Educational leadership, management and administration has a rich history of epistemological and ontological dialogue and debate. However, in recent times, at least since the publication of Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski’s trilogy – knowing, exploring and doing educational administration – there has been a distinct dearth. Educational Leadership Relationally explicitly returns matters of epistemology and ontology to the centre of the discussion. Through a sustained and rigorous engagement with contemporary thought and analysis, Scott Eacott articulates and defends a relational approach to scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration.

Eacott belongs to a group of scholars in educational administration who could be called metasociologist. This group blends sociology, historical revisionism, managerial theories and general philosophy to emphasise the relevance of sociological analysis in the field of educational administration. Proposing a relational turn, Eacott outlines a methodological agenda for constructing an alternative approach to educational leadership, management and administration scholarship that might be persuasive beyond the critical frontier.

The relational research programme is arguably the most ambitious agenda in educational leadership, management and administration coming out of Australia since Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski’s natural coherentism and Richard Bates’ Critical Theory of Educational Administration. As a research agenda, it engages with: the centrality of administration in constructions of the social world; the legitimisation of popular labels such as ‘leadership’; the inexhaustible and inseparable grounding of administrative labour in time and space; and overcomes contemporary tensions of individualism/collectivism and structure/agency to provide a productive – rather than merely critical – space to theorise educational leadership, management and administration.
Educational Leadership Relationally
Educational Leadership Relationally
A Theory and Methodology for Educational Leadership, Management and Administration

Scott Eacott
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For Amy, Daniel and Madelyn
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PREFACE

This book originates in a discussion with a potential doctoral candidate. He had taken a class with me the previous year on the foundations of educational administration theory and we had remained in contacted ever since. On this particular day we were discussing French social theory, particularly the work of Pierre Bourdieu and to a lesser extent Michel Foucault, and the mobilisation of critical social theory in contemporary educational leadership, management and administration studies. After careful discussion, we had reached a point where we had highlighted the commonly used theoretical resources of Bourdieu and Foucault and the tell-tale signs of a Bourdieusian or Foucauldian study. It was at this point that the potential student turned to me and asked, this is all good and well, but what would a student of yours do?

So began an intellectual pursuit. What would a student of mine do? If I was to be more than a guy who used Bourdieu in educational leadership, management, and administration, what was I to offer a potential doctoral, masters or honours candidate? There are many others who very competently think with Bourdieu in educational leadership, management and administration – and I am thinking specifically of Helen Gunter and Pat Thomson, among others. It was during this time I was to make two key intellectual connections, one more fleeting and the other enduring. In the case of the former, while working at the University of Newcastle (Australia), I was fortunate to work in the Faculty of Education and Arts when Lisa Adkins was appointed as the BHP Billiton Chair of Sociology. Lisa came to Newcastle via Goldsmiths (University of London), Manchester, the Australian National University and Kent. While best known for her work on gender and labour, it is in her engagement with Bourdieu that was most insightful. Rather than mapping an intellectual terrain with Bourdieusian resources, Lisa was adamant that Bourdieu was writing in a different time and space and therefore the challenge of the contemporary scholar is to bring Bourdieu’s social theory face-to-face with key problems of the twenty-first century. In doing so, my engagement with Lisa inspired the mobilisation of theoretical resources to think anew the contemporary condition. There remain substantial traces of Bourdieusian thinking in my work. However, it is not a strict adherence, nor is it restricted to the popular resources of fields, habitus, and capital.

The second key connection was to Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski, two scholars I hold in the highest regard. This connection developed following my acceptance to give a public lecture at the University of New South Wales (where Colin is currently located). Colin and Gabriele are well known for their natural coherentism research programme in educational administration. Unlike many, dare I say most, people working in educational leadership, management and administration, Colin and Gabriele have systematically built a research programme over 25 years. Despite working in different institutions, Colin and Gabriele have consistently supported and encouraged me to push my thinking and develop a programme of research. This sounds straightforward. However, in a contemporary
academy that is obsessed with only publishing in the ‘right’ outlets and privileges (at many places anyway) the bringing in of money, the systematic development of a comprehensive and sophisticated research programme is about playing a long-term scholarly game more so than the short turnaround of institutional research assessment exercises. Arguably the greatest moment of scholarly pride I have experienced was during the annual Educational Leadership, Management and Administration (ELMA) theory workshop I host when Colin and Gabriele commented that my work was programmatic and they liked how I was willing to put my ideas out there rather than playing it safe behind the names of great thinkers. At least that is how I recall it. The combination of thinking a new and building a generative programme is what I have sought to do in this book.

*Educational Leadership Relationally* is an intellectual project which aims to explicitly articulate my distinctive brand of scholarship for educational leadership, management and administration. I am not claiming to have developed a completely new form of scholarship. The work I present in the following pages is very much rooted in Bourdieusian thinking, among others. What I have sought to do is bring a collection of intellectual resources face-to-face with the contemporary conditions of educational leadership, management and administration. These include new forms of administration and regulation, changing understandings of the local, and the challenges of researching objects to which we have substantial investment.

This comes at a time when educational leadership, management and administration as a disciplinary space is under renewed stress. This stress is theoretical, methodological and one of relevance. I have sought to bring matters of methodology, beyond the simplistic division along paradigmatic lines (quantitative/qualitative), to the fore to enable dialogue and debate. In my work I aim to develop, argue, and defend, a distinctive brand of scholarship for educational leadership, management and administration. This is not an ahistorical scholarship. Rather it is one with a significant intellectual heritage drawn from social theorists Pierre Bourdieu, Luc Boltanski, Gaston Bachelard, who themselves drew on many others. It also calls upon leadership studies by Mary Uhl-Bien and others working in the broader relational agenda, and understandably educational administration thinkers such as Colin Evers, Gabriele Lakomski, Helen Gunter, and Richard Bates among others.

What I offer is not a definitive theory of educational administration, or a finite set of theoretical resources, instead, I offer a research programme for scholarship in educational administration. It is less focused on delivering a theory and more focused on a way to study. Attention is therefore given to epistemology and ontology to generate a *relational* approach. In particular, I propose this work as a counter to the scholarly bias, or anti-intellectualism in educational administration that others such as Helen Gunter have written about. My work also goes beyond the simplistic binaries of the introductory research methods courses of contemporary university programmes. In short, I reject the entity based thinking that partitions theoretical and research practices into isolated stages and territories.

One of the hallmarks of generative research programmes are their ability to not only transcend the temporality and socio-spatial conditions of the intellectual
context and empirical terrain of its initial articulation and to produce new ways of thinking, but to think itself and even to out-think itself. This book is not free from contradictions, gaps, tensions, puzzlements, and unresolved questions, many of which I have tried to openly acknowledged, and perhaps at times accentuated, in the pages that follow. What will become clear is that I oppose the orthodoxy of educational leadership, management and administration as a scholarly discipline. I seek to challenge the rhetoric that dominates the space as a domain of intellectual inquiry and in particular what I see as the closing of boundaries between research traditions. As a result, this book is an invitation – an invitation to think with, beyond and where necessary against me in advancing a relational approach to educational leadership, management and administration scholarship. I will have achieved my purpose if this work serves a stimulus for others to mobilise in their own analysis. In this sense, I encourage others to use it, engage with it, change it, protest it, most of all, think with it.

Scott Eacott
Sydney, October 2014
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As noted previously, this book is an output – but far from final word – of an intellectual journey to articulate an approach to scholarship for educational leadership management and administration. As a result, the ideas presented in this book have been tested out in various forums and appeared in parts in other publications.

The ideas proposed throughout the chapters have been presented at various conferences, including but not exclusively, the Australian Association for Research in Education and the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, and have been the basis of presentations I have given at the University of Newcastle, University of Queensland, Australian Catholic University and the University of New South Wales. A version of Chapter Two appears in a special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, and a version of Chapter Seven appears in *Journal of Educational Administration and History*. Sections of Chapter Three appear in *International Journal of Educational Management*.

In addition to such formal outputs, I would like to acknowledge colleagues both near and far who have stimulated my thinking in relation to this work.

To my colleagues in the School of Education (North Sydney) at the Australian Catholic University, and in particular Tania Aspland, Charles Burford and Judith Norris, your contributions to my thinking through regular conversation and often debate, have helped push my thinking in new and exciting ways.

To my former colleagues at the University of Newcastle, notably Robert Parkes, Zsuzsanna Millei, Eva Bendix Petersen, and Tom Griffiths, whose collegial support and pursuit of scholarship in a contemporary academy that frequently discourages such activity is much appreciated and I would not be where I am today without you.

My network of colleagues further afield, in particular Colin Evers, Gabriele Lakomski, Richard Niesche and Jane Wilkinson, your contribution to my work, though implicit, is great. Colin and Gabriele, you are model scholars. Although we may hold different world views, the guidance and support I have received – and continue to – from you both are invaluable. The productive ways in which you demand me to push my thinking and asking questions of myself and others is outstanding. Jane and Richard, I consider you to be my partners in this intellectual endeavour. We have come into positions of prominence in the discipline nationally at a key junction. The collegial support you provide is much appreciated, as is your encouraging yet demanding attitude to pushing the boundaries of knowledge production.

