It is time to seriously consider re-founding educational administration. My Canadian colleague Eugenie Samier at Simon Fraser University has begun a conversation involving Canadian, European and American scholars about such an idea (Samier, 2005). A “re-founding” may not be as radical sounding as may first appear. A similar “re-founding” of public administration occurred in the early 1980s, and came to be known as the Blacksburg Manifesto because it was crafted by scholars at VPI in Blacksburg, Virginia (Evans & Wamsley, 2007, p. 200).

We need to understand the context and conditions which produced the Blacksburg Manifesto. Leading scholars in public administration had grown weary of the partisan “bureaucrat bashing” of the Carter and Reagan administrations, as well as the stranglehold of behaviorism and positivism of the social sciences in which public administration had been historically grounded.

The premise of the Blacksburg Manifesto scholars was that the founding of public administration was actually a “mis-founding,” or as described by Evans and Wamsley (2007) “a misapplication of the tenets of managerial or administrative science onto government” (p. 200). The “mis-founding” of public administration left it vulnerable to “bureaucrat bashing” and unanswered questions regarding the epistemological legitimacy of the field. I believe we have a similar problem in educational administration (English, 2002; 2006) which has left us open to a range of criticism from the neoconservatives in the Broad Foundation and Fordham Institute (2003), the American Enterprise Institute (Hess, 2003), and even to Arthur Levine’s (2005) “research,” if it can be called that.

The Blacksburg Manifesto called for a “re-founding” of public administration’s normativity within a democratic state grounded in effective public
participation. The participation concept was re-conceptualized as a policy process located in the public interest, as opposed to the idea of privatization and marketization advanced these days in business administration. These latter concepts are coming to dominate educational administration in the continuing pejorative legacy outlined over forty years ago in Callahan’s (1962) *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*.

The writers of the “Blacksburg Manifesto” viewed public administration “… as a calling to service of one’s fellow citizens – a moral enterprise, as contrasted with the mere management of public agencies.” Such a vision embraced an “empowered citizenry as partners in the governance process” (Evans & Wamsley, 2007, p. 200). The Manifesto positions public administrators as “agential leaders whose authority is derived from their civic virtue, their sense of vocation, and their experience in administration” (Evans & Wamsley, 2007, p. 200).

**Re-Founding Not Re-Culturing**

I endorse the move to engage in a “re-founding” because it is becoming clearer that the forces which continue to dominate our discourse have perhaps irreversibly corrupted it beyond salvage. It is difficult to express an oppositional voice when the grounds of the conversation have already been captured by the ideology one opposes. But first let me differentiate between the notion of “re-founding” versus “re-culturing.” The latter term assumes that the initial point of a field is correct, only that somehow it either went astray or turned sour.

I think one could build a fairly substantial case based on the research and scholarship of many of our UCEA colleagues, past and present, that educational administration was mis-founded, first on scientific management (Callahan, 1962) and then on managerial science (Culbertson, 1988). Both of these traditions remain strongly entrenched in our field into present times, though scientific management has morphed into TQM, various sundry accountability schemes, and the managerial skill sets represented in the approach taken in the creation of the ISLLC standards. Furthermore, the legacy of these traditions continues implicitly in the form of institutionalized racism (Tillman, 2003); sexism (Blount, 1998); and homophobia (Lugg, 2003). And it seems doubly ironic that calls for “re-culturing” often take on the metaphors and rhetoric of marketization and job standardization which continue and extend such past practices (Saltman, 2000; Emery & Ohanian, 2004).

Pierre Bourdieu (2003) has commented on the strategy of the neoliberal forces at work in our larger society in which conservatism “presents itself as progressive” (p. 34). Bourdieu (1998) identifies the metaphors of neoliberalism as “lexical tricks” in which “the idea of freedom, liberation, deregulation … reform, for example [are] designed to present a restoration as a revolution, in
a logic which is that of all conservative revolutions” (p. 50). Catherine Lugg (2000) has similarly labeled neoliberal supply-side economics as “essentially nineteenth century classical economics reclothed in an Armani suit” (p. 25).

We would be naïve to believe that educational administration as an applied field, wholly situated in the larger political context, could somehow avoid the pervasive lexicon and neoliberal discourse of our times. Bourdieu (1998) has called the neoliberal world view centered on such phrases as the “global village” and “globalization” as one which engenders “fatalism and submission” (p. 57). He quotes Max Weber as saying that dominant groups “always need ‘a theodicy of their own privilege,’ or more precisely, a sociodicy” which is “a theoretical justification of the fact that they are privileged” (p. 43). For these reasons it is my contention that “re-culturing” is simply not adequate as an antidote for the malignity of our times and of the current contestation for what Ted Kowalski (2004) has called “the soul of school administration.”

**Two Key Issues in the Focus on the Re-Founding of Educational Administration**

I want to focus on two key aspects of the discussion around “re-founding” the field of educational administration. They are: (1) the possibility of supporting a boundary between a “field” and a “non-field”, or especially if claims are made about the field being “scientifically grounded,” between a “science” and a “non-science”; and, (2) the pervasive and perverse impact and influence of economics, rational choice theory, and privatization from business administration as models and metaphors for educational administration. This latter emphasis works to deregulate governmental influence towards the law of the marketplace.

