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Culture and educational administration A case of finding out what you don't know you don't know

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Abstract (Summary)

Hallinger and Leithwood outline the rationale for exploring the role of culture in the practice of educational administration. They examine how culture fits into a broad theoretical framework for studying administrative behavior in education. In doing so, they distinguish between the use of the societal culture construct as an exogenous and an endogenous variable. There is much conceptual leverage to be gained from employing culture as a variable in such a theoretical framework. They suggest a revisiting of the framework for studying educational administration developed by Getzels et al. almost 30 years ago. Finally, they look at the transmission of a knowledge base through training. They explore the implications that a cultural perspective has on the interpretation and use of knowledge as well as on its communication through preparation programs. They contend that the cultural lens illuminates the limitations of the current knowledge base and supports the importance of this line of research in the future.

Full Text (8287 words)

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The past 15 years have been a time of questioning and introspection in the field of educational administration. Virtually every facet of the field - policy, practice, training, theory and research - has been inspected closely; each has been found wanting in more than one respect. As in the field of general management, the paradigms that have guided administrative practice in education have come under scrutiny for their applicability and effectiveness in a changing world.

Policy makers have questioned the results being produced by educational systems and their managers. Dissatisfaction with system performance has led to an international effort to rethink the organization of schooling as well as its administration. From Australia to Europe to the USA to Asia, policy makers have sought more effective and efficient ways to deliver quality education. Not surprisingly, policy makers have subsequently called for revamping administrative training as a corollary of system reorganization.

The response of practitioners to these new demands has been mixed. An evolving series of normative role configurations has been laid at their feet since the 1960s: manager, street level bureaucrat, change agent, instructional leader, transformational leader. This has kept practitioners busy trying to understand the nature of their changing professional roles and up-to-date in terms of the skills demanded in their rapidly changing organizations. Witness the fact that for almost two decades, practitioners have themselves called for more training

and support to meet these changing job pressures and expectations[1]. At the same time, educational administrators and the field in general have been equally vocal in voicing criticism of predominant methods of administrative preparation and development[2, 3].

These practical concerns emanating from policy and practice have challenged the core of the academic enterprise in educational administration. A range of international scholars have questioned both the quality and practical utility of research in educational administration[4, 5, 6]. On the preparation front, academics have also sought - though with limited success - to reassess the knowledge base underlying the administrative practice[6]. For example, a major effort was mounted by the National Policy Board in Educational Administration in the early 1990s to develop a high-consensus knowledge base for educational administration in the USA. The effort, though well-intentioned, has to date borne disappointing fruit. When placed alongside the efforts of institutions in countries such as Malaysia (e.g. see Bajunid paper in this issue) to rethink the meaning and substance of administrative practice, there can be little doubt that educational administration preparation is firmly rooted with its feet in mid-air.

Indeed the very social science paradigm that guided the field's development since the 1950s has been soundly rejected by influential voices around the world[7, 8]. Permeating these various critiques has been a growing recognition of important intellectual blind spots in the discipline's field of vision. This has emerged saliently in critiques offered by feminist scholars, critical theorists and cognitive theorists. These academics have used new lenses through which to frame and understand what had once been considered self-evident administrative processes under the reigning structural-functionalist paradigm. Critics of training and preparation similarly have tried to reassess the relationship between educational administration as a field of practice and its conduct as an academic discipline[6, 7, 8, 9].

Despite this rather bleak picture, it may be that the dark hour is turning into dawn. The field's capacity to critique its own state of progress in itself reflects a growing intellectual maturity. This is evident in the growing acceptance of more diverse perspectives and voices within the field.

Moreover, there are hints of substantive progress along several fronts. For example, in a review of research on principal effects research, Hallinger and Heck[10, 11] recently concluded that significant progress has been made in the quality of research and application of theory in educational administration since 1980. In contrast to earlier reviews by Bridges and Erickson, they note a significant trend towards the accumulation of knowledge, at least in this sub-field[4]. The fact that scholars in educational administration have heard and begun to respond to the earlier critiques bodes well, at least for academic scholarship.

Similarly, the past decade has witnessed a growing acceptance among constituent groups that preparation methods must change. Though consensus over the most appropriate methods for preparing school leaders remains elusive, there is evidence of a greater openness and flexibility in considering alternatives. Moreover, as in other fields of professional practice, experimentation with radically different approaches to learning the craft (e.g. problem-based learning, constructivist designs) is proceeding internationally[12, 13, 14].

