Afterward? Moving onwards for developing pracademia and pracademics in education

Introduction

It has been my pleasure to read and comment on the articles contained in this Special Issue of the Journal of Professional Capital and Community on the topic of *Pracademia: Exploring the possibilities, power and politics of boundary-spanners straddling the worlds of practice and scholarship*, guest edited by Trista Hollweck, Deborah Netolicky and Paul Campbell. When I was first asked to provide a rejoinder or afterwards for the Special Issue, I said yes as I have long been curious about the terms "pracademia" and "pracademic." I first heard the term pracademic in the early 2000s when I was working as a senior government official responsible for education research. At that time, pracademic was being used to refer to people with doctorates who were working in government (rather than academia), and the importance of valuing all roles involving connections between research, policy, and practice. Indeed, my own career has been centrally about connections and interactions between research, policy, and practice, including roles working in education systems to contribute to improvements in educational practice, as a government official and advisor informing education policies, and as a researcher and scholar seeking to contribute to the academic and education communities. Now, a couple of decades into the 21st century, Hollweck, Netolicky and Campbell argue there has been a surge–or resurgence–of interest in the concepts of "pracademia" and "pracademics" as understood and applied in the field of education. Hence, the impetus for this Special Issue contains six articles. I summarize these articles briefly below for readers who are reading this "Afterward" as a standalone article.

The first article, *Defining and exploring pracademia: identity, community, and engagement,* is by the guest editors (Hollweck, Netolicky and Campbell). They provide a conceptual exploration of the term pracademic, including a review of relevant literatures in and beyond education, and then discussion of the definition and nature of pracademia specifically in education. They propose metaphors and key definitions and components to aid in understanding and investigating the concept of pracademics, plus draw on their own experiences as self-identified pracademics.

The second article, *Education focused pracademics on Twitter: building democratic fora,* is also by two authors identifying as pracademics, Steven Kolber and Keith Heggart. The article is based on autoethnographic case studies of their own experiences, one as a practicing teacher and one as an early career researcher in a university, of engaging online to develop their professional learning, research engagement, and collaboration with a community of educators and researchers. Drawing on three examples of online activities–Twitter, TeachMeets and #edureading–they identify features of pracademic spaces in online fora to support networks of pracademics and contribute to the development of the education profession.

The third article, *Pracademic productive friction: boundary crossing and pressure points,* by John Paul Mynott and Michaela Zimmatore, draws on their own experiences as collaborating pracademics working in an elementary school to facilitate cycles of lesson study in the UK. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted by the authors on themselves, Mynott and Zimmatore reflect on the frictions, challenges, possibilities and lessons learned about attempting to be pracademics in elementary schools, while also wishing to continue to engage in university-connected roles and research.

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In contrast to the previous articles, the fourth article's author does not self-identify as a pracademic. By contrast, Scott Eacott problematizes and critiques the movement about "pracademic" in his article, *Pracademia: an answer but not the answer to an enduring question*. In a conceptual paper, drawing on the theoretical framework of a relational approach, Eacott argues that pracademia inappropriately approaches a dualism and hierarchy in the theory and practice divide. In this shift, he suggests the focus on pracademics as individuals and role holders is egocentric and problematic, whereas the focus needs to be on the work. Eacott proposes an approach examining knowledge claims as more appropriate.

While the author of the fifth article, Sharon Friesen is also a senior academic (as is Eacott), she solidly positions herself as a pracademic engaging in pracademia. In developing her article, *Dwelling in liminal spaces: twin moments of the same reality,* as a thinking piece, Friesen draws on the concepts of wide-awakeness and praxis to argue for the vital role of pracademics in questioning, disrupting, and transforming the status quo and to instead bring about social change. Friesen provides two examples from her own work–the Galileo Educational Network and Cloverdale Public School District in Canada–to demonstrate the potential and power of collaborative, design-based professional learning to support educational improvements.

