

Studying school leadership practice: A methodological discussion

Scott Eacott

University of Newcastle

This paper seeks to engage the field of educational leadership in a methodological conversation. It outlines a methodological position taken by the author (a focus on leadership practice using Bourdieu) in a currently funded project and seeks discussion with the wider field. The paper is structured to provide the reader with background to the theoretical position of the author and the implications this has for the study of school leadership practice. The discussion highlights the need for multi-layered descriptions of leadership and the dual purpose of leadership research. This provides for a greater understanding of the phenomenon of leadership, and the subsequent implications for leadership practice and, potentially, preparation. The intent of this paper is not merely to critique existing works in the field, nor to create a modernistic binary between the positions of others and those presented here. Rather, the value of this work is its potential to intervene in the scholarship of the field and disrupt the status quo, highlighting the benefits of embracing the complexity, ambiguity and moment-by-moment contestation that defines the social practice that is school leadership.

Introduction

Recognising that education reform is critical to advancing Australia's future productivity and social inclusion, the Commonwealth government has committed \$3.5 billion over five years to enable the nation's education systems to pursue high quality education for all Australian students. School reform initiatives have identified 'improving school leadership, including support for school principals' as a priority with \$550 million allocated to this end. This increased political attention is supplemented by the current professional standards agenda being rolled out to school based education professionals through such bodies as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership nationally and the New South Wales Institute of Teachers at the state level. This trend mirrors many international reforms aimed at improving education. England and Scotland have moved to a system of pre-requisite qualifications for the principalship built around national competencies (Clarke & Wildy, 2010). The US and Canada have a long established system requiring a post graduate degree and subsequent certification and licensing. While the Australian model is more apprenticeship than formal certification, the current professional standards agenda is a path in that direction. Combined with the policy space that has brought us MySchool (a government website enabling the comparison of schools on the basis of standardised test results) and the Federal government's 'education revolution', the principalship has become a focal point of education policy and the desire by others (e.g. those beyond the field of education) to further embed their role in a highly surveilled and performative regime. A worrying development in relation to leadership preparation and improvement at the policy level is the work of Porter, Polikoff, Goldring, Murphy, Elliott and May (2010) in the US and their quest for a

psychometrically valid instrument for the assessment of school leadership. In the contemporary political landscape, any instrument to measure the 'quality' of leadership is dangerous. This is one of the significant issues with numerous 'pedagogical reforms' being rolled out and the measurement of pedagogical and assessment task 'quality'. The scholarship of educational leadership, both internationally and at this point in time, specifically Australia, is arguably at its most critical junction. If as a field we are committed to leadership practice that is 'enabling and reinvigorating for education' (Wilkinson, Olin, Lund, Ahlberg, & Nyvaller, 2010, p. 67), then it is crucial that we maintain a commitment to education that is about more than the bottom line.

The terrain from which this paper emerges is a research project jointly funded through an Early Career Researcher Grant from the University of Newcastle and the Education Research Institute, Newcastle (ERIN). Entitled the Leadership Practices of Educational Managers this project responds to Bates' (2006a) call for the study of educational leadership as a social activity through the integration of the macro-level analysis of education as a field and the micro-level practices of school leaders. This project examines the interface between leaders' view of the field and their leadership practice. While energy has gone into understanding the procedures and mechanics of management in educational institutions, little attention has been paid to developing means by which school leaders can monitor their leadership. An important distinction to include at this point is the difference between monitoring in relation to professionalism and monitoring in the form of evaluation. The intention of this work is not to engage in a performative regime of coding and ranking leaders and assigning labels such as 'quality' and 'effective'. Rather, a key component of this project is testing the applicability of a model for reflecting on leadership practice. This is consistent with Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004), who criticise the normative approach of much of the field's literature for its offering of simplistic prescriptions of practice suggesting that 'theory is not so much a guide or template for the moves leaders should make, but rather a tool for helping leaders to think about and reflect on their practice' (p. 5).

