CRITICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu

Pat Thomson

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Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu was one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century. He argued for, and practised, rigorous and reflexive scholarship, interrogating the inequities and injustices of modern societies. Through a lifetime's explication of the ways in which schooling both produces and reproduces the status quo, Bourdieu offered a powerful critique and method of analysis of the history of schooling and of contemporary educational polices and trends.

Though frequently used in educational research, Bourdieu's work has had much less take up in Educational Leadership, Management and Administration (ELMA). *Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu* argues that ELMA scholars have much to gain by engaging more thoroughly with his work. The book explains each of the key terms in Bourdieu's thinking toolkit, showing how the tripartite concepts of field, habitus and capitals offer a way through which to understand the interaction of structure and agency, and the limits on the freedom of an individual – in this case, an educational leader – to act.

Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu offers an analysis of dominant trends in ELMA research, examining the kinds of questions asked, projects undertaken and methods used. It provides alternative questions and methods based on a Bourdieusian approach, further readings and a range of exemplars of the application of these tools. The book will be of interest to those whose primary focus is the utility of Bourdieu's social theory.

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Critical Studies in Educational Leadership, Management and Administration

Series Editors: Pat Thomson, Helen M. Gunter and Jill Blackmore

This series draws on social and political theories from selected key thinkers and activists to develop critical thinking leadership tools. Each text uses the work of a particular theorist or theoretical approach, explains the theory, suggests what it might bring to the ELMA field, and then offers analysis and case studies to show how the tools might be used. Every book also offers a set of questions that might be used by individual leaders in their own practices, and in areas of further research by ELMA scholars.

In elaborating the particular approaches, each of the books also suggests a professional and political agenda which addresses aspects of the tensions and problems created by neoliberal and neoconservative policy agendas, and the on-going need for educational systems to do better for many more of their students than they do at present.

Titles in the series

Deconstructing Educational Leadership: Derrida and Lyotard
Richard Niesche

Educational Leadership and Hannah Arendt
Helen M. Gunter

Educational Leadership and Michel Foucault
Donald Gillies

Educational Leadership and Nancy Fraser
Jill Blackmore

Educational Leadership and Pierre Bourdieu
Pat Thomson

Acknowledgements

This book has been a very long time in the writing. I have always found writing with Bourdieu to be very difficult and it just 'takes as long as it takes'. In this instance, taking as long as it takes has been a matter of years, not months. I have therefore to thank my co-series editors, Helen Gunter and Jill Blackmore, as well as co-authors Ruth McGinity and Helen (again) for their patience. I am grateful that they continued to trust that this book would see the light of day. A grovelling apology must go to Anna Clarkson and the team at Routledge, with thanks for being prepared to hold onto the book despite serial missed deadlines. A very special thanks go to Helen and Shaun Rawolle for reading the very nearly final version of the book and providing helpful feedback. All errors and interpretation issues that remain are clearly mine. Finally, thanks to my partner Randy who has put up with the never-ending moaning about the never-ending writing project and, as always, has administered appropriate quantities of tea, sympathy and hugs.

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The book reuses a paper which first appeared in 2010 as "Headteacher autonomy: a sketch of a Bourdieuian field analysis of position and practice", in *Critical Studies in Education* 51(1). The paper is updated and has new, additional commentary to highlight its methodological approach.

Series foreword

Imagine yourself walking into the foyer of the Department of Education Victoria, Australia. In front of you is a wall on which a series of names are displayed ceiling to floor. You glance quickly and note the following: Edward de Bono, Richard Elmore, Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves, Maria Montessori, Linda Darling-Hammond, Daniel Goleman, Kenneth Leithwood. Now imagine yourself in England. You decide to go to the website of the state owned leadership research and training National College and you find a section called Key Thinkers. When the screen changes you find yourself looking at a list which contains many of the same names.

