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The field of educational administration

A historical overview of scholarly attempts to recognize epistemological identities, meanings and boundaries from the 1960s onwards

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Abstract

Purpose – Based on journal articles that focused on epistemological issues in the field (e.g. the field's nature, purposes, borders, knowledge base, uniqueness, etc.), this paper seeks to outline the intellectual discussions in the field of educational administration (EA) since the foundation of its major journals and suggest some lessons for the state of the field at the present time.

Design/methodology/approach – The review is based on all papers, scholarly, historical or empirical, that observed philosophical, epistemological and methodological issues and concerns in this field. The papers were analyzed and coded by their purposes, arguments, epistemological questions, criticism, findings and insights.

Practical implications – The major concluding epistemological message of this historical account is of “recycling,” i.e. the field is typically embedded with debates over similar ideas, assumptions, and insights about EA as a field of study throughout the last five decades. Therefore, it is a time for radical changes in the understanding of the field's intellectual missions and boundaries.

Originality/value – The historical overview is likely both to acquaint one with the historical scholarly streams, trends and debates in knowledge development of EA as a field of study, and help international field members understand and mould their professional identity.

Keywords Educational administration, History, Epistemology

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Knowledge production in modern society takes place in diverse arenas, such as corporations, research institutions, entrepreneurial agencies and universities. The last arena is embedded with disciplines and fields of study demarcated by institutional and scholarly boundaries within which intellectual work is conducted (Gunter, 2002). Each field (and discipline) has its own special interests, structured activities, rules of access, meanings and positions (Fitz, 1999; Gunter, 2000) that provide “the intellectual lenses through which problems are defined and their solutions sought” (English, 2001, p. 32).

Yet fields are also dynamic arenas of struggles, “as their occupants seek to determine what knowledge and practices are to be regarded as legitimate and in what knowledge forms and practices they are prepared to invest” (Fitz, 1999, p. 313). Social and political forces of their times influence the scholarship, structure, power relations and resources of a field, and field members engage in the practice of differentiation (i.e. how their field is differentiated from other fields, what are the boundaries of their own

field) and, through it, recognize just who they are and what they do (Messer-Davidow *et al.*, 1993).

As educational administration (EA) is considered to be a field of study concerned with the management and operation of educational organizations[1] (Bush, 1999), its history is replete with intellectual struggles and ferment as well as reflections over the nature, methodologies, purposes, boundaries, knowledgebase and so forth of the field[2]. Since the establishment of EA as an academic field of study scholars have narrated its intellectual history (e.g. Callahan, 1962; Culbertson, 1988; Domoyer, 1999; Heck and Hallinger, 2005; Mitchell and Ortiz, 2006; Murphy and Forsyth, 1999), sought to understand the theoretical and practical nature of the field (e.g. Boyan, 1981; Erickson, 1979; Heck, 2006; Ribbins, 2006), and reviewed the knowledge to obtain an overview of the dominant concerns and trends within the field using textbooks, curricula, course syllabi, proceedings of international conferences, doctoral dissertation and journal articles (e.g. Fitz, 1999; Haller and Knapp, 1985; Oplatka, 2007, 2008; Swafford, 1990).

The current overview continues these scholarly streams of thoughts and reflections upon the field. From a historical standpoint, it gains insights into the prevailing intellectual concerns and trends over the last five decades of scholarly work in the field. Thus, based on journal articles that focused on epistemological issues in the field (e.g. the field's nature, purposes, borders, knowledge base, uniqueness, etc.), I present the scholarly discussions in the field about the field itself since the foundation of its major journals and suggest some lessons for the state of the field at the present time. More specifically, several questions are posited here: what have been the main lines of epistemological debates in the field about the field itself? How have these changed over time? What insights have been gained from these lines of work? What have been the main criticisms of these directions and suggestions for change?

Engaging with historical issues of knowledge production is a demanding task (Gunter and Ribbins, 2002). Yet, this kind of overview is likely to both acquaint us with the historical scholarly streams, trends and debates in knowledge development, and help field members understand and mold their professional identity. Consistent with other scholars (e.g. Achilles, 1994; Foskett *et al.*, 2005; Ribbins, 2006; Riffel, 1986; Willower, 1996), I believe EA is in need of historical review as any reflection of the intellectual debate is an important part of any field's evolution, repair and development. It helps sharpen issues of theory vs practice, legitimate areas of study and "proper" methods to explore and make sense of EA.

For this historical overview I read and analyzed scholarly articles written about EA as a field of study published in the three oldest and most dominant refereed journals – *Journal of Educational Administration (JEA)*, *Educational Administration Quarterly (EAQ)*, *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership (EMAL)*[3] from their first volume to the present (late-2007). Thus, the review is based on papers, scholarly, historical or empirical, that observe philosophical, epistemological and methodological issues in this field. The papers were analyzed and coded by their purposes, arguments, epistemological questions, criticism, findings and insights. The open coding of the papers was followed by a comparison of the papers within every category and between the categories to verify clear boundaries between the categories and trace inconsistencies. The reference list contains the papers chosen for this overview from the three journals indicated above.

Three notes are warranted here. First, the decision to base this overview on journal articles emanated from the assumption that academic journals are an arena where dialogue about knowledge production and the nature of the field takes place (Gunter, 2002), as well as reflecting and defining lines of inquiry developed by those in the field (Immegart, 1990; Thomas, n.d.). Second, my purpose was not to conduct an exhaustive and conclusive study of the scholarly literature in EA; therefore I restricted the scope of my review to papers from the three leading journals in the field. I believe these journals contain the main writings in the field in the last five decades and reflect the field's intellectual development during this period, an assumption shared also by Thomas (n.d.). Besides, whereas past historical overviews of the field were restricted to a single nation (mostly US and the UK), this overview documents international intellectual trends, i.e. it brings together voices of scholars in the field from different countries.

Third, my selection carries with it some limitations: I searched for documents published in three journals only; thus the insights provided in this review do not represent writings compiled in handbooks on EA. I am also aware that my literature review, as any review, according to English (2001), assumes that the topics under publication are linear, have a beginning and an end, thereby providing the researcher with chronological borders (patterns) or periods in a progression of development. This is a potential weakness the reader should take into account.

While this historical overview commences in the mid-1960s, the decade in which two of the three major journals in the field were established, some concise reference to earlier scholarly debates is warranted. Historical accounts of the field (e.g. Callahan, 1962; Campbell, 1981; Culbertson, 1988) have seen the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the beginning of EA as a profession and later on as a field of study in universities. The search for efficiency in education encouraged many educators to participate in administrator preparation programs, leading in later years to the institutionalization of EA programs and departments.

Before the mid-1950s, however, EA was substantially oriented to normative concerns, taught by senior educators (superintendents, senior principals) who had retired and delivered their practical knowledge and wisdom to prospective administrators. The spirit of logical positivism originated in social sciences coupled with common dissatisfaction with the prescriptive nature of the field led to the emergence of the "theory movement" which defined the knowledge in EA in accordance with conventions of a modernist, positivistic, rational-empiricist approach to science (Culbertson, 1988; Griffiths, 1983; Willower, 1996). In its proponents' optimistic view (e.g. Andrew Halpin, Daniel Griffiths), an improvement in the administrative practice of educational institutions would be brought about when a prescriptive knowledge was replaced by a stable, cumulative, empirical and generalizable knowledge base.

Despite much criticism of this movement[4], it helped the field gain an academic legitimacy as an area of study underpinned by scientific principles, and therefore it was granted a place in the ivory tower. Indeed, many universities, first in US and later in other western countries, established graduate programs in EA, research grew in volume and quality, and researchers linked themselves to government agencies that agreed to fund their work (Riffel, 1986). Most of the professors of EA in that time, however, were white, middle-class American males (Hayes, 1966) who cared little about

the massive literature on EA in other countries, as Walker (1984), the founder of *JEA*, retrospectively and grudgingly noted.