The conceptualisation from which this paper is based suggests that leadership practice exists in a social space given life through constant power struggles. It is this contestation that defines leadership, and arguably leaders, moment-by-moment. It cannot be captured in a static framework or separated from the context in which it occurs. As Samier and Bates (2006) argue, leadership cannot be reduced to the 'seven simple steps to reforming education' and/or snappy acronyms or mnemonic devices to sell the latest fad or 'adjectival' leadership. The project is premised on the notion that leadership is messy and complex and to understand the phenomenon in question there is a need to make explicit the indirectly accessible features of practice.

This paper seeks to engage the wider field of education in a methodological discussion. As such, this paper is an invitation to all of those involved in the field of education - whether they are academics, higher degree researchers, post-graduate/under-graduate students, consultants, practitioners, or systemic authorities - to join me in this ongoing agenda. The explicit purpose in presenting such early work on the project is that it models the behaviour that I feel should characterise educational research, that is, a joint

venture seeking to better understand the phenomena that constitute education and not merely the evaluation of practice. Therefore, as with others before me (for example see Gunter, 1997), I encourage readers, both those who agree and those who do not, to make contact with me to discuss the project. This paper is not the final word. Rather, the goal is to initiate an open and wide-ranging discussion on how as a field we can engage in work that pushes the very edge of knowledge of school leadership practice.

Educational leadership strategies

The notion of practice employed in this study is theoretically informed by the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. In arguably his most significant text, *Distinctions*, Bourdieu (1984) presents the following equation to explain practice, [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice. While somewhat mechanistic in appearance (Crossley, 2003), the underlying assumptions are significant. Practice in this conceptualisation is an effect of actions and interactions which are shaped, simultaneously and in equal measure, by the habitus and capital of agents as well as the context and dynamism constituted by their shared participation in a common 'game' (field). Many have utilised his concepts of capital (cultural, social, intellectual and symbolic), habitus, fields and to a lesser extent, strategies, as lens through which to investigate the possibilities and constraints within the work of educational leaders (Lingard & Christie, 2003). Building on from previous work (see Eacott, 2010a; 2010b), this project is specifically interested in the leadership strategies of educational managers. Following Grenfell (2010), the convention of putting Bourdieu's key concepts in italics has been adopted from this point forward. This is done as a mental reminder that each of these comes with a complex and sophisticated theory of practice and should not be simply taken and substantiated as analytic metaphors.

Bourdieu's notion of strategy is not a rationalisation of practice such as that seen in the literature on strategy in educational administration (Eacott, 2008). From a Bourdieuan perspective, strategy is not conscious individual rational choice, rather appropriate actions taken without conscious reflection. To access such strategies requires an interrogation of leadership practice, in particular, looking to extract the indirectly accessible under-currents of practice. This significantly shifts research from a 'what works' agenda to providing a theoretically rich narrative on the leadership of schools. This project moves beyond the sociological naïve and under-developed conceptualisation of practice that is limited to 'what people do', restricted to the bodily movements of actors and the functional implications of such actions, as this thin description fails to acknowledge the discursive nature of social interactions. In contrast, this project shifts attention by moving from acting 'and' having a reason and acting 'because' of that reason. While in the former an actor may have a reason for a behaviour, unless this reason was the cause of the actor acting as they did, the reason does not explain the act (Fay, 1994). In seeking to define what he means by strategies, Bourdieu writes:

... the real principle of *strategies*, that is, a practical sense of things, or, if one prefers, what athletes call a feel for the game (*le sens du jeu*). I refer here to practical mastery of the logic or immanent necessity of a game, which is

gained through experience of the game, and which functions this side of consciousness and discourse (like the techniques of the body, for example). Notions such as habitus (or system of dispositions), practical sense, and strategy are tied to the effort to get away from objectivism without falling into subjectivism (Lamaison & Bourdieu, 1986, p. 111).

This conceptualisation of strategy welcomes ambiguity as it cannot be represented in a neat framework, a normative list of behaviours or a one size fits all model of leadership, but most importantly, it rejects the isolation of individual actors from the context in which they are present. Therefore, to understand the context in which they work, leaders and scholars alike, must have an understanding of the collective unconscious assumptions of their work, the value placed on their work by a diverse range of societal forces and ever present power relations. Importantly, this space also represents a given point in time, the product of historical and contemporary struggles. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, failure to acknowledge the temporal features of practice is to abolish the very notion of strategies. This interpretation of the 'state of play', or in Bourdieu's terms, 'feel for the game' is central to the theoretical framework of the project. In a similar conceptual argument, Brooks and Normore (2010) suggest nine educational leadership literacies that leaders must be conversant with to effectively lead from a glocal perspective. The notion that leaders need to be multi-lingual has also been noted by Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003) and to a lesser extent, Wilkinson (2010).

