

Theoretical notes on a *relational* approach to principals' time use: Sketching an international research project

SCOTT EACOTT

University of New South Wales

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Principals' time use has emerged as a serious policy problem in an era of reported decline in school outcomes – both organizational and individual student – and with difficulties in attracting quality candidates for vacancies. The contemporary crisis of the principalship is centered on an ever increasing workload (volume and complexity) and a deficit of time for instructional leadership. This paper presents a theoretical intervention for the field by proposing an alternate conceptualization of temporality and offers a, not the, means of designing an international study to advance the line of inquiry.

Proposed conceptual argument: Units of the clock are the orthodox version of time in modern Western society. This however is not a universal and is based on an external measure of practice. Theoretically, this paper offers an alternate version of temporality built on the relational theory that sees practice not as having time but generating time and space. It does not assume a single version of time and instead focuses on the subjective experiences of temporality of principals.

Implications: Shifting focus from the measurement construct of clock time to the subjective experiences of principals, this paper offers a sketch of an international project for principals' time use. The proposal can supplement existing literatures on principals' time use to form the basis of interventions in the interests of better understanding and improving practice.

Keywords: principal; time use; relational; research; theory

Type of article: conceptual paper

Across the social sciences there has been increased scholarly attention to matters of time. Evidence of this heightened interest can be found in sociology (Adkins, 2009, 2011, 2014), human services (Colley, Henriksson, Niemeyer, & Seddon, 2012), education (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013), teacher education (Eacott & Hodges, 2014), and educational administration and leadership (Eacott, 2013, 2015). This paper contributes to this ongoing dialogue and debate through a concern with issues of temporality and the study of principals' time use.

The history of educational administration and leadership, courtesy of a foundation in Taylorism and Fordist models of management, has adopted a particular version of temporality – one based on units of the clock. I trouble this orthodoxy on the basis of the clock operating externally to practice. This problem is identified as concerning a reliance on an entity/substantialist approach that overlays a particular version of time on practice. The research object (e.g. principals' practice) remains unchanged as time is nothing more than a

measurement construct. I argue that to understand the principalship through clock time is to miscomprehend practice.

To overcome the “Neo-Taylorism” (Gronn, 1982; Hodgkinson, 1978) of this orthodoxy I offer a *relational* methodology (Eacott, 2015). A focus on relations rather than entities moves beyond the external overlaying of a measure to the inscription of practice in spatio-temporal conditions. This paper therefore posits that temporality rather than (clock) time is a crucial lens for the theorization of educational administration and leadership including the ongoing recasting and potentialities of principals’ labor. I conclude by sketching a project mobilizing a *relational* approach to study principals’ time use.

OUR RELATIONS WITH TIME

Modernity privileges a particular version of the temporal. The dominant ideology of Western thought, achieved through an appeal to the rational individual, universalism and standardization, is based on the clock. It is therefore not surprising that schooling as a major social institution of modernity is a temporal activity. As I have argued previously:

What we have come to know as the school and the administration of schooling is constituted through the operationalisation 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. (Eacott, 2013, p. 96)

To think of principals’ time use in such a way is to mobilize a version of temporality that is a measure external to events and reversible to units of the clock (Adkins, 2009). As Bourdieu (2000[1997]) argues, legitimized through the ordinary language of the everyday, time is constituted as a “thing” – an entity – that one has, gains or wastes. The possibility of time being anything other than the clock is beyond everyday comprehension due our complicity with the orthodoxy. Clock time has come to occupy all aspects of daily life and is central to our understanding of institutions and labor. Marxist social theory, Critical Theory in educational administration (e.g. Bates, 1983; Foster, 1986), and to a lesser extent Weberian social theory (e.g. Weber, 1978[1922]), argues that the clock is an instrument of control through the regulation of labor. Taylor’s (1911) germinal work, *The principles of scientific management* was based on the efficient use of (clock) time and his approach was centered on time-motion studies (i.e. the observation and measurement of employee’s time-use). Taylorism was a central feature of educational administration programs in US universities during the first half of the 20th century (Callahan, 1962; Tynack & Hansot, 1982). Many of the leading professors of the time, including George Strayer (*Teachers College Columbia*), Edward Elliott (*Wisconsin*), Franklin Bobbit (*Chicago*), and Ellwood Cubberly (*Stanford*), were advocates. As arguably a founding figure of modern management, traces of Taylorism remain in existing theorizations of organizations and in particular management (Kanigel, 1997), in the case of my argument, this is despite claims to it have dissipated in educational administration and leadership some time ago (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Although notions of a “science” (usually taken to be synonymous with positivism) of educational administration and leadership, commonly linked with the *Theory Movement*, are no-longer legitimate markers for scholarship (Culbertson, 1981, 1988), logical empiricism (a particular form of positivism) remains a dominant mode of inquiry. With a debt to Simon’s (1945) *Administrative behavior*, and the Vienna Circle (notably the early writings of Feigl), educational administration and leadership studies have long sought “objectivity, reliability, operational definitions, coherent or systematic structure, and comprehensiveness” (Griffiths, 1959, p. 45). As the orthodoxy of scholarship, and by virtue the privileged form of

knowledge generation, when combined with contemporary moves for reproducible and scalable research providing “what works” for policy makers, systemic authorities, and practitioners (Camburn et al., 2016; Donmoyer & Galloway, 2010), it is not surprising that an apparently objective, external and knowable construction of temporality – clock time – is the dominant position.

