The Greenfield Award Winning Theses, 1998-2005: An examination of their purposes, conceptual frameworks, methodologies, and findings

Jan Stewart

Abstract

This paper examines nine of the theses that received the Thomas B. Greenfield Dissertation Award from 1997-2005. Particular attention will be made to the purpose of the studies, the theoretical underpinnings of the work, the method of data collection and analysis, and the major findings of the research. The theses will be classified and discussed according to literature that emerged during this period of time. The chapter written by Willower and Forsyth (1999) entitled “A Brief History of Scholarship on Educational Administration” included in the Handbook of Research on Educational Administration is used as the framework to classify the variety of themes found in the theses. Joseph Murphy’s (2002) framework for redefining leadership provides three core concepts that are essential to the development of new theories and leadership practices in educational administration.
“The academic study of educational administration goes on, in Sylvia Plath’s plangent term, like life under a bell jar. It is sealed from the larger world, but the barrier is noticed by virtually no one in the oppressive, airless environment” (Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993, p.44).

These words written by Thomas Greenfield in 1979, were originally stated to draw researchers and scholars to the attention of the world around them. Greenfield was warning us of the danger in seeing only what we wanted to see and in believing in the science that allowed us to do this. He cautioned researchers who only believed in the truth of numbers and who insisted that nothing was true unless it was true everywhere. Greenfield (1993) suggested that we should be questioning what the relationship is between the event that is happening and the context in which it exists. We should attempt to understand the world by our experience in it. He encouraged others to believe in the studies of humanities and to look to theories that are based on diverse meanings and interpretations.

Greenfield’s words continue to hold some truth, but for different reasons. This analysis will demonstrate that scholars have explored life from outside of the proverbial “bell jar” and they have constructed new meanings by experiencing and interpreting the events around them. What remains problematic is the inability to integrate the results of these studies into concrete practices that practitioners can, and will, use. “There remains a gap between the promise of theoretically informed inquiry and the execution of research
in our field” (Heck and Hallinger, 2005). We need to refocus the field on a common set of agreed upon values that improve the teaching and learning in schools if we hope to face the many challenges that lay ahead.

This paper will examine nine of the theses that have won the Thomas Greenfield Dissertation Award from 1997 to 2005. Since this study was primarily an analysis of nine theses, the discussion will focus on the trends, themes and strands that were identified in each thesis. The analysis will focus on the research topics, the conceptual frameworks, the methodology, data collection, analyses, and the major findings found in each study. Literature from this same period of time will be examined to further describe the current state of educational administration as a field of study in Canada. The results of the reviews will be used to speculate on the possible direction and emphasis for future doctoral studies in Canada.

**Thomas Barr Greenfield**

It is not possible to fully comprehend the field of educational administration without an understanding of the work conducted by Thomas Barr Greenfield. In 1974, Thomas Greenfield delivered a paper to the third International Intervisitational Programme which changed the face of educational administration and had an impact on the future research conducted in the field. Since the 1950s, educational administration as a field of study was dominated by positivist thought and empirical studies that generated theory. Theory formed the frame of reference for the practitioner and it served as a process for analyzing events and it guided decision-making (Hoy and Miskel, 2001). The theory of administrative behaviour was situated within the general theory of human behaviour.
Although doubts were voiced in the 1960s, the demise of the theory movement came at the 1974 meeting in Bristol (Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993). At this meeting, Thomas Greenfield delivered a paper that renounced the view that organizations are real and distinct from the actions, feelings and purposes of people. Greenfield viewed organizations not as structures subject to universal laws but as cultural artefacts dependent upon the specific meaning and intention of people within them (Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993, p.4). Rooted in European philosophy and social science, Greenfield’s view of social reality was based upon naturally existing systems or upon human invention of social forms. Greenfield rejected a scientific view of administration, and relied on the tradition of European and North American interpretivist social science. Greenfield’s core essays and papers are included in his 1993 collection entitled *Greenfield on Educational Administration*, edited by Peter Ribbins and Thomas Greenfield.

Towards the latter part of the 1970s, Greenfield broadened his critique and examined social reality as a human invention, as opposed to social reality as a natural system. “He has constructed strands of argument on the nature of knowledge, on administrative theory and research, on values, on the limits of science and the importance of human subjectivity, on methodology, understanding and the nature of social science, and on truth and reality” (Evers and Lakomski, 1991, p. 76).

The work of Thomas Greenfield ushered in a period of diverse epistemological standpoints and a plethora of topics, methods and issues related to educational studies. “In the 1970s and 1980s, faculties, schools, and departments of education in institutions around the world began to witness the emergence of more interpretivist accounts of phenomena in the social and organizational world” (Chapman, Sackney & Aspin, p. 91).
The work of Greenfield and those who subsequently worked within this view, embodied subjectivist views of knowing and understanding based on phenomenological/cultural views. Richard Bates and Christopher Hodgkinson viewed educational administration as a moral rather than technical and rational field. Scholars outside of education espoused similar views to that of Greenfield, and evidence of this is found in the social sciences and humanities.