This work looks at the unique location of school leadership in the *field* of schooling but importantly, conceptualises the location of school leaders as one that requires a transgression of *field* boundaries. It is important to note that leadership was not a focal point of Bourdieu's work.. This has significant implications for the field of educational leadership (an intellectual puzzle that I am exploring elsewhere), but it does allow for the interrogation of leadership practice in a school without the limitations of job titles or distinctions such as teacher leadership versus principal leadership. Anderson (2009) argues that school leaders live in the crossfire of multiple constituencies, all with differing needs and demands. This boundary work is pivotal to understanding school leadership, yet remains somewhat under-discussed. Following Fraser (1989), a nuanced approach to understanding the boundary role played by school leaders is required. Work exploring how school leaders engage with the intersections and collisions of multiple *fields* or logics of practice will go a long way to providing theoretically rich descriptions of practice. Bourdieu (1996) argues that the *field* of education is weakening in terms of its capacity to protect its boundaries, language and, indeed, practices from the field of politics, journalism and economics as the language of markets and managerialism has penetrated into core educational discourses. If education is to resist the reproductive (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) forces of external influence, those which Callahan (1962) described in the first half of the 1900s in the US, then research exploring boundary work is timely.

Historically, educational leaders have been powerful definers of the culture and organisation of schooling and its social relations. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that various players beyond the *field* of education have sought to change the

consciousness of school leaders. An explicit mechanism for this intervention is through mandatory preparation programs. As Grace (2000) argues, programs such as England's National Professional Qualification for Headteachers are part of a strategy for cultural transformation, an attempt to restructure professional identity through occupational trainability. As part of the managerialist project of the contemporary state, this neoliberal regime of preparation and evaluation by numbers constructs and communicates a doxa, or self-evident truth (Bourdieu, 2000), of good leadership practice and uses structures (e.g. school-based planning, merit selection, leadership capability frameworks, and competitive enrolment in leadership preparation programs) to legitimise it as the preferred or required leadership practice. These structural arrangements seek to establish and maintain a particular logic of practice or principal habitus in aspiring school leaders. That is, those aspiring to the principalship are disposed through their positions as aspirants and their life histories of playing the educational game to act according to its rules and internal narratives of truth (Thomson, 2010). As such, once those beyond the *field* of education infiltrated the game of education (if they were ever separate that is) and acquired dominance, the acquisition of *capital* within the *field* is achieved only through conformity to the hegemony of neoliberal policy and the measurement of education by numbers. This works by having the players in the game (*field*) compete over what is at stake (*capital*) rather than challenge the rules of the game or the knowledges, dispositions and strategies that constitute its winning formulae and its contribution to the wider mission of the state (Thomson, 2010).

Indirect intervention points include the field's scholarship, which is strongly influenced by the apparent need for managerial problem solving materials in preparatory programs (see the discussion of textual apologists in Thrupp and Willmott, 2003), and competitive research funding regimes bias toward 'scientific', narrowly defined, research. Mulford (2007), among others, has cited the low level of funding for educational leadership research in Australia. Donmoyer and Galloway (2010), while using a US based example, argue that research funding regimes favour large-scale experimental studies, or when case-study research is funded, it is oriented toward producing hypotheses about 'what works' that could be tested in the large-scale experimental studies that regimes value. Anecdotal evidence would suggest a similar bias in projects funded through the Australian Council for Research (ARC) in Australia. Within the UK, Gunter and Forrester (2010) note that a substantial body of research has been undertaken in the past decade, however the majority of funded projects have been either commissioned or contracted as part of the delivery of government policy.

