

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Kathy Snow

University of Prince Edward Island

Kirk Anderson

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Many of us began our study of educational administration seeking to reflect an objective reality to support equity, as such we sought to examine leadership and decision-making processes that were “neutral and objective.” Critiquing the objectivist reality, Greenfield (1986) described this ensconced approach to educational administration as a process “...whose experts claim that an objective view of the social, world enables them to conduct value-free inquiry. They claim to possess knowledge that enables them to control organizations and to improve them” (p. 47). Outlining what he believed to be the fallacy of neutral objectivity within educational administration he further argued that “...such large claims appear increasingly unsound, for the science that justifies them rests on methods and assumptions that dismiss the central realities of administration as irrelevant. Those realities are values in human action. If administrative science deals with them at all, it does so only in a weakened or spuriously objective form” (p. 47). This ontological approach was supported by the epistemological view of an “objective truth” wherein we are free from “... the anxiety of decision making and remove the administrator’s sense of responsibility for his decisions” (p. 57).

Greenfield rejected the false certainty of this positivistic and modernist approach to ‘administrative science’. The “Greenfield wars or debates” disrupted the science of educational management and many of its foundational beliefs towards a more post-positivist and indeed post-modernist view of educational administration to enable a better understanding of schools and the people who live and work in them. As Greenfield put it, we need to understand human values and subjectively, in favour of “... a conception recognizing that values bespeak the human condition and serve as springs to action ... values are subjective realities, and people bind them inextricably to the facts of their worlds” (p. 57).

Schools and schooling are not a neutral process, but a reflection of the values of the decision makers and those entrusted with the care of children, one of our most precious resources. Within this special edition of *The Morning Watch* we aimed to share a collection of research that illustrates the historical and ongoing educational development within Inuit Nunangat¹ in a shared global context. As we can see from the literature review provided by Peters, circumpolar peoples—Inuit and Sami—have not been exempt from colonization efforts, first by missionaries then through more strategic national efforts, all with the aim of making them more like what is sometimes called the mainstream society. Whether you call it assimilation, integration, or aid, the end result is the same: access to education requires some kind of submission of self. Putulik (2018) characterized the resilience of Inuit using the Arctic environment as the metaphor, describing Inuit as being fully prepared to thrive in the seasonal

¹ It is important to note that this edition does not share any stories from Nunatukavut, which is the territory of the Inuit of south and central Labrador under the British-Inuit treaty of 1765. Inuit of Nunatukavut live in a contested space that has not yet been included in the boundaries of Inuit Nunangat within Canada.

Conclusion

changes of the environment, some expected and some not. However, she also detailed the emergent social and economic factors thrust upon Inuit as new forces for which youth have not been prepared. This brings us to the J. Anderson article, which clearly critiques the problems of adopting regional assessment from a southern province to a northern territory.

The Canadian education system was built on the foundations of regional control of education. Regional control can be critiqued from the outside as heavily bureaucratic, because of the duplication of the services such as curriculum design, teacher certification, and the challenge of making credentials transferable from one province or region to the next. But this is the real strength of the education system. Under local control, for example, schools in rural PEI teach science through agricultural practices relevant to island families. Schools in BC ground youth in the shared history of the province and its peoples, such as shown in the rationale for the name change of Queen Charlotte Islands to Haida G'waii. But as both the J. Anderson and Copeland et al. articles articulate, such regional autonomy is not offered to the same degree to educational jurisdictions within Inuit Nunangat—neither through directly observable classroom activities such as assessment and curriculum (exemplified by J. Anderson in Nunavut) nor in teacher preparation which, as Copeland et al. discuss, which also often relies upon “southern” partners for accreditation. Here is where boundary crossing does become problematic, through the increased complexity regions must negotiate in order to be able to offer accredited graduation certificates at all levels. These complexities amplify the challenges of regional ministries seeking to revision education to reflect local values and build capacity.

Resilience of communities, people, and the systems they navigate became another theme highlighted in the works shared here. While exploring a school setting in Nunavik, K. Anderson illustrates that school participation reflects a process of navigating the southern biases typical of many other schools across the North in a way that allowed the students not only to meet the external demands but to excel. Resiliency in this case is clearly linked to the community support; strong Inuit language and culture in school initiatives; and teachers, administrators, students, and parents who expect the best and had high expectations. The Quebec context also offers a glimpse into the unique challenges of multilingualism and supporting Inuit, French, and English mother tongue students and teachers to work cooperatively together.

Moore et al., writing from the youngest acknowledged regional area, reiterate this call for culturally relevant education and describe its impact on students when it is approached systematically. They outline how the Nunatsiavut government has done this through resource development, and three dedicated courses at varied levels within K–12 education focused on language and traditional knowledge and values. But they also highlight the challenge of creating a bridge from the warm embrace of home to post-secondary outside the home territory, which can feel like a very distant and unwelcoming environment.

Local autonomy is critical for educational success, and this is reiterated through most of the articles in this issue. The O’Gorman and Carpenter article highlights specific examples of successful practices when regions and teachers are empowered. Though attendance remains a challenge, the graduation rate of youth in Tuktoyuktuk has been increasing. O’Gorman and Carpenter attribute this to Inukialuktun language development, culturally relevant curriculum and land-based learning, and administrative processes that respond directly to local challenges to remove barriers for progression. Finally, the Copland et al. article illustrates exactly what aspiring teachers must accept as part of the process of their teacher education, and where they have begun to push back and change the system.

Conclusion

None of these discussions are new. The call for culturally responsive education, language support, and relational teaching, as not only a response to the systemic failures of the past but simply as good teaching, has existed across all cultures in some way. Every education student learns about the theories of Freire, Vygotsy, Krathwohl, and Bloom, but it appears these practice foundations get lost in the system of education. Accordingly, Greenfield commented more than 30 years ago:

Despite its claim to objectivity, the science of administration is usually to be found on the side of the status quo. It starts from a standpoint of things as they are, and then asks why they are so. It does not question whether that which is ought to be.” (1993, p. 140)

Further, he questions such a stance, asking Bellow’s (1993) simple but fundamental question: “With everyone sold on the good, how does all the evil get done?” (p. 154).

To us it is clear that replacing local control with external priorities is a toxic formula. Local control and decision making by those closest to their schools is the support that shows the greatest promise for the people these schools serve. There has been significant progress in the sharing of research for Indigenous education since Greenfield’s 1980s call rejecting the “science of educational administration,” yet systems still tend to favour administrative and management structures alongside “objective” context. Southern voices still dominate northern landscapes despite many examples of exemplary locally-developed responses to education in the North as evidenced by the contributions shared in this journal.

References

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