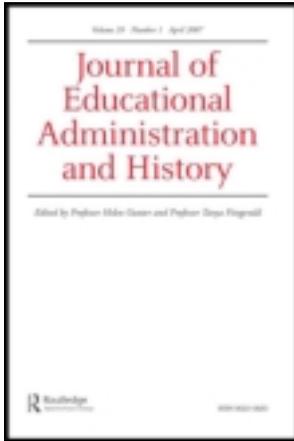


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Scripting, ritualising and performing leadership: interrogating recent policy developments in Australia

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In this article, we argue that leadership of schools is a form of performance that has become ritualised and routinised through the official scripting of policy texts that mandate how leadership of schools should occur. Our interrogation of recent policy scripts in Australia reveals that there is limited scope for leadership in schools to occur as accountability mechanisms and policy directives codify the professional expertise that leaders are required to possess, act out and act on.

Keywords: leadership; leadership development; policy scripts; performance

Introduction

The act of leading draws attention to a particular individual, moment, idea or action. In most situations, leaders are public figures who occupy a specific institutional context within a particular social, economic, political and historical milieu. Leadership is frequently portrayed as a purposeful, positive act or activity. Their roles span a continuum from the ceremonial to the everyday. Furthermore, ways in which leaders act, react and perform their roles are intensely scrutinised in public and by the public.

Leadership has been aptly summarised by Grint (2000, p. 28) as, ‘the world of the performing arts, the theatre of rhetorical skill, of negotiating skills, and of inducing the audience to believe in the world you paint with words and props’. A performance is an event that occurs in the present. It cannot be reproduced; it can be repeated although it is then a different production. Audience members view, interpret, respond and create their own meaning according to what they have seen, heard and viewed. Furthermore, performances can be recorded so that the quality of what has occurred can be scrutinised, evaluated and improved.

In this article, we examine recent Australian policy documents to illuminate how leadership *of* schools is being defined and scripted. Documents such as the

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Australian charter for the professional learning of teachers and school leaders (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL] 2011) as well as *A background paper to inform the development of a national professional development framework for teachers and school leaders* (Timperley 2011 [hereafter *Background paper*]) and *Our schools our future* (Caldwell and Loader 2010) are policy props that ensure a level of adherence to and compliance with the efficient and effective implementation of the wider reform agenda (see here Gewirtz 2002, Gunter 2012). The underpinning message in these policy scripts is that in order for schools to be effective and future focused, school leaders and teachers are required to embrace change that is 'aligned with school, sector and system goals' (AITSL 2011, p. 3).

Policy scripts consistently sketch schools as inefficient, outmoded and in need of fixing. Reform is the antidote to this chilling narrative; systemic reform will alleviate and rehabilitate and the school leader is ultimately mobilised as the protagonist who will 'transform' and 'deliver' what is required for a successful outcome (Gunter 2012). Thus, there is limited scope for improvisation (Schechner 2003) primarily because accountability mechanisms and policy directives codify the professional expertise that leaders are required to possess, act out and act on. Moreover, the scripting of what training and professional development ought to occur is no less than the official sanction and control of the skills, knowledge and expertise of teachers and school leaders (Mulford 2003). Unrelenting adherence to these officially sanctioned scripts is imperative as it reduces the possibility of under-performance. Control of performance is complete once leaders internalise these scripts and do not question the performance that is expected.

Drawing on our interrogation of recent Australian policy scripts, our central proposition is that leadership *of* schools is a form of ritual performance that is staged and scripted by policy for a particular audience. In the theatre of school leadership, the physical setting (the school) is familiar to participants (teachers and students), and the scripted interactions (performances) that occur are played out to an audience (community, policy-makers and media) that has its own set of expectations and experiences about what 'counts' as a pleasurable, memorable and desirable performance.

