

Introduction:

Knowledge Base Problems in Educational Administration

During the last ten years, various groups within the field of education have attempted to articulate knowledge bases for their particular subfield. The effort began in teacher education, spearheaded in part by the Holmes group, a consortium of deans of schools of education and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education,¹ but educational administration—the subject of this book—soon followed suit. These efforts sought to catalog the knowledge that the practitioners of a particular field ought to possess and employ and, in the process, to legitimate the authority of those who possess, employ, or teach the designated knowledge base.

The impetus to develop a knowledge base in educational administration originated with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, a consortium of ten national school administration–related organizations.² In its report, *Improving the Preparation of School Administrators: An Agenda for Reform*, the National Policy Board recommended that the field rethink and clearly articulate its knowledge base and even suggested seven general categories of knowledge that could be used to frame the discussion: (1) societal and cultural influences on schooling; (2) teaching and learning processes and school improvement; (3) organizational theory; (4) methodologies of organizational studies and policy analysis; (5) leadership and management processes and functions; (6) policy studies and politics of education; and (7) moral and ethical dimensions of schooling.

Subsequently, the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), one of the National Policy Board’s member organizations, accepted the National Policy Board’s challenge and began a ten-year effort to identify “the knowledge essential for

school leaders to solve critical contemporary problems of practice” (UCEA 1992, 13). The first phase of the UCEA project has been completed and the products of that first phase have been published by McGraw-Hill in the form of a set of documents called *Primis*.

Primis is organized around seven general categories of knowledge. Each category in *Primis* includes an overview essay, a case study, an annotated bibliography of representative readings, and a number of illustrative papers. Patrick Forsyth (1993), the executive director of UCEA, indicates that the second phase of the ten-year project will be built around seven additional objectives: (1) To review the completeness of the seven domain structure, making adjustments and additions where necessary; (2) expand the knowledge in each domain; (3) analyze each knowledge domain for adequacy; (4) modify the content of each domain; (5) articulate the knowledge of each domain; (6) identify appropriate media for communication to multiple audiences; and (7) search for ways to integrate knowledge across domains (2).

The idea that some sort of knowledge base is needed in education is not new. On the contrary, the utility of a knowledge base for the field of education has been accepted relatively uncritically since the turn of the century, when reformers became intent on turning over educational decision-making to professionals (Tyack 1979). Explicit in their notion of professionalism was an assumption about the existence of a body of knowledge that, when learned and understood, conferred on the knower a level of expertise not available to nonprofessionals. The founding of schools of education and departments of educational administration was part of this effort. Contemporary knowledge base projects, however, differ from earlier ones in that they focus on creating a knowledge for educational subfields, such as teacher education or administration, rather than the field of educational more generally. But the goal of defining a knowledge base that in turn can ground and legitimate professional work has not been altered.

This book looks critically at the assumptions and beliefs that underlie efforts to create a knowledge base in educational administration. Its chapters consider a wide range of fundamental issues concerning the need for a knowledge base in educational administration and the possibility of developing and legitimating such a knowledge base. Also included are a number of chapters that accept the need for a knowledge base but offer suggestions concerning the content, development, and legitimacy of a knowledge base in educational administration that differ significantly from other recent efforts.

While this book project was stimulated by UCEA's initiation of a knowledge base project, the book itself should not be viewed primarily as a criticism of UCEA or its effort. We felt there was a need to address fundamental questions that virtually all knowledge base articulation efforts, not just the UCEA project, left unaddressed. We wanted, in short, to bring some assumptions about the nature of knowledge, and the use of knowledge to legitimate professional control, into the open. Indeed, we believe that any effort to develop a knowledge base in educational administration may be problematic for epistemological and practical reasons.

The Epistemological Problem

The epistemological problem can be stated succinctly: knowledge today is not what it used to be. Contemporary conceptions of knowledge in the social sciences and even, to some extent, in the physical sciences (see, for example, Harding 1991), are radically different from the conception encountered by early twentieth-century medical reformers. Nonetheless, it is this early twentieth-century conception that has served as a model for those intent on bolstering the professional status of various education-related fields, including educational administration. Today, in contrast to that positivist-like conception, there is a growing realization that knowledge—most certainly knowledge of the social world—is never independent of the knower. What we know always has something to do with who we are, where we have been, who has socialized us, and what we believe.

