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## Thomas Greenfield and the Quest for Meaning in Organizations: A Postponed Dialogue With Ludwig Wittgenstein

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*In this article, I highlight the role of the notion of meaning for educational administration. I draw attention to Thomas Greenfield's theses regarding the role of meanings in organization. I explore the relations between Greenfield's thesis about meaning in organization and Ludwig Wittgenstein's thoughts about language and meaning. I shed some light on the encounters and distances between these two thinkers. My account is both exploratory and critical. On the one hand, I point to the relationships between meaning, practices, and action in organization. On the other hand, I identify one aspect of Greenfield's thought that can be further explored in the light of Wittgenstein's remarks about the public character of meaning.*

### Introduction: Why Meaning? Why Wittgenstein?

This article is a staged dialogue. Thomas Greenfield did not cite many philosophers in his published works. However, this does not mean that his work does not have a strong philosophical perspective. As many commentators on his work have pointed out (Gronn, 1983, 2003; Ribbins, 2003; Hodgkinson, 2003), there is a clear philosophical stance in his intellectual production. In this article, I show that in fact Greenfield's ideas are philosophical in nature. One of the philosophers whom Greenfield admired the most was Ludwig Wittgenstein (Hodgkinson). He quoted Wittgenstein with sympathy on several occasions (Greenfield, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1993a).

In this article, I sketch some conceptual parallels as well as point to some divergences between these two thinkers. It is worth mentioning that the commonalities are more than just conceptual: biographical coincidences between Greenfield and Wittgenstein are worth noting. Both changed their theoretical points of view at some point in their careers to the extent that they became critics of their earlier creeds. In fact, an early Wittgenstein is represented by the philosopher who wrote the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) and a later Wittgenstein represented by the one who wrote the *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Similarly, it is generally agreed (Macmillan, 2003) that Greenfield's turning point was his participation in the 1974 International Intervisitation Programme Conference in Bristol, England. Before this time, his work can be characterized as "objectivist" (Ribbins, 2003). In the case of

Wittgenstein, his early work was influential in the development of the Vienna Circle and what was known as Logical Positivism, although he never became part of the Circle or endorsed their doctrines. The Circle's influence in the Theory Movement in educational administration has been documented (Culbertson, 1981, 1983; Nodoushani, 2000; Heck & Hallinger, 2005), and it is clear that Greenfield's early work can be situated in this model. In their later work, both Wittgenstein and Greenfield were critical of their past theories and proposed accounts that took into consideration contexts, meanings, and practices as opposed to objectivistic or empiricist models of reality.

For example, according to Wittgenstein (1953), intentional action can be situated in sociolinguistic contexts. He used the expression "language games" to indicate that understanding an action is a matter of being immersed in a practice: "The term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form" (§ 23). Similarly, Greenfield (1980) says, "language in some sense lets us understand organization and organization lets us understand language. Or, as Wittgenstein again indicates, 'An expression has meaning only in the rivers of life'" (p. 51).

In another passage, Greenfield (1984) talks about the interrelationship between our conception of reality and language:

As Wittgenstein (Kenny, 1973) makes us see, the ideas in our heads are not so much models of the world as models for the world. We believe in the ideas in our heads. We trust our models for the world so deeply that we make them true. We will them to be true. (p. 153)

The biographical similarities between Wittgenstein and Greenfield go beyond their professional careers to their personal lifestyles and political sympathies. Ribbins, (2003), Hodgkinson (2003), and Gronn (2003) provide accounts of some aspects of Greenfield's personal life that are worth contrasting in Wittgenstein's biography (Bartley, 1973; Monk, 1990).

I begin the dialogue between Wittgenstein and Greenfield by arguing that Greenfield's account of the nature of organization can be studied in the light of Wittgenstein's ideas about meaning and action, and particularly his reflections about "following a rule"; that is, understanding organizations requires a contextualized perspective in which practices and actions must be taken into account. I believe that Greenfield's insights point in this direction in that he provides an integrated framework in which meaning plays a fundamental role.

