

ORDER, ANARCHY, AND INQUIRY IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT. This article explores future prospects for inquiry in educational administration. In particular it looks at efforts to bring conceptual order to often unorderedly school organizations. It is argued that the pace and nature of our changing world and the increasing impact of diversity will erode the legitimacy of approaches that look to establish underlying and enduring patterns of human interaction in schools. This is done by illustrating how the process of theory construction works with the help of a piece of popular fiction, describing the rapidly changing contemporary experience of space and time, and showing how the increasing acceptance of diversity is influencing theory construction. Finally, the author offers a number of suggestions for future inquiry.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article examine les perspectives de recherche en administration scolaire. L'auteur s'attarde en particulier aux efforts déployées pour imposer un ordre conceptuel aux organismes scolaires où règne souvent le désordre. L'auteur soutient que le rythme et la nature du monde mouvant où nous vivons et l'impact croissant de la diversité auront pour effet d'éroder la légitimité des approches qui visent à établir des structures sous-jacentes d'interaction humaine durables dans les écoles. Pour ce faire, l'auteur illustre à partir d'une fiction populaire le fonctionnement du processus d'élaboration des théories, décrit l'expérience contemporaine très mouvante de l'espace et du temps et montre comment l'acceptation de plus en plus grande de la diversité influence l'élaboration des théories. Enfin, l'auteur propose un certain nombre de pistes de recherche.

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.*

William Butler Yeats

Harvey (1989), Anderson (1990), and Tarnas (1991) are only a few of a number of social scientists who refer to the Yeats passage to characterize the distinctive nature of our current social landscape. These two lines capture in a unique way what many of these individuals see as the

increasing sense of fragmentation, ephemerality, and chaotic change which many of us experience today. According to Harvey (1989), Jameson (1991), Giroux (1991), Giddens (1991), Bauman (1992), Smart (1993), Anderson (1990) and others, men and women around the world can no longer cling to what were once believed to be relatively enduring, stable, and often predictable life patterns. Rather, they must in this day and age attempt to cope with aspects of their lives that display distinctly transient, fleeting, and contingent qualities.

When we look around we see the kinds of changes to which these authors refer. The Berlin wall is demolished almost overnight. The Soviet Union breaks up. The former Warsaw Pact and the communist world are in tatters. Italy votes to overhaul its political system. South Africa achieves Black rule – events that were unthinkable only a decade ago. But such changes are not restricted solely to the political realm. They are also reflected in economic production. Jobs in well-established industries disappear with little warning. Opportunities in new endeavours materialize out of the blue. Entrepreneurs make their fortunes in a day and lose them the next. The organization of work takes on new and often unfamiliar forms. Other social practices are also subject to the same kinds of disruptions. Popular trends, fashions, tastes, and pastimes change with uncommon frequency and irregularity as populations are bombarded with an infinite range of media images and messages. It seems the only thing that we can be sure of in this day and age is that things will change, often in rapid and unpredictable ways.

Schools have not escaped the effects of this changing social landscape. Among other things, educators have to cope with an information explosion that often renders long standing knowledge either irrelevant or false. Medical schools, for example, have had to look to different ways to train doctors so that they can better prepare them to cope with the constant and expanding flow of information that renders today's break-through discovery obsolete tomorrow. Educational institutions also have to deal with increasing diverse student populations. No longer can teachers expect to instruct uniform groups of students. Indeed, what may have worked for these teachers in the past may often be of no use to them in classrooms where up to twenty different cultures and languages are displayed and spoken. When combined with such things as conflicting and contradictory educational philosophies and limited resources, these and other phenomena undermine those who seek orderly and neat school environments. Fraatz (1989), for example, maintains that:

People in schools spend their days carrying out difficult tasks with uncertain consequences; they pursue vague and often conflicting objectives with highly variable and conflicting resources; they rely on poorly specified "technology" to identify problems and to discriminate among solutions; and they are connected with one another in ways which appear structured and predictable, but which are in fact tenuous and circumstantial. (p.4)

This changing world has far-reaching consequences for inquiry into the organization and administration of schools. In particular, the pace and nature of these changes and the increasing impact of diversity will continue to erode the legitimacy of approaches that look to identify underlying, regular, enduring, and universal patterns of human interaction in schools. The so-called theory movement (Culbertson, 1983; Greenfield, 1986) and the accompanying methods of inquiry which at one time showed so much promise for the field continue to display an inability to deliver on promises and to provide meaningful direction for administrators of our schools (Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1978; Blumberg, 1984). Newer scientific approaches that stress coherence (Evers & Lakomski, 1991), based as they are on many of the same principles, would also seem to show little promise. In light of this inadequacy, this article will explore future prospects for inquiry in educational administration. In doing so it will examine in more detail the relationship between the changing social landscape and the growing inadequacy of overarching theoretical approaches to inquiry. First, however, I will elaborate on a selective history of efforts to order an apparently disorderly social environment through science (and philosophy). Next, I will use a popular novel to further illustrate how this process works. Third, I show how the pace and diversity of the current environment will continue to elude efforts to impose a comprehensive order on it. Finally, I offer some suggestions for the future direction of inquiry in educational administration.