To put the matter another way, there is a growing realization that what we know is always dependent on paradigms and that the paradigms we employ are not so much determined by the data as by determiners of what the data mean and often what the data are. The power of paradigms, perspectives, or epistemologies to influence what we know can be understood by considering the plight of an empirical researcher who sets out to determine whether one form of curriculum organization produces more learning than another.

Before the researcher can answer this question, the term *learning* must be defined and operationalized. The field of psychology provides an array of paradigms that define learning quite differently from each other. The researcher, for example, might look at Piagetian psychology and employ Piaget's concept of conservation as the basis for formulating dependent variables. There is no equivalent concept in Skinnerian behaviorism; indeed,

Skinnerians mean something quite different than Piagetians when they use the term *learning* and, hence, the dependent variables they would employ are also quite different.

In fact, these two schools of psychology tend to view learning—and by implication teaching and curriculum organization—in virtually antithetical ways. For Skinnerians, learning occurs because someone has carefully structured curriculum around incrementally sequenced behavior that is to be mastered and reinforced. For Piagetians, learning is itself a process of structuring that must be engaged in by learners themselves. Teaching cannot be turned into a mechanical process of reinforcement, and schools and school districts cannot choreograph the teaching and learning process. Indeed, in Piagetian thought there is no analog for the Skinnerian concept of reinforcement. The best a teacher can do, from a Piagetian perspective, is to create a rich environment with which students can interact, allow students the freedom to interact with that environment, and then fashion instruction improvisationally to respond—frequently in the form of questions—to what students say or do.

The paradigm the empirical researcher chooses will thus influence the dependent variables employed in a study, the type of validity considered appropriate, aspects of the study design, and, ultimately, the conclusions the study comes to about the relative worth of different forms of curriculum organization. No statistical procedure can mitigate this a priori, paradigmatic influence. No critical experiment can be designed that will provide a final, metaparadigmatic answer.

The situation becomes even more complicated when we turn to paradigms that call into question the fundamental assumptions of experimental design. Philosophers such as Buber (1968) and, to some extent, Dewey (1916; see also Kleibard 1975), and curriculum theorists like Jardine and Clandinin (1987), for example, suggest that teachers should not manipulate students in a classroom the way scientists manipulate variables in a laboratory. Rather than attempting to control students, either directly as Skinnerians recommend or indirectly as suggested by Piagetians, these educational perspectives or paradigms suggest that teachers should engage in dialogue with students. Rather than formally or informally transmitting predetermined objectives to students, teachers should work with students to construct the curriculum for the class.

The empirical assumptions implicit in these prescriptive theories are consistent with views of social action articulated by

more descriptively oriented sociological paradigms, such as ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. These paradigms portray the social world not as a world of causes and effects but as a world of meanings that must constantly be negotiated and renegotiated. From this perspective, the cause-effect way of thinking that undergirds the process of experimental design distorts, in fundamental ways, what social action is and how it occurs.

Whether or not one accepts the conception of human action articulated in ethnomethodology or symbolic interactionism, these paradigms do provide an alternative to a cause-effect conception of how the social world operates, and, as a consequence, they remind us that the cause-effect conception of the social world is just that, one possible conception among many. In short, these paradigms have reinforced an idea put forth by Kant: It is impossible to talk about the nature of reality with any sense of certainty because we can never know reality independent of the cognitive structures that influence our perceptions of it.

Additional complications arise when such phenomena as ethnicity and gender are considered. Heath (1983), for example, indicates that the low-income African-American children in the school and community she studied did not come to school with limited preschool learning and parental teaching; rather, problems arose because what African-American parents meant by *learning* and *teaching* differed radically from the conceptions of learning and teaching enacted in the school setting. (Ironically, many of the skills these children learned in their homes are highly valued by business.) Similarly, it appears that women sometimes have a different way of knowing (Belenky 1986); they also at times know different things (Tannen 1991). Noddings's (1984) feminist theory of ethics, which is built around the notion of caring, for example, suggests that discussions of the moral and ethical dimension of schooling (Category 7 in the National Policy Board's framework and Domain 6 in the *Primis* document base) that are informed by feminist thought would be quite different from traditional discussions of this topic. Among other things, it is unlikely that someone guided by Noddings's feminist conception of ethics would link an ethics discussion with a discussion of legal matters as is done in the *Primis* database. Indeed, the emphasis on caring and affect in Noddings's feminist paradigm seems to require that we either abandon the knowledge base metaphor entirely or radically redefine what knowledge is.

