

The Scholar-Practitioner

A Philosophy of Leadership

JEFFREY R. SCHULTZ

Tuscaloosa City Schools

Abstract

This article serves to provide theoretical grounding for the five core values of scholar-practitioner leadership and will investigate the cyclical pattern of inquiry-generated knowledge for educational practice. The core values of leadership embrace community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity. After grounding the core values in current research literature, this article will explain how inquiry of, in, and for practice help the scholar-practitioner leader to generate knowledge of, in, and for practice. This generated knowledge for practice is further guided by a lens of criticality grounded in the theoretical constructs of critical pragmatism and Dewey's democratic conception of education.

I teach because I search, because I question, and because I submit myself to questioning. (Friere, 1998, p. 35)

Leadership is a willful act where one person attempts to construct the social world for others. (Greenfield, 1984, p. 142)

There is no difference between theory and practice; there are only different realms in which people engage in practice and theory. (Foster, 1994, p. 48)

The citations above substantiate the need for a contemporary definition of educational leadership, which will provide knowledge for innovative practice, generated through critical inquiry that will positively influence the course

of education in the 21st century. Educational leaders embracing these concepts will close the gap between theory and practice while fostering educational environments that are centers of learning for all stakeholders. Robert Schaefer (1967) addressed the need for such an institution when he said, “. . . the school must be much more than a place of instruction. It must also be a center of inquiry—a producer as well as transmitter of knowledge” (p. 1). An educational institution with such innovative leadership at the helm would become a center of learning, not just for students, but for educators and administrators as well.

Inquiry would center on administrative practice, thereby generating knowledge of practice in the realm of educational administration. This approach to educational leadership, according to Jenlink (2001), seeks to conjoin “inquiry as practice, wherein the leader as scholar and her/his leadership practice are inseparable” (p. 5). Therefore, knowledge-generative inquiry results from the actions administrators perform in their daily roles. Their administrative actions thus inform and guide future practice through reflexive interpretation and a continued generation of knowledge of, in, and for practice (Jenlink, 2001). The call for educational leaders who utilize scholarship via inquiry of, in, and for practice brings us to the label of the *scholar-practitioner*.

If the act of administration shall include practical inquiry, it serves to reason that an inquiry of actions within an educational setting, which serves to generate knowledge, might also seek to mediate issues of inequality based on race, gender, or class. Giroux (1994) addressed such issues of equity, saying:

What critical pedagogy refers to is the ways in which knowledge, values, and power are constructed in schools and other cultural sites as part of a deliberate attempt on the part of administrators and teachers to influence and construct privileged orders of representations, social identities, and cultural practices. It draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, and experience are produced under specific conditions of learning. (p. 39)

Inquiry guided by critical thought can level existing asymmetrical relations of power, culture, and equity in schools. Practical knowledge generated through this type of inquiry can then effectively guide administrative practice that will, in turn, generate more knowledge.

This cyclical pattern of practically-generated knowledge, examined through a lens of critical inquiry, provides a foundation for democratic and scholarly leadership in schools. Foster (1986) called for this when he wrote:

The administrator, the teacher, and the student of administration and schooling work not to reproduce a given social world, but to remove the limits set by it. To achieve this task theory must become practice, must inform our methods of dealing with the world and influence our ways of framing our condition. (p. 191)

Simply put, the act of generating knowledge becomes part of administrative practice leading to what Jenlink (2001) referred to as “knowledge-of-practice” (p. 10).

Knowledge generated via critical inquiry, hereby an essential act of educational leaders, embraces concepts that are tied to democratic values. As Jenlink (2001) wrote: “Embodied in the work of the educational administrator/leader are the values of social justice, equity, caring, and democracy” (p. 6). A need for educational leaders to value community has also been raised. Beck (1994) discussed the importance of schooling in relation to fostering community when she wrote:

The most appropriate reason for the formation of social structures is the promotion of human or personal development within the context of communities. The dominant values of this perspective are fraternity and compassionate justice, and the major ethical systems revolve around caring and the building of community. (p. 2)

Scholar-practitioner leadership exists to create educational environments that are reflective of the core values of community, democracy, equity, social justice, and caring. Creating a body of knowledge for educational practice, generated through a lens of critical inquiry of and within practice, becomes the principal charge for educational leaders who would be scholar-practitioners. This article serves to provide theoretical grounding for the five core values of scholar-practitioner leadership and will investigate the cyclical pattern of inquiry-generated knowledge for educational practice.

