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PERSISTENT DIFFICULTIES WITH VALUES IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: MAPPING THE TERRAIN

Abstract. This chapter examines scholarly work in the area of values and Educational Administration, and maintains that academic inquiry into values has proceeded over the past several decades in the absence of any broadly shared conceptual agreement as to what values actually are or might be. It is argued that this conceptual incoherence hampers practitioners' efforts to understand the role values might play in their professional lives, and ultimately hinders the development of meaningful reflective practices. To this end, it is suggested that greater clarity is needed with regards to the dimensions of difference which characterize values inquiry. Four key dimensions are proposed and discussed: knowing values, framing values, investigating values, and informing values.

Recent scholarly attempts to better understand the work of principals and superintendents has accorded the study of values increased prominence (Begley, 1999a). This does not suggest, however, that the interest in values is particularly new. Indeed, questions surrounding truth, goodness, and moral rightness can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, and related axiological concerns have been raised in philosophical inquiry for several centuries. Yet over the past several decades, scholars of educational administration have begun to recognize the importance of values for those individuals we charge with running schools, evidenced by the formation of two affiliated academic centres, OISE/UT's Centre for the Study of Values and Leadership, and the University of Virginia's Centre for the Study of Leadership and Ethics. Moreover, recent texts edited by Begley and Leonard (1999) and Begley (1999b), further illuminate the vast and at times divergent interests in values.

As a basic assumption, it can be acknowledged that values are important to academic inquiry into educational leadership. As Willower (1992) points out, "a significant portion of the practice in educational administration requires rejecting some courses of action in favour of a preferred one" (p. 369). Nonetheless, while scholarly work in educational administration has increasingly embraced the term 'values', this shared focus is largely illusory, belying the actual level of coherence in academic approaches to studying values. Perhaps the two most rudimentary questions of the field remain highly contested: *what are values and how can we best understand them?*¹

Greenfield explains:

the fundamental problem in knowing and understanding social reality is of the place values shall play in inquiry. For nearly two decades this question has troubled the theory and knowledge promulgated in the field of educational administration (in Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, p. 169).

Central to Greenfield's point is that there is a lack of any widely-shared understanding of what values actually are or might be. In examining the extant

literature on the subject, Nicholas Rescher (1969) compiled a non-exhaustive list of nearly a dozen distinct, and at times, contradictory descriptions of values. Similarly, Frankena (1967) stresses this lack of coherence, explaining that:

the terms 'value' and 'valuation' and their cognates and compounds are used in a confused and confusing but widespread way in our contemporary culture, not only in economics and philosophy but also and especially in other social sciences and humanities (p. 229).

More recently, in a discussion of the conceptual dimensions of values, Green (1999) describes the host of alternative ways in which 'values' have been understood, entitled rather discouragingly, "The Grand Delusion" (pp. 123-147). While Green, driven by an interest in moral education, makes quite a concerted effort to be clear as to what he means by 'values', it would seem that many scholars of educational administration have been somewhat less conceptually fastidious. Indeed, a great deal of literature in educational administration refers to 'values' rather obliquely, providing little or no account of what is meant by the term.

Superficially, then, it may seem unlikely that values inquiry can meaningfully serve to examine administrative phenomena in the absence of any basic conceptual agreement as to the nature of what "values" actually are. As the literature on values has been informed by an exceptionally wide range of assumptions about "values", it should only be expected that the accumulation of scholarly work in the field is remarkably diverse. Thus, inquiry into values is not simply heterogeneous, but might even be said to be examining entirely different phenomena under the singular and dubious banner of 'values'.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE DIFFICULTIES WITH VALUES IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

It might be safely stated that, at this point in the development of the field, it is not likely, or perhaps even desirable, that universal agreement regarding the conceptual dimensions of values be pursued. If this is indeed the case then, at a minimum, there is a need for more clarity about the differences among competing perspectives which inform values research. To this end, I attempt to examine systematically the differences across perspectives in values research, "mapping the terrain" as the title of this chapter suggests. Of course, it would be nothing short of a Herculean effort to propose a comprehensive overview of perspectives which have their roots in centuries-old philosophical debates. Rather, the intention is to seek greater clarity than currently exists, by identifying and examining themes in the literature which embrace a broad range of theoretical understandings embedded within scholarly work on values in educational administration.