Finally, I need to acknowledge my wife Amy and children – Daniel and Madelyn. Your understanding, particularly during what can be the challenging and stressful moments of writing a book is much appreciated. Your love and support are what makes the effort worthwhile.
CHAPTER ONE

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION RELATIONALLY

INTRODUCTION

Fenwick English (2006) argues that advancing scholarship in educational administration requires criticism of it, philosophically, empirically and logically, suggesting that we do not search for core pillars but the contested grounds on which educational leadership is defined moment-to-moment. As a domain of inquiry, educational administration has a rich history of epistemological and ontological debate. From the work of Andrew Halpin and Daniel Griffiths in the 1950-1960s in what is known as the Theory Movement, through to Thomas Barr Greenfield’s critique of logical empiricism in the 1970s, the emergence of Richard Bates’ Critical Theory of educational administration in the 1980s, and Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski’s naturalistic coherentism in the 1990-2000s, debates about the ways of knowing, doing and being in the social world have been central to advancing scholarship. However, in the most recent decade, at least since the publication of Evers and Lakomski’s work, questions of the epistemological and ontological preliminaries of research have become somewhat marginalised. This is not to suggest that such discussions are not taking place, but rather that they have been sporadic and piecemeal. This is further embodied in the context of various traditions of educational administration research (e.g. critical, humanistic, instrumental, scientific) rarely, if ever, engaging with one another.

Given the relative absence of epistemological and ontological debate in contemporary educational administration thought and analysis, Izhar Oplatka (2010) argues that it is timely to once again engage with such matters. This book explicitly establishes the importance of the interplay of theory and methodology in the scholarship of educational leadership, management and administration. Fusing multiple analytical frames, I outline and defend a particular ‘scientific’ view of scholarship before using that perspective to criticise existing administrative theories and develop a distinctive alternative, one that I label a relational programme in educational administration. This is not to be confused with just another adjectival approach to leadership, management and administration scholarship. The argument that I am building is for a relational approach to scholarship in educational administration and the rationale for this is grounded in a recasting of administrative labour in the contemporary social condition.

The intellectual heritage of my relational project is eclectic, drawing heavily on French social theory such as the work of sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (critical) and Luc Boltanski (pragmatic), management scholars such as Peter Dachler, Dian Marie Hoskings, and Mary Uhl-Bien, but also critical management studies, political science, policy analysis, organisation studies, and given my own disciplinary location, recognised educational administration thinkers such as
CHAPTER 1

Richard Bates, Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski, Thomas Greenfield and contemporaries such as Helen Gunter, Pat Thomson, John Smyth and Fenwick English. Centrally, in bringing critical pluralism to scholarship I engage with what I see as the key theoretical problem of the legitimation of the social world and its empirical manifestation in the organisation of schooling. I mobilise the label ‘scientific’ in the Francophone (or even continental European) sense, that which adheres to rigorous inquiry through the explicit interrogating of a large scale theoretical problem embedded within an empirical problem, as opposed to the more conservative Anglophone tradition – primarily that of North America – which privileges the exhibitionism of method and analysis. In doing so, this book delivers an elaborated, and coherent, discussion from the fragmented discourses of contemporary educational leadership, management and administration thought and analysis to sketch an alternate research programme. Importantly, this book is not a critique of the field – something that is already too frequent enough. Rather, it is devoted to sketching an alternate research programme for advancing scholarship. Specifically, I aim to:

– To break new ground methodologically for the ‘scientific’ study of educational leadership, management and administration.

In working to this aim, this book is arguably the most ambitious book since Evers and Lakomski’s three book series: Knowing educational administration (1991), Exploring educational administration (1996), and Doing educational administration (2000). Importantly, I interpret this aim widely and my discussion is based on the following guiding questions:

– What are the large scale theoretical, and empirical, problems on which educational administration is based?; and
– How can we study them?

These questions, I believe, are vital as the domain of educational administration faces increasing questions of its relevance and status within education, and as education itself faces increasing challenges from both within, and beyond. The arguments put forth in this book clearly stem from my intellectual pedigree in critical social theory – that which is frequently assigned the label of ‘sociology’ or ‘organisation studies’ more so than educational leadership, management and administration. However, in order to engage with the aim and guiding questions of the programme, I am not going to apply or map the intellectual terrain of educational administration using a critical social theory lens, as this is not desirable or helpful for my purposes, as such an approach would leave the existing theorisation of educational administration intact. Rather, what I offer is a theoretical intervention that enables one to see educational administration in new ways. Such an approach settles many of the popular assumptions of contemporary educational leadership, management and administration thought and enables a new
understanding of the relationship between schooling, policy and broader socio-economic conditions.

OUTLINING THE ARGUMENT

The canonical literature of educational administration, as is so often the case, comes from a bygone era. Classic administration works, such as Frederick Winslow Taylor’s (1911) *The principles of scientific management*, Chester Barnard’s (1968) *Functions of the executive*, and Herbert Simon’s (1976) *Administrative behavior*, were written at a time of industrial expansion and in the case of the latter two, shifting post-war socio-political conditions. Influential educational administration texts such as those written by Andrew Halpin (1966), Daniel Griffiths (1959a, 1959b, 1965, 1985, 1988), Thomas Greenfield (see Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993), Christopher Hodgkinson (1978, 1996), Richard Bates (1980a, 1980b, 1983), William Foster (1986), and Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski (1991, 1996, 2000), were also written in a different time and space. This is not to suggest that ontological and epistemological arguments are bracketed to a particular historical period, rather I argue that if we are to advance scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration we need to recognise that the research object has shifted over time and by virtue, our ways of knowing said object must change to.

The challenge for educational leadership, management and administration scholarship as engaged with in this book aligns with three markers: first, the changing image of what is essentially a modern institution, the school, in contemporary (post-modern?) times; second, the critique of ‘science’, or what will become clear, logical empiricism, from scholars, primarily from the critical school; and finally, the contemporary, although arguably enduring tensions of administration polarising individualism and collectivism and agency and structure. The relational research programme, as proposed in this book aims to reformulate the image of school administration by seeking to get beyond the tensions just mentioned. What in particular is the narrow attribution of ‘science’ with logical empiricism and *Theory Movement* inspired scholarship. Although notions of science in educational administration have been critiqued by: the humanists (e.g. Greenfield, Hodgkinson) for privileging the objective and failing to account for the subjective; the emancipatory critical theorists (e.g. Bates) for being an instrument of control; and the critical sociologist (e.g. Gunter) for its apolitical approach, this querying of science however is primarily on the basis of the limited mobilisation of science in educational administration and its relations with the social. The binaries of objectivity and subjectivity, as with individualism and collectivism, and agency and structure, are hardly productive theoretical spaces. Therefore, as with Evers and Lakomski’s research programme, I accept the various criticism of empiricist epistemology raised by the scope of alternate perspectives, but argue that they do not seriously affect the value of science as a scholarly endeavour.

I seek to pursue, and even increase, anchorage in a rigorous empirical science, which seems to me to represent a fundamental contribution of the work developed.
in the framework of this *relational* programme, by offering theoretically rich descriptions of the activities of actors in particular administrative situations. To this end, it seems unproductive to engage in a power explanation whose mechanical utilization risks crushing the narrative prior to any data being generated. To be brief, my move therefore consists in re-orienting from a critical sociological lens to the search for a description which attests to the unstable character of administration. This is not to suggest an abandonment of the project of the critical, however, through attention to close up descriptions of disruptions in production, one is better placed to craft accounts that can productively theorise educational administration in ways that can inform our understanding of how schools are constructed and exist in the social. The programme is inherently pragmatic, exploiting the resources supplied by current intellectual threads in history, philosophy, sociology, geography, literature, psychology, often taking different paths but focused on *in situ* activities in schools. Coming together in this way, by its very nature involves compromise, and the union is one that is eternally fragile. This approach to knowledge production mirrors the knowledge dynamic in which its object is embedded and embodies. In doing so, it moves beyond the mapping of directives and influences to an explicit interrogation of the messiness of the social. Such a move is incompatible with modernistic accounts which present educational leadership, management and administration as a coherent and focused body of work (field), marked with a past, present and future (English, 2002). Theoretically this enables us to break down the hierarchal world view that dominates much of the discourses of administration, management and leadership, that which reduces asymmetries in the social to single measures (e.g. class, gender) or binaries (dominate – dominated), to a *relational* way of thinking.

This move plays out in both the relations that the researcher has with the research object and also in the empirical. The intimate relationship between the researcher and the research object is magnified in educational leadership, management and administration (and arguably other domains within the professions) given that most, if not all, academics working in the area have previously held administrative positions in organisations and have a long association with such institutions, therefore heightening the embedded and embodied nature of their engagement. In the empirical, while the theme of colonisation has been replaced by globalisation in broader discourses, I argue that the image of the school, and by virtue, school administration, has for the most part not moved beyond the image of a colonised social group of educators working at some distance from the centre of education governance embedded within the state bureaucracies. This is despite policy moves focused on empowering schools and their communities.

