

## **Lacking a Shared Vision: Practitioners and the Literature on the Topic of Strategy**

**ABSTRACT:** *Strategy* is an ambiguous term in the field of educational leadership. This article reports on a study in which I sought to investigate how practicing school principals and the literature construct the concept. Specifically, I investigated the congruence between two sources of data: the transcribed texts of interviews with practicing principals and a systematic search of peer-reviewed journal articles extending over a 28-year period. The poor match between practitioners and the literature in how they portray the strategic role of school leaders challenges scholars and practitioners alike to reconsider the conceptualization of strategy. If strategy is to become a meaningful construct in the field, then a broader, more discursive lens is required; otherwise, the concept risks fading into obscurity or becoming little more than yet another adjectival form of leadership.

Over the past few decades, the use of the term *strategy* and, implicitly, *strategic* has experienced a series of intellectual ebbs and flows within the field of educational leadership. One of the greatest weaknesses in the literature has been the striking lack of precision in the use of the term and even what constitutes the concept. As a result, the term *strategy* remains frustrating (Quong, Walker, & Stott, 1998), elusive (Fidler, 2002), and considerably misunderstood (Eacott, 2008b). The phenomenon of strategy within educational leadership is of interest for two reasons. First, as governments encourage an enterprising culture (McWilliam, 2000) in the delivery of education, as built on a market ideology and explicitly linking economic prosperity with student achievement, the relationship between school leadership and society moves beyond the mere instruction of children toward a greater level of interdependence. Second, scholarship on the strategic role of the school leader has tended to follow practitioner

---

Address correspondence to Scott Eacott, PhD, School of Education, University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW Australia 2308. E-mail: Scott.Eacott@newcastle.edu.au.

trends (e.g., legislative changes mandating that schools produce strategic plans), the conceptual development of the term *strategy* within the field has been significantly stifled.

Despite the volume of strategic management models presented to educational leaders, the fundamental question “What is the strategic role of school leaders?” has been relatively omitted in the current literature. This is surprising when considering that one of the key elements of the strategic role is the presence of commonly shared goals, values, and norms that demarcate members of an organization or organizational unit. This article reports on a study in which I asked practicing public school principals, “What is your strategic role?” I used the responses to construct a framework for the strategic role, which I then compared to a sample of the field’s literature on the topic. The result confirms the commonly held belief that academic research on educational leadership poorly aligns with the perceived reality of day-to-day school leadership and management.

In the opening chapter of *Homo Academicus*, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) differentiated between social activities (empirical) and activities that come into being through social analysis (epistemic). I argue that this is the underlying issue in relation to the lack of alignment between practitioners’ perspectives of strategy and the literature of the field. That is, strategy, as constructed through analysis, is decontextualized and dehumanized and essentially a vacuous concept with limited utility to the practice that it seeks to explain. The construct of strategy is debased and most frequently drawn on when consultants and managers want a more impressive word than *important* (Beaver, 2000).

The premise of this article is that a field of practice (Bourdieu, 1998), such as educational leadership, is a community of practitioners who share a common identity and language. The roots of this premise trace back to the sociology of knowledge, in which science is a fundamentally social enterprise (Kuhn, 1962; Merton, 1968). As such, it is language that enables this social construction. Language or word systems are used to create the distinctive identity of group members. It is through language that members of a field express their ideas; consequentially, it is through language that the essence of a topic can be identified. For this study, I drew loosely on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Specifically, I operated under the assumption that by using the transcribed text of interviews, I could identify the language that gave rise to the participants’ responses, thus imputing their conceptions of what constitutes their strategic role. The overarching goal was to investigate the words that practitioners and scholars use when discussing the topic.

## METHOD

A semistructured interview schedule (see appendix) served as the data collection strategy for this study. The questions and probes encouraged the participants to give specific, detailed examples of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that characterized their strategic roles. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that “to understand social behavior requires interviewing or intensive field observation, with these the only two methods of data collection sensitive enough to capture the nuances of human living” (p. 28). The understanding of a social or human problem—in this case, the strategic role of the public primary school principal—is the core purpose of qualitative analysis. The purpose of the semistructured interview was to obtain information in the form of text, as concerned with my trying to understand how practicing school leaders think about the concepts of strategic leadership and management. It was deliberately structured to have the participant define his or her strategic role and then explain how he or she enacted that role. This allowed for an internal validity check within the interview. That is, each participant’s responses could be compared with one another to ensure that they presented a consistent message.

Van de Ven, Angle, and Poole (1989) highlighted that without studying strategy from the leader’s or manager’s perspective, it becomes difficult (if not impossible) for an investigator to understand the dynamics confronting leaders and managers. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) supported this stance by stressing that within the goal of better understanding human behavior (i.e., the strategic role), the use of participant perspective is necessary to achieve a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Within a school, the principal is generally viewed as the primary decision maker, facilitator, problem solver, or social change agent. Additionally, the study of strategy in adjacent fields (e.g., marketing, management, economics) is primarily concerned with individual decision makers. Consequentially, a convenience sample of public primary school principals formed the unit of analysis for this study.