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY: CONSTRUCTING METANARRATIVES

Life in pre-modern times was somewhat more predictable than it is today. Men and women back then could usually depend on nature's life cycles, even though they might not have always been able to predict accurately what the future held for them. This all changed with the introduction of technology. The onset of mass production, with its inherent instability, eventually brought on what many believed to be rather chaotic conditions in Europe at the time. Dissatisfied with these conditions, a number of intellectuals attempted to establish a degree of

coherence in this maelstrom of change. Subsequently known as Enlightenment thinkers, they looked to uncover what they believed to be the inherent underlying patterns and regularities of 16th and 17th century Europe. Once these universal and immutable qualities were revealed in the form of what Lyotard (1984) would eventually refer to as metanarratives, then humanity, it was believed, would be in a better position to understand and control the world about it. Mastery of the natural and social world then would provide the means to secure universal morality, pursue human emancipation, and enrich daily life. Men and women would be free from scarcity and want and from natural and social calamity.

Eco (1990) provides insight into the construction of these metanarratives in a piece of fiction. His story revolves around three editors who decide to work on their own fable, after spending considerable time reviewing the manuscripts of occult fanatics. Inspired by one of these manuscripts, their tale revolves around a search for the proverbial lost Holy Grail. Those who are able to locate it, they tell us, will inherit untold and unlimited powers. The authors begin with what most of us would regard as facts of history. They do, however, put a different face on some of these events. Never satisfied with the obvious or superficial meanings, they persistently search for a deeper meaning. This process inevitably involves connecting many seemingly unrelated facts. As Causabon, the central character maintains, "our brains grew accustomed to connecting, connecting, connecting everything to everything else, until we did it automatically out of habit" (p. 386). As they build their story, the authors go out of their way to weave many of the most significant and insignificant world events into their unique tale.

In this process, however, our friends' story evolves into more than just a piece of fiction. As the pieces of their puzzle begin to fall into place with uncommon regularity, they become caught up in the process and actually begin to believe that their tale is real. Their own apparent belief, however, proves to be less destructive than others' acceptance of their story. As it happens, there are others – Diabolicals, as they refer to them – who are more than willing to believe their tale and the prospect of the accompanying power. Unfortunately this outside interest eventually spells trouble for the authors. In time they all meet their end, two of them at the hands of these power hungry fanatics. As the end approaches for Causabon, he sums up his fruitless quest in these words, "I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma, a harmless enigma that is made terrible by our own made attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth" (p. 81).

THEORY IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

Inquiry in the field of educational administration and organization has over the years displayed many of attributes that Eco (1990) pokes fun at. Indeed many social scientists in the area have been engaged in many of the same activities as Eco's hard working and imaginative editors. First and foremost, many scholars have been preoccupied with exposing what they believe are the natural underlying patterns of interaction in educational organizations. This idea was first introduced to the field by the so-called theory movement in the 1950s (Culbertson, 1983; Greenfield, 1986). Proponents of the movement sought to put inquiry in the field on what they felt was a more solid footing by grounding their statements in scientific rather than ideological practice. They believed that administrators could benefit most when they had in hand objective knowledge of how their organizations really worked. Once equipped with reliable information about the various relationships and tendencies of organizational phenomena, administrators would be in a position to make decisions that would enhance their organization's efficiency. Eventually known as organization theory, this approach would come to dominate the field of inquiry in educational administration for years to come. And even though its influence has waned over the past decade, many proponents continue to adopt its mandate to generate universals. Coleman and LaRoque (1989), for example, are just two of a whole genre of researchers in educational administration who cling to the notion that their task is to generate general propositions about effective schools and districts (Ryan, 1993). Adherents of traditional scientific inquiry in the field, however, are not the only ones who look to generate universal principles. More recent adaptations of scientific approaches also adhere to this pattern, albeit in more subtle ways. Evers and Lakomski's (1991) coherentist view, for example, while highly critical of the theory movement, nevertheless looks to a future where all (correct) theories articulate with one another. Although they do manage to accommodate a certain amount of diversity, when it comes right down to it Evers and Lakomski (1991) foresee a world where all natural and scientific theories cohere in a type of metatheory that explains all natural and social phenomena (see also Barloski, in press).