Today, both of these things have disappeared. The names on the wall in Victoria have been removed and the National College website has been revamped. But they were both in place for some years. Seeing them made us wonder how it was that the very same people were being lauded on both sides of the world. We noted that both lists were dominated by North American men. In the Australian case no Australians were listed, and in the case of England, the English names were in a minority. Would this happen if we were exploring a leadership space or place in Los Angeles? In Edinburgh? In Cape Town? In Beijing? In Buenos Aires? In Toronto? It is interesting to think about where and where not we might see similar listings.

We are sure that we would not have found this thirty years ago. While there was an international circulation of educational ideas and texts, the development of a celebrity leadership culture promoted by international gurus with modernizing know-how is a new phenomenon. It is worth considering why this might be the case. We think of four possible reasons:

1 Leadership now encompasses all aspects of 'continuous educational improvement'. All professionals (and increasingly children and young people as well), are identified as leaders, doing leading and exercising leadership. Head teachers, or principals, are deemed repositories of leadership that they do or do not 'distribute' to others to enable 'delivery' to be 'maximized'. All educational professionals are spoken to or about as school leaders, often without reference to role titles, and so just about everyone is potentially included as a consumer of leadership ideas and models.

2 There is now a much greater focus on leadership development. All education policymakers understand that if policies are to be implemented then they need leaders at the local level to make that happen. Many have also decided that they only need to provide directions for change, and frameworks for what is to be done, and then devolve to the local leader the means to secure the necessary resources.
3 Systems now assume that they need to be seen to be using 'world's best practice'. National governments are highly conscious of their place in international league tables and their national credibility rests on being able to show some kind of 'continued improvement'. They are extremely vulnerable to media portrayals of 'failing' schools and/or systems. They believe that there are international 'solutions' to local problems that may appear to be not dissimilar to problems in other jurisdictions.
4 There now seems to be a leadership industry made up of knowledge producers and popularizers located in private companies, universities, and schools. This leadership industry has made significant interventions in all spheres of activity, including in education and in educational leadership. What is on offer from a select range of academics and consultants, the travelling policy entrepreneurs, are tailor-made as well as off the peg 'solutions' to individuals, organizations and governments. These solutions are sold as transnational, evidence-based and transferable.

The readiness of the leadership industry to provide policy solutions creates a situation in which it seems, if one examines the kinds of training on offer to potential school leaders, that there is a one-best way to do leading and leadership, and to be a leader. The promotion of leadership, policy anxiety and entrepreneurial activity is not necessarily, we suggest, a virtuous circle. We call this conjunction the Transnational Leadership Package (TLP).

The TLP is not a homogenous body of work or people. It is derived from different national and cultural settings. It draws on a range of intellectual histories and practice traditions in different national contexts within the field of educational leadership, management and administration (ELMA). There are distinct but interrelated intellectual lineages within the field of ELMA, which can be backtracked from contemporary concerns to particular historical contexts and theoretical origins. We call these lineages paradigms. ELMA paradigms cannot be easily disconnected from each other, either theoretically or chronologically, as different approaches were developed differently in different places and at different times, in response to the failure, or lack of explanatory power, of earlier paradigms. The ELMA paradigms, each with their own internal logics, can be roughly depicted as:

1 The US adoption of the Ford manufacturing, Taylorist principles of **scientific management** (standardization, specialisation, synchronisation, concentration, maximization, and centralization), as the 'factory model' to emulate in schooling during the 1920s. Its later renditions are the school effectiveness

and school improvement movements (SESI). SESI is now interlocked with education policy through the imposition, across the entire public sector, of private sector market principles in the form of New Public Management. The core principles underpinning the resulting managerialization and marketization of schooling are competition and compliance, efficiency and effectiveness. School rankings and comparisons are central to this push.

2 The post war **human relations movement**, again largely US driven. This movement recognised how supportive social relations and participative decision-making informed productivity. This human relations paradigm is re-emerging in the 21stC in the therapeutic turn in education. Emotional intelligence and managing interpersonal relations and intercultural communication are now seen as core leadership skills rather than a display of weakness. This paradigm informs the move away from the provision of public service through institutions towards brokerage, contracts and partnerships. Notably it is visible in the organizational and pedagogic discourse of personalized provision.

