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Making Trouble in/for Educational Leadership

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Abstract

This article presents critical and previously neglected perspectives in many current debates around education and educational leadership. Based on an interdisciplinary literature review we analyse the mission and the role of educational organizations in their commitment to an improvement in society. We examine the role of principals and other organizational members in the development of the educational organization they represent and how their understanding of the different factors which influence the exercise of educational leadership may or may not lead to a more just society. Our analysis highlights how these numerous and multivariate factors affect goal attainment, organizational and group members—teachers, students, and others—leadership, and leadership identity. Democracy, equality, capitalism, and social justice are some of the topics discussed. Change and change agent roles and status are considered, particularly tensions between insider and outsider critical friends and change agents. The article concludes with a discussion that revisit the concept educational leadership and bring back its essence. These ideas should be taken into account to design new education policies in a more informed way.

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Prelude, an introduction to our critical approach

We cannot and should not be satisfied with the status quo, as change will not occur without deliberate action. Schools, schooling, and education as they currently stand leave much to be desired. But what does this mean for us, our work, our mission? While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child[1] recognizes education as a fundamental right, not all children benefit equally. Whether one accepts the views of cultural reproduction theorists (e.g., Bourdieu & Passerson, 1990; Willis, 1981) or simply examines the available data on student achievement from high-stakes tests (both within countries and comparatively across countries), it is evident that students do not enjoy the same advantages in the formal, state-sponsored education they receive.

In light of these disparities, we must ask ourselves: What kind of education do we need to address these challenges? What type of education do we truly aspire to for future generations? And, perhaps more importantly, what role does educational leadership play in achieving this?

To remain relevant, current education policies and practices must evolve in response to social and global trends and, some might argue,

[1] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention). The Convention has been ratified by 196 countries; the United States is not among them (https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/frequently-asked-questions).

future challenges. To do so, it is essential that we equip this generation of students with the skills, attitudes, and dispositions necessary to thrive, fulfill their obligations, and contribute meaningfully to their families, society, and the world at large. Today, schools and schooling are largely focused on outcomes, emphasizing the domains of education Biesta (2010) refers to as socialization and qualification, while neglecting the third domain: subjectification. [2] International reports such as PISA, TIMSS, TALIS, or PIRLS are examples of this, since of the four domains, subjectification is the most difficult, if not impossible, to measure. These reports overlook, downplay, or entirely omit relevant aspects of the individual, such as the capacity for dialogue, reflection, and the recognition of unique characteristics and potential.

Today, particularly in so-called "developed" countries, we operate under what Waite (2017, 2022) describes as "the hegemony of the quantitative"—a system dominated by testing regimes, big data, and algorithms. Governments and global corporations (e.g., Google, Facebook, and others) use these analytical tools to heavily influence, if not control, us, our lives, our options, and our preferences (Saltman & Means, 2017; Waite et al., 2017; Zuboff, 2019). Together, these forces inform and sustain what Waite (2014, 2016, 2022) refers to as "The Imperium"—a loosely connected yet influential network of power brokers from different sectors, including industry, banking, and the government. Though not formally organized, its members share common interests such as profit seeking, wealth accumulation, global stability, and control. This control is exerted primarily through

[2] Subjectification, or the process of becoming a subject, refers to educating individuals "to become more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting" (Biesta, 2010, p. 21).

schooling and its socialization processes and manifested in the policies and programs of NGOs and global organizations (i.e., the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and others).

Education, in its broadest sense, should go beyond simply managing school projects. Instead, it must foster the active and reflective participation of students as citizens and leaders in society, both now and in the future. Additionally, education must adapt to the local and global demands of the settings in which it operates. Robinson (2015) argued that a key goal of education should be to provide opportunities for teaching faculty to learn, and that schools and universities should be spaces of connected learning—places where individuals not only develop but also realize their potential (Lawrence, 1950; Wright, 2010). This would require creative learning as a catalyst for discovery and a passion for learning. It entails a teaching/learning process that operates in a new way, where individuals, whether students, teachers, or leaders, learn to view the world from multiple perspectives and embrace a more global, critical, and comprehensive vision (García-Carmona, 2015).

Education, grounded in the social contract, envisions schools and educational institutions as being open to society, actively engaged in fostering communal benefit, and spaces for nurturing creativity. This approach involves the educational community and positions education as a tool for change and social improvement (Miller et al., 2019) and where leadership is essential in achieving the goals. Indeed, success will largely depend on the ability of educational leaders to cultivate a motivational and participatory environment that fosters reflection, confidence, trust, and respect within the organization and

the wider community. School leaders must also understand the broader influence of social, economic, cultural, and political systems to promote social justice for all students (Boske, 2014).