Perhaps the most forceful point that Eco (1990) makes through his three editors is that theories are socially constructed. That is, men and women are responsible for creating the theories that they employ to explain their experience. Although we all engage in this pastime to some extent, most people are not preoccupied with the process in quite

the same way as social and natural scientists. Scholars in educational administration are no exception. In much the same way as Eco's editors who connect fact after fact, academics in educational administration have been busy constructing theories to explain how schools work. They base much of what they write and say on the kinds of data that they collect. But raw data – if there are such phenomena – are not the only determinants of theory. As Eco (1990) makes plain in his novel, and as scholars in educational administration (Greenfield, 1980; Bates, 1980; Evers & Lakomski, 1991) have emphasized, facts only become facts by virtue of the perspective (or theory) which men and women bring to their project. This is not to say that theory construction is a uniquely arbitrary process, but rather that a variety of external conditions will have a decided impact on the kind of theory that is eventually generated. Of particular importance here are the interests which social scientists represent and the power relations under which they work.

Theory generation in educational administration revolves around power issues, albeit in marginally different ways than Eco (1990) depicts. Power is implicated in this process in a least two ways. The first involves the kinds of things that the generated knowledge will allow those for whom it is intended to do. For example, an approach to inquiry that purports to be able to establish consistent relationships, connect various facts and events, as organization theory approaches do, (supposedly) makes it possible for administrators to make predictions of future events. Knowing how various actions or events will have an impact on organizational life extends to administrators the (illusory) potential to control what goes on in their schools. Those who were able to obtain this kind of information, it was believed by a number of social scientists, could muster the power necessary to preside over school events and in the end improve school performance. It comes as no surprise then that social scientists in educational administration, like Eco's editors and Diabolicals, recognized the potential of this approach to invest considerable and much needed power in the hands, in this case, of administrators, and thus pursued it with vigour for many years.

Differential power relations also allowed the field to be dominated by one particular genre of inquiry for many years. Kuhn (1962) has much to say about the difficulties associated with paradigm shifts, and many of his ideas are reflected in the decisions of so many to cling to the ideas affiliated with that so-called theory movement. Indeed this approach appeared to be appropriately suited to school administrators whom scholars felt needed guidance to help them deal with the uncertainty

they faced at work every day. The appeal of this approach lay both in its simplicity and power (Ryan, 1988a). The fact that this perspective – like many other scientific approaches – had the potential to provide ready answers to a myriad of problems led many social scientists to believe in it, and helped sustain its dominance for many years. For over two decades the ideas based on the theory movement dominated the field, eclipsing other approaches to inquiry and knowledge in academia, and marginalizing the practical, unique, and everyday experiences and wisdom of teachers, administrators, women, and various ethnic groups. Even though many teachers, administrators, and others would come to dismiss knowledge generated in this way simply because it often did not coincide with their experience of school life (Blumberg, 1984), it continued to hold sway in academic circles, in university classrooms, and occasionally in public policy forums.

Through Casaubon, Eco (1990) makes reference to one final by-product of this process – the fact that a “harmless enigma is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth” (p. 81). In other words, as I interpret it, the process of establishing universals can wreak havoc. Horkheimer and Adorno (1969) would certainly support this view. In particular they maintain, among other things, that the ideology of neutrality associated with this form of knowledge has masked its role in the domination, inequality, and alienation that it has helped produce. Whether or not this has been the case with traditional forms of inquiry in educational administration remains to be seen. Nevertheless there have been documented incidents where social scientists have employed their scales, instruments, and formulas with less than sterling results in administrative settings. Greenfield (1991) recounts occasions where he and other colleagues would descend upon groups of administrators, with leadership instruments in hand, make the required measurements, and rank individual men and women according to supposedly scientifically devised scales. He remembers leaving these situations with an uneasy feeling, realizing that he and his colleagues had in all probability done more harm than good, and wishing that they had left their instruments at home.

In the past decade the repeated criticism of traditional approaches to educational administration seems to have taken its toll. Traditional approaches have been largely discredited, at least in some circles (Hodgkinson, 1978; Bates, 1980; Greenfield & Ribbins, 1992), and alternatives have emerged and are, for the most part, accepted (Evers & Lakomski, 1991; MacPherson, 1987). In my own experience, for

example, very few doctoral students in educational administration today employ in their thesis work the quantitative methodologies generally associated with the principles of the theory movement. Those proponents of traditional inquiry that remain among us will find that they will be even more hard-pressed in the upcoming years to establish the legitimacy of generating universals. This is because our current experience of space and time will continue to change at an even greater rate, and other diverse forms of knowledge are increasingly being recognized as legitimate.