An understanding of Greenfield's remarks would require bringing out an array of complex and interrelated notions such as agency, moral order, chance, intention, and value among others. However, this would be beyond my main goal in this article, which is to explore the notion of meaning and suggest some areas for further exploration. I wish to illustrate the tensions

between Wittgenstein's and Greenfield's notions of meaning. I point to some complexities derived from emphasizing the assumptions that support Greenfield's particular notion of meaning. My argument relies on the idea that language has a communicative aspect, and communication is possible only when meanings have a public dimension. In my view, this communicative dimension is overlooked by the methodological subjectivism implicit in Greenfield's overreliance on the individual's perceptions and the central role given to the subject in constructing meaning. I borrow some remarks from Wittgenstein to argue that Greenfield's notion of organization could gain additional support from a view that emphasizes the public and contextual nature of meanings. Although the individual is the entry point for understanding organizations, the public nature of meaning is required to uphold a coherent theory of language.

### Meaning and the Nature of Educational Organizations

Greenfield's contributions to the field of educational administration are broad and profound. The effect of his arguments against managerialism and his challenges to the theory movement still reverberate today in academic debate. One feature that makes Greenfield's work so unique and influential is his treatment of organizations as symbolic contexts where human actions can be interpreted through the notions of meaning, moral order, and power.

In this section, I highlight the importance of meaning for the study of organizations, emphasizing the relations between meaning and action. My point of departure is Greenfield's belief that organizations are symbolic constructs: they are expressed, recognized, and experienced through intention and meaning. In this sense, language becomes pivotal for understanding organizational reality; it provides a framework for understanding actions as organizationally bounded.

I start with a caveat. In my view, Greenfield (1980) showed reluctance to frame his discussion in traditional metaphysical dichotomies. For example, when he says, "organizations are essentially arbitrary definitions of reality woven in symbols and expressed in language" (p. 44), he seems to blur the traditional distinction between ontology and epistemology by pointing out that the essential nature of organizations cannot be described as detached from our symbolic apparatus.

Greenfield (1993a) said, "concrete, specific action is the stuff organizations are made of" (p. 53). That is, organizations do not exist independently from human beings. According to him, a false dichotomy between organizations and individuals has portrayed organizations as entities that are separate from human experiences. This separation relies on the assumption that organizations are necessary to individuals for them to obtain social benefits (Durkheim, 1957).

Following Greenfield's view, this separation is a mistake because organizations are conventions; they comprise sets of rules and procedures so that people act toward a given goal (Greenfield, 1993a). Furthermore, this argument allows Greenfield to avoid a metaphysical problem: if organizations had a separate existence from people as external, independent realities, then we would have to explain the ontological status of the rules, procedures, symbols, and conventions in organizations (Evers & Lakomski, 1991). Furthermore, regarding organizational change, we would have to explain what exactly is transformed or modified by the change processes independently of human perceptions.

On the contrary, according to Greenfield's (1980) line of thought, change is the transformation of a symbolic apparatus, a change in the content of meanings. Therefore, if organizational change is a transformation of meanings, and meanings are semantic features of the human mind, then organizations could not be understood as separate realities. So there is no point in studying organizations as objects separate from human intentions. They exist in the same sense that meanings exist. Furthermore, their existence is known through a person's actions. In other words, to be organized means to display action patterns and to have a repertoire of meanings for understanding the environment and relationships between the organization and the environment.

Organizations are the meanings we find in our lives, regardless of how those meanings came to be there. The self cannot escape organizations. Indeed, self is organization in a profound sense, though the self may behave and feel quite differently as it moves from organization to organization—from fragment to fragment of its personal world. (Greenfield, 1993a, p. 54)

The symbolic character of organizations inevitably ties them to human action and experience. They provide a framework for us to identify ourselves as members or outsiders.

In a similar vein, Wittgenstein (1953) reflects on meaning and following rules. In *Philosophical Investigations*, he says, "for a large class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (§ 43). In saying this, he is not pointing to the behavioral aspects of speech, but to the complex relations in which humans are immersed when they use language. Using language is like playing a complex game, a game that is framed in culture, in our form of life.