Educational leadership should not focus simply on maintaining the status quo. In this regard, school leaders and schools are having to rethink their roles and how they can better address the evolving needs of the community through their work. Such forward-thinking leadership is well-equipped to address societal changes driven by diversifying student and teacher populations, personalized learning experiences, inequality, and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), among other factors (García-Carmona et al., 2022). Additionally, the expectations of community members' are also high and challenging to address (Gurmu, 2020; Miller et al., 2019).

Given such profound societal changes, educators must embrace new directions in leadership. The traditional methods that once served us are no longer sufficient to address the complexities of today's world. We cannot simply rely on "best practices" or outdated models. Instead, we must reimagine our approach to education and leadership to meet the evolving needs or our students and communities. We must learn to think for ourselves and reimagine the world with fresh perspectives. We must be our own best leaders. While the old models, including those discussed here, have value and should be recognized for their contributions, certain aspects, as we will discuss in greater detail below, may be revived or adapted to serve as a foundation upon which to stand and move courageously into an uncharted future.

But we must have a compass (either moral, ethical, or of some other kind) by which we guide and gauge our efforts. It is imperative that we remain true to our beliefs in the dignity of all, in the betterment of our conditions (avoiding all the while the tender traps laid for us by antiquated Enlightenment thinking or master narratives). As educators, as teachers, we must refuse to be seduced and distracted by numerologists and others seeking to control us, our work, and the lives of generations of children in our care. We owe them our best efforts.

In what follows, we will present a critical examination of educational leadership as documented thus far—its core premises, overarching themes (where they exist), and, most importantly for our purposes, its gaps, limitations, and contradictions. Our primary goal is to encourage reflection on how educational leadership is currently conceived and to assess it through both a critical and constructive lens. In doing so, we hope to contribute, even in a small way, to the development of a field to which we are deeply committed.

What is educational leadership and why does it matter?

Following Biesta (2017), we will deliberately avoid adopting a technicist or instrumentalist framing of the applications and practices, past or present, that the literature identifies as defining features of educational leadership. Instead, we step back and engage with a more fundamental question: "Educational leadership for what?". Biesta commented that:

> *Education has a particular interest to stand for, a particular interest to defend. This educational interest in the possibility for children and young people to exist as responsible subjects of their own actions may be something that educational leaders need to take into*

> *consideration when they seek to formulate their own answers to the question of what it is that they should lead for. (2017, p. 25)*

In asking, like Biesta, "Leadership for what?" we must first address the question: Education for what? What are, or should be, the aims of education (Biesta, 2010)? In the U.S., the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, published in 1918 by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education of the National Education Association, outlined seven key objectives of education. These included health, command of fundamental processes, vocation, worthy home-membership, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character—all arguably valuable aims even today, albeit adapted to better suit today's schools and societies.

In Spain, Article 27 of the Constitution of 1978 established that education should aim for the full development of the individual, while upholding the democratic principles of coexistence, fundamental rights, and freedoms. In line with Biesta's (2010, 2017) concept of education's subjectification role, education—and by extension, educational leadership—carries an inherent ethical dimension (Starratt 1994). In this context, Lorenzo Delgado (2004) conceptualized leadership as a "function, a quality, and a property that resides in the group and energizes the organization to generate its own growth in terms of a shared mission or project" (pp. 195–196, authors' translation). However, while educational leadership should reflect this ethical dimension, decisions made by leaders often do not. Instead, many (perhaps most) administrative decisions are driven by purely contingent, pragmatic, and/or utilitarian considerations. Novak's (2002) vision is particularly relevant here, as it presents leadership as fundamentally concerned with people, emphasizing care and ethics in

relationships, both among individuals and within institutions and society. Furthermore, educational leadership for social justice is deeply rooted in ethics, recognizing ethical considerations as inseparable from it practice (García-Carmona et al., 2021; Miller et al., 2019; Waite and Arambula, 2020).

Educational leadership: A new key, historically understood

Reflection and critique are essential processes in education, though this has not always been the case. Burke (2000, 2012, 2016) and other authors remind us that knowledge and knowledge dissemination were historically viewed simply as the transfer of received wisdom and that questioning and criticizing authority were considered heretical. The critique(s) we present here are just the beginning, not the final word. We must think about the future, envisioning it first to shape it later. We need to push our thinking into the near future. With this in mind, we believe that the field of educational leadership would benefit from critical and reflective deliberative processes.

