*The Sixth Annual William E. Drake Lecture*

# Reframing Leadership: The Study of Educational Philosophy as Preparation for Administrative Practice

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It is both a personal pleasure and a genuine honor for me to be asked to bring the sixth annual William E. Drake Lecture to the Texas Educational Foundations Society.

It is a pleasure because I remember with thanks the considerable positive impact Bill Drake had on me as a graduate student in the 1960's. What Dr. Drake taught and stood for has, in large measure I think, been incorporated into my own perspective on scholarship and society reflected in twenty years in university administration. Although I cannot lay all the credit or blame for my time in academic purgatory, as Dr. Drake sometimes called administration, at his feet, I can say without hesitation that Bill's understanding of the role of education in a democratic society and, conversely, the impact of the society on the shape and substance of education has been a keystone in the arch of my own education.

Being asked to bring this lecture is an honor as well as a pleasure because of the quality of the five lecturers, including Dr. Drake himself, who have preceded me. I hold them all in high regard. I was fortunate enough to hear Jack Willers last year as he presented a refreshingly balanced and carefully nuanced report on his editing of the Drake papers and the insights they are yielding. This is a Herculean task for which we will all be indebted to Dr. Willers.

### Introduction

The topic I have chosen for this presentation is "Reframing Leadership: The Study of Educational Philosophy as Preparation for Administrative Practice." Since this is a scholarly company, let me raise three caveats.

First, "preparation for" is a loaded phrase for those of us who take with some seriousness Dewey's dictum that education is not a preface to some abstract and foggy future.[1] Education is not a "getting ready" for future tasks and responsibilities, but a "doing" of the present, using the interests, resources, and abilities that are at hand. Do this, Dewey believed, and the future will take care of itself. At the same time, it is clearly possible and sometimes desirable to look backwards on the influences, decisions, and happenings of the past as they became our history to try to discern what happened to us, or, if you prefer, what we constructed. So the intent of that phrase in the title is to try to discern how serviceable my philosophic wonderings have been in dealing with the devilish matters of administration.

The second disclaimer is that the points I try to make today take their cue from reflection on my experience in administrative harness rather than an examination of the twists and turns taken in the netherworld of educational philosophy. My perspective, then, will be autobio-graphical rather than historical. This is for my protection since I may have missed a turn or two.

The third caveat is that my interest in this subject is more from the standpoint of the sociology of educational philosophy than from the standpoint of educational philosophy itself. Sociology of educational philosophy may sound to some of you like an oxymoron. I don't think it is. It appears to me that it is as legitimate (and sometimes interesting) an enterprise to look at the social placement of our philosophical perspective and activities, broadly conceived, as at the philosophical perspectives or activities themselves.

One endeavor is not a replacement for the other; it is an addition to it. After all, we accept the legitimacy of the subdiscipline known as sociology of knowledge whether we agree with its claims or not. Similarly, intellectual history is a respectable academic game. Study of the historical placement of ideas (if you favor an older school of thought) or the historical impact of prevailing and changing paradigms (if Thomas Kuhn's work is more to your taste[2]) has scholarly credence. The social placement of philosophies of education (or, more aptly, doing educational philosophy) can have, I believe, similar credence.

The thesis of this paper is, as you might expect, that the study of educational philosophy is advantageous to the academic administrator. How it is beneficial, or, more accurately, how it has proved beneficial to me, I will try to demonstrate by identifying three shifts in the social placement of theorizing (used here as synonymous with educational philosophizing). I have experienced these as a university system official, an administrator in a health science center and a university president. I have tried to reflect on the shift in emphasis which each of these adjustments occasioned.

### I. Knowledge

The first locus of theorizing is knowledge itself. Burton Clark has written that[3]

The university is prototypically an institution whose faculties originate, assess, compare, apply, relate, and, if lucky, transform knowledge. Knowledge is the reason for being of universities.

Ernest L. Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has recast the functions of faculty traditionally stated as teaching, research, and service into the functions of the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of teaching, and of application.[4] Whether you prefer the three or four part division of labor, all have to do with knowledge whether

it is assumed to be substantive (a "stuff"), procedural (sets of skills or models), or open-ended processes which modify the known and/or the knower.

