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Managerial Rhetoric, Accountability, and School Leadership in Contemporary Australia

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On an international scale, public administration is undergoing considerable restructuring as principles of private enterprise are becoming the orthodoxy. At the same time, economic instability (or crisis) is gripping both national and global financial markets, suggesting a flaw in the system or even that capitalism has reached its limits. Crises in capitalism are frequently met with shifts in the rhetoric of management. In this article we mobilize an emerging research program (Relational Administration) to argue that contemporary discourses of school leadership in Australia have a hybrid—part normative part rational—management rhetoric as a result of the unique economic conditions compared with many developed nations. With particular attention to the role of accountability in constituting and sustaining this hybrid rhetoric, we craft an argument for greater attention to sociogeographic location and temporality when thinking of, with, and through leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary thought and analysis in the scholarly discourses of public administration and management sciences is that leaders matter. This is not surprising given that in broader public discourses leaders are believed to not only matter, but to be an essential ingredient of effective/successful organizations. Correspondingly, when things are not going as well as desired, leaders (frequently limited to those who hold the highest office within an organization) are often held to account. As Barbara Kellerman (2013) notes, since the beginning of the European debt crisis, over half of the European Union nations have had a change of government. Luc Boltanski and Eve

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Chiapello (2005) argue that since the mid-1970s, capitalism abandoned the hierarchical Fordist work structure primarily on the basis of the attack on the alienation of everyday life by capitalism and bureaucracy. In parallel to this recasting of administrative labor, the “leadership industry,” at least in the U.S., was spawned and sustained as corporate America was, for the first time since the Second World War, fearful of competition from abroad, especially Japan (Kellerman, 2013). It was during this time that Edward Deming’s (1982) book *Out of the Crisis* was able to bring Tayloristic thinking¹ into a new time and space of managerial discourses. Within Deming’s 14 principles for management was the need to “institute leadership” for the purpose of improving quality, and by virtue, productivity. In this sense, the managerialist mobilization of “leadership” as a label was a form of neo-Taylorism. Such a position is supported in Robert Kanigel’s (1997) argument that Taylorism is so embedded in our ways of seeing and knowing the social world, and particularly organizations, that we no longer recognize it. Thinking specifically in the space of educational administration and policy, Helen Gunter (2012) contends that leadership has been constructed as the solution to economic and social woes.² Our overarching interest in this intellectual space is in how the contemporary capitalist condition is shaping and shaped by public administration. With specific attention to educational administration, we argue that the contemporary condition requires “school leaders” (interpreted broadly) to understand and make known the underlying generative principles of policy and practice. Significantly, leadership is promoted through a normative rhetoric of establishing aspirations and outlining how things could be different, yet balanced with a highly rationalized rhetoric of planning, targets, and deliverables in bringing the aspiration/s into being. As a result, contemporary school leadership functions as a hybrid between normative and rational management rhetorics.

In the education context, Dinham, Collarbone, Evans, and Mackay (2013) argue that “principals play key roles in creating the conditions in which teachers can teach effectively and students can learn” (p. 467). This indirect influence—where school leaders influence teachers who impact on student learning—is the contemporarily dominant position in educational leadership scholarly discourses. Importantly, though, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), building from a review of research literature on leadership and school achievement, claim that the “total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects” (p. 5). Therefore, if overlooking the impact of out-of-school influences (which is frequently the case with public policy, despite a substantial and enduring research base demonstrating out-of-school effects as the greatest predictor of student outcomes), leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors and the effects of leadership are usually largest where and when they are needed most (e.g., the most challenging schools; Leithwood et al., 2004). As a result, school

leadership is frequently positioned as a key leverage point for public policy crafted for the purposes of improving school outcomes and, increasingly, for raising the ranking of national school systems in global league tables.

Structurally, Australia has an idiosyncratic school education system. With national, federal, and state/territory policy levels, the constitutional authority of schooling lies with the states/territories, yet the vertical fiscal imbalance of Australian federalism allows for federal intervention through the allocation (or non-allocation) of resources. Irrespective of the level of government, when moving beyond leveraging for greater funds, there is a universal goal of improving student outcomes. While the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, a national policy, is couched in the language of excellence (economics) and equity (social), hegemonic discourses in Australian public policy debate concerning education have reduced educating to quantifiable numbers—both performance and funding. It is even possible to argue that outcomes reported in national (e.g., National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and international (e.g., Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) testing regimes have become proxies for schooling, especially in the context of government policy aiming to be a top-five school system by 2025. However, this does not provide a comprehensive description of the contemporary condition—if such a thing is even possible. Unlike commercial enterprises, which can be explicitly located within market exchanges, it is possible to argue that education as a public institution exists in a hybrid social space embodying features of a gift economy³ on a macro-scale, yet market exchange at the micro-level. It is this constant interweaving of the macro- and micro-level that constitutes, legitimizes, and sustains a particular set of discourses around school leadership.