Foregrounded in this argument is the role of ontology and epistemology. Core to my argument is that the centralist mindset of education research – even that which explicitly speaks back to it – limits our way of conceptualising the school and by virtue, theorising educational leadership, management and administration. I argue that there is a need to move beyond the linearity of rational action and consciousness. As is frequently witnessed when a centralist mindset is mobilised,
and especially so when an emancipatory account is put forth that in the process of building its argument further embeds the centralist agenda, it is difficult to move beyond a somewhat deterministic narrative being constructed. In the case of educational leadership, management and administration, this more often than not translates into seeing the school as the local face of a state agenda. The mobilisation of labels such as neo-liberalism, managerialism, and new public management, are too broad a brush stroke to sustain meaningful advances in knowledge anymore. Far too much is gathered in the sweep of the labels and the usage has diffused to such an extent that it is rarely productive in the space. The agenda of the relational research programme that I am advancing in this book has a chance to move beyond this limitation. I investigate how the production of knowledge about the legitimacy, effectiveness, efficiency, and morality of administration connects with the practices of administration. In doing so, questions are raised regarding the extent to which ‘new’ forms of administration – leadership, participatory, distributed, and so on – are generative or thwarting of new knowledge. Such a move is not surprising given that for the most part scholars, at least those who take such matters seriously, are looking for an alternate ontology as the Newtonian/Cartesian universe inhabited by self-interested, atomistic individuals – that which fits nicely with managerialist accounts of administration – does not logically fit prescriptions for collaborative practice nor the image of the school as a nebulous unit. A relational focus enables scholarship to move beyond internal tensions and external pressures by opening up the school and engaging with the dynamic relations that it both holds with other social institutions and those which constantly redefine its very existence. As a means of highlighting the key features of my argument, below I list five central features of the relational programme explored in this book:

– The centrality of ‘administration’ in the social world creates an ontological complicity in researchers that makes it difficult to epistemologically break from our spontaneous understanding of the social world;
– Rigorous ‘scientific’ scholarship would therefore call into question the very foundations on which the contemporarily popular discourses of ‘leadership’ ‘management’ and ‘administration’ in education are constructed;
– The contemporary social condition cannot be separated from the ongoing, and inexhaustible, recasting of administrative labour;
– Studying educational administration ‘relationally’ enables the overcoming of the contemporary, and arguably enduring, tensions of individualism and collectivism, and structure and agency; and
– In doing so, there is a productive – rather than merely critical – space to theorise educational administration.

In light of this, the primary point of departure I make with mainstream educational leadership, management and administration scholarship is my attention to matters of epistemology and ontology, or knowledge production. However, rather than locate this work in a philosophy of science space, I explicitly bring this into
discussion with contemporary discourses of educational leadership, management and administration. This move enables the argument to speak across intellectual (e.g. education, management, organisational studies) and socio-geographic boundaries through the provision of a theoretical argument that is not confined to any one empirical problem, space or time. Adopting this analytical strategy enables an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship while also fusing multiple lenses for the specific intent of opening new lines of inquiry and renewal in a field of knowledge production – educational leadership, management and administration – under question for its scholarly value within the academy.

TOWARDS A RELATIONAL RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Despite relationship-orientated perspectives being around since the earliest forms of scholarship on leadership, management and administration, the term ‘relational’ leadership is surprisingly new (Uhl-Bien, 2006). James Hunt and George Dodge (2000) consider relational perspectives, and the approaches within them, to be at the forefront of emerging leadership scholarship. In the time since Hunt and Dodge’s claim, relational approaches have solidified a place in the intellectual space of broader leadership scholarship (Dinh et al., 2014). The significance of a relational approach is often argued for as a means of generating scholarship that has more relevance to the world of practice (Bradbury & Litchenstein, 2000). Key thinkers in this space include Peter Dachler and colleagues, Dian Marie Hoskings, and Mary Ulh-Bien.

There are two major schools in the broader relational scholarship: entity; and relational. Although both ‘entity’ and ‘relational’ approaches view leadership as a social process, what they mean by process, particularly with respect to their ontology and epistemology, is quite different (Uhl-Bien, 2006). An entity perspective is consistent with an epistemology of an objective truth and a Cartesian dogma of a clear separation between mind and nature (Bradbury & Litchenstein, 2000). Relationship-based leadership from this perspective is focused on individuals and their perceptions, intentions, behaviours, personalities, expectations, and evaluations relative to their relationships with others. In contrast, a relational perspective views knowledge as socially constructed and socially distributed, not as mind stuff constructed or accumulated and stored by individuals. As Dachler and Hoskings (1995) argue, ‘[t]hat which is understood as real is differently constructed in different relational and historical/cultural settings’ (p. 4). The distinction between the entity and relational schools of thought are important. Consistent with my argument through this entire book, the identification of work within a relational space does not suggest a homogenous approach.

Helen Gunter (2010) argues that there is an emerging, or arguably re-emerging, sociological stream of scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration. The relational research programme that I am building and defending in this book fits within this sociological tradition of educational leadership, management and administration scholarship. I am of course not the only individual playing in this space. David Giles and colleagues in the Flinders’
Leadership And Management in Education (FLAME) research group (Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia) are building an agenda around ‘relational’ leadership (see Giles, Bell, Halsey, & Palmer, 2012). The point of departure, or ‘distinction’ to think with Bourdieu, in my work is both empirical and theoretical. Whereas Giles and colleagues seek to operationalise a ‘relational’ approach, adding yet another adjectival leadership, and in doing so, aligning with an entity approach, I am not seeking to map an intellectual terrain using existing theories adopted from elsewhere yet alone operationalise them. Rather, my argument is built upon what I see as the demise of theoretical advancements in educational leadership, management and administration. As a domain of scholarly inquiry, there is a proliferation of adjectives that exist beyond the need for any concrete referent and a denouncement of the heroic individual through ‘new’ organisational forms, yet the celebration of the individual ‘turnaround’ leader at unprecedented levels. The volume of critique regarding the impact of the expansion of the managerialist project has never been greater yet the aspirational tone of narratives of individual and/or collective autonomy has never received wider popular appeal. The relational approach I am advancing seeks not to map the existing terrain but to recast it. My intellectual project – an ongoing and generative one – is to recast educational administrative labour and the relations between the researcher and the researched.

While this is undoubtedly a theoretical monograph, something that is unpopular in the literatures of educational leadership, management and administration, it is not a theory. The theoretical and methodological frame I build is largely based on the work of others. Importantly, I have sought to mobilise multiple analytical frames in my analysis of educational administration. For the most part, I have sought to explicitly name the frameworks from within which I construct various claims, but in some parts this is more subtle.

Although it is difficult to accurately pinpoint the genesis of an intellectual project, this book is grounded in a Bourdieusian inspired scholarship, particularly the methodological perspective first sketched out in a text written by Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Claude Chamboredon and Jean-Claude Passeron (1991[1968]) entitled The craft of sociology: epistemological preliminaries (le métier de sociologue). However, my use of Bourdieusian theorising is neither with utmost loyalty or reverence. Bourdieu never explicitly wrote about educational administration, but most importantly, as James Ladwig (1996) argues, built within the very French, Durkheimian sociological tradition, Bourdieu’s theoretical and methodological stance begins from the epistemological presumption that (in Poincare’s words) ‘facts do not speak’. The result being that for Bourdieu, ‘scientific’ knowledge does not come into being through deduction or induction rather through social construction. He believes that social science is not about reality, nor is it about how reality is experienced, instead social science must focus on how reality is constructed in a dialectic between objects and subjects. As I will touch on elsewhere throughout this book, Bourdieu’s belief in science is not the science of mainstream Anglophone employment, that which is mostly tied to logical empiricism and displaying an ‘exhibitionism of data and procedures’ rather
he believes ‘one would be better advised to display the conditions of construction and analysis of these data (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992], p. 65). Bourdieu’s view of science, or more specifically scientific inquiry, sees it as an act of distinction from ordinary language and the under-problematised view of the social world as it is.

As I have argued previously, research in educational leadership, management and administration – or anywhere for that matter – is a political activity (Eacott, 2013). Therefore, what I have sought is to ground my work in a methodological tradition that explicitly pays attention to the relations between the researcher and the researched – the epistemological preliminaries of scholarship – as much as it does the relations between the empirical foci of research. It is the contention of this book that the relational approach I am building and defending offers important resources for engaging with both of these levels.

The type of analysis made possible by this relational approach offers a means of crafting theoretically charged descriptions illuminating the situated nature of administration and illuminating the embodied and embedded location of the educational leadership, management and administration scholar. Struggles for legitimacy are at the core of institutional labour, whether that is the principal working in a school or an academic in a university. These tensions are performative in that they only exist in practice and cannot be solely reduced to the structural arrangements of the empirical. The contested terrain that is the struggle for legitimacy is inexhaustible and as such, is a forever unfinished project. The binds that hold a group, organisation, institution and so on together are therefore problematic, active and by virtue of these qualities, fragile. However, as Les Back (2009) argues, what makes sociology interesting is engaging in the task of the interpretation of meaning that inevitably must be left open. He contends that the slippages, the insights, as well as the blindness, are what make it valuable and where the incomplete record is nonetheless compelling. These features though are not necessarily consistent across all research traditions.

Working from the above, this book contains a theoretical intervention demonstrating how a relational approach can be used to theorise educational leadership, management and administration. My appropriation of multiple analytical frames is guided by my singular (theoretical and empirical) task of trying to describe what I see happening in the scholarship of educational leadership, management and administration.

