# From Scientific Management to Social Justice…and Back Again? Pedagogical Shifts in the Study and Practice of Educational Leadership

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## Abstract

This article presents an historical overview of pedagogical orientations of school leadership in the United States, and then considers issues facing contemporary educational leaders in this context. Our survey begins with a consideration of the early influence of Frederick Taylor and ends in the present day, a time when the fields of practice and scholarship in educational leadership collectively stand at a critical, yet not unprecedented, crossroad—the intersection of social justice and scientific management.

# From Scientific Management to Social Justice…and Back Again? Pedagogical Shifts in the Study and Practice of Educational Leadership

"One faces the future with one's past."
—Pearl S. Buck

## Introduction

In the United States, school leadership underwent a profound transformation over the course of the twentieth century. Prior to World War II, the likes of Elwood Cubberly, George Strayer, and others in the Frederick Taylor-influenced First Wave of Scientific Management, shaped a nascent and under-conceptualized knowledge base. After 1945, an explosion of scholarly activity in educational leadership and the emergence of university-based preparation programs helped buoy several significant pedagogical movements that had profound implications for educational leaders. In particular, two mid-Century movements, one devoted to the creation and testing of administrative theory and another centered on the application and exploration of social science research methods shaped the thirty years preceding 1980 and continues to exert significant influence on the field today. The eighties saw the study of educational leadership take a "postmodern turn," as a cadre of influential scholars and practitioners reconceived leadership by conducting inquiry through conceptual lenses grounded in various forms of ethical critique, critical and feminist theories, pluralistic multiculturalism, and social justice. Yet, for over a century's worth of practice, inquiry and interest in educational leadership, practitioners and scholars seldom look backward for guidance as they consider the future.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, we seek to examine pedagogical trends in educational leadership toward the goal of identifying patterns that have historically shaped the field. Second, given this historical perspective, we consider issues and contingencies that confront a field of practice and scholarship standing collectively at a crossroads. As a Second Wave of Scientific Management gathers strength, scholars and practitioners alike must consider how concepts such as social justice will inform, transform, or have marginal impact on the preparation and practice of a new generation of leaders.

In order to ground subsequent discussions in an historical context, we begin this article with a review of literature that chronicles certain historical trends in educational leadership. It is important to note at the onset that we consider this review broader than it is deep; we posit zeitgeist rather than expounding subtleties within specific eras. After establishing broad themes that have informed formal educational leadership during various eras, we then turn from the past to the present and consider how these themes inform the practice, preparation, and study of educational leadership.

## Pedagogical Trends in Educational Leadership in the United States: Pre-World War II

### *The First Wave of Spiritual and Social Leadership*

At the onset of the twentieth century many community members viewed school leaders as having a few primary concerns, including the promotion of traditional spiritual values and the development of strong social contacts within the school community. The social contact element dealt with enlisting the cooperation of faculty members in finding solutions to institutional problems and "accurately sensing" the social problems of the student body (Johnston, Newlon, & Pickell, 1922). Upon sensing problems and "correcting" them, principals were then expected to actively promote appropriate moral and spiritual values among school community members. School leaders of this era embraced a pedagogy grounded in the belief that humans could be molded into a particular vision of "perfectibility" (Mason, 1986). However, sensing social problems and applying an uncomplicated (and uncompromising) moral functionalism as a salve was soon not enough for a field moving quickly toward professionalism and systematic preparation.

### *The First Wave of Scientific Management*

It is hard to overstate the importance and influence of several key individuals and a single institution on the development programs and processes of educational leaders in the first four decades of the twentieth century. With regard to institutional significance, the Teachers College at Columbia University stands alone. From 1904-1934, over half of all dissertations completed on topics related to educational administration were conducted at the "temple of Educational Administration in the Pre-World War II era" (Campbell, Fleming, Newell, & Bennion, 1987, p. 180). This generation of Columbia-educated pioneers included Dutton and Snedden (1909) who published one of the earliest textbooks on educational administration, *The Administration of Public Education in the United States*, an exhaustive 600 page text which "left nothing unexamined" (Campbell et al., 1987, p. 176).

English (2002a) notes that early Columbia Generation writers were "infatuated with the rhetoric and publicity surrounding the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor" and accordingly, "the 'new' mission for education colleges was to scientifically prepare educational leaders" (p. 110). Campbell et al (1987) lent further support to this analysis, pointing out that "the assumptions of scientific management are evident throughout" Dutton and Snedden's (insert year), *The Administration of Public Education in the United States*, as evidenced in part by the "Problems of Active Interest" that the authors list including:

1. The centralization of administrative functions;
2. The determination of the most effective areas of local administration, according; to the type of education under consideration;
3. The most effective distribution of functions between lay and ex-officio administrators, on the one hand, and experts on the other;

4. Supervision of instruction in non-urban areas, and;
5. The development of new agencies of control for new types of educational activity (p. 176).

