TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH CRITICAL LEADERSHIP, POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Invisible Influences on Decision-Making

Perspectives from Policing, Medicine, Education, and Counselling

STEPHANIE CHITPIN & MICHAEL DOUGAN

The Invisible Influences on Decision-Making

This is a thoughtful and experiential exploration of decision-making and oft-unrecognized influences on our choices.

—***Jessica Israelstam*, M.Ed., Registered Psychotherapist**

The authors offer a compelling exploration of decision-making and the many influences that impact leadership in various areas of life and the social world. This book offers valuable insight into decision-making processes and future directions for research.

—***Rebecca Smith*, M.S.W., R.S.W**

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH CRITICAL LEADERSHIP, POLICY AND PRACTICE

Series editor: Stephanie Chitpin

Transforming Education Through Critical Leadership, Policy and Practice is based on the belief that those in educational leadership and policy-constructing roles have an obligation to educate for a robust critical and democratic polity in which citizens can contribute to an open and socially just society. Advocating for a critical, socially just democracy goes beyond individual and procedural concerns characteristic of liberalism and seeks to raise and address fundamental questions pertaining to power, privilege and oppression. It recognizes that much of what has gone under the name of 'transformational leadership' in education seeks to transform very little, but rather it serves to reproduce systems that generate structural inequalities based on class, gender, race, (dis)ability and sexual orientation.

This series seeks to explore how genuinely transformative approaches to educational leadership, policy and practice can disrupt the neoliberal hegemony that has dominated education systems globally for several decades, but which now looks increasingly vulnerable. The series will publish high-quality books, both of a theoretical and empirical nature, that explicitly address the challenges and critiques of the current neoliberal conditions, while steering leadership and policy discourse and practices away from neoliberal orthodoxy towards a more transformative perspective of education leadership. The series is particularly keen to 'think beyond' traditional notions of educational leadership to include those who lead in educative ways – in social movements and civil society organizations as well as in educational institutions.

This page intentionally left blank

The Invisible Influences on Decision-Making: Perspectives From Policing, Medicine, Education, and Counselling

BY

STEPHANIE CHITPIN

University of Ottawa, Canada

AND

MICHAEL DOUGAN

University of Ottawa, Canada

United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2025

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83662-695-4 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-83662-694-7 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-83662-696-1 (Epub)

Contents

This page intentionally left blank

About the Authors

Stephanie Chitpin is a Full Professor of Leadership at the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, Canada. She is the recipient of the 2020 Research Excellence Award. Her Memoire, *Keep My Memory Safe: Fook Soo Am, the Pagoda*, was the Ottawa Book Award Finalist for 2024. Her research is international in scope and is funded by the Sciences Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Ontario Ministry of Education. She is also the Series Editor of *Transforming Education Through Critical Leadership, Policy and Practice*.

Michael Dougan is a practicing Psychotherapist and Clinical Supervisor in Ontario, Canada. He has close to a decade of experience in mental health care and also has a background as a part-time faculty member at various Canadian post-secondary institutions. In addition to his clinical work, Michael is a doctoral candidate in Education at the University of Ottawa (Canada). His doctoral research inquires into experiences of therapeutic attending among psychotherapists.

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgements

We want to pay our respects and extend our gratitude to all individuals who work as helping professionals in Ontario (with a special shout-out to first responders) and all physicians who perform medical assistance in dying (MAiD) provisions. We would also like to say a big thank you to everyone who participated in the study discussed throughout this book. This book would not have been possible without your willingness to share your stories. A special thanks to friends and colleagues for their feedback on the manuscript. We are very appreciative of all your help and support! Thank you very much!

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Introducing Decision-Making in Professional Practices

Michael Dougan and Stephanie Chitpin

University of Ottawa, Canada

Abstract

This introductory chapter helps to orient and situate readers to the rest of the book about decision-making in four healing, helping and community or human service professions: education, policing, counselling or psychotherapy and medicine. This chapter starts by reflecting on the ubiquity of decision-making and how research on the topic is typically siloed in different occupations and academic fields. Following a brief description of working in the helping professions, examples of possible invisible influences on professional decision-making (e.g. social influence and social interest) are discussed. This segues into an overview of some central themes and assumptions throughout the book before touching on education's role(s) in supporting the development of professional decision-making competencies. This chapter closes with an overview of the remaining chapters in the book.

