

# Educational Administration and History

The state of the field

*Edited by*

**Tanya Fitzgerald** and **Helen Gunter**



# Educational Administration and History

In the past 40 years there have been a number of significant developments across the fields of educational administration and history. In this volume, the authors have selected a number of key issues to illustrate and trace these changes. The seven chapters by leading scholars in the field offer an analysis of contemporary educational administration, history and policy debates and how this has impacted on teachers, leaders, schools and the education sector. This book offers readers a valuable insight into continuing and contemporary debates in the field and the authors offer a refreshing interpretation of these debates. This book provides a rich analysis from a range of theoretical, methodological perspectives and highlights the extent to which these debates remain a contemporary concern.

This book was published as a special issue of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*.

**Tanya Fitzgerald** is Professor of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. Tanya has an extensive publishing record on the history of women's education, gender, leadership and ethnicity, and teachers' work. As well as co-editor of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Tanya is executive editor of *History of Education Review* and the *New Zealand Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*. Her forthcoming book is a study of women professors at the University of New Zealand 1911-1961.

**Helen Gunter** is Professor of Education Policy, Leadership and Management in the School of Education, University of Manchester, UK. Helen's research interests focus on the history of the field, with a particular interest in knowledge production through theorising, research and practice. She has published five books and over 70 papers, and is currently co-editor of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Richard Bates** is Professor of Education (Social and Administrative Studies) in the Faculty of Education at Deakin University. His scholarly work has been concerned with the Sociology of Education (where he contributed to the debate over the new sociology of education in Britain in the 1970s) and Educational Administration (where he contributed to the emergence of an alternative 'critical' theory during the 1980s). His work as Dean (1986–2000) drew him into debates over teacher education and his Presidency of the Victorian and Australian Councils of Deans of Education led him to contest official views regarding teacher supply and demand, and challenge the marginalisation of teacher education programmes. He is past President of the Australian Teacher Education Association, a past President of the Australian Association for Researchers in Education and a Fellow of the Australian College of Education and of the Australian Council for Educational Administration. He is currently writing about morals and markets, public education, ethics and administration, the impact of educational research, and social justice and the aesthetics of educational administration as well as global teacher education.

**Scott Eacott** is a lecturer in the School of Education, the University of Newcastle, Australia. He has primarily written on the strategic role of the educational leader (the focus of his doctoral work), however more recently Scott received a Teaching and Learning Fellowship through the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of Newcastle and is conducting a series of studies on the instructional practices of educational leadership programmes particularly in the online environment.

**Tanya Fitzgerald** is Professor of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. Her research interests include the history of women's higher education, academic women and the development of historical identity, teachers' work and education policy, educational biography and narrative inquiry. Her forthcoming book *Outsider or Equals: A History of Women Professors at the University of New Zealand 1911–1961* is to be published by Peter Lang. Tanya is co-editor of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, co-editor of *History of Education Review* and editor of the *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*.

**Peter Gronn** is Professor of Public Service, Educational Leadership and Management in the Department of Educational Studies, University of Glasgow. Previously, he was Professor in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. In two projects he is currently researching head teacher recruitment and retention, and the preparation of school leaders through coaching. He was a consultant to the Australian Council for Educational Research on the project 'Standards for School Leadership' and in 2006–7 he co-authored the Country Background Report for Australia which formed part of the OECD international project on school leadership.

**Helen Gunter** is Professor of Educational Policy, Leadership and Management in the School of Education, University of Manchester. She has produced over 70 publications including books and papers on leadership theory and practice. She is particularly interested in the history of the field of leadership, with a focus on knowledge production. She has recently completed an ESRC-funded project into the rise of school leadership under New Labour. Her most recent book, co-edited with Graham Butt, University of Birmingham, is about workforce reform: *Modernizing Schools: People, Learning and Organizations* (Continuum, 2007).

**Pat Thomson** is Professor of Education and Director of Research in the School of Education, The University of Nottingham. Her research interests include the changing work practices of headteachers; the arts, inclusive pedagogies and school change; and doctoral education. She has just recently edited *Doing Visual Research with Children and Young People* (Routledge, 2008) and is now working on two Routledge books, one on headteacher supply and retention, and another on changing schools through systematic inquiry.