To summarize, today there is a growing realization that no knowledge is objective and that all knowledge reflects the values,

interests and biases of the knower. One implication of this realization is that when we legitimate certain knowledge—when we make it part of an official knowledge base, for instance—we are, in essence, serving the interests of some individuals and groups and thwarting the interests and concerns of others. To state the matter more boldly: We are engaging in a political act. This analysis calls into question the professional/political distinction that has been accepted uncritically throughout most of this century. At a more fundamental level, it calls into question the viability of the very notion of professionalism within an applied, value-oriented field such as educational administration.

The Pragmatic Problem

There is a second, more pragmatic problem with traditional and possibly contemporary notions of a knowledge base. For years, many practitioners have described traditional administrative preparation programs as being largely irrelevant and out of touch with practical concerns. Today practitioners who advance this point of view have a growing number of allies among academics both within the field of educational administration (see, for example, Bridges 1992) and in other related fields (see, for example, Schon 1983). These allies provide powerful theoretical justifications for practitioners' claims because these theoretical justifications often suggest that the knowledge required in action-oriented contexts is fundamentally different from the theoretical knowledge valued in universities. This pragmatic problem, therefore, like the epistemological difficulty discussed above, suggests the need to question traditional assumptions about professionalism and traditional notions about a knowledge base. That is precisely what this book attempts to do.

The Purpose of This Book

The purpose of this book, in fact, is to bring to the center of the knowledge base discussion the epistemological and pragmatic concerns articulated above. Because our wish is to give voice to an array of alternative perspectives rather than to advocate a particular point of view, the reader will encounter considerable diversity within this book. We have intentionally created an intellectual vaudeville rather than a book with a single coherent point of view.

As was noted above, some of our contributors call into question the very notion of a knowledge base; others accept the legitimacy of the notion, but argue for a particular kind of knowledge base, or for the inclusion of content that to date has not been a part of the educational administration knowledge base. Furthermore, the book's diversity is not limited to substance. Because substance and form are often inextricably linked (for example, even such a simple matter as whether one writes in first or third person can suggest something about one's views on the value and/or inevitability of subjectivity), the editors of this volume have consciously tried to limit their editorial role. We have solicited participants, using a concern for diversity as a guiding principle; we have managed the process (serving as a liaison with the publisher, setting deadlines); we have engaged in minimal mechanical editing or "correcting"; we have shared reviewers' comments; and we have organized the selections into three broad, loosely defined parts, and put the selections into what seemed to us to be a sensible order within each part. To the extent possible, however, we have tried to let our contributors speak for themselves, both with respect to form and substance.

The Organization and Content of the Book

The essays in Part I, Framing the Debate, address the two problems articulated in the first part of this introduction. The first group of essays in Part I focus primarily on the epistemological problem. The lead-off essay, "The Knowledge Base in Educational Administration: Postpositivist Reflections," by James Joseph Scheurich, directly challenges the current UCEA knowledge base project from a postpositivist point of view. In this paper, Scheurich contends that newly emergent perspectives, like critical theory, feminism, race-oriented perspectives, and postmodernism, undermine or, at least, call into question much of what has been considered to be the knowledge base in educational administration. The second essay, Janet Littrell and William Foster's "The Myth of a Knowledge Base in Educational Administration," is written from a similar vantage point but is even more critical of the knowledge base project. Littrell and Foster argue that a science of management, or a science of administration, is a myth that serves to hide the dimensions of power and control that shape contemporary management methods. A third essay, Paul Bredeson's "Building a Professional Knowledge Base in Educational Administration: Opportunities and Obstacles,"

takes a more neutral stance with respect to the recent knowledge base articulation effort but, nevertheless, poses an important cautionary question for those articulating the knowledge base: Does the articulation of domains of professional knowledge and skills enhance our understanding and inform our practice, or does it tend to perpetuate historic boundaries that separate individuals and groups within teaching and learning communities?