Core Value: Community

John Dewey (1916) wrote of a democratic conception of education in which schools function as communities. He noted: “In the first place, the school must itself be a community life in all which that implies. Social perceptions and interests can be developed only in a genuinely social medium—one where there is give and take in the building up of a common experience” (p. 358). Dewey’s words imply the need for a shared experience in the decisions of a communal educational environment. Additionally, this concept aligns with the scholar-practitioner values of democracy, social justice, caring, and equity.

Schools that function as communities incorporate values of their populous by involving community members in schools. Lynn Beck (1999) indicated that community involvement evokes images that are indelibly positive. She referred to common community metaphors and indicated that images of family, village, and musical ensemble are among the most common descriptors. Proffering that community metaphors such as these tend to “evoke pictures of life in simple, rustic settings” (p. 19), she added that metaphors of community also create “a sense that needs will be met, that one can make a difference, and that one is responsible

for the well-being of self and others” (p. 23). In such a community, she continued, members will be afforded “a sense of individual and corporate identity” (p. 23). Kenneth Strike (1999), while writing about tensions that arise from the inclusiveness of communities, offered his own community metaphor, saying: “Educational communities are more like congregations than they are stores or banks. They are places where people unite in common projects” (p. 49). Strike and Beck together clarify the value of community, as embraced by the scholar-practitioner leader, as providing positive school images within communities which champion the integration of individuals who unite toward shared purpose.

Core Value: Democracy

Scholar-practitioner leaders, uniting stakeholders in a shared purpose, embrace democracy as a fundamental value in their philosophy of leadership. Democratic value finds its definition in the writings of John Dewey (1916). He noted that an educational institution “which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic” (p. 99). The value of community, revealed previously, provides for the equitable participation of members of society. Democracy, by Dewey’s definition, bestows for institutions the need to be reflective of their actions, values, and norms thus granting the flexibility to change when beliefs or practices no longer serve the needs of the populous.

Dewey’s conceptual purpose of schooling within a democratic society exists to educate its citizenry to engage in critical thought, a process whose end result can suppress and/or subvert the institutionalizing of practices that marginalize. Joel Spring (1999) expounded upon Dewey’s conception of democratic schooling, explaining: “The form of critical thinking Dewey argues is necessary for a democracy involves an understanding of the social construction of knowledge and the ability to test and judge the value of new forms of knowledge” (p. 21). Scholar-practitioner leaders, valuing this conception of democratic education, engage in critical inquiry of their educational practice to ensure the perpetuation of an equitable democratic society. The importance of this is clearly defended by Spring who added: “In a democratic society it is possible that a majority of the citizens might decide to limit free thought and expression and establish laws and institutions that restrict the rights of minority groups” (p. 16). Scholar-practitioner leaders, thus, also embrace the cause of social justice within their educational practice.

Core Value: Social Justice

Returning to Dewey’s democratic conception of education in which citizens participate equally in determining the values and norms within their communities

and educational institutions, social justice as a core value functions to remove barriers to equal treatment of students, citizens, and social groups. According to Rachels (1993), “questions of justice arise any time one person is treated differently from another” (p. 188). For some, equal treatment is indicative of a universal philosophy of human rights. Spring (1999) attested: “Human rights includes political, social, and economic rights and imposes an obligation on all human beings to protect the rights of others” (p. 3). Scholar-practitioner leaders, focused on the human rights of the students and families within their educational community, endeavor to create an environment of socially just practice in which no populations are marginalized.