In this article, we argue that the rationality inherent in managerialist discourses in parallel with the normative position of national aspirations has legitimized a particular form of contemporary school leadership. In particular, we explore the relationship between economic conditions, management rhetoric, and the inexhaustible legitimation of what it means to lead a modern institution in contemporary times. Located in the unique time and space that is education in contemporary Australia, we contend that the hybrid nature of management rhetoric in a national economy that has survived (at least so far) the global financial uncertainty that has gripped many nations in the global North calls for more than a context-based scholarly narrative but an indigenous scholarship that engages explicitly with the reciprocity of relations within the social world. In doing so, we put forth a scholarly narrative of “accountability” that moves beyond the well-rehearsed critiques of governmentality (Niesche, 2010), performativity (Ball, 2000, 2003), panoptic surveillance (Perryman, 2006), the managerialist project (Eacott, 2011), and forms of textual apologism (Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). To make

our argument, we focus on the key question: How is school leadership structured by and structuring of the contemporary condition? Put more simply: Why here and why now? Specifically, the argument of this article is marked by three lines of inquiry: the first is dominant discourses of management in parallel with economic conditions; the second is Australian education policy moves and their location in both the national and international policy trajectory; and the third is bringing the two previous discussions together to constitute an indigenous description of accountability in the contemporary Australian school education context. Our intent is not to deliver a comparative piece on education policy. Rather, we provide a theoretical argument around the organizing rhetorics of management that is empirically grounded in Australia. In doing so, we create the conditions in which (and encourage) comparative work can be undertaken that extends, supports, or even refutes our claims. Before outlining our argument, we first turn our attention to articulating the theoretical resources we are mobilizing.

THEORETICAL RESOURCES

This article explicitly fuses multiple analytical frames under what is labeled a relational approach to the study of educational leadership, management, and administration being advanced by Eacott ([in press](#)). The intellectual heritage of this relational approach is eclectic, drawing heavily on French social theory such as the critical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and the pragmatic sociology of Luc Boltanski, but also critical management studies; political science; organizational studies; and, given our own disciplinary location, recognized educational leadership, management, and administration thinkers such as Richard Bates, Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski, Thomas Greenfield, John Smyth, and contemporaries such as Helen Gunter, Pat Thomson, and Fenwick English. Centrally, in bringing critical pluralism to scholarship we engage with what we see as the key theoretical problem of the legitimation of the social world and its empirical manifestation in the administration of schooling. Through this theoretical and empirical focus, a relational approach investigates how the production of knowledge of the legitimacy, effectiveness, efficiency, and morality of administration connects with the practices of administration. In doing so, questions are raised regarding the extent to which existing ways of thinking are generative or thwarting of alternate ways of being. A relational focus enables scholarship to move beyond internal tensions and external pressures by opening up institutions and engaging with the dynamic relations that they hold with other social institutions and those which constantly redefine their very existence. As a means of bringing this relational approach into conversation with contemporary school leadership, and in particular accountability, the central features of the relational approach are:

- The centrality of “administration” and “accountability” in the social world creates an ontological complicity in researchers (and others) that makes it difficult to epistemologically break from our spontaneous understanding of the social world;
- Rigorous “scientific” inquiry calls for questioning the very foundations on which the contemporarily popular practices of accountability are constructed and legitimized;
- The contemporary capitalist condition is constantly shaping, and shaped by, the image of administrative labor;
- Foregrounding social relations enables the overcoming of the contemporary, and arguably enduring, administrative tensions of individualism vs collectivism and structure vs agency; and
- In doing so, there is a productive—rather than merely critical—space to theorize educational administration.

This approach foregrounds two foci of accountability within school administration to interrogate. First is the relationship of policy reforms and initiatives to the sociogeographic space, or more specifically, the degree to which moves are particular to the local or adhere to global discourses. Second is the relationship that reforms have with temporality, and specifically whether they mobilize event or clock time (Adkins, 2011; Duncheon & Tierney, 2013; Eacott, 2013).

