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ABSTRACT

Principals' support for various approaches to educational planning were examined in rural and suburban schools in Ohio and West Virginia. It was expected that rational approaches to planning would be more prevalent in suburban than rural schools and in a state with more tightly coupled bureaucratic control (West Virginia) than a less tightly coupled state (Ohio). An instrument was developed that reliably measured principals' endorsement of rational and strategic planning ("new technicist planning") and somewhat less reliably measured their support for traditional-consensual planning, incremental planning, organized anarchy, and reactive planning. A mail survey, using the instrument, received responses from 207 West Virginia principals and 441 Ohio principals. Results show that new technicist planning was favored by suburban principals and by West Virginia principals. The traditional-consensual approach was favored by principals in suburban West Virginia and rural Ohio. Only rural West Virginia principals showed somewhat strong support for organized anarchy. Overall, the findings suggest that the particulars of locale (state and locale as they encompass and differentiate prevailing conditions) rather than locale per se (or uniquely) account for differences in principals' approaches to planning. (Contains 24 references.) (SV)

Educational Planning in Rural Context

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Based on our experience with rural schools in two states, we suspected that approaches to educational planning in rural schools might differ from approaches taken in suburban schools. Experience suggested that suburban schools might be more likely to endorse rational approaches to planning, and rural schools more likely to endorse traditional and consensual approaches. Moreover, having worked in two states with different historical responses to the local control of schools, we suspected that educational planning in a more tightly-coupled state (West Virginia, in our study) would be more rational and less incremental, heuristic, traditional, or consensual than planning in a less tightly-coupled state (Ohio, in this case).

The Relevance of Place: A Limited Literature Base

In the states we studied, official educational planning appears to respond to urban (cosmopolitan) prerogatives. This is because rural purposes and lifeways comprise no part of the mainstream professional conversation about school improvement in either of these states. In fact, rural lifeways and communities in these states are more likely than not to be seen as *impediments* to educational improvement, though few officials feel sufficiently comfortable to voice such concerns publicly (Education Writers Association, 1988; Seal & Harmon, 1995a). Nonetheless, rural places are commonly considered deficient, inferior, and in need of fixes, especially educational fixes (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Seal & Harmon, 1995b).

Rural societies are typically portrayed as comparatively more informal, less modern and more respectful of tradition than urbanized societies. The extent to which the rural circumstance in the US might constitute a "rural society" has not, however, been well articulated. In fact, rural *schooling* has been criticized by many observers as substantially dominated by cosmopolitan norms and purposes (e.g., DeYoung, 1995). Indeed, some observers doubt that rural schools, in general, are any closer to their communities than schools anywhere else (e.g., Howley, Bickel, & McDonough, 1996; Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). The literature on rural education, therefore, offers contradictory suggestions about the approaches to planning that might typify rural schools.

Broadening the literature base to include sociological literature on economic and social planning in rural places in the United States, we find evidence indicating that rational planning tends to accompany externally imposed innovations, which are often rejected or subverted by rural residents (see e.g., Daley & Poole, 1985; Rogers, 1995). Furthermore, external agencies tend to construe traditional approaches to planning as less effective than rational approaches (Rogers, 1995). In fact, what we call "traditional approaches to planning" may not be construed

by outside reformers as legitimate forms of planning at all. Some studies do show, however, that traditional and consensual approaches to planning can lead to productive outcomes in rural communities (e.g., Salamon, Farnsworth, & Rendziak, 1998).

The Relevance of State Regulatory Context

Given the failure of the federal constitution to establish education as a fundamental right, the state is the ultimate educational authority in the US. In most states, the policies with the strongest influence on district and school-level planning originate at the state level, but the nature of such policies and the extent to which compliance is expected vary substantially among the states (e.g., Wirt & Kirst, 1989). The state contexts that influence schooling, however, are not limited to differences in education policies, but also reflect economic, social, and political differences (e.g., Spring, 1998).

This study used two states to represent substantially different contexts for education, broadly speaking. The economy of Ohio, overall, is much more diverse and more affluent than the West Virginia economy. West Virginia was developed as an internal US colony, principally in the latter half of the 19th century (DeYoung, 1995; Salstrom, 1991). As a consequence, it developed a narrow economic base and a legacy of poverty and dependence. Moreover, elites — with direct involvement in the schooling enterprise — emerged to reinforce these legacies. And to increase control over schools during the Great Depression, the legislature mandated massive consolidation of local into county districts (432 became 55 with this one Act of the legislature). By contrast, schooling in Ohio is organized into 611 local and independent school districts, resulting from consolidations in the early and mid-1900's that moved school district governance from the community to the township level. Townships persist everywhere in Ohio as political units, but in West Virginia the county identity dominates the full range of social and civic projects from schooling to roads to libraries to "welfare." In Ohio, towns and townships maintain comparatively vigorous identities and institutional capacities based on a lengthy history of localism (e.g., Guitteau, 1949). In addition, there are still 49 local districts (exempted village districts) in Ohio that remain independent of township-level governance.

