

## Introduction

From my journal, 7 September 1987:

*As I sat in the outhouse next to my home, flies buzzing, the stench of many years past, being careful not to snag my nylons on the wooden seat, avoiding the insects on the tentacles of vines growing between the cracks of the weathered boards, touching my mom's diamond heart necklace around my neck, I reflected. Here I am, off to work as a college instructor. Raised middle class, the last several years living with much less . . . swapping stories with mountain folk at the laundry mat, trying to put the pieces together of shattered myths related to religious "love" and caring for our "brothers" [sic], and the accompanying perpetuation of oppressiveness and elitism within myself and others. Now, white, middle class, woman, although raised "rural," the midwestern, farm country in Indiana feels very "yuppish" and metropolitan compared to this.*

*Gotta be careful how I "get up into" my four-wheel drive truck so as not to get my skirt dirty, and somehow keep my legs together, "like a lady." I, the pacifist, hold my .22 handgun in the lap of my suit, as my truck bounces over the mountain coal road to the college, radio cranked to the top 40. Probably in these moments I am most fully me. Embracing my own diversity—all the parts—because, as soon as I pull into the drive of the college, it all changes. No one sees my mountain home, nor the internal struggle with theological principles, philosophical values, and theoretical constructs, nor the ways I oppress myself and others in my acts of "empowerment."*

I wrote this journal entry during my five years of work in the Appalachian mountains of southeastern Kentucky. While I was working toward my doctorate in the Department of Educational Leadership at Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, I was both a teacher and the director of the special education program at Red Bird School in Beverly, Kentucky. I was placed at Red Bird Mission as a two-year missionary for the United Methodist Church, working

with students in preschool through high school who were experiencing difficulty in school—including students identified as disabled—and their families and communities. Later, I became the founding director of a nonprofit agency and a college instructor at Union College in the same region.

I struggled to reconcile what I was learning at Vanderbilt about administration, leadership, and organizations with my work in public schools, private colleges, and nonprofit agencies in the Appalachian mountains, and to weave the two together. This was especially challenging as I confronted the “layers” of difference of the people with whom I worked—differences associated with the rural geographic location, the Appalachian culture, low socioeconomic class, and gender, in combination with disabling conditions—and the layers of difference, and evolution, within myself as a white, Protestant woman raised in a rural, midwestern, middle-class family, and the intersecting dynamics between myself and the persons I worked with, many of whom became my friends and neighbors.

Initially, understanding the administration and work of schools and organizations through my doctoral studies proved to be remarkably useful in my Appalachian work. I found it a constant challenge, however, to merge church theology about “helping others” with the administrative theories and practices of such oft-quoted organizational analysts as Hertzberg, Peters and Waterman, Hershey and Blanchard, Bolman and Deal, and Thompson. This challenge was compounded by my own internal development in respecting the dignity of the mountain people and being open to learning and growing from their way of life. Thus, when I first began conceptualizing this book, I knew that the literature and research (or “stories”) I had studied in educational administration, both theoretically and practically, failed to address the range of “Others” I had experienced as a teacher, administrator, and researcher. I then learned (as described in chapter 1) that the stories I had been told were limited to structural functionalism or to a few “interpretive stories, the latter via my training in qualitative research methods.

The summer before writing my doctoral dissertation I attended Syracuse University to study special education administration and to continue my training in working with persons with severe disabilities. It was there, through the teaching of Doug Biklen and Alison Ford and meeting with Steve Taylor, and their introduction of emancipatory educational literature, that I had a glimpse of a possible reconciliation between what I knew about organizations and administration and working with persons along the axis of oppression. Subsequent reading in the critical theory literature of education and educational adminis-

tration also resonated with my life experience and politics.

I wanted to put together this book because I wanted to create a space to discuss the social context of education, school administration, and the diversity within and among persons along the axis of oppression. When I reviewed the literature for information on school administration and cultural pluralism for both my research and my teaching, many books were on the market that examined school administration, but these books did not link leadership practices to issues of equity. Exceptions were books that focused primarily on school administration and gender. While these books made an important contribution to the knowledge base, they did not consider the parallels between gender issues and the history of exclusion for others. Other books in general education addressed issues of equity in education, but they did not specifically consider the role of educational administration in responding to equity concerns.

A few books directly address equity and school leadership. This book differs from these efforts, however, in two important ways. First, this book builds on a multiple paradigm approach of administration by incorporating feminist poststructuralist theories. Previous books, while providing provocative insights on equity issues, approach the subject without naming or claiming a clear paradigm or theoretical framework.