Acting out policy scripts

Educational policy scripts are a form of public theatre. The language used to promote educational reform utilises democratic images that promise responsiveness, change, improvement, involvement and choice (Apple 2008, Beck 2008). What has occurred is that education has been reduced to a matter of consumer choice and the educational market place is the arbiter of what is both good sense and common sense and what is not. Dating back to the 1980s, these managerial ideologies and practices have influenced policy, schools and educational leaders. As a modernist agenda (Butt and Gunter 2007), new public management

focuses on the individual leader holding statutory power in a top-down hierarchical structure. Accordingly, there is an industrialised chain of command and control whereby the identified leader is charged with operational and strategic responsibilities (Gunter and Fitzgerald 2007). The routines of leadership are therefore primarily concerned with efficiency, accountability and maintaining a competitive presence in the educational marketplace. Leadership texts (see, e.g. Bush 2003, Bush and Glover 2004, Caldwell 2006) as well as leadership programmes seek to legitimise leadership as *the* solution to political and management problems such as failing schools, pupil performance, declining standards, decreasing funding, teacher shortages, community and employer demands, and the preoccupation with producing good students with good skills who will secure good jobs (Fitzgerald 2007). A postmodern world, 'characterised by flexibility, adaptability, creativity, opportunism, collaboration, continuous improvement and a positive orientation towards problem solving' (Hargreaves 1994, p. 63) does not seem possible. Leaders and leadership are discursively situated as the solution to everyday organisational and professional problems (Gunter 2001). There is no possibility of an impromptu performance as the setting (the school) as well as the actors within the school (teachers and students) are carefully stage-managed as well as trained for the roles that they play. The performance of leadership takes place within a setting in which there is a specific public purpose and a deliberate casting to ensure agreed outcomes are met through careful adherence to the script.

In the past two decades, there has been an explosion of texts that concentrate on leadership preparation and development (see, e.g. Day and Leithwood 2007, Lumby *et al.* 2008) and which offer a 'management by ring binder' (Gunter 1997) script for educational leaders. Whether a self-help text such as *The one minute manager* (Blanchard and Johnson 1982) that introduces snappy acronyms or texts that serve to reduce leadership to seven habits (Covey 2007) or seven claims (Leithwood *et al.* 2006) as well as lessons learned (Murphy 2012), these texts are frequently accompanied by self-paced DVDs (Fifty Lessons 2010) and web-based tools that script how leadership ought to be performed. These texts, models and training tools are intensely seductive because they offer a linear and rational organisation of the skills, habits and knowledge required to undertake core leadership activities.

Since 2000 there has been a preoccupation in countries such as England, New Zealand, the USA and Australia with school leaders and leadership *of* schools. Accordingly, policy has been directed at the improvement of school leadership through carefully scripted leadership-development programmes via the establishment of organisations and centres such as the National College for School Leadership in England (established in 2000), the First Time Principals Program (established at the University of Auckland in 2002) and the licensing of school leaders in the USA. Australia has not been immune to these trends. Since 2006 school leaders in Australia have been selected to attend the *Leading Australia's Schools* programme jointly run by the Hay Group and the University of

Melbourne. This partnership between an international HR firm and a university is nothing new; this was the model that underpinned leadership-development programmes in England as well as in New Zealand (Brundrett *et al.* 2005).

These leadership-development programmes offer an immediate need; training to deal with the challenges of leading and managing schools. Less recognised is the extent to which these programmes offer a level of credentialed professionalism in which those who undertake and complete the training are then authorised to perform their roles as effectively and efficiently as possible. In other words, this training is focused on how to get things done quickly and simply and in as risk-free a way as possible (Lumby and English 2009). Developed from a singular, stable and standardised knowledge base, these leadership-development programmes have been exported from England to New Zealand and Australia (Brundrett *et al.* 2005) and while they attempt to offer a level of leadership preparation, the absence of theoretically informed research is a concerning omission. Although the architects of these programmes argue that there are links with the educational leadership literatures, as Thrupp (2003) has shown this knowledge base in itself has been codified and modified so that a set of orthodox scripts can be produced.