The next pages describe the epistemological debate chronologically according to the decade of publication due to my intention to show that decade by decade scholars raised similar issues without being able to solve them adequately, as well as to the historical standpoint I adopt in this review to demonstrate the dynamic nature of the epistemological debate in the field.

The 1960s and 1970s: the period of institutionalization

The 1960s, where our historical review commences, were marked by events, processes and paradigms that influenced the generation of the field at that time, such as a growing distrust of societal institutions, including schools and universities (Willower, 1993), and increasing Federal funding for administrator training programs and for facilitating the study of EA (Culbertson, 1974; Flower, 1963; Walker, 1964). This was the time of the welfare state and the civil rights movements in many western nations which constructed the principal's role in terms of leader of welfare reforms who is autonomous in using his expertise to devise the best means of implementing governmental programs and legislations (Bottery, 2006). At the end of the 1970s, the "effective schools" movement was launched, with a dual concern for equity and effectiveness (Boyd, 1999).

In this period, EA as a field of study was "exported" from the US, where it grew over several decades, to other countries. New professional organizations were founded (British Educational Management Association (BEMA), the Commonwealth Council for EA (CCEA), the European Forum on EA (EFEA), and the Australian Council for EA) around the world[5], with the aim of improving EA and fostering a high standard in the practice and study of EA at all levels, and facilitating intellectual and empirical exchanges (Ewing, 1975). Thomas (1971), the interim secretary of CCEA in those years, described the CCEA as "a new centre for educational leadership, whose purpose is to encourage more tertiary institutions to establish training in EA for senior or even relatively junior positions" (p. 130)[6].

In parallel, the field's first academic and refereed journals (*JEA*, *EAQ*, *EMAL*) were created in this period. Their aims were manifold: to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge about research, training and practice in EA, to provide a forum for the intellectual and empirical discussions, to meet the needs of practitioners, to promote high standards in the teaching of, and research into EA, to encourage the formation of local groups in the association, and the like (Thomas, 1987). J.A. Richardson, a founding member of the *JEA*'s editorial board, hoped that this journal would help to widen the vision of those who administered schools and colleges in spite of a lack of academic background in the area of administration itself (Thomas, 1982). Yet, the editors and editorial board members of those years had to make their journal more influential and appealing to professors and practitioners, which in turn would contribute to reflective and intellectual debate in the field (Campbell, 1979; Hughes, 1997). Many years later, two editors felt this purpose had been well met (Campbell, 1979; Thomas, 1982).

In light of these contextual events and developments, three concerns were highlighted in the debate on EA as a field of study in those years.

The place of the Social Sciences in the field

Under the supreme of the social science disciplines in the field, EA borrowed relevant concepts and theories from these disciplines, and its programs became more specialized and increasingly theoretical and quantitative (Walker, 1984). Two decades later Willower (1996) commented:

The optimism of those days included the notion that if schools were studied using ideas and methods from developed and relevant specialties, it would be possible to bring about positive changes in education (p. 346).

Haller (1968) found that education was the most influential discipline for the authors who had written for *EAQ*, followed by sociology (32 percent of all citations and 49 percent of all social science citations), mainly due to the interest in organization theory among researchers of EA at that time. Much further behind were psychology and social psychology, which led Haller to assert that "when one considers that administration is often defined as 'decision making' or 'resource allocating' the scarcity of psychological, social psychological, economic, and political science citations stands out sharply" (p. 70).

The belief of many members of the field in those days was that a knowledge base produced in the disciplines and "translated" into the world of educational practitioners would help them in their work. This belief, however, engendered an intellectual controversy. Three scholars at that time criticized "the trend toward a discipline-based approach to the study of EA" (Culbertson, 1974, p. 7), suggesting to replace it by trends toward the use of more applied bodies of knowledge. In their view, the field could not be grounded in the disciplines because they were themselves in the process of development, and therefore what they had to offer was not well-validated theoretical principles or empirical laws on which to base applied procedures, but more or less fragmentary analytical frameworks in which to analyze clinical problems (Campbell, 1972; Hills, 1978). Campbell (1972) added:

... we also failed to take concepts and methodologies and reshape them to fit our world ... we realize that many of the concepts have little utility in the study of administration and those that do may have to be adapted and modified to our purpose. We are more problem oriented and we continue to ask what light the respective disciplines can shed on the problems ... (p. 14).

Their thoughts illuminate issues such as the nature of the knowledge base in EA and the practical orientation of the field.

The scope and nature of the knowledge base

Scholars of that time highlighted the lack of clear boundaries and cumulative knowledgebase in the field, reviewing the content of the papers published in journals in order to shed light on the field's major focuses and deficiencies. Hills (1978), for instance, claimed that "EA is clearly not a unified profession" (p. 6) and Farquhar (1974) pointed to the common disagreement over the most appropriate content for administrator preparation programs. Both topics of articles and programs in EA were claimed to be too varied and widespread (Campbell, 1979). Following a review of the first 14 issues of *EAQ*, Campbell (1979) noted:

The published articles [in *EAQ*] deal with such a wide range of articles that one is led to conclude that (1) there has been little cumulative building of knowledge in the field, and (2) that the editors, for the most part, dealt with the manuscripts submitted, with little or no conscious effort to secure manuscripts that might have contributed to the building of cumulative knowledge (p. 16).

The search for understanding the field's boundaries included commentaries and systematic reviews of the field's new journals. To begin with the former, a change of emphasis in the field was observed from school administration in local settings to EA in diverse settings, including nonpublic schools, college settings, state agency settings (Campbell, 1972) and higher education institutions (Culbertson, 1974). Burlingame (1979) identified several major areas of interest, among them democratic leadership, planning, and a vision of knowledge as power.

Two systematic reviews aimed at understanding the dynamic nature of the articles published in journals of EA by the 1970s (Campbell, 1979; Hills, 1978). Campbell (1979) found that the most mentioned topics of articles published in *EAQ* from 1965 to 1978 were: politics-policymaking (23.1 percent), school finance (18.8 percent), decision-making (14.6 percent), motivation-satisfaction (14.6 percent), preparation programs (14.6 percent), leadership (12.5 percent), administrative behavior (10.4 percent), authority-bureaucracy (10.4 percent), collective bargaining (10.4 percent), and organizational structure (10.4 percent). He concluded that *EAQ* had published articles representing a very wide range of topics, and any attempt to classify the articles by type proved to be extremely difficult, at least in part because the field had developed few foci of interest around which scholarly interests might be grouped (Campbell, 1979). Similar topics appeared in *EMA*, as two English writers showed two decades later (Hughes, 1997; Strain, 1997). The parallel English journal contained articles about management training, the relation between the professional and educational roles inherent in headship, and in-school evaluation (Hughes, 1997).

Scholars, though, called to pay more empirical attention to issues of school effects on student achievements (Erickson, 1979), comparative EA (Farquhar, 1974), politics of education, and superintendency (Campbell, 1976). For Campbell (1976), "training in our field should prepare persons for a wide range of other positions as well ... [such as] heads of non-public schools, directors of education for business firms and other organizations, and leadership posts in state and federal agencies ..." (p. 13), an illuminative call given the attention accorded in the field today to school-based educational leadership research.

