

Educational leadership: The necessity for theory and theorising in neoliberal times

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The Global Education Reform Movement, whose instantiation in England has been in evidence for more than thirty years, has been enacted according to an implicit, yet powerful shared theoretical understanding of how education should work; whom the key actors and institutions should be and what they should be doing. Those heading up schools have featured heavily in this theoretical framing, and have largely accepted the concomitant label of leader and have undertaken the package of activities labelled leadership. However, this theoretical basis for action is implicit in that the reform movement's goals and policies are legitimated through its rejection of theory and their alternative foundation in apparently neutral evidence. This 'what-works' agenda actively de-theorises and de-politicises the fields of education and its leadership and so promotes as natural and inevitable the transformation of the professional head teacher into the corporatised school leader.

In this keynote presentation, I intend unpacking the key events that have led the field to this position. I problematise the a-theoretical nature of neoliberalism in order to argue for the necessity of theory and theorising in education and educational leadership as a field of intellectual study and also as a field of professional practice, so that the major challenges facing us can be more readily addressed.

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