**Jane Wilkinson** currently lectures in education at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia. Her doctoral thesis examined representations of ethnically and socioeconomically diverse women leaders in the Australian media and universities. She has published in a variety of areas including praxis and educational leadership, diversity policies and their implications for women's leadership and critical feminist scholarship. She recently has been a visiting scholar at the University of Nottingham and the University of Manchester, UK.

**Terry Wrigley** is a senior lecturer in the Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh. His research interests include school development and social justice, with a particular emphasis on class. His publications include three books: *The Power to Learn* (2000), *Schools of Hope* (2003) and *Another School Is Possible* (2006).



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## **Introduction: the state of the field of educational administration**

Tanya Fitzgerald and Helen Gunter

As noted in the editorial in Volume 40, Number 1, the *Journal of Educational Administration and History* [JEAH] is in its 40th year. This occasion is therefore an opportunity to reflect not only on the journal and its contribution to the field, but the theoretical and methodological state of the field itself. With this in mind we have invited seven authors to offer a critical reflection on key issues that underpin the field. Accordingly, in the collection of papers in this book, attention is focused on the identification and critique of key concepts and issues that include headteacher's critique of and resistance to policy, the intersectionality of gender, leadership and ethnicity, ongoing issues in teacher performance management, the orthodoxies of school effectiveness research, a critical analysis of texts related to the field, and the modernisation agenda. This book concludes with an analysis of the preceding papers and their contribution to debates in and the development of the field of educational administration.

The focus that we have elected 'The state of the field of educational administration', is not accidental. The genesis of this book began with a conversation amongst a group of scholars that critical debates should continue to surface in journals such as JEAH as well as in scholarly texts. Essentially we were troubled that the term 'critical' was, at times, juxtaposed with the term 'oppositional' and this was not our collective reading of what being critical, engaging in critical dialogue and what our contribution to critical scholarship entailed. We saw an interconnection between critical reading, critical writing and critical thinking that contributed to current debates and scholarship in the field. By inference, this does not involve a rehearsal of debates but the adoption of a stance that surfaced critical questions concerning the nature and shape of knowledge, how this knowledge was being produced and by whom and the underpinning construction of this knowledge for the field. What remains problematic is that knowledge production is frequently linked with the agenda of the State as we have commented on previously.<sup>1</sup> It is essential that critical debates concerning knowledge production continue to occur

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<sup>1</sup> See here Gunter, H.M and Fitzgerald, T. (2008) Educational administration and history: Debating the agenda, *Journal of Educational Administration & History*, 40(1): 5-20; Gunter, H.M and Fitzgerald, T. (2008) The future of leadership research? *School Leadership & Management*, (in press).

and that the insistent presence of a neo-liberal reform agenda continues to be critically evaluated, not the least because of its impact on the field and field development.

In order to publicly debate these agendas and surface our disquiet concerning the state of the field, this group of scholars collectively engaged in a connected symposium at the September 2007 British Educational Leadership Management and Administration (BELMAS) conference in Reading. The underpinning concern of the architects of this symposium was that the field of educational administration appeared to be at a point of theoretical disconnection and, accordingly, we shaped our presentations around our concerns. Each of the papers traversed some of the current debates and highlighted the extent to which knowledge production remains connected with a neo-liberal State. In order to draw together the theoretical and methodological threads of these papers, Peter Gronn acted as discussant and reflected on the extent to which the papers highlighted and extended the issues. Substantially revised and lengthened, these papers are collected together in this book.

### **Documenting debates**

As we have indicated, this book highlights a number of contemporary policy and scholarship issues that underpin the field of educational administration. As editors of a learned journal in the field, our challenge is to ensure that a plurality of voices is encouraged and that wider debate about purposes and practices in the field is surfaced. The authors featured in this book, have not only responded to this challenge but have offered their own nuanced understandings of these contemporary issues. What is refreshing, we believe, is that the authors have not simply rehearsed debates but offered their own critical stance that challenges the field itself. How can the field be renewed and re-invigorated with robust debate?