The scientific-applied debate

Since the foundation of EA as a field of study, much debate has concerned the scientific versus applied (practical) nature of the field. A very central paper in this respect (Hills, 1978) analyzed the knowledge base of applied fields in terms of problem-oriented bodies of knowledge and relevance to practitioners, suggesting that EA professors should pay careful attention to the kinds of problems encountered by practitioners. In this vein, Willower (1975) argued for bringing the work of the practitioner and scholar closer together, and Thomas (1987) notified a decade later that the editors of *JEA* were prepared to consider for publication articles of interest to administrators, emphasizing in this way the field's commitment to practice in those days. Hughes (1997) found that

nearly a third of the articles published in EMA between 1972 and 1975 came from principals and staff of schools and colleges.

In this sense, for many scholars, including those who pressed for a more scientific knowledge base in the field (e.g. Hoy, 1978), the purpose of EA as an applied field of study was to transmit and develop theoretically-grounded knowledge organized around the problems of practice (Hills, 1978; Walker, 1965), as well as to “inform thoughtful administrative practice and assist the implementation of values in practice” (Willower, 1979, p. 37). Hoy (1978), an advocate of the scientific study in EA, expressed his awareness of practice, relevance and utility in light of public pressure to make teaching and research in EA more useful and pragmatic:

The 1970s bear witness to the vitality of practice orientation. There is a visible press to focus on practice – a press to train leaders to practice, to perform research to inform practice, and to make decisions to shape practice; a press for development and for practical research (p. 3).

Many scholars in that period believed that the field ought to help educational institutions to change (e.g. Culbertson, 1974; Hills, 1978). Nevertheless, they were aware of the difficulty to devise a knowledge base that provided practitioners with practical procedures either for diagnosing administrative problems or for improving administrative practices (Hoy, 1978) due to the nature of universities and schools as social systems, and the divergent languages and values characteristic of theorists and practitioners, as Willower (1975) noted.

Whereas the applied nature of the field was not contested, two scholars of that time, Willower (1975, 1979) and Hoy (1978), highlighted the significant place of scientific inquiry in the field and the need to reaffirm the field’s commitment to it in order to understand a great deal about organizations. In their view, the field’s main purpose was “the free search for ideas and their critical examination” (Willower, 1979, p. 37), consistently and permanently, mainly, as Hoy (1978) believed, through a systematic and critical empirical inquiry of hypothetical propositions (i.e. positivistic methodologies)[7]. Reviews of journal papers from those years (e.g. Campbell, 1979; Hughes, 1997; Willower, 1975) supported this line of thought, providing evidence for some increase in the proportion of theoretical, conceptual and empirical articles at the second half of the 1970s as compared to earlier decades.

In spite of this increase, the two scholars seemed to lament the tenor of their times which was “practice, action and immediate results, not theory, research and reflection” (Hoy, 1978, p. 7), explaining this situation both by the decline of the theory movement and by the search among practitioners for plain and rapid solutions:

Such disenchantment with theory as may exist seems to stem from unrealistically high expectations for quick infusions of new knowledge via theory based research, on the one hand, and from concern about the difficulties of applying theory to practice, on the other hand (Willower, 1975, p. 77).

In light of the phenomenological revolution several years before, Hoy (1978) stated that security, respectability and stability in EA could only be achieved if the field strictly adhered to a traditional (positivistic) model of natural sciences and conduct scientific research rather than focusing on policy research or seeking to solve human or social problems[8].

The 1980s: epistemological concerns about purposes and boundaries

The 1980s witnessed governmental policy alterations in many countries, leading to new education reforms and legislations. In the US, the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, "A nation at risk," encompassed the recognition of the need to improve the principalship (Owens and Shakeshaft, 1992), while in England, a left-wing government introduced market forces into the public sector, including education (Oplatka *et al.*, 2002). Absurdly, this was also a time of public budget cuts, which in turn resulted in a period of decline in the field (Willower, 1983), and in a series of examinations regarding preparation and scholarship in EA (Clark-Lindle and Foster, 2004). This was largely expressed by critical questions posed by a few field members about the evolution of the field and its quality (e.g. Griffiths, 1983; Riffel, 1986), and by the appearance of the first *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, compiled by Boyan (1988) as an attempt to offer part of the knowledgebase in the field.

In the view of American scholars at that time, the field had reached its maturity and improved considerably, although there was a great deal of room for improvement in the future (e.g. McCarthy, 1986; Willower, 1983). The field was considered to exhibit a remarkable degree of liveliness and intellectual vigor (Willower, 1983), through large-scale theoretical and empirical work (Willower, 1987), becoming more conceptually sophisticated (McCarthy, 1986). In England, however, where the field had formally been established only in the 1970s, Tipton (1982) felt that the field was not as well-developed yet as compared to the US. This is the background against which four scholarly issues appeared in the 1980s.

"The big bang": a limitless expansion of the field

While queries about the field's content and knowledge base had emerged almost from its establishment, the polarization of areas of study, sub-fields, methodologies and paradigms[9] seemed to generate an urgent need in the 1980s to understand what field members studied when they did research in EA, as Haller and Knapp (1985) aimed to, and if the field had objectively defined its knowledge (Hoy, 1994). Underlying this debate was the common conjecture that the field is too diffuse, inchoate, diverse, complex and fragmentized, covering a multitude of ideas and activities representing considerable differences of views between various groups within the profession[10]. There was a virtual absence of a unified, cumulative knowledge base, coherent conceptual unity and methodology as well as a consensus over theoretical issues (Bates, 1980; Glatter, 1987; King, 1984; Riffel, 1986; Willower, 1987)[11]. Hoy's (1982) article was especially insightful in illustrating this situation:

Systematic and cumulative knowledge building is conspicuously absent, and researchers pay little attention to each other's work. Replications of studies are unusual, and researchers rarely analyze another's work with the expressed purpose of correcting the obvious defects or otherwise improving their own research (p. 4).

In this respect, a varied picture of the field unfolded. It was evident that the field focused on the administrator's beliefs, values and attitudes (e.g. Haller and Knapp, 1985), values and equity (Willower, 1987), motivation (Hoy, 1982), organizational culture and climate (Willower, 1987), and management/policy interface (Glatter, 1987). Above all, however, the increased public demand for accountability (and criticism of public education) urged researchers to be more concerned with school outcomes,

improvement and effectiveness (Hoy, 1982; McCarthy, 1986; Willower, 1987). However, some scholars in that period warned against undue emphasis over issues of management and technical activities divorced from values and ethics (Glatter, 1987; Willower, 1987).

In addition, the field's diversification and complexity were manifested through scattered efforts devoted to multiple aims in EA departments (Willower, 1983), professors who were more diverse in their perspectives and background (McCarthy, 1986), a wide variety of methodological paradigms (Willower, 1987), and diverse conceptual frameworks guiding research (e.g. classical theory, functionalist theory, behaviorism, human relations theory, phenomenology, symbolic interaction, neo-symbolic interaction or critical theory) (Bates, 1993; Clark-Lindle and Foster, 2004)[12], without dominance of any one of them (Griffiths, 1983)[13]. This internal diversification was related to professors' own allegiance to differing disciplines or to differing ideologies within these disciplines (Bates, 1980).

Under these circumstances, some scholars debated the impact of diversification and specialization on the field. McCarthy (1986) commented:

Perhaps, specialization was a necessary developmental stage to broaden perspectives and the acceptance of various conceptual lenses through which to view the organization and administration of schools. The term "research in EA" is no longer considered synonymous with organizational theory. I see it not as a sign of fragmentation but as a positive development that reduces parochialism in the field as a whole (p. 11).

Similarly, Riffel (1986) maintained that diversity of standpoints was likely to result in a theory that combines intellectual craftsmanship with moral engagement.

