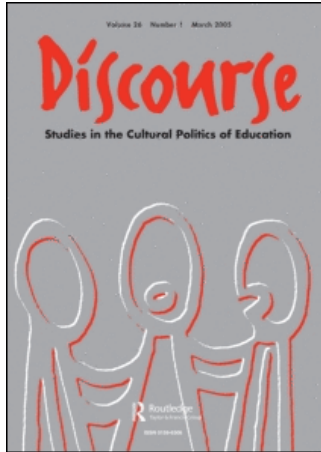


This article was downloaded by:[University of Queensland]  
On: 10 October 2007  
Access Details: [subscription number 770299606]  
Publisher: Routledge  
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713413500>

### EDITORIAL OVERVIEW

Pam Christie <sup>a</sup>; Brigid Limerick <sup>a</sup>  
<sup>a</sup> University of Queensland, Australia

Online Publication Date: 01 March 2004

To cite this Article: Christie, Pam and Limerick, Brigid (2004) 'EDITORIAL OVERVIEW', Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 25:1, 3 - 6  
To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/0159630042000178536

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0159630042000178536>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article maybe used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## EDITORIAL OVERVIEW

# Leadership as a Field of Study

Pam Christie & Brigid Limerick

*University of Queensland, Australia*

This special issue of *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* signals developments in educational leadership as an academic field of study sufficiently robust to engage with research and theory at the cutting edge of other fields. From its early roots in political science and history, the study of leadership has in recent decades moved squarely into the repertoire of management and business thinking. From a preoccupation with the traits of great leaders—overwhelmingly masculinist and heroic—leadership studies developed into a consideration of styles and repertoires adaptable to individuals and their contexts. More recently, a preoccupation with vision, inspiration and the “management of meaning” has seen the popularity of so-called “transformational leadership”. This has found particular resonance in studies of educational leadership, where the inherently normative nature of education finds affinity with idealist moral notions of betterment. Most current theories of leadership include something of all of these approaches: the qualities of individual leaders; their adaptability to engage with different situations in contingent ways; and their capacity to influence others to build a vision of change.

In mainstream management—and educational—studies, leadership is a valorized concept associated with success, not failure or even mediocrity. Seldom is it probed in ways that reveal the conditions of its own construction. The ethics of its power dynamics are often glossed over. The interplay of unconscious as well as conscious, of irrational as well as rational dynamics in human relationships, is often overlooked. Its embodiment in gendered and raced forms and its emotional evocations are often not confronted. The macro-structural contexts within which it operates are often not considered, as is the fact that leadership is more often concerned with working within these structural contexts rather than changing them. It would be hard to find, in mainstream literature on leadership, a depiction of controlling individuals (see Sinclair, this issue), ineptly juggling complex contexts, and manipulating others to collude in shallow visions of a desired future. Although an obvious caricature, we suggest that this sketch

has more resonance with common experiences of what passes for leadership than the idealized depictions of many serious leadership texts.

Using Bourdieu's notion of field to point to structured social spaces with their own logics of practice, we suggest that leadership is currently enjoying a spotlight, both as a field of practice and as a field of research and scholarship. Our focus here is on the latter, and our concern is to trace some outlines of the topography of this field. From the area of study depicted above, a more nuanced field has developed in research on educational leadership, where the concept itself is deconstructed and reconfigured. The different theoretical vantage points from which leadership is now addressed signal an intellectual robustness and engagement with a diversity of scholarship, which is a welcome move away from tired paradigms and old toolkits.

As the articles in this special edition illustrate, discursive approaches are now to be found in analyses of power relationships; and studies of identity, diversity, gender and sexuality call into question disembodied stereotypes of leaders. Historical and cultural analyses challenge static and acontextual approaches to leadership and change. The ethics of influence is on the agenda, and notions of transformation are critically scrutinized. Contexts of neoliberalism and in particular the corporatization of government, as well as new organizational forms and new work regimes, are rigorously explored in terms of their impacts on schooling and what it means to lead in education in current times. Globalization, with its attendant flows and rapid changes, new technologies, hybridity of cultures, jagged inequalities, and violent manifestations in war and terror, demands engagement with complex, uncertain and unstable futures. From the quintessentially modernist architectures of schooling and its leadership structures, current times call for reflexive and ethical agency from educational leadership. From the field of scholarship and research, current times call for a serious commitment to exploring ways in which leadership may contribute to forms of education which equip young people with resources for shaping a world in which they and others would want to live.

We begin this special edition with Amanda Sinclair's article, which opens the field of leadership theory and traverses it both theoretically and personally. Sinclair's approach is comprehensive, mapping the journey of a young woman academic teaching about leadership in a business school through a career that reaches an academic pinnacle, and then extends beyond it. It is a remarkable narrative, analysed with theoretical sophistication. Sinclair's concern is to write about leadership "in a way that resists the objectified, disembodied, de-gendered and positivist tradition of the vast bulk of leadership research". Significantly, she challenges the field of scholarship to adopt a rigorously reflexive approach to leadership, to "critique and subvert imposed and received notions of leadership", to go against standard practice, but also to go beyond critique into engagement with alternative understandings and practices.