Finally, the last article by Youmen Chaaban, Abdellatif Sellami, Rania Sawalhi and Marwa Elkhouly is *Exploring perceptions of pracademics in an Arab context*. The authors explain that the term pracademic was previously unknown and not used in the Arab context so they conducted research involving semi-structured interviews with 18 participants who were working in teacher education. Convincingly arguing that working in teacher professional development might be a particularly interesting and important form of pracademia, the authors ask people who are actually doing this work to reflect on their professional identities and experiences and whether the concept of "pracademic" did or did not resonate for themselves and in the context of Arab countries. Interestingly, ten participants self-identified with the term pracademic and found having a name for their type of work and professional identity was beneficial; whereas eight participants did not and preferred to remain focused on prioritizing their work as teacher education practitioners.

While the above summary of the articles already indicates similarities and differences between the articles, my initial reactions ranged from interest in developing concepts, definitions, and arguments, curiosity about questions raised but not necessarily answered, and even an unsettling feeling about the real problems and challenges (as well as positive experiences) about people being and becoming pracademics. This Afterward is based on my review of each article and then thematic analyses for each article and across all six articles to investigate the question "what was the conversation (if any) between the articles?" I discuss three themes below–the purpose, promise and perils of pracademics; a quest for clarity in a messy reality; challenges and possibilities for professional capital and educational improvement–and then conclude with a discussion of moving onwards for pracademia and pracademics in research, practice and policy.

The purpose, promise and perils of pracademics

Hollweck *et al.* (2021) trace the term pracademics over a 30-year history with origins in the field of public administration. Friesen contends that there have long been people behaving as pracademics in the field of education, even if that specific term was not originally applied in education:

> Pracademics in the academy and the profession is not a new phenomenon. Long before there was a name for pracademics, there were individuals within both the academy and the profession who oriented their scholarship to addressing stubborn problems of practice. Their scholarship resides in

> the liminal space between theory and practice. Liminal from Latin meaning threshold, it is the intermediate space between—between theory and practice, and between the academy and the profession. It is in this liminal space that pracademics are not only situated, but it is also here that they engage in praxis by embracing both theory and practice, not as dichotomous entities, but as twin moments of the same reality (Friesen, 2021) [1].

Hollweck *et al.* suggest that the rise of the term pracademic has gained traction recently in education through discussions at conferences, on social media and in recent publications–including by the three guest editors. Consistent with Friesen's comments, Hollweck *et al.* (2021) define the scope of pracademia and pracademics in the following way:

> Pracademia, meanwhile, is the field or the space in which practice and scholarship are simultaneously engaged with. Similar in use to the noun *academia*, pracademia frequently refers to the life, community, and world of those straddling the spaces of practice and academia. However, the use and conceptualizations of pracademia could also refer to a new space and context of operation for those who do not traditionally sit within the parameters laid out by traditional conceptualizations of "practice" and "academia". Ultimately, the focus of this paper is on defining and conceptualizing pracademia as a liminal space and what it means to be a pracademic— an individual working astride and dynamically across both practice and academia domains.

According to the articles, pracademics are engaged in practice and in scholarship (in various forms and ways), they connect and integrate theory and practice, they span boundaries, broker and translate research and practice knowledge, they network and collaborate, and they engage in professional learning and development.

Pracademics can be people in a wide range of research, policy and practice roles. For example, the articles refer to educators enrolled in graduate studies or more commonly doctorate holding practitioners who continue to engage in practice and in research; research-engaged practitioners and practice-engaged academics; people providing and engaging in teacher education, professional development and professional learning; consultants, gurus and keynote speakers; and the authors of several of the articles who themselves hold multiple roles in the education system and in the academy. While this is potentially a large population of people, Hollweck *et al.* (2021) contend that pracademics are a "rare breed." Kolber and Heggart suggest that pracademic should not be a term that is universally applied, but could be a role that is formally recognized and explicitly developed:

> The term itself pracademic holds great potential for those few who may be able to fulfil its definitions. It may never, nor should it, cover all teachers or all academics; indeed, perhaps its rarity and liminal nature is one of its strengths. However, in a properly funded and aspirational education system the role of pracademic or a similar functioning title, such as: "teacherprenuer" (Berry *et al.*, 2013); "Research Lead" (Bennett, 2015); or "Middle Leader" (Day and Grice, 2019; Lipscombe *et al.*, 2020) would be available within a lattice or continuum (Posner, 2009, p. 17) of leadership roles. Accessible across career stages where teachers and academics could delve into the liminal space between research and practice and emerge on either side, becoming real professional chameleons, adopting and discarding roles and titles as their interest and career stage dictated (Kolber and Heggart, 2021).