The emphasis in leadership-development programmes is on generic training; training that is practical and which enhances and develops skills. This focus represents a technical approach to dealing with the challenges of leadership and while such training is useful in terms of assisting participants to deal with the everyday in their roles, there appears to be little attention paid to either the educational or preparation for the unknown. In many ways, current and aspiring leaders are located as the objects to be trained and therefore reduced to roles as high-level technicians certificated to implement dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of schools, staff-rooms and classrooms. For schools of 'tomorrow' (Government of New Zealand 1988) and the 'future' (Caldwell and Loader 2010), leaders who are educated to think critically about policy and practice ought to be central to any such programme. However, the message about leadership from official policy and officially sanctioned training programmes is that market advantage, efficiency, outputs and the management of the school workforce are of critical importance (Fitzgerald 2007, Hoyle and Wallace 2007). The concern here is that school leadership has become aligned with the principles and practices of managerialism. Leadership *of* schools is now framed by principles such as:

- standards and accountability;
- devolution and delegation;
- competition and outputs; and
- objectives, mission statements and organisational strategy.

These are the principles that are used to legitimate the linking of school leadership with the reform agenda.

Reforming and performing

The AITSL was established on 1 January 2010. Its core purpose is to, ‘provide national leadership for Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership’ (www.aitsl.edu.au). Its core roles and responsibilities include:

- develop and maintain rigorous national professional standards for teaching and school leadership;
- implement an agreed system of national accreditation of teachers based on these standards; and
- foster and drive high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders through professional standards, professional learning and a national approach to the accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses (www.aitsl.edu.au).

On 28 October 2011, AITSL released the draft *Australian charter for the professional learning of teachers and school leaders* (hereafter *The Charter*). The fundamental purpose of the *Charter* is to support and reform teacher and school leader professional learning. The *Charter* ‘articulates the central importance of ongoing professional learning to achievement, development and progression’ against the *National Professional Standards for Teachers and the National Professional Standards for Principals* (AITSL 2011, p. 2). Thus, this official language of leadership scripts what leaders ought to know and how they ought to act in their schools.

The principles underpinning the *Charter* are based on ‘compelling evidence’ (AITSL 2011, p. 2) about what works in schools. Terms such as endorse, require, inform, influence, improve, effective, observe, reflect, challenge, support, innovation and adaptability signal the ‘future-focused approach’ that ‘recognises and embraces’ change that is ‘aligned with school, sector and system goals and reform initiatives’ (AITSL 2011, p. 3). This is the ‘shared responsibility and commitment’ (AITSL 2011) that the *Charter* requires of teachers and school leaders and which situates improvement and performance as an individual responsibility. Individual success or failure can then be named and shamed (Blackmore and Thomson 2004, Thomson 2009) and improvements are calculated in order that evidence can be presented to substantiate that change has occurred. This is no less than a carefully constructed script in which the actors (teachers and school leaders) must perform according to the prescribed set of rituals and routines. Wholly absent is any recognition of the complex, messy and contested environment of schools and school leadership.

Also released in Australia in 2011 was Timperley’s (2011) *Background paper*. This *Background paper*, presented as a common-sense approach to professional practice and the development of professional expertise, is no less than

a performative script to be acted out by teachers and school leaders. This is achieved in four particular ways:

- (1) The *Background paper* is explicitly addressed to teachers and school leaders with a commitment to their own professional learning. There is the underpinning assumption that all teachers and school leaders agree with the official management pedagogies surrounding professional development and learning. In effect, this script casts teachers and school leaders as both professionals *and* learners, both experts and novices.
- (2) Drawing on four core principles for ‘quality-effective professional learning’, this learning is contextualised, specified and structured. The performative emphasis is on content that is officially specified and the surrounding discourses that frame the standards to be met and the official knowledge and skills to be acquired.
- (3) The *Background paper* prescribes the official pedagogic knowledge base for teachers and school leaders that is predominantly drawn from the school effectiveness and school improvement literatures.
- (4) The *Background paper*, which concentrates on describing the micro-practices of how leaders ought to perform in schools, is officially recognised by AITSL and as such is a sanctioned script.

The fundamental assumption that underpins this *Background paper* is that teachers and school leaders will embrace this officially recognised and sanctioned training and that the proposed principles are rational, workable and fixed. Furthermore, Timperley suggests that the national professional development framework will reform what was a traditional notion of professionalism based on ‘industrial models’ (AITSL 2011, p. 1). These industrial models will be ‘replaced with more flexible notions of successful teachers and leaders being adaptive experts’ (AITSL 2011, p. 1). These views need to be challenged as traditional notions of professionalism fundamentally support the idea that teachers and school leaders are already adaptive experts when given the freedom to write their own scripts. The key tension here is the paradoxical positioning of teachers; on the one hand, teachers will become adaptive and, on the other hand, teachers will conform to the prescribed routines of standardised policy.