This multi-analytic approach recasts the image of the school, the administration of schooling, and its relationship with a range of other social institutions and bodies. The move I make is beyond that of merely mapping the various relations that schooling has to external bodies (not to mention the arrays of internal dynamics at play). Here I want to explicitly state two differences between my argument and that of mainstream educational leadership, management and administration discourses. First, for me, the contemporary focus of ‘leadership’ is an epistemic, and not empirical, research object; and second, the school, as a unit of analysis, is now located in a floating territory no longer defined by the downward linearity of state policy and/or ties to the ‘local’. Following the former,
from this point on I am going to adopt the label ‘educational administration’. I am well aware that this is unpopular and for many seen as an historical label (as is ‘educational management’), but I do it for two reasons: i) I believe it to be too cumbersome to continually mobilise the rather lengthy ‘educational leadership, management and administration’ label, therefore having a very pragmatic goal of increasing readability; and ii) conceptually, as I build my argument I believe it will become clear that ‘educational administration’ enables a broader perspective for interrogating the theoretical problem and opening new directions for scholarship.

In presenting this work, I argue that the developments, dynamics, and ruptures inherent within the relational research programme have a significance that lies well beyond the boundaries of educational administration, beyond its immediate parents (education and public administration), and into the larger family of studies of society (sociology). This is partly because theory travels better across boundaries, especially geographic but also cultural boundaries, than empirical research (Miller, 2011). Importantly, this means that while the examples I use throughout the book are primarily Australian, this is much more than an Australian story.

MORE THAN AN AUSTRALIAN STORY

This book, and somewhat understandable given my own geographic location, is unashamedly Australian. As an intellectual home, Australia has a rich tradition of contributing to educational administration scholarship, particularly from a socially critical perspective (Bates, 2010; Gunter, 2010). More than just contributing, Australian scholars have a rich history in disruptive scholarship, that which challenges the hegemonic discourses, including that of fellow Australian scholars. At the same time that Brian Caldwell was selling the virtues of the self-managing school (see Caldwell & Spinks, 1988, 1992 1998), John Smyth and colleagues were critiquing the movement on the basis of its social impacts (see Smyth, 1989, 1993). Elsewhere, Smyth’s Deakin colleague Richard Bates’ (1980a, 1980b) Critical Theory offered a viable alternative to the logical empiricism of the US-centric Theory Movement and the Thomas Greenfield inspired humanist movement (see Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993), Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski’s (1991, 1996, 2000) natural coherentism proposed a post-positivist perspective that challenged many of the criticisms of ‘science’ in educational administration, and at a more specific level, Peter Gronn (then of Monash, but now at Cambridge via Glasgow) engaged in a methodological debate with Ross Thomas (long time Journal of Educational Administration Editor) over the value of observational studies (Gronn, 1982, 1984, 1987; Thomas, 1986; Thomas, Willis, & Phillipps, 1981). This book speaks both to the intellectual history of Australian educational administration scholarship and the contemporary context.

There is little doubt that on a global scale managerialist discourses have become the orthodoxy of the contemporary condition. Therefore, despite being intellectually located within a rich Australasian tradition, the arguments put forth in this book speak to a global audience. The underpinning of academic scholarship is the process of grounding new theorisations and empirical examples in the existing
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body of knowledge. Through my engagement with theoretical tradition and the lived experience in the empirical, this book seeks to not merely contribute to acts of recognition, such as recognising the various roles played by anointed leaders in educational institutions, rather by providing means of cognition. That is, ways of thinking about educational administration grounded in histories but not bounded by historical categories, images and metaphors. As I have argued though, the intellectual project from which this book speaks is dynamic. This book is neither the beginning nor end of a research programme. I argue that both as individual chapters and as a whole, this text offers theoretical interventions that enable one to see the leadership, management and administration of educational institutions in new ways. Ways which are not limited to any one specific socio-geographic location but rather theoretically charged. As noted previously, theory travels far better across boundaries, both geographical and cultural, than empirical research. Offering a research programme of questioning the status quo of knowledge production and practice, this book sketches areas of relevance and possible theoretical development that serve to extend current debates, in fruitful directions. In doing so, and to borrow from Peter Berger (1966), this book is an invitation to the reader, and therefore warrants a generative reading, but it will become clear that ‘the reader will need to go beyond this collection if the invitation is to be taken seriously’ (p. 7). Therefore, I encourage the reader to think with, beyond, and where necessary, against what I argue in the spirit of the intellectual enterprise.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book seeks to model the research programme in which it espouses. As a result, the book is more or less divisible into three parts – although such partitioning is problematic as it artificially partitions the social world in ways not experienced apart from in the book form itself. The first part establishes the importance of epistemological issues and stresses the need for an epistemological break with ordinary language. This discussion takes place across two pivotal chapters in the book, Problematising the intellectual gaze and The (im)possibility of ‘leadership’. In the former, I argue that educational administration can credit its genesis, and level of esteem, to the administration of schooling becoming a public concern. That is, once society, or at least enough people, began to see administration as a key leverage point for improving outcomes (social and economic), there was demand for systematic inquiry. However, those who did the inquiring were frequently affiliated with school systems, administrators themselves, or as the current profile of the academy suggests, academics who themselves are former administrators. I contend that this does particular things to the intellectual gaze of the scholar through a form of ontological complicity. While epistemological debates once raged in educational administration, there is a somewhat uncritical engagement with the epistemological preliminaries in contemporary scholarship. As it stands, there is an awful lot of talking past one another with a number of completely contradictory viewpoints, arguments and interpretations whirling around the pages of publications, but more importantly, the
lack of any really meaningful dialogue between them. I am not trying to suggest a need to congeal around a core set of problems and/or theoretical resources as diversity – assuming robust and rigorous scholarship – is a healthy sign for a domain of inquiry. Rather as Robert Donmoyer (2001) argues, and Martin Thrupp and Richard Willmott’s (2003) book Education management in managerialist times demonstrates, as a domain of inquiry, educational administration exists in a state of tacit agreement where those with whom we disagree, we treat with benign neglect. In picking up this debate, and arguing for what I see as one of the key issues at play, in The (im)possibility of leadership, I model the notion of the epistemological break through an interrogation of ordinary language and the construction of ‘leadership’ as the contemporarily popular buzzword.

Having undertaken the intellectual work to problematize the intellectual gaze of the educational administration scholar and destabilised the contemporarily popular notion of ‘leadership’, Chapter Four Recasting administrative labour explicitly reconstructs the research object of educational administration on the basis of the epistemological break undertaken in the previous chapter. Mobilising a relational approach to understanding the social world, this chapter revises the conceptualisation of the school, and by virtue its administration, by locating it within a floating territory that is no longer defined by the downward linearity of bureaucratic policy directives or explicit ties to the ‘local’. Such locating work speaks to, but also challenges, notions of autonomy, policy, and community, among others. In doing so, schools and administrators are constituted as much more than the local face of a state agenda.

If this book is to have an audience beyond itself, then it is vital that I can demonstrate further how this approach to scholarship plays out. In what could be described as the second part of the book, I begin by engaging with an outlining of the empirical focus of the relational approach. Working with the notion of ‘worth’, taken loosely from Luc Boltanski and colleagues, this chapter blends the seemingly fragmented discourses of ‘value’ and ‘values’ to offer a renewed research object for educational administration. I further bring the relational research programme to life through the following two chapters. First, I engage with how the relational differs from two relatively recent Australian studies on school leadership. This nuancing is less about how one approach is better than the other, but instead about demonstrating how the relational facilitates the asking of new questions. This chapter is then followed by one where I begin to outline how the relational approach could be mobilised to think through the principalship in the context of autonomy. Importantly, as the relational is a generative research programme, what I offer is ‘a’ (not ‘the’) relational approach. It is not necessarily better than other approaches, although I am a little bias here, but offers a different way to think through the organising of education.

Before concluding the book I devote a single chapter – although later than one may expect – to develop an argument for the perspective put forth thus far in the context of contemporary thought and analysis in educational administration. This work will bring the discussion into direct conversation with, and in some cases opposition to, other perspectives. The location of such a chapter is important.
Rather than foregrounding this explicit chapter and then outlining the relational research programme, I feel it is important to do the work first and then outline how this engages with, and opens up, current perspectives to new ways of thinking. The previous chapters serve as supporting evidence for the claims in this chapter regarding the strength of the alternate programme being proposed.

To bring the discourses of the text into a coherent argument, the final chapter Conclusion revisits the arguments put forth and essentially captures the key points of the narrative constructed. Moving beyond simply bookending with the introduction, this chapter is an explicit invitation to others to join the relational research programme being proposed. It asks for a generative reading, other case studies in different locations (both in time and space) to advance our understanding, and importantly, for others to work with, beyond and where necessary against what I have proposed in the interests of the intellectual enterprise. This book is not the final word on the relational research programme, rather just an articulation.

NOTES

i It is important for me to acknowledge at this point that Helen Gunter (1999, 2000, 2002, 2004) has already eloquently used Bourdieu to do this work, using England as her geographic anchor.

ii The term ‘disruptions in production’ is mobilised as a deliberate means of moving beyond the reproductive nature of education as advocated by critical sociologists such as Bourdieu and numerous contemporary educational administration scholars.

iii Being of a Bourdieusian persuasion, I cannot mobilise the notion of ‘field’ to discuss educational administration as a domain of inquiry. This is a matter that I shall return to in later chapters in relation to the study of disruptions in production.