To do so, we are deliberately eclectic in our selection of intellectual resources. To engage with the ontological complicity of the topic, we take as our research object the construction and constant re-construction of the object itself in a particular time and space. In doing so, we mobilize the work of David Hartley (2010) on the interplay between management rhetoric and education, specifically administration and policy. This opens up avenues to illuminate, at least partially, the underlying generative principles of contemporary practices of accountability in schools. Such analysis is made possible by bringing the management rhetoric dialogue into conversation with education policy—in particular, with *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, and more recent policy moves by the Australian federal Labor government. By locating our description in the here and now, we develop an “indigenous narrative” (Li, 2012) of accountability. In the broader management literature (at least Anglophone), indigenous research is seen as a powerful way to move discourses beyond content and contextualization to an explicit engagement with epistemology and the political nature of research (Eacott & Asuga, *in press*). Through this focus on time and space, we pay attention to the relations between various actors, be they institutions (e.g., schools, school system) or individuals (e.g., principals, school leaders), and locate these within a web of relations. These webs move beyond structures through their attention to relations, and also remove the ideal of complete agency (Eacott, *in press*). It is the combination of

bringing these diverse intellectual resources into conversation that enables us to offer a productive means of outlining contemporary accountability in Australian schooling. That is, rather than critiquing accountability and highlighting the various forms of oppression it brings into being, we explicitly seek to sketch a productive space in which to theorize accountability in the here and now that holds the prospect of taking scholarship in new and fruitful directions, which with further work could then be translated into practice.

MANAGEMENT RHETORIC

David Hartley (2010), building on the work of James O'Connor (1973), argues that changes in economic conditions bring about parallel changes in hegemonic management discourses, and this relationship is most observable during periods of economic expansion and contraction. Significantly, and despite the often argued centrality of education to national and international economies, or the presence of departments of educational administration and policy in many universities, the relationship between education, the economy, and shifts in management rhetoric has been little explored (Carpentier, 2003). Hartley draws on Eric Abrahamson's (1997) classification of two major rhetorics of management: the rational rhetoric, which focuses on standardization, hierarchy, audit, performance management, and efficiency; and the normative rhetoric, which appeals to the social and emotional needs of employees, and, in the context of schooling, we would add stakeholders (e.g., parents, community, and at a larger scale, the nation-state). In a similar argument within the organizational sciences, Paul Adler and Charles Heckscher (2006) refer to "control" and "commitment" approaches. The questions asked by O'Connor, Abrahamson, Alder and Heckscher, and Hartley center on why different rhetorics become orthodoxy in certain capitalist conditions. To place this in context, Figure 1 displays the annual

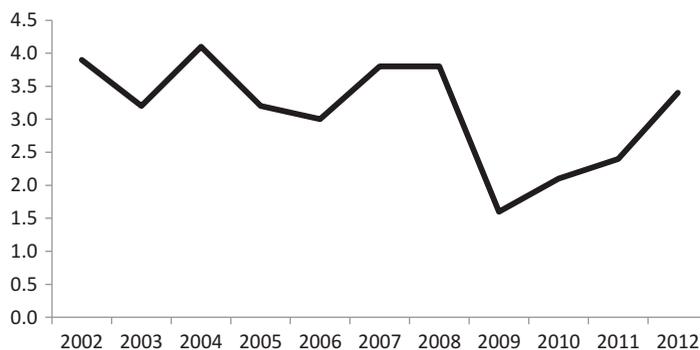


FIGURE 1 Gross domestic product—percentage changes, 2002–2012.

changes (using June as a marker) of changes in the gross domestic product for Australia. While a relatively crude measure of the nation's economic condition, it does provide an appropriate—and widely accepted—measure for locating our discussion around the relationship between managerial rhetoric in school leadership and public policy and the overarching economic condition.

Prior to the decline from 2007 in global economic conditions, Hartley (2010) noted that a more normative commitment was beginning to emerge as a means of reconciling the dehumanizing effect of managerialism.⁴ He speculated that this normative phase would continue until a new policy direction was agreed upon and/or imposed. We argue that such a time has arrived—at least in Australian education policy—and it is embodied in contemporary discourses of accountability, education, and school leadership.