Leadership is concerned with the well-being of others and the collective good, considering the dignity and rights of others. As Leithwood and Day (2007) noted, leadership is an interactive process. This practice, rooted in teacher-learner dialogue, involves specific skills that must be considered when energizing the classroom and in the act of educating. Woods (2005) emphasized that the essence of leadership is not an individual act but rather a dynamic relationship of almost imperceptible directions, movements, and orientations that have no clear beginning or end. It is in this interplay of processes involving the student, the teacher, and the leader that educational leadership emerges. In this regard, there are clear parallels with Arendtian action. For Arendt (1958), action is one of the three essential

activities in humans' *vita activa* or active life (labor and work being the other two). Action is defined by its plurality, anonymity of origin, endless nature, unpredictability, and the unknowability of its outcomes.

This actualization takes into account the contexts in which the educational process occurs. In this sense, educational leadership is concerned with the development and negotiation of how the organization positions itself in relation to individuals who are both internal and external to the school. Here rationale and action come together in practice in the unpredictable, ever-changing, and uncertain contexts of the school. This is what Sockett (1987) referred to as "reason in action," which suggests that the situation is fluid, constantly evolving, and subject to change. The actions of professionals are guided by what is deemed best, that is, based on judicious practice (professional judgment) and experience (Biesta, 2014).

In this way, educational leaders strive to accomplish at least three fundamental goals for students in their educational practice. According to Robinson (2015), these goals are rooted in motivation: 1) inspiring students to give their best through a passion for the academic discipline and by fostering trust and confidence; 2) developing students' knowledge and skills so that they feel confident and continue growing; and 3) nurturing creativity, that is, encouraging the development of competencies and sparking curiosity to help students become original thinkers with unique thoughts. Through such efforts, educational leaders enhance student performance by securing and providing resources, motivating both students and teachers, and creating a climate of trust and confidence within the classroom and school. Guided by creativity in thought and action, this atmosphere

fosters confidence in both students and teachers while supporting the positive evolution of schools within an educational community oriented towards the future.

Re-thinking leadership roles

Leadership roles are related to yet distinct from administrative roles, just as leadership differs from administration and management. The way leadership roles are conceived and conducted is inseparable from the contexts in which they take place. Global, ideological, or conceptual contexts shape local actions, affecting how they are perceived, conceived, framed, and executed.

Context matters, but not in the sense that everything is simply relative. In some contexts, female students and leaders face extreme violence, such as being spat upon, having acid thrown in their faces, or experiencing more subtle forms of assault. In more tribal societies, leaders may be expected to prioritize members of their tribe or clan and face criticism when they try to act fairly and do what is right for all students, faculty, or other groups within the larger community. In patriarchal societies (which most are to some degree) women are often subtly or overtly discouraged from pursuing leadership positions or face obstacles when they try. Male leaders may also face backlash if they exhibit non-conforming gender behaviors, including leadership styles deemed more feminine than masculine. Such situations are examples of the "glass ceiling" and its implications for education (Cáceres et al. 2012; Waite, 2017), but the reactions can easily be more profound, pervasive, and insidious.

Multicultural contexts present distinct challenges that must be taken into account when addressing educational leadership. In these

situations, school principals and other educators face unique challenges for integrating disadvantaged and immigrant youth, requiring them to move beyond debates of "equality" to adopt practices of "equity." These practices are essential to meet the changing needs of students amidst unprecedented immigration and demographic shifts (García-Carmona et al., 2021). Crossing national borders demands a gradual process of intercultural education to facilitate the resocialization of immigrant children and their parents, while also promoting intercultural adaptation and accommodation by teachers and school leaders. Schools play a vital role in such efforts. Systematic interventions, along with social justice and culturally relevant leadership practices, are crucial to preventing the exclusion of these youths and their families, both before they enter school and certainly when they leave.

In this sense, it is important to emphasize the need for schools to open up to society at large and especially to the community. The contexts in which schools are situated shape and enrich the teaching-learning process. Therefore, continuous educational improvement must be a central focus when discussing leadership. Building and fostering relationships in these environments create opportunities for mutual enrichment.