In light of this intellectual and practical ferment, we wish to share our thinking about how the concept of culture might deepen our understanding of educational administration and refine the application of both administrative concepts and practices. Culture, like the conceptual constructs offered by feminist and critical theorists, entails donning a new set of theoretical lenses for viewing administrative practice.

It has been said that there are those things that we know; those things that we don't know; and those things that we don't know we don't know. A powerful theoretical construct will illuminate things "we don't know we don't know". As suggested in the other papers comprising this thematic issue of the journal, we believe that the culture construct has such potential for expanding our field of vision in educational administration.

We assert that the cultural lens may stimulate us to rethink constructs that have been taken for granted and assist in identifying new problems of significance. On the practical front, an explicit consideration of culture in administrative practice may illuminate new possibilities for attacking persisting problems[15, 16]. Morally, the globalization of the world economy and society brings with it demands for a new intellectual honesty. This requires recognition that for a variety of historical reasons the twentieth century witnessed an implicit international collusion that resulted in an hegemony of Western ideas. Without placing blame anywhere, it is time to enrich theory and practice in education by seeking out the diversity of ideas and practices that have existed largely hidden in the

shadows of the dominant Western paradigms that have guided the field (see the Bajunid paper in this issue for the most direct and persuasive argument on this point).

In this article, we will examine how culture might enter into our thinking about theory, research and training in educational administration. Given limitations of space as well as the nascent state of culture-based research in educational administration, we restrict ourselves to pointing directions, rather than drawing conclusions. We begin by establishing why we think it is important at this time to pick up the challenge of bringing a cultural perspective to the field. Then we will examine culture in terms of its place in theory, research, training and practice.

Culture: a missing variable in leadership theory

Theoretical discussions of the knowledge base in educational administration address explicitly the cultural foundations of leadership and administration[17] are surprisingly scarce. The notion that leadership is contingent on the context in which it is exercised is by no means a new idea[18, 19, 20]. However, most published theory and empirical research in administration assumes that leadership is being exercised in a Western cultural context. Exceptions to this characterization generally appear outside the educational literature in the field of private sector management. Even there they remain surprisingly scarce and mostly concern issues of training and socializing managers in cross-cultural settings[21, 22, 23, 24].

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been so dominated by Western paradigms that the intellectual traditions and practices of other cultures are often judged without questioning the implicit assumptions embedded in Western cultures[25]. The tendency for Western knowledge to overshadow the intellectual traditions of other cultures has become even more acute in recent decades. Rising educational levels and new technologies have been concentrated in the West. So has the proliferation of academic and professional information disseminated in education and management. Consequently, we find few modern discussions of leadership or administration grounded in non-Western cultural contexts[16, 26, 27].

It is also true that Western theoretical treatises on the nature of leadership - in education and other fields of management - are often transferred across cultures with relatively little concern for their cultural validity. This tendency is not limited to Western scholars. It often reflects an unwitting collusion between our own ethnocentrism and the ritualistic approach that graduate students from developing countries - future academic and professional leaders - often take towards their education[26, 28]. This results in the transfer of our knowledge base to their societies, too often without sufficient critique concerning its cultural salience and validity[22].

The role of culture in a theory of educational leadership

Going back to the work of Getzels et al. in the 1960s, administrative theorists have sought to develop comprehensive conceptualizations of educational leadership[10, 20] (see Figure 1). By comprehensive, we refer to models that account for personal antecedents of leadership, contextual factors that impinge on the leader's thinking and behaviour, mediating variables subject to the leader's influence, and organizational outcomes. In their seminal work, Getzels and his colleagues located the administrator and the educational institution in a cultural context[20]. Moreover, they discussed at length the varying impact that different cultural values could exert on the thinking and behaviour of leaders and other organizational participants.

Such models while extant for some time, have received surprisingly little empirical treatment. Instead researchers have tended to focus on exploring selected pieces of such models. Thus, despite this type of theoretically potent conceptualization, few scholars in educational administration have subsequently explored culture as a contextual determinant in understanding the exercise of educational leadership. This is true in terms of conceptual development and even more so empirical research.