For the educational administrator, notably the principal, how institutional actors experience and utilize the passing of time is of heightened importance. A growing concern with the temporal aspects of schooling (Daniels & Haller, 1981) is based on the perception of time as a resource and lever for improving performance (Yair, 2000). In the contemporary marketplace that is education, the value of the institution, and individual actors within it, is based on their effective and efficient usage of time. Reporting cycles, schedules, even conceptions of career stage (e.g. Earley & Weindling, 2007; Mercer, 1997; Oplatka, 2004a) are based on units of the clock. As Duncheon and Tierney (2013) note:

School leaders wrestle with how best to allocate their teachers' time given both instructional and administrative demands (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Indeed, because scheduling creates both possibilities and limitations, teachers' work is fundamentally shaped by and interpreted through the dimension of time (Hargreaves, 1990). How people spend their discretionary time also enhances or limits their success in education or the work-place (Becker, 1965). For students, “the non-school hours (evenings, weekends, summers) can be times of opportunity, risk, or stagnation” (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003, p. 26). Students can theoretically improve their achievement by using their time in academically meaningful ways (Carbonaro, 2005). For instance, scholars have explored the effects of homework (Ulrich, 2007; Witkow, 2009) or involvement in extracurricular activities (Price, Wight, Hunt, & Bianchi, 2009) on academic achievement. Time allocation research therefore helps to explain and facilitate positive educational outcomes (p. 238).

To conceive of time as an external measure leads to analysis primarily concerned with return on investment or at the least, a conflated correlation-based causal claim concerning activity and outcome. As with Taylorism, efficiency becomes of primary importance. Mobilized as a measurement construct, the unit of measure (partitions of the clock) becomes of greater significance than the object it is being mobilized to measure. There is a focus on structure (describing principals' daily activities) rather than meaning (Ås, 1978). The structuring of this line of inquiry focuses on the “passing of time”, granting ontological status to a social construction as though it is an external and knowable entity/substance – to think with Durkheim (1982[1895]), a “social fact”. Time becomes a *social a priori* constitutive of the organizing of society. Without time, society would not be possible. Organizing activity, including educational administration and leadership, would not be possible. Administration, in all forms, finds its origins in the pursuit of social order with substantial control exercised over the use of this “time”. This underlying generative principle brings a form of rationalism to research and conceives of time as an unquestioned foundation of the social. The result is an unquestioned adoption of a socially constructed measurement. This ontological complicity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992]) comes from the embedded and embodied nature of the educational administration scholar (Eacott, 2015, ch 2).

Given the absence of scholarly debate around notions of temporality in educational administration and leadership it is of little surprise that the theoretical resources of the broader social sciences have not been put to use to engage with matters of principals' time use. This is even less surprising if we consider that our current time problems are widely understood to concern a crisis of not having enough (clock) time. In the context of clock time based accountability and reporting it might be useful to ask of what value are alternate perspectives of temporality, but this is the very question of importance. In failing to move

beyond the measure of time based on the clock, or at least being open to alternatives, it is impossible to generate any disruption to the existing social order.

To this end, it is the contention of this paper that in alternate understandings of temporality – as opposed to clock time – that we find important resources for the study of principals' time use. At first sight, these theoretical resources might appear to bear little connection to or resonance with current research and policy moves on principals' time. The usefulness and relevance of these resources may only be made explicit if we understand these events as concerning a reworking of time, an ontological and epistemological shift in how we come to see and understand principals' work. The intervention of this paper is based on the claim that *the current problems with principals' time use concern a crisis of temporality* and that *the relational research program provides the resources to help us understand this crisis of temporality*. This intervention is not about mapping the social with a new lexicon and instead focused on understanding principals' time use in new terms. These new terms not only allow for an unsettling of many of the normative assumptions regarding time deficits and accelerated administration, but they also allow for questioning the unpredictability of the forthcoming and perpetual efficiencies of organizational practices. After all, Duncheon and Tierney (2013) argue, traditional theoretical and methodological approaches to time research no longer capture the nuances of temporal realities.

FROM TIME TO TEMPORALITY

Understanding how time is perceived and experienced is a necessary prerequisite to constructing theories, policies and practices concerning the organizing of education. Despite considerable attention on the need to re-inject education (or specifically instructional oversight) into school leadership, a well-rehearsed argument in the literatures is that the actual percentage of instructional work undertaken by school leaders is minimal (e.g. Camburn, Spillane & Sebastian, 2010; Murphy, Neumerski, Goldring, Grissom, & Porter, 2015). For many in education, notably policy makers and systemic authorities, this is a pressing issue given the links between an instructional focus by school leaders and improved student outcomes (e.g. Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). As Grissom, Loeb and Matini (2015, p. 774) argue:

... principals must make decisions about how to allocate their time among competing job demands. These time-use decisions are important for effective leadership, as evidenced by the relationship between principal time use and school outcomes (e.g. Grissom et al., 2013; Horng et al., 2010).