The emphasis in the *Background paper* is on the leadership of schools in which enthusiastic conformity to organisational structures, regulatory frameworks, normalised routines and policy scripts is required. Criticisms of such papers or frameworks are echoed in the work of Lumby and English (2009, p. 108) who contend that leadership and professional development programmes primarily concentrate on the, ‘acquisition of sets of rational-technical skills required to manage schools and an acceptance of national aims and values as ritually presented’. The educative purposes of the proposed professional

development framework in this *Background paper* are difficult to uncover as links with theoretically informed research are markedly absent.

The hidden curriculum evident in the proposed professional development framework is the formation of teachers and school leaders who possess the knowledge and competencies as well as the necessary dispositions to re-train and re-learn across their careers. The ritual of performance embodied in this framework is evidenced by the use of terms such as ‘demonstrate’, ‘communicate’, ‘recognise’, ‘reflect’, improve, ‘act’, ‘adapt’, ‘provide’, ‘ensure’, ‘identify’, ‘evaluate’ and so forth. The cumulative effect of this reductive language is to mandate and officially sanction the skills, knowledge and professional practices that teachers and school leaders *must* possess. Evidence of the successful acquisition of this officially sanctioned knowledge is provided through regular evaluation and assessment of both the individual and the school. This is carefully selected and selective knowledge that increasingly structures teachers’ lives and work (Beck 2008) and is no less than a script to be acted on and acted out. Furthermore, that teachers and school leaders are required to produce evidence that they are acting correctly has fundamentally re-configured what it means to be a professional and undertake professional work.

There are a number of deeply concerning issues around the centralisation of teacher-learning as well as the shaping and defining of school leadership that are highlighted in the *Background paper*. The centralising of professional learning policy through AITSL is a significant step towards the introduction of prescribed professional standards. This is not a benign document. While the research on the effect of teachers on student outcomes continues to gain traction (see, e.g. Ingvarson *et al.* 2005, Dinham 2008, Darling-Hammond *et al.* 2009, Hattie 2009), often erroneously cited and interpreted as Snook *et al.* (2009) have shown, there is greater opportunity for national systems such as that proposed by AITSL to prescribe systemic reform through further regulation. The ‘common sense’ position advocated is that school leaders need to control teaching and learning practice in order for all teachers to perform *at a particular standard*. To provide the means for school leaders to achieve these reforms, the common sense solution is to provide a learning routine, or script, for school leaders and teachers. Thus, professional learning is reconstructed as a benign-sounding tool for the delivery of the efficient (and parsimonious) view of education as symbolised by the new public management agenda (Butt and Gunter 2007).

In describing the place of the *National Standards* for teachers, Timperley suggests they should be ‘regarded as important signposts of progress providing a holistic direction for professional learning’ (Timperley 2011, p. 10). However, the writer is more reductive in practice when stating that the *National Standards* for teachers and principals are based on the ‘evidence of practice that matter’ (Timperley 2011, p. 2). Similarly, the *Background paper* is more than suggestive that school leaders and teachers have been operating from a deficit skill base when arguing that the evidence about how to teach all students will be

made available to, 'support leaders and teachers in their practice and assist them in the change in expectations to educate all students' (Timperley 2011, p. 1). Once again, the argument supporting performativity in the *Background paper* is the assumed failure of leaders to guide teachers. This rationale is a continuance of the exporting downwards principle of accountability (Apple 1995) that saw governments and government departments of education blame schools for national economic woes. Accordingly, the *National Professional Standards* and *Background paper* echo a very clear agenda. The dual goal is to ensure that teachers and school leaders are simultaneously located as responsible for and committed to the reform agenda as part of belonging to a modernised profession (O'Reilly and Reed 2011). The net result is that leadership is conceived and constructed by policy as a device (or prop) to change and mobilise teachers' professional behaviours and actions (Mahony and Hextall 2000, Smyth 2007, Hall *et al.* 2011). Teachers and school leaders are constrained to a particular context, role and script and there is limited capacity for improvisation (Grint 2000).