The changing experience of space and time

Establishing general theoretical statements will become more difficult as our experience of space and time continues to shift. In particular, the rapidly increasing and unpredictable pace of life presents new and formidable obstacles to those looking to reveal underlying patterns of interaction in school organizations. While accelerated and sometimes erratic life styles can be attributed to any number of social phenomena, they are perhaps best reflected in the changing conditions of economic production. Economic patterns, which had been in place since the end of World War II, according to Harvey (1989), took an abrupt turn around 1973. At this time the so-called Fordist-Keynesian system that had been in place for almost forty years broke up. After the war the policies and practices associated with this ideology including large scale production, the steady flow of capital and more-or-less predictable patterns of consumption, and the tense but fine balance between organized labour, corporate capital, and the nation state permitted a steady growth in production. Employment wages placed ample money in the hands of workers to enable them to spend enough to support industry and to stave off the problems generally associated with over accumulation. For almost thirty years the match between technological capabilities, regulatory practices, political-economic interests, and consumption habits allowed the market system to proceed without any major disruptions.

This all changed in the early 1970s. One particularly influential change involved the world financial structures. After the war the United States, backed by its overwhelming productive apparatus, assumed the role of guarantor of world money. The American dollar became the medium of world trade and it was technically backed by a fixed convertibility into gold. However, increasing competition from abroad and the rising debt accumulation, among other things, eventually undermined the American position, thus leading to the establishment of a global system of floating exchange rates. The effects, according to Harvey

(1989), have been legion. The “de-materialization” of money, and the often volatile exchange rates between the various world currencies, continues to generate uncertainty. The pace and uncertainty in the world economy is not restricted to world financial structures, however. It also has been affected by technological advances and the changing organization of work.

Technology and the organization of work are closely related. Advances in technology have made both possible and necessary changes in the structure of work. Technological innovations in the area of communication and transportation, for example, have led to dramatic changes in production. Satellite communication and fibre optic telecommunications, jet cargo and transport, and containerization have decreased contact costs, allowed for almost instant communication between various parties in the production process, and have expedited the circulation of both goods and services around the world. On the other hand, electronic banking, plastic money, financial services, and a computerized market have enhanced the flow of capital. This technology has also increased the amount and availability of information. And as Toffler (1990) notes, immediate information about such things as consumer habits can give producers a decisive strategic advantage over competitors.

These and other advances in technology have made it possible for producers to gravitate towards more flexible work environments (Harvey, 1989; Toffler, 1990; Reich, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994). Many have seen these flexible arrangements as desirable because the reduction in labour costs and turnover times which accompany them can improve profitability. Unlike the Fordist production line, flexible organizations produce goods in comparatively small batches. They generally target niches in the market, favour subcontracting, and are equipped to adjust the nature of their products quickly. These producers also look to increase turnover time and eliminate the capital investment necessary for accumulating inventory by making use of information technology to operate “just in time” delivery systems (Harvey, 1989; Toffler, 1990). Uncertainty is an inherent part of this system. Product lines may change dramatically from week to week, employees may come and go on a moment’s notice, and entire operations may move to other more distant locations overnight.

This uncertainty accompanies the increasing articulation between producers and volatile consumer preferences. This volatility can be traced, in part, to the changing nature of product lines and the influence of producers on consumers. The increase in the consumption of services

as opposed to strictly goods has required an adjustment in timing patterns. This is because the lifetime of personal, business, health, entertainment, and other services is usually much shorter than that of most goods. Those providing the services often have to make more and quicker adjustments in the kinds and manner of services they deliver than other strictly goods-producing organizations. The active cultivation of consumer needs on the part of producers also has an impact on this volatility. More and more producers look to the advertising business to manipulate the desires and tastes of their potential customers with images that may have little to do with the actual product. This image-producing industry, as Harvey (1989) maintains, actually specializes in the acceleration of turnover time through the marketing and production of its images.

Those who wish to identify underlying and essential patterns of human interaction in schools or for that matter any other institution face formidable obstacles. First and foremost, they must attempt to impose order on social conditions that increasingly display an ephemeral and fragmented character and that change often and in unpredictable and haphazard ways. Efforts to establish stable singularities of knowledge are also complicated by the recent explosion in information. Men and women are bombarded by an infinite range of information sources – from advertising images to scientific studies – which often presents us with contradictory and conflicting claims. All of this, Hargreaves (1994) maintains, has led to a collapse of certainty.