Other scholars were less sanguine, suggesting that the diversity of theoretical and paradigmatic views was "an indication of the amorphous nature of the field" (Bates, 1980, p. 2), which fragmented the field and obviated a comprehensive, holistic understanding of the school as organization (Campbell, 1981). Admittedly, the conceptual pluralism seems to have sharpened the long dispute over the theoretical vs. practical orientation of the field, a controversial debate that gained more attention in the literature of the 1980s, probably due to increased governmental demands to improve public education. Illustrative of this debate was the recognition of professors' role conflicts (e.g. to pledge sole allegiance to a single paradigm, to examine critically both practice and scholarship and at the same time be supportive of practice), and the widening gap between theory and practice in the field (Burlingame, 1985; Campbell, 1981; Owens and Shakeshaft, 1992). The next two sections elaborate this controversy of the 1980s.

The field's main purpose: an improvement of practice

The scientific-practical contest already permeated the field's literature, as we saw in the section on the 1960-1970s; therefore, the question arising is whether the characteristics of this dispute were changed or reshaped in the 1980s to justify a second look at this issue. The answer is too complex to be answered in yes or no. In broad terms, it was likely that the conceptual expansion of the field coupled with an augmentation in research-oriented professors, attributed by McCarthy (1986) to a greater emphasis on research in the promotion and tenure process, led several scholars to criticize the prominence given to scientific and empirical works in the field at the expense of applied knowledge (e.g. Tipton, 1982; Walker, 1984). This resulted in

de-emphasis of the normative dimension (Tom, 1987), a production of irrelevant knowledge for practitioners, and avoidance from practitioners' problems (Haller and Knapp, 1985).

This line of thought was accompanied by a scholarship that opposed referring to EA as a science or discipline, but rather as a field of practice (Campbell, 1981; Culbertson, 1981; Glatter, 1987; Hodgkinson, 1981; Riffel, 1986). It was argued that EA was not comparable to physics or chemistry, was not a discipline or field of inquiry, but rather a field of practice, which required a theory of practice based on the special features of educational institutions. This was accounted for by an absence of conceptual purity in the field (Hodgkinson, 1981), the relation of EA to cultural and social contexts (Riffel, 1986), and its reliance on other disciplines (Campbell, 1981). Culbertson (1981) illustrated this line of thought in a slightly more modest way:

...The critics of positivism argue that it is unsound to seek explanations and predictions in contingency-laden human contexts. Rather, the goals of inquiry should be more realistic, i.e. to produce understandings and interpretations of these contexts (p. 41).

Two conclusions were drawn from this criticism: first, professors of EA no longer had to be restricted to the extension of new (positivistic) knowledge, but as field members were counseled to be fundamentally concerned with the improvement of practice in the field (Battersby, 1987; Campbell, 1981; Tom, 1987), and with the articulation of courses for the administrative practitioners (McCarthy, 1986). Although this expectation appeared, to a limited extent, in the literature of the 1970s, scholars in the 1980s contested unequivocally and fervently the great emphasis given in past decades to research as if this were the main, almost sole, aim of the field.

Second, the dichotomy – research vs practice – was replaced by a complementary hybridization. In the 1980s, there was a greater emphasis on field-based research and policy studies that link researchers and practitioners, i.e., the professor was considered to be a link between disciplinary-based knowledge and the practice of education (Campbell, 1981; McCarthy, 1986), responsible for producing knowledge that would enable practitioners to effectively enhance pupil outcomes (Haller and Knapp, 1985). To this end, Campbell (1981) suggested retraining those professors whose main education was in the disciplines:

I am convinced that we must turn the relationship around and insist that the disciplines be focused on problems in the field or practice instead of having the field of practice used merely as a convenient laboratory for the disciplines. This change in emphasis will require more commitment than some discipline specialists appear to have had ... (p. 13).

Having said that, he added:

... It may require that a greater number of persons with initial training and commitment in education pursue advanced training in the disciplines (p. 13).

In this last sentence, he pointed to some concerns raised by scholars in respect to the scientific background of those professors who had begun their careers as practitioners and later on moved to professorship. Yet, few scholars impelled researchers to conduct inquiries into school reality and problems, suggesting how to act in a wise and effective way based on theories and scientific rules such as skepticism, relativism (McCarthy, 1986; Tom, 1987; Willower, 1983), otherwise we would have been at risk of returning to the prescriptive period of the 1940s.

The importance of theory for the field

In the face of “the applied field movement,” some authors (two of them took the same stance in the 1970s) glamorized the use of theory and research in the field, because the practice benefited the most when it was “examined and reexamined through the lenses supplied by theories and concepts used by reflective and critically minded individuals” (Willower, 1983, p.194). Theories, if developed carefully, were premised to enable administrators to deal with the human complexities they face (Hoy, 1982) and were to be implemented by them in their work environment (Battersby, 1987).

The need to focus, first and foremost, on research was also highlighted in the scholarship of those days (e.g. Hodgkinson, 1981; Hoy, 1982; Willower, 1983), probably because relatively insufficient numbers of professors spent time on research. Willower (1983) lamented (again) the poor scholarly work in the field:

How could a field be intellectually vital when only a limited contingent of professors pursue research and scholarship. I believe that a multiplier effect operates in the intellectual realm, i.e. the work of a limited number of creative and talented individuals can become the basis for large parts of the literature. An idea conceived by a single person can also generate much work by others (p. 186).

The kind of research, however, was controversial; while Willower (1985) observed that “the prevailing spirit of inquiry is one that values thoughtful explanation, novel ideas and insightful hypotheses and speculation” (p. 8), Hoy (1982) clearly indicated that the questionnaire was the widespread research methodology in the field.

Disillusionment from the disciplines

Whereas previous decades were characterized by a prevalent belief in the potential contributions of the disciplines to the field and practice of EA, new voices appeared in the 1980s. Indeed, some scholars acknowledged the dependency of the field on the basic disciplines, including management and foundations of education (e.g. Campbell, 1981; Hoy, 1982; McCarthy, 1986; Tom, 1987), because, as McCarthy (1986) claimed, interdisciplinary perspectives did not negate the uniqueness of EA as a field of study. At the same time, nevertheless, they suggested a careful transfer of concepts developed in a discipline to the field. To wit, “only when the concepts have been tested in the educational setting,” as Campbell (1981) noted, “can the nature and extent of that adaptation be ascertained” (p. 13).

In contrast, scholars like Bates (1980) and Tipton (1982) called to develop a distinctive approach based on practice and educational issues, because educational organizations had much in common with other formal organizations, but they were strikingly different. In this sense, scholars protested against the few references to schools in the field’s discipline-based textbooks (King, 1984), the disappointing results of discipline-oriented inquiry (Tom, 1987), and the limited exposure of professors from the disciplines who received a position in a department of EA to schools, students, teachers, administrators and parents (Campbell, 1981). Tom (1987) added a new critical view in this respect:

The discipline-oriented scholarship is fragmentary and reductionist . . . [because] the problem is deeper than the tendency of disciplines to approach phenomena from different directions. Paradigms that purport to represent a limited realm of educational phenomena accurately often fundamentally distort the very phenomena they are designed to analyze. Reductionism

would not be such a serious problem if educational findings were not time and culture bound or if teaching and administration were not such integrative enterprises ... (p. 11).

The new education reforms in the 1990s would challenge his thoughtful argument.

The 1990s: public pressures towards quality and practice

Education took the national political spotlight in the 1990s as it never had before in many western countries, as more and more right-wing governments adopted policies of privatization, accountability and marketization in order to "save" the country's education and raise students' academic achievements (Glatter, 1999; Weiner, 2000). In England (and later on in some Commonwealth countries), for example, the educational legislation of the Thatcher governments in the 1980s introduced forms of centralization, devolution, school choice, a system of national testing, performance management and executive leadership (Bottery, 2006; Glatter, 1999; Oplatka *et al.*, 2002).