"So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"—it is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life. (§ 241)

In this passage, he seems to highlight the situated nature of language. If language is situated in a context and that context is a form of life, then meanings in that language are more likely to be identified with our practices than with abstract entities or universal constructs. The question *What do you mean?* does not point to an abstract idea: it points to the practices in which a certain expression is used. In the same sense, understanding an action does not depend on the application of a set of rules to a certain situation. An action makes sense once it is contrasted against the background of a practice or set of practices.

This could be clearly linked to Greenfield's (1977) insight into the nature of organizations. It could be said that an action is organizational once it is understood against the background of our organizational practices. In *Organization Theory as Ideology*, Greenfield traces a brilliant analogy between the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the famous remark at the end of the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein, 1922). "Wittgenstein's logic takes him to a point where logic has no meaning, to a vision of the universe akin to that found in the contemplative religions of the east" (pp. 105-106). Greenfield's point here is that in trying to understand organizational reality, we must go beyond logic, beyond abstract theories, because "living in the world is synonymous with action. The individual can not escape doing; no more can the leader escape decisions or the agony that often goes with making them ... [to] escape from action is impossible" (p. 106).

Similarly, Wittgenstein (1953) discusses the notion of following a rule, concluding that "there is a way of grasping a rule that is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases" (§ 201). It is the practice as a whole that determines understanding, not just the mental representation of the rule. "And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to think one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule" (§ 202).

According to Greenfield, organizations are intrinsically linked to human actions; they are not separate, independent entities. Acting in organization is not to follow a predetermined rule that was arbitrarily established and kept in an abstract realm. Acting in organization is to be immersed in a situation, in a context that provides meaning to our experience.

It is important to emphasize the intrinsic relation Greenfield (1993a) notes between the organization and the individual (Bush & Bush, 2003). He criticizes the traditional organization/individual dichotomy on the basis that this separation makes the organization an external force with which the individual has to comply, creating a relation of subordination where persons have to rely on a superior form to guide their lives. Furthermore, in a metaphysical sense, this separation cannot explain the origin of meaning in an organizational context, namely, the symbolic contexts that the individual uses to make sense of his or her actions and to relate to the environment

(Bolman & Deal, 2008). Gray (1982) also formulates this claim from the same perspective: "Organizational change occurs only as a consequence of changes in the individual self-concept. It is the individual's view of himself that changes, not the organization" (p. 38).

Regarding organizational change, Greenfield (1993a) says that an objectivist view of organizations would imply that organizations are entities to be studied and modified using the tools that the natural sciences and mathematics provide. Reform in this case is a matter of altering an object by means of intervening in the relevant variables, trying to find the universal principles that explain change.

Thus according to Greenfield (1975), there are at least two opposite ways to understand organizational reality. On one hand, there is the *natural systems theory*, which sees organizations as systems that can be studied as objects of nature. On the other is the view of organizations as symbolic human creations. Greenfield (1991, 1993b) sees the former as realist and objectivist and the latter as subject-centered, a "humane science." Natural systems theory sees social science as a truth-seeker that aims to find the universal laws that rule individuals and society, whereas a humane science sees the social sciences as sciences of meaning, concerned with how people understand their experiences.

### Meaning and the Transformation of Organization

Following this line of thought, meaning becomes the central issue in organizational studies (Macmillan, 2003). It could be said that Greenfield (1980) sees organizational change as the transformation of meanings held by individuals. Furthermore, if organizations are symbolic constructs, then organizational change is the transformation of meanings. Therefore, the study of change in organizations necessarily includes a semantic dimension. So if organizations are symbolic constructs that cannot exist apart from people, then a study of organizations necessarily implies a study of meanings and how people create and transform such meanings (Evers & Lakomski, 1996).

