

A Playful Puppy Chasing its Own Tail

(“A playful puppy chasing its own tail in ever-hilarious circles describes the KB issue to me” Achilles, 2005).

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A few months ago, the editors of this new TCPEA journal asked me to address the advantages of state organizations (e.g., TCPEA) joining forces with the national organization (NCPEA). Rather than just discuss some the obvious advantages, I want to try to accomplish my task in more of a round-about-way – and tie into the discussion a national initiative and then discuss ways the state organizations can not only *benefit* but also *contribute* to the profession at the same time. It has been argued by some (Bok, 1989; Achilles, 2005; Culbertson, 1990) that the profession of educational administration lacks a firm, solid foundation built on an appropriate knowledge base (KB). Others (Beach & Berry, 2005; Creighton, Busch, MacNeil, & Waxman, 2005) contend we actually have the KB, but it is incomplete and not very well organized or available to all in the field (professors, students, and practitioners).

Simply defined, the KB *consists of the knowledge and information necessary for school leaders to effectively lead and manage schools*. The KB must be easily and quickly accessible, and *freely* available to all who prepare aspiring administrators and equally available to all who practice school leadership in our schools. Presently, this is not the case: the education administration KB is incomplete and unorganized, existing in a hodgepodge of textbooks and education journals, and is of limited access: Access limited to those in our field who purchase textbooks and subscribe to education journals.

I have written on this subject elsewhere (Education Leadership Review, Winter 2005), but to summarize, the problem relates to the following:

1. The KB in education administration does not exist in one central location.
2. The existing KB (authored by a select few) is primarily accessible to those educators who purchase textbooks or have subscriptions to professional journals, making the access cost prohibitive.
3. The existing KB is often outdated due to the dynamic nature and constant flux of education administration and the time lapse between writing and publication.
4. The KB is not *freely* accessible to all (nationally and internationally in multiple languages).

5. The existing KB is absent the contributions of knowledge and expertise from large numbers of unpublished scholars and practitioners.

There is evidence that the existing KB in education administration lacks relevancy to the practitioner and comes mostly from the research and theory end of the spectrum, generated by relatively few scholars, researchers, and authors. Though significant, these contributions come from a very small percentage of the entire professorate, and even more disturbingly, rarely come from practicing school leaders who are closest to the application of the KB and have first-hand experience with its use.

One of the greatest ironies of the culture of education administration in higher education is the exclusion of practicing school leaders in the development of and access to the KB in the field. The irony exists in the absence of significant contributions made by practicing school administrators to the KB and even more distressing by their lack of access and use of the KB. Those of us in higher education must ask the question as to why those practicing in the field, who know the KB the best and benefit from it the most, utilize it and manage it the least?

A National Initiative

In July 2004, the NCPEA Executive Board unanimously approved a major project to *organize and assemble* the knowledge base in education administration. The impetus for this project is based on the belief that our present KB does not exist in depth, is not representative of the whole profession (scholars and practitioners), and most importantly does not exist with convenient access to all. In addition, the KB is scattered across a wide variety of mediums (i.e., texts, journals, papers) and is authored by a select few void of the majority of voices from the professorate and practitioners in the field. In October 2004, the NCPEA Executive Board entered into a collaborative partnership with the Connexions Project at Rice University to pursue the publishing of a more thorough and inclusive KB with free access to the world.

Again, you have read about this project in other publications. In addition, the initiative will be highlighted at the National Summit on the Preparation of School Leaders (NCPEA Summer Conference). But my task here is to focus on the advantages and benefits of aligning TCPEA with NCPEA. I've completed my *round-about-approach* and now want to use the Connexions Project to emphasize the potential benefits to professors in TCPEA. Let me first present a brief overview of Connexions and will then follow with how TCPEA can benefit from its use.

- Connexions is a Web-based repository for academic knowledge with tools necessary to access and add to that knowledge.
- Anyone who has Internet access is free to use the Connexions content or to add their own content.
- The repository is hosted by Rice University.