The fundamental rationale underpinning the *Charter* (AITSL 2011) and the *Background paper* (Timperley 2011) is that predetermined content and instructional procedures are both relevant and appropriate for schools of 'today' and 'tomorrow'. Emphasis is placed on the predictable and practical rather than creative preparation for the unforeseen and unknown. The exercise of agency does not seem possible as these materials and programmes ostensibly contribute to a pedagogy of management that presupposes that knowledge can be broken down into discrete parts, standardised for easier consumption, routinised to ensure consistency and subsequently measured through predefined forms of assessment that prove that the training has been beneficial. Thus, both the *Charter* and *Background paper* reduce teachers and school leaders to specialised technicians operating within a bureaucratised environment whose primary function it is to manage, implement, test and report on what counts as standardised knowledge or curricula (Ball 2002, Apple 2008, Fitzgerald 2008). The central problem then for leaders of schools is how to allocate resources (students, teachers, pedagogical materials) in order to produce the maximum number of outputs (student passes in national tests and examinations) within a designated timeframe.

Implicit in the *Charter* and *Background paper* is that leadership will be distributed and that leadership is a collective activity. However, the underpinning discourses point to the valorisation of individual achievements and the individualised management of performance. The rhetoric of managerialism evident in these documents casts individuals as responsible for their own success, individualised improvement and under-performance. At an organisational level, school leaders are responsible and accountable for teacher, student and school performance. Thus, leadership of schools is primarily a singular activity located and executed in the office of an individual. Leadership is a solo performance. School leaders and teachers are, yet again, the rabbits in this latest

education reform spotlight. School leaders in particular are required to implement more prescriptive measures in their schools in support of the standards agenda outlined in both the *Charter* and *Background paper*. While doing so, their enthusiasm for government initiatives will be assessed through ongoing evaluation of their (prescribed) leadership performance.

Ritualised and routinised leadership

Educational policies of ‘tomorrow’ and the ‘future’ rest on a set of powerful and troubling myths that have contributed to the ideological success of school self-management (Beck 2008, Fitzgerald 2008, Smyth 2011). Namely, these myths have manufactured a level of uncertainty about schools as institutions and consequently heightened certainty about the need for an educational marketplace where choice, standards, accountability and outputs dominate:

- (1) The fundamental myth is that there is a crisis in schools. This crisis has been manufactured by the emphasis on international data and benchmarks that suggest countries such as Australia do not perform as well as can be expected and that a level of direct intervention is required.
- (2) The second myth is the role and dominance of the educational marketplace. This myth suggests that problems can be alleviated if schools are subject to market forces whereby parents as consumers will exercise a level of choice about schools for their children. A direct consequence of rational choice in the marketplace is that ‘good’ schools will survive and those deemed less than successful will not.
- (3) The third myth is that accountability and compliance will secure quality. This myth suggests that systems such as school inspection, teacher registration, performance management and teacher professional standards will ensure that outputs and targets are met.
- (4) The fourth myth is that business management practices are appropriate ways for schools to operate. Accordingly, this myth secures the legitimacy of labels such as Chief Executive Officer (for the principal or head) and middle manager (for teachers who are 60% of the workforce).

have gained a level of ascendancy precisely because teachers and leaders of schools have been seduced into thinking that self-management is in their own professional interests (Smyth 2011). Self-management is a powerful policy script that offers no alternative or possibility of improvisation.

These myths exist in a political and ideological climate that presents both a threat and a challenge to teachers and school leaders. These threats are masked in a series of policy initiatives that display little confidence in the ability of teachers and school leaders to educate students to be thoughtful and active citizens. The purpose of schooling is far wider than a prescriptive set of standards and the resulting accountability processes teachers and school leaders must perform. To deny that schooling for all is predicated on classic concepts of democracy, participation and equity is an anti-intellectual stance supported by economic theory, which, according to Ladwig, is the neo-liberal 'version of moral philosophy' (2008, p. 15). Further, some school leaders and teachers consider the sustainability of public schooling as an ethical endeavour in itself (McInerney 2003), where schools enact social justice through democratic decision-making for the purpose of modelling a classical view of learning (and living) for the larger society. This is the *longue durée* (long-term) view of renaissance; the historically situated tradition of debate and critical enquiry as the twin pillars of democratic practice central to participatory citizenship (Annette 2009).