The field of EA responded to those and related changes by focusing on educational leadership, the impact of policy on practice, effective principal preparation programs, and the quality of research and programs (Foskett *et al.*, 2005; Glatter, 1999; Ribbins, 1999)[14]. This was accompanied, however, by concerns about the field's future directions, a sense of hard times and a need for renewal and improvement (Achilles, 1994; Bell, 1991; Boyd, 1999; Bush, 1999; Swafford, 1990). Within these new contexts, two associations (BELMAS[15] and UCEA) initiated seminars and task forces aimed at identifying and mapping the field's unique areas of study and knowledge (Hoy, 1994; Ribbins, 1999). Bush (1999) presented the new situation explicitly and clearly:

Educational management has become an important discipline but it needs a period of renewal. The prize for a successful review could be a new beginning and continued growth ... Educational management is not in crisis but we are at a crossroads. It is time to develop a new sense of direction; a revitalized discipline is required to meet the needs of schools and colleges, teachers and managers, in the new millennium (pp. 249-250).

The new governmental policies led to an emphasis on the practical utility of research and its quality, and particularly on that concerned with leadership, the new promise for effective schooling in the era of accountability and ostensibly tightly organized schools. This brought about a revival of prescriptive books attempting to improve the practice. This background had some influence on the intellectual debate of that period.

Acceptance of the incomplete nature of the field's knowledge base

A prominent change in the scholarly discourse in the 1990s referred to the recognition that the field's knowledgebase may reasonably be flawed, incomplete, political, dynamic, broad, reserved and extensive (Bush, 1999; Hoy, 1996; Lomotey, 1995; Rowan, 1995a), features that were no longer considered to be merely negative. This represented the tentative nature of applied knowledge emanating from policy changes and developments in theory and research.

Similar to scholarly articles in the 1980s, the picture arising from articles in the 1990s was of extended boundaries, i.e. multiple paradigms and a tremendous variety of topics and subject areas published in the field's texts (Boyd, 1999), which made it virtually impossible, according to Swafford (1990), "to say precisely what defines research and scholarship in EA" (p. 18)[16]. In the 1990s, though, new areas of interest

were generated, recycled or intensified, such as stress and burnout, participatory decision making (Swafford, 1990), effective school research, reform movement, human resource theory (Owens and Shakeshaft, 1992), school change, marketing, curriculum management (Bell, 1991), teaching and learning, and social contexts of schooling (Rowan, 1995a).

Here, again, a controversial debate between advocates and opponents of multiple paradigms in the field emerged. The former believed that there was no one best way of thinking about EA; therefore, different theoretical paradigms and a more varied and inclusive methodologies were necessary as a basis for adequately understanding the multiple aspects of educational organizations, solving varied problems and challenging conventional wisdoms (Bull and McCarthy, 1995; Griffiths, 1997; Hoy, 1994; Owens and Shakeshaft, 1992; Willower, 1993). Griffiths (1997) sharpened this point:

The basic idea is that all problems cannot be studied fruitfully using a single theory. Some problems are large and complex and no single theory is capable of encompassing them, while others, although seemingly simple and straightforward, can be better understood through the use of multiple theories (p. 372).

In contrast, other scholars indicated that a state of multiple paradigms results in competition over the “truths,” insular lines of thought and fragmentation (Fitz, 1999; Lane, 1995). This was expressed by a focus on management and leadership in isolation from other aspects of the school and schooling.

Regardless of this controversy, some scholars suggested extending the field’s content by including interdisciplinary thinking (Paige and Mestenhauser, 1999), issues of learning and teaching in schools (Rowan, 1995a, b), classroom assessment, learning strategies (Hoy, 1994), issues of racism, sexism, classism and other illegitimate forms of exclusion issues of social justice (Lomotey, 1995; Ribbins, 1999). This was justified by their contribution to practice[17]. It was assumed that these new topics would provide administrators with better tools to understand learning and teaching issues, in general, and the interconnected nature of instructional and organizational issues, in particular (Levin, 1999; Prestine, 1995). Similarly, the preparation of future educators, who reflect understanding, appreciation and respect for cultural differences, was related to issues of sexism and racism (Hoy, 1994; Lomotey, 1995).

Other scholars argued and justified the case for a stronger comparative and international emphasis in the field, which could expose the value of theory and practice from varying cultural perspectives and enable educators to acquire a better understanding of historical, political, social and cultural influences on EA (Dimmock and Walker, 1998; Paige and Mestenhauser, 1999), a neglected area of study in the field during the 1990s (Levin, 1999).

In light of the field’s over-diversification, it is noteworthy to illuminate the concerns brought up (again) by some scholars in regard to the separation of administrative concerns from educational concerns and the dominant role given to the former in the field (Bates, 1993; Bell, 1991; Bush, 1999; Fitz, 1999; Rowan, 1995a)[18]. Glatter (1999), for example, suggested reconnecting the field with the educational enterprise (in terms of human learning and development), and Ribbins (1999) felt it was time for EA to focus much more upon what was specifically educational about its concerns, i.e. schools rather than industrial organizations.

Deeper insights into the practitioner's needs

The expansion of the field discussed above signaled, at least in part, an attempt to make the field more compatible with the needs of the practice, as they had been reshaped by the new ideologies underlying governmental legislations and policies. These policies stimulated an old debate in the field, in that "the practical orientation" was backed now by greater public demands for efficiency and improvement of the practice and concomitantly the research which was assumed to entail these demands. Thus, scholars at that time described the field as "an example of a practical form of knowledge" (Ribbins, 1999, p. 234), distinct and distinguishable from other disciplines of administration because practice and training in education were unique (Strain, 1997). Rowan (1995a) commented:

What is distinctive about EA, as distinct from other forms of administration, is that it occurs within a particular social context. In my view, EA can be defined as the exercise of leadership in the context of formal, organizational arrangements explicitly chartered by society to produce learning through teaching (p. 349).

In the context of pervasive discontent from the public sector, a notion of justification arose; a disciplinary, yet practical knowledge was argued to be a precondition for any effectiveness and improvement in practice because it informed administrators about what was right, what worked, what was risky, what could be done, and whether it would be an ideal state (Hodgkinson, 1993; Immegart, 1990). The contribution of theories was also highlighted.

Theory was no longer positioned in front of practice, but as an indispensable means to improve it. In this view, one could not run a school effectively without using theory to inform his/her activities and decision (Owens and Shakeshaft, 1992), because theories offered tentative explanations of reality that helped administrators grasp the order and regularities of social behavior in organizations, gaining insights informed by theoretical knowledge, and changing the reality adequately (Hoy, 1996).

Accordingly, some scholars (e.g. Immegart, 1990) called to develop a theoretical and empirical knowledge that was "organized around the problems of practice, including administrative intervention and its consequences for teaching and learning" (Miskel, 1990, p. 39), a call that was adopted in some of the field's journals (Strain, 1997). The practitioner's role, then, was to judge whether what the theorist said worked (Lane, 1995). For example, Bull and McCarthy (1995) indicated that school leaders might come to see law and ethics as relevant to all their decisions and actions, which in turn, would reinforce the effectiveness of their performance.

More, but still insufficient, empirical studies

While past decades have been characterized by a small portion of professors who centered primarily on scholarly work and research, articles in the 1990s transmitted a sense of some improvement in the amount and quality of this aspect in the work of people in the field, although a need for further progress was acknowledged (Bush, 1999; Miskel, 1990). Evidently, the proportion of papers first authored by university academics based on empirical work (mainly a survey research) appeared in *JEA* (Swafford, 1990), and a group of professors who saw themselves as experts in a line of inquiry (e.g. policies of education, organizational studies) was observed (Burlingame and Harris, 1998; Fitz, 1999).