That said, this perceived problem of time allocation or deficit to do the instructional work of the principalship reflects a particular version of time. As an enduring line of inquiry, time is conceived of as a resource (Saxby, 1984) that requires management (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2015; Grissom et al., 2015; Heaney, 2001; Helps, 1994; Kouali & Pashiardis, 2015; Osborne, 1986; Walkington, 1966), but most significantly, represents a solution to the problems and pressures of the principalship (Brighouse, 1983).

Orthodox approaches to time in educational administration and leadership mobilize a rationalist logic. With roots in Parsons (1937) via Getzels and Guba (1957) and central to Hoy and Miskel's (1978) much used textbook, rationalism seeks to bring control, roles and order to the social world. For Parsons (1937), among others (e.g. Hill, 1982), the very existence of organizations is the division of labor within society and as a result, form (e.g. the principalship) follows function (e.g. improving outcomes). The separation of time from practice gives rise to the prioritizing of measurement, and specific measures (primarily for

comparison). Discussions of performance are not far removed from the shopfloor notion of rates of production. From this perspective, time remains intact and other variables require manipulation (change) to achieve a desired outcome. The argument of time allocation is a case in point. There is a finite amount of (clock) time available and to achieve the desired outcomes activity must be focused on the tasks leading to the greatest return on investment. Efficiency and effectiveness, a legacy of Taylorism and Fordist models of management, become paramount. Hattie's (2009) work has been influential for this perspective as it explicitly names practices with the greatest effect on student outcomes. Time, as in units of the clock, remain a constant and external to practice.

A substantial body of literature on principals' time use mobilizes units of the clock. Multiple versions of activity logs (e.g. Barnes et al., 2010; Camburn, Spillane & Sebastian, 2010; May & Supovitz, 2011; Spillane & Zeburi, 2009) and experience sampling methods (e.g. Spillane, Camburn & Pustejovsky, 2008), as with the Mintzberg (1973) inspired structured observations before them (e.g. Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Martin & Willower, 1981; Rosenblatt & Somech, 1998; Thomas, 1986; Thomas, Willis, & Phillipps, 1981), have minutes and/or hours as a primary measurement unit. The underlying generative principle of this position is an external knowable reality and the measurement of that entity with an external framework. This is especially so when asking principals to identify their activities against a pre-existing classificatory system. Harvey (1993) argues that coding of activities should be done following data generation (e.g. by the researcher/s) not during by participants. The measurement construct and classificatory system serve the observer's purposes more so than reflect the experiences of the observed. Despite the Anglophone "exhibitionism of data and procedure" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992], p. 65), time is uncritically accepted as units of the clock and goes largely untroubled. Not only is it untroubled, but the hegemonic version of time is considered to be universal.

Attempts at cross-cultural or cross-national understandings of principals' time use (e.g. Lee & Hallinger, 2012), as with large scale projects such as the *Multinational Time Use Project* and *Multinational Comparative Time Budget* work (Szalai, Kim, Oh, Choo, Kang, Park, & Yang, 1972), are somewhat dependent upon a universal construct of time. The search for patterns, causes and effects that are consistent across time and space requires a unifying framework – something that clock time provides. That is, while the context changes – as with any variable in a systems thinking approach – the measure remains. Combining a perceived objectivity, a practice frequently equated with being "scientific", and a rationalist concern for efficiency, time is germane for a common measurement (e.g. clock time) for the purpose of comparison and intervention. For scholars from the global north, or even just the dominant centers of educational administration and leadership research, this raises a question of epistemic imperialism. Unlike historical forms of colonialism that relied upon physical occupation, contemporary forms include the production of territory through the mapping of new terrains with concepts and labels from elsewhere. However, there are alternate versions of time.

Sociologists and anthropologists have been influential in advancing a social constructionist (subjectivist) framework for time as an alternative to (objectivist) clock time (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013). This is not to be confused with a form of relativism, rather that constructions of time are emergent from particular spatio-temporal conditions. Understandings of time are therefore embedded and embodied in context rather than separate. As a social construction time poses some serious methodological considerations for educational administration and leadership. Adkins (2011), following Bourdieu, makes a key point in arguing that time "does not offer itself to be felt or sensed and passes largely *unnoticed*" (p. 352, emphasis in original). Passing largely unnoticed troubles classic empiricist approaches which rely on sensory experience and also rationalist approaches

seeking to apply a pre-existing normative orientation to the social world. If time is beyond the senses, then it is not of the empirical but rather an epistemic. As an act of construction, time requires theoretical attention – namely at the ontological and epistemological level – more so than procedural control.