Second, this book examines school administration and ethnic and cultural minorities and women, but it also considers other persons along the axis of oppression, such as persons with disabilities, persons of lower social classes, lesbians and gay men, and the challenging geographical contexts of persons in developing countries and persons in rural communities. The contributors probe the role and representation of these persons in (a) the research and literature in education, (b) school reform, and (c) organizational theory and behavior—and the ways the instructional organization and school culture can constrain or enhance their school achievement. Based on this probing, each of the chapters also provides specific implications for administrator practice and preparation.

My line of inquiry considers multiparadigm views of organizations and equity in theory and in practice. My work, rather than dismissing traditional approaches to education, explores their utility in conjunction with other epistemologies and their accompanying methodologies, such as feminist poststructuralist theories. Therefore, in the first chapter, I describe a multiparadigm approach for administration in a pluralistic society and explain why it can be a useful approach and what it might mean for practice.

The contributors in the following chapters propose theoretical and practical frameworks that move beyond using only a structural-functionalist view of educational administration, and incorporate—in addition to structural functionalism—interpretive, critical, and poststructuralist approaches to examine the research and literature and to propose practices related to educational administration and persons along the axis of oppression. Even though I suggested that the contributors adopt a more critical approach than structural functionalism, I left it up to them to define this critical view for themselves. Therefore, the chapters reflect a variety of positions from a critical perspective. A few contain seeds of critical theory, a few others could probably be considered a purer critical approach, while still others reach into poststructuralist views. This theoretical spectrum is probably a more accurate representation of those who engage in emancipatory work—a consequence of our indoctrination in structural-functionalist approaches and the extraordinary process of learning and applying other theoretical perspectives. While most of the chapters take a critical view of educational administration, however, the chapters extend beyond the criticisms and consider implications for administrative practice and preparation.

In this volume we “name” specific nondominant groups along the axis of oppression and devote a separate chapter to each, a practice that critical theorists generally avoid, preferring instead to refer to a generic oppressed person (see chapter 1). The phrase *nondominant group*, however, suggests that concrete boundaries mark the differences among persons with particular characteristics. For example, this phrase implies that specific boundaries can be drawn between the characteristics associated with males and females. These boundaries, however, do not leave room for the “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics in all of us, regardless of gender, nor do they consider that these characteristics are socially constructed (see chapter 1). Further, naming each group separately obscures the similarities and differences both among and within groups, and indeed, as Sears asserts in chapter 5, promotes an essentialized, objectivist approach. Citing individual underrepresented groups also promotes generalized versions of difference without naming the layers of diversity within and among individuals. Because of the unabashed neglect of particular nondominant groups from the equity discourse in educational administration, however, I felt it necessary to name just who it was we were talking about.

I have decided to use the term *persons along the axis of oppression* to describe the persons and identities we focus on in this book. No “correct” terminology exists, however, to refer to persons who are mem-

bers of groups that typically hold less political and economic power in society. The phrase *persons along the axis of oppression* shifts from persons that have been lumped into an essentialized group (see chapter 5) to socially constructed relations among people in which the lines demarcating boundaries between groups may shift but there is still a line differentiating between relative power positions. The phrase, and its use of the term *oppression*, however, may raise a red flag to some and suggest attitudes and actions of the '60s. Some may subscribe to the idea that the education of persons of "nondominant status," rather than oppression, needs to be addressed to enable the United States to remain economically and politically competitive with other nations. Others believe that a productive work force of as many people as possible, regardless of social status, is necessary to maintain social security benefits for themselves. Still others may believe in the "pay now or pay later" position, which suggests investing in the educational productivity of young people during their elementary and secondary years rather than pay higher taxes to support all the social welfare programs for the residual effects such as the cycle of poverty, addicted babies, and chemical abuse for those who aren't successful in school. Another position to take is to address the educational needs of persons characterized by nondominant status because it is the appropriate legal action to take. That is, legally, all students, regardless of status, have a right to an education. Regardless of the terminology or reason for educational change—enlightened self-interest or a personal goal of transforming societal inequities—I hope the material in this volume will be useful for both school administrators and faculty in preparation programs.

Given the limitations of framing the book around specific groups of persons along the axis of oppression, I encouraged the contributors to consider the layers of diversity within the nondominant group each is addressing. For example, when Pat and Richard Schmuck speak of school administration in rural communities, in chapter 7, we do not read of the generic rural community and the generic rural administrator. Instead, for instance, we find administrators of color facilitating school change within pockets of rural poverty. I do not explicitly call attention to these layers of diversity and oppression; instead, I challenge readers to uncover these intersections of power and oppression and consider their own position in relation to these intersections.