Leadership of schools has become part of the managerialist project that is primarily concerned with securing a competitive advantage in the educational marketplace. Terms such as leader and leadership dominate policy discourses that officially sanction the means by which educational reform can be secured (Ball 2002, Fitzgerald 2008, O'Reilly and Reed 2011). What appears to have been overlooked is how power and control remain centralised (Strain 2009, Smyth 2011) and the extent to which the tactics of decentralisation have co-opted leaders to act for and on behalf of the State. Government-driven reform that requires leaders to enact policies at school level is no less than the downward delegation of the managerialist project. Accordingly, leaders become the deliverers of reform (Gunter 2001, 2012) and are discursively positioned as transformational leaders precisely because change is secured at a local level (Hall *et al.* 2011). Change that is aligned with economic and instrumental purposes is predicated on the masking of managerialism through the leadership of schools rather than leadership in schools. Accordingly, leaders are required to perform their roles against a predetermined set of managerial objectives and standards. Reform is thus positioned as a rational, linear and calculable process. To ensure that reforms to the structures and curriculum in schools occur in uniform ways, performance management regimes have been established to assure the State that teachers and school leaders are performing according to required standards (Fitzgerald 2008, Gunter and Fitzgerald 2008). Ultimately, school principals are accountable for teacher and school performance and as such are required to ensure that the managerialist project is successfully institutionalised in their schools. Their commitment to

this agenda is secured through annual performance agreements, key performance indicators and public data such as pupil performance in national tests (Beck 2008). There is however little or no evidence to suggest that anything has improved through systems of regulation and control (Angus and Brown 1997).

The drive to make schools more fiscally efficient has co-opted principals, teachers and the community into practices that have contributed to the decline of public schools (Gewirtz 2002). Illustrative of this point is the managerial creep of corporate discourses that extol ‘excellence’, ‘best practice’, ‘evidence-based’ and ‘continuous improvement’. These terms are deeply seductive – after all, who could possibly refute the need for schools to offer quality education that meets the educational needs of students? But what has not been fully revealed is the extent to which these seductive discourses have been used to carefully craft schools of the ‘future’ and ‘tomorrow’ as the ‘only game in town’ (Gunter and Thomson 2009, p. 472).

The state-instituted game is one of targets and performativity (Strain 2009). Outwardly schools may appear to be self-managing and self-managed, but in reality they are required to play the game and act in their own economic self-interest. Hence, teachers, parents, school leaders and the wider community have been seduced into thinking that self-determination and participation are advantageous, as schools are rendered more competitive, more efficient, more responsive, more accountable and transparent. The anticipated policy consequence of the schools of ‘tomorrow’ and the ‘future’ was that schools, teachers and their leaders would act in more economically self-interested ways (Smyth 2007, 2011). Crucially, it is the leaders of ‘tomorrow’ and the ‘future’ who are ultimately responsible and accountable for delivering the outcomes required. Hence, leadership of schools rather than *in* schools was discursively situated as the preferred and sanctioned practice.

There is little or no recognition or conceptualisation of the historical, social, economic and political complexities that surround the initiation and implementation of such policies. The leader of today is, by inference, redundant. Leaders of ‘tomorrow’ and the ‘future’ are required to modernise schools as well as the school workforce (Gewirtz 2002, Butt and Gunter 2007). The mantra of schools of ‘tomorrow’ and the ‘future’ is efficiency, effectiveness and competitive advantage (Fitzgerald 2007). However, as Bates (2006) has consistently argued, any attempt to define what educational leaders ought to do in times of risk and uncertainty is highly problematic.