The knowledge explosion has led to a proliferation of expertise; much of it contradictory and competitive, all of it changing. This has begun to reduce people's dependence on particular kinds of expert knowledge but also created a collapse of certainty in received wisdom and established beliefs. Sunshine is good for you, then it is not. Alcohol is assumed to be detrimental to one's health until it is announced that modest levels of red wine actually *reduce* cholesterol levels. The reported release by the Colombian drug cartel that cocaine is high in fibre, is a joke that points to the disconcerting pervasiveness and perversity of such scientific certainties. Science no longer seems able to show us how to live, at least with any certainty or stability. (p. 61)

In educational administration social scientists continue – as they did in the past – to mimic natural scientists in their efforts to produce order out of what they see as clutter. Sungaila (1989), for example, looks to the recent work on so-called chaos theory (Gleik, 1987). Her insights, however, produce very little of anything new. In fact, she merely uses

the principle of the “butterfly effect” – that small changes can bring on very large changes – to make a case for administrative action. Like the butterfly whose stirring in Peking transforms weather systems in New York, the principal of a school, Sungaila (1989) claims, can accomplish great things with seemingly insignificant acts. But in the end science plays virtually no role in guiding administrative action. Instead Sungaila (1989) relies on management gurus such as Peters (1982) for advice on how to “beat the institution” (p. 16).

Recognizing difference

The comparatively recent change in the value of social difference also has substantial ramifications for constructing theory. We have seen in recent times the celebration of the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups. Today many have abandoned presumptions of homogeneity and acknowledge the multiple forms of “otherness” as they emerge from differences in gender and sexuality, race and class, and temporal and spatial locations (Harvey, 1989). More than ever before we are witnessing the emergence of ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities of a more localized nature (Hargreaves, 1991). Not only are diverse groups being recognized, but they are also being increasingly listened to. Many today believe that all groups have a right to speak in their own voice and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate. As a consequence we now have the opportunity to listen to voices that have for many years been unheard, neglected, ignored, marginalized, or dispossessed. In Canada, for example, aboriginal people are speaking out and they are being listened to more than ever before. This phenomenon is not restricted exclusively to Canada, however. Nor are these opportunities accomplished without a struggle. Groups all over the world are demanding, even fighting, to be heard. The appearance of diverse voices is also not restricted to ethnic groups. Over the past couple of decades women’s groups, for example, have managed to get people to listen to them and, as a result, have made progress in areas of concern to them.

The ascendancy of these voices and their accompanying world views increasingly call into question the legitimacy of universal, abstract and transcendental metanarratives. Women and members of various ethnic groups tell us that these theories frequently do not represent their experience, nor do they work in their interests. Many persist in their efforts to expose the myth that such knowledge is neutral and objective in nature and that it is equally relevant and useful to all. Critics

maintain instead that universal claims tend to be Euro- and androcentric in nature, and as such, work to enfranchise the former groups at the expense of others (Giroux, 1991a; Shakeshaft, 1989). General abstractions do so by denying "the specificity and particularity of everyday life, generaliz[ing] out of existence the particular and the local, and smother[ing] difference under the banner of universalizing categories" (Giroux, 1991b, p. 229). They conclude that the supposed validity of claims associated with many of these theories emanates not from neutral and infallible techniques of inquiry, but from particular forms of power. By failing to accommodate the voices, feelings, beliefs, and world views of people of colour, women, and the poor, general theories often do not represent their interests and, as a consequence, may do little to increase their already limited life chances.

Examples of Euro- and androcentric bias abound in social science. Kirby (Kirby & McKenna, 1989), for example, discovered that her particular experience as a high performance athlete was not represented in research – research that had paid scant attention to the experiences of women. The message she received was that theoretical examination of sport took precedence over her experience as a (female) athlete who had lived and worked in sport culture. Among other things, it prompted her to ask, "have I retired wrong?" Shakeshaft (1989) explores this same bias in educational administration theory. She maintains that most research in the field has been conducted from a male perspective that fails to represent or explain female experience and behaviour. Shakeshaft goes on to say that the results of this research have been mistaken for a universal reality and have subsequently been inappropriately applied to both males and females. To make her point she provides examples from a number of popular theories in the field, including Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Her contention is that Maslow's hierarchy does not necessarily correspond to women's experiences. Many women, Shakeshaft (1989) contends, value affiliation needs. Consequently, their attainment of these needs may often be more important to them than satisfying the so-called self-actualization needs which occupy Maslow's highest level and which seem to be more important to many men. Shakeshaft (1989) also notes that Maslow's initial conception, although based on one woman and one man, was subsequently "tested" on 46 people, 42 of whom were male.