There would be no better title for an award to recognize an emerging Canadian scholar in the field of educational administration, than the Thomas B. Greenfield Dissertation Award. This prestigious award is presented annually by the Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration (CASEA) to recognize the top doctoral dissertation in Canada. Since 1978, CASEA has given its doctoral dissertation award to 28 students. There was no winner in 2000 and there were two winners in 2005.

Context of the Study

Analyzing the last decade of theses was of interest to me as I anticipated reading divergent theories of leadership and educational administration and creative ways of conducting research. In addition, I looked forward to reading more about topics that have emerged from critical theorists and those that espoused the atheoretical concept of “postmodernism” (English, 2003). Before reading the theses and embarking on the first level of analysis, I recorded some of my initial thoughts based on what I thought would be some of my findings. I made the following hypotheses: (1) There would be more qualitative studies than quantitative, (2) Some of the current literature on moral and ethical leadership might emerge, and (3) The methodologies used by the researchers would be diverse. Considering that all of the theses were “award winning dissertations” I
anticipated that the writing would be exemplary and that the study would reflect the highest level of academic rigour. Because the task in reading these theses was to classify and analyze the studies, it was also necessary to consider some of the frameworks used by scholars who have embarked on similar studies. I approached this task cautiously and with some reservation as I was concerned about reader bias and the tendency to make the work fit into a pre-existing framework.

Barbara Tuchman (1981) cited in Fenwick and English (2005) guarded against beginning any study with a preconceived theory. She argued that the theory itself might influence, intentionally, or not, the selection of facts or the telling of the history to fit the facts. For the purposes of this inquiry, all of the theses were read, and individual summary sheets were developed using the following categories: thesis title, author, statement of problem, research questions, conceptual framework, methodology, data collection, and findings. See Appendix. Using this framework, I retained some of the language used by the researchers themselves to describe their work. It was not until all of the summaries were developed, that I began the second level of analysis which involved coding each of the nine summaries to develop a classification scheme. I considered some of the frameworks that existed in the literature on educational administration as a means to classify the studies.

A Conceptual Framework for the Study

Generally, it is presumed that Handbooks of research represent the authoritative voices in a particular field. The Second Edition of the *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, edited by Joseph Murphy and Karen Seashore Lewis represents the scholarly work conducted by the leading researchers in the field of
Educational Administration. Talcott Parsons (1960) as cited in Hoy and Miskel (2001) was the first to propose three levels of an organization: the technical, managerial, and institutional. Joseph Murphy and Karen Seashore Louis used this Parsonian classification scheme to organize the chapters in *The Handbook* (1999). This approach appeared to be a more “traditional” form of classification that would be limiting for the purpose of this analysis of the nine theses. With many of the theses pertaining to values and ethics and the concept of meaning making, the technical and managerial and institutional themes would not adequately represent the content of the nine theses. The task approach to educational administration is another means of classification which includes classifying leader behaviour in terms of task-oriented behaviours, relations-oriented behaviours, and change-oriented behaviours (Yukl, 1998 as cited in Hoy and Miskel, 2001). This approach would also not suit the purpose of this analysis, as the theses could not easily be fit into such categories as human resource administration, financial administration, or physical plant administration. Heck and Hallinger (1999) provided an overview of educational administration research and classified it into three domains: positivist, interpretive and critical/contextual. Although the interpretive and critical/contextual domains were well-represented in the theses, the same could not be said for the positivist domain. Leithwood and Duke (1999) categorized leadership articles in four leading journals and organized the works into models of leadership. Both of these classifications served well for studying the subset of leadership studies within the field of educational administration, but neither seemed to provide a classification scheme that would reflect the diversity of topics or the varying methods used in the nine theses.
The first chapter in *The Handbook*, is written by Willower and Forsyth (1999) and titled, *A Brief History on Educational Administration*. Willower and Forsyth divide the chapter into three main sections that represent the thematic domains that have unfolded throughout the history of study in educational administration.

To organize the analyses of the theses, I have situated the data within the conceptual framework that provided the best fit for the information gleaned from the studies. Willower and Forsyth (1999) stated, “The history of a field of study is a recital of its landmark events, including the problems emphasized, the lines of inquiry pursued, and the issues contested” (p.1). They further suggested that the investigation of available information and ideas is necessary to make sense and interpret the information. In their examination of the history of the scholarship of educational administration from the 1950s to the late 1990s, they revealed strands of ongoing activity over the history of the field as an area of study and they lay the foundation for the next decade of scholarship.

After examining and coding the theses, it was evident that Willower and Forsyth’s framework would provide the scaffolding on which to critically examine the overarching themes and sub-themes. It was flexible and comprehensive enough to situate each thesis within its framework and did not restrict the diversity of topics revealed.