Bourdieu (1998) has called this trend “the involution of the state,” in which the “the social functions of education, health, welfare, and so on,” are repressed and abandoned (p. 34). The Germans have created a word for this backward movement as it pertains to social gains, i.e., *regressionsverbot* (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 41). We see this battle occurring in our midst over the idea of *social justice* as one of the major focal points for university preparation programs. While NCATE has already abandoned social justice in a craven surrender to the neoliberal agenda, nowhere is that struggle clearer than the current debate over the revision of the ISLLC standards.

**Science, Certainty, and Conceit**

The first problem with the continuing notions of a “field” concerns the triumph of rationalism and/or logic in promoting “administrative science.” This trajectory in educational administration has long been documented (Griffiths, 1988; Crow & Grogan, 2005) and despite much criticism continues to endure (see Young & Lopez, 2005). The critical assumption of the
existence of a “field” defined by science is that it is possible to empirically or logically support what Lakatos (1999) has called a “line of demarcation,” that is, a place where a juncture between science and non-science, or in our case, a field from a non-field can clearly be demarcated. Lakatos (1999) has called this dilemma, “the central problem in [the] philosophy of science (p. 168) and goes on to elaborate why empirical or logical support for any “line of demarcation” is futile.

However, on just such an assumption we have constructed a “knowledge base” (see Scheurich, 1995; Donmoyer, 1999). The knowledge base, the presumption of a line of demarcation, and the existence of a “field” are synonymous. Upon this conceit our current delineation of “professional standards” is anchored. I use the word “conceit” to indicate that it is a “fanciful idea” or “an elaborate or strained metaphor” (Merriam-Webster, 1972, p. 171).

When examined closely and critically, there is very little certainty for a singular knowledge base which is congruent with an empirical or logical confluence comprising a “field” in educational administration. When that dissolves, so does the notion of a universal set of professional standards. But we continue to perpetuate that conceit because so much has been erected upon it (licensure, accreditation). It is time to seek a different “founding” for our endeavors which is much humbler and more humane, less certain, and more open to a fuller examination of the many facets of leadership which comprise both art and science (see Heilbrunn, 1996).

Ed-Bizspeak: Privatization, Profits, and the Law of the Market Place

The other contaminating influence on the practice of educational administration has been the expansion of neoliberalism in the economic and business spheres of the nation which has immersed administrative practice and studies of administration in the “law of the market place” (see Anderson & Pini, 2005).

Bourdieu (1998) indicates that this concept consists of setting up as an ideal “the real regularities of the economic world abandoned to its own logic” (p. 35). Then he explains what this means.

*It* [the law of the market place] *ratifies and glorifies the reign of what are called the financial markets, in other words the return to a kind of radical capitalism, with no other law than that of maximum profit, an unfettered capitalism without any disguise, but rationalized, pushed to the limit of its economic efficacy by the introduction of modern forms of domination, such as ‘business administration’, and techniques of manipulation, such as market research and advertising* (p. 35).

Various scholars have revealed the agenda of neoliberal policies being promulgated and pushed on the schools from the business community. Emery

At work in the neoliberal/business agenda is “the transfer of public institutions into private hands” which “eclipse democratic concerns with the development of a critical citizenry and institutions that foster social justice and equality” (Saltman, 2000, p. ix). House (1998) had earlier observed that four types of economic errors were commonly made by policymakers and the public alike, “… misunderstanding the economic system; misunderstanding the educational system; misunderstanding the fit between the two; and misapplying economic concepts. All four errors are abundant in education” (p. 11).

Cuban (2004) has pointed out the irony of the current business led education reform:

> What business-inspired reformers wanted for state and local curricula, tests, and ‘bottom line’ accountability has largely been achieved at the cost of preserving orthodox school organization and conventional teaching practices that an earlier generation of business-led reformers severely criticized as both traditional and regimented. (p. 111)

I would add to Cuban’s criticism the creation and implementation of the ISLLC standards as the presumed zenith of school leadership. In so doing it becomes a barrier to radical school reform because when existing practice becomes best practice then that is all practice will ever become. Standardization amounts to the freezing of change. When social justice is excluded from such standards than current social practices and relationships are similarly ossified. Social inequities are thus perpetuated and legitimized, and in this maneuver we have passed off a regressive social policy as “progressive”.

We need to unmask these practices and the discourse in which they are embedded and in which are own practice has been reduced to enabling a minority to control the majority by creating its own sociodicy.