The participants were drawn from the Hunter region (based around the city of Newcastle) in the state of New South Wales, Australia. By population, New South Wales is the largest of any state school system in Australia. By number of schools, the Hunter region is the largest of the 10 regions in the state, representing 14.19% of all schools (232 out of 1,635 primary schools). Although the Hunter region has a diverse range of socioeconomic-status schools, the teaching and student population is relatively homogeneous. The timing of this research is significant. In 2005, the state school system initiated a system of school-based planning

with a 3-year planning cycle. Although targets continue to be set at the state level (i.e., politically), they are interpreted at the state, regional, and school levels (in that order). Through the central office, the state school system delivered to schools a planning model<sup>1</sup> intended to assist schools in linking a planning and annual reporting process as part of the performative policy context of public schooling. Such reform mirrors the Education Reform Act of 1988 in the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The interviews reported here took place in August–September 2007, approximately 2 years into the first cycle. Schools had completed an evaluation and report on the 1st year of the plan and were beginning to prepare for the second report. The 3rd year of the cycle is designed to prepare the next iteration of the school's plan.

The participants for the study were identified through a self-selection process. Following an invitation from me at district principal meetings ( $n = 4$ ), I distributed consent forms for completion. From a population of 169 principals<sup>3</sup> in the region, 36 agreed to be interviewed (21.30%). Creswell (2002) suggested that a sample size of 15 to 25 is appropriate for this style of exploratory research. The 36 interviewees consisted of 21 women (58.33%) and 15 men (41.67%). There were 12 principals (33.33%) from large schools (i.e., more than 450 students enrolled, per the classification of school size used by the state department of education and training), 18 from medium-sized schools (50.00%; 160–450 students), and 7 from small schools (19.44%; fewer than 159 students and a dual teaching–administration role for principals). The tenure of principals ranged from 1 to 12 years. In contrast to the majority of studies in the field, this study was interested in all principals, not just those identified as good operators by supervisors or predefined criteria. This is consistent with the overarching goal of the work to build an empirical argument.

Following transcription, I conducted a modified version of conventional coding. Nag, Hambrick, and Chen (2007) labeled this process *lexicographic analysis*, which is a form of content analysis where the goal is to conceptualize core features—in this case, features of the strategic role—from within extensive text and through the identification of distinctive words and phrases. The identified categories serve as the building blocks for a theoretical positioning of the inductive framework. Following multiple iterations of the process, I identified a set of 36 words/phrases.

I initially developed tentative categories based on small clusters of words. For example, several words dealt with students (e.g., *students*, *kids*, *children*, *pupils*); some clearly focused on stakeholders (e.g., *parents*, *community members*); and others fell into other tentative categories.

This multistep process led to the following definition of the strategic role of the primary principal, as imputed from the distinctive lexicon of

the text: “The strategic role of the public primary school principal deals with (a) advancing the school’s purpose (b) by balancing the demands of others and (c) synthesizing and providing direction through (d) leadership behaviors.” I acknowledge that this definition is not elegantly worded or graceful in syntax; rather, it represents the best effort to integrate the four dimensions into sentence form. Adhering to this method of induction allows the definition to fundamentally differ from others in the field because it represents the way that principals talk about the role; that is, it does not ask them questions derived from a preconceived model. I now briefly contextualize each dimension in educational leadership and, specifically, the literature on the strategic role of school leaders. As will become evident, there exists considerable overlap among the dimensions, reinforcing the argument that it is difficult, if not impossible, to break down educational leadership into isolated parts.

#### ADVANCING THE SCHOOL’S PURPOSE

The purpose of schooling has a rich history in the literature, although not frequently in the educational leadership literature. More often, it appears in the sociology of education or sociology in general. School structures and processes mirror the norms, values, and ideologies institutionalized in society (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Their structure conforms with and is constrained by institutional rules of what society defines school to be (Meyer, Scott, & Deal, 1992). However, the debate on “What is the purpose of schooling?” has failed to reach any conclusions. A principal in the study noted,

Education is no longer just purely the academic side of things, it really has a very strong pastoral care and welfare side and that is just the nature of education today. It is the social, it’s the emotional and it’s the academic side as well and quite often in this role, you’re also supporting families. (Principal 31)

Schools have historically been considered a primary social mechanism for ensuring that all members of society receive an education that allows them to take their place in maintaining and improving a complex, democratic, and free society (Lutyen, Visscher, & Witziers, 2005). For some, this translates into education that prepares students for the world of work, primarily through a focus on the three *Rs* (Callahan, 1962; Walsh, 2006). Bourdieu argued that the major role of education is the contribution to social reproduction, the reproduction of relationships of power and privilege between social classes (Wacquant, 1997). Yet practitioners and scholars alike argue that schools should reflect the best interests of

students, which in many cases is not the reproduction of existing power relationships (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007).