However, understanding leadership and its various social relationships requires insights from the breadth of the social sciences (e.g. history, philosophy, economics), the very courses that the contemporary push for leadership standards push out of preparatory programs (English, 2006) and not accessible in the depth required (such as theoretically rich discourse) in large-scale experimental studies. In this sense, following Apple (2010) we need to think 'relationally'. That is, understanding education requires that we situate it in the unequal power relations of larger society and in the realities of dominance and subordination – and the conflicts – that are generated

by the relations. These contests are part of intellectual work, in the form of scholarship in the academy and the day-to-day practice of school-based leaders. Leonardo (2010) argues that contradictions and tensions are:

... not an annoyance to wish away but opportunities that present the researcher with a glimpse into the order of things. To live without contradictions is to exist with one eye closed, missing a full view of the panorama called education. Education is full of contradictions, giving way to both complexity and vulnerability. That said, leaving tensions prevents movement and change. Being open to contradictions is not the same as surrendering to them. Wading through, rather than lingering in, contradictions allows development and the potential for growth (p. 157).

This work is about problematising educational leadership, engaging in the messy world of organisations, and acknowledging that the ways in which the effectiveness of schools, and by implication school leaders, is measured within the managerialist project of the contemporary state is reflective of a much larger field of dominance and subordination. Frequently in the scholarship of educational leadership, the jump from descriptive to the normative is made too quickly and at the expense of rigorous analysis (Eacott, 2010b). The quest for answers to the question 'what school leaders do?' when combined with the academic mantra of 'publish or perish' all but destroys the likelihood of longitudinal and fine grain analysis of social practice. Arguably, research on school leadership practice and/or the strategies employed by principals is more time consuming and labour intensive than conventional methods (e.g. questionnaire, interview, document analysis) and leads to fewer publications in the short term. Wolcott (1973) notes that it took some six years for the process of researching and writing his ethnographic monograph, 'The Man in the Principal's Office'. Innovative work which sheds light on previously under-developed or unexplored elements of practice has a far greater chance of surviving the test of time (e.g. Bourdieu), than the repetitious, prescriptive and aspirational tone of much work in the field. Engaging in the construction of new knowledge based on multiple realities and multiple truths embedded in multiple discourses of inquiry will almost 'never be efficient, perhaps not even cost effective, but then, true discovery and significant intellectual and practical breakthroughs rarely are' (English, 2006, p. 470).

The methodological challenge

The advancement of any field of inquiry depends on the soundness of the research methodologies employed by its members. Researchers carefully design their studies to observe the phenomenon under investigation in a way that is consistent with their theoretical disposition. Therefore, research is inextricably linked with theory as even if a theoretical framework is not made explicit, researchers are using one. Walker (1964) makes it very clear that the only relevant distinction is that between good theory and bad theory. It should of course be noted that Walker went on to argue for a rational/scientific theory, consistent with the Theory Movement of educational administrative thought (see for example the work of Daniel Griffiths, Andrew Halpin and Jack Culbertson). The methods chosen by the researcher reflect their ontological and epistemological assumptions, therefore, the misconceptions and ambiguities

surrounding theory are reflected in the interpretation of the meaning and purpose of research. All researchers bring their own perspectives and experience, even if they are not willing to admit it overtly, to their research. Theory – acknowledged or not – dictates what kinds of patterns one finds (Anyon, 2009). It does not arrive after the last data are gathered but arguably informs what one looks for and what one considers worthy of study. This is not to suggest that research is reducible to ideological predispositions, rather, it is to pose the possibility that theory is both cause and effect of data because it allows the scholar to limit the field of possible evidence and because theory is updated by the documentation that it makes possible (Leonardo, 2010). Therefore, theory is an *a priori* filter of the research journey. Theory is made concrete when it speaks with the empirical world, not something waiting to be discovered, or randomly discovered, but part and parcel of an explanation that affirms the power of socially engaged inquiry (Leonardo, 2010). Practice, Bourdieu argues, is not differentiated from theory as they exist in a dialectical relationship, or *praxis*.