Recent educational research can provide practical administrative guidance. The words of Starratt (1991) provide direction for educational leaders who seek to create a socially just environment within schools. He stated:

To promote a just social order in the school, the school community must carry out an outgoing critique of those structural features of the school that work against human beings. Often the naming of the problem (critique) will suggest new directions or alternatives for restructuring the practice or process in a fairer manner. (p. 194)

Lynn Beck (1994) argued that social justice is achieved when a spirit of caring pervades schooling practices. Equating caring with compassion, she stated: “The genuine marriage of compassion and justice requires both escaping from (and, for all practical purposes, destroying) oppressive forces and constructing communities conducive to development” (p. 10). Scholar-practitioner leaders who desire social justice within their schools can thus utilize an ethic of caring in their critical practice to further protect the rights of their student and community populations.

Core Value: Caring

One of the primary reasons for an ethic of care as a value for the scholar-practitioner leader is that caring about others invokes a desire in people to take responsibility for others. Utilizing the terms *care* and *nurturing* as simile, Beck (1994) reported, “. . . the need and desire to participate in nurturing interactions are basic and natural to persons” (p. 22). Additionally, she added, “when one opens to receive another, she or he begins to assume responsibility for the other’s welfare” (p. 20). Noddings (1998) tells that the ethic of care begins with the recognition that, “all people everywhere want to be cared for” (p. 317). Scholar-practitioner leaders, thus, adopt caring as an ethos because of their desire for the welfare of their students and communities.

Caring can create reciprocal relationships that provide a supportive climate in which school members look out for one another. Furthermore, a caring school

culture can assist teachers and leaders in meeting the needs of individual students as well as the collective groups within the educational community. Sernak (1998) wrote: “Caring on an institutional level, I believe, requires recognition of the collective. That is, caring, most often conceptualized in terms of the individual, must be reconceptualized from the perspective of caring for and about the whole” (p. 18). Caring, in this way, must be modeled foremost by the scholar-practitioner leader so that the school community can learn how to give and receive care. Sernak continued:

If an ethic of caring is modeled and practiced . . . then it seems reasonable to expect that teachers, administrators, and other staff will have to know how to care for *each other*, they will have to know how to model caring to persons not of their own cultures and values; *they*, perhaps, will need to be taught. (p. 27)

In engendering an ethos of caring, scholar-practitioner leaders must extrinsically model this core value, in part, to be instructive toward their colleagues, faculty, staff, and students.

In connecting an ethic of care with that of respect for humanity, Dillon (1992) bridged the value of caring to the final value embraced by scholar-practitioner leaders. She remarked: “Because care respect begins with a recognition of the intrinsic value of persons insofar as they are individual and human ‘me’s’, it has no difficulty with the idea of equality of worth” (p. 122). Caring, thus, bolsters the democratic conception of education that values social justice, community, and equity. A look at the latter ideal, equity, will complete the examination of scholar-practitioner core values.

Core Value: Equity

Equity refers to the leveling of power relations along the lines of gender, class, and race. If the scholar-practitioner embraces community, democracy, social justice, and caring, it stands that their practices may also serve to undermine marginalizing power structures. Foster (1997) wrote about the importance of equity in schools stating: “Various configurations of status and power relations in the schools and the communities they serve can either foster or stifle the participation of certain groups” (p. 176). Scholar-practitioner leaders who value Dewey’s democratic concept of education desire the equal participation of all community members. A school community that is wholly equitable becomes their charge.

Structures within schooling can contribute to inequities. According to Stromquist (1997) a school’s curricula can significantly and silently marginalize females. She wrote: “The area of educational content—or curriculum—should be of utmost importance in developing gender policies” (p. 38). Issues of racial and social equity must also be considered. The scholar-practitioner leader can

foster dialogue among the constituents of their schools and communities exposing issues of equity across gender, class, and race. Hall (1997) reported:

Unless school communities recognize the necessity to talk about, do talk about, and work through issues of gender, race, and class in relation to equity and make that a part of their mobilizing philosophy, they will not empower themselves to produce authentic equity and effectiveness. (p. 219)

Authentic equity must be modeled by the scholar-practitioner leader if marginalizing structures are to be removed from the educational institution.