For example, perhaps the best known attempt to develop a comprehensive conceptualization of educational leadership in the past 15 years is represented by the work of Bossert and his colleagues at the Far West Lab for Educational Research and Development (see Figure 2)[30]. This group of scholars gave great weight to the impact of context on administrative leadership. Explicitly adopting a contingency approach, they asserted that successful leaders must adapt to their particular context as they seek to shape the internal processes of schools towards desired ends. They identified both the community and the institutional context of schools as exogenous variables influencing the principal's leadership.

By community they were referring to a dominant set of factors in the school's external environment including socio-economic status of the parent and student population, geographic features such as urban/suburban/rural, parental expectations, and levels of community support. By institutional context, they were taking into account the structural policy system within which the school is embedded. While each of these context factors is indeed influenced by societal culture, culture is notably absent from the framework. This reinforces our contention that culture is often treated as an implicit variable in the Western intellectual management tradition.

It is, at the same time, interesting to note that the Far West Lab framework does highlight school culture as an endogenous variable subject to the principal's influence. Given the interrelationship of these conceptual constructs and the possibility for confusion, we will first elaborate on the definitions of community, institutional context and school culture before continuing the discussion of how the broader notion of societal culture fits with this model.

Community context. Facets of a school's community will of course reflect the larger social culture of a nation. This variable, at least as conceptualized in the Far West model, must, however, be treated as a more narrowly framed exogenous factor. That is because salient community characteristics will also vary widely even within a given nation and exert independent effects on schools apart from the effects of the broader social culture.

Compare, for example, schools located in suburban neighbourhoods that serve children who come predominantly from middle class homes with those in rural or urban schools serving economically depressed communities. Research indicates that the educational expectations generated by parents in these communities will differ significantly (see, for example, [31]). We hypothesize that community socio-economic background will account for differences in the pattern of educational expectations exerted on the schools apart from other effects of the nation's social culture.

Similar distinctions could be drawn in relation to other facets of the community context. Suffice it to say that it represents a distinct variable that influences the school and its leadership.

Institutional context. The Far West Lab model of principal leadership posits institutional context as an exogenous variable acting on principal leadership. A defining characteristic of the institutional context is the formal organization as represented by the structure, goals, rules and regulations that govern the school and its relations to the broader educational system. Institutional context encompasses features as diverse as school and district size, degree of system centralization, state and national regulations, mandated curricular or managerial goals, unionism, and other related governance arrangements.

Practice in a field such as educational administration is tied intimately to these features of the institutional context. As suggested by any number of researchers, leaders must respond to and establish a fit between the school and its institutional structure. Moreover, it is readily apparent that institutional structure varies across settings. The principal of a small rural elementary school in Kentucky operates in a very different institutional context than the principal of a large secondary school in Los Angeles (and the secondary school principal in LA is again in a very different institutional setting than his/her counterpart in Melbourne, Australia).

Apart from the size and complexity of the school itself, in the USA the school district and the state represent important sources of institutional variation. Consequently, at the school-site level we can observe variation in virtually every sphere of administrative activity when comparing schools in Kentucky and California: personnel policies, curriculum, graduation standards, length of the school day and year, tests, resource availability and distribution, role definitions of educational staff, strength of unions, and salary structure. These facets of the institutional structure shape the context in which the principal leads.

The situation is the same, only more so, when looking across nations. Countries such as Thailand, China, Hong Kong and Malaysia operate with highly centralized, bureaucratized educational systems. In a country such as Thailand with a population of 60 million people, virtually all educational decisions regarding policy, curriculum, goals, standards and funding are made by a centralized bureaucracy. Centralized decision making even decides the size and acceptable load of backpacks students may use to carry their books to school.

The degree of centralization in such nations forms a qualitatively different educational context for the principal. Centralized structures seek to reduce the boundaries of discretionary decision making open to the principal. This reflects a traditional belief that people at the centre have more of the expertise and knowledge to make the most efficient decisions. This belief reflects cultural norms concerning status and age. It also, however, derives from an

historical situation in which bureaucracies in developing countries sought to increase efficiency in civil service systems characterized by relatively low educational levels at the bottom (e.g. among classroom teachers).