This view also has an ethical significance: it is not only the promotion of democratic values and participation that sees individuals and organizations in an "essential" relationship, but also the view of individuals as active parts in the reform process. This could displace the issue of who is in charge of reform from the administrator's hands to the individual's hands in the organization. However, Greenfield (1982) does not take the analysis from the individual level to the group level. In his view, there is no change until personal meanings are transformed, and this in the end is an individual endeavor. According to him, "it is the individual that lives and acts, not the organization. It is, therefore, the experience of individuals that we must seek to understand" (p. 4). He says this in the context of his critique of the idea of *group mind*. His point is that the last level we can reach in organizational

analysis is the individual level; keeping in mind that in his view social reality is created by individuals, it would be reasonable to suppose that the only way to gain access to the social sphere is through the individual's experiences.

An anarchistic theory of organization may be summed up in two statements: first, a statement that rejects group mind and denies an over-arching social reality thought to lie beyond human control and outside the will, intention and action of the individual; second, a statement that acknowledges the tumult and irrationality of thought itself. (p. 14)

In this passage, Greenfield seems to adopt a skepticism about collective or social knowledge. In his view, all we know about the world comes from our experience, so it is reasonable to assume that there is no hope in pursuing further knowledge beyond the boundaries of our perception. Thus in his view, the idea of group mind can be dismissed under the charge of incoherence. If the individual's experiences are the entry point to organizational analysis, then the existence of group minds or shared mental contents like meanings is an arbitrary theory that cannot be justified. Greenfield's conclusion is based in a series of assumptions that support his "anarchistic theory of organization." He starts by asserting the pivotal role of the individual in organizational structure: "An anarchistic theory of organization recognizes the individual as the ultimate building-block in social reality" (p. 3). So an analysis of organizations will inevitably lead us to the individual as the ultimate component, the foundation of the structure. Therefore, any study of organizations should begin by looking at the individual's perceptions (Ribbins, 2003).

But Greenfield (1982) goes further and offers additional reasons, namely, we know by empirical evidence that people have diverse perceptions and world views. He says,

We live in separate realities, what is true for a person is not for another. In that sense we live in different worlds. Each of us, Huxley says, is an island universe. There is no action—however terrible or appalling it may appear to some of us—that is not sensible and rational to others. (p. 5)

The plausibility of relativism supports Greenfield's (1980) subjectivism. According to him, empirical evidence shows that varied perceptions of the world coexist in society and particularly in organizations. Therefore, if contradictory world views are present in an organization, it would make no sense to analyze organizations as coordinated groups. Furthermore, in this view, if there is agreement or coordination, it is the result of the imposition and power rather than a product of group agency. World views could not be

in conflict in a group mind: "In the production of organizations, we should be aware of what Giddens calls 'asymmetries' in meaning and morality and in the power of certain people to force their meanings and moralities upon others" (p. 46).

If we are to undertake an analysis of meanings and language, we may need a conceptual or theoretical framework to understand what we are seeing. Is there a theory of language that supports Greenfield's subjectivist conclusion?

### Toward a Theory of Meaning for Educational Administration

How can we explain organizational agreement over certain concepts, meanings, and conceptual frameworks? According to Greenfield (1980), agreement would be nothing more than the product of an imposition or the concurrence of diverse wills toward a common end. In his view, the individual's meanings are expressed in social contexts: "the basic problem in the study of organizations is understanding human intention and meaning ... Action flowing from meaning and intention weaves the fabric of social reality" (p. 27). Thus he seems to accept a social context where meaning is expressed through the individual's action.

It could be argued that the Greenfield (1980) of "The Man Who Comes Back Through the Door in the Wall and Against Group Mind" (1982) is not the same Greenfield of "Phoenix" (1991) and "Science and Service" (1991, 1993b). It is evident that the latter was more interested in a general criticism of systems theory in the light of the impossibility of a clearcut distinction between facts and values. However, although there is a clear change of focus, I do not believe that there is conclusive evidence of a change of perspective on the nature of meanings in educational organizations. In an interview conducted in 1991 (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993), Greenfield said,

I hope there is *not* a single end even line of development through all my papers ... I hoped the position in "Science and Service" is consistent with what has gone before, with positions that set out the realities of different perceptions of the world and that describes the realities of those views in conflict. (p. 269)

One consistent aspect throughout Greenfield's academic production is the fundamental role given to the subject in understanding organizations. If the individual is the ultimate component, then his or her perceptions become the entry to understanding organizational reality: "What the social researcher is doing is launching out upon an inquiry into other people's realities ... of how one prevails over another, of how power is used to sustain and propel certain views" (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, p. 252). So it is clear that inquiry should begin in the individual.