This raises the question of whether pracademics are, or should be, a rare breed, or whether becoming and being a pracademic is a professional identity that should be more widely recognized and embodied by people in education.

The proposed appeal and promise of pracademics is that they can contribute to educational transformation and change. For example, in Friesen's (2021) article:

> The purpose of the paper is to make the case that it is pracademics who are well suited and attuned to questioning, challenging, and disrupting the ordinariness of the everyday, to envision new possibilities, and who take responsibility for mobilizing the educational community to undertake meaningful social change within an education system.

Based on their own experiences, Kolber and Heggart (2021) suggest pracademics "can say the things that no one else can – or no one else has thought of including suggesting alternatives and new ideas." By bringing new and different knowledge, experiences, and expertise from practice and from scholarship and by connecting and integrating theory and practice in different ways, pracademics are argued to have the potential to collaboratively contribute to changing the culture of education, improving knowledge and practice, responding to systemic challenges, challenging and changing the orthodox status quo, and bringing about educational innovation and improvement. While this work is always important, Kolber and Heggart (2021) suggest pracademic ways of thinking and working "proved especially important during the pandemic and during lockdown as groups needed to rapidly rethink approaches and a great deal of pooled resourcing resulted."

Yet, the concept and application of "pracademic" is not without its problems and perils. As will be discussed further below, across the articles, authors identifying as pracademics make clear that while this is worthwhile work, it is also challenging in many ways. In particular, there is not always professional recognition or appreciation of the nature, role, work and impact of pracademics. Furthermore, as Eacott argues in his article, the need for the concept of "pracademic" is not accepted by all. He explains:

> I am sceptical of the need for pracademia and/or the pracademic in educational leadership. While I recognise and acknowledge the groundswell of attention circling around the idea, and the profile building some can extract from being affiliated with the title, I see it as the uncritical acceptance of a (false) analytical dualism of theory and practice (Eacott, 2021).

He contends that:

> ... the very idea of pracademia does three things: first, it perpetuates and promotes the false analytical dualism of theory and practice; second, it seeks to establish a class-based system of knowledge generators that places pracademics at the top; and third, it does not necessarily provide a test of equivalence to assess knowledge claims coming from different knowledge worlds (Eacott, 2021).

And concludes "While its appeal is understandable, the idea of pracademia is arguably the right answer to the wrong question for educational leadership as a field" (Eacott, 2021). These are certainly points of disagreement and debate across the articles, with most of the articles arguing that pracademics overcome and reject a binary dualism between theory and practice and that there is potential and value in this concept.

A quest for clarity in a messy reality

The above discussion indicates that the concept of pracademics remains contentious. In their review of the literature, Hollweck *et al.* (2021) conclude: "there remains no consistent understanding of the term, no one identifiable group of pracademics and no clear defining criteria." Furthermore, it is not currently a term that is widely known, including globally. Authors in this Special Issue are located in Australia (four authors), Canada (two authors including myself), England (one author), Hong Kong (one author) and Scotland (one author); whereas the final paper from Chaaban *et al.* (2021) explores the interesting and important consideration of whether the term pracademic has resonance or utility in the Arab context. In attempting to gain clarity about the concepts of pracademia and pracademic, there are two main strands of exploration throughout the Special Issue: first is conceptual discussion and definitional developments; and second is exploring and reflecting on the work of pracademics in practice.