The theme of reflexivity is picked up by Helen Gunter's survey of labels and labelling in the field of educational leadership. Tracking the change in label from "administration" to "management" to "leadership", Gunter poses the question

of whether this shift is due to changes in types of activities and actions, or whether it signifies changes in responsibility and accountability—the power dynamics of the field. Using a Bourdieuan analysis of field and capitals, she argues that performance leadership, now valorized by state education policies in the UK and elsewhere, represents a significant narrowing of the goals and purposes of educational leadership. She makes a strong case for a reflexive approach within knowledge production on educational leadership, so that such significant shifts in power dynamics may be better understood and engaged with.

The reflexivity that is sustained in Pat Thomson's piece is deliberately and determinedly provisional and playful, remaining speculative to the end. Notions of identity and principalship are explored through personal narrative as well as emerging research evidence from an Australian study of the principalship. A Cartesian metaphor is teased through the binaries of head/body, mind/emotion and thinking/doing, to present a picture of the clumsy human machine of the school/body and its principal/head. Thomson effectively uses this genre to serious ends, as she interrogates the changing conditions of principals' work in relation to moves towards entrepreneurial governance in the public sector. One of her concerns is to forge a space for research and scholarship which presents "the material everyday reality of principals", as well as their emotions and identities, in more textured and theoretically robust ways. Her proposed research agenda points provocatively towards this.

The three articles that follow begin a different theme, as they switch context from the UK and Australia to Thailand, Hong Kong and South Africa, and raise different sets of considerations. Focusing on Thailand, Philip Hallinger draws on his consummate international experience in leadership and school reform to question the extent to which principals are able to lead change in different cultural contexts. Outlining significant global changes that have set new agendas for schooling, he points out that principals have become "favoured targets of policy-makers intent on system-wide reform". However, this runs counter to the culturally "conserving" role of schools, which "are *designed* to change more slowly than the society surrounding them". In his view, recent educational reforms in the Southeast Asian region, informed by globalization, run counter to traditional Asian cultural practices. School principals in Thailand face particularly difficult challenges in leading a change agenda because of specific cultural understandings, positionings and practices. Hallinger raises significant themes for a study of leadership: global shifts, cultural contexts, and the importance of a moral basis for educational reform.

In exploring principalship in Hong Kong, Allan Walker demonstrates the usefulness of careful and detailed historical and contextual analysis in understanding leadership practices. Drawing a contrast between deep and surface structures, Walker traces the complex organizational and cultural forms of School Sponsoring Bodies in Hong Kong and the powers they wield in upholding deep leadership structures. While global policy trends and the transfer from British to Chinese control have influenced government reform agendas for education, School Sponsoring Bodies and principals have drawn on cultural

practices to evade attempts to curb their powers. Like Hallinger, Walker alerts us to the local mediation of global reform agendas, and suggests that national as well as organizational cultures may be mobilized to preserve power relationships around leadership rather than change them.

In their South African case study, Fleisch and Christie also question assumptions about leadership and school change. They argue that systemic school improvement is inextricably linked to structural features of the economy, politics and society, features that are usually glossed over in models of school effectiveness and improvement. Through their account of school breakdown under apartheid and difficult reconstruction in the 1990s, they place issues of legitimacy and authority squarely on the agenda for school change, as concepts related to but eclipsing individual school leadership. They also challenge homogenizing approaches to leadership and school change. States in transition, they suggest, require different theoretical analyses to understand the impact of wider social changes on school improvement. In such societies, the restoration of legitimacy and authority is a precondition for sustainable effectiveness and improvement, and this has implications for theorizing the role of leadership in school change more generally.

The final article in this special edition looks ahead to new futures. David Gurr addresses a central but under-theorized area for the field of educational leadership research, namely, the effects of advances in information and communication technologies (ICT). Gurr suggests that leadership in technology-mediated environments is a neglected area in educational research, since ICT-mediated environments are not yet prevalent in educational institutions. Nonetheless, early research in e-leadership in other organizational contexts suggests that ICT-mediated environments may pose particular challenges for leadership. Gurr suggests that communication, community building and establishing trust appear to be more important for leadership in these environments, as does some form of leadership dispersal. Gurr ends by reiterating a challenge posed earlier by Alvolio and Dodge: "The question is not whether to study e-leadership, but where to start."

Taken together, the articles in this special edition illustrate the complex and varied topology of the current field of research and scholarship in educational leadership, and all are suggestive of fruitful ways of extending the knowledge base of the field.