Further, this volume doesn't promise a comprehensive discussion of all persons along the axis of oppression (it omits, for instance, discussion of persons of non-Christian religions), and it includes at least two chapters that aren't typically considered in the discussion of equity: persons in rural communities and persons in developing countries.

Rural and small-town schools are addressed because often inequities are exacerbated by the rural community context. Moreover, school reform and administrator preparation programs typically do not consider the unique characteristics of rural communities.

Even though the field of educational administration sometimes includes comparative study with its democratic counterparts in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, the work of educational administration scholars and practitioners in developing countries is seldom considered. Rather than importing models of administration from the United States and other Western nations, in chapter 8, Sander takes a macrolevel perspective to explain the reconstruction of models and theories that fit the culture and politics of third-world people. Similarly, this volume argues that, in the United States, "mainstream" theories and models of educational administration are not appropriate, in and of themselves, for people who are not characterized by the white male "norm," necessitating a rethinking of school administration.

While feminist poststructuralist theories tend to reach beyond the fact/value dichotomy, threads of ethics and values are silently woven among all the chapters. Although ethical issues are receiving greater attention in educational administration, ironically, ethical decision-making, and its study in preparation programs, can obscure issues of difference among people. Thus, William Greenfield offers an essay devoted to school administration and ethics and its relation to cultural pluralism. The last chapter describes school administrator practice and preparation for social reconstructionist schooling. First it reviews the current status of persons along the axis of oppression within school reform, organizational theory, and the instructional organization and culture of public schools, derived from a synthesis of the issues presented in the preceding chapters; then it makes specific recommendations for social reconstructionist administrator practice and preparation in a pluralistic society.

# 1

## Educational Administration in a Pluralistic Society: A Multiparadigm Approach

Demographic statistics are no longer necessary to persuade school administrators that the demographics of the United States are changing. The increased numbers of persons of color and persons in poverty, accompanied by the continued press of equity concerns surrounding gender, disability, and sexual orientation (and their parallels and intersections), pervade the structure and culture of the educational community. Thus, administrators need to be attuned to the complexities of changing demographics as well as to the needs of those persons who have always been a part of the landscape and core of education but who now request a presence in the educational dialogue.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how a multiparadigm view of education can assist administrators in recognizing the contradictions as well as the possibilities of educational practices for all persons, including those along the axis of oppression. The framework presented does not suggest a “grand theory,” nor does it position itself as the only way to approach cultural pluralism, but it offers a conceptualization of administration, diversity, and power as a heuristic device for considering the axis of oppression in organizations, particularly schools.

When considering a multiparadigm approach to educational administration in the context of societal pluralism, some questions to be deliberated include: a) What is a multiparadigm approach to educational administration and how is it derived? b) Even though the chapter

admits that a multiparadigm approach is just one way to view educational administration in a pluralistic society, why is it a useful approach for this purpose? and c) How can this approach be used in administrator practice and preparation?

To address the first question, the bulk of this chapter describes the individual paradigms which comprise a multiparadigm approach to educational administration and how they were derived. Following this description, this chapter also addresses the second question and explains why a multiparadigm approach can be useful when confronting societal pluralism. This chapter also briefly addresses question three by providing examples of the ways each paradigm can guide administrative practice which considers societal diversity. The last chapter in this volume explains in even more detail how a multiparadigm approach can guide administrator preparation and practice.

Critical inquiry is used as the grounding conceptual framework for this multiparadigm approach (Sirotnik and Oakes 1986). The epistemological foundation and practical application of critical inquiry are described, and the limitations of the critical theory aspect of this approach are discussed. Feminist poststructuralist theory and its constructs are then defined and used to address the limitations of critical inquiry. But first, the study of diversity and societal power inequities in relation to organizations such as schools necessitates unraveling the strands of literature and research associated with organizational paradigms and educational administration.

## ADMINISTRATION AND PARADIGMS

According to Burrell and Morgan (1982), sociological theory can be aligned along two axes—one axis represents a continuum of the nature of science (objective to subjective), and the other represents a continuum of the nature of society (sociology of regulation to sociology of radical change). Together, these axes form four quadrants, which can represent different theoretical paradigms: structural functionalist, interpretivist, radical humanist, and radical structuralist.<sup>1</sup>

Often, differences between radical humanism and radical structuralism are not made explicit, and critical theory is referred to as a theory that spans both paradigms, thus constituting a third paradigm (Foster 1986a; Sirotnik and Oakes 1986; Popkewitz 1984).