Other features of the institutional context are also salient. Take the selection and placement of principals (and teachers). In Thailand, for example, this function is accomplished at the Ministry of Education on the basis of bureaucratic criteria, rather than through the type of mixed market system that predominates for example in the USA and Canada. These selection criteria include age, years of experience, size of prior school, and test results on administrative exam. Principals routinely are rotated among schools every two to four years. The decision is made at the Ministry, again primarily on bureaucratic criteria.

How do such features affect the role of the principal? They generate the system expectations that drive principal performance. For Thai principals, these tend to be grounded in maintenance rather than improvement-oriented activities. Principals tend not to be rewarded for efforts at school improvement. Moreover, they simply do not remain in their schools long enough to develop shared educational goals among staff. This is significant given a growing body of research conducted in different cultures suggesting that principal effectiveness is related to their role in establishing a mission of shared values and goals with staff (and parents) for the school[11].

Contrast this institutional context of rules and regulations with that of Australia or New Zealand. There the trend has been to free schools to make their own policy decisions. In the state of Victoria, for example, schools directly control over 90 per cent of the education funding. This clearly represents a very different institutional context for administration or leadership. Principals in this context operate more like chief executive officers than as middle managers in a bureaucratic system[32].

This notion of institutional context focuses attention on differences in the formal organization of schooling. As such, it is conceptually distinct from the notion of societal culture which is grounded in the values and norms of a country. Though conceptually distinct, there are likely to be interesting interactions between the cultural norms of a nation and the types of formal institutional systems they design for the organization and management of education. We will return to this issue later. Next, however, we will examine the construct of school culture.

School culture. The closest that researchers in educational administration have come to employing a cultural construct for analytical purposes is the exploration of organizational cultures as contexts for leadership. From a micro-organizational perspective we can say that organizations (and the institutional systems in which they operate) have their own cultures. These cultures can be inferred from the values, norms, expectations and traditions that describe human interaction with the system (see for example, Figure 1).

In educational organizations, we typically refer to this as the school culture. Bossert and his colleagues refer to this as the school learning climate (see Figure 2)[30]. While they locate the school learning climate as an organizational (i.e. endogenous) variable, they also imply that the effects of the school's culture are multi-directional. That is, while their framework appears to suggest that the principal's leadership acts as an independent variable influencing the school's culture, they also note that the school's culture will likely influence the principal's leadership as well. Further research and theoretical treatment of school culture as a construct in ensuing years affirms this latter conceptualization. While principals may be able to shape the culture of a school, the impact of the school's culture on the principal and other school-level leaders is likely to be as great or greater.

At the same time, this notion of school culture or climate is more narrow than the construct of societal culture. While schools do indeed have different cultures, it is also likely that schools operating within a given societal context (culture) will share many similar cultural characteristics when compared with schools in other nations. Put differently, the values and behavioural norms shared by people of a given culture will exercise a profound effect on all aspects of relationships within their schools. This is the case even though there will also be variation in the organizational cultures that characterize a sample of their schools (see, for example [16]).

Thus, if we make the culture construct explicit, then it is necessary to view the principal as located within a cultural context that encompasses and influences (independently) all relationships within the social system of the school (see Figures 3 and 4). For example, despite the many similarities between the Canadian and US educational systems, there is a clear cultural difference in the weight assigned to student achievement as a valued educational goal. Simply cross the border from Buffalo, New York and head to Toronto. Any Canadian principal will tell you how Americans are crazy over test scores (New Zealanders and Australians will likely concur).

This is very much a cultural phenomenon and will likely be shared widely - although with some internal variations - across Canadian and US schools. Moreover, it reflects the differences in values that characterize Canadian and US education. This different value orientation has both obvious and subtle effects on operation of the system. From our perspective, the cultural context has an impact on each of the four zones represented in the Far West Lab model. This is made more explicit in Figure 3. In the following section, we will elaborate on the nature of this impact.

Societal culture as an overarching independent variable

As Getzels and colleagues theorized and researchers outside educational administration have investigated empirically, the construct of organizational culture reveals only a portion of a larger cultural variation of interest to students of management[20] (see also [24, 33, 34]). That is, we hypothesize that the societal culture exerts a significant influence on administrators beyond that of the specific organization's culture. To date, however, surprisingly little effort has gone towards uncovering the cultural foundations of leadership when we refer to culture in this broader sense. This is particularly true in educational administration.