The innovative methodology utilised in this project follows Spivak (1988), and later Smyth's (1998), call for the 'enunciative space', that is, an opportunity to articulate what it means to be an educational leader, to tangle with the social, cultural, political and historical issues beyond the technicalities of managing an organisation, and having some agency within which to question and challenge the wider structures surrounding leadership, management and administration. The theoretical starting point for this work is that there is no set of one-size-fits-all school leadership competencies or set of professional standards. Rather, there is a complex socio-cultural politics to school leadership that is context specific and multi-layered. This positions school leadership as a social practice that transcends the domain of being an individual's activity and can only be understood by getting up close to the culture of schooling and the social positioning of school leaders. This shifts the focus to interpreting how educators struggle to enact a vision of good education in their school and the relational aspects of this to wider social discourse. As opposed to conservative research methods looking to produce a list of desirable features of educational leadership, this project builds on what Fisher (1996, cited in Smyth 1998) labels a 'critical theory of place making'. This frames questions at three levels or layers.

1. the empirical – describing what is and how things are, and trying to ascertain what is present and what is absent in school leadership practice;
2. the hermeneutic – seeking to understand why things or activities are real for individuals in schools, and asking why different interpretations exist; and
3. the critical – exploring underlying value and power structures, and asking how things came to be the way they are, and how they might be different.

Each of these layers requires a different relationship between the researcher and the researched. As Kemmis (2010) argues, empirical research adopts a third-person relationship with practice as an object of enquiry; hermeneutic research adopts a second-person relationship with practice as the action of another person who is a subject like oneself; and critical research adopts a first-person relationship with practice as constituted in one's own action or in one's participation in the social praxis of a community or group or profession. The intellectual work involved in this project is

complex. However, a purely theoretical reading of this proposal, as with Bourdieu, misses the point of the text. The central thesis of this project is not simply to interpret the actions of the school leaders, but to change them. Change them in the first instance, influencing the ways in which we, educational scholars and practitioners think about leadership practice. By changing the ways of world making, change can occur (Bourdieu, 1989). To do so however requires new or alternate methodologies. This project explicitly aims to break the mould of linear ways of thinking and acting in the practice of educational leadership. There is an explicit position taken that educational leadership is not 'static' (English, 2006) or even a set of dynamic relationships, rather it is much more complex. Following Smyth (1998), this project engages in major and multiple methodological struggles on at least four different levels:

1. at the level of the reading the position we bring to the project which is one of critical theorising;
2. at the level of the interpretation being placed on the social, cultural, political and historical influences on leadership practice by our research participants in schools;
3. at the practical and ethical level of how we make sense of the observed social activity and narratives told to us, what gets included, excluded, silenced or marginalised as we construct the accounts; and
4. at the level of the representation of the account and how we maintain a sense of fidelity to a wider interested professional and scholarly audience.

In recognition of these struggles, this research will be pursued according to a number of implicit principles of procedure. Firstly, social agents are located within a particular social space and that to understand leadership as a social practice – as opposed to the practices of individual leaders – we need to tap into wider hermeneutic and critical spaces. This is crucial given that the office of school leader is situated in the social space of school education that owes a number of its most distinctive properties to the set of relationships it holds with other school based personnel, schools and society at large. Secondly, as with Smyth (1998), there is great importance in 'honouring voice', which requires listening to and responding to the narratives of self-knowledge, so that those who make the utterances know they have a voice. Thirdly, that despite the perceived autonomy of school leadership (Grace, 2000), historically, school based leadership has been subjectified to state bureaucracy and oppression and that there is a need to acknowledge and speak back to this relationship. Finally, this project is committed to constructing accounts of leadership practice which seek to make the previously invisible visible. This is to anchor the research in local forms of knowledge which are different from the normative, hegemonic, depersonalised knowledge frequently proliferated in the field.

These principles are consistent with Bates' (2006a) strong argument for the consideration of the relationship between the school leader and society in the scholarship of educational leadership. It is impossible to extract the role of school leader from this social space. Consequently this project aims to both isolate school leadership practices while simultaneously interrogating them in an attempt to capture the contradictions, tensions, paradoxes and perplexities. The theorising of school leadership in situ is imperative to advancing the aims of the project. After all, any

attempt to objectify and/or de-contextualise leadership practice destroys that which it attempts to explain. Unlike conservative research designs which frequently seek to uncover patterns, commonalities and cycles, this alternate methodological approach seeks out the discontinuities, the ruptures and the dissimilarities because it is in these spaces that solutions and alternatives for novel problems may be found (English, 2003). This is not to say that conventional methods such as interviews, questionnaire, document analysis and observations are not utilised, in fact these form the basis of the data collection strategy, however it is what is done with this data and its relationship to theory and theorising that makes this project innovative. This project is about talking back to orthodoxy in the *field*, challenging the *capital* at play and examining the *habitus* of school leadership. By highlighting the *doxa* of school leadership and what that means for leadership *strategies*, this work seeks to go well beyond what is already known and set forth a new conceptualisation and methodological recommendations for the study of school leadership practice.