Bredeson's concern with informing practice provides a transition to a second set of essays in Part I, that address pragmatic issues. Joseph Murphy, in his essay, "The Knowledge Base in School Administration: Historical Footings and Emerging Trends," provides a historical perspective on contemporary knowledge articulation efforts. Murphy's essay offers considerable optimism that contemporary efforts will yield a knowledge base rooted in the craft dimensions of the profession and avoid the problem of elitism that plagued past efforts. In the next essay, "A Knowledge Base for Educational Administration: Notes from the Field," Robert Donmoyer, writing from the perspective of an acting principal, develops a position that is considerably less optimistic than Murphy's. Donmoyer's experiences with and reflections on knowledge use in the field has led him to conclude that the search for a knowledge base and the whole knowledge base metaphor may be inappropriate starting points for reforming administrator preparation. According to Donmoyer, we should ask, instead, pedagogical questions: "How do we make preparation programs more 'lifelike'? What should we have future administrators do so they will be prepared for the complexity of their work?"

Rodney Muth's essay, "Craft Knowledge and Institutional Constraints," suggests that those who ask such questions and arrive at sensible answers will confront mammoth implementation problems. Muth describes an array of factors likely to impede efforts to make the academy more responsive to the craft dimensions of our profession. Following Muth's essay is Michael Imber's "Organizational Counterproductivism in Educational Administration," which adopts a skeptical stance similar in many respects to the stance found in preceding articles in this section. Imber contends that practicing administrators possess little of the knowledge that professors of educational administration claim to teach and that these practitioners often act in ways that are inconsistent both with what they have been taught and what they claim to know.

The final essay in this section is Gary Anderson and Bonnie Page's "Narrative Knowledge and Educational Administration: The Stories That Guide Our Practice." Anderson and Page argue that

an extensive knowledge base for educational administration can be found within what they refer to as practitioner stories or narratives. These practitioner narratives are themselves contained within larger metanarratives that are based on assumptions about schools, administration, learning, and children. These assumptions, according to Anderson and Page, need to be subjected to critical questioning.

The second part of the book reinforces the critique of Part I but from a different slant. Part II, *Hearing Traditionally Excluded Voices*, presents perspectives that have historically been under-represented within the field of educational administration. The first essay, Charol Shakeshaft's "A Cup Half Full: A Gender Critique of the Knowledge Base in Educational Administration," examines ways that the traditional knowledge base has systematically ignored gender and demonstrates, through current research on men and women in administration, that a knowledge base built solely on male administrator behavior only tells part of the story.

Flora Ida Ortiz and David Jude Ortiz reach a similar conclusion in "How Gender and Ethnicity Interact in the Practice of Educational Administration: The Case of Hispanic Female Superintendents." As their title suggests, however, their chapter considers how both gender and ethnicity undermine traditional conceptions of the knowledge base in educational administration. Gender and ethnicity concerns remain at the center of the third essay in this part of the book: Vivian Ikpa's "Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and the Quest for a Knowledge Base in Educational Administration" argues that in the quest for an appropriate knowledge base, gender, ethnicity, and race have not been sufficiently considered. Her essay, like others in this section, contends that the knowledge base in educational administration primarily reflects the exclusive concerns of white male administrators. She suggests that efforts to articulate a knowledge base need to be grounded in an inclusiveness that reflects societal diversity.

The fourth essay in Part II, Jayminn Sulir Sanford's "Lessons of Leadership: A Critique of the Knowledge Base in Educational Administration," also places race at its center, but Sanford is more pessimistic than Ikpa about the possibility that any resulting knowledge base will be more inclusive than previous ones. She sees little reason to expect that any improvement appreciative of the diverse populations of successful urban educators and people of color will occur. This section concludes with an essay by Rosemary Papalewis, "Fe/Male Voices: Leadership and the Knowledge Base."

Papalewis focuses specifically on differences between female and male patterns of communication and relationship styles that have been traditionally excluded in educational administration. She concludes by advancing a critically important point made by all of the authors of this section: Any knowledge base in educational administration needs to reflect the diverse voices in society and in educational administration.