Hollweck *et al.*'s (2021) opening article does a good job of investigating, discussing and seeking to develop the conceptualization and definition of pracademics. They "test out three

metaphors to theorize the concept of pracademia and how the pracademic is situated within that space" (Hollweck *et al.*, 2021). The first metaphor is "The bridge" which they admit "risks being overly simplistic" but can connote the bridging of theory and practice, and of practitioner and scholar. The notion of bridging research and practice is long-standing. Indeed, when attending my first research conference back in 1999, the President's speech was on this very metaphor and began with a bridge picture accompanied by Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" song. While the bridge metaphor has a value in its simplicity, more recent understanding of how research, policy, and practice connect and how knowledge is mobilized have moved beyond a simple linear connection to more complex systems approaches indicating the interconnections and interactions involved (Godfrey and Brown, 2019; Gough *et al.*, 2011: Pollock and Campbell, 2021). In her article, Friesen (2021) replaces the bridge metaphor involving spanning a gap and replaces this with the metaphor of a ladder. Hollweck *et al.* (2021) also move beyond the bridge with two further potential metaphors. They discuss the Möbus strip, which they describe "as a two-dimensional object in three-dimensional space", which recognizes the fluidity, dynamics, and connections of being both a scholar and a practitioner. Hollweck *et al.*'s (2021) third metaphor is "Dismantling the Wheel" with pracademics "dismantling traditional conceptions" of research and practice and instead valuing the importance of "working simultaneously within between, and beyond the demarcated spaces of practice, policy, and academia." This can bring about disruption, transformation, and innovation–points also emphasized in Friesen's (2021) discussion of pracademics. While these metaphors are helpful for conceptualizing and considering the nature of pracademics, I think there is further work to be done on developing which metaphor–and probably metaphors–is apt to imagine and capture the meaning and work of pracademics. In my own work, I have increasingly been drawn to the concept of ecosystems to consider the interconnections and interactions between researchers and practitioners and people who are involved in both (Campbell, 2018).

Hollweck *et al.* (2021) also offer three main threads in defining pracademia:

(1) Pracademic identity – the complex, enduring process of situating and understanding self, and how this relates to the communities we interact with(in);

(2) Pracademic community – how the self is situated within the communities we interact with(in), and the sense of connection and belonging that does or does not exist because of the community membership the individual does or does not hold; and

(3) Pracademic engagement – the dynamic interplay between the self, the other and the space, and the consequential action, communication, collaboration, knowledge-making and influence.

These three definitions are helpful, as emphasized by the fact that the themes of identity, community, and engagement are present across the articles in this Special Issue. As Hollweck *et al.* (2021) explain: "the ways of doing and ways of being within pracademia are inextricably linked together."

Exploring the concepts and practice of pracademia and pracademics as ways of being and ways of doing are very useful and a recurring theme in this Special Issue. Different authors have different views on negotiating pracademic identity/identities–a way of being involving being part of the academic world and part of professional practice, but also standing apart from both by engaging in different practices to question, challenge, change, develop, and improve both research and practice. While this can be motivating and exciting, pracademics have challenging roles and work. For example, Mynott and Zimmatore (2021) explain how the "duality to our identities" contributed to frictions and frustrations in attempting to facilitate cycles of lesson study as both practitioners

and academics. Hollweck *et al.* (2021) also reinforce the nature and challenges of pracademics having multiple and changing identities, concluding "Ultimately, pracademics are different from both practitioners and academics; they possess the mindset of both, yet exclusively belong to neither group." Interestingly, in Chaaban *et al.*'s (2021) study of 18 participants working in teacher development:

> Some participants ($N = 8$) could be seen as holding on to their prior identities and roles as school teachers, rather than seeking new identities as pracademics, while the other group of participants ($N = 10$) readily identified with their personal definitions of "pracademic", and felt a sense of relief for having discovered an emerging identity for themselves.

In further developing understanding of pracademics and pracademia, research on the work of people engaging in practice and research to understand why or how they do or do not identify with this identity would be interesting. As Eacott (2021) argues, it is important also to focus on the actual work required and being done.

Challenges and possibilities for professional capital and educational improvement

As this is a Special Issue of the *Journal of Professional Capital and Community,* I was surprised that the articles did not specifically discuss how pracademia and pracademics link to the concept of professional capital and the development of human capital, social capital and/or decisional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). From my reading of the articles, there is the potential for the conceptualization and work of pracademics to link to understanding and advancing professional capital.