Keywords: Inter-professional research; professional education; qualitative research; decision-making; cross-disciplinary learning

The Ubiquity of Decision-Making Within and Across Professional Practices

Decision-making is a ubiquitous and highly experiential human phenomenon. Whether one is determining what to eat, where to go on vacation or what course of action to take (or not) in a professional setting, decision-making is involved. The experiential nature of decision-making (Kordeš, 2009) stems from decision-making being a lived-through experience, another name given to ordinary life experiences as they unfold in the contexts of everyday life (van Manen, 2017). Investigating lived experiences requires exploring the experiences themselves, how

The Invisible Influences on Decision-Making, 1–15

doi:10.1108/978-1-83662-694-720251001

they manifest and are expressed and how the understandings such experiences might engender are all interrelated (van Manen, 2017). This invites further reflection and questions about what it can mean to make a decision, how decision-making might manifest and be experienced in various contexts and what contributing factors or other such processes might contribute to, underlie and impact decision-making in professional contexts. Variations of these questions and others will be examined and explored in the chapters throughout this book.

Much research already exists on decision-making in psychology and economics (Blanchette & Richards, 2010; George & Dane, 2016; Lerner et al., 2024). Furthermore, additional scholarship about decision-making can be found across several domains of professional practice. For instance, decision-making has factored prominently in research about education (Huisman & Tight, 2022; Wentworth et al., 2021; Wroblewski & Palmèn, 2022), counselling or psychotherapy (Cottone et al., 2022; Gibson, 2019; Lindholm et al., 2020), medicine (Felder & Mayrhofer, 2017; Sox et al., 2024; van Manen, 2020; Vordermark II, 2019) and in other fields such as policing (Andersen et al., 2020; Engel et al., 2019; Feys, 2023; Roycroft & Roach, 2019; Willis & Toronjo, 2023), among many others.

Separating such decision-making research into distinct professional fields makes sense regarding how each profession will be somewhat unique. Each field often has its own education or training, profession-specific demands, tasks and functions, and regulatory or other profession-specific requirements. For example, a teacher's requirements will likely differ from those for a physician, which will still vary from those for individuals in policing. However, what if several professions, particularly those in the helping, healing and community or human service fields, might have more in common than we may believe? Moreover, what if potential, plausible and practical insights can be gleaned from inquiring into and sharing such experiences and knowledge from an inter-professional standpoint?

Part of our grappling with such questions stems from our respective engagement as practitioners in what some describe as the people (Carr et al., 2016) or human service (Edlins, 2023) professions. Individuals in such occupations are often called helping professionals (Edlins, 2023). Helping professionals repeatedly and directly interact with the public to deliver particular services and/or enact various forms of public policies (Edlins, 2023). Therefore, part of being a professional helper requires making decisions about others and making decisions about and for oneself (Edlins, 2023) as part of one's professional practice. Another common thread between such professions is that relationships are integral to their respective practices (Lachance et al., 2019). Despite their occupational differences, the issues, problems and demands within the people professions often overlap (Carr et al., 2016). There also appears to be a dearth of inter-professional or cross-disciplinary scholarship about such overlap, which is strange given the increasing encouragement or requirement for greater inter-professional collaboration among such occupations (Carr et al., 2016). With this dearth in mind, we wrote this book focusing on some of the potential factors that might influence and impact decision-making processes in four different helping professions: education, policing, counselling/psychotherapy and medicine.

Working in the Helping Professions: Making Professional Decisions

Being in close connection to and working with others through professional relationships in the people professions provides incredible opportunities to help, guide, advise, heal, etc., all of which bring the possibility of experiencing substantial joys or gifts from engaging in such work (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). However, as Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) also note: 'Settings of intense human need can be very unsettling for those in the helping [...] professions. This occurs because we are taught to assess, experience, and respond to human need at a much more intense level than the public' (p. 6). Consequently, individuals working in helping professions will typically practice in very stressful environments often characterized by a dearth of resources, high levels of ambiguity, high demands for services and significant time pressures, among many other stressors (Edlins, 2023). Therefore, a substantial difference between decision-making in everyday life and professional practices is how helping professionals often contend with and must make decisions in highly ambiguous and usually quite stressful contexts (Bertilsson et al., 2019; Cummings, 2022; Di Nota & Huhta, 2019; Edlins, 2023; Heyhoe & Lawton, 2018; Kinsella & Pittman, 2012; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2022). Moreover, a considerable area of overlap across all professional practices is that professionals regularly must make so-called sound judgements (or decisions) to fulfil their professional responsibilities (Vokey & Kerr, 2016) despite these stressors.

