

Chapter 2

“Getting Bruised, Hurting, and Dirty” in School Leadership: Tempering the “Leprosy” of Careerism With a Sense of Calling

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ABSTRACT

Two themes, 1) administrative managerialism and 2) human kinship, are used to theorize an effective approach to educational leadership. The first arises from difficulty in Canada recruiting teachers into school administration. The second emphasizes human kinship, where we speak out of our materiality as an earthling. These themes suggest a leadership profile grounded in valuable experience gained in the practice of teaching. The intent of this chapter is to theorize an approach to leadership that emphasizes a sense of calling toward the public good, where school leaders can engage in the action that nurtures a culture encouraging teachers to be responsibly accountable and students to engage in assiduous study. “Careerists” rarely take time to understand the complexities of a symbolic/cultural approach and the author’s claim is that we need to select leaders who understand how to infuse the work of teaching with value, meaning, passion, and purpose.

PROLEGOMENON

A primary objective of this book is to propose school leadership models or styles that can be emulated and applied as a model or framework for the best or better school leadership practice in a particular context or region. All chapters are expected to align themselves with this particular objective. Hence the book’s title: *Predictive models for school leadership and practices*.

The purpose of this prolegomenon is to make a prefatory comment about the particular meaning of “predictive” that is at work in this chapter. Typically, “predictive” implies a declaration in advance (if not a promulgation of almost prophetic proportions) that if “x” is done, then “y” will happen. In leadership, this line of thinking tends to induce a sense of strong probability that, if a leader undertakes

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certain actions, then those actions will have some very definite and clear positive effects. The tendency is to assume that the prognostication of leadership possibilities is derivable from general laws that hold in all regions of time and space, implying that human organizations are inanimate. This tendency is based on the “unity of science” assumption, that methodologies applied in the natural world can serve in a similar manner to investigate the human world; and on the “science is value-free” assumption, that there is a clear delineation between values and facts, undergirded by the belief that facts are neutral and not socially constructed.

My critique of the “unity of science” assumption is that the social world cannot be understood with the same methodologies as the natural world because social knowledge is made up of changing, ever-modifying, and interpretable facts and therefore bears no resemblance to knowledge of the natural world because social facts are dependent on their context. My critique of the “science is value-free” assumption is that knowledge always has value for someone or for some purpose because it reflects the time or context in which it was created, together with some aspect of the espouser’s values, and therefore cannot be seen as neutral. Hence, my contention that any understanding of “predictive” must not ignore the context in which facts are constructed but must take that context seriously into account. Moreover, I maintain that failure to do so often leads one to potentially flawed conclusions, because the social world represents a contradictory and contingent array of humanly constructed interpretations and distortions that cannot be rationally ordered, engineered and managed by a putative value-free science. Thus, rather than indulge in making instrumentally-derived projections on the basis of a set of unchanging laws of the social world that constitutes educational institutions—projections that would likely prove insubstantial and possibly unethical—my approach to predictive suggestion is epistemologically different. I choose to view “predictive” interpretatively from a “lived experience” perspective in order to analyze the ethical challenges that leaders face in attempting to be successful at helping teachers to become empowered, both personally and professionally, in a rich and complex tangle of human values that constitute the institutional policies and conditions of teaching in the frequently politicized organization of schools.

Introduction

This chapter builds on two ostensibly incongruous themes in educational leadership—1) administrative managerialism and 2) human kinship—to theorize an effective approach to educational leadership. The first theme arises from research I conducted a decade ago for the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) that found that school districts in Canada were having difficulty recruiting appropriately experienced teachers into school administration at a time when numerous positions were opening up (Grimmett & Echols, 2002). The second enunciates that, although the world is tragic, full of injustices and things that make us angry, against which we have to fight and kick back, our weapons are to be *love, kindness, and beauty* where we speak out of our materiality as humans, establishing a kinship with the Other. I shall pick up on these themes in the exercise of school leadership to suggest an administrative profile that does not exclude the stranger but speaks out of one’s “materiality as an earthling” that has gained valuable experience in the context and practice of teaching. Hence, the title, *Getting Bruised, Hurting, and Dirty*. My intent is to theorize a different, more efficacious approach to school leadership, one that emphasizes a sense of calling toward the public good, working toward the betterment of schools. I intend to show that this approach to leadership is potentially more “predictive” of educational efficacy at the school level because it garners the conditions in which leaders *can engage in the kind of action that nurtures a culture that encourages teachers to be responsibly accountable and students to engage*

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