Another difference between the states is that teachers in Ohio have greater influence over their salaries and working conditions than teachers in West Virginia. Even without comprehensive legislation permitting collective bargaining, teachers in some Ohio districts engaged in collective negotiations as early at the late 1960's (Green, 1973), and in 1983, the Ohio General Assembly passed legislation permitting collective bargaining. By 1993 approximately half of all districts in Ohio were bargaining with their teachers (Ashyk, 1995). West Virginia prohibits work actions by teachers, and there are no provisions enabling West Virginia's public employees to engage in collective bargaining.

Despite notable differences, there are commonalities in the educational plight of the two states. Education funding is troubled in both states, and rural interests have, in both states, successfully pursued litigation that has overturned the legality of the prevailing state systems of school finance (with little ultimate effect on educational funding in each case). In each state, as well, the respective legislatures have enacted serious accountability and testing measures, and each state's "reform" package requires principals to draw up school improvement plans. These two states' accountability schemes may, in fact, constitute the only enduring outcome of rural

equity challenges.

Considering their different histories, Ohio and West Virginia seem like they might support differerent models of planning. Our hunch was that planning in rural Ohio schools would be more traditional and consensual than planning in West Virginia schools — either rural or suburban.

Methods

We developed an instrument that reliably measured principals' endorsement of rational and strategic planning (which we called "new technicist planning") and somewhat less reliably measured their support for traditional-consensual planning, incremental planning, organized anarchy, and reactive planning. Following a mailing of the instrument and of a follow-up postcard to a total of 1163 principals from the two states, we received responses from 651 principals. Returns provided 207 cases for West Virginia (157 rural, 45 suburban, and 5 with missing data on locale) and 441 cases for Ohio (219 rural, 207 suburban, and 15 with missing data on locale); 3 cases had missing data on "state."

Findings

As Table 1 reveals, there were apparent differences in the planning approaches supported by rural in constrast to suburban principals and between West Virginia in contrast to Ohio principals. Because of the low reliabilities of two of the planning factors, we examined differences related to three of the five approaches to planning only.

Table 1: Univariate Statistics[a] (Dependent Variables: Aggregate Factor Scores)

			FACTORS		
			new technicist	traditional-consensual	organized anarchy
LOCALE	STATE				
suburban	WV	Mean	.201	.123	-.060
		SD	1.064	.944	1.034
	OH	Mean	.092	-.202	-.072
		SD	.942	1.051	.926
	Total	Mean	.112	-.142	-.070
		SD	.964	1.0382	.944
rural	WV	Mean	.087	.064	.217
		SD	.992	.997	1.0234
	OH	Mean	-.242	.079	-.098
		SD	.989	.973	.999
	Total	Mean	-.103	.073	.036
		SD	1.002	.982	1.020

Total	WV	Mean	.112	.077	.155
		SD	1.007	.983	1.030
	OH	Mean	-.080	-.057	-.085
		SD	.980	1.020	.963
	Total	Mean	-.017	-.013	-.066
		SD	.992	1.010	.991

a. unweighted cases; aggregate factor scores computed from weighted data

Rural principals showed greater support for traditional-consensual planning and for organized anarchy than suburban principals did. Suburban principals showed greater support for new technicist planning than rural principals did. Further, West Virginia principals appeared to support all three types of planning more strongly than Ohio principals did.

To test the significance of these apparent differences, we first ran one-way analyses of variance. These revealed signficant differences between rural and suburban principals' support both for new technicist planning ($f = 8.76$, $p = .003$) and for traditional-consensual planning ($f = 3.91$, $p = .048$). Rural principals were significantly more likely to support traditional-consensual planning than were suburban principals; and suburban principals were significantly more likely to support new technicist planning than were rural principals.

In the state comparisons, the difference between level of support for both new technicist planning and organized anarchy turned out to be significant (for new technicist: $f = 4.82$, $p = .029$; for organized anarchy: $f = 4.75$, $p = .03$). West Virginia principals' support for both approaches was significantly higher than Ohio principals' support for them.