Application of the culture construct involves a subtle interplay of foreground and background. Normally we operate without an awareness of our own culture - it is just "the way we do things around here". Consequently, our theories typically make little or no reference to the cultural context in which leaders work (see Figure 4). A cultural context exists, but our "acculturated lens" blinds us to its effects. Consequently, most scholars implicitly ask the reader to "hold the cultural context constant" while they conceptualize how leadership is exercised within a particular educational context.

Current conceptualizations of administrative practice represent a useful point of departure. Frameworks such those proposed by Bossert and colleagues point to important antecedents of leadership. These are contextual and personal variables that shape the needs and requirements of leadership within the organization. They further point to the paths by which leaders may achieve an impact on the organization[10, 30, 35] What remains is to make the cultural context explicit so we can explore its impact on the social and institutional system in which leadership is exercised. Theoretical work in educational administration and research in the general leadership literature provide useful direction in this quest[10, 30, 34].

If we wish to make the cultural context explicit in a conceptualization of educational leadership, it is first necessary to define what we mean by culture. From a macro-perspective, the societal culture represents the values, norms, expectations and traditions that define a society (see Figure 1). Kluckhorn and Kroeberg referred to culture as "patterns of behaviors that are acquired and transmitted by symbols over time, which become generally shared within a group and are communicated to new members of the group in order to serve as a cognitive guide or blueprint for future actions"[21]. As noted, this conception is distinct from, though related to, the community and institutional contexts as well as the organizational culture in which the school administrator operates (see Figure 3).

Human interaction within social systems reflects the values and behavioural norms that underlie the surrounding culture. Although research on values, culture and administration remains relatively sparse, studies conducted to date point towards several interesting directions for researchers. Both theory and empirical research suggest the hypothesis that between-society variation in predominant value and norms is larger than within-society variation, though this remains subject to more systematic empirical testing.

Second, evidence has begun to accumulate in support of Getzels et al.'s proposition that cultural values shape followers' perceptions of leaders and that these perceptions will vary across cultures. Gerstner and O'Day, for example, assert: "Because leadership is a cultural phenomenon, inextricably linked to the values and customs of a group of people, we do not expect differences in leadership prototypes to be completely random. Rather they should be linked to dimensions of national culture"[22, p. 123].

Their own cross-cultural research in the business sector found significant differences in how different nationalities perceive the traits of leaders. Additional analyses found that these perceptual differences were also significant when countries were grouped as being an Eastern or Western culture. Unfortunately, less empirical data is available concerning the impact of culture on the behaviour, as opposed to simply the perceptions of managers.

Nonetheless, experience suggests that it does. Recent conversations with principals from the USA, Australia and Thailand illustrated this at least at an anecdotal level. When discussing hierarchical relationships in different

national systems of education, an Australian principal enunciated that system-level administrators in Australia receive little of the deference shown by American principals towards their district superintendents. A Thai principal joined in that although Thai principals hold clearly delegated authority within their institutional systems, norms of seniority remain stronger than institutionally-granted authority. She illustrated this by describing how an administrator who is younger and less senior than one of his/her teachers will be constrained by cultural norms from making critical comments about the teacher's classroom instruction. These anecdotal observations suggest the differential influence of culture on administrative behaviour that derives from the interplay between the cultural norms of the society and the institutional structure of the system.

Third, although the research here is less developed, there is also support for the proposition that different cultural values and norms distinguish, at a gross level, Eastern versus Western cultures. How people approach space, time, information and communication are shaped by the cultural context and appear broadly to differentiate Eastern (high context) and Western (low context) cultures[23].

This viewpoint receives support in the articles written for this issue by Walker and colleagues and Cheng and Wong. Their reports again highlight the fascinating interplay between social culture and institutional context. Through primarily qualitative inquiries, they demonstrate how the broader culture of the society impinges persistently on the behaviour of administrators vis-a-vis subordinates, superordinates and peers. As Walker et al. indicate, this was clearly the case, even for administrators in a training context where formal relationships could be relaxed. Their trainees were given permission - even encouraged - to operate under norms of open discussion and equal participation as they used problem-based learning; yet, even under these conditions, traditional cultural norms of age, gender, informal status and seniority continued to exert considerable influence on their behaviour. This reinforces the hypothesis that cultural values and norms of behaviour operate beyond the level of organizational culture.