Knowledge is the baseline from which most of us start our university odyssey as people "professing" something. Theorizing about how knowledge is manipulated, interconnected, and used in various ways in diverse contexts is the target when knowledge itself is the predominant site. If this substantive kind of vocabulary makes you uneasy, as it does me, a vocabulary of process may be more appropriate. But regardless of the language frame, the "place" of theorizing from this perspective is the knowledge arena itself.

The open-endedness of knowledge and the noetic process was what made the university attractive to many of us as a workplace in the first place. The function of educational philosophizing at this site is definition and clarification. Defining and clarifying has sometimes been done by using a set of analytic tools which helps to get statements and referents straight. At other times the tool set of pragmatism has been used so that practice can justify or reject options by playing them out with feedback and change.

A homely metaphor for this way of thinking might be a bowl of soup eaten as the main course of a meal, as opposed to its usual place as a preliminary course, a prelude to the main food event. Theorizing at the knowledge-dominant table, like soup as the main course, was the defining event of my educational meal, a major attraction. Usually, and probably for good reasons, soup has a lesser place on a well-planned menu, but it can be a very satisfying meal in itself, and, for a real soup lover, could displace the other elements that balance the diet.

This is a far fetched example, but I find it illuminating because as a graduate student enamored with philosophy and intellectual history in general, and educational philosophy in particular, I found myself trying to make the soup of definition and clarification the total meal. Head people like to try to get things conceptually straight even if the rest of existence stays muddled. Getting things conceptually straight is, I know now, humanly impossible in any final sense and an example of intellectual hubris, a condition not unknown in the academy.

The intoxicating effect of seeing the internal logic, classy inner connections, and elegance of a system of thought--even a system which had denial of the possibility of a system built into it--is not easy to break. But it did break for me, and the break signaled a shift in the site of theorizing.

The break came when I became an administrator with the overblown title of Assistant Vice Chancellor of Academic Programs in the central administration of The University of Texas System. When I came to it from a faculty position at another university I naively thought that I could continue to eat the soup of definition and clarification. I found out differently.

My major responsibility, at least during my first year and a half in the job, was to read and evaluate degree and certificate program proposals from System universities, including their proposed budgets and sources of funding. I was to visit some of the campuses involved, talk with key faculty and administrators, look at the facilities, and evaluate the promise of these programs from the standpoint of a generalist, not an expert from within the discipline. This meant I went as an outsider to the campus. I came with the dubious government worker introduction, "I'm from the System and I've come to help you." I came with some not clearly defined influence on that institution's desired future.

The universities were varied and unalike. They ranged from a small, young, upper division institution struggling in those days for identity, students, and survival to the flagship institution, The University of Texas at Austin, often called with some justification a world class research university with more students than it wanted, adequate and sometimes ample funding backed up by a recordbreaking endowment, and significant human, equipment, and space resources.

I visited both those campuses and others which had program changes pending. I read, I listened, I asked questions, I toured, and I found that what was at stake for these institutions in these proposals could not be rationalized using the typical educational models which I had learned, taught, and enjoyed. The deficiency lay not so much in the models themselves as in the institutional, social, cultural, and political contexts in which they were placed. I was trying to make one size fit all, so to speak, and it would not.

The problem, of course, lay at that very point. My operational understanding, not my conceptual understanding mind you, of what it meant to do educational philosophy was to try to stuff these real multidimensional institutional dilemmas into a preset cognitive framework. They wouldn't fit, thank goodness. As a fledgling administrator at the staff level I was an idealist in a pragmatist's suit. The pragmatist's suit was right for me in the long run. But the dissonance between what I assumed naively and idealistically should be "academic affairs" and what, in fact, real academic affairs were was jarring. The latter involved human faculty, administrators with mixed agendas, economic and social pushes and pulls, political currents, institutional expectations, and all the other buzzing confusions of a live enterprise. This dissonance formed the wedge that opened for me an understanding of educational theorizing as the tools and mindset for changing tools and mindsets as needed. I am grateful for that dissonance that broke up the closed loop mind game.

