

# Addressing 21<sup>st</sup> Century Challenges in Education

## An Ecocritical Conceptual Framework toward an *Ecotistical* Leadership in Education

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### ABSTRACT

This article critiques the notion of individually-focused notions of leadership, instead offering an ecocritical conceptual framework that works to support education at all levels with the aim of recognizing the importance of how leaders in Western industrial culture think, act, and thus organize communities. This framework is applied to examine the potential for EdD programs to critically (re)imagine the role K-12 and higher education institutions might play in reinterpreting how leadership might be (re)constituted—as local and in support of social justice and sustainability. From this lens, the article explores how 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges that emerge from the complex intersections of social justice and sustainability might be addressed through EdD program development, supportive program structures, and course content influencing teacher education and K-12 school leadership. Calling for a particular kind of leadership supportive of social justice and sustainability, this article shares examples from the authors own practice, program structures, curriculum, and future research.

### INTRODUCTION

The vision of the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) calls for the development of leaders prepared to address the educational challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Given the intractable local and global challenges of humanitarian crises, the effects of climate change, and widespread concern for democracy, CPED provides timely guiding principles that focus efforts and attention in EdD programming on equity, ethics, and social justice. Programming that strives for alignment with the CPED initiative offers the potential for the development of educational leaders whom one might characterize as both critical and ethical—in other words, these programs seek to develop an educational leadership committed to working toward justice while addressing a myriad of challenges facing us all in the early years of this century. Given the current political context in the United States, it is hard to not consider the politics of the presidential campaign in 2016 as an example of where such 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges were brought into the fold of mainstream discourses of what constitutes leadership. Sanders (2016) stated:

Election days come and go. But the struggle of the people to create a government which represents all of us and not just the 1 percent—a government based on the principles of economic, social, racial and environmental justice—that struggle continues. And I look forward to being part of that struggle with you (para. 4)

Although Sanders made these comments in his concession speech at the Democratic Convention in which he pledged his support for his opponent Hilary Clinton, his attention to these principles of justice resonated throughout his primary campaign. While they are certainly not new ideas—nor ought they be attributed to originating with or belonging to him or his campaign—they serve as powerful public markers of the kind of leadership the world needs, wants, and

is demanding. The world needs leaders deeply committed to social justice and sustainability. However, questions still remain regarding why we need a different kind of leadership and what that different leadership might entail.

There are 7.5 billion people in the world. Despite a growing awareness of human rights, the circumstances of an estimated 700 million people living in extreme poverty are dire (United Nations, 2014). Most often, women and children bear the brunt of this tragic, and at times fatal, suffering (United Nations, 2016). The United Nations Children's Fund (2016) reports that “unless the world tackles inequity today, in 2030: 69 million children under the age of 5 will die between 2016 and 2030” (p. 3), and the outlook for the world's impoverished youth is becoming increasingly grim. The United Nations (2015) reports that since 1990, global carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions “have increased by over 50 per cent since 1990” (p. 8) and scientists have argued that this increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is linked to changes in climate that contribute to increased floods, droughts, famine, and war (American Meteorological Society, 2012; Anderegg, Prall, Harold, & Schneider, 2010; Doran & Zimmerman, 2009; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2015; Oreskes, 2004). Given current conditions of social suffering and the increasing impact of climate change potentially contributing to even greater widespread harm, current leadership models may need to be rethought and their effectiveness evaluated in order to truly address the pressing issues of social justice and sustainability. Furthermore, such matters have become life or death.

As the past decades of educational trends in educational leadership and the impending crises we face in the next half-century clearly demonstrate, a refusal to understand and embrace mutuality and interdependence is woven throughout the interconnected hardships of social suffering and environmental degradation. This refusal is embedded in a conceptual framework based on a system of ex-



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ploitation and violence—a lens that serves as the dominant, shaping force regarding what it means to be a leader. In this article, I assert that a dominant *egotistical* leadership—or leadership focused on the individual or self—must be examined and critiqued for its limitations in favor of efforts toward an *ecotistical* leadership approach focused on the health and well-being of a broader ecological community. In confronting this stark contrast, I emphasize that as critical leaders, and especially as educators, we have a responsibility to examine and address how schools create, support, and sustain the violence of social suffering and environmental degradation. When leaders are faced with such challenges, we must be willing to inquire into the ways that current forms of exploitation are rationalized, justified, and/or ignored. In accordance with this inquiry, the purpose of this work is to introduce a different direction for thinking about horizontal educational leadership by presenting an ecocritical conceptual framework for the educational doctorate. Calling for a particular kind of leadership supportive of social justice and sustainability, I share examples from my own practice, program structures, curriculum, and suggestions for research. I conclude by calling for a particular kind of leadership supportive of social justice and sustainability.