At the same time, there remains considerable variation among Eastern cultures in important predominating values. For example, the Chinese dominated cultures differ in important respects from those of Malaysia and Thailand. Bajunid's detailed description of Islamic precepts and their influence on administrative behaviour offers powerful anecdotal support for the notion that Asian cultures sport considerable culturally-determined variations as contexts for schooling and administration. The effects of these normative differences on administration has not been well-studied inside or outside of education. At the same time, as Cheng and Wong ably demonstrate, frameworks such as Hofstede's hold considerable theoretical leverage for assisting in this task.

In sum, culture is the source of values that people share in a society. As such culture can be viewed as having effects on multiple features of the school and its environment. Culture shapes the institutional and community context within which the school is situated by defining predominant value orientations and norms of behaviour. It influences the predilections of individual leaders as well as the nature of interactions with others in the school and its community. Moreover, it determines the particular educational emphasis or goals that prevail within a system of schooling.

Since cultural values vary across nations, we would expect cross-cultural variation in the educational goals of societies as well as the normative practices aimed towards their achievement. For example, US society places a high normative value on cognitive reasoning. The assumptions that underlie our notions of best practice reflect the heavy value placed on individual achievement and mastery of cognitive goals.

These values and normative expectations form a context for educational leadership in two ways. First, they shape what leaders and followers perceive as desired outcomes for schools in the society. Second, they influence the nature of the interactions that occur between the leader and followers (see Figure 4). As noted above, this extends to how people within a given culture conceive leadership and how they will work together within a school organization.

In this section, we have tried to clarify what we mean by culture and examine its place in a theoretical model of educational leadership. Our contention is that the concept of culture goes well beyond the similar, though more limited, notion of exogenous variables such as community and institutional context and the endogenous variable, organizational culture. Like Getzels and colleagues, we view culture as having an impact on schools at the institutional level, on the community context, on the beliefs and experiences of administrators, on administrative practice, and on a school's particular culture.

If this is the case, it follows that the knowledge base that underlies administrative practice will also be influenced by the cultural context in which the administrator works. This was suggested through examples offered earlier and is further reinforced in the papers authored by Bajunid, Heck, Cheng and Wong and Walker and colleagues. In the next section, we will elaborate on how and why culture might come into play when scholars consider the knowledge base in educational administration.

The impact of culture on administrative training and practice

For the past 30 years, professional preparation and development programmes have sought primarily to teach prospective administrators about the field of educational administration. The curriculum content has focused primarily on theories and concepts derived from the social science disciplines of sociology, psychology, economics and political science. The predominant modes of instruction have been lecture and group discussion, with case teaching, simulations and experiential learning finding occasional favour among certain professors and in selected programmes.

On entry into the field, however, graduates of these training programmes report that relatively little of the knowledge to which they have been exposed seems relevant to the problems and tasks they confront on the job. Consequently, over the past decade in the USA, numerous reports and articles have been issued critiquing administrative preparation in education. In the USA, these concerns have moved the dialogue about the nature of the knowledge base in educational administration from an abstract academic discussion towards an action agenda[6, 36, 37, 38].

Perceived inadequacies in the professional training offered to educational leaders are not, however, confined to the USA and other "Western" countries[39]. Both the content and methods used in the administrative training programmes of developing countries have generally been borrowed more or less directly from Western societies. Although exceptions do exist (see for example the Bajunid article in this issue), this has been the case even when there is neither conceptual nor empirical validation of the knowledge base in the receiving culture. Thus, the state of affairs in developing and non-Western countries with respect to administrative preparation may be even more problematic in certain respects.

Recognition of the need to localize the knowledge underlying administrative preparation at a fairly fundamental level is, however, gaining ground. The reasons for this are perhaps best enunciated by Bajunid as he describes the experience of the Institut Aminuddin Baki in Malaysia. Their institutional attempt to draw the best from Western thinking while building a knowledge base grounded in their own cultural traditions is most impressive and sets the challenge for scholars in most clear terms.

If there are culturally-related differences in the practice of educational administration, several questions arise. What are the implications for the design and conduct of training programmes for prospective and practicing administrators? Is there a universal body of theoretical and craft knowledge that school administrators should know regardless of their country? Will the effectiveness or appropriateness of different methods of training vary in any systematic ways that are related to the culture of the practitioners?