Trainers, researchers, and practitioners concerned with organizations and administration ground their work primarily in one paradigm, or in “one theoretical story”—structural functionalism (Hoy and Miskel



1987; Willower 1980), interpretivism (Bates 1980; Greenfield 1983), or critical theory (Anderson 1990; Ferrel-Zey and Aiken 1981; Foster 1986a). At worst, scholars, particularly those within the structural-functional tradition, may fail to accord legitimacy to the fact that there even exist other theoretical stories for understanding organizations. At best, scholars may "tell other theoretical stories"; that is, they acknowledge theories rooted in other paradigms but implicitly or explicitly maintain the ontological, epistemological, and methodological supremacy of their own preferred paradigm, which supersedes and is independent of other paradigms.

Social theorists and scholars in educational administration are not unanimous in their support for Burrell and Morgan's conceptualization of paradigms or, indeed, in their belief that paradigms even exist (Evers and Lakomski 1991). Some theorists and scholars (including Burrell and Morgan [1982] themselves) give credence to the paradigms but believe they cannot be used together to view a situation, that they are incommensurable (Foster 1986a; Jackson and Carter 1991; Parker and McHugh 1991). These scholars argue that the paradigms are incommensurable not only because they are constituted by differing epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies and their associated language, but also because they have fundamentally different goals; that is, two are oriented toward social regulation, and two are oriented toward radical change.

Other scholars of organizations (Gioia and Pitre 1990; Hassard 1991) and of education (Sirotnik and Oakes 1986) argue, however, that theoretical paradigms need not be exclusive (or incommensurable) but may be used in concert in both theory and practice. For example, Gioia and Pitre (1990) present a multiparadigm view of organizations, and Hassard (1991) demonstrates how to use all four paradigms in research on organizations. Sirotnik and Oakes (1986) combine structural functionalism, interpretivism, and critical theory into a practical, educational approach they term "critical inquiry." Sirotnik and Oakes apply their critical inquiry to a case study in one school in which their role was that of outside collaborators. Relying on the work of Freire, they were self-consciously committed to horizontal power structures in all aspects of their work. For example, they sought to be invited by the school and strove to have the goals and process of school change emerge from discussions with a broad range of participants. School and community people participated in all aspects of the process, including data collection and analysis.

One possible framework for administration in a pluralistic society relies on the critical inquiry approach of Sirotnik and Oakes (1986). But

while their approach is liberating, it has weaknesses, in part, because of the limitations of critical theory. This chapter will first explain each paradigm used by Sirotnik and Oakes and describe its implications for practice. The chapter then suggests that feminist poststructural theories can address some of the limitations of critical theory and, accordingly, can be used as a fourth paradigm to view theory and practice. The combination of these four paradigms constitutes the basis of a multiparadigm approach for educational administration in a pluralistic society.<sup>7</sup> The argument against commensurability is addressed more specifically at the end of this chapter and in the last chapter; that is, in this multiparadigm approach, the goals of critical theory and feminist poststructuralism do supersede the goals of the interpretivist and structural-functionalist paradigms, but these latter two paradigms can support and are necessary for administrator practice and preparation that are emancipatory.

Further, because the parameters of Burrell and Morgan's (1982) paradigms lie on a continuum, and because of the complexities of organizational life, the paradigms themselves are not pure, nor does any application of the paradigm to any entity render that entity a "pure" example of the paradigm. This aspect of paradigms is also true for the multiparadigm approach for educational administration presented here.

This chapter gives greatest attention to the critical and feminist poststructuralist paradigms. The structural functionalist and interpretivist paradigms have received a considerable amount of attention in the literature in educational administration. The critical theory approach to educational administration has been receiving more attention, but primarily from the perspective that it is the antidote to the ills of the other two paradigms. In this chapter, I describe the main tenets of critical theory as well as its limitations. I then give the most attention to feminist poststructuralism—an approach that is just beginning to find its way into education.

## THE STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALIST PARADIGM

Historically, organizational theorists have viewed the relationship between organizations and their environments from a structural-functionalist perspective rooted in systems theory. Theorists whose work originates in this paradigm strive toward regulation and approach knowledge from an objectivist viewpoint. The functionalist approach directly applies the principles of natural science to social science. Burrell and Morgan (1982) explain: "The functionalist approach to social science

tends to assume that the social world is composed of relatively concrete empirical artifacts and relationships which can be identified, studied, and measured through approaches derived from the natural sciences" (26). Structural functionalists in educational administration tend to view the existing social order and its institutions as legitimate and desirable. While they often seek to make improvements in the operation of education, they accept its basic structures and roles and the nature of the societal context schools serve. They are interested in understanding how institutions work and how they might work more efficiently and smoothly, assuming that various forms of social injustices can be corrected while maintaining existing systems intact. Language to describe this paradigm includes the terms *rational, efficient, concrete, real, standardized, goal orientated, and traditional*.<sup>3</sup>