To overcome some of these limitations and blind spots, I propose a shift in lexicon from “time” to the “temporal”. This means going beyond the empirical question of how does one spend or allocate his/her time and its measurement to a theoretical question about the nature of practice. Generated through an expansion of the role and exponential increases in workload volume, the principalship is experiencing somewhat of a crisis of time. Reflective of a substantialist/rationalist approach to understanding the social, ready-made versions of temporality (e.g. clock time) and procedures for measuring those (e.g. logs, structured observations) are determining the problems to be studied. Going beyond measurement constructs such as time, but also student/school outcomes, means a shift in the unit of analysis to the principalship. Rather than the mapping of a terrain with external measurement constructs, a relational approach requires the inscription of the principalship in spatio-temporal conditions. Substantialist notions of time such as units of the clock or markers on a calendar and space as a particular location, are thought anew in a relational approach where spatio-temporal conditions are produced through organizing activity.

SPATIO-TEMPORAL CONDITIONS

The limitations of privileging the measure of time over practice are not unnoticed (e.g. Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton & Ikemoto, 2012; Earley & Bubb, 2013). Grissom, Loeb and Master (2013) note:

The time-use and survey measures that we use may indicate that the allocation of principal instructional time matters, but it is possible that these measures are proxies for the skills and behaviors that different principals bring to the table when trying to support teachers instructionally. It may be these differences in skills and not the time use that actually cause the school outcomes observed. (p. 442)

Consistent with my argument earlier, the external clock time is arguably not the cause of distinctions in performance (whatever the measure – with the exception being “time” itself). This is why a focus on structures rather than meaning is problematic. Lee and Hallinger (2012) argue that context is important in determining how principals allocate and use their time, yet Spillane and Zuberi (2009) contend that many approaches struggle to “put particular interactions into context” (p. 393). The two citations immediately above highlight the limitations of orthodox approaches to principals’ time use. There is the commodification of time by Lee and Hallinger, and then the separation of interactions from contexts illuminated by Spillane and Zuberi (2009).

Rather than have time as a thing that a principal allocates and uses, my argument is that the principalship as an organizing activity makes spatio-temporal conditions. Although present in broader organizational studies literatures (e.g. Endrissat & von Arx, 2013; Maitlas & Lawrence, 2007; Samra-Fredericks, 2003), the spatial and temporal dynamics of organizational life are often overlooked (Fahy, Easterby-Smith, & Lervik, 2014), and especially in educational administration and leadership. An enduring argument in educational administration and leadership has been that the work of principals is fragmented, fast-paced, varied and undertaken over long hours (e.g. Lortie, 1975; Martin & Willower, 1981; Wolcott, 1973). Although there is some troubling of this argument, notably Golding, Huff, May, and Camburn (2008) who argue that the role may not be as fragmented as previously thought, the

centrality of time as *the* problem has “the nature and pace of events often appear to control principals rather than the other way around” (Manasse, 1985, p. 442). This may alternatively be expressed as:

(1) Context (social structures) → practice.

Employing a structural deterministic logic (Dèpelteau, 2013), the principalship as a practice is dependent upon – or determined by – social structures. Bureaucratic accounts that stress the downward linearity of policy, constraints of environmental factors, including the deficit of time, are aligned with this logic. The explanatory value of the principalship is insignificant when compared to external social structures, and especially so when combined with an external measure of time. The opposing position, an independent logic, privileges the agency of the individual (both person and collective such as the school) to overcome social structures. In other words, if used appropriately, time is a resource that enables positive outcomes (e.g. Yair, 2000). This is the underlying causal principle of the successful schools / turnaround leader agenda (e.g. Day & Gurr, 2014). It can be expressed as:

(2) Practice (agency) → context (social structures)

Attempts to blend these causal mechanisms such as the interdependent:

(3) Practice (agency) ↔ context (social structures)

or the moderated

(4) Context (social structures) → (+/-) practice (agency) → transformed or reproduced

conflate practice and context (3) or rely on analytical dualisms (4). All of the above causal logics are based on a separation of context and practice. A *relational* approach to principals' time use calls for a rethink of causality. This is not to endorse the abandonment of causality, rather a re-orientation beyond causal determinism. Taking context to be the ongoing configuration of spatio-temporal conditions provides the basis for an alternate conceptualization of context and causality. The enacted nature of the principalship as an organizing activity shifts attention to the unfolding description of practice and greater theorizing of spatio-temporal conditions – relating activities to one another rather than necessarily applying a linear cause and effect set of claims. This is in contrast to the correlational basis of linking time spent on activities and perceived outcomes of that activity.

Asserting that the principalship is constituted in and through relational activity is not controversial. Practice as generative of spatio-temporal conditions while also emergent from them does however challenge the orthodoxy of principals' time use literatures. Recasting context as spatio-temporal conditions and part of, rather than separate to, the principalship has clear implications for theorizing. The overlaying of an external frame (e.g. time) is neither desirable nor particularly useful. To think anew spatio-temporal conditions for the purpose of understanding principals' time use requires a considerable shift. Following Donati (2015), I am going to use the label of *auctor*, meaning “s/he who generates” (p. 88), to refer to the principal. This is not about bringing a novel lexicon to a discussion of principals' time use rather it is about challenging the underlying generative causal claims of orthodoxy research. In thinking of generation rather than use, we have the intellectual resources to breakdown binaries and the minimal engagement across the different research traditions of educational administration and leadership.