Let us push the envelope and ask, What is the origin of the individual's meanings? Greenfield's (1993a) answer is puzzling: "Organizations are the meanings we find in our lives, regardless of how those meanings came to be there" (p. 54). This is problematic because leaving the question of the origin of meanings, he brushes aside the question of their nature. If organizations are made of meanings, then a study of their origin may shed light on the nature of organizations.

A possible extension of Greenfield's (1993a) reflections could point toward an inquiry about the origin of meanings in organizations and their relation to the understanding of organizational action. It is clear that Greenfield highlights the relation between power and language and how prevalent meanings are an expression of those in power: "Language is power. It literally makes reality appear and disappear. Those who control language control thought, and thereby themselves and others. We build categories to dominate the world and its organizations" (Greenfield, 1982, p. 8). However, this does not address an underlying issue: where did the original meanings come from?

Greenfield's subjectivism is methodological. He is saying that a subject-centered perspective is our best choice for understanding organizational reality. He does not endorse a Cartesian solipsism that implies the existence of an isolated individual deceived by an evil genius. Evidently he sees organizations as collections of individuals, but methodologically speaking, he has no reason to accept that organizations are understood through collective representations. In his view, agreement is the result of coercion. We can enter a school and see people working together and acting as coordinated bodies; however, following Greenfield's insights, this does not mean that people have a common understanding of the organization. In fact a closer look would reveal diversity, contradiction, and conflict. Consensus appears only on the surface.

The difficulty I reveal here is that if we accept that methodologically speaking, the ultimate source of organizational knowledge is the individual, then it would be difficult to explain how individuals acquire the organizational language for understanding meanings and achieving agreements in organizations. About language in organizations, and particularly about developing meaning, it would be necessary to ask how individuals become acquainted with their meanings in the first place. Thus if our method focuses on the individual in order to understand organizational structure, then our methodology should cohere with a theory of language that explains how the individual manages to acquire language and use meanings for communication.

I illustrate this tension by again contrasting Greenfield and Wittgenstein. In this case, Greenfield's subject-centered perspective collides with Wittgenstein's remarks about the public nature of meaning. A Wit-

tgensteinian perspective on meaning would regard methodological subjectivism as highly problematic because it presupposes what it aims to deny, namely, the public character of both language and meaning and the communitarian exercise of meaning-building.

I start by noting that language and meaning are fundamental to understanding organizations. "In the study of organizations, the analysis of language and the flat description of what happens appear as our best approaches and methodological tools" (Greenfield, 1982, p. 8). Furthermore, there is no hope in trying to know anything beyond the boundaries of language.

Given that language both limits our realities and creates them, the student of organizations has little choice but to use language as people do in all its ambiguity, inconstancy, and richness, as they try to understand organizations. Language in some sense lets us understand organization and organization lets us understand language. Or, as Wittgenstein again said, "An expression has meaning only in the rivers of life." (Greenfield, 1980, p. 51)

If language is the epistemological condition for understanding organizations, then organizations are the natural context for understanding language. This co-dependency of language and organizations indicates that language, and by extension meanings, grant knowledge of organizations. Furthermore, keeping in mind that organizations are symbolic constructs, we can conclude that an analysis of the use of meaningful expressions would provide hints about the nature of organizations.

The notion of organization as context can perhaps be understood by analogy with language. Such an analogy is not simply a convenient example to illustrate meaning, for it is apparent that language is at the heart of the process by which we understand reality and by which we exert control over ourselves, others, and the physical world. But language is an abstraction; it does not exist as a concrete entity. One cannot meet the English language—or any other language—face to face. It exists as a context, as a framework of meaning that makes speech possible. (Greenfield, 1980, p. 45)

Here organizational context is the context created by the individual's meanings and his or her actions, so methodologically speaking, there is no public or external context in which organizations can be studied. There is no organization beyond the individual's subjectivity.

