



## New Frontiers in Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Theory

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## INTRODUCTION

# New Frontiers in Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Theory

Educational leadership, management and administration as a field of study has a rich history of epistemological debate. From the work of Andrew Halpin and Daniel Griffiths in the 1950s and 1960s in what is known as the *Theory Movement*, through to Thomas Barr Greenfield's critique of logical empiricism in the 1970s, the emergence of Richard Bates' and William Fosters' Critical Theory of educational administration in the 1980s and Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski's naturalistic coherentism from 1990 to the present time, debates about ways of knowing, doing and being in the social world have been central to advancing scholarship. However, in the most recent decade, at least since the publication of Evers and Lakomski's work, and despite the emergence of a more sociologically informed stream of scholarship (Gunter, 2010), questions of the epistemological and ontological preliminaries of research have become somewhat marginalised. This is not to suggest that such discussions are not taking place, but rather that they have been sporadic and piecemeal. This is further embodied in the context of the various traditions of educational administration (e.g. scientific, instrumental, humanistic, critical, etc.) rarely, if ever, engaging with one another.

In this special issue, we provide an elaborated and coherent discussion from these fragmented discourses to deliver an innovative and provocative dialogue with contributions from both established and emerging voices in the field. Our coherence comes not from the adoption of a single theoretical lens, but rather in our engagement with epistemology, ontology and methodology. It is in the diversity of approaches taken by our contributors that as a group we make a contribution to contemporary thought and analysis in educational leadership, management and administration theory. Importantly, this is not a critique of the field—something that is already frequent enough. Rather, our attention is devoted to sketching possible alternatives for advancing scholarship. The choice of the plural 'alternatives' is deliberate and its use is to evoke the message that there is more than one way to advance knowledge. That being said, the approaches adopted across this collection we believe offer fruitful directions for the field and hopefully, will stimulate substantive dialogue and debate in the interest of advancing knowledge. Specifically, we aim to:

- foreground the ontological/epistemological preliminaries of educational leadership, management and administration scholarship; and
- sketch areas of relevance and possible theoretical/methodological developments that serve to extend current debates on the leadership, management and administration of education.

We interpret these aims widely, consistent with our goal of promoting creativity and innovation. Importantly, we asked our contributors to respond to the following guiding questions:

1. What are the theoretical/empirical problem/s from which educational leadership, management and administration are based?; and
2. How can we engage them?

These questions, we believe, are vital as the discipline of educational leadership, management and administration faces increasing questions of its relevance and status within education, and as education itself faces increasing challenges from beyond. Our goal was not to bring a series of like-minded contributors together to outline the virtues of a particular position, as such an activity would do little more than provide legitimation for our existing theorisations. Instead, we sought to bring a diverse group of scholars together to engage in rigorous debate around our two guiding questions. This is a significant move, as instead of surrendering our thoughts to a singular, stable and standardised knowledge base (that which is frequently sought in educational leadership, management and administration, and arguably, the professions, in general), we explicitly seek to interrogate the dynamism of contradictions, multiplicities and antinomies of a vibrant field of theories and practices. We argue that such a stance is consistent with a healthy ‘science’. Our choice of ‘science’ is deliberately provocative. However, it should not be seen as a synonym for logical empiricism; instead, we mobilise it writ large to reflect a broader array of activities designed to bring rigour and robustness to every step of inquiry.

While it is always difficult to identify the genesis of an idea, in many ways, the beginning of this Special Issue lies in conversations at the annual Australian Association for Research in Education conference. Building from symposia that have led to other special issues (see Eacott, 2013; Wilkinson & Eacott, 2013), and in particular a 2012 symposium that featured earlier versions of three of the contributing papers, this collection—although Australasian centric—is part of a global movement disrupting hegemonic (and conservative) discourses in educational administration. The contributors to this Special Issue were purposely chosen to reflect our goal of established and emerging scholars, with a bias towards the latter, and personally invited on the basis of their innovative and provocative research programmes in educational administration. As such, we call for a generative reading. The contributions, while each a stand-alone piece, are not the final word in any particular approach. To take the arguments of each paper and the collection as a whole seriously requires going beyond the papers themselves. This is a decision that rests with the reader alone, but arguably our success in bringing this collection together can be best measured in the amount of dia-

logue/debate and take-up of the ideas put forward. On that note, we encourage readers, both supportive and critical, to make contact either with individual authors or us as editors to further extend, challenge or simply discuss the ideas presented in this collection. Such dialogue is crucial to the individual and collective endeavour of knowledge production.