Critical inquiry uses structural functionalist epistemologies and methodologies in part to guide "systematic and standardized data-based exploration methodology" (Sirotnik and Oakes 1986, 33). The kind of data to collect and the manner of collection are determined by a variety of participants with the goal of finding out "the way things are" (34). Critical inquiry in this stage includes collecting information on "static characteristics" or "what is" in a situation, patterns of behavior ("what people do, how they interact with each other and with the things in the environment" [33]), and "sentiments" or feelings of persons. For example, a school that is incorporating outcomes-based education as part of its restructuring efforts, guided by many different representatives of power, could gather data on the status of outcomes-based education in the second and third grades. Data could include the curriculum guiding the approach, which students consistently move from the "basic" to the "extended" curriculum and which do not, and how students, parents, and teachers view the approach.

### THE INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM

The interpretivist paradigm posits that organizations are socially constructed and exist only in the perceptions of people. Based on subjectivity, an interpretivist approach to organizations focuses on social life interactions and the meaning of these interactions as perceived by individuals, rather than on so-called objective reality. Moreover, because this paradigm is rooted in the sociology of regulation, "the problems of conflict, domination, contradiction, potentiality and change play no part in [the] theoretical framework" (Burrell and Morgan 1982, 31). In other words, interpretivists share structural functionalists'

assumption that the existing social order and its institutions are legitimate and not problematic. While structural functionalists are concerned mainly with how organizations operate, interpretivists are concerned mainly with how people experience them. Language associated with interpretivism includes the terms *interpretations of reality*, *reflection on events*, and *organizational culture*.<sup>4</sup>

Critical inquiry uses interpretivist epistemologies and methodologies to provide participant meaning and understanding to the characteristics, patterns of behavior, and feelings of persons. Revealing these meanings enables participants to peer into their own belief systems, attitudes, assumptions, and ideologies underlying their educational practices. Using interviews and observations of events and interactions in this interpretive mode can uncover the similar and differing perceptions of "what's happening" in the school. This process of reflection can move participants into deeper meanings, below "ordinary understandings" and "commonsense" assumptions. Using the interpretivist paradigm, "decisions for change become informed ones; they can be made with an understanding of the meanings that school participants assign to the way things are now" (Sirotnik and Oakes 1986, 36).

## CRITICAL THEORY

Typically, discussions of critical theory in educational administration begin with a review of the principles and constructs of critical theory. Major principles and assumptions of critical theory gleaned from these reviews will be discussed here.

### *Concern for Suffering and Oppression*

Critical theorists in educational administration assume society is cloaked in suffering and oppression. As Gioia and Pitre (1990) point out, "The goal of [this] theory is to free organization members from sources of domination, alienation, exploitation, and repression" (588). Although terms like *oppression*, the *disadvantaged*, and the *dispossessed* are not explicitly defined, critical theory, because of its foundation in Marxian thought, refers to social class primarily in terms of oppression. Being "oppressed" is defined as the inability to participate in capitalist society, primarily in economic terms (Smyth, 1989). Anderson (1990) suggests, however, that critical ethnography "attempts to redress the dominant managerial bias of current research in educational administration by illuminating how current structures of social class, patriarchy, and race are sustained through the ways meaning is managed in

educational institutions" (50). Dantley (1990) also includes race and gender in his critical analysis of effective schools. Thus, more contemporary critical theorists allude to gender, race, and class in their scholarly work.

### *"Critical" View of Education*

Critical theorists in educational administration draw support for their arguments primarily from the Frankfurt school, most notably from Habermas (Anderson 1990; Foster 1980, 1986a, 1986b). Critical theorists take a "critical" view of schooling and explicitly link schooling to its historical, political, economic, and social context (Sirotnik and Oakes 1986). Foster (1986a) believes that "critical theory is based, first and foremost, in a critical analysis of the capitalistic system" (67). Further, a critical view is defined as one that determines whether past and current practices address social justice and empowerment and whether those practices have a commitment to oppressed persons. Therefore, administrators must critically examine situations "taken-for-granted" and "commonsense" assumptions about schooling, determine "to what degree . . . this administrative practice contribute[s] to the development of truth, freedom, or justice, and offer[s] options for change" (Foster 1986a, 255).