By its nature, education is fundamentally different from other human transactions (Oplatka, 2004), and some have argued (Heller & Paulter, 1990) that the purpose of education is in direct conflict with other managerial and political functions of educational leadership. The purpose of schooling is therefore firmly rooted in the realm of continuous emotional and intellectual turmoil. On the one hand, any effort made by the school is largely at the mercy of sociopolitical circumstances, with the school embedded in society and needing to react to economic and cultural changes and developments (Greenfield, 2005; Huber, 2004); on the other hand, is the protection of the school's teaching and learning programs, the quality of which lies not in the results of standardized tests but in the process itself, a process that defies simple linear measurement.

## BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF OTHERS

Many reasons explaining the contestable nature of schooling and its purpose stem from the multitude of people and sectors of society who seek to influence its operations. School leaders are responsible for working with the entire spectrum of social groups—from students to school council members, parents, policymakers, teachers, local business owners, support staff, and union officials (Mangin, 2007)—all of which imposes on school leaders logistical issues and many levels of people management and leadership. Three representative comments follow:

Public schools in particular need to service the needs of the broader community. There is a need to be continually bringing in the views of the stakeholders. I am not saying that any particular group hijack the agenda, but you certainly need to ensure that decisions made are consistent with the wants and needs of the school's stakeholders. (Principal 20)

If we are going to be servicing the needs of our broader community, we have to be continually bringing in the views of the stakeholders and working with them. There is a need to accommodate the different view points and consider them when decisions are being made. (Principal 21)

I have to lead my school where I need to satisfy the needs of the community, the needs of the staff, the rules of the Teacher's Federation, the requirements of the state department of education and training and both the state and federal governments all at the same time. (Principal 29)

However, the second principal later added,

When it comes to the actual pedagogical understandings and those practices of the school and classrooms, questions and views from parents and those

outside the school can only ever be impressions or perceptions and nothing more. It would be unrealistic to expect that they would have the experience to analyze the style of delivery and things like that. So those types of input are done in-house, through the executive. (Principal 21)

These words highlight a further tension: How and when do others participate? The language of collaboration, empowerment, and voice for stakeholders in the governance of schooling has gained prominence based on the idea that student learning is stifled by excessive bureaucracy, conservative turf-protecting teachers unions, and out-of-touch reformers imposing ideas on schools from above. Anderson (1998) warned that it is important to understand the fundamental differences between participation as consumerism and participation as citizenship. Stakeholders' participation as a means of balancing the demands of others has a temporal issue. Such participation is usually limited to those who have children attending the school or those who hold a political office, which limits schooling to the equivalent of a "consumer product rather than being a social institution charged with broader social objectives to serve a wider community of citizens" (p. 584). As with advancing the school's purpose, balancing the demands of others is a complex and ambiguous activity that defies simplistic representation.

## SYNTHESIZING AND PROVIDING DIRECTION

Synthesizing and providing direction requires the leader to pull together the purpose of the school and take into account the demands of a variety of social groups on premise. It requires deciding what courses of action to pursue and which not to, as principals in the study cited:

In my current role I need to look at government objectives and align those with what the community wants. I need to work with data from whatever source, both internal and external, and establish a plan to achieve the outcomes set by the government and the community. (Principal 26)

Strategic planning and direction setting is great and very important for the school and its community, but at the same time, the department mandates what areas of the plan should be, in our case, literacy, numeracy and student welfare. (Principal 2)

Strategic leadership is about the simple game of leverage. There are things that we ignore, things we shut out, intentionally. Not just the dead dog syndrome, we strategically ignore things that take our focus away from what has the greatest capacity to make a difference for students. (Principal 4)

The three comments each highlight a slightly different dimension of synthesizing and providing direction. The first example speaks to the need to

synthesize information from a variety of sources/stakeholders and provide direction, which explicitly deals with balancing the demands of others and implicitly utilizes the conceptualization of schooling's purpose through reference to government objectives and community wants. The second example more explicitly highlights the limitations of systemic direction setting in school. In this case, despite the departmental rhetoric about the devolving of school management decisions, the central office still set the target areas for schools in line with government plans. English (2003) discussed this type of situation in his critique of evidence-based decision making, arguing that decisions are already made by the information that is collected. For example, a "good school" is one that makes significant improvements in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and student welfare. From a political perspective, each area has standardized numerical data drawn from testing regimes and student records to support claims. Although schools have some discretion over what direction they take, political forces shape the construction of a successful school or student. The strategic plans and directions taken by schools as individual enterprises obscure the workings of the direction-setting process.

## LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS

Like any organization, a school depends on leadership to shape a productive future through a series of actions and decisions. The analysis of the interviews revealed three forms of leadership: leadership with others, leadership from others, and leadership through others. The three perspectives represent a somewhat continuum of power relations, beginning with the leader-centric approach (through others) and moving toward the transitional stage (with others) and final form (from others).

Leadership through others reflects the notion of influence. For Bush (2007), influencing represents the ability to affect outcomes through personal characteristics and expertise. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) suggested that, in contrast to the notion of authority, influencing is a dynamic tactical element of leadership not bound to a superior-subordinate relationship: "Strategic leadership to me really means your capacity to convince other people that this is the direction to take. It is a capacity to get people to jump on board with an initiative" (Principal 31). Leading with others suggests a more distributed model wherein the leadership role is shared among a group of people.