With regard to *human capital* and the development of individual talent, an obvious connection is that several of the articles discuss the work of pracademics as people who design, facilitate, and engage in forms of teacher education and professional learning. As professional development from initial teacher training through to continuing professional learning should blend theory and practice (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017), this does seem like a fertile area for the role and work of pracademics. Chaaban *et al.* (2021) propose the need to recruit and value pracademics for these purposes:

> Consequently, recruiting pracademics to work with pre-service teachers during initial teacher preparation should become rooted in university planning and policy development, not only on part-time bases during the field-based experiences, as is common practice in many universities, but more strategically by considering these professionals indispensable to the effective preparation of future teachers (Swennen *et al.*, 2010). Equally important are the pracademics, whose main target audiences are in-service teachers. Professional development providers have mostly depended on this specialized group of professionals who unconsciously perform the work of pracademics (Swennen *et al.*, 2010).

However, if people who think and act as pracademics are to be recruited into teacher education and professional learning roles, these roles and the work of pracademics has to be considered professional, legitimate, valued and needed. In Chaaban *et al.*'s (2021) study, participants struggled with perceptions of being considered "lower status" when they moved into university roles, a feeling of being "invisible" and "unrecognized by the university community." This is a serious issue and one that requires attention in the policies of universities and education systems and in developing career paths in the education and academic professions; it should not be left only to the individual navigation and resilience of people who choose to do this work.

The emphasis on collaboration and networks in *social capital* is important throughout several of the articles. Building on the notion that pracademics lead and engage in professional learning, Friesen's (2021) example of the Galileo Educational Network provides

an informative description and analyses of the work of pracademics using "Design-based professional learning is collaboratively designed with teachers and/or school and district leaders." In this example:

> Practicing wide-awakeness, the pracademics supporting the professional learning are attuned to the ways in which taken-for-grantedness reveal themselves in problems of practice and in dialogue about practice (Friesen, 2021).

A theme that emerges is that for pracademics to be engaged in the work of connecting and integrating research and practice, they may also have to create the context and spaces for such work to be possible and valued. Kolber and Heggart (2021) provide a helpful consideration of the role of social media as developing a "third space" for academics and practitioners to connect, network, and collaborate. They explain:

> This "third space" serves the purpose of bringing together teachers and academics around shared goals and common understandings. Crucially, these exist beyond the boundaries of formal associations or think tanks: they are, in many cases, spaces created by pracademics. They allow for the enactment of pracademic interactions and by so doing, develop both existing pracademics as well as moving practitioners towards this classification (Kolber and Heggart, 2021).

As Kolber and Heggart propose "this relationship" of academics and practitioners who engage online and through social media is "relatively under-examined." Yet, given the significant rise in these types of activities and engagement, this is an area worth further investigation.

While there is much promise in the role and work of pracademics developing *social capital*, there are also challenges for the role, work and implications for pracademics themselves. Creating, facilitating, and supporting teacher education, professional learning, and online networks and exchanges all take labor, time, thought and action. In their discussion of the positive use of Twitter, TeachMeets, and #edureading, Kolber and Heggart (2021) note nevertheless:

> The crucial challenge of these spaces is the additional burden of unpaid digital labour shouldered by the participants, but most pressingly those that moderate, organise and nurture these spaces and their communities. Whilst they may be free, or low cost, in a monetary sense there is also a personal and a time commitment cost that needs to be paid in their sustenance.

They conclude that the "expectation of unpaid and unrecognised labour" (Kolber and Heggart, 2021) is a significant concern with the current conceptualization and operationalization of pracademics. This point is also re-enforced by Mynott and Zimmatore (2021) in their discussion of their work as elementary school practitioners and also university adjuncts designing and facilitating lesson study cycles. For example, on the challenge of time:

> The pressure and challenges of scheduling meant that "*it felt like an extra thing*" and this friction meant that rules within our academic identities felt strained as we did not have time to read widely and our practice identities also felt pressured to move forward so we ensured that the Science curriculum was covered (Mynott and Zimmatore, 2021).