Portability of content knowledge in educational administration

It is quite common for professors in developing countries to receive their graduate training in the USA, Canada, Europe or Australia. On return to their countries several factors conspire to press them to apply the knowledge to which they have been exposed abroad. First, their own expertise in the field is largely grounded in the received knowledge base. Second, their graduate degree symbolizes a legitimacy or imprimatur on the foreign knowledge base. Third, colleagues and administrators will tend to expect the returning professor to pass on the new knowledge derived from their experience abroad.

Together these create a climate in which professors will tend to apply the foreign knowledge base with only limited adaptations. Notably, this is the case even when the knowledge base from abroad is under severe criticism as has been the case over the past 15 years. While this is, of course, an overly broad generalization, our experience suggests that it characterizes a reasonable proportion of administrative training in developing countries. Adaptations to theoretical models and curricular content tend to be made on the margins, rather than rethinking the fundamental appropriateness of the theoretical, empirical, or practical knowledge base. This begins to distinguish the Malaysian effort as described by Bajunid from many others; the simultaneous deductive/inductive construction

of the knowledge base.

By adopting a cultural lens, we would question the salience of Western theories of leadership and schooling to the role of administrators operating in very different cultural circumstances. Moreover, researchers would begin to explore the empirical basis for the application of theoretical knowledge, craft knowledge and school/system policies. The result would be a more active research and development effort formulated and conducted by researchers in developing countries.

A positive example of such an effort exists today in Hong Kong. Hong Kong academics are engaged in an unusually systematic programme of research into the application of a Western construct - school effectiveness - to Hong Kong and Chinese schools[27, 40]. The paper by Cheng and Wong in this issue is but one example of this research effort. This stands as a model for R&D programmes in other countries. At the same time, even the Hong Kong research work is only beginning to enter the development and evaluation stages during which knowledge derived from locally conducted research is turned into locally validated training products.

Both research and practical experience in administrative training support the notion that the interpretation and application of knowledge - learning - is a culturally-mediated activity. As suggested above, the knowledge base itself must be considered first for its salience to the local culture. For example, Cheng and Wong analysed the context of administrative training in the Chinese culture. They conclude quite clearly that the knowledge base concerning what it means to be an effective administrator differs in key respects from so-called Western notions.

In China certain attitudes and moral codes of behaviour hold much higher priority as distinguishing between more and less effective leaders than appears to be the case in Western schools. Traits such as dedication, discipline, strong will and persistence are considered highly important as are age, seniority and experience. This reflects a different sense of administrative priorities from the performance-oriented normative descriptions of administrative practice that characterize Western nations.

These culturally-related differences have direct implications for the knowledge base to be taught in preparation programmes. Not surprisingly, training programs in China emphasize the inculcation of right attitudes. This contrasts rather sharply with the knowledge and skill development orientation that predominates in the West. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that students could graduate from many administrative preparation programmes in the USA with only minor consideration of affective or attitudinal dimensions of administrative work (i.e. beyond an occasional abstract or case-based exploration of values).

As noted earlier, the paper by Walker et al. offers useful insight into how cultural dimensions exert a not-so-subtle influence on leader and group behaviour, even in the protected setting of a training course. Students in their programme reported great difficulty and even reluctance to transgress traditional normative behaviours that guided their inter-group relationships. Transpose these to the workplace and one can see how some prescriptive behaviours borrowed from an American or Australian preparation programme (e.g. equality of participation, frank, open communication; consensus decision making) could wreak havoc in another cultural context.

Portability of instructional methods across cultures

In terms of instructional approaches, Asian training institutions tend to be somewhat more conservative than their Western counterparts, only departing infrequently from lecture and discussion. Even on those occasions when case teaching is employed, the cases tend to be based on the problems and contexts of Western school systems. Such was reported to be the case by Walker and colleagues as their students mentioned their prior experience with the Kennedy High School case, a US case study in another course. There is however no reason to believe that lecture and discussion methods are any more effective in these training contexts than they have proven to be in the West.

Like their counterparts in Western training institutions, students may simply misapply the theoretical content through a lack of understanding. Administrative training typically is not designed to teach beyond knowledge and comprehension levels on Bloom's taxonomy. Thus, when faced with the need to apply prior conceptual learning to a real problem, administrators may lack models for how to put their training into practice. This addresses the critical issue of how learners develop the type of thinking processes associated with administrative expertise. Development of the complex thought processes that characterize expert knowledge in professional domains requires an approach to instruction that incorporates application of learning[40, 41, 42, 43].