Beyond Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership should embody socially just principles, working towards social justice both within schools and in society, while being oriented toward the future of students and the broader community. Such leadership must be based on a well-articulated vision of the organization's goals and encourage collaboration to achieve its mission (García-Carmona, 2014). However, for-profit

schools, charter schools, and other commodified educational institutions, particularly those rooted in a capitalist, corporatist paradigm (Waite, 2014), diminish the potential for contributing to social and economic justice. This is where Waite's (2020) "in defense of (public) education" becomes pertinent. Without a shared or unified educational experience upon which to build, the *demos* or social cohesion of the public becomes weakened or fractured. Those whose only option is public school are likely to be marginalized, groomed for wage labor, if they work at all, and their future as fully agential citizens with control over their lives may be seriously limited.

These ideas are reflective of Freirian notions of education as liberation. In this sense, schools can be understood as a space for personal transcendence and fulfillment (Biesta, 2019) and vehicles for the transformation and betterment of society. Although a critical educator may not be able to transform a nation from a course they coordinate or a seminar they direct, they should not succumb to ennui; they can demonstrate that change from within is possible, thus reinforcing the importance of the "political-pedagogical task" (Freire, 1997, p. 108).

Re-thinking educational organizations

Beyond schools and educational institutions or organizations, much of modern life is shaped by what occurs within organizations and organizational settings (Waite, 2010, 2022; Whyte, 1956). Understanding what organizations are and how they influence not only students, teachers, administrators, and leaders, but also broader social contexts should be a primary concern. However, these factors are often overlooked, accepted without question, or taken for granted. Organizational influences are rarely scrutinized, nor are alternatives to prevailing models seriously considered. While there are some notable

examples of the problems inherent in organizational structures and their effects on students and educational outcomes (e.g., Waite, 2010, 2014, 2022), they remain exceptions rather than the norm.

For example, Waite (Ajofrín, 2008) referred to education administrators as "prisoners of the organization" (p. 3). Other authors (e.g., Morgan, 2006), borrowing from and extending on a Weberian perspective, view educational organizations as prisons (Weber's "iron cage") or inhibitive spaces (see Graeber, 2016). Waite (2010, 2014) demonstrated how not only educational organizations, but other types of organizations and associations in post-modern societies ~~worldwide~~ have been deeply influenced or "colonized" by corporate values and structures, what is known as "corporativism."

Such an analysis could provide educational leaders with the vision and empowerment they need to (re)design educational organizations as models in which focus is placed on the development of each member of the community.

Graeber (2016) demonstrated how the lived world has become thoroughly bureaucratized. Though its origins can be traced to the Church and ancient Chinese imperial governance, the bureaucratic form has been co-opted by capitalism, with the two systems operating in symbiosis. As a result, corporativism has emerged as the dominant social structure. By engaging with Foucault's (2010) notion of biopolitics, we can better understand the profound and fundamental changes this brings to both the subject and its subjectivity, extending beyond the concept of *homo economicus*. Corporativism—a bureaucratic capitalist ontology—ultimately infects or colonizes the entire social world. Efforts towards social justice, or even less ambitious attempts

at social change and improvement, are largely ineffective without an anti-capitalist framework, strategies, and tactics (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 2016; Kundnani, 2023; Wright, 2019).

Bureaucratic capitalism, if not redundant, is antithetical, even disastrous for education and schooling, particularly when schools are modeled on more communitarian ideals and structures. Educational leaders committed to equality, egalitarianism and, above all, social justice, must remain vigilant to the many ways corporativism (bureaucratic capitalism) seeks to infiltrate education, schools, and pedagogical relationships (i.e., learning). Since schools reflect society, it is unlikely that they can be transformed rapidly and effortlessly into institutions that are less capitalistic and more communitarian. Nonetheless, vigilant leaders will recognize and work to mitigate the most harmful aspects of corporativism and seek alternative, more communitarian-based models and methods. Through a Gramscian lens, such leaders will recognize key moments where strategies of maneuver and positioning can be employed more effectively (Hall, 2016).

Building on Rancière's (1991) notion of intellectual equality and his assertion that the central issue is how to be an equal being in an unequal society, the chief concern of justice-minded educational leaders is how to build and sustain an equality-driven school in an unequal (capitalist) society.