These administrative goals and functions are consistent with principles of scientific management, in that they reveal an overarching concern with protocol and procedure, and a penchant for efficiency, control, and effectiveness. Other textbooks were generally in keeping with this orientation ( e.g. Strayer & Thorndike, 1912, Cubberly, 1922). While Dutton and Snedden (1909) had an influence on early administrative thought, their students Elwood Cubberly and George Strayer continued Columbia's history of influence by shaping several subsequent generations as textbook writers.

The emerging view of the 1920s principal as scientific manager dominated the scholarly writing of the 1930s. The spiritual element of the principalship became less important, and the conception of schools as businesses with the principal as an executive became more popular. Business values and rhetoric gained acceptance within school systems, and, as leaders of the schools, principals became business managers responsible for devising standardized methods of pupil accounting and introducing sound business administration practices in budgeting, planning, maintenance, and finance (Strayer, 1930).

School organization and supervision of employees were critical components of educational leadership. Leaders concerned themselves with designing school systems where expertise and efficiency governed the organization. University-based educators contributed to the development of educational leadership as a professional occupation by creating degree programs and special courses of study to prepare educational leaders (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Murphy's (1931) study (as cited in Beck & Murphy, 1993) revealed that these preparation programs commonly included courses such as finance, business administration, organization and administration of school curriculum, and management of school records and reports.

*Human Relations and Social Policy.*

By the late 1930s, even early proponents of scientific management began to turn their interest from Taylorism. Cubberly (1929) himself integrated human relations concepts into a revised version of *Public School Administration* in order to acknowledge the dynamic and complex nature of educational administration. Newlon (1934), another Columbia University professor, added to the field's sudden ontological pluralism by adding an influential book titled *Educational Administration as Social Policy* which suggested the role of administrators was actually as developers and implementers of educational policy rather than site-based authorities. Importantly, Newlon implicitly predicted what was to become the intellectual thrust of one of the most influential post-war movements in educational administration when he noted that school leaders must "look to the emerging social sciences, not to the physical sciences, for its methods

of inquiry" (Campbell, et al., 1987, p. 178). Newlon had predicted the Theory Movement.

## The Search for an Intellectual and Theoretical Base for Educational Administration

### *Democratic and Theoretically Based Leadership Preparation*

World War II had a profound effect on educational leadership in the United States. Society expected their school leaders to be the leaders of the war effort on the home front by promoting and instilling in their students distinctly "American" values. With this idea came a different social purpose for schooling, particularly at the building-site level; Principals were expected to provide democratic leadership enabling students and teachers to more actively engage and understand decision making processes as they sought to lead a productive life. Involvement of various stakeholders in decision-making processes became important. Farmer (1948) and Reber (1948) suggested that an effective principal understood the community and provided for positive community relations to ensure the success of the educational organization. Leadership preparation became concerned with curriculum development, group coordination, supervision, and personnel development (Barnard, 1938; Campbell, Fleming, Newell, & Bennion, 1987).

In addition, a host of structural and organizational issues influenced educational leadership during the early post-war years. Universities began offering administrator training courses on a larger scale; society became more centralized; the United States began to play an increasing role in international affairs; technology advanced rapidly; and schools themselves became more crowded and more complex (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). As a result of these factors, educational leaders were expected to draw insights from educational, psychological, sociological, and business research[1]. When schooling practices were challenged, principals were expected to defend those practices with empirical and theoretical findings from behavioral science disciplines (Campbell, 1981). However, concurrent to these shifting societal and topical emphases, another substantive change was taking place.

The administrative theory movement began in the late 1940s and continued through the 1950s. Proponents of this movement advocated that educational leaders develop and test theories like researchers in other scientific disciplines. Buoyed by widespread acknowledgement among influential educational administration organizations and from strong philosophic influences outside the field (Culbertson, 1995), educational administrators and the professors who prepared and trained them embarked on a journey of conceptual exploration, popularly called, the

[1] Of course, while the new-found emphasis on social science methods marked an important development, many researchers continued to concentrate on administrators' effective and efficient use of time and fiscal resources by focusing on details of school operations, including methods for handling daily attendance slips, change of classroom procedures, and effective ways of introducing new staff members to the school environment (Kyte, 1952).