The choice to use Willower and Forsyth’s framework to discuss “Greenfield award winning papers” may seem incongruent, considering that there is no question as to which side of the “paradigm wars” Willower and Forsyth were on. Their choice of inflammatory language to describe Greenfield’s writings included, “numerous attacks on science and its methods” (p.4). When referring to Greenfield’s perspectives they termed it “advocacy to political agenda that either downplayed or rejected scientific inquiry” (p.4).
Willower emerged as a major critic of Greenfield and of his alternatives to empiricism (Evers and Lakomski, 1991). Having stated this, Willower and Forsyth’s (1999) three themes of unity and diversity, the search for meaning, and the pursuit of relevance were appropriate and well-suited categories that represented this period and sample of scholarship.

The discussion of what we might come to see as award winners in the forthcoming decade of scholarship in educational administration is the point of departure from Willower and Forsyth’s framework. Joseph Murphy (2002) in his book, “The Educational Leadership Challenge: Redefining Leadership for the 21st Century” developed a framework for the next era of study educational administration. Murphy’s blueprint for reculturing the profession provides the scaffolding on which to speculate on the forthcoming topics of inquiry. Specifically, he argues that the profession needs to ground itself in school improvement, democratic community, and social justice. The complementary work of Murphy, Willower and Forsyth provide the philosophical and theoretical framework for the discussion of the theses from the past decade.

The review of the theses has certainly been too brief to make assumptions, generalizations, or to do full justice to what was happening in the entire decade of scholarship in educational administration. There were numerous other researchers across Canada who were not acknowledged by CASEA and who were also completing dissertations and embarking on careers in educational administration. Many of these theses may represent completely different theoretical orientations, methods of inquiry, and means of analysis. Having said that, an analyses of the nine award-winning theses
from 1997-2005 reveals some noteworthy trends, themes, and strands in the research that deserve consideration and further investigation.

Themes in Doctoral Research

The first level of analysis involved situating the individual theses within one of the three domains delineated in the framework developed by Willower and Forsyth (1999). See Table 1. It is quite possible to see all three domains, to varying degrees, represented in each thesis. For example, all of the authors search for meaning, knowledge and understanding. All writers represent diverse philosophies, ideologies and views, and all uniformly search for ways to blend theory with practice in the effort to contribute to the knowledge of educational administration. My discussion of the themes will, of necessity, be selective rather than comprehensive, and is aimed at illustrating the major purpose that guided each author’s study. For this investigation, the primary purpose of the study was considered and then classified into the domain which best represented the overall intentions of the work. With more careful examination of the theses, it was quite clear which primary domain and sub-theme each best fit into. A note was made in the appropriate column on the table where there was strong secondary purpose that was worthy of mention. In all circumstances this secondary theme was the search for meaning. This will be discussed further in the latter part of this paper.

Unity and Diversity
The first theme selected by Willower and Forsyth (1999) is the interplay of unity and diversity. This includes the factors that have brought the field together and those that have created divisiveness. Three major unifying elements that have brought the field of educational administration together are: (1) open and participative, democratic organization, attitudes and concepts, (2) the continuing reliance on logic and evidence in research and, (3) the numerous associations, rituals, and symbolic activities that affirm common goals.

Table 1

Themes in Doctoral Research Categorized Using Willower and Forsyth’s Framework Listed by Author, Date of Award, Thesis Title, and Sub-theme of domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unity and Diversity</th>
<th>Search for Meaning</th>
<th>Pursuit of Relevance</th>
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The first of the two diversifying elements examined by Willower and Forsyth are the variety of roles and specializations in the field that encompass both scholarship and practical applications. The second diversifying element is the allegiances and commitments to schools of thought or theories, as well as differences in styles of research. The theme of diversity is also emphasized by Heck and Hallinger (2005) in a review they conducted on the research in educational leadership and management between 1990 and 2005. “During the 1990s, there was a notable increase in scholarly inquiry from contrasting perspectives including critical theory, postmodernism, and feminism” (p. 232). They further suggest that much of this work originated from the work of Robert Bates (1980), Bill Foster (1986) and Thomas Greenfield (1968, 1978). The direction of research changed as more scholars approached research in the field with a humanistic and moral orientation rather than a scientific one.

Educational administration encompasses a variety of roles, specializations and multiple complex activities (Willower and Forsyth, 1999). The theme of diversity is most prevalent in this sample of nine theses. The role of the teacher, principal, government consultant, board member, policy maker, elder, and director are all studied as a means to contribute new knowledge to the field of educational administration. The selection of different areas of study, schools of thought, and methods of research were highly variable. This diversity contributes to the development of allegiances which leads to more specialization in the field. Heck and Hallinger (2005) note that a more pessimistic view
of this diversity is that scholars have agreed to disagree and to “conduct their work within different spaces within the intellectual universe of school leadership and management” (p. 236). The discussion regarding the diversity in the frameworks, themes, and methods used in the nine theses will continue in the latter part of this paper.