- The tools to access and add to that content were developed by and are maintained by the Connexions project staff.
- Students use Connexions to view content on-line. This content can include text, images, sounds, or most anything you can put on a Web page.
- Instructors and practitioners use Connexions to select and link the modular content into courses for their students' use.
- Authors use Connexions to write, collaborate, and publish their own content. Content published with Connexions can be revised and republished in minutes.
- All published work and education materials sits in the ***Content Commons***.
 - Encoded in XML (eXtensible Markup Language)
 - A living/dynamic repository of educational materials
 - Open and free access; open contribution
 - Global; cross-institutional; cross disciplinary
 - Multi language support (presently Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Thai)
 - Can be added to or edited instantly
 - Authors retain copyright forever
- Connexions aims to serve the global educational community.

So, What Does This All Mean to TCPEA Professors?

NCPEA's goal is first to assemble the existing KB in Connexions, making available to professors, students, and practitioners at no cost. Specifically, we see this as (1) an opportunity for professors to publish their research and writing to a much wider audience (gaining world-wide recognition), (2) the availability of education materials for course design, and (3) a repository of materials for aspiring and practicing school administrators to help with their job of leading and managing schools.

NCPEA, as a third-party, independent of Connexions, acts as a "lens" or "filter" endorsing materials as high-quality and directs both the professor and practitioner to publications deemed professionally rigorous, research-based, and aligned with practice. This is a primary difference from publishing/posting information on the Internet. There is no filtering process on the Internet – tried a Google search lately? Contributions/publications to the education administration KB will have to travel through two layers of filters: first, submissions will be reviewed by an NCPEA editorial team, and second, anything published to Connexions is further filtered for appropriateness of form and style by the Rice University staff. You may now visit the Connexions site to view the NCPEA/Connexions style sheet (<http://cnx.rice.edu>); search the Content Commons with the keyword phrase, *creating the future*. You will access the recent NCPEA publication, *Crediting the Past, Challenging the Present, Creating the Future*.

What Might the Process of Submission Look Like? And Why Would an Individual Professor and Practitioner Contributions to the KB?

Earlier I stated that we seek to broaden contributions of the KB to include a more critical mass of the professorate AND and as significant, a critical mass of the practitioners in the field. It seems to me that this is where NCPEA can really be of service to both the profession and the individual professor. The specific editorial process (filter) for the NCPEA Connexions Project is still in the planning stages, and will be discussed in further detail at the National Summit on the Preparation of School Leaders. Additional discussion will take place with the State Affiliates. For now, allow me to present a “proto-type.”

1. Author creates a module (single or multiple articles with no specific length requirements), and submits to NCPEA for review and consideration to publish in the NCPEA/Connexions Content Commons.
2. NCPEA review team (composed of professors AND practitioners) either accepts or rejects with revisions (this review can be turned around in a few weeks).
3. Upon final acceptance, author’s work is published with NCPEA’s seal of endorsement and recommendation of quality and significant contribution to the KB in education administration.
4. NCPEA will communicate with universities and school districts assuring them that what is published has been rigorously reviewed by professors and practitioners and equals or exceeds the quality of contributions to professional textbooks and journals in education. In addition, professors’ deans, department chairs, and tenure/promotion committees all receive notification of acceptance.
5. Author maintains ownership of content and copyright; author also has right to *maintain content* – add or change content of the original publication. This process allows for instant changes and updates, accommodating the *dynamic* nature of education administration.

Conclusion

Through the partnership between NCPEA and Rice University’s Connexions Project, NCPEA’s role is not to *create* a KB, but to be responsible for assembling the KB. Individual professors and practitioners will *create* the KB. In addition to serving as a *filter* or *quality control*, NCPEA will actually be responsible for handling the workflow. This project in reality is an ongoing process and does not have a beginning and end.

A few advantages the Connexions format include: (a) unlike traditional publishing methods, authors are encouraged to submit an unlimited number of contributions and at any time; (b) the review process is accomplished quickly;

- (c) an author's work is sanctioned and endorsed by a professional organization;
- (d) an author receives additional support for tenure/promotion purposes; and
- (e) content is free and available to all in the world from the Internet.

The most powerful feature available to professors, practitioners and students is the *course composer*. This tool allows for searching the Content Commons (all published material) to create syllabi or chapters sequenced into a course, with customized links and annotations. These course materials can be stored on web servers and presented through a web browser. PDF versions can be printed locally as e-books and paper texts, or even spooled to an on-demand publisher such as Kinko's.

With the help from state organizations such as TCPEA, our profession stands poised to finally address the collecting, organizing, and publishing of the knowledge base in education administration. We look forward to working with TCPEA and individual professors and practitioners in this dynamic and innovative venture.

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