The past, present and future of educational administration

This issue of the Journal of Educational Administration and History marks our first as Co-Editors. We are excited by the opportunity to serve the field in this capacity and look forward to supporting innovative and insightful scholarship in what we view as a vibrant and important space that has made key contributions to educational leadership research and practice. We have seen a distinct and critical change in JEAH under the editorship of Professors Helen Gunter and Tanya Fitzgerald. During their tenure, JEAH has shifted from a journal where educational administration and history were reported on separately to one that brings the two domains of practice together. The editors have broadened and redefined educational administration as not only governance and government, but policy, leadership and management. There is a recognition in the journal that history is a living discipline that reports on contemporary issues – history in the making – not only on events in the past.

JEAH is rare in being one of the few educational leadership journals that has cultivated a strong critical and social justice leadership focus as well as a focus on multidisciplinary methods and methodologies. As such, it has become a journal in which scholars in these traditions (and still others) can publish. JEAH has built up a strong reputation for combining scholarly excellence with this niche lens. As scholars in the critical, social justice paradigm, who draw on a range of methodologies from anthropology, critical feminism, practice theory, sociology and critical policy, we see our role as editors as complementing the trajectory of the journal that Professor Helen Gunter and Professor Tanya Fitzgerald have built. However, we also seek to extend the journal into new research areas, encourage the exploration of under-represented geographic locations and provide a forum for cutting edge and classic perspectives and debates that shape the past, present and future of educational administration.

As we discussed potential foci for this issue, we considered several issues that influence contemporary leadership discourses – among these was the campaign and subsequent election of the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump. It occurs to us that there are two basic perspectives to adopt in relation to the Trump Presidency. On the one hand, it is easy to make the argument that this election is a paradigm-busting moment that forever shifts the discourse on leadership. Gone is the social justice and care-based orientation developed over the past several decades, and in its stead we now have a leadership built on propaganda rather than evidence, on hatred rather than compassion, and on economic elitism rather than a distribution of goods, services and opportunity. This perspective suggests that might makes right, and that leaders are justified by their positional power and individual gravitas. They are not to be questioned or held accountable by subordinates. The second perspective on Trump’s leadership is that it is more evolution than revolution – it is the next (and perhaps obvious) step in a long arc of social injustice, White supremacy and economic inequity in a country better characterised as a Plutocracy than a Democracy, no matter popular rhetoric to the contrary.

Authors in this special issue seek to reconcile these two perspectives, and instead of treating them as conclusions, they tend to use them as points of departure. In Making America’s Schools Great Now: Reclaiming Democracy and Education Leadership Under Trump Sonya Horsford reconsiders leadership by examining active and passive forms of resistance from contemporary and historical perspectives. Susan Faircloth, in Leadership in the Era of the Trump Presidency: Implications for the Education of American Indian Children and Youth, looks specifically at the
existential and actual consequences of a leader with outright disdain for non-White Americans. Steve Courtney wonders about what a Trump presidency augurs for the solvency and integrity of government school systems in Privatising educational leadership through technology in the Trumpian era. In Enacting President Trump’s Leadership Contract with Educators: Toward a Communal Leadership Perspective Chen Schecter explores the tension between the leader as individual and the leader as part of a collective. Eugenie Samier rounds off the issue by considering the way that a Trump presidency frames the spirit of contemporary leadership in Education in a Troubled Era of Disenchantment: Emergence of a New Zeitgeist.

Collectively considered, these articles represent high-quality research that seeks to make sense of a contemporary phenomenon, and to put that phenomenon into historical perspective as a way to make sense of future policy and practice. In many ways, they embody the diversity of thought, method and geography that is a hallmark of the Journal of Educational Administration and History. They help scholars, practitioners and policy-makers make sense of an event that has punctuated the (perhaps false) equilibrium that seemed to be moving conceptualizations of leadership closer to a social justice orientation.

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