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CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEMATISING THE INTELLECTUAL GAZE

INTRODUCTION

Administration has been a central element in the trajectory of human society. As Peter Gronn (2010) notes, above a certain numerical threshold, humans, much like many examples in the animal kingdom, tend to establish hierarchies and the self-organisation of numerous (collaborating) societal groups proves difficult. Although frequently thought of as little more than a technology of control, administration and its key activity of policy, are intimately connected to our understanding of the social world. What remains rarely, if ever, addressed, at least in educational administration discourses, is the extent to which being embedded, and embodying, this world view shapes the intellectual gaze, and by virtue, ‘scientific’ inquiry. In this chapter I mobilise Bourdieusian social theory to challenge the nature of scientific inquiry in educational administration. Although Bourdieu never wrote on educational administration per se, and earlier claims that his work is minimally used in educational administration despite his theoretical attention to the relationship between individual agency and structural determinism (Lingard & Christie, 2003), the increasing use of Bourdieu’s work is part of the re-emergence of a sociological approach to educational administration (Gunter, 2010). However, while Bourdieu has been used to interrogate aspects of educational administration, such as school reform (Gunter, 2012), professional standards (English, 2012), leadership preparation and development (Eacott, 2011), strategy (Eacott, 2010), autonomy (Thomson, 2010), educational leadership at large (Thomson, 2015), or even the intellectual field of educational administration (Gunter, 2002), the focus of this chapter on epistemological preliminaries through a Bourdieusian lens is rarely, if ever mobilised, in educational administration.

Much of the Bourdieusian inspired work in educational administration gives primacy to his thinking concepts of field, habitus, and capital, and this is understandable given the centrality of these concepts to his theory of practice. After all, establishing boundaries for the topic, exploring the dispositions of key players, and the value of items – both material and symbolic – within the game is important for building an argument. However, what this does though is to highlight the need to engage with the epistemological preliminaries of the work. For example, Bob Lingard and Shaun Rawolle (2010) argue that school leaders, interpreted as principals, sit at the intersection of multiple fields and that the work of leaders, or leadership practice, is the mediation and expression of cross-field effects. Embedded within this argument is that school leaders need to be multilingual to engage with the discourses of multiple fields. Pat Thomson’s (2010) contribution on the other hand is that headteacher practice is caught between different social fields. In making this argument, Thomson articulates how the work
of headteachers is both within the individual school (as a sub-field of the larger field of schooling) and beyond, where headteacher practice is about advancing – through the acquisition of capital – both the school and the individual in the broader social space. Pivotal to Thomson’s argument is the boundary work of headteachers and the constant negotiations in which school leaders’ push for greater autonomy. Both contributions add to our knowledge of educational administration, however, in advancing theory of educational administration I see two major limitations: first, the centrality of the principal/headteacher (even if defined relationally); and second, the argument for a field of educational administration.

Neither Thomson or Lingard and Rawolle claim to be describing any role other than the principal, yet contemporary thought in educational administration is that leadership, management or administration is no longer – if it ever was – the property of a single individual or title within an organisation. This challenges, if not forces, us to problematise the very concept of administration and the identification of administrators, and by virtue, non-administrators. The long standing problematic matter of the separation – which was the original stimulus for the establishment of departments of educational administration and the domain as a topic of inquiry – needs to be acknowledged and engaged with. In making an argument for a field of educational administration, there is the constitution of what Ron Kerr and Sarah Robinson (2011) label an ‘elite field of leaders’, where a class habitus serves to stratify the social world through links to organisational, not necessarily social, positions. The primacy given to Bourdieu’s thinking tools in such studies, as opposed to his epistemological arguments, leads to a situation where it is difficult to get beyond the reproductive nature of the administration of schooling. Therefore, much of the Bourdieusian work in educational administration does not move past the role of the state in maintaining existing asymmetrical power relations of the social world, something primarily achieved through schooling (see Bourdieu, 1996[1989]; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990[1970]).

There has been intense critique of the administration, or policy, of contemporary Western democratic-capitalist societies, particularly in sociology, management (at least in critical management studies), and education, among other domains of inquiry. This critique, especially in educational administration, has privileged the empirical problem over the large-scale theoretical problem – that is, the monopoly of legitimisation of the social world – embedded in the research object. I do not mean this in the sense that invokes the (false) dichotomy of theory and practice, rather, as a means of highlighting the intimate relations of the theoretical problem and empirical object in the scientific enterprise. Through the explicit privileging of the empirical, robust discussion around the ways of perceiving the social world are censored, or even dismissed as unnecessary intellectualism. Following the work of Pierre Bourdieu, it is the contention of this chapter that an important element of scholarship is to take as one’s object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992], p. 229). I build my argument on two key points, first, the centrality of administration in our understanding of the social world, and second, the intellectual gaze of the
embedded actor, to argue for a re-thinking of scientific inquiry in educational administration. As with Bourdieu, I seek to cast doubt on orthodoxy, or, to make the familiar strange. This is a necessary, and important, task when working in the social world that the researcher is involved. Importantly, such a move requires explicit attention to the epistemological break of the embodied agent, and the construction of the research object, rather than just the confirmation, or disconfirmation, of the researcher’s model of reality (see Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991[1968]). To engage with these issues, I do not offer a fully articulated theory, research programme or even ‘how to’ description, that is the intent of the book at large. Rather I sketch an argument centred on the need to interrogate the construction of the research object as a means to extend current debates on leadership, management and administration of educational institutions in new and more fruitful directions.

SOME PRELIMINARIES

My use of the label ‘science’ in both this chapter and throughout the entire book is deliberately provocative. It is through the mobilisation of this label that I seek to both engage with, and contribute to, the discourses of educational administration. As with Bourdieu, I have a belief in science. An alignment with the view of science, and more specifically scientific inquiry, as an act of distinction from ordinary language and the under-problematised view of the social world as it is. Therefore, for me, science is, and should be, the goal of all inquiry into the social world.

The labels of ‘science’ and ‘scientific’ have a long association with educational administration. The establishment of departments of educational administration in US universities aligns loosely with the publication of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s (1911) *The principles of scientific management*, and these principles were strongly advocated for by leading figures at the time, including George Strayer at Teachers College Columba, Edward Elliot at Wisconsin, Franklin Bobbit at Chicago, and Ellwood Cubberly at Stanford. Taylor, like other classic administration thinkers such as Lyndall Urwick and Henri Fayol, was a practitioner-researcher rather than scientist-scholar, mindful that binaries are rarely productive. However, the prominence of ‘science’ and the ‘scientific’ study of educational administration were at its peak during the so called *Theory Movement* of the 1950-1960s. Primarily through the work of Andrew Halpin and Daniel Griffiths, this US-centric school of thought, whose genesis is commonly attributed to the annual meeting of the National Conference for Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) in Denver Colorado during August 1954, but owes many of its underlying principles to Herbert Simon’s (1945) *Administrative behavior*, marked the beginning of a systematic traditional (natural) science approach to educational administration. This new ‘scientific’ movement drew heavily on the (early) writing of Herbert Feigl – linked to the Vienna Circle – and sought to characterise educational administration inquiry through ‘objectivity, reliability, operational definitions, coherent or systematic structure, and comprehensiveness’ (Griffiths, 1959, p. 45).
Interestingly, the Theory Movement sought to break educational administration inquiry away from the atheoretical knowledge of the practitioner-researcher, yet did this not by embedding (social) theory per se, but rather rational technique of inquiry. In doing so, ‘science’ was constituted through the neutrality and apparent distance between observer and research object. Significantly, it also privileged methods over methodology.

Twenty years later, at the 1974 International Intervisitation Programme at Bristol, England, Thomas Barr Greenfield challenged the American pragmatic empiricism of the Theory Movement and the epistemological assumptions of an objective science of administration. Greenfield’s core epistemological claim is that all our knowledge of reality, natural and social, contains an irreducible subjective component. That is, objectivity is a myth – in both the natural and social sciences. In arguing for a subjectivist/phenomenological approach to educational administration scholarship, he called for a ‘humane science’ (see Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993). Through the rejection of objectivity and submitting his argument to the subjectivity of social phenomena, Greenfield does however leave himself in a situation where anything goes – a situation which is arguably equally problematic. He was not alone in the critique of logical empiricist inquiry, as Richard Bates’ (1980, 1983) Critical Theory of educational administration also made the claim – so too have sociological approaches to educational administration (see Gunter, 2010). Significantly, these critiques led to many believing that the pursuit of a science of educational administration was neither worth pursuing, or even possible.

In contrast, Colin Evers and Gabriele Lakomski (1991, 1996, 2000, 2012) have consistently argued that it is not science that is the problem, but rather the model of science. They contend that it is the narrow operationalisation of science as logical empiricism that is the problem, not the pursuit of scientific study.