Many social scientists also bring a Eurocentric framework to the study of aboriginal issues. The Ontario Ministry of Education (1989), for example, adopts a battery of categories, "factors," and instruments that have traditionally been employed (not always with success) to study the causes of dropouts in schools attended mostly by European Canadian

students. Their methodology, however, cannot accommodate aboriginal voices. Nowhere in the study do we find mention of self-determination as a potential option for future schooling – something aboriginal people across country and in their community see as a necessary condition for success in education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Assembly of First Nations, 1988). Approaches of this nature simply cannot acknowledge the different world views and ways of knowing displayed by many groups of aboriginal people (Colorado, 1988).

The bottom line here is that scientifically generated knowledge represents just one particular way of knowing. The fact that it has achieved such a lofty status cannot be attributed to its unique ability to generate truth, but rather to its connection with powerful interests. There are other ways of knowing, some of which are better able to represent other interests and the often marginalized experiences associated with those interests. As power dynamics shift and the divergent claims that emanate from these diverse perspectives acquire more legitimacy, the prospects for establishing universal truths through scientific method will continue to dwindle.

INQUIRY IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

The future of inquiry in educational administration would not seem to rest, as it did in the past, with aspirations of constructing unified representations of organizations. Those who attempt to picture the world of organizations as a totality full of connections and differentiations (Harvey, 1989) can expect to encounter formidable obstacles. The ephemeral and often fragmented character of a perpetually changing and legitimately diverse world would seem to dictate against such a project. This is not to say that we should not theorize (Giroux, 1988), or that differences in language and tradition render common understandings impossible and all accounts of inquiry meaningless to those who don't belong to similar traditions (Bernstein, 1992; Burbules & Rice, 1991). Rather, those who theorize must acknowledge the perpetually changing nature of situated and local voices and traditions, and the potential benefits that can accrue from both successful and not so successful attempts to understand other perspectives.

Approaches to inquiry

Given present day reality, scholars in educational administration need to recognize and, if possible, accommodate the following approaches to inquiry.

PRODUCING SITUATED UNDERSTANDINGS RATHER THAN SCIENTIFIC CERTAINTY. Educators will be best served if social scientists direct their efforts at understanding what happens in local situations and cultures (Hargreaves, 1994). Priority here will be given to describing and explaining how various concepts and issues work themselves out in the immediate context of the site. If enough care is taken to provide detailed descriptions of these contexts, then readers of this work will (or will not) be able to identify with the situation described and decide what is relevant to them in their own situations. Here the authority of the generalization rests with the reader rather than with the study design (Erickson, 1992).¹

A FOCUS ON PRACTITIONER KNOWLEDGE. Practitioners know a great deal about their situations. Unfortunately traditional methods, based as they are on an exclusive view of what constitutes valued knowledge (Ryan & Drake, 1992), are not always able or designed to tap into this knowledge. Useful descriptions and understandings of local situations can best be achieved when social scientists make use of the knowledge of those who work and learn in school settings. Elbaz (1981) and Irwin (1989), for example, provide us with valuable insight into teaching by focusing on what they refer to as teachers' "practical knowledge."

PROVIDING WAYS TO LET PREVIOUSLY SILENT VOICES SPEAK. Understanding school settings in our increasingly diverse society, requires that scholars seek out ways to allow those who have been silent to find their voice. Social scientists will only be in a position to help various ethnic groups, the poor, women, and children improve their life chances when and if they are able to devise ways for them to both air their views, opinions, and perceptions, and to put them in positions that enable them to do something about their situations.

INITIATING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH AND/OR AFFECTED BY INQUIRY. Acknowledgment of the necessarily situated character of knowledge and of the legitimacy of previously ignored perspectives can lead to a situation where one is confronted with an ineradicable plurality of world views and positions (Bauman, 1992). This can become a problem when and if these positions prove to be incommensurable (Bernstein, 1992). It is up to social scientists to initiate a dialogue not only among themselves, but also with those who are generally the subjects of research. This is not to say that all differences can be worked out, but that the very act of trying can result in a tolerance for, and understanding of, diversity of all sorts (Burbules & Rice, 1991). Social scientists who make these efforts are more likely to find themselves open to cross-

disciplinary work, and willing to accommodate the wishes, views, and perspectives of all those who participate in their research projects.

EMPLOYING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY. Qualitative research methods provide techniques for allowing researchers to fulfill some of the above conditions. This is not to say that quantification has no place in inquiry. Numbers can from time to time provide useful information. However, quantitative methods have limitations when it comes to describing local settings and perceptions not already programmed into the methodology. On the other hand, the flexibility that is built into open-ended interviewing techniques, participant observation, and various forms of document analysis allow researchers to be sensitive to local conditions and personal perceptions and views which they may have not anticipated or expected when they began their investigation.