### The Problem of the Nature of Meaning

I show that Greenfield's (1982) approach to organizations holds a series of assumptions. First, he says that organizations exist as symbolic constructs

constituted by meanings. If meanings are subjective features of the individual, then the only sound way to understand organizations is through the individual's meanings. Second, given that the person's meanings provide the context for understanding organizations, it could be said that organizations exist in the same sense that meanings exist. They are as real as the individual's meanings, but due to this feature, they could not be the object of study of a positive social science (Greenfield, 1991, 1993b). So in Greenfield's view, organizations are not objective entities.

Following these insights, it can be said that there is no common organization for all members. There are as many subjective versions of the organization as individuals in it. So in principle, there would not be comprehensive organizational goals. Each individual has his or her own conception of the organization, and, therefore, each individual has his or her own organizational goals. Strictly speaking, for Greenfield, truly organizational goals are nothing but the sum of all the individuals' goals, so the formulation of common goals is absurd. Any consensus would be the product of the exercise of power by one individual over the others.

I have no particular reason to oppose the power-imposition perspective. However, my point is that a powerful imposition requires a common ground so that those under control can be controlled and controllers can deliver their discourse of control. This common ground is the language, particularly the semantic content that carries the meaning of linguistic expressions.

So what are the perspectives for educational reform in Greenfield's account? How can we transform schools? As I show, Greenfield suggests that the only option of intervention is exercising power. Organizational change is unidirectional in origin (initiated from a powerful individual), but multi-dimensional in interpretation (interpreted from several individual perspectives). The object of study of educational administration is reduced to the individual's meanings, because it is only through the individual's experiences that we can learn anything about organizations (Sackney & Mitchell, 2001). In this conception, ideas like collective agency, collective action, group mind, and distributed leadership become nonsensical.

Above I highlight Greenfield's contribution to educational administration regarding the role of meaning. Also I suggest that Greenfield's theses about meaning leave some unanswered questions about the nature of language in educational administration, especially the nature of meaning and its role in organizational analysis.

In the face of a multi-faceted, ambiguous "reality," one needs a conception, an idea of it, if one is to speak of organizations. The idea inevitably stands between us and what we think is reality; it links our experience and our sense of an outside world and others' behaviour in it. It is this mysterious void between behaviour and experience that the image must fill. (Greenfield, 1993a, p. 71)

In this remarkable but cryptic passage, Greenfield is noting an important problem for the epistemology of educational organizations. There seems to be a gap, a *mysterious void*, between my own experiences and others' behavior. How is it possible to interpret others' behavior as *organizational behavior* or *organizationally oriented behavior* if I have no access to their own perceptions and knowledge? Indeed, it is possible that others' behavior corresponds to other motivations and intentions than mine. That is, others' behavior could be motivated by another conception of organization. However, I cannot know whether their behavior has the same origin as mine, because following Greenfield, my interpretation of my own experience depends on my privileged access to my own experiential states, and in principle, according to this line of thought, I do not have such privileged access to anyone else's experiential states.

So how could I interpret other people's actions as organizationally oriented actions? My only option would be to interpret other people's behavior by analogy to my own case, creating a conception, an "idea that inevitably ... links our experience and our sense of an outside world and other's behaviour in it" (Greenfield, 1993a, p. 71). That is, because my conception of organizational reality is subjective and I interpret human action by using my conception of organizational reality, then my interpretation of others' behavior is necessarily subjective (Ryan, 1988). Therefore, I cannot know whether other people's behavior is organizational behavior, because I cannot escape from my own perceptions.