Others offer definitions grounded in practice, such as "school leaders . . . [must] analyze their organizations and their structural and ideological features within the larger social context" (Dantley 1990, 115). This analysis exposes "how some individuals and groups have access to resources and others do not; why some groups are underrepresented and others are not; why certain influences prevail and others do not" (Yeakey, Johnston, and Adkinson 1986, 594).

### *Leadership/Authority*

Critical theorists in educational administration question the uses of authority in schools and assert that "power is often exercised through unobtrusive forms of control," primarily through knowledge and communication (Foster 1986a, 44). Critical theorists do not question the assumption that a "leader" or position of authority is necessary in schools, and they do not criticize hierarchy or patriarchal structures. Instead, administrators grounded in critical theory are individuals who try to find others who will lead, and posit that leaders need to have a different agenda from status quo leaders; that is, an agenda of social change.

*Empowerment and Transformation*

Educational administrators, a critical view argues, should “empower” and “share power” with staff, students, and community (described as “followers”) and, in turn, “transform” society. In part, administrators empower others by helping the oppressed become aware of their oppression. The assumption is that administrators who understand the nature of oppressed persons’ reality better than those persons do, can empower them and thus “giv[e] voice to the voiceless” (Tierney and Foster, 1991, 3).

*Emphasis on Morals and Values*

Critical theory in educational administration reunites facts with values (Foster 1980, 1986a, 1986b; Greenfield 1985). The administrator must practice morally and be ultimately concerned with freedom, equality, and principles of a democratic society.

*The Power of the Intellect*

The necessity of superior intellect is another fundamental assumption of critical theory. Education leaders must be, in Giroux’s (1988) phrase, “transformative intellectuals” who know how to “analyze critically modern forms of discourse which disguise power relationships and who can bring to a specific site the ability to inform and educate” (18). Thus, critical theory in the administration of schools assumes significant intellectual prowess to ascertain the presence of suffering and oppression, to critically analyze situations to determine their link to social inequity, to be able to exercise leadership and authority, to empower followers, and to recognize the moral imperative in their actions.

*An Emphasis on Rationality*

Oppressed followers are empowered, situations are critically analyzed, authority is exercised, and moral concerns are aligned in administrative action through clear, rational thought. The cause-and-effect determination of critical theory is straightforward: If we take this action, then empowerment, transformation, and, indeed, revolution will occur. This rational thought and action is manifested in speech and language in social situations (Dantley 1990; Foster 1986a, 1986b). Finally, critical theorists in educational administration emphasize dialectics, meaning the ability to reflect in every proposition its opposite (Foster 1986a).

### *Summary*

Grounded in the work of the Frankfurt school, critical theorists in educational administration are ultimately concerned with suffering and oppression, and critically reflect on current and historical social inequities. They believe in the imperative of leadership and authority and work toward the empowerment and transformation of followers, while grounding decisions in morals and values. Finally, critical theory relies on intellectual acumen and support of a dialectical, rational interchange. The unity of theory and practice, and recognition of the importance of language as a means of control, also are important to critical theory.

More specifically in practice, Sirotnik and Oakes (1986) use critical theory as a way to frame the goals of school improvement, and to provide “insight . . . into why particular practices came into being and how human interests are served by them” (36). The goal of the critical view is “the attainment of a schooling process that is in the best interest of every student” (38). Sirotnik and Oakes explain:

The methodology of critical reflection demands that participants attend to how educational structures, content, and processes are linked to the social and political forces in the setting and to the larger social, political, and economic context in which the school is situated . . . [and includes] such questions as “What are the effects on participants of things being organized the way they are?” [and] “Who benefits from these organizational patterns?” (36)

They further argue:

Both the process and aim of critical theory are consistent with what we most often claim to be the fundamental aim of education itself—that of cultivating the best in all human beings so they may create a just society (37).

Sirotnik and Oakes then give considerable attention to “competent communication” and “consensus” in group decision making about the “truth” of what exists. They argue that the essential ingredient for this critical process is “unlimited opportunity for discussion, free of constraints from any source” (37). However, they do acknowledge that “the viability of an inquiry paradigm in practice does not necessarily rest upon its ideal implementation. . . . [A]spir[ing] to the ideal suggested by an inquiry perspective, therefore, is all the practitioner can hope to

do" (38). They suggest school staff strive for "free exploration, honest exchange, and non-manipulative discussion . . . in light of critical questions like: What goes on in this school? Who benefits from the way things are?" (39).