Essentially, the leadership of schools is the preferred practice and mobilised in policy as a way of changing teachers’ behaviour in order to deliver the required outcomes (Gunter 2012). Schools of ‘tomorrow’ and the ‘future’ are no less than a broad policy agenda to render schools more accountable to parents whilst at the same time removing schools from what was argued to be inefficient centralised control (Caldwell and Loader 2010). The stark reality is that these policies have created an ongoing climate of management

of schools by stealth (Smyth 2007) that has set in motion practices aligned with the educational marketplace such as choice, national testing, inspections, league tables and teacher performance management. Put simply, self-management is self-damaging (Ball 2002) and it is yet to be shown via evidence that improvement has occurred. Leadership remains choreographed by policy architects wedded to the notion that the market both speaks and is correct.

Abandoning the script

As we have outlined in this article, attempts to script and measure leadership are counter-productive primarily because attention is focused on micro and modernist practices rather than on larger struggles about the nature and purposes of schooling and how leadership *in* schools can be enacted. In essence, what we are suggesting here is that leadership is more than what is officially scripted, ritualised, rationalised, recorded and sanctioned. By its very nature, leadership *in* schools simultaneously involves a conscious and unconscious contestation of hegemonic attempts to codify and bureaucratise leadership. Leaders *in* schools need to move beyond the blind conformity that scripts of ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’ enunciate and critically engage with the spaces in which educational leadership is embedded (Bates 2006, Eacott 2011). In other words, leadership cannot be reduced to a script that situates leadership as an adjectival phrase and a set of performance indicators.

Leadership for tomorrow and the future is possible if it is repositioned, viewed and understood from the standpoint of those who have least power (Apple 2008). Currently, the voices of those who are heard most clearly by policy-makers are those with the most economic, cultural and social capital. There is no level playing field and consequently educational reform initiatives for ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’ are another set of mechanisms for social and economic stratification. One of the more invidious consequences is that working-class parents and students are reconstructed in the image of the ideal or typical middle-class parents and students. As long as hierarchies exist within schools and the wider labour market, the middle classes will continue to seek and accrue strategic advantages (Gewirtz 2002, Strain 2009). Although we recognise that this unequal influence cannot be addressed adequately in this article, a focus on leadership *in* schools would offer a way to connect with the pedagogical purposes of schooling that would further concentrate attention on community aspirations (for a discussion of the politics of educational advantage see Fitzgerald 2007, Apple 2008, Smyth 2011).

The management pedagogies that permeate schools are powerful discourses in which no other alternative is open for debate, discussion or action. In this climate, teachers and school leaders are required to conform to prescribed standards. Performance is defined and controlled and the achievement of targets is part of the calculative measures to ensure that all are ‘on message’ (Gunter 2012). Dissent and disagreement are neither encouraged nor tolerated and for

those who stray, public vilification is frequently the result (Blackmore and Thomson 2004, Thomson 2009). Through the delivery of training and adherence to policy scripts, leaders are 'empowered' to deliver results. Increasingly, leadership is being defined through policy scripts in which leadership is being removed from schools. Leadership *of* schools is a form of the 'bastard leadership' that Wright (2001) argues is antithetical to both democratic and learning practices. How then might regulated policy be rejected in order for leadership *in* schools to occur?

In the first instance, leaders should reject any attempts to impose models of adjectival leadership. Terms such as 'transformational', 'distributed' or 'effective' do little more than emphasise conformity to a predetermined norm (Fitzgerald and Gunter 2008). Leadership cannot be reduced to categories of behaviour or captured by labels (Gunter 2001, 2012) and so repeated articulations of individual characteristics punctuated by adjectives should be discontinued. Although these labels have been used to produce what Gronn (2003) refers to as leadership by design, they overlook the importance of the settings in which leadership occurs and the sense-making leaders bring to their own practices. Labels and labelling leadership impose a level of control and advance ideological power about how leaders ought to act (Mabey and Finch-Lees 2008).

Second, it is critical that leaders view their work as pedagogical. Leaders are not performers of a policy script and consequently should take responsibility for shaping the purposes and conditions of schooling. Leadership in schools involves engaging a community of teachers and students in the pedagogical purposes of schooling and the development of an active and engaged citizenry (Apple 2008, Reid *et al.* 2011). Less important then is the performance of leadership that is concerned with the metaphorical public character acting out a particular script to a defined audience.