For whom is this research?

The challenge of educational leadership knowledge is not only about the work of academics but about the socio-cultural norms of progress and change that are part of the political nature of contemporary life. Such power struggles are evident in government policy initiatives (professional standards, league tables, performance pay, school-based management) and emerging/established social movements (school based reporting, participative decision making). Many of the issues of the *field* are problematic, although they are infrequently discussed in such manner. Education is however, a political activity. Educational leaders, at all levels and sectors, need to perceive themselves as political players in a large ideological struggle for power and domination within the larger social order. Through the application of Bourdieu's social theory, this project gets beneath the surface of the socially projected images of the school leader, institutions, programs and policies, and goes directly to the network of power relations that shape school leadership. This historically significant moment for education in this country calls upon a new form of educational leader. This leader is not one who seeks to maintain the status quo, but someone who challenges the contemporary practices and asks the big questions of education. Until school leaders return to the fore in the game of defining and re-defining the boundaries of the *field* of education, our children will continue to have their educational futures decided by those beyond education. This project explicitly targets this type of educational leadership and is therefore highly significant at this point in time. Following Gunter and Fitzgerald (2008), educational leaders need to reconnect with their role as public intellectuals and speak back to policy.

The hegemonic position of the educational management industry is premised on the assumption that school-based leaders need problem solving tools in order to effectively meet the many challenges which they face (Grace, 2000; Gunter, 1997). There is a sense of urgency to act here, because internationally educational discourse is being dominated by neoliberal, neoconservative and authoritarian populism despite the concerted efforts of a growing number of academics to move research, discourse and eventually practices towards more expansive notions of social justice (Hoffman, 2009).

The purpose of this project is not to merely critique existing work in the *field* and in doing so create a modernistic binary between this project and that of others in the *field*. Rather, the intention of this paper, and the project for that matter, is to bring an alternate voice into the discussion and disrupt the status quo, highlighting the benefits from embracing the complexity, ambiguity and moment-by-moment contestation that defines the social practice that is school leadership. Education in all sectors has been under-going reconstruction in the name of national productivity and international competitiveness (Blackmore, 2010) and the consequential loss of a social justice agenda in Australian education is highly problematic (Smyth, 2008). The structure of schooling favours managerialism – getting things done – and school leaders who fail to attend to their managerial functions usually do not last long. However, Lugg and Shoho (2006) point out those administrators who ignore the leadership dimensions of their role frequently survive. The managerial imperative of the principalship tends to support the reproductive nature of schooling and society at large, as Thomson (2010) argues:

If headteachers' activities can be understood as a logical field of practice, then the repertoire of activities that are normally described as school leadership practice – the organisation of systems, symbolic and rhetorical work, strategic development and planning, establishing governance systems that operate in harmony to the benefit of the school, pedagogical leadership, associated work with key allies and partners, promotional work and so on – are in reality, the set moves that heads take in order to ensure that actors within the school also conform to the logic of the field (p. 14).

Each wave of studies in educational administration thought (e.g. trait, behavioural, situational) has enriched understanding of the phenomenon of leadership in schools. However, much of this research still does not capture the experience of 'doing' leadership as a practical activity in a complex organisation. Critical social analyses are powerful, not because they have elite or even trendy status but, because in their ability to intervene, they confirm the power of language to expand our understanding of social and educational life rather than narrow it through reductive analysis (Apple, 2010; Leonardo, 2010). As an intervention, this project disrupts practice, not by doing research to others, but by engaging with others in doing the research. This explicitly breaks down the theory and practice binary and engages in a co-construction of knowledge and meaning making. In this sense, the work is both interruptive, butting into the lives of school-based practitioners, and disruptive, in the reciprocal manner in which it speaks and listens to its unit of analysis. For this point alone, this research project provides both the practitioner and the scholar with knowledge which can shape future practice.