This was not only a practical issue of workload, it was intrinsically linked to the challenges of changing and fragile dual identities as a practitioner and scholar. Mynott and Zimmatore (2021) explain:

> In crossing the boundary between identities, we experienced moments of professional anguish: "*I was really torn between having my Science hat on and actually taking part in the Lesson Study*" . . . We were facilitators, experts, participants but the visible work was linked to processes and ensuring

> everything worked, not the research. We experienced friction between our different identities as there was not a clear role for us as pracademics.

This friction of being part of the professional collaboration, but also apart from it due to their role as pracademics contributed to a feeling of isolation:

> . . . we had to struggle to find the space and time to think, organise, support and lead LS, which in turn reinforced our sense of isolation as participants in not being the same as the other members of the LS group, but also not being able to access a network of peers to support us further. In this our identity as pracademics was challenged. Could and should our enthusiasm be the only thing to maintain us? (Mynott and Zimmatore, 2021)

Hence, pracademics can be the creators of new space for professional collaboration and the designers, leaders, and contributors to collaborative professional learning and networking; yet, opportunities for pracademics to network with each other and to support each other in this role and work are also vital. This Special Issue is in itself an important opportunity in giving voice and visibility to pracademics.

Following from the above discussion of social capital, the connections between pracademics and the importance of *decisional capital* involving professional expertise, experience and judgment is complex. Through the professional learning spaces they create and the collaborations they engage in, pracademics can contribute to the development of professional knowledge and practice. For example, in Kolber and Heggart's (2021) discussion of social media:

> Perhaps the most important aspect of these pracademic spaces is that they encourage the practice of **professional enquiry and the formulation of new knowledge**. This is a significant shift away from the rather old-fashioned model of teacher as "appliers of academic knowledge", and instead recognises that their professional experience is of value – and can create new knowledge. Teachers and academics work together as knowledge creators in pracademic spaces. For this reason and the others outlined above, it should be clear that pracademic spaces such as #edureading, and the action of those pracademics within those spaces, **foster collaboration and democratic processes** (emphasis in the original).

Friesen (2021) also discusses and demonstrates how her and colleagues' pracademic professional learning work has contributed to improved practices, processes, and outcomes for schools and school districts. These are important achievements for educational improvement and change.

However, understanding of pracademics within the education profession and the university, and challenges about the perceived professional status and identities of pracademics raise questions about how to advance the recognition of pracademics' own *decisional capital*. Chaaban *et al.* (2021) conclude: "The reality for many pracademics in the current study was one of isolation, depreciation, and lack of trust." Across the articles, it is clear that while the work of pracademics can be motivating and enriching, it is professionally challenging as the worlds of practice do not necessarily value the work of research and scholarship, and universities do not always fully value the knowledge and work of practitioners. This is an enduring tension. Yet, it now feels an outdated tension as the connections between research, policy, and practice and by the people who engage in and across this work are essential for educational improvement (Campbell, 2014; Nelson and Campbell, 2017, 2019) and in other sectors too (Boaz *et al.*, 2019).

Moving onwards for pracademia and pracademics in research, practice, and policy

The six articles in this Special Issue provide insightful, interesting and thought provoking discussions of the conceptualization, operationalization, and implications of pracademia and

pracademics. I began my Afterward by asking: what was the conversation (if any) between the articles? It is clear that there is debate to be had about pracademia and pracademics and the utility and need for these concepts in education. This Special Issue is an important contribution to moving a debate forward.

While I began by asking about what conversation there was between the articles specifically, I am left wondering what larger conversation, literature, and field of inquiry the concept and study of pracademics in education fits within. Originally, I had envisaged the Special Issue theme to be part of a much larger and longer-standing discussion about research use, evidence-informed policy and practice, and more recently concepts of knowledge mobilization, knowledge brokers, and related topics. Yet, most of the articles did not go in that direction. Eacott (2021) suggests that consideration of pracademia is part of a longer debate about theory and practice in educational leadership, but the shift to pracademic is different (and in his view, unhelpful):

> An important distinction here is the difference between "pracademia" as a means of bringing theory and practice together and the promotion of "the pracademic" as a distinct form of knowledge producer. The former is part of an enduring quest in educational leadership to blend theory and practice. The latter is a more ego-centric approach or individual identity work to understanding and naming one's field location.