The Hegemony of the Quantitative

Rethinking organizations, and with it, leadership, is a creative and courageous act. Putting such ideas into practice is even more courageous and may even be risky. A simple example of how we might

rethink our world(s), beginning with critique and propelled by dialogue and discourse and fueled by creativity and imagination, concerns the dominance of obsessive quantification, what Husserl referred to as "the mathematisation of the world" (as cited in Crotty, 1988, p. 28), in reference to Galileo. (Actually, the phrase Husserl used was the "mathematization of nature" [1970, p. 23], but by nature, Husserl is understood to mean the plena, or the surplus left from mathematicians' and physicists' modellings of the world). This hegemony of the quantitative (Waite, 2017) sweeps us up, seduces us in its all too facile representation of reality. An obsession with quantification and quantifying is an all too easy way to think about, talk about, and even view the world. The predominance of quantification speaks to the supremacy of positivism, of empiricism. It is not an easy habit to break. It is difficult to think otherwise. Postmodernism served as a bit of a corrective, as does the new materialism (Barad, 2007).

Indeed, many leadership narratives and theories are of a positivistic bent or inclination, based, as it were, on causality, prediction, and control. In fact, it seems as if the more positivistic the theory, the more popular it is. These include so-called data-based decision making, so-called value-added assessment, and others. Awareness of these tendencies is perhaps the first step in counteracting their most insidious effects. An openness toward and employment of oppositional forms, such as the narrative or storytelling components of, for example, critical race theory, can serve as counterweights to the hegemony of the quantitative.

The Leader's Identity and Positionality

It is not our intention to revisit past debates and controversies in the field merely for the sake of rehashing them or covering well-worn ground. Rather, we wish to briefly mention the differences and similarities between leadership as a task, a function, and even a field in Bourdieu's (1977) sense of the term, and administration, similarly conceived as a field with its own tasks and functions. We do this in the hope of offering fresh insight, as these issues remain despite the evolution of discourse in their respective fields. Having invoked Bourdieu, we also draw on his concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1987) in our examination of educational leadership. What defines a leader's identity? How do they perceive themselves? A difficult balancing act ensues—leaders, more so than administrators, make use of the tensions, the dynamics in the insider-outsider role. Leaders are more likely to be in that position having been members of the tribe they lead.[3] Change can be fueled by this insider-outsider dynamic; but the critic within has more knowledge, leverage, and empathy, derived, in large part, from her identity and position (Walzer, 2002). Detached, objective, even-handed, fair and unbiased; these are some of the values or dispositions we might hope for in our leaders. Burke (2016) borrowed Karl Mannheim's notion of the free-floating intellectual (*freischwebende Intelligenz*) to try to capture and depict the dual positioning of, in this case, the social scientist or historian, in terms of involvement and detachment. Walzer asked these poignant questions concerning detachment: "How much distance is 'critical distance'? What kind of criticism is possible from far away and from up close?"

[3] In the ape world at least, interlopers, usually juvenile males, are regarded with suspicion and accorded marginal roles when they first attach themselves to a new troop (Cheney & Seyfarth, 2007).

(p. xii). Walzer discussed the social critic's personal morality, their goodness. The social critic's essential values are three: courage, compassion, and a keen eye. Walzer described this last virtue using Max Weber's term *augenmass*, "which is translated into English as 'a sense of proportion,' a capacity to make 'cool' judgments about the relative importance of this or that" (p. xvii). Or "perhaps," wrote Walzer, "the idiom *ein gutes augenmass haben* comes closer: 'to have a sure eye.' Seeing and judging "requires an immediacy of vision as well as distance and coolness. The immediacy comes first, and its loss is especially disastrous for the critical project" (p. xvii).

In line with Walzer (2002), we believe that for critics to be successful and truly agential, they must operate from within, embedded in schools, the education administration, and other relevant institutions. This is why administrators and other school leaders are essential to radical change efforts (and even to less radical ones). For Walzer, as for us, "good social criticism is the work of good men and women" (p. xiv).

Knowledge in/of the Field of Educational Leadership

As Burke (2016) reminds us, all knowledge progresses through four stages—gathering, analyzing, disseminating, and employing—and the knowledge that leaders engage with (and those who study them) is no exception. These epistemological issues are pertinent to our discussion of educational leaders, yet they are rarely addressed in popular leadership texts. Such texts are marked by silences, lacunae, gaps, and omissions.[4]

[4] Ignorance, much like knowledge, is socially constructed and shaped by taboos, secrets, concealment, prevarication, and more. In his taxonomy of ignorance, Smithson (1989) identifies various forms, including conscious ignorance,