We elucidated these simple comparisons by constructing increasingly more complicated statistical models. The first of these involved two-way analyses of variance (locale by state) for each of the three factors. The results confirmed statistically significant differences with respect to (1) new technicist planning by both locale and state, (2) traditional-consensual planning by the interaction of locale and state, and (3) organized anarchy by state

These results showed that new technicist planning was favored by both suburban principals and by West Virginia principals. They also showed that traditional-consensual planning was rated more highly by suburban West Virginia principals and rural Ohio principals and less highly by rural West Virginia principals and suburban Ohio principals. The main effect of state on support for organized anarchy was reaffirmed in the two-way analyses.

Finally, we performed a two-way multivariate ANCOVA incorporating into the model contextual covariates that had the potential of explaining the differences observed by locale and state. Our final model (presented in Table 2) included two covariates — career ratio (i.e., proportion of a principal's career spent in administration) and district size (logged to approximate a normal distribution).

Table 2: ANCOVA[a]: Planning factors (locale by state)

Source	Factor	df	F	Sig.	Power[a]
Corrected Model	New Technicist[b]	5	8.972	.000	1.000
	Traditional-Consensual[c]	5	3.219	.007	.889
	Organized Anarchy[d]	5	2.931	.013	.854
CAR_RAT	New Technicist	1	12.208	.001	.937
	Traditional-Consensual	1	2.218	.137	.318
	Organized Anarchy	1	4.538	.034	.566
LN_ENR_D[e]	New Technicist	1	16.456	.000	.982
	Traditional-Consensual	1	3.793	.052	.494
	Organized Anarchy	1	1.325	.250	.210
LOCALE	New Technicist	1	.072	.788	.058
	Traditional-Consensual	1	.001	.970	.050
	Organized Anarchy	1	3.859	.050	.501
STATE	New Technicist	1	.042	.837	.055
	Traditional-Consensual	1	6.116	.014	.695
	Organized Anarchy	1	.294	.588	.084
LOCALE * STATE	New Technicist	1	.770	.380	.142
	Traditional-Consensual	1	3.578	.059	.472
	Organized Anarchy	1	3.240	.072	.435

a observed power at alpha = .05
b R Squared = .070 (Adjusted R Squared = .063)
c R Squared = .026 (Adjusted R Squared = .018)
d R Squared = .024 (Adjusted R Squared = .016)
e natural log of district enrollment

The results in Table 2 show that career ratio and district size had sufficient influence to account for the observed locale and state differences in principals' preferences for the new technicist approach to planning. A simultaneous entry regression equation using the four independent variables (state, locale, career ratio, and logged district enrollment) showed that principals in larger districts were significantly more likely to prefer the new technicist approach to planning, and principals who had spent larger proportions of their careers in administration were less likely to favor the new technicist approach. Table 2 also indicates that the covariates did not exert significant influence on principals' preference for the traditional-consensual approach, but introduced a spurious main effect of state. Finally, career ratio, but not logged district enrollment, exerted a significant influence on principals' preferences for the organized anarchy approach. Regression analysis revealed that the greater the proportion of a principals' career that he or she had spend in administration the more likely was he or she to favor organized anarchy. To examine this latter influence further, we ran a second two-way ANCOVA for organized anarchy, with career ratio as the sole covariate. This analysis confirmed that career ratio alone was sufficient to explain the between-state difference identified via the one-way and two-way analyses of variance.

Discussion

Overall our findings suggest that the *particulars* of locale (state and locale as they encompass and differentiate prevailing conditions) rather than locale per se (or uniquely) account for differences in principals' approaches to planning. West Virginia principals tend to find themselves in larger districts and, thus, they fashion their planning efforts to fit in with the requirements of the larger, more distinctly bureaucratic systems that prevail in that state (cf. Howley, 1996). If new technicist approaches are best suited to implementing systemic reform, as they are purported to be (e.g., Kaufman & Herman, 1991; Lilly, 1995), then West Virginia's circumstance of tighter coupling via a reduced span of control (55 instead of 611 districts) may improve the chances that its education bureaucracy can successfully impose top-down reform measures.

This interpretation, moreover, sheds some light on the rather startling finding that, of all principal groups, only the rural West Virginia principals showed somewhat strong support for organized anarchy. This approach more than any of the others takes account of chaotic conditions in the environment surrounding the organization and permits the organization to take action in face of uncertainty and even duress. In other words, principals who intend that their planning organize anarchy are "making the best out of a bad situation."