What remains in educational administration, and education at large for that matter, is the canonical opposition between theory and practice, most profoundly inscribed in the division of labour between administrators/teachers, those physical located in schools and school systems, and academics/scientists, those who occupy the hallow halls of the university. It is this (false) dichotomy between theory and practice, and its impact on the intellectual gaze of the educational administration scholar that I seek to problematise. Particularly, my argument is that it is scientific inquiry that separates the practitioner/researcher from the scientist. That is, there is something about the way of thinking, without reducing this to an essentialist argument, which creates a distinction. It is not that the scientist and practitioner/researcher think about different things, in this case the administration of schooling, rather, my argument is that these groups – and the line of demarcation is not easily identified, or maintained – think differently about such matters. Importantly, scientific language, that employed by the scientist, is separate from ordinary language (and this also goes for the mobilisation of ‘science’ as a label) and therefore troubles common sense. As such, scientific inquiry is a powerful means of political intervention, and the genesis of creativity and innovation. Yet as Fenwick English (2006) reminds us, intellectual (scientific) work “is never efficient, perhaps not even cost effective, but then, true discovery
and significant intellectual and practical breakthroughs rarely are’ (p. 470). As a means of interrogating and problematising the intellectual gaze of the educational administration scholar, I build my argument around three key points: first, the embodied agent of the educational administration scholar; second, the scientific break from the pre-scientific world; and finally, the need for epistemological vigilance.

EMBODIED AGENTS

A central issue in the scholarship of educational administration is that administrators are, as are all social actors, spontaneous sociologists (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992], p. 66). This is particularly so in the professions, such as education, but also law, business, architecture, engineering and medicine. In the case of educational administration, most, if not all, academics are former administrators at school and/or systemic levels. Further to that, many hold administrative positions in the academy, further blurring the boundary between the native (naive) perception of the spontaneous sociologist and the research objects constructed through the ‘scientific’ method of the scientist. Following Bourdieu, this does two (considerably overlapping) things, first, the doxic modality through which the social world is perceived is the result of the internalisation of the objective structures of the social world in the cognitive schemata through which they apprehend the social world. Alternatively, the social world exists in the body as much as the body exists in the social world. Second, there exists a belief, or illusio, in administration, and most importantly, the stakes of the task at hand. That is, administration functions only in so far as it produces a belief in the value of its product (e.g. policy, security, order), and means of production (e.g. governance). What I have brought to attention here is the importance of engaging with the epistemological (and ontological) preliminaries which shape, and in turn are shaped by, scholarship in educational administration.

In relation to my first point, the doxic modality, there is great difficulty in studying the social world in which one is involved. The tensions of this engagement are highlighted in Bourdieu’s (1988[1984]) Homo academicus, among others. As noted above, resulting from the occupation of a particular position in the social (and physical) space, and the trajectory – both professional and personal – that got them there, educational administration academics are frequently, if not always, immersed in an in situ brand of scholarship. The individual’s social history of education, and specifically of educational institutions, and the history of the singular relationship with these institutions, significantly, often in spite of ourselves, orients our thought. This blurs the boundaries of the empirical and the epistemic, as ‘educational administration’ as the research object is the institutionalisation of a point of view grounded in a pre-reflexive belief in the undisputed value of the object itself. This brings to the fore the need for an epistemological break – a point I shall return to later – in the scientific enterprise. As Bourdieu (2000[1997]) notes:
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... it is clear that, to secure some chance of really knowing what one is doing, one has to unfold what is inscribed in the various relations of implication in which the thinker and his thought are caught up, that is, the presuppositions he engages and the inclusions or exclusions he unwittingly performs. (p. 99)

It is the epistemic unconscious, that which is the history – however opaque – of the individual, and the intellectual field, that shapes the scientific enterprise. Administrative theory, most of the time, align with a Western pattern of thought that centres on administration (social order) and management (control) of populations and/or environments. This administration and management is exercised by more or less arbitrarily defined populations, produced through the successive partitioning of an initial category that is itself pre-constructed: ‘first-year female small school principals’, who administer or manage over more or less arbitrarily defined populations, produced through the successive partitioning of an initial category that is itself pre-constructed: ‘disadvantaged students in regional areas’.

This brings me to the second, but deeply interwoven, point of ‘investment in the object’. The original investment in, or belief in the value of, educational administration has no specific origin, because it always precedes itself. Therefore, even though the positive or negative relations that one may have with educational institutions, that which appear to create a distance between object and subject, the difficulties in recognising this ontological complicity limits the intellectual enterprise. As it is, the scientist frequently credits the research object with his/her vision of things as a result of the pre-reflexive conditioning. That is, the academic, s/he who is embedded and embodies educational administration rarely calls into question the value of educational administration. To challenge the value, or worth, of educational administration would be to not only question the very core of the domain, but to question the value of the self and one’s role in the social fabric. The researcher, who is therefore implicated in the world, is unable to withdraw from the world in order to construct a re-creation of it through a manuscript or lecture. Furthermore, although somewhat deterministic, I would argue that education researchers for the most part, struggle to move beyond the innate desire to ‘educate’. Therefore, much of the work in education seeks to ‘teach’, hence the implicit adoption of Taylor’s (1911) ‘one right method’ – that which is contemporarily translated into ‘best practice’ – and the eternal quest for how best to prepare and develop school administrators for the purpose of bringing about change (generally towards some performative measure operating within the managerialist project).

The intellectual gaze of the researcher is significant here. What is arguably the raison d’être of the ‘applied’ domain, the advancement of practice, that which is perpetuated in part by the submission of many researchers and administrators to the managerialist discourses of the contemporary world and by the inertia of the academic/practical problematic handed down in the technicist classes of the contemporary school leadership preparation and development programme – whether they be based in universities or beyond – simply must be engaged with. I raise this point not as an iconoclastic attack, or privileged intellectualism, rather because I believe that, for the most part, educational administration researchers, for
all their research and voluminous literature, do not ask themselves these questions. By avoiding asking oneself about the stimulation and provocation of your questioning, the individual scientist, and the domain at large, is significantly limited as to what it can say about the social world. There is of course substantial risk, at least intellectually, and arguably career wise, in trying to know, and make known, what the world of educational administration knowledge may (or does) not want to know, especially about itself. In building my argument here, I contend that administration may derive its most substantive scientific work not from producing countless lists of best practice and essential traits or behaviours, but rather through a constant effort to undertake a sociological informed critique of its own reasoning. That is, I am stressing a critical engagement with not only the limits of thought, but also on the conditions in which that thought is exercised. Understandably, an initial question may be to ask ‘But what scientific profit can be discovered from such an exercise?’ I argue that most, if not all, educational administration researchers enter the academy to effect change, to change the way of the world toward some inherently ‘good’ orientation. Critically engaging with thought enables the researcher to break with the intimate relation that one has with the social world – at least to a certain extent – and engage with that which is opaque to us due to familiarity.

As Bourdieu (1988[1984]) notes, there is a need to get ‘increasingly closer to the originary of the ordinary’ (pp. xi-xii). The educational administration researcher does not stand outside of the social world they analyse, nor do they look down on it from above. Rather, they themselves are agents in the social world, and the pre-constructed notions of educational administration, the management of systems, teachers, students, and buildings, derive their self-evidence and their legitimacy from the actions of subjects. Following Bourdieu, the social world that educational administration inquiry deals with is something that the subject themselves make, modify and transform through their activity. The individual, or research team, who studies schools has a ‘use’ for them, one that may have little in common with the parents who seek to find a ‘good’ school for their child, or the system or government looking to leverage performance. What I am doing here is not suggesting any one perspective is better than the other, although to say I am neutral here is also misplaced, but rather to stress that the internal politics of scholarship matters. For example, the Critical School, particularly that coming out of Deakin University (see Tinning & Sirna, 2011), has an explicit social justice agenda focusing on the adversarial role of education and the emancipatory power of learning/education. In what may appear similar to the novice researcher, or wider public, the School Effectiveness and School Improvement (SESI) movement has a belief in the transformational power of schooling – primarily through upward social mobility – that can be achieved through the perpetual improvement of student outcomes. However, unlike the Critical School, there is no questioning of the value of the measures (see Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). The School Based Management (SBM) movement, which is gaining renewed traction in Australian education policy, as with elsewhere, is built on a romantic belief in ‘participation’ at the local level and frequently exhibits a denial of power relations in the social,
yet invokes a level of common sense logic that is difficult, if not impossible, to refute. As Bourdieu notes, in the social sciences, even the least competent and intellectually equipped scholar (Bourdieu, following Alain, actually uses the label ‘dumbest’) can use common sense and find support, especially beyond the academy (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992]). What this raises is the need to engage with the pre-scientific world and the construction of the research object.

THE PRE-SCIENTIFIC WORLD AND THE BREAK

Educational administration, like the sociologies of the professions (e.g. education), primarily owes its existence to the currency of public concern over particular social issues (e.g. schooling, education policy). Such inquiry however rarely achieves any scientific status while it remains in the realm of the pre-scientific, that of public concern or technocratic management. The researcher can, and I would argue that this is common in educational administration, avoid engaging with the epistemological break required for scientific study by remaining in the pre-scientific world of the wider public. This is most overt in the solicitation of researchers for the production of marketable products such as the ‘leadership/management by ring binder’ genre (see Halpin, 1990; Gunter, 1997), that which can prove to be very profitable, materially and symbolically, for those who opt to serve the dominant vision. However, educational administration cannot claim to be studied scientifically, – note that my argument is for the scientific study of, not a science of – without breaking from the orthodoxy of the pre-scientific world. This is not to discredit, or reject, the practical sense of the spontaneous sociologist, as it is this orthodoxy that is the beginning of the scientific enterprise, yet as Bourdieu argues, the choice of problem, the elaboration of concepts and analytical categories function as a ratification of the doxa unless the crucial operation of scientific construction breaks with the social world as it is (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992[1992], p. 248). Therefore, what is required of the researcher, is submitting to scientific scrutiny everything that makes the doxic experience of the world possible. This includes not only the pre-scientific representation of the social but also the cognitive schemata that underlie the construction of the image.