Ignorance, or non-knowledge, is an important consideration for educational leaders and those who educate them—not merely as something to be eradicated or erased, but as an epistemological consideration: What is known, and how do we know it? What knowledge is concealed from us and what knowledge do we hide from ourselves or others? Why do we do so, and to what end? While most of us are well aware of the links between knowledge and power, we often fail to reflect on the connections between ignorance and power. This is especially pertinent in today's post-truth climate. As Kirsch and Dilley (2015) pointed out:

> *The idea that there is a general crisis of confidence in contemporary society about what knowledge is, what it is for and what its impact on others might be. The debate going on at the heart of education in the U.K. and elsewhere at present is stimulated by the policies of governments aimed at making teaching and research more accountable, more relevant to taxpayers and the labour market. These concerns act as triggers of epistemological doubt, and they raise our awareness of how not only knowledge, but also ignorance, is produced.* (p. 6)

Schools can be thought of as epistemological communities (Crotty, 1998) and, if this is so, the leaders in/of the school (formal, informal, co-present or not, regardless of title and of reference group) can be seen to be complicit in the perpetuation of regimes of ignorance. A regime of ignorance is "the total set of relations that unite, in a given period or cultural context, the discursive practices and power relations that give

informational and epistemological ignorance, neglect, absence, distortion, incompleteness, uncertainty, untopicality, undecidability, inaccuracy, taboo, confusion, and non-specificity.

rise to epistemological gaps and forms of unknowing that have generative social effects and consequences" (Kirsch & Dilley, 2015, p. 23). Again, awareness is critical and practical, as addressing ignorance is a true school improvement project.

Leader's Relations to the Group, the Tribe, the Herd

Principals, heads, and educational leaders of all stripes must contend with in-group/out-group dynamics which can manifest as blatant tribalism. A positive bias toward members of the in-group (cronyism, nepotism, and corruption are possible/likely in such organizational contexts) and a negative bias toward members of an out-group (e.g., leading to discrimination, exclusion, and even outright hostility that may culminate in harassment and violence). Affinity/preference for members of one's own tribe, clan, or family often outweighs considerations of competence. (See Cuddy et al., 2013, on likeability or 'fit' versus competence, and Durante et al., 2012). The group exerts pressure on school leaders to conform to what are, in our opinion, dysfunctional group norms or cultural practices, such as hiring members of the tribe or the extended family (Shah, 2010), regardless of their competence.

What is needed instead are proactive community leaders and activists who are deeply rooted in the community and dedicated to promoting its betterment and well-being (García-Carmona et al., 2021). A deep love and respect for one's community—core values of both the critic and change agent—can inspire candid, open, and honest dialogue, which is an essential tool for this professional work.

It takes courage to challenge or even resist strong group norms or beliefs and practices with effective tactics and strategies. Here again

we find the overlaps or interrelatedness among epistemologies, knowledge, ignorance, and practices. Practices, beliefs, and epistemes are contextual, and so is leadership. This is one reason we are cautious not to generalize or prescribe for others. Knowledge dissemination is essentially knowledge translation (Burke, 2016), where both the provider and recipient shape the knowledge (data, theory, etc.) to make it comprehensible, using familiar terms or concepts (vocabulary) and adapting it to local contexts.

As Burke (2016) noted, newer technologies and communication media facilitate the dissemination and exchange of knowledge, as does the rise of a lingua franca, such as English. A key issue here is the hegemony of English or Anglophone leadership texts, and their adoption in non-English-speaking or non-Western contexts. The export-import of English-language leadership texts, theories, models, and practices often functions as a form of imperialism (García-Carmona et al. 2020; Oplatka & Arar 2016). Western models can simply become the standards by which other leadership practices (and "results") and knowledge are judged, often despairingly so. In such cases, multiculturalism and comparative studies of the experiences of different countries become especially important, as they account for a variety of contexts and cultures.

We can prevent the premature closure of the field of educational leadership, what Burke (2016) referred to as specialization, by intentionally incorporating authors and ideas from the peripheries of the field and from geographically diverse perspectives—ideas related to philosophy, creativity, and eco-justice, to name just a few (see Waite, 2017). Narrowing the focus too early or becoming too myopic causes us to lose sight of the broader, more general good, such as the purposes

of schooling and education (Biesta, 2010; Dewey, 1916). Diversity, especially a diversity of ideas, enriches us, broadens our understanding, and reconnects us to our shared humanity. It has the potential to remind us of our purpose, our mission, or why we engage in this thing called leadership in the first place.