Scholar-practitioner leaders seek authentic equity in their development of democratic communities guided by the values of social justice and caring. They seek equity through inquiry of, in, and for practice to generate knowledge that can transform current educational structures toward a conception of democratic schooling. The following paragraphs explain elements of critical inquiry and knowledge generation for the scholar-practitioner and provide summary with a discussion of the scholar-practitioner's role in connecting theory and practice.

Inquiry

Scholarly practice begins with intellectual inquiry into sources of practical and theoretical knowledge available to the administrator. Jenlink (2001) stated this type of inquiry is "an inquiry approach that seeks to transform practice through examination and generation of knowledge" (p. 9). Furthermore, this type of inquiry provides a glimpse at both theoretical knowledge and knowledge-of-practice thereby providing "generative materials for interpretation and examination of practice" (p. 10). In other words, inquiry of practice, or reflective inquiry, provides new knowledge, which can be utilized to guide future practice.

Democratic and post-positivist theories of leadership include elements of reflective inquiry as a basis for their philosophic positions. In his article on democratic leadership, Starratt (2001) depicts reflective inquiry as a process of deconstruction. "The reconstruction of schooling involves both a deconstruction of meanings, values, and assumptions, the analysis of their negatives and their positives, of what is to be rejected and what kept, *and* a reconstruction" (p. 346). School administrators wishing to improve their schools as scholar-practitioners cannot be void of the skills and desires for reflective inquiry. The writings of Murphy (1992) affirmed this statement saying: "Removing reflective and dialectical thought from the province of meaningful expression, allows the perpetuation of the extant social order" (p. 241). In other words, inquiry for, of, and in practice seeks to illuminate obstacles to equity and justice of all school stakeholders. Obstacles are often the result of perpetuating an oppressive societal structure but may be remedied through the deconstruction of, reflection on, and reconstruction of current cultural meanings and values.

Critical pragmatism also embraces reflective inquiry as a necessary component of school leadership. Murphy (1992) suggested that, “. . . tomorrows leaders must promote an atmosphere of inquiry. They must be curious and inquiring about schooling practices and effective learning conditions, and they must instigate curiosity and inquiry among others” (p. 134). Maxcy (1991) argued that, “. . . a critical method of thought is necessary if participants in schooling choices are to exercise good judgment; and this reflective process must be attuned to the practical changes ideas may make in human conditions” (p. 54). Therefore, utilizing reflection as a form of inquiry cannot as a process stand alone; inquiry must apply a lens of criticality, which reflects the values of the scholar-practitioner leader.

As Jenlink (2001) stated: “Scholarly practitioners use a critical lens to guide inquiry and practice, seeking to ensure that ethics of social justice, equity, and caring are woven into the generative processes associated with knowledge” (p. 11). Knowledge of practice generated through inquiry must be ethically and morally grounded by the ideal of eradicating the barriers that oppress and marginalize individuals. Giroux (1994) provided dialogue on an adverse discourse of educational leadership, the scientific management approach, which values work, economics, and the marketplace. He proffered a contrary position in that: “The real challenge of leadership is to broaden its definition beyond the narrow parameters of these concerns to more vital imperatives of democracy, citizenship, and social justice” (p. 34). Administrative inquiry concerned with the values of community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity must therefore be critically guided.

Criticality

Reflective inquiry of practice, for practice, and in practice without criticality stands as an empty administrative means toward achieving lasting change in schools. Authors of democratic leadership theory emphasize this point most effectively. Capper (1998) wrote: “The goal of education from a critical theory perspective is social justice and equity” (p. 357). Paraphrasing John Dewey’s perspective of critically based inquiry, Starratt (2001) reported that, “. . . the production of knowledge [is] necessarily a social process, involving multiple perspectives and opinions in the clarification and solution of [a] problem. . . . This normative methodology . . . [would serve] to ensure a greater probability of the solution actually serving human interests” (p. 339). Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991) view inquiry as a means to “uncover the distortions that exist in our language and our view of the world. . . . [To] allow all voices and arguments to be heard regardless of race, class, and gender” (p. 97). Here, the values of social justice and equity are clearly tied to the values of democratic leadership and democratic schooling.

