

EPILOGUE: THE INTERSECTION OF PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

James M. Smith
Bowling Green State University

After reading, reviewing, and reflecting upon the various chapters that comprise the totality of this work, the reader is certainly drawn toward several powerful, and interestingly intersecting, themes. These themes, in all probability, are as uniquely defined as is the reader him/herself. For purposes of this epilogue, the author has chosen just one such theme or point of intersecting ideas to use for the concluding thoughts to this edited text. That theme can best be defined as the dialectic that exists between the desire for change and the reality of constancy. Professor Alford articulated this most openly. As one reads her chapter, it is impossible not to think of the old adage that rings true for many of us from our childhood memories: that being “the more things change, the more they remain the same.” Professors Hoyle and Papalewis draw the reader to a similar view of constancy when descriptions of diversity are mentioned. As much as the profession of educational administration has articulated the need for a central focus on diversity, the paucity of racial, gender, and socioeconomic diversity in our profession (both at the practitioner level and in higher education) remains an embarrassment. Professor Murphy powerfully notes the need for empirical studies of our preparation programs, while simultaneously admitting that less than 3% of all such empirical studies (i.e., from 1975 to 2002) accomplish that articulated need. And, as is always the case, Professor Achilles challenges us to examine the diaphanous nature of our knowledge base and, in turn, openly admit that we have failed to produce the empirical studies Murphy has called for. Achilles goes beyond that of Murphy and posits that “faked data” are often the progenitors of our actions in the educational administration classroom. However, for this author, the most powerful challenge to look beyond constancy and dream of real change came from the words of Professor English. Drawing on the legal arguments presented in *Mendez v. Westminster* and *Brown v. Board of Education*, English has stated what some might call a blinding glimpse of the obvious – that one of the lessons from our past is that we’ve not learned much from it. His calls for activism and orientation toward emancipatory leadership rooted in social justice bring us back to *Mendez* and *Brown* and, concomitantly, show us how little we have truly accomplished in creating a new social order.

So, how can that intersection of past, present and future be informative and useful to and for those who will be the next great leaders in the field of educational administration? To illustrate this, it seems only logical to rely on

that which is truly most comfortable for this administrator: providing a case study and a simultaneous analysis of said study via use of applied political theory (see Hoyle and Papalewis). This case begins and ends in the Great State of Ohio. Not long ago in that state, Governor Robert A. Taft delivered the annual State of the State Address. That address, entitled “Unleashing Ohio’s Economic Potential,” was not unlike many other such addresses delivered throughout the nation. Phrases such as “the time is now” and “there is far more to be done” rang out loudly and clearly. However, to the surprise of this author, the most robust levels of applause were offered in reaction to two specific areas of the speech that, just a few years ago, would have gained little to no positive reaction. Governor Taft dedicated a significant portion of the valuable time set aside to describe the state of his state by making claims about the stability, or lack thereof, of P-12 schools in Ohio. He touted the following as significant indicators of educational effectiveness:

We’ve boosted elementary reading proficiency by more than 24 percent and my budget will include new choices for students trapped in persistently failing schools. Our academic content standards are recognized as among the best in the nation. (Taft, 2005, p. 6)

Missing from this broad statement regarding success in educational advancement for Ohioans was the fact that state mandated proficiency tests, at present, yield differences in failure rates of 20% or more between Caucasian students and those of African American and Hispanic decent (Spencer, 2004). Also absent from this grand pronouncement was the fact that calls for increased utilization of standardized testing are, and have consistently been, articulated openly by senior staff of the Ohio Department of Education (S. T. Zelman, personal conversation, December 5, 2003) – all this in light of potent data indicating that such mandated testing is bringing forth increased levels of “narrowed intellectualism” on the part of students and overtly or covertly causing appreciably increased numbers of drop-outs in urban communities (Smith & Ruhl-Smith, 2002a). Is this governor blinded by the national rhetoric surrounding testing? Or, has he simply acquiesced to the political right that is an essential part of the shifting political (i.e., both individual and collective) landscape Professor English categorizes as largely disinterested in the future of a participatory democracy? The answers to these queries are certainly not readily available, but the power of the questions themselves must become imbedded in the curricular mosaic that is created in graduate educational administration programs from Maine to California.

To dig deeper into this case, the following must be asked: Why would the aforementioned levels of applause be so overwhelming and, thus, signify prominent support for these notions? Is it because Ohio continues to be a state operating under an illegal funding formula and rather than address the painful funding needs, state leaders attempt to acclaim that standards and standardization will make “all else right”? Given the lack of appropriate funding levels and the

even more constricted projections on short-term growth of taxable income in the state, do these men and women not see the banality of applauding the broad-based use of scarce dollars to test and retest thousands of young children? Could it be that, with enough applause, the public at large will begin to believe that these testing schemes are indeed improving the educational experience? Here again, this type of discussion must become central (regardless of ISLLC Standards or NCATE evaluators) to the work of doctoral students and other advanced graduate teaching and research fellows who, in very significant ways, will be the future of the educational administration professoriate.