My role as the principal is to involve the community. Getting other people to do the stuff so that you don't have to do everything. It is not that I don't want to do the work, it is about creating a sense of community. (Principal 21)

It is such a broad job [the principalship] that there is no shame in not knowing every aspect of everything. There is too much to do and you could not humanly do it. It only makes sense to involve others and work with them to get things done. (Principal 2)

Leadership from others links with the dependence model of school leadership and management, and it is the most frequently portrayed causal model of strategic leadership and management in education (Eacott, 2008a, 2009). It represents a form of nonleadership by the principal, where the decisions and directions are set by those other than the principal. Any stakeholder in the organization can initiate this leadership, yet that most frequently cited in the interview text was the education department:

You can be a great strategic leader, but you can be completely circumvented by things that are completely out of your control and you can stand there in front of staff and they can say, we don't agree with this and we don't think this is the way it should be. All of our professional knowledge and background and experience can say that this is not the way to go, yet the system requires us to do it. (Principal 18)

## VALIDATING THE PRACTITIONER DEFINITION

I sought to determine the validity of the implicit definition of the strategic role of primary school principals. To do so, I used the four dimensions themselves, rather than the word and phrases that induced the dimensions, to examine the literature on strategy in the field of educational leadership. Conducting this test required a corpus for comparison, for which peer-reviewed journals were the most appropriate outlet. The survey of literature to establish the corpus was not exhaustive; rather, it illustrated the kinds of work relevant to the main arguments of the study—that is, the discourse on the topic as accepted in peer-reviewed publications.

I searched the table of contents and abstracts of each issue of 18 educational leadership and management journals. I populated the list of journals using (1) the journal-banding study conducted by the University of Newcastle and the Australian Association for Research in Education<sup>4</sup> and (2) the draft journal rankings proposed for the new Excellence in Research for Australia<sup>5</sup> scheme. Although the Australian nature of this list is a potential limitation for an international audience, the list includes journals from the United States (*Educational Administration Quarterly*; *International Journal of Leadership in Education*; *Educational Policy*; *Education Policy Analysis Archives*; *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*; and *Education Leadership Review*), the United Kingdom

(*Journal of Education Policy; Educational Management Administration and Leadership; International Journal of Educational Management; School Leadership and Management; Policy Futures in Education; and Journal of Educational Administration and History*), Australia (*Journal of Educational Administration and Leading & Managing*), the Netherlands (*School Effectiveness and School Improvement and Journal of Educational Change*), Cyprus (*International Studies in Educational Administration*), and Canada (*International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*). The search period extended from 1980 through until 2007, representing 28 years of publications. This search revealed 82 articles (for an earlier version of this process, see Eacott, 2008b; for a refined version, see Eacott, 2009).

Having established a corpus for comparison, I examined articles appearing between 2003 and 2007 in the leading journals of the field from the United Kingdom (*Educational Management Administration and Leadership; n = 123*), the United States (*Educational Administration Quarterly; n = 125*), and Australia (*Journal of Educational Administration; n = 180*) for the purpose of conducting a logistic regression analysis, or logit. The dependent variable was whether an abstract was identified as one about the strategic role of school. The independent variables were four binary variables, each representing one of the four dimensions of the practitioner definition, coded 1 if there was any reference to one of the words assigned to that dimension. For example, if an abstract included reference to the political context of educational leadership, it was categorized under the dimension of balancing the demands of others. If none of the words in that dimension appeared in the abstract, the binary variable was coded 0. This put the conceptual dimensions of the definition to a direct and stringent test.

The logit was chosen over multiple regression models because the response category was binary rather than continuous. A multiple linear regression model presumed that, given the values of the explanatory variables, the response variable has a normal distribution with constant variance (Landau & Everitt, 2004). This assumption is not acceptable for a binary response. Logistic regression is well suited for describing and testing hypotheses about relationships between a categorical outcome (i.e., whether an article was identified as being about the strategic role) and one or more categorical or continuous predictor variables (i.e., the four dimensions of the definition; Peng, Lee, & Ingersoll, 2002). Before conducting the logistic regression model, I used cross-tabulation to provide initial insights into the structure of the data (see Table 1).

The results of the cross-tabulation show that in the sample, less than 20% of articles previously identified as being about the strategic role

**Table 1. Cross-Tabulation of Data Set**

<i>Strategic Role</i>	<i>Advancing the School's Purpose</i>		<i>Balancing the Demands of Others</i>		<i>Synthesizing and Providing Direction</i>		<i>Leadership Behaviors</i>	
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Not about								
<i>n</i>	388	35	350	73	379	44	276	147
%	91.73	8.27	82.74	17.26	89.60	10.40	65.25	34.75
About								
<i>n</i>	66	16	43	39	26	56	28	54
%	80.49	19.51	52.44	47.66	29.55	70.45	31.71	68.29
Total								
<i>n</i>	454	51	393	112	405	100	304	201
%	89.90	10.10	77.82	22.18	80.20	19.80	60.20	39.80

made any reference to advancing the school's purpose in their abstracts. Additionally, only 48% made reference to balancing the demands of others. This is in contrast to the attention given to the purpose of schooling and the unique context of each school and its community as discussed by the principals during the interviews and identified by the rhetoric of the field.