Two of the theses are specifically oriented to the theme of unity as they both deal with the concept of participation and openness in an organization. Riordan’s thesis (1996) titled *Collaboration Among Teachers in Senior High School*, examines how teachers collaborate with each other. There is a direct relation to the theme of participation and how teachers work together in an organization. Paul Newton (2003) conducted a related study where he examined how school boards worked together. In addition to this main theme, he also investigated how knowledge was transformed within the school board. For this reason, Newton’s thesis might also have been situated within the search for meaning domain. Because the focus of his findings related to how board members and administrators shared knowledge, solved problems, and worked together on projects they valued, it was classified within the sub-theme of participation and openness and positioned within the theme of unity and diversity.

**Search for Meaning**

The search for meaning is represented by two major thrusts as defined by Willower and Forsyth (1999). The first thrust is the search to increase knowledge and understanding through the use of a variety of concepts, theories, and methods. The second thrust is the epistemological and philosophical basis of knowledge, ethics and morals.

The debates over philosophical issues have reflected the social and political events of the time (Willower and Forsyth, 1999). Critical theory, subjectivism,
postmodernism, Marxism, naturalism, pragmatism, humanism, and interpretivism have been included in the contemporary philosophical debates of this era. “In any event, there are now a variety of allegiances and alternative views in most social and humanistic fields, including educational administration. Most of the writing along these lines has been on philosophical issues of the kind under discussion, but there also appears to be more publication of personal narratives and social criticism with little attention to philosophy” (p. 12). Boyan (1988) suggested that the problem associated with the accumulation of knowledge is whether the field lent itself to scientific study or whether it was a field for study.

Willower and Forsyth contend that the work on ethics and values have also been a major thrust in the philosophical work on educational administration. Work conducted by Christopher Hodgkinson and Donald Willower have been fundamental to the hierarchical theory of values (Begley, 1996). Work on racial/ethnic and gender issues is also related to the general search for meaning, although, the notions of equality and fairness have been non-controversial because they are almost universally valued (Willower and Forsyth, 1999). Moreover, scholars and activists have typically sought to advance justice and the welfare of students. The divergent philosophies observed in the history of scholarship in educational administration reflect the influence of social sciences and the broad political and social contexts of the time.

The “search for meaning,” was clearly represented in five of the theses. Researchers questioned the role of ethics and values in the behaviours of teachers or educational leaders (Joffres, 1998; Wallace, 2000; Richmon, 2004). Others sought to build on existing theory (Doetzel, 2004, Bedard, 1998) to generate new theory (Beatty,
2002), or to critique theory (Richmon, 2004). The study of ethics and values and the quest for increased knowledge and understanding reflect broad and divergent philosophical and theoretical perspectives. The scholarship from this past decade of award winners is focused on a search for meaning and the understanding of a variety of philosophical issues. Although Willower and Forsyth claimed that writings on philosophical issues have not paid attention to philosophy, this is not true in the sample of theses. All of the writers have positioned their work in relation to philosophers and theorists representing numerous orientations including: Critical Theory, Hermeneutics, Constructivism, Phenomenology, Postmodernism, Subjectivism and Interpretivism.

**Pursuit of Relevance**

The third theme delineated by Willower and Forsyth (1999) is the pursuit of relevance and the concern from scholars that their work address the problems of practice. The notions of problem solving and preparation programs were emphasized in this domain. In particular, scholars sought to determine the kind of knowledge that should constitute the subject matter for those that would serve in educational administration. Willower and Forsyth state, “Cooperation between practitioners and professors of educational administration has always been a hallmark of the field and it continues to the present day” (p. 17). They further suggested that because of the trend towards research that deals with people in real life settings, more courses in qualitative research were common in the educational preparation programs. This is likely why we see more qualitative studies emerging in doctoral work.

In addition to the differences in research, the last sixty years have revealed the evolution of university based programs in educational administration, the development of
professional associations and boards, and the more frequent contacts between these
groups and those practicing in schools. The pursuit of relevance has been driven by the
desire to solve the numerous problems facing school systems, school reform efforts and
the need to improve preparation programs for administrators. Little attention is focused
on administrator preparation in the theses. The theses in this domain were more
representative of how organizations solved current educational problems.

George Bedard (1997) examined and analyzed Ontario’s Royal Commission on
Learning in an effort to learn about how this public instrument made decisions and how
the members sought solutions to practical problems in education. This thesis was related
to the pursuit of relevance as it was concerned with the ideas and concepts that speak to
problems in current educational organizations, specifically accountability, governance,
programming and vision. A sub-theme of this domain includes understanding problem
solving and Bedard’s research was primarily focused on understanding how the members
of the commission worked together to solve problems.