Nevertheless, in educational leadership, both leaders and leadership are studied, with shifts over time from a focus on individual leaders to a broader study of leadership capacities, values, behaviors and actions (e.g. Leithwood *et al.*, 2020). I think there is a role for both the study of pracademia and pracademics–indeed, the whole purpose of these concepts is to move beyond binaries and to develop integrative approaches. However, I agree that the conceptualization, definition, and study of both pracademia and pracademics needs considerable further development. Put simply, is it a new field of study or is it a fad that moves in and out of popularity? Will there be a future Journal of Pracademics? In advancing the study of pracademia and pracademics, it may be most suited to consideration within the field of educational change–with the focus on purposes, processes, and outcomes to transform and improve education systems–and specifically the work in professional capital to develop the people and profession in education. As suggested previously, the linkages to professional capital require further exploration and explanation.

As well as needing further inquiry into the concepts of pracademia and pracademics, I think there is scope for further empirical study of pracademia and pracademics in reality. Four out of six articles are from authors who self-identify as pracademics. Providing their voices is important, particularly teacher-pracademics who may be less visible in published academic writing than university-based pracademics. Three of the papers are conceptual papers or thinking pieces, although they draw on real world examples too; two papers are studies of the authors' own experiences and work; and one is a study of 18 participants. All provide valuable information. Moving forward, it will be important to continue to develop the conceptual work and the deep ethnographic and qualitative studies, but I suggest there also needs to be larger studies of the why, what, who, how and so what of pracademic and pracademics. For example, in my teacher leadership work both teacher-written vignettes and narratives, plus larger mixed method study of teacher leadership in practice provide differing ways of investigating and understanding teacher leaders and teacher leadership (Campbell *et al.*, 2018; Lieberman *et al.*, 2017).

It is clear that to advance the work of pracademics in practice, there needs to be recognition of this particular role and the value of this type of way of being and way of doing. I suspect there are a lot of people who would identify with the concept, purpose and practice of pracademics if they were aware of this term. As Chaaban *et al.*'s (2021) article discusses, for some people this identification with a named concept can be re-assuring and affirming,

whereas for others it may not resonate or appeal at all. This Special Issue provides a call to connection and a call to action for the pracademics in education. However, if we want to seriously develop this role, people clearly need support in blending and balancing being a practitioner and scholar, engaging in research and practice. Perennial issues of time, workload, work intensification, professional identity, and professional status have become even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this applies to pracademics too. Yet, the pandemic has also taught us that we need people in education who can lead educational change, who can collaborate to support professional learning and expertise, who can integrate research and practice to contribute to improvement, and who can question and think through necessary transformations during times of disruption. In doing so, the development of pracademics' professional capital–human, social and decisional–is necessary. While the concepts of pracademia and pracademics are over 30 years old, perhaps now is the time for these to come to the forefront of future educational change.

Finally, the origins of the concepts of pracademia and pracademics were traced to the field of public administration and the initial writing of a politician. While there are some references to pracademics involving researchers, practitioners, and policymakers; the articles in this Special Issue do not focus specifically on the work of policymakers and the implications for policy. I think these are important areas that need to be developed. As someone who has worked in, with, and for governments in a range of roles–including during my academic career–I firmly believe we need pracademics who are policymakers and/or who engage with policymakers. In the concerns about a post-truth world and fake news, the importance of evidence, of research, of professional expertise and judgment must be re-affirmed and asserted as central to educational change and improvement for recovery during and beyond the pandemic and in addressing the increasingly complex global and local issues affecting education systems, schools, educators and students (Campbell, 2020).

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Note

1. This Afterword was written prior to the final proofs of the published articles and, therefore, I was unable to cite the correct published page references for each citation.

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