Organizational Theory for Equity and Diversity: Leading Integrated, Socially Just Education
Book Review

Heather Hurst [ID]
Frostburg State University
hlhurst@frostburg.edu

Colleen Capper's (2019) *Organizational Theory for Equity and Diversity: Leading Integrated, Socially Just Education* was the text I longed for when re-designing our program's introductory research course, Applying Theory and Research to Practice. Theory felt especially important to me, as our students were struggling to identify and articulate their theories in their dissertations and virtually never spoke of theory when describing their own practice. I was drawn to Capper's text initially because equity and diversity frame her exploration of educational organizational theory; as she writes, "Understanding a range of epistemologies can help leaders/scholars determine the epistemological underpinnings of various educational practices and, in so doing, identify the limits and possibilities of those practices toward equity" (pp. 1-2). In this review, I share both the contributions that this text makes to the field and its meaning within our Ed.D. program, particularly in terms of how we have used it pedagogically to further align our program with the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED), as well as our students' experiences with it. Our Ed.D. program in educational leadership features diverse cohorts as its signature pedagogy; our students are employed in many roles in educational contexts across higher education, PK12 schools, nonprofits, and the government, and they themselves represent a wide range of generations, years of work experiences, races, genders, and sexual orientations. Capper's (2019) text has now become a benchmark in our program. In recent data collection for different studies related to our program, students use her name as if she is a familiar cohort member and not merely the author of a course reading. For instance, when reflecting on the course in which Capper's (2019) text is used, Grace said, "I've referenced Capper so frequently, and I think about that text when I'm thinking about the idea of restorative practices challenging the structural functionalism of academic – that's all from Capper."

Capper's text is unique in that she positions diversity and equity not as topics tangential to our work as leaders but as the primary drivers of our work. For instance, a similar text, *Organizational Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives* (4th ed., 2018, by Mary Jo Hatch) lacks any substantial discussion of equity or diversity; these topics are not even listed in the text's index. Additionally, Capper maintains keen focus on what theory means for the practice of an educational leader, whereas many other theoretical texts focus on framing a research process, such as

Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research (2nd ed., 2023, by Alecia Y. Jackson and Lisa A. Mazzei). Although texts such as *Higher Education Administration for Social Justice and Equity* (2020, edited by Adrianna Kezar and Julie Posselt) frame their exploration of the practice of educational leadership through social justice concerns similar to Capper's, they lack her attention to organizational theory. Her text uniquely synthesizes educational leadership practice, organizational theory, and social justice.

Capper has had a distinguished career in socially just educational leadership. She is Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has published three other texts, including *Leading for Social Justice: Transforming Schools for All Learners*, co-authored with Elise Frattura. She is the editor of the Routledge series, Educational Leadership for Equity and Diversity. Spanning three decades, her peer-reviewed publications explore poststructural feminist leadership, LGBTIQ school leaders, and critical race theory in education.

Capper's first two chapters introduce and provide a history of educational organizational theory. Chapters three and four describe the two dominant epistemologies in educational organizations: structural functionalism and interpretivism. Chapters five through eleven introduce epistemologies that are oriented toward social justice: critical theory, feminist/poststructural/feminist poststructural theory, Critical Race Theory, LatCrit/Tribal Crit/Asian Crit, Black Feminism, Disability Studies, and Queer Theory. The concluding chapter explores "Individual and Organizational Identity Formation toward Social Justice." For some students, Capper's first two chapters are intellectually and emotionally challenging. They understand better after reading more of the book, and so I have learned to instruct them to have patience with the introduction, to read the entire text recursively, and to expect to need to read the entire text to understand the introduction fully.

Capper's second chapter provides a history of organizational theory and outlines several beliefs about the benefits of organizational theory for social justice leadership, such as that theory can lead "prospective educational leaders to examine the larger context, or 'bigger picture' within which their work is taking place" (p. 17), as well as "help leaders become conscious of the epistemologies that guide their values and leadership practices" (p.

18). Throughout this chapter, Capper explores how theories have been used in published educational research with extensive citations of articles utilizing different theories; these citations serve as a guide for students interested in learning more about particular theories – from "definitions of trust" to "theories of absenteeism" (p. 25).

Capper offers numerous opportunities for the readers to actively engage, many of which we have adopted as course assignments. At the end of her second chapter, she asks readers to write a case study about "an organizational/professional event or experience that was significant or challenging for you" (p. 30). We use this case study as an introduction to CPED's problem of practice framework for the Dissertation in Practice. Instead of asking students to conceptualize this activity as connected to their dissertations, which might add anxiety and weightiness to the task, developing a "case study" allows students to begin to consider how a research idea might emanate from a daily challenge that they face.