There are a number of qualitative approaches that are designed to accommodate local conditions, allow for those often silenced to find their voice, and provide ways for marginalized groups to do something about their situations. Included in these are narrative inquiry, ethnography, and critical ethnography. This is not to say that these are the only methodologies available here. Historical research, for example, has much to offer in this respect. Studies of this nature (Carnoy, 1974; Ryan, 1988b; Walsh, 1991) have brought to light the ways in which various indigenous and local cultures have been dominated and the voices of their people silenced. Narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1989) revolves around ways to let respondents tell their stories. Allowing men, women, and children to recount their experiences in this form avoids, at least to a point, formats where their responses are squeezed into categories that are established either before or after the fact. Mischler (1986) also maintains that such an approach can lead to empowerment. Those who tell their own stories may be prompted to use their newly acquired understanding to act in ways that will improve their particular situations. Ethnography (Woods, 1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Wolcott, 1985) constitutes another set of techniques that give legitimacy to local perceptions. According to Wolcott (1985) ethnography provides the means that allow researchers to reveal and describe the symbolic meanings that comprise local culture. Critical ethnography (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Anderson, 1989; Angus, 1987; Simon & Dippo, 1986; Masemann, 1982) takes ethnography one step further. Those who practice this form of research look to show how so-called macro-structures associated with gender, race, class, and age

relations provide the conditions (and meanings) that generate forms of power that work in the interests of some and, among other things, silence the voices of others. These social scientists are preoccupied with showing not only how these structures play themselves out at a local level, but also how these conditions and realities can be turned around to work in the interests of the marginalized.

COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH. Research – particularly in the more traditional studies – often revolves around unequal power relationships within the targeted setting. Often research subjects are subordinated to the research project. They may be told little about what is going on, and never hear from researchers once they leave the setting. Collaborative research provides opportunities for practitioners to become more involved in research (Cousins & Earl, 1992; Huberman, 1987, 1989). Not only do they have the chance to understand what is going on, but they can also play a part in the conception and execution of the inquiry. Approaches of this sort can make use of practitioners' considerable knowledge of local settings, and provide the means to incorporate their voices and other marginalized voices into every aspect of research.

ACTION RESEARCH. Action research is designed specifically to make practical use of research findings (Elliot, 1991; Zuber-Skeritt, 1991). Too often researchers leave research settings without revealing the findings to participants or with information that cannot be easily used. Action research is designed specifically to produce information that can be put to good use in the local settings where it was generated. Knowledge is channeled directly back into the situation in the hopes it will provide changes for the better. Action research is particularly well suited to collaborative and qualitative research techniques.

TRAINING PRACTITIONERS TO DO THEIR OWN RESEARCH. Universities and established researchers have an obligation to equip practitioners to conduct their own research. Those who do acquire these skills need not rely on outsiders who may have interests that do not always coincide with local interests. They now would be able to control every phase of a research project – from its conception to the dissemination and use of results. Those who acquire research skills will be in a position to tailor projects in ways that will uniquely suit the needs of their particular situation.

THE CAUTIOUS USE OF GENERAL THEORIES. Social scientists need to approach general theories with caution. They must be sensitive to the fact that local contexts will either display unique variations of such theories or that such theories may not be relevant at all. Scholars and others who

conduct research should not attempt to operationalize these theories to the extent that local conditions and voices are glossed over or ignored. This is not to say that theories that transcend local situations cannot be put to good use. Indeed scholars and practitioners can from time to time acquire important insights from them. These individuals, however, have to keep in mind the contingent and variable nature of such claims. Finally, social scientists need be cautious about making general statements from their findings in local settings. As alluded to above, generalizations ought to be left to the reader.

ATTENDING TO PHILOSOPHICAL CONCERNS. Scholars and others in the field of educational administration who incorporate a philosophical dimension to their work have an opportunity to keep in touch with the meaning of inquiry. Explorations into the assumptions upon which empirical research endeavours have been based in the social sciences generally (Mills, 1959; Foucault, 1970; Gadamer, 1975; Rorty, 1979; Berstein, 1983) and in educational administration specifically (Culbertson, 1983; Hodgkinson, 1978; Greenfield, 1975,1980; Bates, 1980; Evers & Lakomski, 1991) have provided valuable insights into many of the often taken-for-granted activities of social scientists. Those who do incorporate this philosophical dimension will be better able to understand and critically interrogate the assumptions upon which the various research traditions are built. Philosophically minded scholars and practitioners will also be better able to grasp the context, purposes, means, ends, effects, and ultimately the worth of various kinds of inquiry. Knowledge of this sort will place them in a position to appreciate that all research is value laden, to determine who will benefit from selected methods, and to support research that promotes social justice. The field of educational administration will profit from both philosophically informed empirical research and more philosophical types of inquiry of the sort cited above.