The evidence about the downside of an unfettered “law of the market place” is clear in the corporate world. Since July of 2002 there have been more than 1,000 convictions against corporate leaders engaged in fraudulent practices. They have been saddled with billions of dollars in penalties (Davies & Scannell, 2006). A study of the practice of backdating stock options by professors at Harvard and Cornell found that about 850 corporate chief executives padded their pay by an average of 10% (Hechinger, 2006). The Security and Exchange Commission has been investigating Dell Inc. for fraudulent financial practices. Dell publicly disclosed it would have to restate four years of its financial statements because of “improper account adjustments ranging from several hundred thousand to several million dollars to reach quarterly financial targets” (Lawton & Clark, 2007). Is this the paragon of effective practices recommended for educational
It is amazing that business leaders continue to believe they have something to offer to the improvement of public education (see Bersin, 2005), when the actual public has greater confidence in educational leaders than business leaders (see Brush, 2006). In a recent Wall Street Journal/NBC News Poll of Americans only 16% proffered “substantial confidence in the financial industry” but expressed confidence in the public schools by 32% (Harwood, 2007). While 32% is hardly a ringing endorsement, the even lower rating for the corporate sector should give pause to using the for profit/privatization model as one for improving the quality of public service.

The corporate sector has no other aim but to make money. Clive Crook in The Economist (2005) stated it rather baldly when he said, “When commercial interests and broader social welfare collide, profit comes first” (p. 4). It is time to liberate educational administration from the tenets of the profit making mindset with all of its attendant efficiency metaphors as the exemplar for its practices. Children and parents are not customers.

A Re-Dedication to the Idea of Public Service as the Basis of Moral Authority in Educational Administration

A re-founding of educational administration around the concept of public service instead of privatization is long overdue. In a passionate plea for attention to the recommittal of Americans to the mission of the common schools, Paul Houston, Executive Director of the AASA, recently argued in the 2006 NSSE Yearbook for school administrators “to lead the renewal of the spirit of commonweal that has always been the central expectation of public education” (p. 5) Houston has indicated that “we must recognize that the first and foremost mission of the public schools is their civic mission” He asks pointedly, “What would it take to recapture the deepest reasons we have public schools?”(p. 1)

For UCEA professors the challenge is how to shape our intellectual and research agendas to re-establish the civic mission of public education and to re-energize our purpose to force our constituencies to confront the profound social and economic inequities that schools often reproduce and perpetuate. Bourdieu (2003) also challenges us:

To give symbolic force, by way of artistic form, to critical ideas and analyses … to give a visible and sensible form to the invisible but scientifically predictable consequences of political measures inspired by neoliberal ideology (p. 25)

The moment is at hand to re-found educational administration to resist and overcome neoliberal ideology by employing what Bourdieu (2003) has
termed “scholarship with commitment” defined as “collective politics of intervention in the political field” (p. 25). Such a commitment means that professors abandon the idea that they must not take part in the debates that are going on about the future of education in our society. To adopt a position of advocacy and intervention does not mean that we cannot also engage in competent research. As long as the proponents of privatization can count on our remaining neutral in this struggle, the force of our public intellectualism will be kept from the fray. We will never be “players” in any game as long as we sit on the sidelines, no matter the reason. And ultimately, we become irrelevant.

Rejecting the Neoliberal Vulgate: Getting Active in the Struggle

As we consider re-founding educational administration, we ought to recognize that the American perspective is not the only one in the world, and currently not even the major voice in the English-speaking world. If scholars in other nations take up the challenge of re-founding our field, and indeed move its raison d'être away from marketization, privatization and the landscape of for profit business administration to one of public service, we would have to take notice.

Secondly, this activity is first and foremost an intellectual and epistemological one (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 11). Re-founding the field is not about practice. Rather it is about how we think about practice and to what ends practice is directed. It is first and foremost a theoretical matter, anathema to most practitioners and many of their associations who are content to cull and codify existing practices as though collectively they could produce the nadir of professionalism and the schools in which they were to be applied the epitome of development. The problem is that the currents in which the culling and codifying occur contain the mindscapes and metaphors of consumerism (see Murphy, 1999) or the “neoliberal vulgate” identified by Bourdieu (2003) as far from “a product of spontaneous generation” (p. 12). Rather “it is the result of a prolonged and continual work by an immense intellectual workforce, concentrated and organized in what are effectively enterprises of production, dissemination, and intervention” (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 12).

Mike Bottery (2004), a thoughtful colleague in the UK, has indicated that the landscape of consumerism is “built upon the profit motive [and] is likely to subordinate and transform values like trust, goodwill, sincerity, fairness, as they are primarily used as instrumental values to service a commercial relationship.” (p. 70) Bottery (2004) talks about hollowing out state functions where the state “ceases to have a role in the creation of societal projects . . . [and] is reduced from being a player in the game of life to being an umpire in the game of the market” (p. 72).

We have been operating on a dangerous and disillusioned conceit about practice and professional standards, and a serious discussion about re-founding the field should provide the leverage for the full exposure of it.
Bourdieu (2003) wrote that those of us who “have the good fortune to be able to devote their lives to the study of the social world cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent, from the struggles in which the future of that world is at stake” (p. 11). This is a call to take part in such a struggle on grounds we know well. If we are witnessing what has been called, “the gutting of the compassionate functions of the state” (Saltman, 2000, p. xvii) and within that struggle the erasure of the civic function of schooling, then a re-founding of our work around civic virtue within a democracy could become the means of organized collective resistance to the loss of those compassionate functions of government and the state currently under siege.

References