## II. Culture

A second shift in site for thinking through the meaning and direction of administrative problems was the emergence of cultural frames of reference as an issue. These frames have been present throughout the history of this country. Giving more weight to them in making institutional decisions is a groundshift. Sociologically, culture is a more influential vector in our time than nature or rationality. Classical rationalism, of one stripe or another, is with us--or in us--to be sure. If you doubt it, reread Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind again and ask yourself what the appeal of that book was to its sizable readership (or buyership) in this country. But in spite of this, a time like ours that feeds in a tidal wave of images and sound bytes tends to take its group life more seriously than rational argument.

Culture is used here as a set of common assumptions and beliefs which support a set of desired behaviors. Membership may be formal or informal, intentional or categorical.

This concept of culture when applied to the univer-

sity can designate constituencies external to the institution as well as internal. Examples might include "the business community," "people of color," "the media," "feminists," "faculty culture," "student culture," "arts culture," etc.

Dealing with various interests which these groups reflect complicates life for an administrator because more players are at higher education's table, each wanting a significant stake in the resources, image, and influence of the institution. This dimension of power and resource dissemination is a political issue which will be discussed further.

The point here is that the issue of "interest," to use Habermas's terminology, whether it expresses itself as knowledge, culture, power, or institutionalism, influences the weight given to the various paradigms by which educational philosophy is done.[5] This applies whether the paradigm is a traditional analytic one, a Marxist or neo-Marxist model, a critical theory paradigm, a pragmatic paradigm, or any other model. Some of these models accomodate one or the other of these cultural interests better than the others and the resulting weight of the model's results will be correspondingly "skewed."[6]

This is not meant to be a conservative brief for a return to some retread version of objectivity or Aristotelian rationality. It is no more than a cautionary observation that the social placement of philosophy does more than provide a backdrop. The scenery gets into the act.

Although it is simplistic, the germ of this idea is contained in the leadership truism that in complex organizations too much credit should not be given to the ability of leaders to make things happen. In systems, at least equal weight should be given to the fact that things make leaders happen.[7] This is a part of an evolving common sense about leadership that holds such claims as the belief that leadership is a relationship more than a performance, that it is situation-specific, context-bound, time-locked. When a leader starts her tenure is at least as important as what she does, and when she quits is at least as important institutionally as how influential she is with trustees, regents, and state officials. Administrators are elected or appointed to offices; leadership is an assumed role. The two may or may not coincide or they may coincide sometimes and not others.

The function of educational philosophizing at the cultural site is critique and ideological analyses. Critical theory in some permutation, hopefully with a more sophisticated engine than a Marxist or neo-Marxist one, has touched an ideological nerve attached to cultural sensitivities in both their positive and negative forms. I personally do not believe we will navigate these times of ideological correctness smoothly without the development of sharper and more delicate instruments which probe where critical theory pokes.

To return to my culinary metaphor, the sou chef typology sees the critical task as analogous to improvising a soup from a variety of disparate raw ingredients, some fresh, some questionable, some ready for the compost heap. The chef tastes the questionable vegetables and adjusts the herbs and stock accordingly, or, if they are unredeemable, tosses them. A good soup can become a medley without destroying the individual tastes, enhancing their differences with the complementarity of their neighbors.

III. Power

The third shift in the site for theorizing is to the domain of authority. This means, in current terms, empowerment. In older terms, it means locating, brokering, and disseminating power. This involves human, financial, and physical resources.

In higher education there are now more institutional mouths to feed than there used to be. Examples include multiple campus systems with central offices looking for expanded functions for themselves, statewide coordinating agencies touting efficiency, the elimination of "duplicate" programs, and "proof" of quality often in the face of no peer consensus on appropriate, demonstrable benchmarks of quality in those areas; legislators who sometimes take simplistic beancounter audit approaches to control institutions; and, finally, increasing requests from independent colleges for shared state support of some of their programs through tuition equalization funding and other means.