### (RE)CONSTITUTING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Central to an ecocritical framework is the importance of recognizing the differences between ecological cultures and intelligences; and dominant human and individual-centered cultures. An ecocritical educational framework can be characterized as the examination and analysis of the ways in which culture, language, and the associated values and beliefs, shape our thinking and thus contribute to injustice—and the ability to confront the assumptions that underscore unjust social suffering and environmental degradation (Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2015, 2016a). Such efforts require explicit attention to understanding diversity and the eco-social structural relationships between language, culture, and education that define how we recognize and understand difference. I draw from Weintraub’s (2006) introduction of the term *eco-tistical* in response to a lack of terminology in the English language that describes “humans relating to the nonhuman environment in a harmonious, respectful, and pragmatic manner” (p. 55). By switching *ego-* to *eco-* she intended to direct “focus away from self and toward home or habitat” in response to the absence of any opposite terminology for anthropocentric—the privileging of humanity—and egocentric—the privileging of self (Weintraub, et al., 2006, p.55). In this sense, the term *ecocentric* is an adjective for ecological consciousness, or what Martusewicz and Edmundson (2005) propose as an “eco-ethical consciousness” (p. 73) that takes into consideration the social and environmental impact of decision making and recognizes them as inextricably linked.

The primary emphasis of a growing body of scholarship identifying as ecocritical is a recognition of the limitations of how we—as subjects of Western industrial culture—understand and situate ourselves—humans—as a species that exists separate from and superior to all other forms of living and non-living beings (Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2016b). Within that growing body of literature, scholars are increasingly using the phrase “more-than-human” (Abram, 1996) to draw attention to the larger set of ecological relationships that exist beyond those that are bounded by emphasizing only humans in relationship with other humans. Thus, henceforth in this article, I’ll use the term *more-than-human* to refer to plants, ani-

mals, streams, forests, soil, rocks, and so on to emphasize the existence of webs of connections that do not necessarily even include the human as a reference point. When addressing the injustices perpetuated by the conviction of human supremacy on the planet, ecocritical scholarship in education identifies the important role that schools, and more specifically educators and educational leaders, play in reproducing and reinforcing the root assumptions informing this belief. Therefore, an ecocritical framework is explicitly designed to interrupt and (re)constitute Western industrial assumptions that inform and structure how educators teach, and how such teaching might shape students’ understanding of their human existence in relation to each other and, more specifically, to the living systems to which they belong.

As an ecocritical educator working to facilitate and encourage a change in mindsets for leadership, I focus on *anthropocentrism*—or human-centered thinking. Anthropocentrism is the conviction that human beings are superior to other forms of life/matter and that human wants and needs supersede that of everything else. Importantly, I do not make the argument that anthropocentrism should take priority over other dominant discourses constructing Western industrial culture—such as patriarchy, racism, ableism, classism, and so forth. Rather, I assert that if a critique of anthropocentrism is not included in the critical (re)constituting of how we think as leaders, then it is likely we will continue to fail to address the deep habits of mind upon which many social justice issues are predicated. Our thoughts and actions all exist in complex relationships to one another, and our environments and the diverse relationships within them constitute and mediate how we construct meaning as a culture (Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Martusewicz et al., 2015).

An important premise of an ecocritical framework is that the human-supremacist worldview is a cultural construct. In other words, this stance asserts that we, as humans—specifically those of us constituted by, and constituting, dominant Western industrial culture—have learned to think and behave according to culturally constructed, relational ways of understanding, and we use this understanding to interpret relationships and thus create meaning. Given the nature of meaning as culturally constructed, an ecocritical framework focuses on the ways in which meaning can be constructed in a manner that is supportive of the health and well-being of the entire community. Our cultural constructions can be interrupted and shifted when we learn to think differently about our relationships to each other and to the natural world. Thus, recognizing an anthropocentric worldview is an important entry point for rethinking human-centrism and the role of educators to further teach toward (un)learning the injustice and pervasive violence of Western industrial culture.