The third and final part of the book, *Adding New Points of View*, is a potpourri of positions that range from suggestions for incremental change to suggestions for changes that are more radical. The first four essays would require only slight modifications to the seven-category scheme proposed by the National Policy Board and employed in UCEA's *Primis* project. The first essay in Part III, Joseph Blaze's "The Micropolitics of Education: The State of the Art," accepts the politics and policy category proposed by the National Policy Board and employed by UCEA. He proposes, however, a somewhat different, more "micro" definition of politics. Similarly, Rodney Ogawa, in "Developments in Theory and Practice: An Opportunity to Examine the Impact of the Environment on School Organizations" does not challenge the utility of the organizational theory category; he simply wants to alter the scope of the organizational theory employed. Tyll van Geel's "The Preparation of Educational Leaders and Rational Choice Theory," the third essay in this section, would also fit within the seven-category scheme, but he too wants to alter the scope of the organizational theory category, in his case, by adding rational choice theory and game theory perspectives to the array of possible approaches.

Another contributor, Jane Lindle, proposes an orientation that also does not significantly challenge current efforts to articulate a knowledge base for the field, although her proposal does not fit easily into the seven-category scheme that has served to organize UCEA work to date. Lindle's "Needed: A Knowledge Base that Promotes Creativity—Toward a Rhetorical Knowledge Base for Educational Administration" is reflective of a renewed interest in rhetoric across the social sciences. While her paper begins with a discussion of the importance of classical rhetoric, it ends with a focus on how the "rhetorical art" of humor can serve educational administrators.

The next two authors in this section suggest more global and fundamental changes in our conception of the knowledge base in educational administration, although the changes each recommends are quite different. Nona Prestine roots her recommendations in the perspective of cognitive psychology. Her essay, "A Constructivist View of the Knowledge Base in Educational

Administration,” argues that educational administration is an ill-structured domain of knowledge rather than a well-structured one. Consequently, she suggests that from a constructivist viewpoint, any knowledge base articulated for educational administration must be both loosely construed and open to diverse interpretations.

Like Prestine, Coileen Capper criticizes the general orientation of the knowledge-base articulation effort and proposes an entirely different orientation. Capper’s “An Otherist Postructural Perspective of the Knowledge Base in Educational Administration” is developed in comparison to other relatively new perspectives in educational administration, namely, critical theory, feminist theory, and poststructural theory. In fact, her perspective could be said to be one particular integration of these three latter theories. She concludes by supporting the proliferation of a range of perspectives and opposing the very idea of a definitive knowledge base.

The final chapter in the book is particularly important, given our focus and goals. For much of his career, the essay’s author was, according to Culbertson (1988), one of the small number of architects of the ascension of positivism within educational administration. It is, thus, much to the point of this book that Daniel Griffiths’s essay is entitled “Theoretical Pluralism in Educational Administration.” Griffiths argues that organizations, and the activities that occur within them, are complex phenomena, requiring study from many points of view. He then develops a framework for determining how various problems and issues within organizations are to be matched with appropriate theories or perspectives.

Conclusion

Griffiths’s endorsement of theoretical pluralism provides a somewhat comforting conclusion to the seemingly chaotic intellectual vaudeville on display in this book. We caution the reader not to feel too comforted, however. Theoretical pluralism—for all of its appeal in the intellectual realm of understanding—may be more problematic at the level of action. When we act, either as administrators or as professors of administration, hard choices must be made and contradictions and antithetical points of view must be confronted and somehow resolved. How we go about resolving, at the level of action, what are often incommensurable points of view is not at all obvious.

That issue is beyond the scope of this book which seeks to alert readers to problems or positions that have not been sufficiently addressed and to make sure voices that have traditionally not been heard or even presented in forums like this are presented and, we hope, heard. More fundamentally, we want to open up a debate about what the notion of professionalism should mean in a field such as ours and what role knowledge can legitimately play in grounding and legitimating professional expertise.

Notes

1. See, for example, Holmes 1986, and two recent publications of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education: *Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher* (Reynolds 1989) and *Knowledge Base for Teacher Education* (Murray 1994).

2. The membership includes the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), the American Association of School Administrators, (AASA), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the Association of School Business Officials, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), the National School Boards Association (NSBA), and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA).

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