Chapter three, Structural Functional Epistemology, and chapter four, Interpretivist Epistemology, tend to be revelatory for our students, as these chapters help them recognize the implicit theories undergirding their organizations. They begin to understand how the taken-for-granted practices and assumptions of their organizations – such as the prevailing reliance on data-informed decision-making wherein only certain types of data are deemed useful or relevant – are not only patterned but also theoretical. Prior to learning about structural functionalism and interpretivism as organizational theories, most of our students conceptualize theory as individually held mindsets or approaches – which they are – but too highly personal to be systemic. Recognizing how individual and collective decisions within the organization are driven by organizational theories helps our students begin to imagine other ways of thinking and being within their organizations. Capper provides numerous activities to guide students to consider how these theories are utilized by their organizations, including a critical reflection on their own leadership practice, and guided (individual and group) analysis of their previously composed case studies through the lenses of these epistemologies. For instance, she asks the readers to consider what issues in their case studies are from a structural functional epistemology and what solutions structural functionalism would present. I particularly value that she suggests that this work be done with a partner, both because doing so "provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills" (CPED, 2021, para. 5) and because each reader is bound to "add additional ideas they [see] that you may have missed" (Capper, p. 48). The collaboration demonstrates the value of diverse and outsider perspectives.

Some students are surprised and respond emotionally to Capper's representation of structural functionalism. When this course was taught face-to-face and allowed for extemporaneous discussion, I became accustomed to hearing some students describe Capper as "angry" and "bitter." One student wondered what terrible life experiences she must have had to write a chapter like this one. Yet, when I have asked these students to share specific examples from the chapter demonstrating this purported anger, they have been unable to do so. I suspect that the students themselves are reading emotion into the text because Capper demonstrates how some taken-for-granted educational practices are deficit-based and "expect all students to assimilate to this white, middle/upper class core" (p. 43). Her challenges to structural functionalism, and, to a lesser degree, interpretivism are experienced as personally threatening because she unequivocally states that "I no longer believe that

structural functional and interpretivist epistemologies can be joined with critically oriented epistemologies to view or analyze organizations or to guide leadership practice" (p. 10). Students must wrestle with the dissonance between their personal values of equity and justice and the implicit theory of their organizations.

Chapters five through ten, spanning from critical theory to Queer Theory, are structured similarly. Capper provides a brief introduction of the history of each theory and explains where it is situated in her epistemological framework. She examines how the theory has been used to date in educational research. She shares an overview of the key tenets of the theory and explains the relationship between the theory and diversity/difference. She explores in greater detail what the theory means for educational leadership for social justice. Each chapter concludes with several learning activities and an extensive list of discussion questions. Based on our use of this text over several semesters, her questions for case study analysis through the lens of Critical Race Theory have shown to be particularly useful for some of our students who have been socialized not to recognize the ubiquity of race and racism in their work; even if their case study is not ostensibly about race, they are challenged to consider issues of property, majoritarian narratives, and interest convergence.

As instructors in the program, we find her chapter on Feminist, Poststructural, and Feminist Poststructural Epistemologies to be particularly strong and feature it in a module. In this chapter, I particularly appreciate the guidance she provides for understanding the implications of the theories as more than just "topical." For instance, feminist theory *is* concerned with gender, but it also suggests different ways of thinking and being, and so she asks students to reflect on their case study to consider "How and to what extent are process, emotion, cooperation, nurturance, intuition, the relational, and experience suppressed in the situation?" (p. 95). Our students repeatedly reference her introduction to poststructural understandings of power within this chapter and cite it as useful in troubling some taken-for-granted assumptions about power within their organizations.

Capper's final chapter, Individual and Organizational Identity Formation toward Social Justice, is a strong culmination to the work students do throughout this course in weaving together their leadership practice, their nascent understanding of practitioner research, their newly identified epistemologies and theories, and their commitment to educational equity and justice. She demonstrates the relationship between personal identity and organizational identity and provides extensive activities to frame students' identity explorations.

It is not hyperbole to describe Capper's text as transformational for our program. Beyond those resources provided by CPED itself, her text was the single most profound resource in achieving our goal of implementing the CPED guiding principles for program design. Her thoughtful questions have challenged and guided my own leadership of the program; she has influenced us as faculty in the program to consider issues of power, representation, voice, process, and policy; she has provided all of us with a common language to use across our program. She has helped our students articulate their own theories and to imagine new possibilities for the structure of their organizations – and especially to understand how small, well-meaning initiatives within the existing structure are unlikely to disrupt the status quo. Grace, for instance, described how she always knew that she was a feminist but that she had not previously considered what that meant for her work. Capper's text led her to ask, "Why do I

lead the way that I do?," and this exploration led to her identifying how, in her daily practice, she relied on distributive power and the lifting of voices. She said that she "didn't really know what [those kind of ideas] were to name them," and Capper helped her leave the course with clarity: "This is my identity as a leader."

REFERENCE

Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. (2021). *The CPED Framework.* https://www.cpedinitiative.org/the-framework