In spite of this alteration in the field, some scholars pointed to the lack of strong orientations and active commitments to research and scholarship among professors of EA, as well as the imbalance between research and practice in the field (Griffiths, 1997; Immegart, 1990; Miskel, 1990). Griffiths (1997) complained that practitioners' problems were not adequately explained by present theories nor examined successfully by present-day research due to, he believed, a strong anti-intellectual bias among both professors and practitioners, poor financial support for research, lack of a full-time graduate student body, and absence of powerful theories[19].

Therefore, voices in favor of the need to include more research-based texts and theoretical analysis were strongly and excessively heard in the 1990s (e.g. Bush, 1999; Willower, 1996). Miskel (1990) articulated this need sharply:

Professors should internalize the spirit of enquiry and develop an abiding curiosity about the problems of their specialty – about how schools work and how to explain their behavior (p. 43).

He further noted that departments of EA must encourage their professors to spend extensive and productive time on research and update their research and scholarly skills. Otherwise, the field would be under severe danger of decline.

These calls were accompanied, however, with some illuminations about the weaknesses of theory and research in EA, especially in respect to its irrelevance to practical needs and activities. Scholars acknowledged the failure of theory to improve the teaching and practice of EA (Owens and Shakeshaft, 1992), and the minor contribution of dominant views to our understanding of how schools operate (Maddock, 1994; Willower, 1996). Even though these and related factors indicated in years gone by inspired a sense of *deja vu*, no thoughtful writing was found to suggest ways to handle these weaknesses. The work of Evers and Lakomski (1991) was an exceptional attempt to shed some light on the place of theory and paradigms in EA as a field of study.

Debate over the work of Evers and Lakomski

The work of Evers and Lakomski from 1991 received a respectful place in the discourse of the field, as it stood as a major contribution to the literature of administrative philosophy. Because of insufficient space and the great volume of debate about their work, I briefly present their arguments and the critical scholarly papers that consecutively appeared in the journals during the 1990s. Broadly, Evers and Lakomski's (1991) book sought to examine critically the epistemological roots of the various paradigms of EA which competed for supremacy over several decades, and to trace the ways by which knowledge was justified. Their aim was to advance an alternative to positivism as a basis for a new science of EA, suggesting "to move ahead to a particular post-positivist theory of science that is broad enough to incorporate considerations of ethics and human subjectivity" (Evers and Lakomski, 1993, p. 141). Such a theory should be justified by a coherentist epistemology, which they saw as the major alternative to the foundationalist epistemological assumptions shared by positivism and even some of its critics. They made abundantly clear the limitations of positivistic thought and of subjectivism and critical theory, both of which attacked positivism and attained new popularity after long periods of intellectual marginality[20].

The great influence their book had on some scholars at that time was reflected by a special issue devoted to commentaries on this book. Several scholars pointed to the weaknesses of Evers and Lakomski's analysis, criticizing, for example, their overambitious attempt to propound a new systematic doctrine of "coherentism" (Hodgkinson, 1993), their misinterpretation of Greenfield's main position (Gronn and Ribbins, 1993), as well as their limited attention to the concrete, empirical side of knowledge-getting in EA as an applied field of inquiry. Bates (1993) further pointed to some de-emphasis in their work, in that a great deal of research is done under banners other than those they discussed, or the insufficient attention to the parts played by the societal and social science contexts in bringing about change.

This controversial debate appeared later on in some handbooks and books published by field members in the 1990s and then gradually waned. The 2000s brought with them new revivals to old debates.

2000-2007: a time of critical reflections

The dominance of "globalization," i.e. the great influence of international organizations on economic, social, technological and cultural phenomena (Bush, 2004), on one hand, and increasing pluralism and multiculturalism along with growing achievement, economic and social gaps (Mulford, 2005), on the other hand, is of considerable significance in the field today. Within this context, increased attention is given by governments to reviewing educational policy, practice and research (Mulford, 2005), to the need for effective leadership development for school improvement (Bush, 2004; MacBeath, 2007), and to foster equity in schools (Honig and Seashore-Louis, 2007). The establishment of the National College for School Leadership in England is one result of these processes (Riley and Mulford, 2007).

Under these circumstances, it is a time of wondering, questions, and attempts to understand issues such as the field's intellectual work, ways of knowledge production, intellectual histories, methodologies, and authors' biographies (e.g. Foskett *et al.*, 2005; Gunter and Ribbins, 2002; Ribbins, 2006). This trend is exemplified by a sample of questions posed by scholars:

- (1) What are the specific interests of the field (Gunter, 2002)?
- (2) Does EA have well-established theories or leading ideas (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 2000)?
- (3) Who produces knowledge in EA and where (Gunter and Ribbins, 2003)?

A conspicuous disagreement over the field's proper direction was observed (Heck and Hallinger, 2005), although "educational leadership" as an area of study gains the bulk of interest in the field in our time (Thomas, n.d.)(21]. In contrast, however, the role of "theory" in the field has been marginalized, although a special issue of JEA was devoted to the usefulness of organizational theory to the field (Greenfield, 2005)[22].

A need for renewal: critical looks at the field

The years that have passed since the start of the third millennium are characterized by many voices that encourage critical examinations and assessments of the field's development, construction, maturity, progress, theory-generation and future directions (e.g. Foskett *et al.*, 2005; Greenfield, 2005; Heck and Hallinger, 2005; Johnson and Owens, 2005; Pounder and Johnson, 2007). Underpinning these voices are postmodern

critiques that encourage reflections upon current patterns of thinking (Pounder and Johnson, 2007), which, in turn, may yield useful insights into gaps in the knowledge base (Greenfield, 2005), and a sense of malfunctions and lack of effectiveness of the field, in terms of knowledge production and scholar preparations (Pounder, 2000).

Some of the critical issues arising in articles nowadays have already been indicated by scholars in the past. Yet, new highlights about these "old" issues are observed. First, there are concerns about the form and quality of research in the field due to the overemphasis on practice and utility (Gunter, 2000; Johnson and Fauske, 2005; Ribbins, 2004), about the scant reference elucidated by philosophy of science (Willower and Uline, 2001), the high proportion of non-empirical work in the field (Gorard, 2005), and the over-polarization of qualitative-based inquiries (Gorard, 2005; Heck and Hallinger, 2005). The last weakness means, by and large, a lack of research syntheses, longitudinal studies, robust quantitative studies, or the mixing of qualitative with quantitative data in the field's texts (Foskett *et al.*, 2005; Gorard, 2005). The "revival" of rigid and robust methodologies is expressed in a paper written by the current editors of EAQ, in which they explicitly seek "rigorous and relevant scholarly work that enhances linkages among and utility for educational policy, practice, and research arenas" (Pounder and Johnson, 2007, p. 261).

Second, as past scholars have discussed at length, the knowledge base of the field has been claimed to be irrelevant to practitioners' needs and problems (Riehl *et al.*, 2000), theories did not inform practice (Greenfield, 2005), and its research did not impact substantive practical problems (Foskett *et al.*, 2005; Ogawa *et al.*, 2000). This has accounted for the implausibility to build consensus on important problems (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 2000), or to accumulate knowledge about how to engage in practical activities or how to prepare students to do them successfully (Riehl *et al.*, 2000).

More interesting and illuminating, however, are some new critical insights gained into the field by several scholars. As far as practice is concerned, scholars have critically pointed to the limited accessibility of conventional research to diverse groups of practitioners and its bad reputation among policy-makers and administrators. Therefore, increased efforts at research disseminations and employment of more quantitative, large sample survey have been recommended (Gorard, 2005; Riehl *et al.*, 2000). Pounder (2000) elaborates on this weakness:

Perhaps our greatest unmet challenge as academic researchers is that of communicating effectively to practitioner and policy audiences. The importance of research dissemination is frequently discussed, but we often give rhetoric to this idea rather than actually articulating clear and effective ways to meet this challenge (p. 469).