This position is reasserted in a 1991 interview in which Ribbins (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993) asked Greenfield, "Can I have access to or learn from the experience of another? ... [His answer was:] The only way we can gain access to another's experiences is in symbols of one kind or another, frequently linguistic symbols" (p. 250). It is clear that the question about the nature of symbols persists. We need symbols to understand our own and others' experience, but how did these symbols enter into my conceptual repertoire? I believe that Wittgenstein can help us to clear the path.

According to Wittgenstein (1953), language requires a public dimension that cannot be overridden by methodological subjectivism. In other words, the assumption that individuals have private meanings implies the existence of a public language. In his view, denying the public character of meaning is self-contradictory. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein asks us to consider the possibility of a private language referring to inner sensations.

But could we also imagine a language in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his [sic] inner experiences—his feelings, moods, and the rest—for his private use?—Well, can't we do so in our ordinary language?—But that is not what I mean. The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the

person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language. (§ 243)

In this case, he says, each occurrence of a sensation is associated ostensibly with a word in the private language. This situation is analogous to Greenfield's (1975) reliance on the subject as the meaning-maker in organizations. Let us remember that in his view, meanings in organizations are subjective properties of the individual: "Our own experience of our own organizations is a valuable resource. It is with this experience that the organization theorists must begin to understand the nature of organizations" (p. 91). Indeed, Greenfield's conception of educational administration as a humane science deems individual experiences as the ultimate foundation for knowing educational organizations (Evers, 2003). This is supported by a subject-centered account of organizations: "The world exists but different people construe it in very different ways. Organizations are invented social reality" (Greenfield, p. 77). Therefore, if people construe diverse conceptions of the world and particularly diverse accounts of organizations, then there is no single way to understand or portray organizational reality. In Greenfield's (1977) view, theories are "sets of meanings which people use to make sense of their world and action within it" (p. 77). Educational research must focus on the multiple meanings and world views that coexist in a given place and time. Its goal will be the "interpretation of the subjective meanings which individuals place upon their action.... [and] Discovering the subjective rules for such action" (p. 77). Understanding others is a matter of empathy. We proceed by analogy to our own case: "I must first of all believe that there is somebody else there who is sentient even as I am, whose experience is valid as mine and which I ought to try and understand" (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993, p. 250).

I use of my own meanings to understand the other, but I cannot have access to the other's experience. The fact that Wittgenstein (1953) talks about sensations and Greenfield talks about meanings is irrelevant, because sensations are assigned to words in the inner language, and those words have a meaning. It is the meaning that is private.

Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end, I associate it with the sign "S" and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation. I ... point to it inwardly.—But what is this ceremony for? For that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign. (§ 258)

Thus how can we fix meanings in this private language? It seems that the only way is by ostensive definition. If I have a particular private experience or sensation and I name it "S," then I must assume that the next time I have the same sensation or experience, namely the term "S," I will use it to refer to

this type of sensation. However, an initial problem arises when I have to rely on my memory to confirm that my new experience is an instance of "S." Nothing in my memory provides enough justification for such confirmation. That is, if I need to remember what "S" feels like, I may need to compare my current sensation with my memory of "S."

"I impress it on myself" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about "right." (§ 258)

To Wittgenstein, the problem is how meanings are fixed in a private language (Canfield, 1986). This question could be analogously asked in Greenfield's terms. How are the meanings of organizational concepts fixed if they are defined privately and subjectively? How does one remember the concept's application correctly in the future? So memory seems to be an issue. Indeed, the private linguist seems to rely on the infallibility of memory, which is too much to ask. However, Wittgenstein goes further: he is asking for the *rules or criteria* used to determine whether a meaning is used properly (Kenny, 1971).

Let us remember the discussion above about following a rule. One thing is to follow a rule and another is to believe that one is following a rule: "'Well, I believe that this is the sensation S again.' Perhaps you *believe* that you believe it!" (Wittgenstein, 1953, § 260). A private language makes it impossible to judge whether a statement is true or false. Indeed, in a private language, there is no possibility of establishing a rule to fix the meaning of a concept, and, therefore, the truth value of a statement cannot be assessed because one cannot contrast the statement with the meaning of the concepts included in the statement (Kenny, 1971; Candlish & Wrisley, 2008). Moreover, if it is impossible to tell the difference between the initial meaning and future meanings, given that I lack a method to identify my sensations and experiences, then my private language is useless or is not a language at all because it has no way to fix meanings to words.