"Theory Movement." The goal of the movement was to create a single, unified science of educational administration grounded in the tenets of logical positivism that could guide inquiry, and ultimately practice (Culbertson, 1995; Brooks, & Miles, 2006). Again, educational administration scholars looked outside their ranks to find conceptual inspiration, methodological processes, and epistemological perspective, this time turning to "the applied field of public administration" (Culbertson, 1995, p. 38). Examples of important contributions to the Theory movement included Getzel's (1952) "social process" of administration, Shartle's (1956) theory of "behavior in organizations", Hemphill and Coon's (1957) Theory of Group Leadership, and a broad range of contributions set forth by Daniel Griffiths (Culbertson, 1995). As the field of educational administration sought to develop theory, several strains of inquiry rooted in various social sciences emerged and continue today. In particular, researchers adopted anthropological (Callahan, 1962; Conant, 1964; Wolcott, 1970), sociological (Lortie, 1975), and political science (Scribner & Englert, 1977) methods and theories to investigate educational administration-related phenomena.

## Educational Administration and Social Turbulence

### *Leadership for Social Equilibrium*

As a result of the social and political unrest of the 1960s, principals and academicians made efforts to maintain stability and a sense of normalcy in schools. Theorists and administrators upheld conceptions of schools as rational, goal-driven systems and investigated ways educational leaders might promote institutional and social equilibrium. In particular, theorists relied heavily upon Max Weber's concept of organizations as rational bureaucracies. As a result, administrators and those who prepared and trained them came to believe that this type of governance structure was appropriate for schools and began to stress bureaucratic images and structures in their work (Douglass, 1963; Noar, 1961).

With the proliferation of this belief in rationality, educational leaders were expected to support the educational bureaucracy by protecting their own authority, respecting the position of superiors, and guarding against appropriation of power by teachers (Beck & Murphy, 1993). In addition, principals became on-site researchers as categorical, quantitative, and empirical terms dominated discussions of the principal's work. Principals were asked to use increasingly sophisticated, scientific strategies for planning and measuring (Glass, 1986). The belief that proper techniques and modern technology would produce increased outcomes resulted in principals being held accountable for their decisions and school activities in a way they never had been before. Because of this pressure and related macro-political demands, many principals felt vulnerable and confused about role expectations (Austin, French, & Hull, 1962).

### *Educational Administration as a Humanistic Endeavor*

External factors exerted a heavy influence on administrators' preparation and practice in the 1970s. Increased federal involvement in local schools and the growing number of special interest groups altered

many tasks of educational leaders. As a result of a renewed emphasis on community, leaders were expected to build alliances to ensure that schools and the community connected in meaningful ways (Burden & Whitt, 1973). More than ever, the professional success of educational leaders hinged on the support of stakeholders outside the school organization. In the 1970s, principals were also expected to see that meaningful educational experiences were offered to students, teachers, staff, *and* community members (Macdonald & Zaret, 1975). This emphasis on the human side of schools-as-open-systems also led to the expectation that principals would engage in and encourage positive, supportive interpersonal relationships. Theorists called for principals to adopt a human resource model of administration (Sergiovanni & Carver, 1973).

As a result of these expectations, educational leaders balanced many roles including interpersonal facilitator, information manager, and decision maker. As interpersonal facilitators, principals acted as figurehead, leader, and liaison. As information managers, they were monitors, disseminators, and spokespersons. And finally, as decision makers, principals became entrepreneurs, disturbance handlers, resource allocators, and negotiators (Mintzberg, 1973). The roles educational leaders were to assume and the duties to which they were beholden had expanded to an almost untenable list.

## The Postmodern Turn in Educational Administration

During the 1980s and 1990s educational administration took a "postmodern turn" (English, 2003). That is, a proliferation of ideas, perspectives and pedagogy entered the field to provide fresh insight. In particular, the introduction and application of various forms of critical and feminist theory cast a doubting eye over much of the terrain that had previously been identified as the "knowledge base" that undergirded the field (English, 2003; Foster, 1986; Marshall, 1997). Other important conceptual advances included pluralism (e.g. Capper, 1993), multiculturalism (Banks, 1993), a Second Wave of ethical (e.g. Beck & Murphy, 1993; Starratt, 2004) and spiritual leadership (e.g. Dantley, 2005), and the emergence of several loosely-coupled strains of inquiry called social justice (English, 1994; Young & Laible, 2000). The last of these, social justice, incorporates elements of many of these "postmodern" ideas, and is a movement that prompts scholars and educational leaders to assume an activist stance in practice and urges them to practice liberation and emancipatory pedagogy in all facets of their work.