An essential role of leaders committed to ecotistical leadership is to recognize and value leadership that does not explicitly perpetuate human-supremacy, and in so doing, work to identify and revalue the critical practices of mutual aid and interdependence that still exist in communities all over the world. To help explain this work, I draw from an image that compares a human-centered worldview to an ecological worldview. This illustration has appeared on a variety of social media networks and blogs—most notably credit can be given to the organization Generation Alpha. The Ego vs. Eco image—having made its way around through posts, blogs, brochures, t-shirts, and posters—illustrates two fundamentally different worldviews. Adapting the Internet meme “Ego vs. Eco,” Figure 1 depicts an Ego-centric worldview:



Figure 1. Egocentric Worldview adapted from “Differing Worldviews” (Martusewicz et al., 2015, p. 11). This figure illustrates the socially constructed hierarchical worldview of Western industrial culture.

Focusing on Figure 1, I emphasize the need for educational leaders to engage in recognizing an anthropocentric worldview—that is, one that takes humans as the reference point—and how that worldview is culturally constituted and maintained. In the context of schools, educators and educational leaders can play a vital role in challenging this egocentric worldview that reflects our culture’s anthropocentrism.

Educators and educational leaders have the ability—and arguably, the social and ethical responsibility—to prepare citizens who both understand the need for and potential of (re)constituting this problematic worldview in favor of those more supportive of social justice and sustainability—such as an ecotistical worldview (pictured in Figure 2).

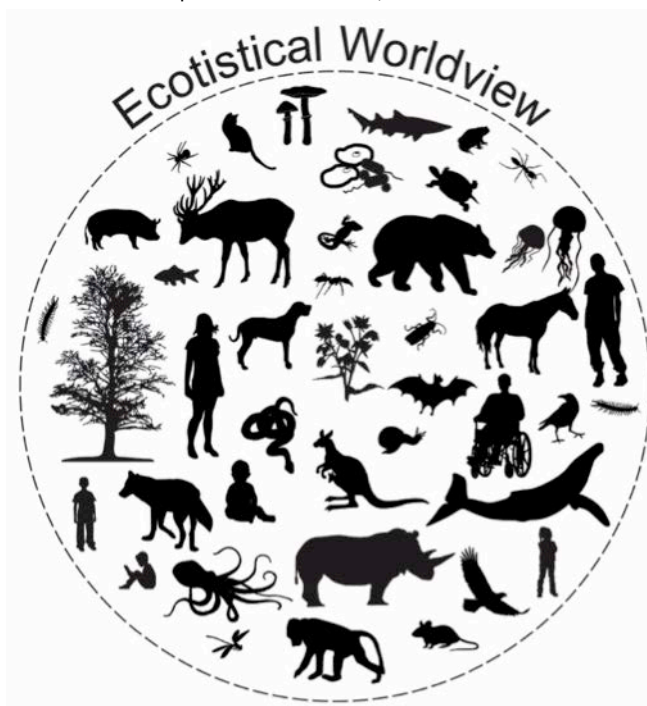


Figure 2. Ecotistical Worldview adapted from “Differing Worldviews” (Martusewicz et al., 2015, p. 11). This figure illustrates an ecologically balanced worldview often overlooked and devalued in Western industrial culture.



Examining and discussing Figure 1 and Figure 2 provides educational leaders with an opportunity for dialogue about the ways in which worldviews can support or conflict with our leadership efforts to address the challenges of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. As educators and educational leaders engage in a critique of anthropocentrism, they develop the capability to cultivate habits of mind that support and sustain all species, not just humans. These habits of mind help to challenge destructive assumptions and practices promoted by anthropocentric egotistical leadership—a leadership approach that is all too prevalent and which often dominates school, family, and community politics. Recognizing the ways in which language influences culture and the ways in which culture influences language is essential as we conceptualize and implement changes to what could and ought to be truly inclusive communities. Thus, language plays an important role in how we interpret and examine the relationship between these two differing, and often conflicting, worldviews. For instance, leadership conceptualized through an ecocritical framework challenges the prominence of dualistic and binary thinking in Western industrial culture. This process includes analyzing hierarchized superior/inferior dualisms in order to identify how such dualistic thinking works to uphold and perpetuate a problematic value-hierarchy that frames our understanding of our relationships with one another, ourselves, and the more-than-human communities to which we all belong.