Marlene Atleo (2001) examined First Nations storywork to investigate indigenous
learning. After gathering stories, interviewing and analyzing the narratives, Atleo
developed a full complex of learning models and specific learning ideologies central to
the Nuu-chah-multh. Atleo’s inquiry into Nuu-chah-multh learning was intended to
prepare educators with knowledge of indigenous learning. Because Atleo’s research was
initiated with the intent to solve problems of practice and to blend learning theory with
future teaching practices of indigenous children, it was best situated in this domain, and
not the search for meaning.

What does it all mean?
The nine theses have been classified into the themes delineated by Willower and Forsyth and it is clearly evident that the search for meaning is the dominant theme. Is this what Murphy (2002) would call the quest for the centre in educational administration? Are we still searching for a credible knowledge base? Have the diversifying elements (methodologies, philosophies, and theories) pulled us away from a common base on which to guide practice? Willower and Forsyth (1999) contend that this disarray and fragmentation “appears to have been influenced by the sense of urgency that stems from a rhetoric of crisis” (p. 20). Although this may be true, it is not reflected in this sample of theses. The studies did not reflect a sense of urgency or the dire need to respond to accountability measures or school reform policies. Instead, the studies appeared to reflect a more deeply situated quest for alternative ways of thinking and knowing that would contribute to our overall understanding of a phenomenon, organization, or group of people. As opposed to an urgent need to respond to external demands, such as accountability, this search for meaning was focused and deliberate contemplation about epistemological, ideological and axiological philosophies of education.

**Refocus, Reposition and Rebuild**

At this point in the analysis, a departure from Willower and Forsyth’s framework to the work by Joseph Murphy is necessary to examine the key concepts needed to rebuild the profession. Murphy (2002) states, “For some time now, the profession has been marked by considerable ferment as it has struggled to locate itself in a post-behavioural science era. During this era of turmoil, the historical foundations of the profession have been thrown into question, especially the legitimacy of the knowledge
base supporting school administration and the appropriateness of programs for preparing school leaders” (p. 65).

Murphy (2002) contends that leadership must evolve to provide the appropriate scaffolding for the reculturing the profession. Historically, the field of educational administration has had four pathways: roles, functions and tasks of administrators; academic research or technical content, practice-based knowledge, and methods. Murphy states that none of these four ways of thinking will help to refocus our thinking or rebuild the profession of educational administration.

Five of the nine theses directly focused on the search for meaning and three others were indirectly related and could also easily be classified under this category. Murphy states, “I do not mean to dismiss knowledge as unimportant. Scientific inquiry, scholarly insights, and craft knowledge will offer useful substance in the process of reculturing school administration” (p. 70). Murphy’s point, however, is that if we rely on this material to guide the profession we will be disappointed. Our traditional ways of understanding school administration hold little promise to move us forward and help us respond to the challenges within the modern day school system. Although the search for meaning is relevant and useful to the field, it does little to provide a platform on which to renew and rebuild the profession.

Murphy offers three core concepts needed for school leadership: school improvement and the need to build instructional capacity, social justice, and democratic community. First and foremost, the goal of education should be to improve student learning. The field needs to focus school improvement on improving students’ opportunities to learn. Secondly, the field must promote equity and justice through the
policies and practices in schools. Educational institutions must continually strive for greater opportunity and justice for all children. Finally, schools must focus on the process and morality of a democratic community and this should be reflected in the core work of schools, curriculum and instruction (Murphy, 2002). Refocusing the theses and situating them within Murphy’s three core concepts would provide a focus that would guide both researchers and practitioners toward common, valued outcomes for education. This might also ensure that we are ultimately using the research to improve the teaching and learning. Without this focus we might not be making any impact at all on what is happening in schools.

We see evidence of Murphy’s three anchors for the profession in the purposes that guided the research in the nine theses. Having said this, Murphy’s work only emerged in 2002, after many of the theses were completed or well on their way to being finished. This suggests that the direction that these emerging researchers are moving towards might very well be in line with Murphy’s plan for to “overhaul the profession” (p.75). After reading the theses and considering the characteristics and the guiding purposes, each thesis could easily be categorized using Murphy’s model: democratic communities (Newton, 2003; Bedard, 1998; Riordan, 1996; Beatty, 2002; Richmon, 2005), social justice (Atleo, 2001; Wallace, 2000; and school improvement (Joffres, 1998; Doetzl, 2004). See Table 2 on the following page.

While Willower and Forsyth provide the thematic structure on which to examine the theses, Murphy’s model provides the platform on which to use the newly acquired understandings or meanings derived from the studies to refocus, reposition ourselves and rebuild the profession. We must use our new knowledge to reposition ourselves within
the three concepts to collectively channel our efforts around a coherent framework that will guide us through the next era.