Following the cross-tabulation, I fitted a four-predictor logistic model to the data to test the relationship between the dimensions of the definition and the previously identified literature on the strategic role (see Table 2). According to the model, the log of the odds of an article being identified as that about the strategic role of the educational leader is negatively related to balancing the demands of others ( $\beta = -0.004$ ,  $p = .991$ ), if only just, and positively related to advancing the school's purpose ( $\beta = 0.343$ ,  $p = .422$ ), synthesizing and providing direction ( $\beta = 2.731$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and leadership behaviors ( $\beta = 0.454$ ,  $p = .155$ ). In assessing the effectiveness of a model, Peng, Lee, and Ingersoll (2002) recommended attending to the overall model evaluation, the statistical tests of individual predictors, the goodness-of-fit statistics, and the validations of predicted probabilities.

I undertook the evaluation of the logistic model using three inferential statistical tests: the likelihood ratio, score, and Wald tests. All three yielded the same conclusions for the present data, which is not uncommon because of the single dependant variable (Landau & Everitt, 2004; Peng et al., 2002). The results of these tests indicate that all observations are predicted to belong to the largest outcome category. In other words, the logistic model does not represent a better fit for the data than that of only the intercept, or the null hypothesis.

**Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis of Educational Leadership Articles and the Model Proposed for the Strategic Role of the Principal**

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Exp</i> ( $\beta$ )
Predictors <sup>a</sup>						
Advancing the school's purpose	0.343	.427	0.645	1	.422	0.709
Balancing the demands of others	-0.004	.362	0.000	1	.991	1.004
Synthesizing and providing direction	2.731	.328	69.413	1	.000	0.065
Leadership behaviors	0.454	.319	2.023	1	.155	0.635
Constant	-2.880	.241	142.539	1	.000	0.056
Test						
Overall model evaluation						
Likelihood fit			121.220	4	.00	
Score test			121.220	4	.00	
Wald test			121.220	4	.00	
Goodness of fit						
Hosmer and Lemeshow			20.171	4	.00	
Sample size	505					
Cases correctly identified (%)	84.4					

Note.  $R^2 = .213$  (Cox & Snell, 1989).  $R^2 = .363$  (Nagelkerke, 1991).

<sup>a</sup>The strategic role of the public primary school principals deals with . . .

Wald's chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) tests the statistical significance of the individual regression coefficients ( $\beta$ s). According to Table 2, synthesizing and providing direction is the only significant predictor ( $p < .001$ ) of articles identified as being about the strategic role. This is not surprising given the notable bias toward planning and direction setting in the literature. The constant statistic refers to the test of the intercept and suggests whether an intercept should be included in the model. For the current data set, the result ( $p < .001$ ) suggests that a model with an intercept could be applied to the data.

Goodness-of-fit statistics assess the fit of the logistic model against actual outcomes (Peng et al., 2002)—for example, whether an article was identified as being about the strategic role or not. The inferential goodness-of-fit test is the Hosmer and Lemeshow test (2000), which yielded  $\chi^2 = 20.171$  ( $p \leq .001$ ), suggesting that the model was not a good fit to the data. In other words, the null hypothesis of a good model fit to the data was not tenable.

Table 2 reports two additional descriptive measures of goodness of fit, as defined by Cox and Snell (1989) and Nagelkerke (1991) and included on the basis of Peng and colleagues' (2002) suggestions for reporting and interpreting logistic regression models. Note that some researchers (Long, 1997; Menard, 2000) have argued that such measures fail to adequately

ascertain the proportion of variance in logistic regression. Menard (2000) suggested that they do not correspond to predictive efficiency nor can they be tested in an inferential framework. For these reasons, I have included them as supplements to the other, arguably more useful evaluative measures, such as overall evaluation of the model, tests of individual regression coefficients, and the goodness-of-fit statistic.

A logistic regression predicts the logit of an event outcome from a set of predictors. Peng and colleagues (2002) explained,

Because the logit is the natural log of the odds (or probability/[1 – probability]), it can be transformed back to the probability scale. The resultant predicted probabilities can then be revalidated with the actual outcome to determine if high probabilities are indeed associated with events and low probabilities with non-events. The degree to which predicted probabilities agree with actual outcomes is expressed as either a measure of association or a classification table. (p. 6)

I conducted four measures of association to validate the predicted probabilities of the model: Kendall's tau  $a$ , Goodman–Kruskal's gamma, Somers's  $D_{xy}$  statistic, and the  $c$  statistic (see Table 3). The tau  $a$  statistic is Kendall's rank-order correlation coefficient without adjustments for ties. The gamma statistic is based on Kendall's coefficient but adjusts for ties. Peng and colleagues (2002) suggested that the gamma is more useful and appropriate than the tau  $a$  when there are ties on outcomes and predicted probabilities. The gamma statistic for the predictors ranged from .458 to .898. This is interpreted as follows: 45.8% to 89.8% fewer errors were made by using the estimated probabilities of the predictors than by chance alone in predicting which articles would be classified as being about the strategic role or not. Some researchers (Demaris, 1992; Siegel & Castellan, 1988) have raised caution about the gamma statistic, arguing that it has a tendency to overstate the strength of association between estimated probabilities and outcomes and that a value of zero does not necessarily imply independence.