Plumwood (2002) illustrates how in Western industrial cultures humans overwhelmingly understand relationality through sets of value-hierarchized dualisms. This thinking not only justifies and perpetuates anthropocentrism (human/nature), it also upholds forms of oppression such as racism (White/Person of Color), classism (wealthy/poor), sexism (male/female), ableism (typical/atypical), and so on. All of these forms of oppression rely on value-hierarchized dualisms that inform how we understand and interact with one another.

To help explain how this applies to educational leaders learning to recognize sets of superior/inferior dualisms, I offer an example from my practice. The following is a list of some of the dualisms I use while working with teachers and educational leaders to address the logic structure of leadership in Western industrial culture. This list includes but is not limited to:

- superior / inferior
- central / marginalized
- human / nature
- man / woman
- masculine / feminine
- reason / emotion
- mind / body
- wealthy / poor
- White / Person of Color
- civilized / savage
- master / slave
- employer / employee
- teacher / student
- adult / child

As we look at this list together, I ask the educational leaders to stack some of the value-hierarchized dualisms together with superior/inferior and central/marginalized, and then to describe how the dualisms work together as a group. Grouping and stacking a smaller subset of the list shared above visually illustrates for students how these dualisms work within Western industrial culture to set up what is often referred to as the *norm* or the *standard*. Afterward, we high-

light how these dualisms discipline our relationships, with an emphasis on the fact that while these dualisms inform how we think and act, it is important to remain mindful that “A map is *not* the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness” (Korzybski, 1933/1994, p. 58). Specifically focused on identifying and unsettling notions of superiority, we use this opportunity to examine how these hierarchized-dualisms combine to support exploitation and domination of others through our leadership and, simultaneously, how de(re)constructing them offers potentials for alternatives in how we lead.

To better understand the importance of de(re)constructing these dualisms it is necessary to recognize how the terms and subject positions in the first column—which name those that are most highly valued within Western industrial culture—clearly illustrate how, for example, subject positions of wealthy individuals are considered more valuable than those in the second column, the poor. The high value and privilege afforded those in the first column are ascribed via a cultural logic structure that prioritizes and values them at the expense of those in the adjacent column. This list illustrates how such dualisms combine for those identified as being the subject position within the left-hand column to reinforce and legitimize power over, and control of, those identified as subject positions in the column on the right. Although such hierarchies are examined through critical pedagogies in teacher education and educational leadership programs, the direct relationship of human/nature to the other dualisms depicted in the list is a vital facet of this logic that is often overlooked. Pedagogically, I aim for these provocative placements, and specifically, listing them to illustrate how these value-hierarchized dualisms function together, to encourage leaders and potential leaders to critically and ethically question the fundamental assumptions in Western industrial culture about relationships when considering the work they set out to do and the supports they intend to provide. I also intentionally use this list and the described process of drawing attention to the value-hierarchized dualisms and the connections between them to facilitate an understanding of the nature of these value hierarchies as intersectional. Further, I strive to cultivate an understanding of the ways in which these dualisms function—while acknowledging that they are not universally experienced—to expose the inequitable construction of what is often valued and rewarded as “normal” in Western industrial culture and which has manifested in an egotistical very male-centered, White, human supremacist leadership.

## TEACHING TOWARDS AN ECOTISTICAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

With roots in critical pedagogy (Freire, 1993; hooks, 1994; McLaren, 2006; Darder, 2015) and ecocritical pedagogical frameworks (Bowers, 1993; Gruenewald, 2003; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Kahn, 2010; Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2015, 2016a; Martusewicz, Edmundson, & Lupinacci, 2015), this work strives to identify and confront deep cultural assumptions informing worldviews in efforts to support educational leadership for social justice and sustainability. When we are faced with these commitments and the recognition that they are interrelated, it is important to recognize that our cultures play a significant role in how we think and act. It is from such a socio-linguistic and postmodernist position that educational leaders must learn to examine how and why we—as scholar-practitioners—think and act the ways we do. Accordingly, in educational leadership programs, students must learn to see the critical connections between empirical, social, and behavioral research and



that they recognize their role as cultural workers in their communities (Freire, 1998).