Table 2

Reculturing the Profession-Joseph Murphy’s New Blueprints for Understanding Leadership Listed by Author, Date of Award, Thesis Title.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Democratic Community</th>
<th>Social Justice</th>
<th>School Improvement</th>
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Theses Data Collection

After situating the content of the theses in the framework developed by Willower and Forsyth, and the three concepts of leadership outlined by Murphy, a closer examination of the theses’ contents and designs were conducted. See Table 3 on the following two pages. The following categories were used: author and title, purpose, research questions,
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categorical framework, design, sample, time frame, data and collection strategy, analysis, and findings/conclusions. Using the summary sheets from the first analysis, the data was organized onto a spreadsheet so that it would facilitate comparing and contrasting the contents of each thesis. The theses will be discussed using the following topics: purposes of the studies, research design, data collection and analysis, and findings.
Purposes of the Studies

The purpose of the research was stated using the authors’ terminology, but further described according to classifications developed by Miklos (1992). The terms he delineated included: descriptive, relational, evaluative, developmental, conceptual and methodological and reflect the possibilities of the intended outcomes of the theses. The first and most widely used study was descriptive, where the intent of the researcher was to describe an event, practice, process, group, organization or other phenomenon. (Miklos, 1992). Six of the theses were classified as descriptive (Riordan, 1996; Bedard, 1997; Joffres, 1998, Wallace, 2000; Beatty, 2002; Doetzel, 2004). Researchers who conduct relational studies study the relationship between or among certain people, groups, or variables. Newton (2003) studied the relation between boards and administrators, and examined how they collectively made decisions.

A descriptive/relational study attempts to present data and then examine the relationships among variables. Many of these studies are often quantitative. Evaluative studies assess the merits of a particular problem or practice. Developmental studies usually develop a product, program or policy and some testing may also be involved. None of the theses could be classified as descriptive/relational, evaluative or developmental studies. The final study is conceptual and Miklos asserts that to some extent most doctoral theses are “conceptual.” Having said this, conceptual studies are designed primarily for the purpose of clarifying concepts, to test or analyze a theory, or to construct new theory. Only Atleo’s thesis (2002) was primarily for the purpose of clarifying and analyzing (indigenous) learning theory.
It is difficult to speculate why most of these theses were descriptive and why there was not more representation from the other types of studies. With only nine theses, selected, it could be a result of the screening process or it may be purely coincidental. Miklos (1992) in his study of the distributions of 330 theses in Alberta from 1958 to 1991 found that 46% of the theses were descriptive in nature. When examined over three separate decades, “the percentage of descriptive studies increased from 32 % in the first decade to 60% in the third decade, while relational studies declined from 28% to about 6%” (p. 21). The emphasis on descriptive studies and the shift away from relational studies is accompanied with a shift away from quantitative studies to qualitative studies. Miklos’ (1992) findings are consistent with the sample of the nine award-winning theses. Although Heck and Hallinger (2005) noted a slight increase in the use of quantitative methods for studying selected domains in school leadership and management over the past decade. This was not evident in the sample of theses being analyzed in this discussion.

**Research Design**

One of the most interesting facts about the theses studied in this last decade is that all of them were qualitative studies. In fact, the only researcher that made any reference to quantitative analysis was Paul Newton (2003) who reported a measure of the mean and standard deviation for the 35 interview questions he posed to both the board members and administrators. Although this sample of theses is relatively small, a pattern has clearly emerged in this past decade on the reliance of qualitative studies.

Some key questions emerged about the nature of current studies in educational administration. Specifically, what do these findings suggest about the future of
quantitative studies? Further, is this generation of doctoral students unable or unwilling to conduct positivist structural-functionalist studies? Are the types of studies conducted by current scholars able to generate new knowledge in the field? Should professors of education reorient students towards conducting quantitative studies? More importantly, do the studies that researchers conduct, either quantitative or qualitative, meet the needs of the practitioners?

Nancy Doetzel (2005) was the only researcher to adopt a form of action research in addition to using a qualitative design. Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry whereby the purpose is to provide educational practitioners with new knowledge and understanding that enables them to improve educational practices or resolve significant problems in classrooms and schools. It derives from a research tradition emphasizing cyclical, dynamic, and collaborative approaches to investigation (Stringer, 2004). Doetzel’s study would not be classified as a pure form of action research because it did not include a cyclical and action component to her findings. Despite this, Doetzel has brought elements of action research into the field of educational administration and with the increasing emphasis on bridging theory to practice; we might possibly see more examples of action research in the next decade of scholarship.

**New Paradigms**

Heck and Hallinger (2005) stress that doctoral studies are a primary source of knowledge development in the field of educational administration. The field depends on knowledge accumulation which is based on quality research by doctoral students. Their concern is that emerging scholars in educational administration will not be capable of conducting the kind of research that is needed to intellectually advance the field. Heck
and Hallinger promulgate the paradigm debate with their quest for generalizabilities and their search for what is true.