3 The US **theory movement** of the 1960s sought to establish ELMA as a value-free science. This paradigm has been ever present in ELMA, but has gained new clout through the contemporary focus on large-scale quantitative studies, evidence-based/informed practice and data-driven decision-making. Prime examples of this contemporary trend are the involvement of TLP in the *No Child Left Behind* policy in USA and *Every Child Matters* in England.

4 The **experiential** or **pragmatic perspective** of the UK tradition, which derived from a strong practitioner orientation and apprenticeship model of leadership. This has recently re-emerged in the 'what works' discourse in England, as leadership accreditation and training provisions were taken up by governments, and as teacher education was pushed back into schools.

5 The **socially critical, neo-Marxist** and **feminist perspectives**, emerging predominantly from the geographical margins of Australia, New Zealand and Canada during the 1980s and 1990s. These are now being reinvigorated with the revival of social justice as a leadership issue in the 2010s, given the marked growth of educational inequality in both developed and developing nation states. This book series is located within this tradition.

There is now a convergence of the ELMA paradigms. This has occurred at the same time as neoliberal policies have spread from the Anglophone nation states to Asia, the Middle East, Mexico, South Africa and South America. Key aspects of the neoliberalist agenda are virtually enforced by international bodies such as the IMF, World Bank and OECD, and results of international standardized testing such as PISA are now a crucial reference point for policymakers in most countries in the world. This policy spread has been made possible in part through the advocacy work of knowledge and 'know-how' entrepreneurs whose activities inform and are sometimes commissioned by these international agencies. The result is that there is now a coming together of the ELMA paradigms through preferred

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models such as transformational leadership, which is simultaneously about delivery, an emotional commitment to the delivery, and a predictive evidence-based process to that delivery. Tactical and pragmatic mediations may occur in some countries such as England, but in the main ELMA paradigms inform and communicate vision and mission for localized implementation.

ELMA can now be understood as a transnational field of educational research, with a recognizable lexicon, key players and logics of practice. This is the case regardless of whether we are looking at the TLP, other ELMA scholarship somewhat separate from it, or socially critical scholarship. Across ELMA generally there is a trend towards both standardization and normalization in relation to what constitutes good leadership through the development of leadership training programs and professional standards nationally. This represents a shift away from post-occupancy professional development to leadership preparation, in some instances requiring certification. Scholars from the fifth paradigm are also positioned by these developments and engage in the kinds of critical, deconstructive and reconstructive work that is the purpose of this book series. Indeed, we have briefed our authors to engage in this process so that the problematization of the field of ELMA and its relationship with the TLP are essential to engagement with theory and theorizing.

The convergence of ELMA paradigms has also been actively produced by particular scholars and professionals through a process of selective eclecticism and appropriation of a set of concepts in response to the multiple and complex challenges of school leadership and to opportunities offered by anxious governments. This process of production, its agents, and its outcomes, collectively form what we refer to as the TLP.

The TLP is not the same as ELMA. It brings together concepts and practices that were formerly confined to particular localities and institutions into a particular 'saleable' form. The result is an assemblage of ideas and activities, which focuses primarily on the needs of educational systems and national governments. These do not necessarily meet the needs of individual schools, their students, or their communities. The product is in fact constantly repackaged and contains a few genuinely new ideas but plenty of normative rhetoric on the urgency to buy and use.

The TLP consists of three mutually supporting strands:

1 A set of policy prescriptions based on the experiences of consultants working in contractual (and often informal) partnerships with governments and agencies in particular jurisdictions, mostly North America and England, but also now including PISA success story, Finland. There are ready-made sound bites in this strand combined with the authority of 'best practice'.
2 A series of meta-analyses and effectiveness studies, whose impressive statistical manipulations mostly boil down to saying that if you want to improve students' learning, then you have to focus on how teachers and classroom practice can 'deliver' higher outcome standards, and not on networks, teams or devolution of funding since these alone won't produce the desired test result improvements.