Smith and Ruhl-Smith (2005, 2004, 2003, 2002a, 2002b) have consistently, in both theoretical and philosophical ways, shown the fallacy of linear thinking regarding good versus bad in the standardized testing arena. Are these works commonly read, though, by beginning or advanced graduate students? With an open realization that “you can never fatten a hog by continually weighing it,” individuals like President G. W. Bush and Governor R. A. Taft nonetheless still proclaim success in school reform via comprehensive testing methodologies. In other works, this author has gone so far as to suggest that the *No Child Left Behind Act* and other like legislation may have a rather significant counter-purpose:

Is it possible that the intention is not to expand accountability in order to bring forth increased levels of quality in higher education but rather to use these assessment procedures to further reduce the . . . paltry 18% degree attainment for African Americans and 10% level of attainment for Hispanics? (Ruhl-Smith & Smith, 2004, p. 5)

The public does not appear to know the negative side of mandated high-stakes standardized assessments. It is often not the lead story on the 6:00pm news. This issue only becomes truly significant for the media when communities like isolated neighborhoods in South Florida come together and protest for the future of their children (Ruhl-Smith & Smith, 2005). And why is this? In the opinion of the author of this work, it is because less and less attention is given to the scholarship produced by today’s professoriate. Hundreds, if not thousands, of documents exist outlining the inanity of the thoughts uttered by Governor Taft. In the marketplace of ideas, the halls of academia, not a day goes by without such debate or discussion. However, if the professoriate is marginalized and discredited as simply pontificating from the far left, how will the general public ever be familiar with works like those of McNeil and Valenzuela (2000), Kohn (2000), Popham (2001), Ohanian (2002), and Giroux (2002)? In essence, they won’t – and, most certainly, not without the degree of activism that English calls for. At the very least, educational administration students must be aware that if a plan exists to discredit these types of works (and those who compose them), the plan seems to be working and working rather marvelously.

In an earlier section of this epilogue, two areas were mentioned as

gaining notable levels of applause during Governor Taft's talk. The second area was, and probably not to the reader's surprise, cost containment for higher education. The exact words from Taft were as follows:

I challenge our state colleges and universities to keep tuition increases to a minimum by becoming more productive and more collaborative. To that end, our budget will propose an annual tuition cap of 6 percent, to be exceeded only for the purpose of funding needs-based scholarships. (Taft, 2005, p. 8)

Again, in keeping with the articulated need to bring forth real levels of evaluation and study, it seems odd that Governor Taft ignored the fact that subsidy levels (by percentage of overall student cost) have dropped drastically in his state for the past two decades. It seems equally odd that no mention was made of a "flat line" budget for state colleges and universities. And, it seems particularly unsettling that the individual presenting this speech has openly described colleges and universities in his state as "drivers" in the reform of that state's economy. How will this come about in the midst of declining levels of state support, frozen tuition rates, and limited, if not nonexistent, levels of appreciation for intellectual work? As was noted above, it won't. And maybe that is precisely the intent! But will present educational administration students feel comfortable publicly articulating this type of intellectual disconnect? Will they challenge a sitting governor, forcing him/her to explain the "why" and "how" that must be essential elements of these sweeping pronouncements?

As documents like the Academic Bill of Rights gain legislative momentum, can it be a real surprise that these same legislators would loudly applaud for reductions in fiscal support to/higher education? Again, if intellectuals are just mouthpieces for the liberal left, why should legislative bodies continue to fund the work of these individuals? It has become rather commonplace, certainly not just in Ohio, for many of these lawmakers to ignore the findings of oppositional research (see above); by limiting funding levels that sustain that work, it might prove rather simple in the near future to ignore it altogether. Again, as English so clearly noted, democracy is complicated. Are the future leaders of our profession willing and able to articulate the types of queries posed here? Are these men and women trained to offer a counter-hegemonic argument that will bring the public toward a common voice that speaks for those not part of the privileged elite of this nation? To reify the assertions of Achilles, all those involved with professional organizations like NCPEA must come together to fortify the defense of those who are so often left defenseless. Should the outcome of schooling continue to be viewed only as a recorded test score, our future as an egalitarian nation is truly at risk.