Conclusion

Lumby and English (2009) note:

... there is work to be done to understand more fully what the mythic identity of 'educational leader' involves; not the more superficial skills which are delineated in competence and standard sets throughout the world (p. 107).

Policy moves, both internationally and specifically within Australia, have explicitly named school leadership as critical to efforts of education reform. In addition, it is well documented that there is a worldwide teacher shortage and more significantly in the context of this project, an impending mass retirement of current school leaders, combined with research that indicates it is becoming increasingly difficult to fill school leadership vacancies (Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, & Sachs, 2004). While professional standards and leadership capability frameworks are increasing in popularity and becoming of greater importance in the quest for promotion, school leadership as a construct is continuing down the path of an ever expanding cult of efficiency. If Australian school leaders are to break the reproductive cycle of subjectification to those beyond the field of schools, then schools as social institutions need to be viewed as democratic and exemplars of Australian democracy. Practicing leaders, both those with formal titles and those without, need to engage in what Oakshott (1967, p. 59) referred to as the 'conversation of mankind' as it is only within this conversation that curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation, those three fundamental message systems of schools can be properly understood (Bates, 2006b).

To engage with the conversation of the world, leaders need to be aware of the multiple influences on practice and context. They need to see themselves as political players in a larger agenda and be willing to take risks. As Theoharis (2007) argues, this leadership is more than 'just good leadership'. It is risky business, as for many school leaders, particularly those in publicly funded institutions, their salaries are paid by governments. If, as scholars and practitioners alike, we are to engage in work that seeks to explicitly make visible the indirectly accessible dimensions of school leadership practice than we are far more likely to possess deeply meaningful and provocative understandings of practice. While this may lead to turbulent careers, particularly if our research productivity may not fit the norm of the entrepreneurial academy, the work has a greater chance to stand the test of time and continue the time honoured ideal of academic work, that is, using our privileged position in society to help make the world a better place.

References

- Anderson, G. L. (2009). *Advocacy leadership: Toward a post-reform agenda in education*. New York: Routledge.
- Anyon, J. (Ed.). (2009). *Theory and educational research: Toward critical social explanation*. New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2010). Theory, research, and the critical scholar/activist. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 152-155.
- Barty, K., Thomson, P., Blackmore, J., & Sachs, J. (2004). Unpacking the issues: Researching the shortage of school principals in two states of Australia. *Australian Educational Researcher*, 32(3), 1-18.
- Bates, R. J. (2006a). Culture and leadership in educational administration: A historical study of what was and what might have been. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 38(2), 155-168.
- Bates, R. J. (2006b). Presidential address: Public education, social justice and teacher education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(3), 275-286.

- Blackmore, J. (2010). Disrupting notions of leadership from feminist post-colonial positions. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 13(1), 1-6.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989). Social space and symbolic power. *Sociological Theory*, 7(1), 14-25.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *On television*. New York: The New Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Pascalian meditations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. London: SAGE.
- Brooks, J. S., & Normore, A. H. (2010). Educational leadership and globalization: Literacy for a glocal perspective. *Educational Policy*, 24(1), 52-82.
- Callahan, R. E. (1962). *Education and the cult of efficiency*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Clarke, S., & Wildy, H. (2010). Preparing for principalship from the crucible of experience: Reflecting on theory, practice and research. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 42(1), 1-16.
- Crossley, N. (2003). From reproduction to transformation: Social movement fields and the radical habitus. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20(6), 43-68.
- Donmoyer, R., & Galloway, F. (2010). Reconsidering the utility of case study designs for researching school reform in a neo-scientific era: insights from a multiyear, mixed-methods study. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(1), 3-30.
- Eacott, S. (2008). An analysis of contemporary literature on strategic leadership in schools. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 11(3), 257-280.
- Eacott, S. (2010a). Strategy as leadership: An alternate perspective to the construct of strategy. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 38(1), 55-64.
- Eacott, S. (2010b). Bourdieu's strategies and the challenge for educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 13(3), 265-281.
- English, F. W. (2003). *The postmodern challenge to the practice of educational administration*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher Ltd.
- English, F. W. (2006). The unintended consequences of a standardised knowledge base in advancing educational leadership preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(3), 461-472.
- Fay, B. (1994). General laws and explaining human behavior. In M. Martin and L.C. McIntyre (Eds.), *Readings in the philosophy of social science* (pp. 54-110). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Fraser, N. (1989). *Unruly practices: Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Grace, G. (2000). Research and the challenges of contemporary school leadership: The contribution of critical scholarship. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 48(3), 231-247.
- Grenfell, M. (2010). Being critical: The practical logic of Bourdieu's metanoia. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(1), 85-99.
- Gunter, H. (1997). *Rethinking education: The consequences of Jurassic management*. London: Cassell.