3 A cultural professional deficit where the identification of problems, agenda setting and strategizing is perceived as rightly located outside the school, and where notions of professional agency are reduced to tactical localized delivery. Some TLP manifestations have taken up the Finland exemplar to argue that a well-qualified and intellectually active teaching force is vital, and that too much emphasis on testing and league tabling is counterproductive. However, the role of leaders remains the same in both versions, as does the primary goal of system needs.

The TLP provides a (largely) Anglocentric policy flat-pack of policy 'levers' that will produce the actions and effects that count in national elections and international testing. While modern but cheap, it is worth 'buying into', largely because to be seen as different is risky. However, there is considerable debate about whether these objectives meet the needs of schools, communities, teachers and students in countries as diverse as Denmark, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada, Wales and Singapore. At a time when populations in many countries are also becoming more diverse and less egalitarian, it is also not clear that the TLP is up to the challenge.

We are not arguing here that the international circulation of ideas and people is to be discouraged. Obviously, finding out what others are doing can be very helpful as means of generating new perspectives. The debate and discussion that occur when people with different positions come together are a Good Thing. However, we think it is ironic that at the same time as national governments and transnational agencies are concerned to maintain diversity of plants, animals and habitats, precisely the opposite is occurring with education policy ideas and practices. 'Good' leadership features prominently among one-best global prescriptions and representations. Many ELMA scholars not in the TLP, as well as those from critical paradigms, suggest that there is no one-best way of leading or changing a school and that the models of transnational 'success' need to promote diverse approaches that are tailored to local needs histories and circumstances.

We take the view that what is needed in education in these times is more than PISA envy and 'what works'. Prescribing a set of steps that governments and leaders can take, regardless of wherever and whoever they are, eliminates one of the most significant educational resources we have – our capacity to understand, analyse and imagine within our local contexts. It is a fine irony that these intellectual practices are precisely the ones that education systems are designed to inculcate in the next generation.

In these times, those who are engaged in *educational* leadership need, more than ever, to think about their work – its purposes and processes and well as its effects and outcomes. Our emphasis is on the *educational*, where the knowledge, skills and processes that constitute professional practice are located in teaching and learning; these provide the basis for leading and managing. This series of books aims to support this kind of reflective *educational* work. Each volume will focus on the work of a particular social science theory and theorists. We draw on scholarship from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, politics and cultural

studies in order to interrogate, interrupt and offer alternative ideas to the contemporary versions of TLP and the broader field of ELMA. The series provides theoretical and methodological options for those who are engaged in the formal study of educational leadership, management and administration. It provides alternative resources for naming, framing and acting for those who are engaged in the practice of educational leadership, management or administration, or who are providing training and policy for practising educational leaders.

The books and critical thinking tools

This series of books might at first glance seem to be very removed from the kinds of pressures that we have described. However, our motivation for generating the series is highly practical. As series editors, we come to, and hopefully have informed, the field of ELMA from different intellectual and occupational histories.

Together, we take the view that now, more than ever, leading any educational institution requires intellectual work. Educational professionals must, in our view, be able not simply to follow policy prescriptions. In order to do the work of leading and leadership educational professionals need to be able to critically analyse policy directions; assess and evaluate their own institution and its local national and international contexts; understand how and why particular educational issues come to be centre stage while others are sidelined and to communicate this to others; and call on a rich set of ideas in order to develop directions for the institution in particular and for education generally. This requires, among other things, a set of critical thinking tools. These are not all that are required, but they are an essential component of professional practice.

This series draws on social and political theories from selected key thinkers and activists to develop some critical thinking leadership tools. Each text uses the work of a particular theorist or theoretical approach, explains the theory, suggests what it might bring to the ELMA field and then offers analysis and case studies to show how it the tools might be used. Each book also offers a set of questions that might be used by individual leaders in their own practice and some possible areas for further research by ELMA scholars.

In elaborating the particular approaches each of the books also suggests a professional and political agenda, which addresses aspects of the tensions and problems created by neoliberal and neoconservative policy agendas and by the ongoing need for educational systems to do better for many more of their students than they do at present.

Pat Thomson, Helen Gunter and Jill Blackmore
Series Editors

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