A repetitive criticism of EA as a field refers to its fragmented, disintegrative and inchoate scholarship. This time, however, it gains a much deeper debate. Generally, the diversification of the field is argued to generate several problems; researchers employing different conceptual and methodological approaches and asking various questions (Heck and Hallinger, 2005), and a mosaic of too many small-scale and semi-detached institutional units characterize the knowledge production (Gunter and Ribbins, 2003).

Concomitantly, the accumulation of coherent, systematic knowledge is impeded, an integration of research studies into holistic, conclusive evidence useful for practitioners and policy-makers is less plausible, coordination of research programs is minimized,

and in-depth and consistent investigation of a particular topic is rare (Heck and Hallinger, 2005; Ogawa *et al.*, 2000; Pounder, 2000). This poor situation is explained by the strong, practical orientation (i.e. when the policy changes, research focuses change accordingly), the search for fashionable submissions, and the nature of social sciences.

Interestingly, there are very few voices holding up a stricter articulation of the field's boundaries, mulling over the degree to which an academic field, like EA, can or should focus on some specific set of topics or research questions on the ground that this focus improves knowledge production (e.g. Ogawa *et al.*, 2000). Tschannen-Moran *et al.* (2000) argue that we need to articulate a few major conceptual problems around which the field could frame its research efforts. In contrast, some scholars believe that multiple viewpoints (which means a lack of clear and demarcated knowledgebase are needed and strengthen the field – Pounder and Johnson, 2007; Ribbins, 2004; Riehl *et al.*, 2000), a view heard also in past decades.

Two topics were specifically critically addressed. First, in line with scholars in the 1990s discussed above, a prominent failure of the field referred to the scant attention being given to the relationships between the school's structure and management and processes of teaching and learning, mostly how organizational variables impact, limit or support these processes (Greenfield, 2005; Gunter, 2002; Honig and Seashore-Louis, 2007). The second topic referred to the dominance of "educational leadership" in the field's discourse which, in turn, leads some scholars to critically reflect upon its research in a variety of aspects. Briefly, they argued that "leadership" remains in large part a theoretical enigma and paradox (Allix and Gronn, 2005), that too much research is about leadership rather than leading and leaders (Gunter and Ribbins, 2002; Ribbins, 2006), and that most literature on educational leadership is from England or US (Mulford, 2005). Gorard (2005) adds another critical outlook suggesting that "the field is very inward-looking, apparently unwilling to test the impact of leadership on anything but management itself" (p. 158).

It is likely that the (fashionable?) dominance of educational leadership in the field will lead more scholars to reflect critically on this phenomenon which gradually but steadily has constituted an essential part of the field's scholarship.

The field's future depends on a strong practice orientation

Whereas the applied orientation of the field has been considerably debated in past decades, an extreme notion of impending disaster and concerns for the field's future has accompanied the discussions about the schism between theory and practice in the 2000s (e.g. Keedy, 2005). This might be related to greater public pressures towards improving education through study and research, and a belief that research in applied fields cannot occur without practitioners (Riehl *et al.*, 2000). Theory and practice are no longer considered to be dichotomized (Gunter, 2000). Illustrative of this notion is the following quote:

Without a clear payoff for our research in terms of enhancing policy and practice, however measured, educational leadership and management (ELM) researchers will surely be doomed to an existence that is marginal in both academic and professional arenas (Foskett *et al.*, 2005, p. 245).

This notion also comes hand in hand with the commitment of the field to the practitioners as empathically held by some scholars nowadays. In their view, members of the field are obligated, by and large, to assist practitioners in their work, to improve

their functioning, and to change their own professional lives as well as to make research and knowledge more appealing and useful to policy-makers and practitioners (Honig and Seashore-Louis, 2007; Pounder, 2000). This commitment, in turn, is assumed to increase public funding to the field (Foskett *et al.*, 2005), and provides new ways for thinking about practice, thereby helping to generate new research questions (Riehl *et al.*, 2000). Yet some warnings against an unrestrained propensity towards practice are heard (Heck and Hallinger, 2005).

To this end, it is suggested to institutionalize the relationship between academic researchers and administrative practitioners as well as to establish formal channels to facilitate research dissemination through the field's associations (e.g. UCEA, BELMAS) (Pounder, 2000; Riehl *et al.*, 2000) or universities (Keedy, 2005). Professors are encouraged to help practitioners develop long-term perspectives through the description of practice, and respond to practitioners' need for knowledge that will aid in decision-making and action (Gunter and Ribbins, 2003; Keedy, 2005; Riehl *et al.*, 2000). The balance skews again towards practice.

Some lessons for the state-of-the-art in our era

What does such a historical review amount to? What conclusions can be drawn? What implications for the field of EA emerge from this review? Although past reviews have uncovered many of the shortcomings of the field, the historical view adopted in this review enables illuminating the dynamic development of insights about the field, alongside some progress in our understanding of the field globally.

In light of the constraints stemming from a limited scope of review, the major concluding epistemological message of this historical account is of "recycling," i.e. the field is typically embedded with debates over similar ideas, assumptions, and insights about EA as a field of study throughout the last five decades. To wit, in spite of some minor changes and innovative "discoveries," field members observe similar features and contradictions (e.g. a focus on theory or practice, the relationship with social sciences), without sufficiently suggesting ways to cope with weaknesses, uncertainties, and contradictions (the works of Ribbins and Gunter in the 2000s are an exceptional example for they suggest mapping the field in a systematic way). For instance, since the 1960s onward scholars have emphasized the difficulty to utilize the field's knowledge (either theoretical or practical) to improve the practice and help practitioners solve their problems, without suggesting solutions or new directions in an adequate manner. They usually suffice stressing a certain flaw and pointing to its sources.

Furthermore, changes in views and insights are artificially constructed; they represent a fashionable focus on a certain standpoint in a certain period that is replaced by another trendy view in the consecutive period. For example, in the 1970s there was a strong practical orientation while in the 1980s we find more concerns about the scientific nature of the field. Periods of ferment and turbulence lead field members to adhere to new views (e.g. positivism, phenomenology, critical theory), but the major concerns in the field (e.g. unclear boundaries) are sparingly addressed. The "recycling" reflects, in some sense, the intellectual immaturity of the field and its dependence on environmental elements (e.g. policy changes).

Hence, scholars have highlighted the field's unclear boundaries, lack of cumulative knowledge, and its diversification and fragmentation, which result, partially, from a

lack of funding for comprehensive studies in EA research. They continuously search for a common knowledge base in the field's programs, debate the purpose of research in the field (informing the profession or the practice? prescriptive or empirical knowledge?), mull over the place of theory in an applied field, and attempt to define the "proper" clients of it. This is accompanied by concerns about the quality of research, practical utility and dissemination of research findings.

This is not to say, however, that there is no progress in our understanding of scholarly aspects of the field. Indeed, many interesting and profound insights about the field have been accumulated throughout the years, including our recognition that an applied field has no clear boundaries, its field members usually move from one topic to another, or that theory may be beneficial for practice. In addition, new areas of study have been suggested, and the field's content has been expanded considerably. Still, we could not find solutions to the major questions: What is EA? What is its knowledge base? Who are those legitimated to access its professoriate? What are the core topics of the field? Actually, we seem to have turned these questions around now for many years without being able to answer them.