The political frame for viewing higher education can be approached from a micro- and macropolitical perspective. Micropolitics refers here to the internal politics of a university that centers on two factors in Clark's view.[8] One factor is the discipline or knowledge field; the other is the enterprise: the department, school, college, institute, center, or university. The creative tension between the faculty member's relationship to his field and the peers therein, and his relationship to the organizational enterprises define his ties and loyalties.

In most traditional disciplines there is no real contest between the pull of the discipline and the pull of the department. The discipline is king. In more professionally or practice-oriented disciplines or fields, influence shifts toward the enterprise or department, although the discipline is still important. An understanding of these forces gives micropolitics of universities its raw materials.

University macropolitics is primarily concerned with the state's dispersal of power and funding through state officials to public universities and university systems. This level is complicated in our time by university-business-public agency cooperative and joint ventures usually with a community enhancement or service motive. Sometimes collaborative research or joint product development and incubation efforts promise financial benefits both to the private sector entrepreneur and the public sector professor and/or the university.

The growing belief that universities are economic generators for cities and regions is another element in the power equation. University administrators and faculty members, especially in young developing institutions, find themselves subtly and not so subtly pressured by such agencies as economic development councils, business coalitions, new industry development groups, regional councils, and other agencies and persons of community influence to instigate programs which may be inappropriate to that university's role and scope, faculty interest and competences, and, usually, more costly and less beneficial than predicted.

The fictitious scenario might go like this. University representatives are approached by a blue ribbon group whose composition usually includes the mayor, Chambers of Commerce representatives, a local legislator or two, a developer who makes the hard sell, a city father who nods and encourages warmly, a local industry

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godfather if one is available, and a person whose economic contributions to the university are significant.

It seems that company X is looking at three cities as possible sites to build a new plant which will bring a thousand new jobs to the area chosen. They want to locate near a university which would enter into an arrangement with them to train nondegreed "polymer technicians" to their specifications as potential employees. The university, regrettably, has no faculty in the area of polymer chemistry. The group says they would help recruit someone. The Dean smiles noncommittally. Our budget only covers five new faculty positions for next year and all have been promised to areas that are either so overloaded with students that classes are inappropriately large, or to programs which accreditation demands force into high priority. In spite of your and the perspiring Dean's pledge to work with them in every way to explore the feasibility of a university role in this endeavor that will benefit the city, there is some disappointment that "our" local university appears lukewarm in helping us land the plant.

These well-meaning, civic-minded, shrewd business persons have only the most nebulous conception of the ways of the academic tribe: collegiality, bottom-up program initiation and development based on faculty competence and interest, peer group accountability, institutional structural and procedural conservatism in spite of sometimes extreme rhetoric, program ownership, the slow pace of academic decision-making compared to corporate tempos, academic planning on a five and ten year projection, legislative funding in this state on a two year cycle based on past semester credit hour production, etc.

The point to this is that when a university administrator begins to try to understand what is happening in this arena and what she is doing about it, she has shifted the locus of theorizing to authority: how and in regard to whose prerogatives is the power to act in a certain way distributed?

This fact does not do away with the other sites for doing philosophical thinking about administration (knowledge, culture, and the institution are examples). It points to the fact that one of the services a background in educational philosophy gives the administrator is the ability to shift frames as needed in the face of gathering complexity and changing projects.

In spite of the difficulties inherent in the little story I just recounted, I am persuaded that the appropriate theorizing mode when power is the focusing issue is crafting collaborative and complementary efforts. This is a task for tinkerers more than grand theorists. These ventures will have to accomodate who is collaborating, including their idiosyncrasies; what the moment is; what the situational factors are, and what kind of stepped goals the group can live with. Consensus building is not one faction trying to sell something to the others. It is a time consuming and patience-trying enterprise.

What kind of soup would this produce? I don't know, but it would be unique, local, indigenous, with shared ingredients in a borrowed pot on a stove burning fuel paid for by someone else. It would be a kind of folk soup whose character changes daily as it stays on the stove, bowls are ladled out, and additional ingredients are added as they turn up. A recipe (or model) for this kind of dish would be almost impossible to devise. But the soup is hearty.