The benefit of this approach is essentially twofold. Firstly, I submit that the literature on values in educational administration is to a great extent fragmented, and while conceptually meaningful unification of dissimilar perspectives may not be feasible, clarity with the regard to their differences is essential. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, accounting for the persistent differences which underpin

scholarly inquiry into values may assist practitioners - those charged with the formidable task of running schools and school systems - in assessing how particular values perspectives may or may not apply to their work.

This chapter provides an analytic orientation to values perspectives advanced and pursued in the literature over the last several decades. More specifically, a four-part framework is applied to the analysis of existing approaches to conceptualizing values, in an attempt to identify and compare persistent themes. Though no exhaustive review of all values literature is possible, the sources used in this paper were selected based on several criteria including citation frequency, scholarly contribution, and breadth of perspective.

The analytic framework identifies four fundamental issues which will be examined within the literature on values and leadership. Expressed as questions, these four interrelated issues are: (a) what does it mean to know values? (b) how can values be conceptually framed? (c) how can values be investigated? and (d) how can values be informed?

Knowing Values - All social science research is informed by an epistemological perspective, essentially a position on what it means to “know”, or purport to “know” social phenomena. Inasmuch as all knowledge claims about values are embedded in assumptions about the nature of how social knowledge can be acquired, a description of these often unarticulated positions is of paramount importance.

Framing Values - As a point of departure, inquiry into values typically utilizes particular frameworks which inform and guide research. Since these frameworks provide the scaffolding for a great deal of empirical research into values, they are essential in shaping understandings surrounding the phenomenon.

Investigating Values - At the most rudimentary level, it is necessary to consider the role that values play in research efforts to describe social phenomena. Insofar as educational leadership focuses on the work of principals and superintendents in schools, the prominence of values in administrative inquiry illuminates a crucial perspective on understanding values in administrative work.

Informing Values - The relationship between scholarly work on values and administrative practice is of central importance. Indeed, the study of values in educational administration should, at least in some way, be aimed at offering meaningful insights to school leaders. Of particular importance in this area is the ethical content of values inquiry which provides the normative substance that may serve to guide administrative action.

Although this chapter is essentially an examination of existing theoretical literature, it is an interest in supporting practitioners that drives the analysis. The basic premise is that values theory, being highly prolific and diversified, remains overly inaccessible to practitioners. A clearer and more systematic understanding of the breadth and scope of values literature may enable them to better appreciate how values may or may not relate to their day-to-day work. I propose that a better understanding of values can assist school leaders in discriminating between competing tenets embedded in the literature, and hence heighten their sensibilities in drawing upon elements of scholarship which best reflect their own personal “values philosophy”. Inasmuch as values inquiry in educational administration is frequently predicated on the notion that school leaders are indeed valuing agents, it

is imperative that scholars in the field accord school leaders the opportunity to do just that - determine the relative "value" of contending theoretical perspectives which purport to inform their work.

KNOWING VALUES

Begley (1999b) rightly points out that values literature is characterized by "epistemological wrangling" (p. 117). Yet values seemed to be less troubling in the middle of the twentieth century, when the field of educational administration was undergoing a transformation most often referred to as the Theory Movement. The Theory Movement, at its core, sought to develop a science of educational administration, in which law-like generalizations could be developed to guide practitioners in their work (Evers & Lakomski, 1991; Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993). As Getzels explains, "systematic research requires the mediation of theory - theory that will give meaning and order to observations already made and will specify areas where observations still need to be made" (cited in Culbertson, 1988, p. 15).

This era reflected "a general doctrine of positivism which held that all genuine knowledge is based upon sense experience and can only be advanced by means of observation and experiment" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 11). In this conception of knowledge, there are believed to be universal laws guiding human conduct, and hence organizations operate within seemingly functionalist frames. By identifying the relationships between empirically grounded variables, it was suggested that the fundamental truths of administration could be discovered. Yet this emerging administrative science viewed people as highly determinable, and notions of values were eschewed in favour of more material and observable organizational variables. Herbert Simon's work (1945) was among the driving forces behind this movement, which proposed administration as, essentially, a value-neutral activity. Inquiry then, "was to be properly studied on the basis of objective observations informed by operationally defined concepts and directed and ordered by explanatory theories" (Allison, 1989, p. 12).