Accountability is an essential dimension of any contemporary public-sector entity. This is especially so in the global fiscal contraction following the most recent global financial crisis, and the need for government to account for the distribution of public funds. Bob Lingard and Sam Sellar (2013) observe the scope of literatures emerging on educational accountability, stretching from the critical and theoretical (e.g., Ranson, 2003; Suspitsyna, 2010; Webb, 2011) to the philosophical (e.g., Biesta, 2004) and the more normative and policy pragmatic (e.g., Sahlberg, 2010). This voluminous literature is not surprising, as accountability has become a key feature of education policy globally, particularly through No Child Left Behind. In this space, Lingard and Sellar (2013) mobilize the term “catalyst data,” which denotes (public) data that encourage various stakeholders to ask questions about performance in the delivery of a public service. The purpose of which is that following input from stakeholders, key institutional actors can make rational plans—to which they will be held to account—to rectify performance issues.

While the economic data (at least the GDP reported here) is on the incline, the PISA rankings—which are also reflected in other regimes—have been in decline for some time. It is the combination of the perceived need to address the decline in ranking, with the sound economic conditions, that allows for a hybrid form of management rhetoric, one in which the rationality of perpetual improvement is infused with the emotive stance of the normative rhetoric, to be sustained. The relatively recent normative rhetoric of the Australian federal Labor government was centered on becoming a “top five” school system internationally by 2025. To achieve this, and embodying the thesis of Jim Collins's (2001) *Good to Great*, in a letter to Tony Mackay (the incoming chair of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership),⁵ Julia Gillard (then deputy prime minister and minister for education) noted that improving teacher quality requires strong leadership from principals and that excellent school leadership is a key to improving outcomes for students. Likewise, following her elevation to prime minister, as part of Gillard's education reform agenda she explicitly argued,

'If each of those [Australia's 9,529 schools] schools is to be a truly great school, it needs great leadership.'⁶ Rationality is brought to bear in bringing this aspiration into a reality, through the "national school improvement plan". As a statement of where the federal Labor Government (post-Gillard, but pre-2013 election) sits within this agenda, under the leadership of Kevin Rudd, it articulates:

Labor has always stood for fairer, more accessible and higher quality education. A good education is the best creator of opportunity in our society. But Australian students are falling behind the rest of the world. While we already have great schools and teachers in Australia, we need to do better. Labor's National Plan for School Improvement will deliver change and extra resources to every school in the country. As part of the plan, we want to put Australia back in the top five schooling nations in the world for reading, science, maths by 2025. To do this we have to ensure that every school is supported to reach their full potential.⁷

The shift that we see underway in this statement is the explicit mobilization of a rational rhetoric for the purpose of addressing a crisis in performance. The contemporary currency of the national and international economy of schooling is student results in standardized testing regime. This is working with the underlying generative principle of mainstream—by which we mean both popular and populous—literatures of educational leadership, management, and administration that the social world is malleable through the formulation and enactment of rational plans to bring about a desired future state (Eacott, 2010). In addition, there is the generative normative position that leaders should be able to bring about productive change. As a result, the legitimizing work of perpetual improvement (arguably finding its roots in a Tayloristic model of management) is only made possible through an organizing normative rhetoric. In other words, the data generated to construct global league tables has constituted a crisis in performance and we need leaders to take action to correct this situation.⁸ The primary means of legitimizing this perspective of school leadership is through policy.

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION POLICY MOVES

While recognizing the idiosyncratic nature of Australian education policy, a key document is *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008). As a national statement of inter-governmental commitments, its couching in both economic and social language is a key marker in the context of our argument. The policy document has two goals: (1) Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and (2) all young

Australians become: successful learners; confident and creative individuals; and active and informed citizens. An observation made in the document is:

Australia has developed a high-quality, world-class schooling system, which performs strongly against other countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In International Student Assessment, Australia ranked among the top 10 countries across all three education domains [literacy, numeracy, and science] assessed (p. 5).