- Gunter, H., & Fitzgerald, T. (2008). The future of leadership research. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(3), 261-279.
- Gunter, H., & Forrester, G. (2010). New Labour and the logic of practice in educational reform. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(1), 55-69.
- Hoffman, L. P. (2009). Educational leadership and social activism: A call for action. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 41(4), 391-410.
- Kemmis, S. (2010). Research for praxis: Knowing doing. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 18(1), 9-27.
- Lamaison, P., & Bourdieu, P. (1986). From rules to strategies: An interview with Pierre Bourdieu. *Cultural Anthropology*, 1(1), 110-120.
- Leonardo, Z. (2010). Critical empiricism: Reading data with social theory. *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 155-160.
- Lingard, B., & Christie, P. (2003). Leading theory: Bourdieu and the field of educational leadership. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 6(4), 317-333.
- Lingard, B., Hayes, D., Mills, M., & Christie, P. (2003). *Leading learning: Making hope practical in schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lugg, C. A., & Shoho, A. R. (2006). Dare public school administrators build a new social order? Social justice and the possibly perilous politics of educational leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(3), 196-208.
- Lumby, J., & English, F.W. (2009). From simplicism to complexity in leadership identity and preparation: Exploring the lineage and dark secrets. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(2), 95-114.
- Mulford, B. (2007). *Overview of research on Australian educational leadership 2001-2005* (Vol. 40). Sydney: The Australian Council for Educational Leaders.
- Oakeshott, M. (1967). Learning and teaching. In R.S. Peters (Ed.), *The concept of education* (pp. 156-175). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Porter, A. C., Polikoff, M. S., Goldring, E. B., Murphy, J., Elliott, S. N., & May, H. (2010). Developing a psychometrically sound assessment of school leadership: The VAL-ED as a case study. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(2), 135-173.
- Samier, E., & Bates, R. J. (2006). *Aesthetic dimensions of educational administration and leadership*. London: Routledge.
- Smyth, J. (1998). Finding the 'enunciative space' for teacher leadership and teacher learning in schools. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 26(3), 191-202.
- Smyth, J. (2008). Australia's great disengagement with public education and social justice in educational leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 40(3), 221-233.
- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a theory of leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36(1), 3-34.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271-313). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 221-258.

- Thomson, P. (2010). Headteacher autonomy: A sketch of a Bourdieuan field analysis of position and practice. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(1), 5-20.
- Thrupp, M., & Willmott, R. (2003). *Educational management in managerialist times: Beyond the textual apologists*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Walker, W.G. (1964). Teaching and research in educational administration. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 2(1), 9-22.
- Wilkinson, J. (2010). Is it all a 'game'? Analysing academic leadership through a Bourdieuan practice lens. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(1), 41-54.
- Wilkinson, J., Olin, A., Lund, T., Ahlberg, A., & Nyvaller, M. (2010). Leading praxis: Exploring educational leadership through the lens of practice architectures. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 18(1), 67-79.
- Wolcott, H. F. (1973). *The man in the principal's office: An ethnography*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston Inc.

Dr Scott Eacott is a Lecturer in Educational Leadership at the University of Newcastle, Australia. He is currently engaged in work exploring the notion of leadership as a social practice, informed by the work of the French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu.
Email: Scott.Eacott@newcastle.edu.au