The ideals of the Theory Movement, however, have become increasingly criticized over the last three decades. In his famous address to colleagues in Bristol in 1974, Greenfield launched an attack on the positivistic tenets of an administrative science in what would be later recognized as "the epistemological shot that was heard around the world of educational administration" (Hodgkinson, 2000, p. 12). Greenfield (1975) argued that social reality is not a 'naturally' occurring phenomenon; rather, it is construed by individuals in different ways. Knowledge, he argued, should be recognized more tentatively, within subjective frames. In this view, humans are not moral ciphers but valuing agents, and prone to be influenced by these values. The goal of theory, then, would be to describe the ways in which individuals give meaning to their world, and make sense of their actions. Initially, constructivist-subjectivist² approaches came under heavy criticism, particularly from those vested in the development of a more traditional administrative science (e.g., Willower, 1980).

Greenfield's assault on the Theory Movement was bolstered by Christopher Hodgkinson, who challenged strictly technical-rational conceptualizations of educational administration by suggesting the work of school leaders to be morally

artful, rather than simply functional. Much of Hodgkinson's substantial contribution to the field can be found within four books (1978; 1983; 1991; 1996) to which Peter Ribbins (1999) refers to as the "Victorian Quartet" of values literature. Perhaps the most contentious and yet essential component of Hodgkinson's work is his conception of the naturalistic fallacy, which posits that values can not be reduced from objective facts, or as more commonly expressed, you can't get an "ought" from an "is". Viewed in this way, if administration is indeed a value-laden enterprise, and values could not be discerned from facts, then there could be no science of administration (Evers & Lakomski, 1993).

It would be largely incorrect to suggest that subjective-constructive epistemologies simply subverted the dominant positivist thinking of the Theory Movement. What emerged in actuality was a new post-positive perspective, "a contingent positivism that attempts to accommodate the most problematic criticisms of the former" (Begley, in preparation under contract). The extent to which post-positive inquiry differed substantially from the scholarly work of the preceding era is questionable. Allison (1989) explains that:

while Greenfield certainly laid the original optimistic hopes for a theoretical science of educational administration to final rest, his first shots at the positivistic beasts that had come to graze in [the] field of academic educational administration during the age of the New Movement scarcely wounded, let alone dispatched, them. Indeed, even a cursory glance through the pages of any recent issue of *Educational Administration Quarterly* . . . will show that the key notion of studying organizational functioning and administrator behaviour as objective, quantifiable, predictable, phenomena is still very much alive, and even kicking. (p. 13)

Post-positive perspectives frequently recognize the valuing nature of individuals, but view this as non-problematic insofar as values, like organization variables, can also be determined and accounted for, and hence provide but another variable for inquiry into administrative phenomena. This is starkly opposed by Greenfield's view that "values lie beyond rationality . . . they lie beyond quantification, beyond measurement. They are not 'variables'" (as cited in Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, pp. 183-184). Moreover, recent analyzes of paradigms of inquiry suggest that positive and post-positive perspectives frequently exclude the notion that values play a central role in educational research, while constructivist perspectives acknowledge and interrogate this role (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is perhaps for this reason that some scholars of educational administration might suggest, quite astonishingly, that contemporary philosophical work has contributed little to the development of the concept of leadership (e.g., Leithwood & Duke, 1999). One might suspect that the scholarly treatment of values as mere variables in our understanding of organizational processes is related to the view that conducting research itself is a relatively value-neutral enterprise, a position untenable to those who adopt more constructivist or subjectivist frames of inquiry.

Recently, Evers and Lakomski have proposed a theory of naturalistic coherentism over the course of three books (1991; 1996; 2000). In their approach, they "adjudicate a naturalistic definition of 'good' in terms of the role it plays in promoting the virtues of coherence in the theory, or system of statements, in which it figures" (Evers & Lakomski, 1993, p. 147). The promulgated coherentist virtues, which are instrumental in the naturalization of 'values', include: simplicity,



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