The global economic and social conditions have shifted considerably since 2008, primarily as a result of the global financial crisis and political movements/uprisings in many parts of the world—notably Europe and the Arab Spring. In contemporary Australia, our education system has fallen from in the top ten to 27th in international rankings (with a downward trend as shown in [Figure 2](#)). This dialogue is however contested, with the key criticism that Australia’s performance has not fallen—as global league tables are comparative not criterion referenced—rather new players have entered the game, and there is speculation as to whether Australia should pursue reforms to align with the emerging tiger economies (Southeast Asia). Conservative/right-wing think tanks, such as the Grattan Institute (<http://www.grattan.edu.au>) have issued reports highlighting the strengths of the tiger economies and what they do in terms of policy, structure, and practice that Australia does not. This move by the Grattan Institute is consistent with what Sotiria Grek (2009) labels the “comparative turn” in education policy,

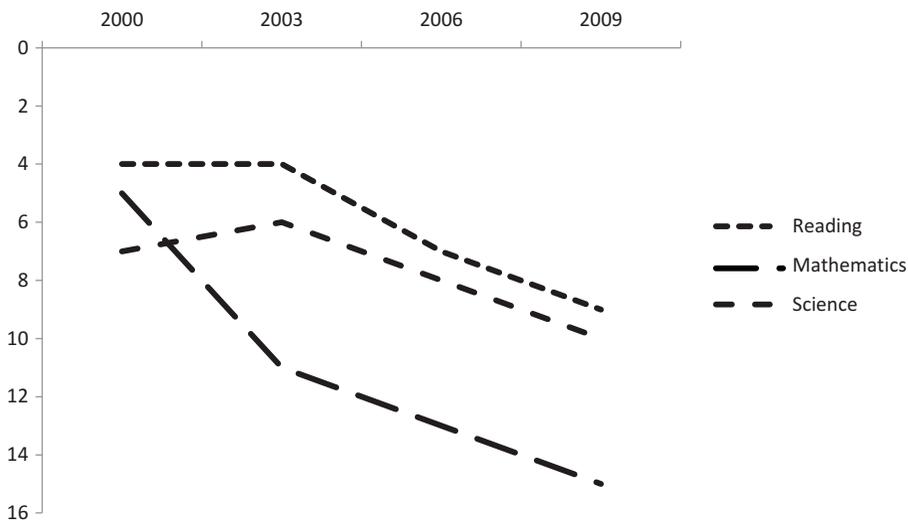


FIGURE 2 Australia’s ranking in PISA testing, 2000–2009.

reflecting the argument that a proposed reform is a feature of successful education systems elsewhere yet is absent in the country in question and its introduction will improve performance. As a result, despite arguable flaws in the rigor of the reporting and numerous academic criticisms of public policy (see Blackmore, 2010; Clarke, 2012; Lingard, 2010; Lingard & Sellar, 2013), there has been an observable shift in public discourses to the hegemonic position that the Australian education system is not performing at a standard desired. Part of this has to do with the universal language of numbers. Whereas complex academic arguments regarding the nature of school performance in the context of dynamic social forces are not always accessible, data in the form of numbers and displayed in figures (such as our own Figure 1) can almost universally be understood. This is often the most powerful rhetoric that politicians can mobilize to create a sense of crisis and, in doing so, present their alternate solution as the path to a better outcome.

The universal appeal of numbers is currently being played out in Australian discourses of education which have all but reduced discussions of schooling to the level of funding to be received following the Gonski review—now known as Better Schools Plan—and performance in the National Assessment Plan, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). In relation to our argument, we do see precursors for the changes in the accountability regimes for school leaders in *The Melbourne Declaration*. The first is in relation to authority and accountability, and the second, closely related, outlining structures to achieve the first. In the case of the former, “school leaders are responsible for creating and sustaining the learning environment and the conditions under which quality teaching and learning take place” (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 7).

This is difficult, if not impossible to refute. School leaders, frequently interpreted as “the principal” but increasingly expanding to include a number of actors within the physical (and virtual) school community, are legally responsible for schools. There is also the symbolic location of school leaders within the ontological complicity of ordinary language and the construction of “the school.” That is, we have come to know schools as places where the principal is “the boss” and, as a result, responsible for the performance of the school. In addition, and arguably of greatest practical importance, the mobilization of the indirect impact of school leaders on student outcomes (moderated by the role of the teacher/classroom practice) is consistent with contemporary thought and analysis in educational leadership, management, and administration. Importantly, the statement in the *Declaration* establishes who is responsible for outcomes. There is an overlooking of the out-of-school effects of outcomes (which a long tradition of sociologically informed research argues are the single greatest factor impacting upon school performance; for example, see Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970/1977), and what is foregrounded are “quality teaching” and “learning.” While they go hand-in-hand, the separation opens potential lines of accountability: one centered on

teaching (or more specifically, the teacher—potentially leading to new forms of teacher evaluation) and the other on the student. To achieve this, it is stated:

Government need sound information on school performance to support ongoing improvement for students, schools and school sectors. Good quality data enables governments to: analyse how well schools are performing; identify schools with particular needs; determine where resources are most needed to lift attainment; identify best practice and innovation; conduct national and international comparisons of approaches and performance; develop a substantive evidence base on what works. Australian governments commit to working with all school sectors to ensure that public reporting: focuses on improving performance and student outcomes; is both locally and nationally relevant; and is timely, consistent and comparable. (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 17)

There is an explicit play here for government to be the regulator, more so than provider, of education. The generation of data about schools, both by the school itself and government (through NAPLAN among others), is for the purpose of public accountability, transparency and data-driven resourcing, and most telling, comparison. There is a tension at play in the text where there is an expectation of innovation and “best practice,”⁹ and a risk-averse system of surveillance designed to detect performance outside the norm. In addition, the government has implemented a rewards program—one that replaces a program focused on the preparation and development of teacher quality and school leadership—to recognize achievement in student performance.

Through the Rewards for School Improvement program, as of 2015 around 500 schools (increasing to 1,000 in 2016) will be eligible for up to \$75,000 reward payments for demonstrated improved performance built upon self-reflection and improvement planning. In doing so, the Australian government is providing \$275.6 million in reward payments over five years. Key elements of the initiative are: the development of a National School Improvement Framework (NSIF); annual school self-evaluation against national measures within the NSIF; annual assessments of school improvement to identify most-improved schools; and reward payments to schools showing greatest improvement over the previous year commencing in 2015.¹⁰

There is little doubt that rational management rhetoric is being employed by policymakers in the ongoing reform of the Australian education system. Consistent with critical appraisal of the discourses, a crisis in performance has been brought to life through generated data and key players—namely policymakers, not necessarily educators—have provided

an avenue to correct the performance. While this argument can be raised for many other nations, with the absence of a recession (if only just) since the late 1980s and an economy that continues to grow, the hegemonic belief in the power of education to lead to prosperity remains intact. That is, while the economic conditions have hit certain industries hard (e.g., retail, manufacturing), the scale has not been as widespread as many of the nations in the global North. The rhetoric around the crisis is therefore not solely bound to a rational rhetoric of rebuilding, but arguably founded on an appeal to the more emotive stance of wanting Australia to regain its top-ten (or to use the government aspiration—top-five) ranking in global league tables. This is at best a very subtle move, but it is having an impact on the contemporary constitution of what it means to be a school leader. There is an expectation of both an outward-looking element (e.g., global rankings) yet locally grounded approach drawing on normative aspirations and rational plans. The key mechanism for providing evidence of this form of contemporary school leadership is through accountability.

RATIONAL, NORMATIVE, OR HYBRID

With the centrality of accountability in public policy, we, as with many others, see accountability as the constituting apparatus of contemporary school leadership. This underlying generative principle, however, goes beyond the “what can be counted counts” argument. Two things in particular stand out: first, despite its somewhat universal definition, accountability means different things in different contexts, so as a result, there is arguably a need for an indigenous narrative of accountability in a particular time and space; and second, the organization of schooling and school leadership around accountability regimes mobilizes a particular version of temporality—one based on clock time and the partitioning of labor (in this case administrative) through those portions of time. Overarching this, however, is the broader question of “leadership” and its location as a construct in the context of management rhetoric. As Gunter (2012) has observed, “leadership” is positioned as the solution to contemporary public policy issues (and this extends beyond education through to other social institutions) and therefore plays out through a normative rhetoric of how things ought to be and desired future states. At the same time, the operationalization of institutions as organizations, groups, or even individuals embodies rationality evident through the hegemonic discourses of strategic plans and key performance indicators. The result is consistent with Courpasson’s (2000) observation that the normative has not superseded the rational, rather softened it. However, we argue that there is a bigger issue at play here, one that raises questions regarding the scholarly value of “leadership” in the context of accountability. That is, the normative

rhetoric of management, as with public policy in general, is being rationalized. This crafts contemporary school leadership as a hybrid or the bridge between the normative and the rational.