BEYOND ANALYTICAL DUALISM

The office of the principalship owes as much of its constitution to its relations to others as it does to anything else. To think of the principal as an auctor requires theorizations sensitive to generative relations. Rather than static and stable social structures, we have social forms. These social forms – including the school – are generated by auctors but are not dependent upon them. Instead, these social forms are an emergent property of situated activity. To bring this into conversation with principals' time use is not to construct an objective (clock time) and subjectivist (event time) binary. Such analytical dualisms are neither desired nor particularly helpful as they do not breakdown the boundaries between approaches and instead perpetuate parallel monologues. Thinking with either/or reduces relations to binary codes of 0s and 1s and nothing more than a measurement construct.

An approach that has the auctor generating spatio-temporal conditions breaks down the possibilities of deterministic structuralism and absolute agency. Following Bourdieu (2005[2000]), mindful of the critique of his work as structural deterministic, much like a gravitational field even the person perceived to have absolute agency is him/herself within the constraints of social relations. The structuralism of clock time privileges the external measure, or quantity of time, and reduces the possibility of agency to the “use” of time. Event time, which privileges the subjectivist experiences of time, temporal diversity, quality and meaning, remains open to the critique of relativism and arguably overplays the choice available to individuals through the denial of overarching social structures. A *relational* approach stresses the messiness of temporality. In negating the prospect of structural determinism and absolute agency, the reductionism required to identify the site of any decision as to how to use time is no-longer possible. This is counter to literatures based on the assumptions that principals have the final decision on the allocation of their time.

In negating the possibility of structure and agency, notions of individualism and collectivism are also called into question. The individualism of the capitalist project and the singular relationship between the person and the clock limits explanations to a focus on productivity and accountabilities – much like Taylorism. Reporting the percentage of time spent on various activities and judgement as to their rate of return in organizational outcomes atomizes organizations and facilitates comparison. As an approach, the focus on the allocation of time – or the productive use of – assumes that it can explain educational outcomes. At the same time, organizing activity is not a coherent whole. It is neither the sum of its individual parts or the collection acting as a coherent whole. An overview of organizational time allocation can provide a useful insight into priorities, but the distribution cannot be conflated with individuals or assumed to reflect an isolated organization as to do so is to remove the organization from the spatio-temporal conditions of its generation.

Oplatka (2016), in responding to my claims in *Educational Leadership Relationally* (Eacott, 2015), argues that the foundations of educational administration and leadership are a universal set of characteristics shared by school contexts the world over. The possibility of universality has been attractive in educational administration and leadership since at least the Theory Movement, but arguably since its inception as an academic discipline. As a community of scholars, educational administration and leadership researchers have established a number of large international studies. Recent initiatives such as the *International School Development Network* (an initiative of the US-based University Council for Educational Administration and UK-based British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society), ongoing work such as the *International Successful School Principals Project* (ISSPP) (e.g. Day & Gurr, 2014), and past projects such as the

International Study of Principal Preparation (e.g. Slater & Nelson, 2013) represent concerted efforts to generate cross-national explorations of school leadership.

International projects are however far from unproblematic. Beyond the logistics of ongoing project management, the enduring challenge posed by the analytical dualism of universalism and particularism is rarely overcome when pursuing standardized knowledge production (e.g. Harvey, 1993). When thinking through past attempts at international school leadership projects, Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2006) argue:

... the disregard for country context is worrying, as despite observations of the apparent homogenization of world education, there remain important differences in how countries approach school education (p. 372).

Asking questions of the universal and particular forces us to question what it is we seek to standardize in the interests of generating data in international projects. Dirlik (2007) argues that we are entering a period of global modernity. Rather than an older Eurocentric modernity that is associated with Western imperialism, colonialism and the presumption of civilizational progress, global modernity is characterized by a plurality of modernities arising from a plurality of cultural traditions (e.g. Confucian, Arabic, Islamic, African, Japanese, Western). To overcome the epistemic imperialism of a Western version of temporality, a cross-national exploration of principals' time use would need to balance the particular experiences of the temporal without assuming one version and a consistency in data generation.

In what ways can relational approaches, particularly given their more theoretical than applied orientation, contribute to this initiative? After all, Eacott and Evers (2015) argue in relation to theoretical work, it is not popular and even more so, "seen as illegitimate in a disciplinary space that is prone to faddism, privileges a conservative, rational, and somewhat atheoretical, set of discourses that seek to maintain a highly applied nature" (p. 310). Dèpelteau (2015) contends that relational approaches are only useful if they can propose new solutions to fundamental issues when compared with existing theorizations. I want to take this further to argue that if relational approaches do not generate the type of intellectual turmoil that Griffiths (1979) argued for, or later Samier (2013) sought in educational administration and leadership, namely by problematizing the orthodoxy of principals' time use canons, then they offer little more than noise. Therefore, to ensure that this paper has an audience beyond itself, in the following section I outline a, not *the*, means of mobilizing the *relational* approach for a study of principals' time use.

