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Leveraging Local Knowledge to Envision Educational Policy and Management Outside the Plunder of Neoliberal Technorationality [Editorial]

Warren E. Whitaker Ph.D.
Molloy University, wwhitaker@molloy.edu

Tricia M. Kress Ph.D.
Molloy University, tkress@molloy.edu

Robert Lake
Georgia Southern University, boblake@georgiasouthern.edu

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Introduction to Special Issue: Leveraging Local Knowledge to Envision Educational Policy and Management Outside the Plunder of Neoliberal Technorationality

Warren Whitaker[*a], Tricia Kress[a] & Robert Lake[b]

* Corresponding author

E-mail: wwhitaker@molloy.edu

a. Molloy University, Rockville Centre, NY, United States.

b. Georgia Southern University, GA, United States.

ABSTRACT

Using the supply chain bottleneck of the post-covid19 pandemic as a lens, editors of this special issue demonstrate problematic aspects of neoliberal technorationality when applied to educational policy and management. They offer humanism as a counterweight to the problematics of neoliberalism in education and illustrate how local knowledge in spaces of learning are always present, provide visions of different futures and offer potential for transformation outside seemingly totalizing neoliberal discourses.

KEYWORDS

local kowledge, neoliberalism, technorationality, humanistic education

Introduction to Special Issue

The conceptualization of this special issue began in 2021, towards the end of the second year of the COVID 19 pandemic. At the time, the U.S. was fixated on the breakdown of the international supply chain made visible through a bottleneck of container ships off the shore of California (Morrison & Miller, 2022). As we watched from afar on the east coast of the U.S., we experienced a resonance between the breakdowns and challenges of educational policy and management that we have witnessed when working with our students of education. Each of us works with teachers and administrators currently employed in K-12 and higher education institutions. The pressures our students experience within their workplaces often stem from needing to implement top down policy despite what their professional knowledge tells them might not be the best approach for their staff and/or students. In addition, in K-12 institutions, the steady roll of the standardized testing conveyor belt mimics a factory assembly line. There simply isn't enough time to depart all the necessary knowledge into children's brains, and really, children aren't empty boxes waiting to be filled anyway. To our chagrin, Freire's description of banking is alive and well, animated by the neoliberal gears of high stakes assessment. Educators and administrators in higher education institutions, too, are not immune to these pressures, and in some places are feeling further squeezed by market-based ideologies that promote higher learning as a commodity or service that students purchase. Such commodification risks cheapening learning for easy mass consumption and higher profit margins while reducing faculty to technicians.

While the three of us do not immediately identify ourselves as scholars of policy and management, our work intersects with and illuminates conversations about education policy and management as we engage in research about the theory and practice of working with young people, educators and parents to improve education, particularly for BiPOC students, students with diverse abilities, LGBTQ+ and gender diverse students, and students living in poverty. We see such discourses as serious threats to learning as a way of being in the world with our students and our ability to toil through the depths of questions about our mutual humanity and needs as people, both inside and outside the walls of learning spaces. For us, learning is meant to be transformative, but the policy and management ideologies that have dominated our experiences as educators often run counter to our liberatory goals. As we observed the supply chain bottleneck while planning for this work, we came to realize how the bottleneck is not just an assembly line moving too quickly for workers to keep up with. We even joked a bit about the similarity between the many ships backed up outside the port and the iconic scene from the show *I Love Lucy* (Asher, 1952) in which Lucy and Ethel are working in a chocolate factory and cannot pack candies into boxes fast enough on the conveyor belt to keep them from falling on the floor. As a remedy, the characters stuff the candy inside their clothing, under their hats and into their mouths. As the machine speeds up, the candies keep coming and a manager off screen barks orders at them while the workers' bodies absorb the problems of assembly line

malfunction. But this analogy wasn't quite right. In the sitcom, there was one supply chain and therefore a fairly obvious reason for and solution to the problem: the conveyor belt was too fast and the workers too slow. Their speed needed to be synchronized to solve the problem. The supply chain problem, however, is much more complex. Multiple mini-economic systems were crashing into each other within an out-of-sync global economy. The reasons for this asynchrony were numerous as were the ripple effects of consequences from the out-of-sync supply chain. It was rather like a tightly knotted collection of chains. Untangling the situation involves pulling them apart strand by strand, moving from one chain to another, often not knowing which chain is which until you pull on one and see another strand move from the pulling.