**Table 3. Validation of Predicted Probabilities**

<i>Tests</i>	<i>Advancing the School's Purpose</i>	<i>Balancing the Demands of Others</i>	<i>Synthesizing and Providing Direction</i>	<i>Leadership Behaviors</i>
Kendall's tau $a$	.138	.269	.536	.234
Goodman–Kruskal's gamma	.458	.626	.898	.567
Somers's $D_{xy}$	.135	.267	.534	.225
$c$ statistic	.061	.165	.315	.163

Somers's  $D_{xy}$  is a preferred extension of gamma whereby one variable is designated as *dependent* and the other, *independent* (Siegel & Castellan, 1988). The  $D_{xy}$  represents the degree of association between the outcome, designated as *dependent*, and the estimated probability, designated as *independent* (Demaris, 1992). In this data set, the tau  $a$  and  $D_{xy}$  are similar.

The  $c$  statistic represents the proportion of article pairs with different observed outcomes for which the model correctly predicts a higher probability for observations with the event outcome than the probability for nonevent observations (Peng et al., 2002). For the present model, the  $c$  statistic ranges from .061 to .315. This means that for between 6.1% and 31.5% of all possible pairs of articles—one identified as being about the strategic role and the other not—the model correctly assigned a higher probability to those classified as *strategic*. A .500 value means that the model is no better than assigning observations randomly into outcome categories. The low  $c$  statistic for each predictor indicates that the four dimensions of strategic role, as derived from the interview transcripts, are not distinguishing elements of the literature in the field as it relates to the strategic role of educational leaders.

Despite correctly distinguishing 84.36% of articles as being about the strategic role of the educational leader or not, only one dimension of the definition was statistically significant: synthesizing and providing direction. This relationship is not surprising given the skewed focus of the literature on the establishment of plans and direction setting in schools (see Eacott, 2008a, 2009). The relationship between synthesizing and providing direction and the identification of an article as being about the strategic role is also consistent with the criticisms of Bell (2002) and Dimmock and Walker (2004) that *strategy* is synonymous with *planning*.

The poor fit of the definition with the literature of the field poses some significant issues for the scholarship of the strategic role. Specifically, the findings of this study propose that, in general, the literature of the field that focuses on the strategic role of the educational leader may be a poor representation of the realities of practice for educational leaders, as constructed by the practicing leaders themselves. In other words, the scholarship of the topic describes a role that is different to the one that principals believe they are enacting.

## IMPLICATIONS

For some, the logic applied in this study is the reverse of conventional practice; however, the process reflects the argument of the article. I sought

to investigate practicing educational leaders' perceptions of their strategic roles and then to evaluate whether there is congruence with the literature of the field. That there is minimal alignment between how practitioners and the literature portray the strategic role in general highlights a significant issue for scholars and practitioners. If research in the field does not reflect how practitioners see the strategic role, then a question that begs to be answered is, for whom is this research?

The "best practice" or "what works" stream of research in the field arguably finds its roots in what many believe to be the key mission of professional schools—that is, to develop knowledge that can be translated into skills that advance the practice of the profession (Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). As such, the central mind-set of this broad research agenda has been the quest for some essence of effective leadership, some distinctive set of traits or behaviors possessed by effective leaders and not others. This is a crude form of positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003), where the overarching goal is to investigate positive deviance, or the ways in which organizations and their members flourish and prosper (Cameron & Caza, 2004). However, it is the interpretation itself that is most limiting in the field of educational leadership. Samples of schools and leaders are frequently selected because they are identified as being effective based on some external criteria, whether high student examination results, retention levels, or other data. The fault in such models is that they fail to analyze the scope of schools and individual leaders and identify what it is that distinguishes "effective" from "less effective."

As such, the literature has tended to follow practitioner trends or, at least, expectations on practitioners. By focusing on the expectations on practitioners, scholarship has developed an undertheorized conceptualization of strategy. Instead of deriving a sophisticated framework of strategy as an educational leadership practice from social theorists such as Bourdieu or Foucault, almost all the research on strategy in education has limited itself to what people do, as restricted to the bodily movements of actors and the functional implications of such actions. This research fails to engage with the discursive nature of social interactions that make up leadership. After all, as Sun Tzu, Chinese military strategist and author of *The Art of War*, pointed out some 3,000 years ago, all men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which great victory is evolved.