THE USE OF THE HUMANITIES AND ARTS. The acquisition of knowledge of organization and administration need not be restricted to so-called scientific or empirical endeavours. The humanities and arts traditions have much to offer those who seek insight into the human condition. In particular such sources provide men and women with the opportunity to step back and critically examine surroundings that they may have previously taken for granted. Those who do pursue the humanities have the opportunity to view not only educational organizations, but life itself from new and exciting perspectives. Social scientists and practitioners who pursue these avenues may have occasion to see and approach their

day-to-day hurdles in ways that had not been previously thought of, and to explore in earnest fresh ideas that would assist them and others in understanding the complexities of educational organizations (Ryan, 1994). Brietzche (1990) and Popper (1983) provide a number of useful insights into ways in which the humanities can be employed by administrators, prospective administrators, and those who train administrators.

An example

A multiyear project to improve reading achievement of Spanish-speaking children in a Los Angeles elementary school (Goldenburg & Gallimore, 1991) incorporates many of the elements included above. Despite the fact that it does not fit neatly into what some would consider educational administration it does provide a working model for those wishing to employ some of the preceding ideas in their research. First and foremost the researchers, Goldenburg and Gallimore, are skeptical about the applicability of general research findings on literacy enhancement for the children in this particular community. This skepticism leads them to explore, among other things, whether or not these parents were sufficiently literate and motivated to help their children – conditions that the literature indicated and teachers assumed were not present. Observations in this setting and open-ended interviews with various members of the school community, however, painted a different picture. Many parents, it seemed, possessed at least rudimentary reading skills and virtually all were willing to help their children with literacy tasks at home. On the other hand, however, the researchers also used more general research findings to counter what they refer to as insular local views. In particular, they took direction from research to explore and eventually provide evidence to counter the view of teachers at the school that these children were not ready for literacy activities in kindergarten. Indeed the information they generated over the course of their local inquiry indicated that kindergarten children in this school were in fact ready for such activities at this level.

This project also involved another unique characteristic – one of the researchers assumed the role of a practitioner. Goldenburg served as an administrative intern, then as a first grade teacher for three years. During this time he was involved in efforts to improve the reading performance of children at the school in his capacity as researcher and teacher. He was in a unique position not only to collect information and formulate research strategies, but also to circulate the information obtained back into the instructional process and evaluate it as any other

teacher would. The kinds of information that he and other researchers ultimately sought proved useful to both teachers and administrators. It was channeled directly into efforts to improve reading and often generated yet more knowledge about the entire process. In the end this approach proved its worth. Most of the children at this school improved their reading skills over this period of time.

CONCLUSION

The options outlined here are not new. In fact, they have been employed over the years in various forms in a number of different social sciences, including educational administration. Taken together, however, they do offer alternatives to social scientists and practitioners who seek useful knowledge in a world that is undergoing rapid and substantial change. As the prospects for generating scientific certainty; specifying natural, universal and enduring patterns of organizations; uncovering stable and causal relationships; and for predicting future events continue to dwindle, social scientists and practitioners would do well to consider some or all of these options if they genuinely wish to help educators with the formidable challenges they face today.

We need not, then, view the receding prospects for generating a unified theory of school administration and organization with disappointment or despair. On the contrary, social scientists and practitioners should welcome the opportunities that accompany this view. At the very least, it frees us from the shackles imposed by the imperative to generate fictitious universals. Those who are willing to accept this fact of life will be in a better position to explore life in new and exciting ways. Tarnas (1991), for example, maintains that the “dissolving of old assumptions and categories, on the other hand, could permit the emergence of entirely new prospects for conceptual and existential reintegration with the possibility of richer interpretive vocabularies” (p. 407). The abandonment of systematic knowledge accumulation associated with social engineering strategies will allow men and women the scope necessary for generating new forms of experience and new ways of thinking (Smart, 1993). It provides us with the opportunity to respond positively with imagination and responsibility to the prospect of living without securities, guarantees, and order and with contingency and ambivalences – a condition, incidentally, that has always been with us. In the end, it opens up the possibility of changing things, of transforming prevailing forms of life, for the better (Smart, 1993).

NOTE

1. This concept applies to this paper as it should all others. The authority of establishing truth here rests with the reader. He or she has the right to decide on the worth of the arguments contained herein. As such, I recognize that my perspective is only one of many potential interpretations possible. And like any of these others, it is subject to the social, cultural, political, and historical webs of influences and power relationships that have given rise to it.

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