SKETCHING A RESEARCH PROJECT

Principals' time use and instructional focus have emerged as serious problems in an age of perceived declining school standards and student outcomes. The type of analysis made possible by the *relational* approach that I am advancing offers a means of composing theoretically inscribed descriptions of situated actions. It explicitly blurs any sense of distance between the researcher and the researched, problematizes the uncritical adoption of everyday language and orthodoxy (e.g. clock time), sees practice as generative of spatio-temporal conditions, goes beyond the binaries of structure/agency, individualism/collectivism and universal/particular, to productively theorizes the temporal experiences of principals. As an approach, it does not definitively resolve the epistemological and ontological issues of principals' time use research, but it does engage with them. Significantly, time is not conceived as a measurement construct or commodity but as an integral feature of practice. In doing so, the *relational* approach offers the potential to provide new ways of understanding more so than simply mapping the intellectual terrain with novel ideas and vocabularies.

Epistemological preliminaries

Arguments for illuminating our ontological complicity with the social world and establishing some form of epistemological break have a long history in the social sciences through Bachelard (1984[1934]), Althusser (1969[1965]), Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron (1991[1968]), and more recently in educational administration and leadership (Eacott, 2015). The primary point of concern is that orthodox ways of perceiving the world are the result of our internalization of the social world as it is. The choice of problem (e.g. time deficits), the elaboration of concepts (e.g. time) and analytical categories (e.g. units of the clock) serve as a ratification of the orthodoxy. An initial task, although to think linearly is problematic, is to subject to scientific scrutiny everything that makes the orthodox experience of the world possible. Failure to do so can lead to the confusion of the pre-scientific – or ordinary language of the everyday – for data and analytical categories. The uncritical acceptance of the everyday language obscures the intellectual resources at work and arguably reduces any sense of scholastic (scientific) work to the structured reporting or organization of common-sense. Such research rarely achieves any broader sense of scientific credibility within or beyond the academy and this is a significant matter for educational administration and leadership given its enduring low quality status as a sub-field (Bridges, 1982; Erickson, 1967; Gorard, 2005; Griffiths, 1959, 1965, 1985; Immegart, 1975) within the low status field of education research (Lagemann, 2000). However, as Bachelard (1984[1934]) reminds us, science (in the broadest sense) can only progress by perpetually calling into question the very principles of its own constructs.

A social scientific approach to principals' time use, as advocated for in this paper, must break free of the ambition of grounding in (rational) reason, the arbitrary division of the experiences of the social world into units of the clock and instead take for its object the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of principals' temporal experiences. This is not a case of theoreticism – or theory for theory's sake – rather, if I return to my original provocation, to trouble the orthodoxy of principals' time use research, then this is only made possible by asking questions of the genesis of the orthodoxy. A useful theoretical resource for this is Bourdieu's notion of epistemic reflexivity (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992]). This involves illuminating the social and intellectual unconscious embedded in analytical tools and operations with a focus on strengthening the epistemological security of scholarship through rigor and robustness.

Confronting one's ontological complicity with the social world requires a recognition of the use of language as an organizing framework. As noted previously, time is often seen to control principal practice. The performative nature of language, particular in the case of organizations and organizing activity, means that the uncritical acceptance of labels cannot be defended. An analysis of the temporal dimensions of the principalship could draw upon the legal requirements of the principalship, advertised criteria and role descriptions, policy documents and government/systemic reports – not to mention the expansive and rapidly proliferating research literatures. Paying attention to the function of temporal language, such an analysis has the potential to illuminate the official temporality of the principalship and provide the basis for empirical inquiry without resorting to definitive, and forevermore, operational definitions. What remains is a generative inquiry.

Empirical grounding

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 relations shaping educational work” (p. 267). Analysis of texts goes part of the way to empirically grounding knowledge claims. However, to provide a “thick description” (Ryle, 1971 via Geertz, 1973) of practice requires some fieldwork. There are a number of options available to generate such data but for the illustrative purposes of this sketch of a project I am going to offer three major sources: interviews; diaries; and observations.

Interview. Although a costly data generation strategy, for the purpose of engaging with the subjective experiences of temporality of principals interviews are arguably the most appropriate method. These interviews would establish the basis of a theory of principals' experiences of the temporal using their own words. This allows for far greater flexibility and potential diversity in the generated data and leaves the analytical work to the researcher rather than participant. The goal of the interview is to therefore have the participant articulate their own understanding of time and how they experience it in relation to their day-to-day work. Questions could include: Tell me about your role at the school? Can you tell me about a typical day for you? What does the term “principals' time use” mean to you in your current role? Can you think of a specific event or series of events when your time has been most challenged? What forms of learning have you undertaken in relation to your time? What sort of analogy best describes your role? Is there anything else you would like to add regarding time and the principalship? As an additional note, in his synthesis of time use data collection Harvey (1993) found little difference in the quality of data generated between face-to-face and phone (potentially also now including technologies such as skype) interviews.