What relationship do leaders have with the group or organization?
When leaders rise through the ranks of the organization, are they so socialized that changing the status quo becomes more difficult? Do their encumbrances, debts, and allegiances irreversibly bind them? If an outsider becomes the leader of a group, resistance and organizational inertia often emerge. As mentioned, it is difficult for an outsider to join an existing group, let alone lead one (Cheney & Seyfarth, 2007). For a leader to be effective, they must share commonalities with the group they lead. Leaders may offer minimal direction, instead focusing on understanding the group and articulating the direction it is headed (Gardner, 1995), which is the reason they are appointed or assume leadership positions. To be effective, adroit leaders must connect with the group, ensuring they do not move too far ahead of those they lead (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2000; Gardner, 1995).

The stranger (Simmel, 1950), the shepherd (Hazony, 2012), the *übermensch* (Nietzsche, 1968), and the barbarian (Lingis, 1994; Sloterdijk, 2013) are roles or identities that may be ascribed to or adopted by innovative or unconventional leaders, yet which speak to a relationship with the group. As Simmel (1950, pp. 401-405) reminded us, the stranger "imports qualities into it [the group], which do not and cannot stem from the group itself." Further, he noted how "the stranger, like the poor and like sundry 'inner enemies,' is an element

of the group itself. His position as a full-fledged member involves both being outside it and confronting it." The stranger, like Hazony's (2012) shepherd, "is by nature no 'owner of soil'—soil not only in the physical sense, but also in the figurative sense of a life substance which is fixed, if not in a point in space, at least in an ideal point of the social environment". The stranger "is freer, practically and theoretically; he surveys conditions with less prejudice; his criteria for them are more general and more objective ideals; he is not tied down in his actions by habit, piety, and precedent." Still, we must keep in mind the space, the geo-political, temporal moment inhabited by the leader—be they a stranger, adoptee, or kith and kin, and the group for which they serve in a leadership role. We are reminded of the ontological aspects of such groups, educational units in our case. Lortie (2009, pp. 50-51) draws our attention to the structural aspects of schools and districts and to "the concentration of power at the apex." This, for him, implies that "independent schools are entirely dependent units; no school has the financial resources or legitimation to operate without district authorization and support." Lortie discussed what he termed "the 'distinctness' of its [the district's] internal units" and referencing Weick's (1976) well-worn notion of the loosely-coupled system, commented on the "'thick' boundaries around subunits within school districts and the rich internal lives that are not immediately apparent to those who do not belong to them." He continued: "Schools are distinct units but, perhaps less obviously, so are individual classrooms. The boundaries around each, physical and sociological, affect the ways in which insiders and outsiders perceive and interact across them."

In addition to the structures, there are innumerable processes, relationships, and interactions—indeed antecedents, biographies, histories, and networks that shape and influence what gets done in

schools, districts, classrooms, colleges, and universities, as well as other educational organizations. As regards the interactive and relational aspects of social life, Foucault (2008) would have us keep in mind that:

> *the state does not have an essence. The state is not a universe nor in itself an autonomous source of power. . . . The state has no heart, . . . no feelings, . . . it has no interior. The state is nothing else but the mobile effect of a regime of multiple governmentalities.* (p. 77).

Leaders, whether insiders or initially outsiders, inhabit and enact these roles (and more) in multidimensional organizational spatiotemporal units. Because of this complexity, a sociological and/or philosophical analytical disposition would serve the leader well (Wagner, 1990).

Concluding remarks

When thinking about leadership, particularly educational leadership, we pay attention to and, where possible, engage with Friedrich Nietzsche's (1968) observation on leadership that "it is not a matter of going ahead (for then one is at best a herdsman, i.e., the herd's chief requirement), but of being able *to go it alone*, of being able to be *different*" (p. 196, emphasis in original). The notion of the shepherd—and its counterpart, the farmer—is central to Hazony's (2012) interpretation of Hebrew scripture. In the scripture, the ideal forms of each are Abel, the shepherd, and Cain, the farmer. Hazony depicts the shepherd as more of an outsider, even an outlaw; guided by a morality rooted in responsibility to the family and the tribe (i.e., the community). Keeping in mind the concerns we raised regarding tribalism; the shepherd symbolizes and advocates for freedom. In contrast, the farmer—the builder, the one tied to the land in Hazony's

schema—is the backbone of the state and ultimately assumes the role of administrator.