As many issues of inequality and unjust suffering are embedded within educational structures that maintain and reproduce the unjust sociological phenomena of Western industrial culture, I strive to uphold the expectation that my teaching foster community-based learning that is rigorous, relevant, and builds strong community relationships. To support the development of ecocritical leaders in any community, educational leaders must aspire to being cultural workers, respected and disciplined researchers, effective and engaging speakers, and must both talk-the-talk and walk-the-walk.

Drawing from a diverse set of pedagogical frameworks rooted in critical theory, the Washington State University (WSU) College of Education's conceptual framework expresses its commitment to diversity and the importance of interrupting the status quo systems of privilege and power as part of its core values. Listed as one of the core values in the conceptual framework, the College of Education (2009) aims:

To understand the myriad ways in which diversity manifests itself in our workplace, and embrace inclusive and non-discriminatory practices. Group differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, ideology and socioeconomic status, can play powerful roles in relationships in the work place and in higher education. We aim to eliminate stereotypes based on those factors and create a democratic environment based on respect. In doing so, we recognize how communities and individuals inform and rely on one another in our work and our lives. We seek to promote critical thought of these issues among ourselves and in our candidates toward the far-reaching goal of social justice. (p. 3)

This commitment to social justice and sustainability carries over into perspectives that contribute to the Educational Leadership EdD Program. There is a strong connection between the conceptual framework and a commitment to the self-reflective process of sharing diverse understandings of what it means for a program to be committed to social justice and sustainability. With strong attention to the inextricable relationship between social justice and sustainability, a critical contingency of faculty in the program strives to recognize that 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges of social justice and sustainability require a strong commitment to understanding and interrupting the complex relationships that constitute, and are constituted by, dominant discourses and discursive practices of Western industrial culture in schools and society. Furthermore, it is essential that such interruptions be intricately and intimately intertwined with our own work in relationship to the tasks we ask of our students and future students.

For example, within the critical tradition (Horkheimer, 1976; Horkheimer & Adorno 2007; Marcuse, 1964, 1989), there exists an ecocritical movement working toward recognizing social and environmental justice as inseparable and inextricably linked with the value-hierarchized social thought of the Enlightenment (Bowers, 1993, 2001, 2006, 2010, 2013; Bowers & Flinders, 1990; Code, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003; Kahn, 2010; Martusewicz et al., 2015; Merchant, 1983; Plumwood, 1993, 2002). An ecocritical approach in a program committed to the role of educational leaders dedicated to social justice and sustainability in education addresses how education is shaped by systems of exploitation, violence, and a refusal to understand and embrace mutuality and interdependence (Lupinacci & Happel-Parkins, 2015, 2016a). To respond to the violence perpetuated by our current social, economic, and environmental contexts, ecocritical educators have the responsibility to examine and address

how it is that schools create, support, and sustain the violence of social suffering and environmental degradation. When faced with such a challenge, ecocritical educators ask: *How is it that exploitation, and the associated unjust social suffering and environmental degradation, is rationalized, justified, and/or ignored?* In an attempt to address this question, a growing critical contingency at WSU, and throughout the CPED network, is taking the position that we, as scholar practitioners, must put to work an ecocritical approach to address inequities in education.

The College of Education at WSU has a collaboratively designed educational doctoral program that sets out to "prepare practitioner-scholars for leadership roles and challenges in education at the local, state, national, and international levels" (2015, p. 6). As members of CPED, the program committee regularly works to ensure that they are reflecting on how the program is shaped by and held accountable to social justice using two guiding frameworks: 1) The College of Education Conceptual Framework (2009); and 2) CPED's Definition of the Education Doctorate & Working Principles for the Professional Practice Doctorate in Education and the accompanying "Design Concepts for Professional Preparation and Program" (CPED, 2015, pp. 1-2).