Wittgenstein's point is that the meaningfulness of a concept depends on the availability of public criteria for its use. In the absence of such criteria, there is no possibility of communication and thus there is no language.

How does one make sense of this puzzle? Greenfield said that organizations are intrinsically tied to practices, actions, and symbols, but also stressed the role of individual meanings to understand them. Following Wittgenstein, a theory of meaning centered in subjective meanings would become incoherent because it could not support any theory of language. My proposal is that Greenfield's framework not only requires a subject-centered methodology in order to account for individual differences in organization, but also

requires a notion of practice and action to account for the origin of meanings in organization. In this sense, meanings come into existence in the practices; it is in practice and through action that we contrast whether our model of organization is existentially coherent. The actions of the leader are not managerial or bureaucratic; they are also a moral task (Greenfield, 1991) that can be resolved only in practice with others. Although meanings have an important role in this array, they are not sufficient. This framework requires a person who understands these meanings and creates models of organization in them. So a method to study subjective engagement with organization is needed, and this is Greenfield's contribution. He envisaged a discipline that pays respect to the individual, to difference, to diversity, a discipline founded in the subject, but founded in practice: a humane science.

### Conclusion: Toward a Theory of Interpretation

It is necessary to point out that Greenfield's (1986) views are framed in his general criticism of the "methods of positivistic science ... as the only ones by which scholars might gain reliable knowledge of administrative realities" (p. 58). In his view, this "scientific" image of educational administration was incomplete because it omitted the subjective accounts of human experience. However, as Allison (2003) points out, Greenfield had a limited image of science that led him to attack logical positivism, but was silent on other models of science like fallibilism.

At the beginning of this article, I say that Greenfield's discussion of meaning is one of his most important contributions to educational administration. He understood the importance of developing an epistemology of educational administration, and most of his themes point toward this project. Nonetheless, the issue of the nature of meaning is not entirely developed in his work (Gronn, 1983). In order to explore some possibilities in Greenfield's work, I orchestrate a dialogue between Greenfield and one of his most admired philosophers, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Greenfield is an author with a wide scope of topics and ideas that can be assessed from a number of perspectives. I chose Wittgenstein because as I demonstrate, Greenfield himself started a dialogue with this Austrian philosopher.

Regarding the issue of power and language in educational organizations, I show that the only way Greenfield could resolve the problem of the origin of organizational agreement and organizational action was by invoking the exercise of power of some individual on others. Indeed, given the implicit subjectivism in Greenfield's account, there is no room for notions like *collective action* or *organizational action* because no group agency could be achieved where the organization-related concepts are methodologically subject-centered.

My aim in this article is to point to the blank spots left by Greenfield, but also to suggest some areas of further research. One path would be to develop

a theory for interpreting action in educational administration. I believe that this is what Greenfield had in mind when he explored the issue of meaning. It is clear that he was interested in the semantic frameworks that we use to interpret action as organizational action. Regardless of the nature of such semantic frameworks, the importance of a theory of meaning rests on its potential to provide a semantic framework for the interpretation of actions and situations in the context of an educational organization. I believe that this is the main function of a theory of meaning in educational administration.

Greenfield (1980) was clearly interested in interpreting actions, and at some point he was aware of the skeptical implications of his ideas. For example he wrote,

I believe it is possible to mediate between frames of subjective meaning in somewhat the same way that we translate from one language to another. It is done, it is accomplished, though it is hard to lay down the rules for doing so. The method is that of hermeneutical analysis that demands as perhaps its only unequivocal rule "a respect for the authenticity of the mediated frames of meaning," that is, respect for other minds and meaning. (p. 49)

In this passage, he suggests a hermeneutical approach to bridge the interpretive gap between individual world views. Unfortunately, he did not develop this idea further. In this article, I suggest some pathways to bridge this gap.

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