### LIMITATIONS OF CRITICAL THEORY

Limitations of structural functionalism (Greenfield 1983) and interpretivism (Foster 1986a) have been addressed in the educational administration literature, thus they won't be repeated here. Predictably, advocates of structural functionalism oppose critical theory in educational administration (Willower 1980). Critical theory, however, has also been challenged by persons within a number of different fields who are supportive of nonpositivist perspectives, because of critical theory's emphasis on rationality, its approach to oppression, its reliance on competent communication, its dependence on dialogue, and its consensus approach to conflict.

First, critical theorists rely on rationality and structure (Liston 1988). Meisenhelder (1989) argues that critical theory's dependence on rationality fails to legitimate the place of the subjective and of emotion in theory. Consequently, objective abstractions of the mind are given preeminence over subjective experiences. Ellsworth (1989) asserts that "rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others" (301).

Second, critical theory legitimates analyses of class over gender and other oppressions, emphasizes the sanctity of the "holy trinity" of gender, race, and class, or, as with Sirotnik and Oakes, fails to address specifically those persons along the axis of oppression (MacKinnon 1983; Fraser and Nicholson 1988; Joseph 1981; Kitzinger 1987).

Third, Lakomski (1987) draws attention to the concepts of "communicative competence and the ideal speech situation" and argues that with an emphasis on "speech" and "words," critical theory effectively eliminates persons of diverse cultures, children who may not have yet acquired speech competence, or persons with limited speech competence, from participating in Habermas's ideal speech situation.

Fourth, critical theory oversimplifies power and decision making. Ellsworth (1989) analyzed the literature of critical pedagogy and took issue with many concepts, including that of dialogue. She asserts that even when a variety of power perspectives are included in decision



making, and even when these persons also possess the knowledge, power, and resources to participate, the task is not one of

building democratic dialogue between free and equal individuals, but of building a coalition among the multiple, shifting, intersecting, and sometimes contradictory groups carrying unequal weights of legitimacy. . . . Rather than dialogue, sometimes groups/persons need time to "talk back" to the larger group, while the rest . . . listen without interruption. (317)

A fifth limitation of critical theory is the consensus approach to conflict and decision making. If a "best" resolution or decision is agreed on, critical theory does not acknowledge "its contradictions, ambiguities, and flaws, [which] will eventually surface, producing deconstruction and disagreement" (Cherryholmes 1988, 170). Crucial points of dissensus can be dismissed in the rush to consensus, points that could be keys to deep change. Further, consensus can mask tensions and create an illusion of community, neither of which is conducive to school renewal.

These appraisals of critical theory, while they provide insight into perspectives beyond the centrality of cognition, capitalism, communication, and consensus, stop short of articulating a theory or pragmatic that can ameliorate these limitations. Feminist poststructuralist theories can address the concerns raised by these appraisals and broaden the critical inquiry approach.

#### THE CONTRIBUTION OF FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST THEORY

The literature of poststructuralist thought includes many interpretations and "strains" reflected in the work of Derrida (1981), Lacan (1977), Althusser (1969), Foucault (1980), and Lyotard (1984). Poststructuralists agree with nonpositivist critiques of critical theory. For example, in contrast to critical inquiry, poststructuralists do not position a person as reaching toward "rationality," but view a person as part of "an observer-community which constructs *interpretations* of the world," with interpretations that are neither wrong nor absolutely right (Cooper and Burrell, 1988, 94). Rather than viewing persons in a situation as the "centre of rational control and understanding" (Cooper and Burrell 1988, 91), the situation is viewed in terms of "paradox and indeterminacy." Poststructuralist thought suggests, in part, that all meaning is not

definitive and shifts depending on perspective, is theoretically distant from practice, and as a result does not support individuals' taking action.

Feminist theorists and other critical theorists have approached poststructuralist theories with caution. They have been suspicious of a theory, promulgated primarily by Anglo males, that, in part, dismisses the importance of practice, does not adhere to any normative standard of "right" or "wrong," and, because of the structural constraints of a patriarchal society, removes the possibilities of persons in power to make a difference, especially when increased numbers of Anglo women and women and men of color are in positions of power (Nicholson 1990; Scott 1988). Consequently, the feminist contribution to poststructuralist theories includes, in part, the retention of practice with the development of theory, the reinstatement of the human potential to "make a difference" in practice, and the predisposition to "take a stand" in the midst of continual self-reflection (Lather 1991).

Furthermore, feminist interpretations of poststructuralist theory reveal limitations similar to those associated with critical theory. Fraser and Nicholson (1988) criticize Lyotard's view of postmodernism for privileging itself as the supreme view of theory and thus not considering its own history, and argue that it is, itself "simply one more discourse among others" (p. 87). Similarly, Ross (1988) argues, "Whether it like[s] it or not, poststructuralism, as a *late modernist* phenomenon, [bears] with it many of the elitist strains so characteristic of the modernist heyday" (x). Feminist poststructuralist theories thus are considered one lens among many that could be selected to view a situation, and they "can also be used for exploitation and oppression" (Capper 1992, 106).