Daily diary: A less expensive and commonly used approach is daily logs or diaries. Building from the data generated in the interviews, the point of distinction from commonly used logs/diary approaches (e.g. Camburn, Spillane & Sebastian, 2010; Spillane, Camburn & Pustejovsky, 2008) is the choice to not use the application of (clock) time and classification of activity into pre-defined categories. Adopting an open-ended rather than closed approach provides principals' with the opportunity to report activities in their own words (e.g., name two or three specific examples that capture how the day was experienced).

Getting the duration of the diarized period workable is a significant task. The greater number of days diarized reduces measurement error, accounts for atypical days, increases the usefulness of data but needs to be balanced against potential declines in data quantity (e.g. response rates) and burden on participants. Shorter samples (e.g. one day) rely on the assumption of little day-to-day variance in activities. If that is the case, additional days do not add value only quantity to data generation. Gershuny (nd), reported in Harvey (1993), developed a design effect statistic and argued that a week data sample gives precision estimates of five or six times larger than a single day measure. Despite concerns for quality deteriorating across the week, he found little evidence and increased non-response only becomes a problem if it comprises the data due to respondent bias (something very difficult if not impossible to test for). Camburn, Spillane and Sebastian (2010) were able to achieve a high level of co-operation from study participants over a two-year project using a web-based self-administered daily log built on the back of regular contact, initial training and support, and email reminders. Building on the work of Camburn and colleagues, I propose that a minimum of 15 days per school year be adopted to cater for the ebbs and flow of the academic year and using an open-ended approach for entries to provide sufficient data to develop rich descriptions of principals' experience of temporality.

Observation. Much of what we know about how principals' allocate their time comes from structured observations (Camburn, Spillane & Sebastian, 2010) and generating data in real time enhances the ecological validity of research (Gronn, 2003). However, observations are expensive, time intensive, potentially miss information due to the “outsider” observing practice and not knowing the history or trajectory of practices. The potential returns of observations for adding to the data generated through interviews and diaries are substantial.

Observations assist the research team to gain information and insights about how principals experience temporality that can be interwoven with interview and diary data. As a data generation approach, observations are “a more reliable method and less burdensome on busy headteachers than research based on self-report, using diaries logs or questionnaires” (Earley & Bubb, 2013, p. 793). The principal goal of observations for the approach I am advancing is to support the data generated in the diaries and interviews. In facilitating the prospect of comparative analysis across multiple sites, as much information should be generated as possible and then standardized coding such as with whom, where, what takes place, how, and whether it was planned or spontaneous should be used (e.g. Harvey, 1993; Spillane & Zuberi, 2009). As this is supplementary to other forms of data generation, the extent of observation is significant but arguably only requires one to two days per participant.

Scaling up

Shifting from the measure of (clock) time to the experiences of temporality makes the possibility of conducting a cross-national exploration of principals’ time use not entirely obvious. There are several possible scenarios that could be followed to achieve a cross-national collaborative program of research. First, there is the prospect of replication of previous studies, although this relies on a single preceding project that meets the necessary theoretical and methodological requirements. For my purposes, this is not an option. Second, somewhat related to the previous, there is the merging of existing data sets to form a common data set that may, or may not, be re-analyzed using a new framework. Again, given my proposal being a significantly shift from the orthodoxy to this point, this is not an option. A third is to co-ordinate the design and conduct of forthcoming studies to facilitate merging them into a common data set with comparable parameters which could be used for cross-national explorations of principals’ time use. This final option is the most common approach in educational administration and leadership (e.g. the *ISSPP*). Common protocols for data generation are desirable in any large scale project and increase the epistemological security of research. On the basis of this approach and scaling up across sites and over multiple years, Leithwood (2005) argues that progress in the *ISSPP* has enabled the team to:

... approximate both the standards of internal validity commonly associated with intensive qualitative research and standards of external validity typically reserved for large-scale quantitative research (p. 619).

and

... the number of cases being developed in some countries is beginning to approximate sample sizes not uncommon in quantitative research. So we are nibbling at the lower edges of external validity within countries (p. 626).

The approach I have been advancing in this paper focuses on principals’ experiences of temporality and this poses some challenges to the scaling up of projects. Most significantly, attention is re-orientated to experiences of principals and this becomes the focus of standardized protocols rather than a universal construct and its measurement. To that end, in drawing on the National Research Council (1990), Porter and Gamoran (2002) and based on the assumption of standardized protocols, I propose two criteria for quality international comparative studies of principals’ time use. First, any study has to have value for better understanding and/or improving practice locally (in the site where the research is taking place) and cross-nationally (at least to those participating in the project, but desirably also

beyond the project). Second, any study should be characterized by conceptual neutrality (e.g. not be limited to Western notions of time and epistemic imperialism).