A significant limitation in accountability regimes at scale is that the data lack any concrete referent for performance. Data are generated in such a way that they are based on the rather vacuous notion of comparability between schools and/or systems—one that aggregates schools to the point of being somewhat meaningless for all except politicians/ policymakers. With the increasing political intervention in education in Australia (Cranston, Kimber, Mulford, Reid, & Keating, 2010; Lingard, 2000; Lingard, Porter, Bartlett, & Knight, 1995), which is not to suggest that education has not been and always will be a political act, accountability has reached a point where it no longer operates on the game of school leadership (an overlay of sorts), but rather has become the game. While there remain critique and nostalgia for a period with less accountability, the experience of accountability is no longer separate to the contemporary rhetoric of school leadership and education in general, but a central discourse. What is particularly important here is that accountability is experienced as the orthodoxy of contemporary schooling and in doing so, educators—and education researchers—are frequently ontologically complicit in its legitimation (see Eacott, *in press*).

This is not, however, to suggest that accountability is universally mobilized. It is here where we see the value of indigenous research frames for advancing our depth of understanding (Li, 2012; Li, Leung, Chen, & Luo, 2012). Unlike in England, where the phenomenon of “failing schools” came into being, Australia has not moved to such an extreme policy environment. In its current manifestation, Australia employs a system in which the lowest performing schools (as identified by national testing data) are provided with additional funds for a period of time (ranging from six months to three years) to address the performance. This move is arguably the outcome of numerous localized factors. Two major factors include the articulated policy position of pursuing a fair and accessible high-quality education system, and the long performance tail in test results indicating a substantial gap between the highest and lowest performers (working at both school and individual student levels). While there is a recognition that the social world is not a level playing field—and arguably never will be—the aspirational nature of governmental, and then systemic, policy to equity, fairness, and accessibility for all considerably softens the rational expectations of plans, key performance indicators, and league tables. A key challenge in this normative element of contemporary school leadership discourse is the temporal nature of testing regimes and performance data.

Just like the temporal rules of the economic field, the hegemonic position on time in educational leadership, management, and administration is its measurement in terms of an abstraction, separate to events and reversible

through units of the clock (Adkins, 2011). As Eacott (2013) has argued elsewhere:

What we have come to know as the school and the administration of schooling is constituted through the operationalization and privileging of clock time. The temporal rules of schooling construct the school day, terms, semesters, the school year, class schedules and the notion of progression based on time. (p. 96)

If we return to our earlier notion that accountability is an organizing rhetoric for school leadership, then the role of temporality, or at least the dominant mobilization of a theory of temporality, is significant. Testing regimes are conducted annually, with individual cohorts measured every two years to allow for the calculation of "value-added" data or growth. With this data being central to our understanding of leadership, and particularly its effectiveness, the notion of temporality played out through clock time becomes a key feature of contemporary school leadership. That is, the effectiveness of leadership is coupled with testing regimes and evaluative judgments are made on the basis of results further legitimizing accountability (and performance data) as central to leadership. The pursuit of fairness, equity, and accessibility in an education system is not easily captured in units of the clock, as it requires a large scale social response, across many institutions such as education, health, and welfare. In contrast, achieving a particular ranking by a certain time is, by its very nature, based on units of clock time and the chosen path to achieve this built upon reversible units of clock time. This leads to a situation in which the generative aspirational elements of contemporary leadership embody the normative, yet the grounding in (clock) time and (comparative) social space embody the rational. To conceptualize contemporary school leadership through the privileging of one without attention to the other is problematic.

CONCLUSION

Jill Blackmore (2004) argues that to understand how educational administration is "perceived, understood, and enacted, one has to have a sense of the broader social, economic, and political relationships shaping educational work" (p. 267). To do this, we have established the contemporary education policy conditions in Australia as they relate to managerial rhetoric. We now turn our attention back to our original question: What is it about the socio-geographic location of Australia that has allowed for a hybrid notion of leadership to emerge?

Global financial insecurity has been a key driver in establishing and sustaining rational management rhetoric at scale. The self-perpetuating nature

of management discourses, embodying the underlying principle of management that the social world is malleable through a series of logical steps, has legitimized itself through the provision of a normative aspiration and then the rationality to bring the aspiration into existence. What we see playing out in the work of Lingard and colleagues on “policy borrowing” (Lingard, 2010) and “catalyst data” (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) is the hegemonic managerialist project, or neo-Taylorism in the public policy debate, and the pursuit of perpetual improvement through accountability regimes.