More than many groups of principals, those in rural West Virginia schools might certainly be said to be facing a bad situation. Rather systematically over the past decade, the legislature and the State Board of Education have advanced policies targeting rural schools for closure, consolidation, and State Department sanction (DeYoung & Howley, 1992; Purdy, 1997). Even when they are meeting conventional standards of effectiveness (e.g., high scores on standardized tests), rural schools in West Virginia are beleaguered by demands to implement curricula (e.g., integrated science) and practices (e.g., computer assisted learning programs) promulgated by state-level bureaucrats and responsive to cosmopolitan business interests rather than to local needs and concerns (Howley, 1996). Facing pressures such as these, but cognizant also of community values and expectations, principals in rural West Virginia schools may often find themselves forging a somewhat precarious truce between state-level requirements and locally responsive practices.

Interestingly, rural principals in West Virginia were less likely than their suburban counterparts — and also less likely than rural principals in Ohio — to favor traditional-consensual approaches to planning. This finding fits well with an interpretation focusing on the contradictory, even chaotic, conditions that rural West Virginia principals face. These principals may find that traditional approaches are no better than technical ones in helping them chart a workable course for their schools. Organized anarchy may offer a pragmatic and flexible way to mediate between technical-rational and traditional interests.

What can explain such patterns? First, one might speculate that the strength of the new technicist factor derives from 100 years of educational practice derivative of classical management theory and "the cult of efficiency" (cf. Callahan, 1962). Certainly the school improvement planning processes mandated by Columbus and Charleston do not principally rest on the precepts of any of the other planning approaches (organized anarchy least of all!).

The appearance of district size as an influential covariate suggests, second, the

importance of the divergent histories of education in the two states, with district reorganization completely altering the West Virginia administrative scene almost overnight, during the Depression. The larger the district, the more valorized the new technicist approach (see Howley et al., in press) and West Virginia maintains rural districts considered huge by the norms of experience in the Midwest and West. The much smaller districts in which Ohio rural schools are located might bear more systematically on the disparate valorization of the new technicist and traditional-consensual approaches to planning than we were able to discover given the limitations of this study (e.g., survey methodology, new instrumentation, choice of states). Third, if modernist attitudes and values are most fully represented in the new technicist approach (as it seems they are), a possible theoretical explanation exists for the observed pattern: principals in suburban districts are more likely to deploy a modernist approach to planning, whereas principals in rural districts are more likely to deploy a traditional-consensual approach. Further study along these lines seems warranted.

This discussion raises an important methodological issue. Might differences between *locales within state* be stronger than differences between *states within locales*? This question should concern scholars of rural education because it addresses the question of research strategy: Would one study the rural context more profitably *within* a state or *across* states? We think the evidence from this study would recommend the former rather than the latter course. West Virginia principals are evidently more "planful" across the board than Ohio principals, as the observed means in panel 3 of Table 1 ("Total") suggest. The dramatic difference in the SES statistics between the two states also points to the importance of state context (i.e., despite the fact that SES does not exert a measurable direct or indirect influence on the dependent variables used in this study). This observation is hardly intended to suggest that state contexts are superordinate, or more salient than locale, but rather that historically diverging state policies, histories, and economies serve to differentiate rural meanings and practices in important ways from state to state. Failure to take stock of such differences could bias results toward confirmation of the null hypothesis when possible rural differences are the object of study. Only as these differences are better understood will it be possible to develop better interpretations of the rural experience generally. The results reported here, in fact, tend to confirm such an inference because the full impact is clearest if "locale" is conceived more complexly (i.e., as the interaction of state and locale).

Principals often lead school change, sometimes by tradition, but increasingly by the imprecation of a higher administrative body (LEAs, SEAs, the U.S. Department of Education). The modalities of school planning inevitably reflect the agendas of the sponsoring authorities, and principals themselves are little aware of this ideological condition of their work lives. Rural school change that is responsive to local circumstance — that is, change that consciously intends to nurture local community over individual greed or the remote prerogatives of national priorities — is not likely to follow the same plan as rural school change directed toward support of globalization and economic supremacy (Pittman, McGinity, & Gerstl-Peppin, in press). The findings reported here suggest that principals do approach planning in different, multiple ways, and that rural principals could well alter their approaches to planning to emphasize more inclusive and responsive approaches directed at helping rural communities (for instance) to sustain themselves, while downplaying the top-down tendencies of technical rationality.

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