We recognize the shepherd in the leader. This is why, in those fleeting moments when we confront the stark truth about what we do and who we are (and who we want to become), it seems disingenuous to write about leadership as if it were something one could see, touch, or do. For us, leadership is unfathomable, unrealizable, and perhaps even unimaginable. (Think of Arendt's [1958] characterization of action as interminable.[5]) Nietzsche (1968) exhorts the leader to be willing to go it alone, to be different. But how can one lead alone? Seldom do we speak of the followers. Leadership for us is a contingent practice, negotiated on a moment-to-moment basis with, between, and among all those who make up a group or organization. It is contractual, whether that contract is implicit or explicit (in reality, all or part of leadership contracts is implicit in an ethnomethodological sense [Garfinkel, 2002]). Leadership, as we envision it, finds parallels in Habermas' (1984) ideal speech situation, where each participant has the freedom to participate or not, free from coercion. In fact, the absence of coercion is a fundamental criterion for democratic, egalitarian relationships, organizations, and larger political entities.

In an egalitarian speech or leadership situation, individuals surrender some degree of their personal freedom to the group, as certain ones must follow while others do the work or take action (though leadership itself is also a form of action.) As a contingent practice, each member of the organization both leads and follows (sometimes even following

[5] Here we also draw on Lakomski's (2005) arguments in *Managing without Leadership*.

their own leadership at different times and in different situations). This makes leadership more difficult than administration or management. True, managers manage people, which adds a degree of difficulty to the task or role. Administrators are ostensibly more role dependent and less contingent than leaders. Leaders, in contrast, negotiate their role *vis a vis* the group as a whole and the individual members of the group on a moment-to-moment basis. Leadership is messy, transient, and ephemeral. This is why we are skeptical of leadership theories, especially of leadership models and recipes. Indeed, there are no tried-and-true recipes. Leadership, to the extent it exists at all, is more like jazz improvisation and jazz dance (Newton, 2004). We are first and foremost people, dealing with people who are infinitely complex, which makes the codification of leadership impossible. Extant models tend to be developed post hoc, a posteriori (Waite, 2009). They are descriptive, often prescriptive, and can never be predictive. For us, leaders cannot be trained. Perhaps administrators can be trained, but we hold that leaders can be educated; and this is an entirely different matter.

Nietzsche and others before and after him (Bogotch, 2012; Waite, 2012) have noted the relation between knowledge and power: "Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power" (1968, p. 266). Fewer have commented on how power manifests in the knowledge-teacher-learner relationship (for more on power and pedagogical relationships, see Biesta, 2014, and Rancière, 1991). As scholars, citizens, critics, members, and practitioners in the field of educational leadership, we are reluctant to place ourselves above others as teachers—or in Rancière's terms, as "the old Master"—who assume a superior, privileged position in relation to knowledge, thereby positioning others as inferior. Instead,

drawing on Biesta, we prefer to think of this relation as initiated by the student; those who choose to be taught by another.

In addition to Walzer's (2002) dispositions of the social critic and leader—courage, a keen eye, compassion, and now his fourth, a moral sense—we would add what we consider to be a fundamental trait of a good leader: humility, being humble. Leaders must, therefore, reflect on themselves, their attitudes and beliefs, their dispositions, and their actions. It begins with reflection (Waite, 2022), but who knows where it ends.

Considering the challenges discussed above and the theories explored, in what follows we outline some key considerations that should be taken not account in both educational practice and future research.

Some final implications for research and practice

This article highlights critical yet previously neglected perspectives in current discussions on education and educational leadership. Based on the reflections presented throughout the manuscript, several implications for both research and practice emerge that warrant consideration.

Recognizing leadership as an educational journey rather than mere training, and acknowledging its potential to enhance well-being, academic success, and more, we argue that programs for these professionals need to be rethought. They should emphasize critical thinking, reflective skills, and contextual awareness rooted in freedom and equity, while also strengthening social and communication skills that foster collaboration and uphold core values such as social justice and humility. Working groups, educational community meetings, and

partnerships between schools and social institutions can help identify practical challenges, gather relevant data, and inform the development of educational leadership programs. Additionally, feedback from educators, families, and students can contribute to improving these professional learning and support initiatives.

Researchers, as well, can deepen our understanding of educational leadership by critically evaluating evidence from studies with diverse strengths and limitations. In this regard, it is crucial that scholars assess the necessity of leadership education.

However, it is important to acknowledge that there is no recipe or "one-size-fits-all" for effective leadership, as it is a dynamic and constantly evolving construct, much like individuals and society. In this sense, leaders continuously face challenges in both their professional and personal lives, and there has never been a better time than now to transform these challenges into opportunities for meaningful action.

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