Working in relation to social justice, the program at WSU has objectives that are carried out through a combination of coursework and field experience in connection with inquiry practices of a variety of research methods that often culminate in action research. Expressing the goal of the program in the handbook, the program committee states: "The ultimate goal is to prepare educational leaders who work together toward the goals of educational and institutional improvement and social justice" (p. 9). Further in the breakdown of outcomes, two of the five outcomes explicitly express a commitment to social justice. Outcomes listed in the program's handbook state:

- Identify and analyze the theories, research, and policies, related to the study of K-12 educational/teacher leadership: ethics and social justice; inquiry; policy; and leadership development.
- Prepare and present written work to both academic and practitioner audiences.
- Understand, evaluate, and apply educational theory and inquiry knowledge and skills to problems of policy and practice of educational leadership.
- Design, conduct, report, and present clear and coherent research studies that contribute to understanding and solving problems of practice on multiple levels of educational leadership.
- Articulate core values and model the guiding principles of the profession including: commitment to social justice; understanding of ethical responsibilities of leadership; effective and respectful interaction with others of similar and diverse cultures, values, and perspectives; commitment to school improvement and a positive impact on student learning (p. 9)

Given the program's objective and connected outcomes, it is not hard for those familiar with CPED's description of the Professional Doctorate in Education to see the connections to, and influence from, CPED's charge that the scholarly-practitioner is responsible to addressing "questions of equity, ethics, and social justice" in relationship to the development and implementation of "solutions to complex problems of practice" (p. 1). Furthermore, the WSU College of Education Conceptual Framework (2009) states:

The College of Education contributes to the theory and practice of the broad field of education, and dedicates itself to understanding and respecting learners in diverse cultural contexts. We facilitate engaged learning and ethical leadership in



schools and clinical settings. We seek collaboration with diverse constituencies, recognizing our local and global responsibilities to communities, environments, and future generations.

Visually represented on the walls of the classrooms and in every syllabi and program handbook is a shortened version of the statement—“Collaboration with diverse communities of *learners* in cultural context, engaged *learning* with meaning and purpose, and ethical *leadership* toward a sustainable and just future.” This statement graphically organizes the three concepts of *learners*, *learning*, and *leadership* in a Venn diagram and serves as a powerful tool for connecting students and teachers with the college’s commitment to what CPED (2015) refers to as the role of developing scholarly practitioners through signature pedagogy, inquiry as practice, and problems of practice.

As a recent addition to the program committee—with my background as a teacher leader, educational researcher, and critical foundations teacher educator—I see these guiding frameworks as playing a large role in holding us as leaders in education ethically accountable to social justice and sustainability. Seeing social justice and sustainability as a complex but interconnected challenge for both current and future generations, I engage through the design of coursework and conducting collaborative research in a self-reflexive ecocritical pedagogical process. This process is framed primarily by engaging in the process of recognizing the relationship between language, culture, knowledge, and power specifically in relationship to any set of diverse problems of practice. In my conceptualization of this particular graduate program at WSU, I see it differing from more traditional approaches to educational doctoral coursework that tends to separate teachers from administrators. By design, this EdD program envisions the higher education classrooms as collaborate spaces where local, national, and international problems of practice are not only identified and examined but also where proposed solutions are discussed across traditional professional barriers.

All too often while working with critical social justice teachers in K-12 classrooms, I would hear echoes of an overwhelming experience that leadership at the building, district, and state level were not entirely supportive of educational changes in the classroom, such as place-based and project-based learning. Yet, while working with principals and district and state level leaders, I would regularly hear that they were working toward their teachers and schools being more student-centered, culturally responsive, and engaged in place-based, and/or project based learning. Clearly, a breakdown occurred in the ability of these two (to simplify these groups a bit) categories of working professionals that were likely learning about the same conceptual interventions to inequity in education but not enough about how to implement and sustain those changes as an entire school community or network of school communities. I jumped at the chance to teach in the program’s Summer Leadership Institute—which I fell into out of the generosity of my colleagues—and immediately learned that this program was fostering an intentional space devoted to developing a very different kind of educational leader: leaders that took social justice and sustainability seriously and that were focused on all levels of public education supporting such initiatives.

It is one thing to say you are committed to social justice and sustainability, but it is another thing entirely to take on addressing, examining, and proposing solutions to inequities in education, society, and the cultural belief systems undergirding the vastly experienced day-to-day violence of oppression and domination of poverty, sexism, racism, ableism, and speciesism. I thought, if this is possible to do in higher education—and more specifically through the

development of scholar-practitioners—then this was as good an opportunity as any to see if we as critical and ethical scholar-educators could commit to interrupting the systemic inequities reproduced by current public schooling in the United States. Certainly, this fit into the college’s conceptual framework and CPED’s definition and design principles. With that in mind, the following is a brief overview of the coursework, research methodology, and approach to supporting students in the program.