Part of professional practice necessitates engaging in complex decision-making processes within continuously shifting or evolving contexts, where multiple often competing sources of information exist that the professionals need to be able to interpret and utilize in their practices (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2022). In other words, professional practices are not merely a matter of the professionals performing technical applications as part of their work (Kinsella & Pittman, 2012). Professional practice requires making wise decisions (Sternberg, 2001) to act ethically while navigating complex situations involving external stressors and high levels of uncertainty (Kinsella & Pittman, 2012; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2022). Professionals need to be able to manage these demands while simultaneously remaining open to and attending to potential disturbances or problems that might (or might not) arise as part of their practice (Kinsella & Pittman, 2012). Evidently, as much as working within the helping or human service professions can bring about the potential to 'positively affect human need' (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 6), such work does not necessarily come without potential costs or burdens. Some of these potential costs and burdens are captured in the following excerpt from *The Resilient Practitioner*:

> The resilience demanded of the helping professional is of another dimension; [...] the helping professional often expresses the agonizing pull between other-care and self-care: There is a continual pull, constant strain, a tautness. [...] Exhausted when saying yes, guilty when saying no- this tension is between giving

> and taking, between other-care and self-care. This is universal dilemma in the human drama. It is just more intense for those of us who are, by nature or inclination, emotionally attuned to the needs of others. It gets highly illuminated when intense human interaction- helping, teaching, guiding, advising, or healing- is the occupational core. Here, giving of oneself is the constant requirement for success. Caring for others is the precious commodity. [. . .] The next ones who enter these helping fields have this natural learn toward the needs of others. [. . .] The best ones struggle the most and figure it out; or leave; or burn, from the inside to the outside while hope dies. [. . .] To know the world through the senses of the Other is like swimming upstream, hard to do and easy to resist. [. . .] [T]o see human suffering and need all around oneself and to constantly be on the teeter-totter of other-care vs. self-care – do I give or pull back – demands its own kind of resilience. [. . .] To be successful in the helping professions, we must continually maintain professional vitality and avoid depleted caring. (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, pp. 4–5)

Decision-making is implicitly present and embedded throughout the above quote, particularly in how professionals must navigate the affective and moral/ethical dynamics of the impacts of their practices and decisions. In other words, the decisions and decisional processes encountered and contended by professionals in their practices are not necessarily always visible. We are particularly interested in such invisible aspects or facets of professional decision-making. For example, one of us (the first author of the book) is interested in the role of social influence (Griffiths, 2020) in decision-making in professional practices. Furthermore, the other person (the book's second author) wonders how social interest (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017; Dreikurs Ferguson, 2010; Sabates, 2020) can affect and contribute to professional decision-making in interprofessional contexts. As discussed below, social influence and social interest are two of many possible examples of invisible influences on professional decision-making.

Examples of Invisible Influences: Social Influence and Social Interest

Social influence denotes the reciprocal impacts that individuals and/or groups can have on each other's behaviours, attitudes and decision-making processes (Griffiths, 2020). In other words, social influence can be understood as how professionals, such as the police, engage with the public and how social forces can shape and influence their professional practices (Griffiths, 2020). As a result, social influence's impacts and influences are not always or necessarily visible. An example of these invisible influences and effects in action is the notion of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum can be defined as the 'processes,

pressures, and constraints which fall outside… the formal curriculum, and which are often unarticulated or unexplored' (Crib & Bignold, 1999 in Lempp & Seale, 2004, p. 324). Phrased differently, the hidden curriculum operates at the organizational or institutional levels, including how organizations are physically structured (O'Donnell, 2015). It refers to the tacitly learned values, norms, attitudes, knowledge bases and ways of behaving endemic to the cultural contexts and professional practices within the organizations in which they occur (O'Donnell, 2015). It is essential to remember that social influence encompasses and extends beyond any given organization and includes the interactions within and between the organization, other individuals and other systems external to the organization (Griffiths, 2020).

Social interest is a term from Adlerian Psychology, which refers to one way the German word *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* is sometimes translated (Sabates, 2020).[1] Social interest can mean a person's commitment to positively contribute to the well-being or welfare of all of humanity (Dreikurs Ferguson, 2010). It can also be defined as 'the kind of empathic bonding people feel for each other and the responsible actions and attitudes they take toward one another, a sense of belonging and participating with others for the common good' (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017, p. 43). In many ways, social interest is construed as the behavioural manifestation or expression of the second, more affective understanding of *Gemeinschaftsgefühl*: community feeling or a felt sense (Gendlin, 2017) of belonging and connection with others and the rest of the world (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017; Hanna, 1996; Sabates, 2020). Social interest is both something that is learned and something one continues to practice throughout one's life (Sabates, 2020). Reports also exist chronicling how a felt sense of community feeling is an experienced phenomenon globally and across socioeconomic classes, education levels and genders (Hanna, 1996).