We recognized through these analogies the intentions and outgrowths of pseudo-capitalist, factory model educational policy and management paradigms (i.e., fostering efficiency and effectiveness) and contemporary neoliberal iterations of such technorationalist forms of policy and management (i.e., rapid growth, expansion and market competition) (McCann, Granter & Aroles, 2020). In both conceptualizations of policy and management the actual people affected by policy decisions and management actions are forgotten (Fujiyoshi, 2017). In the classic Taylorist assembly line model (Au, 2011), workers' bodies are "docile bodies" (Foucault, 1979), extensions of the machine. Their needs and capacities as people are irrelevant as long as the assembly line can keep producing more products. In the more complex neoliberal, multiple supply chain model, people are wholly unrecognizable in the system. They are not appendages to the machine, they *are* the machine. They are links in the chains, objectified, no longer human. The solution to unknotting the chains is elusive because there are too many human factors at the level of the links to easily identify and untangle. In both cases, the design of the system leads to both the function and dysfunction. The same can be said about Taylorist and neoliberal technorationalist notions of educational leadership and management. While there is nothing inherently wrong with wanting efficient and effective institutions of learning, problems arise when the humanity of education work is forgotten, when the illusory race to the high achieving side of the bell curve becomes more important than the people involved. Hence, our desire as editors was to put forth a special issue of this journal that imagined policy and management otherwise. We wanted to break free of the assembly lines and supply chains that demand docility and dehumanization. Such discourses have bound the field of educational policy and management for more than 40 years, and life in schools has not changed nor improved much for students and their teachers who are in greatest need of change. What might educational policy and management look like if we imagined it otherwise, outside the plunder of neoliberal technorationality?

Our initial vision for a collection of articles might be described as future-looking speculations of what else may be possible in educational policy and management aside from what has been the norm for the past 4 decades. Interestingly, the papers that were submitted to this special issue, while certainly invoking possibilities for different futures, are not speculative or futuristic, rather, they are rooted in possibility that emerges from within local

spaces by leveraging local knowledge. In other words, while neoliberal technorationalism may appear to be a totalizing discourse, subsuming the entire world within it, the authors who contributed to this special issue have demonstrated otherwise. There are many ways that neoliberal technorationalism can be resisted or refused by working subversively within the system, leveling critique about the inequitable effects of such totalizing discourses, and departing from the system to work toward educational and social change from the outside. In each of the featured articles, the actors within the educational institutions demonstrated agency towards and desire for new futures that afford a greater humanity for teachers and learners in institutions of learning and beyond.

In the first article, Casey Jakubowski challenges the totalizing discourse of urban education needs that drive educational policy in the state of New York. While often, New York is associated with large metropolitan areas like New York City, much of the state is considered rural, and teachers and learners in those districts are often disadvantaged by sweeping policies that do not take into consideration how moves toward district consolidation and centralization can impact entire communities, making access to quality community schools more difficult. This article highlights the importance of considering local differences and needs when envisioning school reform and its impact on rural communities.

The second article is a critical self-study written by Derek Markides, a school principal in Canada who explores his own identity development as an administrator who is intentionally working against neoliberal compulsions that deaden teachers and students in schools. He brings to the forefront the importance of pedagogies of love that facilitate dialogue, respect and trust among school stakeholders.

In article 3, Ishman Anderson provides an evaluation of the My Other Brother (M.O.B.) program in Oakland, California. Using the work of rapper Tupac Shakur as a framework for understanding and knowledge building, the author highlights how the M.O.B. program contributed to the critical consciousness development and future success of Black male youth.

In the next article, William Waychunas provides a dual case comparison of two novice teachers who were working in no excuses charter schools. Counter to anti-neoliberal and charter school rhetoric, this article demonstrates how neoliberal structures in place were useful for supporting novice teachers who were new to their craft, even as issues of professionalism and management presented various challenges to autonomy.

Finally, in article five, e alexander offers an inside look at the professional socialization of Black womxn in higher education and how they created their own geographies of learning to support them while working in unsupportive and sometimes hostile academic environments. In each of these papers, and as evident across the papers as a collection, future and possibility are always emergent within confining policy and management structures, even if at times we lose sight of what is right in front of us while zooming out to see the big picture of the state of education.

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