John Smyth (2008) contends that Australia has been one of the most enthusiastic neoliberal/ managerialist agenda. However, while Australia has embraced, is embedded in, and embodies the managerialist project, the manifestation of this in contemporary education policy is not exclusive. Although the strength of the rational rhetoric is substantial, and many would say all-consuming, there is enough to suggest that the normative is employed strategically and softens the rational. This normative operates in a very specific way to play to the emotive, or even nostalgic, attraction of better times and when student performance was higher. The common-sense appeal of “doing better” and being ranked among the world leaders works particularly well in a postcolonial state located on the periphery of the developed world whose size (in terms of population) when competing with the largest economies means punching well above our weight. The physical location of Australia when thinking through the geo-political location is significant as major players on the international scale, particularly newer economic powers such as China and India, are much closer physically than the traditional bases of the economic hubs in the global North. We argue that it is because of these multiple reasons that Australian management rhetoric in school leadership remains in a hybrid state.

The locating of Australia in sociopolitical space needs to be supplemented with locating temporally. The temporal features of the Australian education system play as large a part as locating in space. As a younger education system, compared with many in the global North, yet more experienced player than some nations in the international testing regimes, Australia brings a unique track record and trajectory to school leadership discourses. As a nation, Australia is embarking on a series of major reforms, bringing about a greater level of centralization in education management—a national curriculum, professional standards, accrediting body, teacher education reforms, and funding conditions. While there will remain localized variations in its delivery, for the first time Australian governments will be able to engage with international discourses from a relatively standardized platform. This will enable, for the first time, accountability for school performance to take a new shape where—comparability across systems within Australia can be compared for national strategic advantage—the scope and scale of leadership is no longer tied to schools, systems, but to a national agenda. An agenda that is data informed/driven, where the public disclosure

of data is expected, and more importantly, public questioning of data is the orthodoxy, the role of accountability within management rhetoric is heightened. Accountability is a key player in the educational leadership discourses and grounding scholarship in a particular time and space while paying attention to more global discourses creates an opportunity for theorizing about the constitution and ongoing reconstitution of what it means to lead a contemporary school.

Despite having built our argument on the two forms of management rhetoric, there is a need to exercise caution in constructing binaries out of the normative and the rational. Our thesis is that in the Australian education context, contemporary school leadership discourses are a hybrid of management rhetoric. Building from Hartley's exploration of the links between the economy and education, we stress that this hybrid condition is the result of Australian economic conditions, and outlook, bringing a degree of stability (relative to other economies). This stability, even if shifting, has enabled Australia as a nation to sustain activity during recent times of global fiscal uncertainty and created a space where the extreme rational or normative positions have not been exclusively employed. This hybrid discourse may or may not be sustained. After all, our argument is centered on the idea that we need scholarly narratives that are explicitly located in the here and now, and seek not so much to universalize, but rather ground scholarship in time and space. In doing so, this article offers both an individual case but also a methodological intervention in a scholarly field that is to faddism and—primarily on the basis of its parochial empirical object—substituting utility for contextually grounded accounts.

NOTES

1. We refer here to Frederick Winslow Taylor's (1911) classic *The Principles of Scientific Management*, which itself was a precursor to Fordist labor structures.

2. In a similar argument almost ten years earlier, but using the lexicon of the time, Martin Thrupp and Robert Willmott (2003) argued that "management" was constructed as the solution for the time.

3. This is an economy based on giving in the context of a relationship rather than making an immediate transaction. In the case of education, the potential reciprocation of the gift (knowledge, skills, and values) is in becoming a productive citizen. This return on investment is not immediate (as in market exchanges) and there is no guarantee.

4. Hartley use the label "neoliberalism," but we feel this is too broad a brushstroke, both for our purpose and that of our critics. Therefore we mobilize "managerialism," which takes much of its constitution from the work of Taylor (1911). Neo-Taylorism was a possibility, but this has been used by Gronn (1982) in a methodological sense—different to our purpose—and is far less used than managerialism in the discourses of educational leadership, management, and administration.

5. AITSL is the national body tasked with the development of professional standards for teachers and principals (see Dinham et al., 2013), offering professional learning opportunities and acting as a centralized hub for the education profession. See <http://www.aitsl.edu.au>

6. Retrieved from <http://www.alp.org.au/agenda/school-reform/>

7. Retrieved from <http://www.alp.org.au/education>

8. Elsewhere, Scott Eacott (2013) has argued that "leadership" as a concept is brought into being as a result of this normative perspective and its empirical validation in performance data.
9. While this term has a degree of popularity, it is reminiscent of Taylor's (1911) "one best method."
10. <http://deewr.gov.au/questions-reward-school-improvement-initiative>

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