The program is designed for students across the state and region to attend courses throughout the school year through courses delivered through a variety of means that primarily consist of in-person on-campus meetings, video conferencing systems, and online coursework for students in remote locations. Additionally, each cohort of students—which are comprised of an intentional selection of students focused on teacher leadership or educational leadership with diverse backgrounds and professional positions in the state and region—attend a two-week Summer Leadership Institute for two consecutive summers. The program committee explains in the program handbook: “The purpose of the leadership institutes is to build a learning community and support network among the statewide cohort, and to form inquiry groups that will focus dissertation research on common problems of leadership in educational settings” (p. 6). Over the four-year program, students take courses in Leadership, Research, and Foundations together and then fill out their programs with specialized electives and then preliminary exams and dissertation. A typical program of study for students consists of 15 credits in Leadership courses, which consist of the following three credit courses; Leadership Studies, Policy Formation & Analysis in Education, School Organization (or School Administration), Curriculum Theory, Intro to College Student Development (to be replaced by Introduction to Adult Learning and Professional Development). They take the following three credit courses for Research: Action Research, Educational Statistics, Principles of Research, Qualitative Research, and Doctoral Dissertation Preparation. If students elect to do a traditional quantitative dissertation they are required to take a Quantitative Research course that moves beyond the introductory course content they receive in Educational Statistics. Students are also required to take 9 credits of 3 credit Foundations courses: Values & Ethics, Race & Identity, and History & Philosophy of Education.

In theory, the college’s conceptual framework and CPED’s definition of the educational doctorate influence the design and implementation of all courses—and if not in each course, then at a multitude of points through a student’s program. The program faculty in the committee’s current configuration and leadership is at the moment working to curriculum map the courses with a specific emphasis on the role each course plays not only in the scope and sequence of the program but also toward the development of scholar-practitioners committed to social justice and sustainability. The hope is that through this process emerging from a self and group examination of understanding of the program’s objectives in relation to CPED and the college’s conceptual framework, there will be a clearer grasp of a signature pedagogy and inquiry process anchored in addressing problems of practice toward supporting social justice and sustainability. At the current moment, this work is in process and is leaning toward Action Research models that involve community engagement and methods drawing heavily from Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) influencing both the pedagogy in the courses taught, the connected inquiry course assignments, and research dissertations. With an emphasis on where programmatic changes in curriculum and pedagogy can support the ideal of an ecotistical leadership in education,



the program described in this section, although a work in progress, strives to support social justice and sustainability. Colleges of education (and the school districts they serve) are experiencing increasing corporatization under neoliberal influences. In such conditions and facing uncertain futures, leadership education—especially designed and influenced in accordance with CPED—is positioned with the opportunity to intentionally set out to replace such egotistical (anthropocentric and individualistic) priorities with ecotistical (ecological or eco-ethical consciousness) leadership with the interest and goals of better addressing 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the more that educational leaders engage in what this article proposes is a necessary (re)constituting of educational leadership via critically addressing anthropocentrism toward the development and maintaining of an ecotistical leadership, the more potential there will be for educational experiences in schools and communities for educators and other leaders to foster spaces where teachers and students learn together to recognize the tendency of the privileged to dismiss what they would rather not confront. It is important to note that there are plenty of egotistical leaders who for good reason ought to be admired and valued, and who are firm supporters of a shared commitment to respond to the undeniable atrocities that we—as humans—enact on one another. However, none of these atrocities occur in isolation and no solution or political (r)evolution will come from an egotistical authority. In confronting human supremacy and the egotism beholden to Western industrial culture's version of leadership, it is paramount that critical educational leaders work as allied to all those suffering while challenging and confronting the systemic roots of oppression on all our respective fronts. In other words, we all have a responsibility—many of us as privileged members of society—to support those suffering unjustly in whatever capacity we can. As leaders striving toward an ecotistical leadership, we ought to be looking for any and all opportunities to decentralize power from individuals and facilitate a redistribution of power based on justice and equity.