Learning, Practicing and Feeling Through Decision-Making

The learned, practiced and felt aspects of social interest and social influence highlight several prominent themes in addition to the first one about exploring and examining various additional invisible influences on decision-making in professional contexts throughout this book. Referring to something as a practice emphasizes the dynamic, iterative, ongoing and emerging nature of the behaviour one is practicing (Baart & Timmerman, 2025; Rietmeijer & Veen, 2022). Furthermore, all (professional) practices will be situated (Bedorf, 2024), relational or social and embodied phenomena (Green, 2021).[2] Therefore, professional practices involve distinct ways of being-in-the-world (Dall'Alba, 2023; Loftus, 2021).

Alternatively, given their flowing or evolving nature, professional practices involve particular ways of being-in-movement (Sheets-Johnstone, 2024). Consequently, approaching professional behaviour such as decision-making as a dynamic and experiential phenomenon means encountering and experiencing it as a lived through and affectively charged bodily experience that reverberates and

moves in/through living bodies in qualitatively distinct ways (Sheets-Johnstone, 2024). Another way of phrasing this is that such phenomena require an experiencing affective and kinesthetic presence (Sheets-Johnstone, 2024) that touches and is touched by (Kearney, 2015; Merleau-Ponty, 2005) the entirety of the lifeworld (e.g., lived/living experiences of temporality, spatiality, relationality, corporeality, materiality, etc.) (van Manen, 2016, 2023).

Such an approach radically differs from how decision-making has predominantly been approached as a rational and cognitive process (Fox et al., 2016; Heyhoe & Lawton, 2018; Vo, 2020; Wang, 2024). However, our ability to employ reason and make decisions is intricately intertwined with our capacity to feel (Orsini, 2021). Consequently, affective experiences and decision-making are deeply interconnected (George & Dane, 2016; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Moreover, affective processes support applying and transferring skills and knowledge acquired in one context (e.g. school) to other contexts (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). It is, therefore, possible to construe affective experiences such as emotions as a form of decision-making-in-action in that they comprise various repertoires of know-how, allowing individuals to navigate and respond appropriately (or not) to different situations (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). In other words, affective experiences arise from how a professional engages with a decision, who they are making a decision for or about and what they are deciding to do or not do (van Manen, 2020). Consequently, professionals may need to feel their way through their decisions (van Manen, 2020) instead of solely reasoning their way through them. Such a stance compliments how living, or animate, beings (including professionals) ultimately feel–sense–move their way into and through knowing themselves, others and the world around them (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999a, 1999b, 2018, 2024). This connects to a second overarching theme about how felt experiences can and do impact behaviours such as decision-making in professional contexts.[3]

One example of how felt experiences can exert potent effects on behaviours such as decision-making is through fluctuations in arousal or activation of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) (Edlins, 2023). The ANS operates outside of cognitive or conscious awareness and regulates involuntary actions or behaviours such as breathing, temperature, etc. (Edlins, 2023; Fogel, 2009). Through the process of neuroception or the automatic and unconscious scanning for signs of (relational and environmental) threat/danger and safety (Fogel, 2009; Geller & Porges, 2014), the ANS helps us to story or narrate what the nervous system knows (Edlins, 2023). In other words, the narratives/stories we are consciously aware of (e.g. decisions, emotions, thoughts, etc.) are influenced and shaped by the dynamically felt movements of activity within the ANS (Bailey et al., 2020; Edlins, 2023; Fogel, 2009; Geller & Porges, 2014). As a result, affective or felt experiences, much like education, can contribute to, filter and guide our knowledge, thoughts, actions and ways of being, as well as how we go about them (Biesta, 2022; Bruzzone, 2023; Edlins, 2023; Fogel, 2009; Grant, 2020; Hill, 2015). The connections to education segue into how practice and feeling might intersect and interact with learning. This is relevant to a third overarching theme throughout the book: how the felt presence (or absence) of experiences of (dis)

trust can radically impact and influence professional decision-making and how professionals can learn to enact relationships in which they are felt and experienced as trustworthy.