If to the contrary, one is to accept at face value the doxa to construct the research object, you can find lists, directories, role statements, capability frameworks, among others, already constituted by ‘professional’ bodies. I am well aware of the critique, often quickly invoked, that educational administration, and the professions in general, differ from the natural sciences as it is required to be accessible in a way that is not expected of physics. Yet, I am reminded here of Gaston Bachelard’s (1984[1934]) saying ‘the simple is never anything more than the simplified’, and Bourdieu’s consistent refusal to make his work more accessible on the basis that what he was discussing is complex and to make it simple is inappropriate. The professionalisation of educational administration knowledge however mobilises, if not relies on, a kind of quasi-scientific rationalisation of orthodoxy – it is worth thinking through this in relation to the
Theory Movement. In this case, scientific work is little more than an instrument for legitimising power relations as they are. This is a particularly significant matter given the embedded and embodied nature of educational administration inquiry, and the notion that the scientist is at stake in his/her own object. Therefore, if the scientist seeks to construct techniques or instruments that make it possible to manipulate the social order or populations, then inquiry is in the service of ‘administration’ and scientists serve that master as social engineers. The question that this raises is whether educational administration can constitute itself through a refusal to submit to social demands for instruments of legitimation and manipulation? I also want to draw attention here to the use of ‘administration’. I mobilise this term, following Bourdieu, to stress that in heavily administered societies, much like a gravitational field, even the person perceived to have absolute power – or decision making authority – is him/herself held within the constraints of administration. That is, nobody knows anymore who is the subject of the final decision, and the place of the decision is both everywhere and nowhere. This is counter to the illusion of ‘the’ decision maker and the countless case studies aimed at investigating how decisions came to be through merely the phenomenological manifestations of the exercise of power (see Bourdieu, 2005[2000]). However to simply denounce bureaucratic administration, or more specifically hierarchy, does not get us anywhere, rather, what we need to ask is how such a vision of the social world is possible.

What we experience in the empirical is an ensemble of administration. Often in the form of government departments, school systems, schools, faculties, and so on, within which individual actors, and categories of actors (e.g. bureaucrats, principals, teachers, students), struggle over a particular form of authority, that which is constituted through the power to rule or legitimise actions through legislations, regulations, policy and administrative measures. The history of such administration is characterised by a set of negotiations between rival claims of administrative control and individual agency. As such, the administration of schools, and school systems, depends on its bureaucratic past for legitimate authority while also constantly seeking to reform and renew itself. Alternatively, educational administration is a space where existing holders of the legitimacy of discourses come into direct contact with new contenders. The struggle for legitimacy, as with the researchers’ struggle with the taken for granted of the immediate, is always in play. To avoid inquiry becoming little more than the advancement of the current state of affairs nothing can be defined or assumed a priori. That is, the popular practice, especially with graduate students, of operationally defining objects and subjects is not appropriate. In addition to being a direct rejection of logical empiricism, such a claim raises questions regarding the use of theory in educational administration, particularly if the researcher is to work with open concepts, and theory being a means of working through the empirical world. For one, as I demonstrate in the following chapter (see also Eacott, 2013a), the contemporarily popular label of ‘leadership’ relies on an a priori assumption of its existence yet a simultaneous a posteriori labelling of where it occurs. Specifically, while there seems to be little doubt about the ‘realness’ of leadership,
its identification is most frequently limited to the performative markers of the managerialist project of the state. The tautology of such research, where a site has been identified where leadership is enacted and then the findings are correlated against the very measures that we used to identify it in the first place seems somewhat lost, or at least not problematic, for mainstream scholarship in educational leadership, management and administration. I return to this matter again in Chapter Six while critiquing Stephen Dinham’s AESOP work and the International Successful School Principals Project, in particular the Australian contributions from David Gurr and Lawrie Drysdale.

The use of ‘theory’ – although arguably a bastardised mobilisation of such label – in educational administration is frequently limited to the representation of experimental laws, or causal relations, and the ‘research’ is constituted as a distinct part of the process, with a somewhat naive demarcation of the empirical object, theoretical problematising, construction of the research object, and so on. Such research is of greater frequency in the project management style of contemporary academic life in the entrepreneurial university, as opposed to the longevity of the research programme – where one continually delves deeper into an area, not just picking up where one project or others have left off, but rather, better informed and with increasingly sophisticated ways of knowing and being in the world, scholarship is continually delving deeper into the research object, its construction and constant re-construction. In contrast, the project management approach, that which is most frequently limited to the inquiry of public concern, constitutes the researcher as a technician (e.g. a quantitative expert, or worst still, a software package expert, e.g. SPSS) who has the mobility to shift research objects according to the latest national priorities of large scale funding regimes, the whims of government or corporate juggernauts. This is an important aspect to engage with for any potential ‘scientific’ scholarship. With reduced research funding in many national contexts, many researchers or research teams are falling under the control (at least fiscal) of large firms seeking to secure a monopoly, or to use Michael Porter’s (1985) term ‘competitive advantage’, through the commercialisation of profitable products. The relocation, or redistribution, of research funding to the commercial sector reflects administration – both at large, and specifically research – constituted in the model of the firm, embodying the market ideology or neo-Darwinism of the corporation. If we are to break from this solicitation, scientific inquiry requires, if not demands, freedom. Following Michel Foucault, I contend that this freedom is not synonymous with liberation and/or autonomy. The problem is not ‘Let’s liberate our researchers’ but rather engaging with the practice of freedom by which one could define what is scientific inquiry and the researcher-researched relationship. To sustain such freedom, researchers need to combat and systematically resist the infiltration of ordinary language and spontaneous understanding of the social world. The common-sense or taken for granted of the social does however consistently re-appear (if it ever disappears) and there is a requirement of constant vigilance in scholarship. Such vigilance is particularly difficult in 6000 word journal articles, or 20 minute conference presentations, not to mention the temporal nature – or privileging of ‘clock’ time – in university and
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academic ranking systems of publication output. What remains though is that the empirical is inexhaustible, something that objective science struggles to grasp and engage with, and theory is not something that the researcher applies to the empirical, rather it is a way of working through and with the empirical.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL VIGILANCE

Epistemological vigilance is particularly necessary in the social sciences, where the separation between the everyday language and opinion of the spontaneous sociologist and the scientific discourse of the researcher is more blurred than elsewhere (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron, 1991[1968]). It is familiarity with the social world, the ongoing struggle with the spontaneous understanding of the everyday that is the central epistemological obstacle for educational administration as it continuously produces conceptualisations (e.g. organisational structures, leadership) and at the same time, the conditions which serve to legitimise and sustain them. As a result, the inexhaustible intellectual project of getting beyond the everyday is never finally won. Herein lies a core difference between the ‘natural’ and ‘social’ sciences, although such a binary is not necessarily productive, the separation experienced between the laboratory and everyday life for the physicist is substantively more difficult – and dare I say impossible – for the social scientist. This is partially because the intellectual resources of disciplines, in this case educational administration, rarely provide the necessary tools to meaningfully break from the ordinary language of the everyday. In doing so, it is rare for disciplines, particularly those related to the professions (e.g. educational administration) to ask questions of their canonical thrusts (e.g. ‘leadership’).

All of the techniques and procedures of advanced research cannot completely overcome the embedded and embodied nature of the educational administration scholar. Due to the (social) relationship that the educational administration scholar has with the research object, scholarship is never a pursuit of pure truth (if such a thing is possible). Therefore, it is inappropriate to craft a scholarly narrative as though it exists separate to the socio-political, cultural and temporal conditions in which it is brought into being. Neglecting to subject ordinary language, the primary instrument in the ongoing (re)construction of objects in the social world, to a rigorous and robust epistemological/ontological critique runs the risk of mistaking objects pre-constructed in and by ordinary language for data (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, & Passeron, 1991[1968]). The masking of the everyday origins of such data through the mobilisation of scientific language (e.g. the ‘quality’, ‘improvement’, ‘effective’ discourses) is infrequently called into question (except arguably in the critical stream of educational administration research) as the descriptions provided create a sense of comfort through the recognition of familiarity with lived experience. As Bourdieu et al. (1999[1993]) note:

The positivists dream of an epistemological state of perfect innocence papers over the fact that the crucial difference is not between a science that effects construction and one that does not, but between a science that does this without knowing it and one that, being aware of the work of construction, strives to discover and master as
completely as possible the nature of its inevitable acts of construction and equally inevitable effects those acts produce. (p. 608)

Gaston Bachelard (1984[1934]) denies science the certainties of a definitive heritage and reminds us that it (science) can only progress by perpetually calling into question the very principles of its own constructs. Similarly, as noted at the opening of this book, Fenwick English (2006) argues that advancing scholarship in educational administration requires criticism of it, philosophically, empirically and logically, suggesting that we do not search for core pillars but the contested grounds on which educational leadership is defined moment-to-moment. The arguments of Bachelard and English, among others, are significant. Historically, discourses of educational administration, primarily through the mobilisation of the ‘applied’ field label, have generated – and legitimised – the unproductive, and I would say false, binary of theory and practice. For the most part, this is justified through a desire to maintain a closeness, or relevance, to practice. Helen Gunter (2012) contends that such labels (e.g. theory and practice) have been used and abused to shape anti-intellectual cultures within the profession and ‘educational leadership industry’ in business and higher education. Notably, an integral feature of the managerialist project which dominates the contemporary research environment internationally is the discrediting of intellectual work (such as the critique and analysis of the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of research objects) as exotic, indulgent and not in the public interest (Gunter, 2013).