Second, learners in developing countries run the additional risk of correctly applying knowledge derived from Western experience to a context where cultural norms reflect a different set of assumptions concerning the nature of human relationships. A whole set of socially constructed values and norms underlie human behaviour in different cultures. It is entirely possible for Asian students in administration to understand a Western-derived theory or construct and apply it accurately in their own context with disastrous results due to differences in the social roles and expectations that characterize their particular cultures.

Third, it is the case in a number of Asian countries, though not necessarily in other cultures, that administrators habitually make decisions in isolation from others, subordinates and clients included. This is a consequence of rigid hierarchical structures as well as a cultural norm that reflects the nature of leader-follower relationships.

A result of this pattern of leader behaviour is the frequently problematic implementation of decisions and policies. It is only during the implementation of policies when serious problems arise that these administrators become seriously attuned to the needs and opinions of others. While the dynamic of mutual adaptation in policy implementation has been observed in Western societies as well, the degree of difference in Asians cultures, for example, can be startling. This cultural facet of leadership argues for the importance of engaging trainees in the implementation of their analytical plans. This will ensure that they experience some of the immediate consequences of their decisions and, in the longer term, bring them to consider the strengths of different patterns of administrative decision making.

Yet, as Walker and his colleagues report in their article, the attempt to implement a radically different instructional approach - problem-based learning - in Chinese culture was fraught with potential land-mines. Expectations held of teachers by students, expectations among peers, intra-group norms that may conflict with the process of co-operative group learning, and the availability of appropriate resource materials all combined to make deviating from the instructional norm a harrowing experience. This again highlights the cultural dimensions of knowledge and cultural transmission. Problem-based learning operates with certain assumptions about the types of attitudes and relationships that will lead to success in administrative practice. It may be the case that this instructional method would be inappropriate in cultural contexts that place a different cultural value on such group processes and outcomes.

This brief foray into exploring the portability of content and instructional methods in educational administration is only suggestive of how and why culture should be considered in the design of administrative preparation. Other authors in this issue examine key issues in greater detail. Our limited goal has been to demonstrate, if only by way of example, how fundamental facets of training and preparation converge with the theoretical concerns generated via a cultural perspective.

Conclusion

In the concluding article for this theme issue, we have tried to outline the rationale for exploring the role of culture in the practice of educational administration. We have examined how culture fits into a broad theoretical framework for studying administrative behaviour in education. In doing so, we distinguished between the use of the culture construct as an exogenous and an endogenous variable. Consistent with the other authors, we argued that there is much conceptual leverage to be gained from employing culture as a variable in a theoretical framework for educational leadership.

We concluded that the theoretical framework offered by Getzels and colleagues almost 30 years ago deserves to be revisited as a conceptualization for empirical testing. Our own intention is to mount a cross-cultural study of educational leadership that builds on this framework. Moreover, we are confident that the preliminary efforts of the other authors in this issue will also help us to conceptualize better how culture fits into the practice of educational administration.

Finally, we turned our attention from the generation of a knowledge base to its transmission through training. Using the articles by Walker and colleagues and Bajunid as jumping off points, we explored the implications that a cultural perspective has on the interpretation and use of knowledge as well as on its communication through teaching. As with theory and research, we contended that the cultural lens does illuminate the limitations of the current knowledge base and supports the importance of this line of research in the future.

At the outset of this article we noted that the past decade has seen the field of educational administration uncover

a number of intellectual blind-spots. Our purpose in developing this thematic issue of the journal has been to highlight one more. This attempt to explore the role of social culture in educational administration raises more questions than it answers. That was, in fact, our goal. The nascent state of our own understanding about how culture creates a context for schooling does not allow for more than that. We do, however, hope that this effort will encourage others to believe in the importance of tackling the difficult issues that abound in this domain. We believe that this represents one of the significant challenges for the field in the coming century and hope others will also share in this quest.

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[Illustration]

Caption: Figure 1; Operational model of major dimensions of social behaviour; Figure 2; Far West Lab instructional leadership model; Figure 3; Leadership and culture: a preliminary model - for investigation; Figure 4; The locus of leadership within the school and culture

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