This brings me to raise another point. Due to the implausibility of answering these questions adequately thus far, field members have consistently searched for "big," "central" issues to which to adhere. This, in turn, has enabled them to juxtapose the field with a popular area of study, and thereby artificially define and demarcate its intellectual borders and knowledge. Thus, in the 1960s, it was the glorification of Social Sciences and their methodologies that gave justification for the field. Topics such as rational planning, democratic leadership and school finance were in conjunction with this prevailing notion. In the 1980s there were some calls for highlighting more educational topics in the field, coupled with a legitimization to expand the field's boundaries and include a wide variety of topics. The 1990s, in contrast, brought topics such as policy studies, learning and teaching and leadership to justify the field and define its purposes more clearly. The last topic became the leading topic in the spirit of our times. It is likely that every period has its own panacea for the field's infirmities.

The unsatisfactory "solutions," used so far by EA scholars, coupled with the ongoing expansion and diversification of the field threatens, to a certain extent, the legitimacy of EA as a distinctive field with particular purposes and core, accumulated knowledge base, as well as limits the value of research in the field, as Mulford (2005) concluded subsequent to his observation of the education discipline. Consequently, the field needs a widespread general agreement over its core contents and central purposes, which in turn demarcate its intellectual and epistemological borders and sharpen its distinctiveness in relation to other fields of study.

To this end, the field's associations and journal editors need to articulate an agreed-upon formal convention that defines, in broad terms, the contents and topics legitimated to be part of the field of EA (e.g. is a paper about teaching education with no relation to school structure or management a legitimated topic?), rather than remaining "policy-free", as Thomas (n.d.), indicated. Very reasonably, this will have some influence upon programs in EA. This "treaty" should also encompass some references to the theory/practice debate (is there a place for prescriptive texts? Should authors end their paper with practical implications?). This will help us to generate a repertoire of reliable research findings applicable to practice, as Mitchell and Ortiz (2006) aspired to. Further, professors of EA have to know the focus of their work (pure

research? applied research?), which is of high significance for their tenure and academic promotion.

We no longer live and work in a homogenous and “plain” field (e.g. one paradigm, a unified background of professors), but conversely in a very unclear and manifold one. To survive, apart from funding for large-scale EA studies, the field needs clear directions other than those addressed to us by policy-makers (do we want to be technicians who create applied knowledge or respondents to policies just to stick to the proper accord?). Fifty years of scholarly writing and the many dusty periodicals I reviewed show we have not removed many of the field’s stumbling blocks.

Notes

1. For some time in the history of the field, scholars included the management of high education institution as an object of inquiry in EA as a field of study. However, in a certain point in the history, the topic of HE management developed separately and distinctively, leaving EA focused on schools.
2. The field refers to “The field of Educational Administration.”
3. Until 2002 EMAL was EMA – “L” which stands for “leadership” was added then. I use both initials in the text.
4. For insufficient space and due to many books and papers written about the debates over the theory movement, I do not elaborate on this issue here. Briefly, in a lecture delivered by Thomas Greenfield at the University of Bristol in 1974, he claimed that the conception of science underlying the theory movement is inadequate and, therefore, scholars in EA had produced theories that represented superficial and distorted conceptions of educational organizations. In his view, educational problems were fundamentally different to the physical ones for which scientific methods are designed and employed. He further called for the adoption of phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches into the study of EA, and was supported by scholars such as Bates (1980), and Walker (1984). See Waite (2002) for further discussion of this controversy.
5. The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), which according to its website is a consortium of higher education institutions committed to advancing the preparation and practice of educational leaders for the benefit of schools and children, was found in 1954 (www.ucea.org).
6. As opposed to the developmental phase of the field in the USA, where the field already gained academic legitimacy in the 1960s, a decade that witnessed a growing number of professors in programs and departments of EA, the field in European and Commonwealth countries was only in its incipient phases of establishment.
7. Note that Hoy (1978) seemed to respond to the attempts of Greenfield and his supporters to challenge the positivistic paradigm that dominated the field since the mid-1950s rather than challenging the applied nature of the field. See Note 3 above for more details.
8. Griffiths (1983), one of the prominent supporters of the theory movement, claimed retrospectively that in spite of the prevalent scientific philosophy in the 1950s-1960s, no study or line of studies was done completely in the positivist model.
9. Since 1960s, sub-fields, like the politics of education, economics of education, school law and educational finance, developed rapidly, and in the 1980s reached a kind of epistemological boundary that meant, among other things, an opportunity to develop and grow separately (Campbell, 1981; Hoy, 1982; Willower, 1987). Add to this the wide variety of theoretical paradigms guiding EA researchers, and the field was seen more as, in Bates’ (1980) words, a supermarket of ideas and contents, rather than a coherent, disciplinary area of study.

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10. A subtly different diagnosis was brought up by Hoy (1982) who observed some synthesis in the field after an extended period of internal differentiation within it. Similarly, Riffel (1986) claimed that the field seemed held together by near unanimity on a small number of common assumptions.
 11. A different view was brought up by Walker (1984) who claimed that the theory movement had gotten us a long way forward in this respect.
 12. For more information about the critical theory see Bates (1980, 1993), Evers and Lakomski (1991) and Clark-Lindle and Foster (2004).
 13. Griffiths (1983) further added that there was no clear sign that a post-positivistic approach had been developed to replace the positivistic, classical paradigms in the field. For him, a major common denominator of these new perspectives was anti-positivistic thoughts. Yet, the research methodology of the two periods (1950s vs 1980s) was similar. In this respect, it is interesting to consider Willower's (1996) corollary that logical positivism as an accepted philosophic view was not a dominant force during the 1950 to 1970s period.
 14. Note that a large number of the writers dealing with EA as a field of study in the 1990s were from the UK, probably due to their government's high involvement in education and the growth of the field in this country during this period. I also believe that the editorship of Peter Ribbins contributed to the polarization of scholarly articles in the British journal, *EMAL*.
 15. The new name of BEAS is BELMAS (British Educational Management, Administration and Leadership Association).
 16. A slightly different conclusion arising from an analysis of 36 syllabi from UCEA universities which mostly described positions located within general systems theory and geared toward functionalism, while alternative perspectives (e.g. phenomenology, critical theory) were underrepresented (Nicholaides and Gaynor, 1992).
 17. Rowan was exceptional. He highlighted research-oriented purposes in terms of more domain knowledge in this area and more studies on how teachers and administrators think about instruction, assuming this would improve instructional process in schools (Rowan, 1995a, b).
 18. Glatter (1999) remarkably expressed this concern by asking, what is educational about educational management?
 19. To support this assertion Miskel indicated that the low proportion of faculty in the field which subscribed to the leading scholarly journal – *EAQ* and *JEA* – could also be construed as an indicator of a lack of interest in research and scholarship. Moreover, a relatively large proportion of libraries in universities with programs in EA do not subscribe to these publications (Miskel, 1990).
 20. Reflecting on their book from 1991 a decade later, Evers and Lakomski (2001) argued for two central theses in this book: (1) The content and structure of theories of educational administration are shaped in substantial ways by epistemology, that is, by theories about the nature and justification of knowledge. (2) A coherentist epistemology provides the best framework in which to develop a theory of educational administration. For more information about their unique work see the papers compiled in a special issue of *EMAL* (Vol. 21, No. 3).
 21. The central place of “leadership” in the field’s discourse is exemplified by the decision of the British Educational Management and Administration in 2001 to add the word “leadership” to its name. Additionally, the former editor of *EMAL*, Peter Ribbins, reported on his decision not to use EA anymore, but “educational leadership” instead (Ribbins, 2006).
 22. The death of Willower at the end of the 1990s, one of the prominent advocates of “theory” in EA, I believe, may partially explain this temporary marginalization.

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