### **The contributions**

This collection is bookended by our two contributions. Evers and Lakomski and Eacott come together through their shared belief in science, and in particular the coming together of the social and natural sciences. For Evers and Lakomski, this convergence is achieved through the application of a particular naturalised epistemology that makes use of neuroscience, a form of coherentism, that when applied to an understanding of science leads to a much broader post-positivist notion, and one that is argued can include both ethics and an account of human subjectivity within a single framework for understanding educational administration. With Eacott, the convergence is achieved through ‘description’ of the empirical, an intellectual pursuit that is claimed as the domain of both the natural and social sciences. To produce a level of description that is recognised by both the natural and the social sciences requires rigorous and robust work around the research object. In the paper *Problematizing the intellectual gaze*, Eacott engages with work of constructing the research object in educational administration and the complex interplay between the researcher—often administrators, or ex-administrators themselves, bringing to the fore a particular investment in the research object—and the researched. Central to this argument is the need for epistemological vigilance, given the ontological complicity of the embedded and embodied actor, s/he who has the tension of breaking with the spontaneous understanding of the social world.

Paul Newton and Augusto Riveros also pick up on the issue of separation of the researcher and researched, and like Eacott, see potential in the provision of ‘descriptive contextualised accounts of administrative practices’ for expanding our understanding of educational administration. Drawing on sociology and philosophy and bringing these into conversation with educational administration, they argue for an ‘ontology of practices’. This argument sits within discourses arguing that practice is both shaped by and shaping of the social condition and also has some parallels with the indigenous management research movement. It also contributes to what has been described as a ‘practice-turn’ in scholarship and provides a path for scholars and practitioners to come together for advancing practice. Jane Wilkinson and Stephen Kemmis continue the practice focus in *Practice theory: viewing leadership as leading*. Building on the work of Theodore Schatzki and empirical work in two Australian states, Wilkinson and Kemmis contend that a site ontological perspective provides a means of overcoming the enduring tension of individual/collective approaches in educational administration theory. In particular, they argue for the conceiving of educational leadership as the formation of the practices of teachers, children and the community beyond the school. Such an approach raises many questions which are

beyond mainstream discourses of educational administration and open many new lines of enquiry.

Jae Park draws on the heterogeneity of educational administration as a disciplinary body of knowledge and instead of critiquing this diversity, he calls on a phenomenology of recognition to showcase the possibility of approaching and expanding the field topically, rather than with treatise-like generalisations at the macro level that are dated discussions/debates in the philosophy of science. Using a range of philosophical literatures, Park provides an alternate lens for the study of educational administration that is infrequently called upon, and when done, is peripheral.

Another peripheral literature, although arguably growing in educational administration, is that of post-structuralist theory. Richard Niesche and Christina Gowlett bring Michel Foucault's notion of power and Judith Butler's performativity and discursive agency together to argue for a post-structuralist thinking of educational administration. Such a move opens us to what is arguably a closed intellectual space (educational administration) and illuminates the ongoing political work of both scholarship and practice. This highlights the dynamics and contested space that is educational administration, a theme that runs across many of the papers in this Special Issue.

Stephanie Chitpin and Ken Jones bring the most applied paper in this collection when they draw on their work on the Objective Knowledge Growth Framework (OKGF). As with other papers in this collection, the OKGF is focused on problems of practice. Yet at the same time, the attempt to provide an objective engagement with the empirical is at odds with the arguments of some of the other papers while resonating with ideas in the paper by Evers and Lakomski. As with all papers in the Special Issue, Chitpin and Jones provide yet another way of thinking about educational administration.

## **Conclusion**

The scholarship that is presented through this Special Issue is not popular, more so, it is frequently seen as illegitimate in a disciplinary space that is prone to faddism, privileges a conservative rationale and is a somewhat a theoretical set of discourses that seeks to maintain a highly applied nature. To locate one's work in this space is intellectually challenging, but also potentially career limiting. This is especially so in the current proliferation of rating—or really ranking—systems which dominate the contemporary academy and the enterprise university. For that, we would like to acknowledge *EPAT*'s Editor Michael Peters for supporting this project. Such support is not easily found in educational leadership, management and administration journals. Furthermore, we would like to thank the contributors, both for the quality of what they produced and for sticking with us during the often trying days of seeing this project to print. While we draw to a close this particular part of the project—bringing the ideas to print—we truly hope that this is not the end of the discussion and dialogue as we continue our individual and collective intellectual journeys.

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