Critical pragmatism as a theoretical foundation is predisposed to criticality by title. Cherryholmes (1999) described critical pragmatism as an alternative

philosophy to the structuralism of empiricist and positivist thought, writing: "Pragmatists are interested in *conceivable practical consequences of affirming an idea or taking an action*" (p. 124, emphasis in original). Pragmatism encourages decision making based on the prediction of possible consequences. Thus, educational leaders must ask which consequences are worth pursuing? For pragmatists, according to Cherryholmes, "... we should pursue aesthetically desirable consequences; pursue outcomes that are satisfying, fulfilling, harmonious, and beautiful" (p. 28). This further begs the question of what is considered aesthetic. What is satisfying, fulfilling, and beautiful? Cherryholmes (1999) asserted that, "... what is beautiful is context-dependent" (p. 32). Aesthetic values, for educational leaders, are inherently unstable because they are determined within the context of historical and social constructions and imbued with power of the dominant discourses working within current educational institutions. Consequently, educators are warned that adopting a lasting distinction of what is beautiful/not beautiful should be resisted. He advised: "Disaster is courted if one fixates upon a single and rigidly defined set of consequences and aesthetic values" (p. 32). Aesthetic values are continually interpreted and criticized within societies. Aesthetic values for the scholar-practitioner leader will reflect the core philosophical values of community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity.

William Foster (1994) discussed embracing the theory of critical pragmatism as a means toward developing transformative leadership. He suggested that, "... if transformation occurs, then it stands that it should occur in a meaningful fashion, that is, one which increases social freedoms and achieves social justice" (p. 40). This view of criticality further removes the need for scientific management in school leadership. He elaborated:

This means, ultimately, reconceiving of administration as an *educational* rather than a technical specialty. . . . A view of administration as an educational specialty, however, allows us to consider the teaching and empowering capability of administration: that the administrator is an educator whose responsibility lies in opening up new pathways and critically evaluating old ones in the context of everyday practices. (p. 43)

If, as Foster reported, school administrators are to shift from the role of manager to educator, their role will become one of a reflective practitioner, an administrator utilizing a body of knowledge generated through practice.

The scholar-practitioner embraces reflective, critical inquiry in her/his daily practice as a means to creating an educational environment reflective of the core values. Therefore leadership, as Jenlink (2001) wrote, will become "inseparable from scholarly and critically oriented inquiry" (p. 5). As such, he added, inquiry will always be "intimately connected with and generally reflexively related to practice" (p. 8). Another way to view this reflexive connection is described by Anderson and Jones (2000) who stated: "Intentional, systematic, and disciplined

inquiry on educational practice by ‘insiders’ . . . has great potential for challenging, confirming, and extending current theory and for identifying new dimensions of administrative practice” (p. 430). The following portion will delve into the concept of knowledge generation of, in, and for practice, as utilized by scholar-practitioner leaders.

Generating Knowledge for Practice

The previous sections have described how inquiry of practice, with a lens of criticality, leads to generating knowledge in, of, and for practice. From the perspective of democratic theory, as espoused by Quantz et al. (1991), “leaders and followers together create a culture that gives meaning and purpose to their lives with the organization” (p. 97). This meaning and purpose is generated through an understanding of the connection between leadership practice and theoretical knowledge. From a post-positivist view, Greenfield (1984) posited that with critical and reflective inquiry there can be no end truth as found in scientific management theory. He wrote: “In this way of thinking, understanding leads not to technique and technique to control; understanding leads only to greater understanding” (p. 151). Similarly, Cherryholmes (1999) shared his belief that pragmatists must accept and expect that revision of their own beliefs is inevitable. He indicated, “. . . we get insights into whether our beliefs work or not by acting on them and observing the consequences” (p. 44). In this way, pragmatists reject positivist thought by implementing their values within multiple contexts of individual and human perspectives that are inherently varied. Consequently, scholar-practitioner leaders must make decisions and act on them based on their knowledge of, in, and for practice without knowing whether their practice is necessarily correct. Critical reflection of the knowledge generated in practice can help steer educational leaders toward a practice imbued with the core values of the scholar-practitioner.