In brief, feminist poststructuralist theories refer to the interactions and contradictions among subjectivity, power, language, and unquestioned underlying assumptions (i.e., common sense) that are used to examine "how power is exercised" (Weedon 1987) and the potential for change. From this perspective, power relations are viewed through subjectivity in terms of identity, experience, process, access, and selection; power itself, in terms of conflict and dissensus, covert modes of domination, and resistance to power; and language and its authority, history, and availability. The interactions among subjectivity, power, and language contribute to "commonsense" assumptions about the constraining and enabling aspects of social life (see table 1.1).

Similar to critical inquiry, feminist poststructuralism "attempt[s] to show that we need not take established meanings, values, and power relations for granted. It is possible to demonstrate where they come

TABLE 1.1  
Feminist Poststructuralist Theories:  
Subjectivity, Language and Discourse, Power, and Common Sense

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*I. Subjectivity*

1. Identity and process

a. Are the persons represented presented in their identity (once and for all), or are subject positions shown to be "precarious, contradictory, . . . in process" (Weedon 1987, 33) and "a site of disunity and conflict" (Weedon 1987 21)?

b. Is identity presented multiply and as evolutionary, constantly in process?

2. Subjective experience

a. To what extent are "subjective" experiences of individuals considered important?

3. Access to and choosing identity for participants and readers

a. What identities, societal and institutional, are made available (like access to discourse)?

b. Are participants and readers aware they have an identity choice? Do those in power obscure this option by "deny[ing] their own partiality . . . [and] fail[ing] to acknowledge that they are but possible versions of meaning rather than 'truth' itself and that they represent particular interests" (Weedon 1987, 98)?

*II. Power*

1. Conflict and dissensus

a. To what extent is the focus on dissensus, resistance, contradiction, and conflict, or on consensus?

b. to what extent does the text "seek to hide the contradictions at the heart of human existence" (Cooper and Burrell 1988, 100)?

2. Covert modes of domination

a. To what extent does the text recognize that power, control, and domination are "everywhere," that "we are incarcerated within an organizational world, . . . [that] the institutional organization of our lives is total" (Burrell 1988, 232)?

3. Resistance that perpetuates power

a. To what extent does the text include the possible range of "points of resistance which play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle within relationships" (Burrell 1988, 228) and show that this resistance emanates from "webs of power" rather than from singular sources?

*III. Language and Discourse*

1. Role of language

a. Is language understood "in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power" (Weedon 1987, 24)?

*(Continued)*

TABLE 1.1 (continued)

- b. Does the language indicate "meanings to be shifting, receding, fractured, incomplete, dispersed, and deferred" (Cherryholmes 1988, 61), or is the focus on "the" meaning underlying language?
- c. To what extent are particular values and interests served, and which are silenced?
- 2. Authority of discourse
  - a. What is viewed as "natural," "normal," based on God, science, or common sense?
  - b. Who is articulating the discourse? Who is the authority, expert, or knowledgeable one?
- 3. History and availability of language
  - a. What words have questionable histories that could be obscured or definitions that can "uncover the particular regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations?" (Weedon 1987, 108)?
  - b. How do the uses of these terms maintain the status quo in regard to persons along the axis of oppression?
  - c. What discourses are named?
  - d. Which are silenced?

#### IV. *Common Sense*

- 1. What aspects are claimed to be "natural, obvious, and therefore true . . . [in] expressions such as 'it is well known that,' 'we all know that,' and 'everybody knows'" (Weedon 1987, 77).
- 2. What does the text reveal about culture or "the way we do things around here"?

from, whose interests they support, how they maintain sovereignty and where they are susceptible to specific pressures for change" (Weedon 1987, 174). Feminist poststructuralist theory, like critical theory, links individual being and action to societal context.

While literature is emerging that applies poststructuralist theories to education (Cherryholmes 1988; Lather 1991), only Lather reports research that is explicitly grounded in feminist poststructuralism. She used it to analyze student resistance to liberatory pedagogy in higher education. Furthermore, while researchers in educational administration report a few studies grounded in critical inquiry (Anderson 1990; Scheurich and Imber 1991), this literature does not include research that is anchored in a feminist poststructuralist framework. Therefore, a study is in progress that views secondary school restructuring from a feminist poststructuralist perspective.<sup>5</sup> Examples from this study will be used to illustrate how feminist poststructural-