(Re)constituting educational leadership toward an ecotistical leadership requires leaders, and aspiring leaders, in Western industrial culture to stop leading in an egotistical manner, to turn attention toward the difficult necessity for shifting worldviews, and to committing to a cultural change that will mean giving up the power and privilege afforded to some at the cost of others and the environment. As educational leaders deeply embedded in Western industrial culture, for many of us this means learning to listen and practicing humility while trusting that if we, enactors of dominant Western industrial culture, do not (re)constitute the cultural framework by which dominant meanings are socially constructed, then we are destined to recreate many of the problematic relationships that we, as radical educators, often set out to change. Inspired by movements to address unjust suffering from diverse activists around the globe to individual leaders like Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, I am suggesting and sharing in this essay that there are some practical steps toward cultural change and that leadership does not need to be understood or enacted as domination. I end with a list of suggestions aimed toward supporting and addressing the pervasive egotistical leadership in education and turning our efforts toward more ecotistical projects.

- Engage in learning from the diverse projects in our human and more-than-human communities and commit to rethinking the dominant assumptions influencing how we, as humans, construct meaning and thus how we learn to

relate to each other and the more-than-human world. Further, make the commitment to critically and ethically examine how we understand educating, organizing, and taking action towards supporting healthy communities that include all beings and the intrinsic value of recognizing, respecting, and representing the right of all beings to belong to and live in peace within an ecological system.

- Engage in critical and ethical examinations of what it means to be a leader. As notions of leadership are all too often defined in terms of human-centered egotism, it is important to work to (re)constitute leadership in terms of what and how an ecotistical leader might think and act as a leader, and how those often competing but co-existing worldviews contribute to our actions either supporting or undermining the rights of all beings, including future generations, to coexist in peace.
- Engage in examining leadership in terms of ecological systems and the diverse ways in which our living relationships can be recognized, respected, and represented through teaching and learning among all members. Specifically, engage in recognizing the role activist networks in modeling diverse examples of how an ecotistical approach to leadership plays a role in alleviating and eliminating unjust suffering in our communities. Powerfully strong examples in the U.S. can be found in human communities in the Black Lives Matter and Idle No More movements as well as in more mainstream political movements like the Bernie Sanders campaign platform for a political revolution of the US government. Build networks of solidarity with these organizations. Furthermore, ask leaders in these movements about their visions and plans for education that supports social justice and sustainability.
- Engage in supporting the diverse approaches to leading and healing from Western industrial culture and in solidarity show respect for epistemologies that differ from the current dominant way of leading. Support the ways in which diverse forms of resistance work to challenge and break the will of their oppressors and as leaders support this resistance even when it means giving up privilege and power.
- Engage in strong alliance with all those suffering, and support the oppressed in solidarity while simultaneously working to shift and challenge the dominant systems that often perpetuate the suffering of marginalized and subjugated beings. In all cases as leaders stand up, speak out, and take action to stop the systemic domination of one another, ourselves, and our more-than-human kin.

In such volatile and authoritarian times, it is important that ecotistical educational leaders learn to work together to challenge dominant perceptions of what currently constitutes leadership and education and work to (re)constitute toward a leadership that takes serious social justice and sustainability. Efforts toward a political revolution in leadership can begin by focusing on the importance of convivial leadership networks—rather than on individual advancement. Through fostering the development of networks of scholar-practitioners studying and researching 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges that include ecocritical dialogue we can resist the overwhelming egotism and anthropocentrism in Western industrial culture and reject the illusion that as humans we are separate from and superior to each other and all other beings on the planet. We challenge egotism and anthropocentrism when we build solidarity in addressing common dilemmas in our communities with other ecotistical leaders and especially when we teach one another to make choices to include in our leadership networks more-than-humans—be they animals, mountains, trees, a river, the salmon that swim upstream to spawn, the large winged osprey that visit the lakes where we swim and cool off on a hot summer's day, the food that we grow, or the vast net-



works of mycelium in the soil. It matters mostly, in this sense, that we work away from understanding ourselves as independent individuals toward the kind of ecotistical understanding of self as interrelated and interdependent on the diverse living systems to which we belong. The point is that we learn a deep respect for difference and our shared dependencies when we understand in an ecological sense what it means to be ecotistical leaders—to recognize and value that we are in relationship with a diversity of wonderful beings and that we owe our existence to these devoted networks. From such relationships, we learn what it means to lead by belonging and without framing that understanding within anthropocentrism; rather, belonging and respect become the leadership practices that we enact in our everyday lives as ecotistical leaders. When we practice an ecotistical educational leadership it is through these convivial and mutually sustaining relationships that we learn to overcome the isolating ills of Western industrial culture and our habits of egotism, and we are called to action with our diverse sisters and brothers to teach and lead in support of living systems.

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