The so called “talk of paradigms” originated from the work of Thomas Kuhn, who was a historian of science and was quickly appropriated by scholars in the social sciences (Donmoyer, 1999). The debate in the mid-eighties was essentially between those that advocated qualitative research and those who advocated quantitative research. Gage (1989) as cited by Waite (2002) termed the changing views on teaching and research as “the paradigm wars.” The “positivistic social science” was the mainstream view and the alternative views were referred to as “interpretivist,” “anti-naturalist,” or originating from critical theory. Interest in the qualitative methods resulted in the emergence of new ways of thinking about the nature of knowledge and knowing and the nature of reality (Donmoyer, 1999). The “talk of paradigms” is also evident in Chapter 7 of The Handbook, written by Heck and Hallinger entitled “Next Generation Methods for the Study of Leadership and School Improvement” and Chapter 24 by Hill and Guthrie titled “A New Research Paradigm for Understanding (and Improving) Twenty-First Century Schooling”. There is ample evidence that the paradigm wars exist, but the debate is no longer centred on just qualitative and quantitative studies.

The word “paradigm” now encompasses different models, topics, issues, and patterns. Heck and Hallinger (1999) state, “During the past decade, the fields of education and management have both been in the midst of paradigm shifts. These shifts have led to the reconsideration of theoretical conceptualizations as well as research methods” (p. 142). The use of “paradigm talk” in the field has helped us gain a better understanding of the construction of knowledge, but it has also confined us to only two
dichotomous realms of thinking. Considering that the research in this past decade is overly representative of the qualitative paradigm, it might be time to abandon the “talk of paradigms” and search for different and less confined ways to construct knowledge.

Riehl, Larson, Short, and Reitzug (2000) explored the conceptions of what constitutes knowledge in educational administration, how it relates to practice, and how universities and schools can engage in research. The authors made several recommendations for how doctoral programs should strive to develop educational administration students as scholars and researchers. As such, they suggest that doctoral programs ought to provide students with a range of opportunities to inquire and explore in various methodologies and with a variety of inquiry methods. Students should engage in both conventional and practical research at a high standard of research scholarship. Many doctoral students are practitioners and have no interest in becoming scholars. These students are not drawn to the conventional forms of research. Students should be encouraged to address problems in their practice and use this as a basis of their research. Allowing students to build their own program of study to meet their needs and goals will broaden the field of educational administration, and hopefully, develop a more comprehensive understanding of scholarship.

Data Collection and Analyses

The research methodology from the past decade of theses also confirms the eclecticism in terms of the data collection strategies. Table 4, on the following page, illustrates the type of data collection used in each of the nine theses. For the purpose of this classification scheme, surveys and questionnaires were considered to be the same and phone conversations and e-mail messages were also included together as only one category. The
phone conversations and the e-mail messages were sent to clarify an issue or to follow-up from either an on-line interview or an in-person interview. Because the two mediums served the same purpose, and they were not the primary method of data collection, they were categorized together. The category titled “demographics,” used by Beatty (2002), comprised of school demographic data and included information such as: population of students, number and age of teachers, geographic area, and grade levels in the school.

Data collection methods from this last decade, combined with the number of studies using the particular method (in parentheses) include the following: storytelling (2), on-line forums (2), focus groups (3), demographic information (1), participant observation (4), document analysis (2), meeting or conferences (2) personal interviews (8) surveys (2), on-line interviews (2) and e-mail or phone conversations (2). As more and more “less traditional” methods of collecting data become more acceptable and widely used, we might also see more representation of other alternative forms used in doctoral research. Data collected from artefacts, diaries, logs, e-mails, journals, photographs, videos, web-site polls, blogs, or various art forms might also be utilized.

Although the variety of data collection methods was diverse in the sample of nine theses, the most notable was Nancy Doetzel’s on-line forum and on-line interviews to study the spiritual development of educational leaders. Using computers exclusively to gather data from people on one of the most personal and individual topics seemed awkward and unconventional. Ten years ago, the thought of studying personal and professional spirituality through a computer-based data source would be unheard of. Moreover, using computer-assisted means of collecting any form of qualitative data would not have been considered. Doetzel acknowledged that her collection would not
include the interpersonal nuances that one could acquire in a person-to-person interview, and thus, it limited her findings. She did, however, argue that this strategy enabled her participants to dialogue freely and anonymously on-line at their convenience and at a location of their choice. Although acquiring all of the data electronically appeared limiting, she was successful in obtaining rich and pertinent information and insights into leaders’ personal and professional spiritual development. In this collection of theses the emergence of the on-line forums, on-line interviews and the use of e-mail began relatively recently, in 2002. More researchers may opt for using these strategies for the benefits of convenience and anonymity. There is no doubt that many of these data collection strategies will continue to raise ethical and methodological concerns as well as questions concerning the integrity of the research.