So-called learning happens in emotional contexts in which learners can feel or sense connections between their previous experiences (whether educational, professional or personal) and how and what they know (Sewell, 2020) in the present. Moreover, it is widely established that learning is facilitated through the presence and experience of safe and trusting relationships (Cozolino, 2013; Stella & Taggart, 2020). Consequently, it is unsurprising to know that learning (especially in the helping professions) is relational (Konrad, 2010). Relational teaching and learning are ultimately believed to best prepare students to enter into professional healing or helping relationships with others (Konrad, 2010). This makes sense, given how people learn how to be in relationships through their own (early) experiences relating to and being related to by others (Allen, 2022; Lyons-Ruth, 1998). These patterns of interpersonal interaction, or implicit relational knowing, are repeatedly practiced and gradually sedimented into one's habitual ways of being (or relating), which then become implicit and practical guides for how to interact with others (Allen, 2022; Fuchs, 2019; Lyons-Ruth, 1998).

In other words, learning does not just occur based on the 'what' and 'why' of curricula, pedagogy and assessments (Biesta, 2022). Learning is primarily a product of the 'how' or the relationships between how a learner relates to what they are learning and how others relate to them in their learning processes (Biesta, 2022). It is crucial to remember that at least two individuals are present any time a human service interaction occurs – the professional helper and one or more members of the public (Edlins, 2023). Moreover, each party within such interactions will also bring with them and be able to experience differing levels and capacities for felt experiences of safety or danger (Edlins, 2023). Consequently, any time a professional helper interacts with the public, that presents one or more opportunities for co-regulation (Edlins, 2023) as part of supporting possible experiences of feeling seen, heard or felt by someone else (Baldini et al., 2014; Saevi & Foran, 2012; Siegel, 2001, 2020; Siegel & Drulis, 2023). This brings us to question how one might learn and teach someone such relational decision-making skills to foster felt experiences of trust and what professional education's role(s) in promoting or cultivating such learning might be. Such questioning is particularly poignant given how the scientific methods of gnostic knowledge (Ingold, 2023; van Manen, 2016) are unlikely and insufficient to produce the wisdom (Ingold, 2023) inherent to and within experiences of pathic knowing (Bjorbækmo et al., 2018; van Manen, 2016).[4,5]

Education and Professional Decision-Making

Typically, someone undergoes a professional education not just to learn but to be able to learn something specific, learn it from someone else and have this learning be for one or more particular purposes (Biesta, 2022; Biesta & van Braak, 2020). The purposes of professional education are believed to include professional

qualification (e.g. learning the requisite knowledge and skills needed to do and be a competent professional in one's occupation), professional socialization (e.g. cultivating or fostering the particular dispositions and ways of interacting with and understanding the world from one's occupational perspective and developing one's sense of professional identity) and professional subjectification (e.g. determining which knowledge, skills and attitudes are needed for any given situation along with knowing when and how to employ these as part of making sound professional judgements) (Biesta & van Braak, 2020; Trinidad et al., 2023).

The third purpose of professional education (e.g. professional subjectification) and how it might intersect and interact with the other two sparks significant interest. Part of our interest in this stems from how professional education is cited as quintessential to supporting practicing and prospective professionals in developing their competencies to make professional judgements (Vokey & Kerr, 2016). It is also believed to be a precursor for ethically responsible professional actions (Vokey & Kerr, 2016). Much of what we know about how helping professionals engage with the public is predicated on a so-called surface-level understanding (e.g. who and what) of such interactions (Edlins, 2023). From Edlins's (2023) perspective, there is a need for more and deeper research into how such interactions are experienced, along with inquiring into and about how additional factors (e.g. racial, cultural, socioeconomic, emotional, etc.) might manifest and impact interactions between helping professionals and the public.

Therein lie significant factors underlying our respective interests in writing such a book: the role(s) of education or training in fostering and developing competencies in professional decision-making, reflecting on what might constitute and underly professional decision-making processes, especially in the context of educating professionals to make responsible or ethical decisions and their corresponding courses of action, and helping to provide the public with the necessary knowledge about what is known, not yet known, and what might need to be known about decision-making processes in various professions to work to build, facilitate or rekindle a greater sense of trust in those professions. Each chapter, described below, draws from relevant research, personal–professional experiences and qualitative methodologies to weave a narrative exploring various invisible influences on professional decision-making processes in different occupational fields within the helping or human service professions.

The Organization of the Rest of the Book

This book is organized into nine chapters, including this introduction. Our book describes and uses examples from multiple case studies (some phenomenologically inspired) about decision-making processes across several helping professions, such as policing, education/teaching, counselling/psychotherapy and medicine. Readers can choose to read the book from front to back cover or select the most interesting and relevant chapters, as each has been written as a standalone chapter.

The second chapter of the book provides an overview of the topic of indecision. Part of our reasoning for including a chapter about indecision in this book is