## IV. Institutions

The final shift I want to consider is a focus on the institution itself. Organizational analysis has widened and deepened significantly as an area of study in the last twenty-five years.[9] It has been approached from various disciplines such as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, public administration, business, and others employing various methodologies. Some management theorists and some sociologists have come to a multiframe or sequential frame method of analysis which might be termed postmodern and pragmatic.

Multidisciplinary curricula have for some time accepted multi or sequential frame perspectives across disciplines. Hospitals or schools, for example, might yield more, and certainly different, information when viewed by a microeconomist and a sociologist with different questions. The integration or other kind of structuring of these multiple findings rests in multidisciplinary studies with the individual who is trying to see two or more perspectives with one pair of eyes.

To take the multiframe perspective another step would be to use it within the discipline itself which management and perhaps other fields are doing.[10] The organization theorist may use multiple assumption sets, analytic procedures, and findings depending upon what he is trying to do. An institutional researcher may use concepts which have much or little in common with each other, such as organized anarchies, coupled systems, collegial authority, and interest group models.

Philosophically, this latitude to choose appropriate methodologies and investigative concepts depending upon the nature of the problem you are investigating flows, as Richard Rorty has argued forcefully and at length, from rejecting a question such as what is the real nature of this institution?[11]

This question assumes a metareferent or truth behind, above, or below the organization which, if there, mere mortals do not have access to it. So this question has a hard time holding our interest. Unless we have some property interest in it, we yield to the lure of other more engaging questions.

The function of educational philosophizing for an administrator at the institutional locus is the fabrication of multiframe institutional analyses. Rational frames, instrumental frames, and others devised or yet to come cease to be icons revered for themselves or for what they represent, and become instruments valued as useful tools for what they can do. They are no more and no less than this.

The final soup du jour for this multiframe institutional perspective is, what else?, a soup made from leftovers that have already been tried separately and individually and now are combined as the chef thinks appropriate for a different clientele. Echos of Monday' meatballs and Tuesday's corn and bean cassarole may surface on your tongue, but the mixture is both appetizing and nourishing.

## V. Summary

Educational philosophy did not provide me with the tools to practice as an administrator. I did not expect it

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to provide those. Instead, and more importantly, it provided me with the ability to change conceptual tools as needed, to see administrative practice as an arena which could be analyzed from perspectives appropriate to the given project.

I would like to close by reading two paragraphs from Rorty on Dewey's view of pragmatism which say succinctly some of the things it has taken me twenty years as an administrator to appreciate existentially.

> It (pragmatism) provides a rationale for nonideological, compromising, reformist muddling-through (what Dewey called " e x - perimentalism"). It claims that categorical distinctions of the sort philosophers typically invoke are useful only so long as they facilitate conversation about what we should do next. Such distinctions, Dewey says, should be blurred or erased as soon as they begin to hinder conversation--to block the road of inquiry.

> Dewey thinks that muddle, compromise, and blurry syntheses are usually less perilous politically, than Cartesian clarity. That is one reason why his books are often thought bland and boring. For he neither erects an exciting new binary opposition in terms of which to praise the good and damn the bad, nor does he distinguish between bad binary oppositions and some wonderful new form of discourse which will somehow avoid using such oppositions. He just urges us to be on our guard against using intellectual tools which were useful in a certain sociocultural environment after that environment has changed, to be aware that we may have to invent new tools to cope with new situations.[12]

This advice makes experts scarce and ordinary practitioners plentiful. It may help us not to get caught up in utopian schemes or mired down in paralyzing skepticism. These days that's quite a lot.

## References

[1] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1938), p. 19f.

[2] *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), second edition.

[3] *Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[4] Quoted by Donald N. Langenberg, "The Chronicle of Higher Education," September 2, 1992, p. A64.

[5] Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

[6] "Skewed," that is, if one is willing to step outside the paradigm used and look through the lenses of an alternative paradigm. There is no Archimedes' point to stand outside all models and get "the real picture."

[7] Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991), pp. 409-410.

[8] Clark, 1983, pp. 28-34.

[9] Burton Clark, ed., *Perspectives on Higher Education: Eight Disciplinary and Comparative Views* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 9.

[10] Bolman and Deal, 1991, chapters 16 and 17.

[11] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979). *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[12] Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, p. 211.