Critical pragmatism insists upon a connection of leadership theory and practice stressing the importance of intellectual leadership that is at first educational. Maxcy (1991) noted that “educational administrators should be philosophic, and that the political and cultural context in which the school operates should be seen as a maximally democratic one” (p. 55). In this regard, educational leaders embrace the ideal of critically oriented inquiry-based knowledge governing their practice toward the ideals of democracy. Therefore, as Murphy (1992) wrote, when educational leadership makes a “shift away from a ‘science of teaching’ and toward ‘research on cognition’” (p. 117) generative knowledge will connect the science of teaching (practice) with research (theory). Likewise, Anderson and Jones (2000) shared: “When practitioners begin to see themselves as generators of knowledge, they are more likely, not less, to seek out and use research done by ‘outsiders’” (p. 430). Once practice becomes informed by outside theory, Foster (1994) indicated “the theory, in turn, is informed by the practice” (p. 41). This

brings educational leaders as scholar-practitioners full circle in the process of generating knowledge, through inquiry of practice, bound by critical theory, re-applied to practice, which in turn generates new knowledge; thus, the need for scholar-practitioner leadership, in which theory and practice are reliant on one another, is affirmed.

Discussion: Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

Elements of scholar-practitioner leadership relating to critical inquiry and generative knowledge here function to eliminate or at least close the gap between current administrative discourses of educational leadership practice and theory. The ideal of scholar-practitioner leadership, according to Jenlink (2001), “envision[s] . . . the practitioner as a scholar of practice, [who] seeks to mediate professional practice and formal knowledge and theory through disciplined inquiry, and uses scholarly inquiry and practice to guide decisions on all levels of educational activity” (p. 7). Additionally, the scholar-practitioner leader must use “her or his scholarly practice to ensure that issues related to power relations, marginalization, or cultural reproduction do not contribute to oppressive conditions” (p. 14). Scholar-practitioners utilize core values of community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity, to critically guide their daily practice and restructure schooling practice to reflect them. Theory and practice become indelibly linked.

If, as Starratt (2001) noted, “schools exist in a democracy that is partially compromised by . . . a form of government many see as serving special interests and itself more than the broad needs of the people” (p. 341), I contend that a new vision of educational leadership must exist if schools are to emerge from their hierarchical, democratically antithetical, and marginalized caves. Leadership in the ideal of the scholar-practitioner is situated to fulfill such a mission of change. Starratt (1991) attested, “. . . educational administrators have a moral responsibility to be proactive about creating an ethical environment for the conduct of education” (p. 187). This ethical environment, I would argue, is best shaped by the core values of the scholar-practitioner that serve to fashion a democratic concept of education situated within a socially just, equitable, and caring community.

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About the Author

Jeffrey R. Schultz, Ed.D., has worked in the field of music education for twenty years. Beginning his service as a secondary school band conductor, Schultz then took his talents to the university level where he served in various capacities on the faculties of The University of Alabama, Baylor University, Stephen F. Austin State University, East Texas Baptist University and Eastern Illinois University. In 2006 he completed his dissertation research examining educational leaders' stories of the arts in an era of accountability. Following his study, he returned to public schools in an effort to share the positive developmental aspects of music with as many students as possible. Dr. Schultz currently serves as an Elementary Music Specialist in the Tuscaloosa (AL) City Schools teaching approximately five to six hundred K-5 students each week. His research interests include the arts in education, caring, narrative inquiry and scholar-practitioner leadership. Email: schultz.jeffrey@yahoo.com