The first contribution by Pat Thomson interrogates the extent to which headteachers deal with escalating policy demands and considers how their agency fosters a level of resistance. In a direct theoretical and empirical challenge to the field, the author challenges headteachers (as professionals) and academics (as scholars) to consider how collective action might 'speak back' to policy regimes that are deeply inequitable. Importantly, Thomson raises questions concerning headteachers' voices and the potential for their critical *and* collective voice to take up multiple subject positions and re-frame the research agenda. Importantly, there is a call from the author for the field to consider ways in which headteachers and headteacher associations might contribute to knowledge production in the field that can offer a rich perspective.

In similar ways, Jane Wilkinson, in the second paper, extends the call for multiple voices and highlights the diversity of possibilities for the field if it is 'opened-up' to the inclusion of critical, Black, feminist and Indigenous perspectives. Notably, Wilkinson takes seriously recent calls for research and theorising to include in more explicit ways notions of diversity and leadership in ways that are conceptually rich, socially just, educationally transformative, as well as providing critically reflexive possibilities. As part of her own reflexive turn, the author examines the interplay of her own biography and scholarship in the field and proposes that serious questions concerning power and knowledge production should be more insistently raised. Wilkinson concludes by suggesting that active intervention is

required if genuinely productive, democratic and socially inclusive ways of leading are to be realised and actioned.

In her analysis of teacher performance management, Tanya Fitzgerald highlights ways in which the continuing lack of trust in teachers has underpinned the development and implementation of policy and associated practices. Performance management, as a policy solution to the 'problem' of teachers, is, according to the author, predicated on the flawed assumption that the intervention of the State and its agencies is required to ensure that teachers' work is aligned with organisational objectives. Accordingly, the shift in teacher accountability from the profession to the State has, in effect, served to de-professionalise teaching and teachers' work.

The historical construct and emergence of school improvement is examined by Terry Wrigley. Arguing that the concept of improvement is intrinsically ideological, the author argues that the significant and explicit paradigm change that occurred in the early 1990s, resulted in a managerialist and reductionist approach to improving schools that exacerbated poverty and inequities rather than alleviated, or mediated, its effects. One of the key features of Wrigley's paper is that he overviews the emergence in England of school improvement and school effectiveness studies and therefore reminds readers of the long-term consequences of these paradigms.

Richard Bates and Scott Eacott offer a challenge to those working in the field of higher education. That is, they challenge field members to consider the texts that are in use, those that are discarded and the extent to which these texts can be used to formulate the knowledge that is taught, reinforced, received and, at times, regurgitated. Drawing on evidence from the Australian context, the authors question the 'local', 'global' and 'international' and via their highly nuanced study of educational administration programmes in Australia, conclude that there is a focus on the academic (as opposed to the technical and operational) but that there is a steady albeit worrying decline in numbers of Australian studies and authors being used. Central to their analysis are questions about how texts are used (or mis-used), reflected on or deflected in current and contemporary debates. Essentially Bates and Eacott ask - in what ways might the field be complicit, intended or otherwise, in its own demise by decisions made as to which texts are 'worthy' and which ones are to be discarded? How might the field be 'read' if texts are used as evidence of what 'counts'?

The penultimate contribution by Helen Gunter provides a theoretical backdrop for this book. The author's examination of modernisation and Barber's policy implementation strategies is a refreshing account of history-making and history-writing as a deeply complex and contested process. Arguably too, the 'deliverology' and its consequences that Gunter highlights have similarly surfaced in the work of Thomson, Fitzgerald, and Wrigley. In her call for ongoing dialogue about the nature of the field and what scholarship is in practice, Gunter highlights the central concerns that led to the BELMAS seminar and this collection of papers. The passionate plea for field members to engage in debate and dialogue and position themselves as central to the development of the field is a challenge that requires response.

Drawing this all together, Peter Gronn has used the metaphorical 'turn' of Hamlet and the state of Denmark to not only reflect and comment on the papers in this book but also to contribute his own critical ideas to how the field, the 'kingdom', has developed and the challenges it continues to face. This is a paper that can well preface as well as summarise the contributions and we would like to suggest can and should act as a catalyst for continuing these critical debates.