Because Australia has yet to embrace the compulsory leadership preparation movement of other countries—notably, the United States and the United Kingdom—the teaching of educational leadership in general and

strategy in particular remains somewhat problematic. Despite some 22 of the 36 mainstream Australian universities having programs in educational leadership (Bates & Eacott, 2008), most of such teaching remains the terrain of education systems, professional associations, and consultants. The advent of professional standards for teachers, of which the highest level is professional leadership, further complicates this matter. Systemic authorities, consultants, and professional associations rarely offer programs that critically engage with ongoing power struggles and question the authority of systems and the state. This is not to suggest that university programs be privileged over any other, given that it would conform to the criticism that I am raising—that is, the privileging of one over the other. Rather, it is arguably through only collaboration and critical reflexivity that the leaders of tomorrow can become literate across the many educational leadership literacies from a *glocal* perspective (Brooks & Normore, 2010). For it is only with this *glocal* perspective that aspirants can become educational leadership literate and therefore create, engage, and implement educationally relevant strategy.

## CONCLUSION

Ironically, strategy as an educational leadership concept has failed to shape the direction of the field in practice and scholarship. At the most practical of levels, the good strategist is anticipatory, acting in anticipation of others' reactions. In doing so, strategists shape the future rather than merely react to the present. The narrow focus of scholarship on strategic planning is therefore a curious one. Strategic planning is little more than a return to Taylor's (1911) scientific management. Although some in the field, such as Les Bell (2002) and Brent Davies (2006) and colleagues, have refused to allow policy statements such as the Education Reform Act of 1988 in the United Kingdom shape the ontologically reality of what is strategy, many in the field (scholars and practitioners alike) are more familiar with strategic planning than they are with strategy.

Educational research is often considered irrelevant to practitioners' needs, with many difficulties in translating abstract theoretical principles into actions. In the data presented here, however, it is the practitioners who have greater breadth in their conceptualization. If the study of strategy in education is to make an influential theoretical and practical contribution, one that commands widespread attention, it must seek to make visible much of the underlying assumptions of strategic actions. Less influential work usually operates with sociologically naïve, taken-for-granted conceptions and old theories that have passed into common discourse—for example,

that involving people in decisions that directly affect them will lead to better outcomes for all. With international concern for the quality of schooling and student outcomes and with the increasing influence of politicians and those outside of education seeking to set the agenda for schooling, the need for strategic educational leaders is arguably at its most critical junction since the adoption of mass education. As educators and, more important, for the students, we need educational strategists shaping the future of education. To assist with this, there is a need for research on strategy in education that moves beyond the superficial rational planning models and toward strategy as a dimension of educational leadership. Anything less, and strategy as an educational leadership concept risks fading into conceptual obscurity or becoming another much-overused yet vacuous adjectival form of leadership.

## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What does the term *strategy* mean to you in your current role?
2. Tell me about the strategic role you play?
3. Can you think of a specific time when your capabilities as a strategic leader have been most challenged?
4. What forms of learning have you undertaken in relation to strategic leadership?
5. What sort of analogy best describes the role of strategic leadership in a school like yours?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to strategy in schools?

## NOTES

1. Although it used the rhetoric of continuous iterative cycles, the planning model was an appropriation of Deming's (1982) quality systems management (plan, do, study, check), which was presented in a diagram as a linear decision-making and planning model.
2. Consistent with the Education Reform Act of 1988, Australia has been looking to publish league tables of schools and identifying "failing" schools.
3. The final population of 169 is the total population of 232, minus relieving principals ( $n = 35$ ) and principals in their 1st year ( $n = 28$ ), in recognition of the time lag between strategic leadership and management and outcomes (for further explanation, see Van de Ven, Angle, & Poole, 1989).
4. This work was published online at the SORTI website but is now available commercially as Publishing in Academic Journals in Education index (see <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-centre/sorti/paje/index.html>).