In closing, this author feels compelled to infuse one additional element into this most complex of case studies. It seems prudent to inform the reader of

Governor Taft's latest solution for those trapped youngsters he mentions above – vouchers. These are the same vouchers that have proven, nationally, far less successful than class size reduction on overall student learning outcomes (Molnar & Achilles, 2000). These are also the governmental vouchers that have been recommended to support Charter School enrollments (i.e., with academic success levels ranging from impressive to outrageously poor) but still offer aggregate passage rates on standardized tests in Ohio at a pace seven times below that of traditional public school students (Ruhl-Smith & Smith, 2005). Can there be any question that the work of the professoriate is systematically being ignored, if not dismantled? Murphy and Achilles are right – the future of this profession rests on meaningful and legitimate studies of the most successful and the most failed of school reforms. However, will our political allies and enemies alike allow such studies to move forward? Economist Alan Kruger offered a rather tantalizing option to those, like Taft, who are convinced that the use of vouchers can indeed be powerful. Kruger proposed that vouchers be used to fund summer school for children of extremely low-income parents. This type of action, in Kruger's thinking, would provide a "value added" element to a child's educational life (Kruger, 2000). Rather than simply resegregating our schools, this option might allow for summer school enrollments to increase beyond the 9% level that currently exists nationally and would provide an additional "shot in the arm" to those who might lose significant educational ground during the summer recess. However, five years after Professor Kruger's article appeared in the *New York Times*, no comprehensive implementation of this program can be found. Is this coincidental or might the force of Kruger's plan hold too much potential for equalizing power? As members of the professoriate struggle with this line of thinking, students must be involved in the dialogue, debate, and discourse, as well. Without an activist orientation, moving far beyond the university classroom and into the P-12 setting, it is certain that the future will hold just more of the same – or just maybe for those struggling with life below the poverty line, that future will become a bit worse day by day. Now is the time for real change in teaching, research, and service to/for the educational community. Let us move forward with that change with "all deliberate speed" and hope beyond hope that English is wrong about the possibility that it may be too late to make things substantively better. Please hold your applause!

References

- Giroux, H. A. (2002). Schools for sale: Public education, corporate culture, and the citizen-consumer. In A. Kohn & P. Shannon (Eds.). *Education, Inc.: Turning education into a business* (pp. 105-118). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Kohn, A. (2000). *The case against standardized testing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Kruger, A. B. (2000, August 17). Vouchers for summer school could help halt the learning slide. *The New York Times*, p. C2.
- McNeil, L., & Valenzuela, A. (2000). The harmful impact of the TAAS system of testing in Texas: Beneath the accountability rhetoric. *The Civil Rights Project: Harvard University* [On-line]. Retrieved July 31, 2003, from http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/conferences/testing98/drafts/mcneil_valenzuela.htm.
- Molnar, A., & Achilles, C. (2000). Voucher and class-size research. *Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation* [On-line]. Retrieved February 7, 2004, from http://asu.edu/educ/eps/EPRU/point_of_view_essays/cerai-00-28.htm.
- Ohanian, S. (2002). *What happened to recess and why are our children struggling in kindergarten*. New York: Mc-Graw Hill.
- Popham, W. J. (2001). *The truth about testing: An educator's call to action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Ruhl-Smith, C., & Smith, J. M. (2004). *In defense of basic intellectualism: Will higher education become the next victim to the political right?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Branson, MO.
- Ruhl-Smith, C., & Smith, J. M. (2005). *The tie between standardized assessments for P-12 schools and the future of intellectualism*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, San Antonio, TX.
- Smith, J. M., & Ruhl-Smith, C. (2002a). Standardized testing and educational standards: Implications for the future of emancipatory leadership in U.S. schools. In G. Perreault & F. C. Lunenburg (Eds.). *The changing world of school administration* (pp. 44-59). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Smith, J. M., & Ruhl-Smith, C. (2002b, August). *Examining corporate solutions to public school effectiveness: The power of hyperbole and the essence of disingenuousness*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, Burlington, VT.
- Smith, J. M., & Ruhl-Smith, C. (2003, February). *Corporate solutions to public school effectiveness: An examination and comparison of ineffective business practices applied to school leadership*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, New Orleans, LA.
- Smith, J. M., & Ruhl-Smith, C. (2004). Corporate answers to public school problems: A call for counteraction. *Education Leadership Review*, 5(1), 1-7.

- Spencer, C. (2004). Minority scores low on trial graduation test. *The Cincinnati Enquirer* [On-line]. Retrieved July 20, 2004, from http://enquirer.com/editions/2004/06/08/loc_ohgradtests08.html.
- Taft, R. A. (2005). *2005 state of the state address: Unleashing Ohio's economic potential* [On-line]. Retrieved May 15, 2005, from <http://governor.ohio.gov/releases/SOS2005speech.pdf>.