All of the researchers used personal interviews, with the exception of Nancy Doetzel. The use of surveys and questionnaires appeared surprisingly low, but justifiable considering the nature of the studies. A final observation about the data involved the absence of any student records or student achievement data or files. There did not appear to be any effort to link educational administration to data related to teaching practices or student achievement. This may be a result of the descriptive nature and the purposes of the studies. The focus of all of the studies centred around teacher or leader knowledge and behaviour and not on the technical core of teaching and learning.

Analyses of the data was primarily interview analysis. Due to the exclusive use of qualitative design, most of the analyses involved the coding transcripts, fieldnotes, and the analyses of some documents. Atleo (2001) used a unique form of analysis in which she termed “metaphorical mapping.” Stories were transcribed as they were heard from
First Nations Elders and then she looked for evidence of metaphors. For example, the metaphor used to talk about post-secondary degrees was whales. The overarching metaphor used to encapsulate the essence of story-telling was the image of a basket, where the weaving of a basket represented the traditional ecological knowledge, social relationships and the dynamics of Nuu-chah-multh culture and worldview.

**Major Findings**

The research findings in the theses were highly varied, however, they could be organized along similar themes or categories. As Table 3 depicts, the primary findings of the theses contribute to the following issues: collaborative relations, knowledge construction of boards, teacher commitments, resistance to gender equity policy, learning models of indigenous peoples, emotions of leaders, sharing of knowledge on a board, spiritual development, and the origination of values. These findings could be categorized in the same domains as were presented in Tables 1 and 2, where they were classified according to purpose. Regardless of whether we classify the findings into Willower and Forsyth’s themes or into Murphy’s domains, all of the theses have uniquely contributed to our overall knowledge about educational administration. Although the findings were not overly surprising and appeared to make minimal gains to an already divergent and often conflicting knowledge base, each study successfully led the reader toward a deeper understanding on an issue in education. Moreover, the inquiry into less traditional topics such as: emotional understanding, spirituality, indigenous storytelling, values, and teacher commitment have most certainly expanded the scope of the previous two decades of scholarship.
\textit{Conclusion}

John Dewey (1916) encapsulates the essence of the nature of research in the following quote:

Thinking includes all of these steps,—the sense of a problem, the observation of conditions, the formation and rational elaboration of a suggested conclusion, and the active experimental testing. While all thinking results in knowledge, ultimately the value of knowledge is subordinate to its use in thinking. For we live not in a settled and finished world, but in one which is going on, and where our main task is prospective, and where retrospect— is of value in the solidity, security, and fertility it affords our dealings with the future (p. 151).

The task of a researcher is to think about concepts and issues in unique ways and to make original contributions to the knowledge base in the field. Thinking about education and making meaning out of it is the educative experience. When we apply our knowledge to practical issues and current problems, we test the validity of this new knowledge and form our own conclusions about how worthy or useful the ideas are. The process is cyclical. Ideas and concepts emerge and re-emerge in slightly different ways. The patterns, themes, and strands found in the history of the field of educational administration provide us with the scaffolding on which to rebuild the profession.

Willower (1988) concludes his first chapter in the first edition of the \textit{Handbook of Research on Educational Administration} with the following statement to remind us that the trends perceived in the research are unfinished and open to questions. He states “Everything is unfinished. Whether the same trends would be seen by others as they have been depicted here, whether their courses will run strong or run out, and whether and in
what ways they are desirable or undesirable are all open questions” (p. 742). Eleven years later, in the Second Edition of Research on Educational Administration Willower and Forsyth (1999) conclude their chapter with a similar statement. “One large lesson that history teaches is that educational change and reform, like inquiry and science, are never finished. The work is always in progress” (p. 20). The field of educational administration includes a substantial body of knowledge that we struggle to make sense of and try to apply to our own circumstances. Scholars and practitioners are naturally selective in the topics they research and the methodologies they use for their studies. We all value different ideologies and we are oriented to different epistemologies. We research topics that are meaningful and serve a purpose at a given point in time. Topics come and go and then resurface again using slightly different lenses or approaches. Murphy (2002) reminds us that we must focus on the “valued ends” of education-school improvement, democratic community and social justice if we hope to successfully confront the challenges facing schools today. With a clearly defined focus, we will be more apt to apply our knowledge to solve many of the problems facing children and educators, instead of focusing on the numerous debates endemic to the field of educational administration.

I conclude this paper, with the words of Thomas Greenfield as he defines his work:

“Great art-and great social science too-must always have a moral content. And we judge their greatness by that content. Describing the world as it is can hardly deny or controvert this position. Indeed it makes the position. That’s what I have been trying to do in my work: trying to describe the world as it is, and trying to contemplate the moral conundrums created thereby.”

(Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993, p. 271)
References