5. The Excellence in Research for Australia is the latest means by which the federal government is attempting to rank the work of academics (under the previous Howard government, a similar scheme was entitled the Research Quality Framework). A thorough description of the criteria used for journal-ranking tiers can be found at [http://www.arc.gov.au/era/tiers\\_ranking.htm](http://www.arc.gov.au/era/tiers_ranking.htm). Basically, A\* journals represent the top 5% in a field; A, the next 15%; B, the next 30%; and C, the final 50%. A number of journals remain unranked at present.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, G. L. (1998). Toward authentic participation: Deconstructing the discourses of participatory reforms in education. *American Educational Research Journal*, *35*(4), 571–603.
- Bacharach, S. B., & Lawler, E. J. (1980). *Power and politics in organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bates, R. J., & Eacott, S. (2008). Teaching educational leadership and administration in Australia. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, *40*(2), 149–160.
- Bever, G. (2000). The language of strategy. *Strategic Change*, *9*, 465–468.
- Bell, L. (2002). Strategic planning and school management: Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing? *Journal of Educational Administration*, *40*(5), 407–424.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. London: Allyn & Bacon.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Homo academicus*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Brooks, J. S., & Normore, A. H. (2010). Educational leadership and globalization: Literacy for a global perspective. *Educational Policy*, *24*(1), 52–82.
- Bush, T. (2007). Theory and research in educational leadership and management. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *35*(1), 5–8.
- Callahan, R. E. (1962). *Education and the cult of efficiency*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cameron, K., & Caza, A. (2004). Contributions to the discipline of positive organizational scholarship. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *47*, 731–739.
- Cameron, K., Dutton, J., & Quinn, R. E. (2003). *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Cox, D. R., & Snell, E. J. (1989). *The analysis of binary data* (2nd ed.). London: Chapman & Hall.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Davies, B. (2006). *Leading the strategically focused school: Success & sustainability*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Demaris, A. (1992). *Logit modeling: practical applications*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Deming, W. E. (1982). *Out of the crisis*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.
- Dimmock, C., & Walker, A. (2004). A new approach to strategic leadership: Learning-centredness, connectivity and cultural context in school design. *School Leadership and Management, 24*(1), 39–56.
- Eacott, S. (2008a). An analysis of contemporary literature on strategy in education. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 11*(3), 257–280.
- Eacott, S. (2008b). Strategy and educational leadership: In search of unity. *Journal of Educational Administration, 46*(3), 353–375.
- Eacott, S. (2009). *The strategic leadership of public school principals: An Australian study*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Verlag Dr Muller.
- English, F. (2003). *The postmodern challenge to the theory and practice of educational administration*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Fidler, B. (2002). *Strategic management for school development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Greenfield, W. (2005). Postscript: Where have we been? Where are we going in the study of educational organizations? *Journal of Educational Administration, 43*(1), 121–126.
- Heller, R. W., & Paulter, A. J. (1990). The administrator of the future: Combining instructional and managerial leadership. In S. Jacobsen & J. A. Conway (Eds.), *Educational leadership in an age of reform* (pp. 131–143). New York: Longman.
- Hosmer, D. W., & Lemeshow, S. (2000). *Applied logistic regression* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Hoy, W., & Miskel, C. (2001). *Educational administration: Theory, research and practice* (6th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Huber, S. G. (2004). School leadership and leadership development: Adjusting leadership theories and development programs to values and the core purpose of school. *Journal of Educational Administration, 42*(6), 669–684.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Landau, S., & Everitt, B. S. (2004). *A handbook of statistical analyses using SPSS*. New York: Chapman & Hall / CRC.
- Long, J. S. (1997). *Regression models for categorical and limited dependent variables*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lutyan, H., Visscher, A., & Witziers, B. (2005). School effectiveness research: From a review of the criticism to recommendations for further development. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 16*(3), 249–279.
- Mangin, M. (2007). Facilitating elementary principals' support for instructional teacher leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(3), 319–357.
- McWilliam, E. (2000). The perfect corporate fit: New knowledge for new times. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 3*(1), 75–83.
- Menard, S. (2000). Coefficients of determination for multiple logistic regression analysis. *American Statistician, 54*(1), 17–24.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Meyer, J. W., Scott, W. R., & Deal, T. E. (1992). Institutional and technical sources of organizational structure: Explaining the structure of educational organizations.

- In J. W. Meyer & W. R. Scott (Eds.), *Organizational environments: Ritual and rationality* (pp. 45–70). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Nag, R., Hambrick, D., & Chen, M.-J. (2007). What is strategic management really? Inductive derivation of a consensus definition of the field. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28, 935–955.
- Nagelkerke, N. J. D. (1991). A note on a general definition of the coefficient of determination. *Biometrika*, 78, 691–692.
- Oplatka, I. (2004). The characteristics of the school organization and the constraints on market ideology in education: An institutional view. *Journal of Education Policy*, 19(2), 143–161.
- Peng, C. Y. J., Lee, K. L., & Ingersoll, G. M. (2002). An introduction to logistic regression analysis and reporting. *Journal of Educational Research*, 96(1), 3–14.
- Quong, T., Walker, A., & Stott, K. (1998). *Values based strategic planning: A dynamic approach for schools*. Singapore: Prentice Hall.
- Siegel, S., & Castellan, N. J. (1988). *Nonparametric statistics for the behavioral science* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Stefkovich, J. A., & Begley, P. (2007). Ethical school leadership: Defining the best interests of students. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(2), 205–224.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Taylor, F. W. (1911). *The principles of scientific management*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Van de Ven, A. H., Angle, H. L., & Poole, M. S. (1989). *Research in the management of innovation: The Minnesota studies*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Van de Ven, A. H., & Johnson, P. E. (2006). Knowledge for theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review*, 31(4), 902–921.
- Wacquant, L. (1997). Preface. In P. Bourdieu (Ed.), *State nobility*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Walsh, P. (2006). Narrowed horizons and the impoverishment of educational discourse: Teaching, learning and performing under the new educational bureaucracies. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(1), 95–117.

**Scott Eacott**, a lecturer in educational leadership, management, and administration in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia, is currently engaged in work exploring the notion of leadership as a social practice, as informed by the work of the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu. His most recent publications explored the scholarship of strategy in education, the perception of principals' strategic actions, how principals navigate the boundaries of strategy and educational leadership, and the preparation of educational leaders. He teaches educational leadership courses in undergraduate and postgraduate programs and supervises a number of research students.