Third, there needs to be recognition that the audience is important. They are not silent observers in the theatre of school leadership. Parents, teachers, students and community exist outside of a formal setting and bring to the school sets of experiences and expectations. Audiences are not singular and so interactions with one group may not be the same as with another. Audiences also offer new opportunities for interactions and interventions in order for the performance to better reflect their perspectives. Importantly, audiences can offer a critique to provide assurances and stimulate changes (Grint 2000) as well as offer the possibility of creative, if not subversive, responses to the formal script. This is the dramatic edge of leadership that requires ingenuity, energy, imagination and skills as well as the choreography of what is important in order for schools to become more locally responsive.

Finally, we would urge school leaders to abandon policy scripts and to draw on their own skills, knowledge and expertise to improvise. Improvisation creates the possibility for creative, flexible and collaborative

leadership *in* schools that is shaped around the needs of the local community. Abandoning a tightly choreographed and well-rehearsed script is essential.

Conclusion

Australian school leaders (and teachers) face national and state curriculum standards, national and state teaching standards and national and state requirements for professional development. Both federal and some state governments are pursuing avenues to implement performance-based pay to reward some teachers. How a *national* system can be devised within a federal system does not appear to have been fully considered and while the politics of sameness and adhesiveness to a national script might be seductive, we predict the net outcome will be a 'one size fits all' approach.

Our contention in this article is that school leaders must follow a tight script in order to stage-manage the performance of government policy. Far from being self-managing, public schools are implementers of external policy-makers (Smyth 2011). Until recently, many school leaders could satisfy government policy requirements while still protecting school communities from the dominant influence of the state (Lumby and English 2009). Hoyle and Wallace describe this strategy of well-intentioned deception by school leaders as 'principled infidelity' (2007, p. 9). The recent escalation of draft publications of forthcoming national policies on standards and frameworks is a 'ramping up' in Australia of the scripted, homogenised reforms that were similarly enacted through Blair's New Labour initiatives of the late 1990s in England. Principled infidelity may no longer be possible.

Leadership *of* schools is a form of masquerade; managerial knowledge, skills and practices are utilised to bring about system-wide as well as school-level reform, made palatable through the use of terms such as 'leader', rather than 'manager' and the creation of 'teacher leaders' through distribution and delegation (Gunter and Fitzgerald 2008).

Leadership *in* schools offers an interpretive frame for understanding institutional settings and the myriad of interactions and relationships that leaders foster. Leaders *in* schools are concerned with challenging routine interactions in order to understand the context in which leadership occurs as well as the opportunities and constraints of these settings.

The rituals of leadership in schools are many; there is wrangling involved in overseeing large numbers of children and adults actively engaged in a myriad of experiential events, and learning and behaviour rituals are useful tools of operational organisation around highly dynamic environments. However, routines of compliance in carrying out increasing levels of standardised curricula and increasing amounts of prescribed training (Mulford 2003) to implement government policy do little to assist school leaders to act in the interests of their particular students, parents and teachers. There is a cost here; time and energy will

be spent on perfecting the script as written by newly empowered official bodies such as AITSL. At a time when Western democracies have produced spectacular economic catastrophes, there is increasing regret by some at the retreat of liberal education philosophy (where, metaphorically, it has become the increasingly distant figure on the education horizon). At a local level, school leaders often embodied the essence of classic values, supportive of challenging views and opinion within a well-established local frame of reference of community context. Such leaders are increasingly difficult to recruit as this frame of reference is not a good 'fit' with the current leadership accountability requirements and compliance. Such leaders are increasingly difficult to recruit as this frame of reference does not easily 'fit' with current accountability mechanisms embedded in policy scripts written for, not by, the school leaders and teachers, the key protagonists in the theatre of schools and schooling. Scripted performance of policy has been situated as the primary narrative of school leadership. Leadership *in* schools, alternatively, is anchored in creative and iterative readings of the pedagogical purposes of education for particular audiences. Rather than a single script to manage the implementation of government policy, leadership *in* schools seeks to articulate the complexity of opportunities and constraints that exist in schools. Leadership *in* schools acts in a diversity of ways to respond to as well as initiate and support local interpretations of school leadership.

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