## Leadership for Social Justice

Social justice is studied by legal scholars, social scientists, and in professional fields such as journalism and education (Cohen, 1986; Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998). Finding conceptual inspiration and guidance in notions of equity and equality, and in critical, feminist, and ethical theories, social justice scholars have largely rejected the rational-technical and efficiency-focused conceptions of leadership that form the balance of the field's traditional knowledge base (English, 2002b; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). While not altogether eschewing

managerial, administrative, organizational and leadership theory, social justice scholars have critiqued and expanded them as they developed a pedagogy of leadership based on an ethic of care and the moral imperative of improving "practice and student outcomes for minority, economically disadvantaged, female, gay/lesbian, and other students who have not traditionally served well in schools" (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, p. 6). Over the past several decades, educational leadership researchers and practitioners who have embraced this calling—this pedagogy of social justice—have drawn from and contributed to emergent multi- and interdisciplinary lines of inquiry in thought and action (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). As a result, several rich veins of research have emerged and phenomena previously ignored (e.g. the influence of leadership activity on institutional racism, gender discrimination, inequality of opportunity, and inequity of educational processes) have gained currency and attention. In particular, scholars have noted a need to raise awareness of social justice issues in pre-service educational leadership preparation programs and to understand how school leaders can promote equity at the building-level (Brooks, 2006).

In order to understand, promote, and enact social justice, school leaders must first develop a heightened and critical awareness of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization. According to Freire (2004), critical consciousness, or conscientizacão, "refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 17). This orientation is taught overtly in some pre-service educational leadership programs, learned on-the-job or in professional development by other leaders, and likely never learned by others.

However, awareness of social injustices is not sufficient, school leaders must act when they identify inequity. School leaders are not only uniquely positioned to influence equitable educational practices, their proactive involvement is imperative. As Larson and Murtadha (2002) note, "throughout history, creating greater social justice in society and in its institutions has required the commitment of dedicated leaders" (p. 135). Without leadership, schools are more likely to perpetuate status quo hegemony rather than advance liberation (Apple, 1979). Thankfully, the proactive leader has a number of options should they choose to pursue external support for meaningful reforms that can substantively and positively change what might be longstanding traditions of inequity in their schools. In addition to increased federal funding through such programs as Title I, school leaders may also apply for additional funding from an unprecedented variety of federal, state, local, and philanthropic programs. Depending on their particular situation, school leaders may also be able to adopt a comprehensive or programmatic school reform designed to ameliorate a particular social and/or educational need (Brooks, Scribner, & Eferakorho, 2004). Other options available to leaders seeking to enact social justice include introducing and supporting democratic and ethical organizational processes, reforming, aligning, and

expanding curricula to better meet the needs of a particular population, promoting understanding of multicultualistic pluralism, practicing difference-sensitive instructional leadership and providing professional development opportunities that focus on how educators can better serve traditionally under-represented and poorly served peoples (Capper, 1993; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Contemporary leaders have a variety of tools and techniques at their disposal that can help them identify social injustice in schools. For example, school leaders can:

1. conduct equity audits using aggregate or disaggregated student achievement data (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003);
2. examine allocation of instructional and curricular resources among school personnel and programs to determine if traditionally disadvantaged populations are receiving equitable disbursement of goods and services (Dantey & Tillman, 2006);
3. form meaningful and vibrant communications networks that include and validate the perspectives of students, families and community members in addition to educational professionals who serve the school (Merchant & Shoho, 2006).

Leaders who develop this perspective and adopt a social justice stance have been characterized as:

1. *Transformational public intellectuals*, who "believe that the pedagogy in schools must be focused on morally impacting ends" (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 20)
2. *Bridge people*, who are "committed to creating a bridge between themselves and others, for the purposes of improving the lives of all those with whom they work" (Merchant & Shoho, 2006, p. 86)
3. *Critical activists*, who will deconstruct political, social and economic inequity and organize school and community resources toward the central aim of providing opportunity for traditionally underrepresented and oppressed peoples (Larson & Ovando, 2001; Larson & Murtadha, 2002)

Still, numerous resources, innovative options, and outstanding individuals do not guarantee that processes will be implemented faithfully or that educational outcomes will necessarily improve.

Even when school leaders recognize inequity and conceive of an intervention, they can be forced into complicity or inaction because they fear sanctions, or even termination of employment, from "higher-ups" in the system that do not share the leader's goals and instead operate from a rational, technocratic, and "difference-blind" pedagogy (Larson & Murtadha, 2002, p. 138). Many school leaders operate in complex and conflicted bureaucracies that prevent rather than often enable the kind of proactive behavior that a social justice orientation toward leadership demands (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Further, while internal organizational constraints can thwart attempts to promote social justice in a school, external and boundary-spanning dynamics such as poor communication with traditionally oppressed families, lack of community support and involvement, and deep-seeded mistrust of public institutions such as

schools among traditionally disadvantaged peoples may likewise prove to be significant obstacles. (Larson & Murtadha, 2002).