With the othering of intellectual work, often referred to as the professionalization of knowledge production, and the embedded and embodied nature of the educational administration scholar, I argue that there is a crisis in educational administration as a domain of knowledge production. For me, this crisis is not centred on divisions resulting from paradigmatic lens, or even intellectual traditions. Rather, this crisis is grounded in the relationship between the discipline as a domain of knowledge production and its interactions with the wider domain of education research and practice. In reflecting on her career working in educational administration, Eugenie Samier (2013) notes:

In the field I eventually settled in, educational administration, significant changes were taking place, beginning in the later 1960s and the 1970s and accelerating throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with feminist critiques, the School of Critical Theory, the emergence of hermeneutics and phenomenology, the transformation of organisational behaviour into organisational studies as a broadly encompassing pursuit that included culture, micro-politics, aesthetic analysis, and psychoanalysis, all spilling into administrative theory as postmodern critiques appeared in English. And then … Not nothing, as this might have been a state preferable to the rise of neoliberalism, the New Public Management, and the market model fostered and distributed internationally through globalisation. (pp. 234-235)

If we accept the social world at face value, the orthodoxy of ordinary language constructs the research object in such a way that you find lists, directories, role statements, capability frameworks, among others, already constituted by ‘professional’ bodies. This speaks explicitly to the argument of this chapter, the data generated (not collected) must not be seen as independent contributions to the
discourses of ‘leadership’ but rather as social constructions in the political game of knowledge creation (Eacott, 2013b). As Jill Blackmore (2004) states, 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).

There is a substantial body of work stressing that as a discipline, educational administration is not held in high esteem within the academy at large or even education as a broader field of study. If educational administration research is to acquire any level of academic credibility within both the academy and wider community, then greater attention needs to be paid to the manner in which it undertakes its inquiry. An interrogation of the epistemological and ontological preliminaries of research, those underlying generative principles, is imperative for advancing a rigorous and robust research programme. Attention to the construction and ongoing re-construction of the research object in time and space would advance our understanding of the administration of organisations in new and fruitful directions. Understandably, to challenge ‘leadership’ – as the contemporary popular label within the discipline – is to attack one of, if not the, canon of the discipline. Unlike the critique of management and/or administration, not to mention the demonization of bureaucracy, ‘leadership’ is the current sacred label of the discipline. To question its scholarly legitimacy brings to the level of discourse the very generative foundations of scholarship and practice, and for most reading this book, our identity. This is why we see numerous critiques of the various adjectives (e.g. transformational, servant, strategic, distributed, motion) used in the rapidly expanding literatures of educational administration, yet minimal, if any critique of ‘leadership’ itself. It is as though the scholarly practice of reflexivity, or critically turning upon itself, has been neglected for the purpose of maintaining a particular relationship with practice. The argument that I am building in this chapter, and throughout the book, is that to engage, and arguably combat, questions of the quality of educational administration research as a scholarly endeavour, greater attention is needed to the ongoing construction of the research object and its relations with the researcher.

CONCLUSION

This chapter, and the thinking behind it, is not a case of theoreticism – or theory for theory’s sake – but rather, if I return to my original provocation, to take as one’s object the social work of construction of the pre-constructed object, then this chapter can be read as a Bourdieusian epistemological preliminary for the study of educational administration. That being said, it is more than merely a didactic exercise, this chapter is more than a mere appropriation of Bourdieu into a different intellectual space. This chapter, as with the book itself, seeks to explicitly reinvigorate epistemological and ontological debate in educational administration. The research approach that I am advancing is easily summarised. I am arguing for an approach to scientifically study educational administration, one that is able to incorporate the embedded and embodied nature of the ‘education’ researcher. To
do this, I am asking serious questions about the epistemological break in scholarship and the construction of the research object, more so than the confirmation or disconfirmation of the researcher’s model of reality.

A social ‘scientific’ approach to educational administration, as advocated for in this chapter, must break free of the ambition of grounding in (rational) reason, the arbitrary division of the social world (e.g. administrators, non-administrators), instead, take for its object, rather than getting itself caught up in, the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of the social world. A chapter such as this is both difficult and risky. Difficult in the sense that, as Bourdieu (2004[2001]) notes, every word uttered about scientific practice can be turned back on the person who utters it. Risky, because as with any argument that directly engages with, or challenges, the status quo, there is the very real and likely outcome that it will be rejected by the existing guardians of the domain. This goes to the argument of the chapter, that administration is frequently the site where the custodians of the domain come into contact, and frequently confrontation, with new contenders. However, my goal is not to merely write a chapter (or book for that matter) on the scholarship of educational administration, but to make a much more fundamental point about scientific inquiry in educational administration, and beyond. Although I have stressed the importance of the break and the construction of the research object, I have deliberately not provided a set of prescriptive ‘how to’ conduct research forever more. Such a claim would actually be counter to the thesis of the chapter. Rather, I have sketched areas of relevance that if attended to, will advance our understanding of the administration of educational institutions in new and fruitful directions. The challenge laid out in this chapter however rests as much with the reader as it does me. If but one person in educational administration engages with the ideas presented here, then this chapter has been successful, albeit limited, in challenging the status quo.

NOTES

i Following Michael Grenfell (2010), from this point on I adopt the convention of putting Bourdieu’s key concepts in italics. This is done as a mental reminder that each of these come with a complex and sophisticated theory of practice and should be simply taken and substantiated as analytic metaphors.

ii I have included both ‘principal’ and ‘headteacher’ here building out of the geographic location (Australia and England respectively) of the two works cited, however from this point on I will use the label ‘principal’.

iii Although, as noted in the previous chapter, despite an initial Bourdieusian approach, Kerr and Robinson quickly revert to a common language mobilisation of field.

iv There is something of an inherent tension at work in this label. I am aware of the issue of the juxtaposition of the diverse disciplines of ‘education’ and ‘public administration’ to create a sub-unit defined as a specific domain of reality, that which primarily serves a pragmatic purpose. At the same time, there is the matter of conceiving of neighbouring sciences (e.g. administration, psychology, sociology, etc) as border conflicts, based on an acceptance of the pre-constructed division of (scientific) labour as an actual empirical reality. Furthermore, at its most limited reading, I am aware of colleagues who would question my labelling of ‘educational administration’, arguing that the area has evolved to ‘management’ and now ‘leadership’.
Interestingly, Cubberly had no background in the study of education. His own professional background was in geology and physical science, yet he taught a range of courses in the educational administration programme, including: school administration; school problems; school organisations; school statistics; secondary schools; history of education; and relations of ignorance and crime in education (Bates, 2010; Tynack & Hansot, 1982).

Some consider Greenfield’s attack to have actually begun at the 1973 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in New Orleans (see Bates, 1980). This supports the argument that it is impossible to demarcate an exact point of origin for thought. As an idea, no matter how original, is little more than a reworking of previous thought in a unique time and space.

I do not however hold the assumption that all university based faculty are ‘scholarly/scientific’, or vice versa. And in many ways, this is the argument of the chapter.

My choice of ‘professions’ here is deliberate. While education is frequently, if not always, a low status faculty in the academy – lived out on a daily basis through numerous apparatus such as research funding regimes, journal rankings, promotion systems, research/post-doctoral fellowships – the same lowly status is rarely assigned to other ‘professional’ fields such as medicine and engineering.

My use of the collective noun (e.g. ‘our’) is for two reasons: first, I see myself as equally implicated in my argument; and second, it is consistent with the argument of the chapter that one cannot escape the social world from which they construct as their research object.

Although this may be read as a derivative of Karl Weick’s (1969, 1995) ‘sense-making’ in organisations, I stress that my focus is on the epistemological and ontological assumptions of scholarship more so than as a framework for engaging with the behaviour of organisations.

There is a tension here given that in Bourdieu’s later works (see 1998[1996]; 1998[1998], 2003[2001]) we see an explicit shift towards engaging a wider audience. He begins publishing small paperbacks that are accessible to a more diverse readership in terms of price and writing style – most being collections of interviews, short speeches, and essays devoted mostly to critique of neo-liberalism/globalisation. This strategy brings a broad readership, one beyond the academy, and also sparks debate in the French media (see Swartz, 2003). Explicitly, Bourdieu sort to engage as a public intellectual by bringing the logic of intellectual life, that of argument and refutation, into public life – but only in areas where he felt competent, and preferably on the basis of scientific research (see also Lane, 2006).

Given this context, the under use of Max Weber’s work, particularly that on bureaucracy, in educational administration is intriguing. When Weber is mobilised, it is rarely for anything other than naming the labeller of the bureaucracy, rather than the sophisticated writings he has on the rise of bureaucracy and its function in the administration of populations. There are of course exceptions, and I am thinking specifically of Eugenie Samier, but for the most part, Weber is much under-utilised in the discussion of educational administration.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 2


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