An underlying generative principle of the argument of this paper is that the principalship is a universal position. Despite having been cautious of universals earlier, for the purpose of the study of principals' time use, it is fair to assume that those participating and engaging with the work will have such a position in place or similar – even if by a different label (e.g. headteacher in the English context). To explicitly investigate the subjective experiences of principals grounds the research in the local. This is not however to limit it to the particular, as there is a substantial amount of information that researchers bring into case studies – not the least of which is the scholarly literatures of the field – and it is even possible to generalize from single cases (Evers & Wu, 2006). This makes the claims by Leithwood above desirable for the rigor and robustness of research but not necessary for achieving useful arguments. The data generated through the *relational* approach advocated in this paper can be related to existing literatures on principals' time use, and interwoven to build a more comprehensive picture of the work of principals. Similarly, local cases studies can be merged with those from elsewhere (courtesy of the standardized protocols) to analyze the experiences from different locations for both their similarities and dissimilarities. In doing so, the research can inform interventions at the local and cross-national levels.

To advance a cross-national exploration, especially one seeking to go beyond the global north or Anglophone world, it is important to not apply a single (usually Western) version of concepts. The global modernity that Dirlik (2007) refers to requires a plurality and this is why the focus of my proposal is standardization of protocols and not concepts. Once again, there is an assumption that temporality is a universal, but there is also the explicit rejection of a universal measure (e.g. clock time) as the only version. This is not to say that principals' may not validly explain their experiences using the clock – given its orthodoxy, this is somewhat expected – but no single version is granted legitimacy over another. It is this neutrality of conceptualization of temporality that makes the prospect of cross-national exploration rather than epistemic imperialism possible.

While having been critical of orthodox theorizations of principals' time use, in this paper I have developed an alternate conceptualization of temporality built upon a *relational* approach and argued for how that could be advanced at scale. To some extent, there is an absence of fine detail as to the questions to ask, the structure of daily diaries and observation proformas, this does not take away from the prospects. Sitting at the intersection of organization studies, sociology, philosophy, and educational administration and leadership, the proposal of this paper offers a fruitful direction that can supplement existing knowledge on principals' time use and provide a balanced basis for interventions in the interests of understanding and improving practice.

CONCLUSION

What is perhaps most striking and troubling in contemporary thought and analysis on principals' time use is the absence of theoretical crisis. This is not to say there is a complete absence of critique, as such scholarship continues to thrive (although this is at the margins), rather that it is difficult to point out any signs that there are deep ruptures or confusions in academic dialogue and debate. Nor, I might add, is there any reason to suspect a looming crisis in the near future.

The argument that I have put forward in this paper involves embracing the temporal. Engaging with the work of the principalship and the temporal is not straightforward as my proposal challenges many of the existing assumptions in the principals' time use literatures. Theoretically, the intervention of this paper was to go beyond the limitations of clock time as

the default way of understanding principals' time use. Mobilizing a *relational* approach overcomes the limitations of privileging time as a measurement construct rather than practice. It also addresses concerns about context not being taken into account in the research frameworks, and/or the de-contextualized nature of some work. The possibilities of theoretical attention to matters of temporality rather than clock time are a significant contribution to the knowledge frontiers of theorizing principals' time use. Methodologically, rather than simply critiquing existing ways of theorizing, this paper has sought to articulate an alternative – the *relational* – and provide a framework for how progressing a project using the framework might work. More so, the argument has sought to demonstrate how the *relational* approach could potentially be used to re-analyze data from existing projects to provide greater insights into the ongoing work of principals. Practically, the research agenda outlined in this paper will illuminate the ways in which the principals' experience time under current spatio-temporal conditions, including, potentially those practices and conditions which contribute to positive social and/or academic outcomes for students without, most importantly, assuming there is a causal link.

The *relational* research program is a generative space. I have sketched an argument on the principalship and temporality if attended to, will advance our understanding of principals' time use in new and fruitful directions and potentially create a space for the various scholarly traditions of educational administration and leadership to find common ground. The challenge laid out in this paper rests as much with the reader as it does me. If but one person in educational administration and leadership engages with the ideas presented here, then this paper has been successful, albeit limited, in challenging the status quo. To that end, I ask you to think with, through and where necessary against, the ideas presented in this paper in the interests of advancing knowledge claims.

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Author Bio

Scott Eacott is senior lecturer and Director of the Office of Educational Leadership in the School of Education at the University of New South Wales. His research interests and contributions to educational leadership fall into three main areas: i) developing a *relational* approach to scholarship; ii) theory and methodology; and iii) social epistemology. Scott is also Co-Editor of the *Educational Leadership Theory* book series (Springer). Recent publications include: *Questioning Leadership: New Directions for Educational Organizations* (with Gabriele Lakomski and Colin Evers, 2017, Routledge); *New Directions in Educational Leadership Theory* (with Colin Evers, 2016, Routledge); and *Educational Leadership Relationally* (2015, Sense). Scott is currently working on a book project entitled *Beyond Leadership: Advancing Educational Leadership Research Relationally* (Springer). Email: s.eacott@unsw.edu.au