## Standing at the Crossroads of Scientific Management and Social Justice: Contemporary Implications

In the United States, 2002's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signaled the beginning of an educational policy era marked by accountability and an emphasis on increasing student achievement. While this twin focus has been part of the foundation for the study and practice of educational leadership for some time, the advent of legislative mandate introduces a new and complicated dynamic, especially since the legal structure of education in the United States means that the somewhat ambiguous NCLB guidelines are interpreted and implemented at the state level (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, & Thomas, 2004). Therefore, by design, the exact manner in which these goals should be attained and the implications of these foci for educational leaders at the school and district levels are unspecified and have been a topic of much debate, consternation, and confusion. To some, the new accountability is a Clarion call for a Second Wave of Scientific Management. In particular, Levine (2003), Hess (2004) and his colleagues (2005) have argued for the abolishment or reconstitution of university-based educational leadership preparation programs, in part because scholars and instructors in their ranks focus on a "utopian agenda" of social justice (Hess, 2004, p. 3). Hess favors a business management, market driven, and high stakes outcome-oriented model of educational leadership. This emphasis on business-style efficiency bears an uncanny resemblance to the Frederick Taylor-inspired traditions that dominated the field throughout the 1920s-1940s. Curiously, as also happened during that era, contemporary educational leaders are considering the rise of scientific management pedagogy at a time when moral issues—social justice issues—have been at the fore of pedagogical conversations.

In light of recent trends in the scholarship and practice of educational leadership, the rise of a Second Wave of Scientific Management asks many questions of practicing researchers and leaders engaged in educational leadership for social justice. We will raise two questions in particular, and then conclude this article by posing others to scholars and practitioners for further consideration and exploration. First—*are social justice and scientific management mutually exclusive concepts?* At first glance, an emphasis on technocratic rationality and outcome measurements may seem completely incongruent to issues of equity, and to be sure, many researchers have argued this point at great length (e.g. Berliner & Biddle, 1995). However, other scholars (e.g. Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Johnson, 2002) have explored techniques for promoting equity using standardized test data and other accountability measures. Exploring this tension is difficult and controversial work but extremely relevant and necessary in a maturing high-accountability policy environment. Second—*what lessons can we learn from the first wave of scientific management that are still relevant today?* To be sure, the political and socio-cultural contexts of

educational leadership are different from a century ago in many respects. However, certain critiques of scientific management retain relevance and are important for contemporary educational leaders to consider. For example, English (2002b), notes that a scientific management orientation "creates a demarcation line, bestowing legitimacy on those who do their work within it while discrediting all that which came before as false or trivial" (p. 111). In a time where demographic trends indicate unprecedented and increasing ethnic diversity, and educators have a heightened sensitivity toward meeting the needs of all students, educational leaders must strive to understand issues from multiple perspectives and craft a leadership pedagogy sensitive to individual and sub-group differences. The idea of creating such a line of legitimization that separates and favors some at the expense of others seems unacceptable.

Certainly there are other questions that beg askance. Given these issues, what is the next step in the evolution of educational leadership preparation? How might credentialing and/or accreditation for educational leaders develop as they seek to navigate uncharted pedagogical terrain? How do educational leaders positively impact the educational experiences of all children in schools? What, if anything, now constitutes the protean knowledge base of educational leadership? Are there signature pedagogies, sets of skills, or certain competencies an educational leader should, could, or must exhibit? Will social justice become another historical era, fondly recalled by a few and gladly forgotten by some, or a paradigm shift that actually produces the liberation pedagogy it promises? Will social justice be washed away by a second wave of scientific management? Surely, educational leaders stand at a crossroads, with critical decisions to be make about the direction of the present and the future.

While the balance of this inquiry was restricted to identifying and discussing pedagogical trends in the United States, this review and these questions touch on many enduring dilemmas and enigmas that educational leaders and scholars have addressed in many national and international contexts. As researchers and practitioners outside the United States reflect on the salience of the perspective we articulate in this article, we invite them to consider how these trends and issues differ or resonate to pedagogical shifts they have witnessed in their own countries. Further, as educational leaders from around the globe increasingly seek to learn from each other in their efforts to provide better educational experiences for children, it seems that unless we try and learn lessons from the history of educational leadership, regardless of political or geographic boundary, then we are doing a disservice to our profession and to the children in our charge.

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