# Weaving Theory into Practice:
## Preparing Transformative Leaders for Social Justice

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the effects of an alternative, transformative pedagogy that may assist us in responding to the urgent call for changes in the way educational leaders are prepared and developed. Within the contextual loom of preparation programs, the two theoretical perspectives of Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Social Theory are interwoven with the three pedagogical strategies of critical reflection, rational discourse, and policy praxis to increase students' awareness, acknowledgement, and action regarding issues of social justice and equity.

## Introduction

Despite conflicting views of social justice, of the sources of injustice in schools and society, and of educators' obligations to committed action, the evidence is clear and alarming that various segments of our public school population experience negative and inequitable treatment on a daily basis (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Scheurich & Laible, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). When compared to their white middle class counterparts, students of color and low socio-economic status (SES) consistently experience significantly lower achievement test scores, teacher expectations, and allocation of resources (Alexander, Entwisle & Olsen, 2001; Banks, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ortiz, 1997). The "gaps" are persistent, pervasive, and significantly disparate. As such, many scholars (see Cochran-Smith, Albert, Dimattia, Freedman, Jackson, Mooney, Neisler, Peck, & Zollers, 1999; Grogan, 2000; Kincheloe

& Steinberg, 1995; Shields & Oberg, 2000) advocate for a critique of educational systems in terms of access, power and privilege based on race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, language, background, ability and/or socio-economic position. In fact, according to Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, and Koschoreck (2001), "What is critically needed is real-life, context-specific, tactical, anti-racist work in our schools" (p. 239). Given this goal**,** the questions remain—Who? When? Where? How?

The purpose of this paper is to explore the effects of an alternative, transformative pedagogy that may assist us in responding to the urgent call for changes in the way educational leaders are prepared and developed (Jackson, 2001; Young, Peterson & Short, 2001). As moral stewards in a global, diverse, and complex society, school leaders need to be much more heavily invested in "purpose-defining" activities and in "reflective analysis and . . . active intervention" (Bates, 1984, p. 268) as opposed to simply managing existing arrangements (i.e., maintaining the status quo). For such changes to happen, aspiring school leaders need to open their minds (see Rokeach, 1960) and explore their self-understandings that are systematically embedded in mindsets, worldviews, values and experiences. According to Senge (1990), these mental models are "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (p. 8).

The strategies described herein are designed to help future leaders for social justice develop as "transformative intellectuals who are both active, reflective scholars and practitioners," who "engage in political interests that are emancipatory in nature" (Sleeter, 1993, p. ix). By being actively engaged in a number of assignments requiring the examination of ontological and epistemological assumptions, values and beliefs, context and experience, and competing worldviews, I believe, and the data analysis confirms, that adult learners are better equipped to work with and guide others in translating their perspectives, perceptions, and goals into agendas for social change. The exploration of new understandings, the synthesis of new information, and the integration of these insights throughout personal and professional spheres can lead future educational leaders to a broader, more inclusive approach in addressing equity issues. Within the contextual loom of preparation programs, the two theoretical perspectives of Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Social Theory are interwoven with the three pedagogical strategies of critical reflection, rational discourse, and policy praxis to increase students' awareness, acknowledgement, and action.

## Review of the Literature

If current and future educational leaders are expected to foster successful, equitable and socially responsible learning and accountability practices for ALL students, then substantive changes in educational leadership preparation and professional development programs are required. New understandings of leader-

ship and redesigns of such programs have sparked much needed debate regarding the knowledge base, course offerings, and foundational purpose of educational administration (see Donmoyer, 1999; English, 2000; Murphy, 1999). In fact, recent conversations and presentations at the annual conferences of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA) have identified social justice as a new anchor for the entire profession, servant leadership as a new metaphor, and equity for ALL as a new mantra. While many agree that theory, research and practice should be intertwined to support the type of schooling (and society) that values rather than marginalizes, few scholars offer ground-breaking, pragmatic approaches to preparing and developing truly transformative leaders.

In a paper for the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation, Jackson (2001) reviewed innovative and exceptional programs and mentioned the use of cohorts and problem-based learning (see Bridges & Hallinger, 1995) as two instructional strategies worth merit. She also reported, "Issues that did not appear as dominant in these programs as one would expect are those of social justice, equity, excellence, and equality. These are areas that warrant our serious attention especially in light of the changing demographics of our schools" (p. 18). Research and shifts in the profession agree. One might think that issues of such great concern would be highly visible in the preparation of school leaders, but Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002) learned that "while diversity is given a certain degree of lip service in administrative credentialing programs, these leaders had not be prepared with tools to analyze racial or ethnic conflict, or with specific strategies for building positive interethnic communities" (p. 4). Results from Lyman and Villani's (2002) national survey indicated a similar void—only 14.3 percent of the respondents perceive social justice to be receiving the "most emphasis" in their preparation programs. Young and Laible's (2000) review of such programs concluded, "the incorporation of a few competency entries that include the words of race, gender, culture, and diversity do not reflect a serious attempt at addressing these critical problems" (p. 387).

The movement *from* a "community of sameness" *to* a "community of difference" (see Furman, 1998; Murtadha-Watts, 1999; Shields & Seltzer, 1997) underscores the urgent need to confront socially difficult topics with respect, dialogue, and a continuous expansion of awareness, acknowledgement, and action. Developing the vocabulary, skills, and knowledge necessary to engage in substantive discussions regarding the dynamics of difference is a critical component to the preparation of leaders for social justice and equity.

> Wise educational leaders will learn to create psychological spaces for genuine exploration of difference; they will initiate conversations where problems and challenges may be identified and discussed; and they will create a climate in which staff and students feel safe in clarifying their assumptions to deal with cultural dissonance. (Shields, Larocque & Oberg, 2002, p. 130)

While Andrews and Grogan (2001) call for aspiring principals to "understand their ethical and moral obligations to create schools that promote and deliver social justice" (p.24), the question of how to accomplish this remains unanswered. If "Leadership is the enactment of values" (Miron, 1996), then preparation programs must include approaches that enable participants to challenge their own assumptions, clarify and strengthen their own values, and work on aligning their own behaviors and practice with these beliefs, attitudes and philosophies. This article outlines clearly the need for professors to retool their teaching and courses to address issues of power and privilege—to weave social justice into the fabric of educational leadership curriculum, pedagogy, programs and policies. By exposing candidates to information and ideas that they may resist, leadership programs can assist students in stretching beyond their comfort zones to a deeper consciousness of equity.

I agree with Bandura (1982) that beliefs mediate knowledge and action (behaviors/skills) and argue that integrating interventions with diversity and social justice content can enhance the development of leaders for social justice and equity. Courses designed for individuals preparing for careers as educational administrators should require critical thought and systematic reflection regarding ideas, values, and beliefs surrounding social life, cultural identity, educational reform, and historical practices. Adult learners can then be challenged to explore these constructs from numerous, diverse, changing perspectives. Personal biases and preconceived notions they hold about people who are different from themselves by race, ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and physical and mental abilities can be identified and discussed. As such, these courses require an active, sustained engagement in the subject matter and an openness of mind and heart. Students need time and structure to think, reflect, assess, decide and possibly move from their current perspectives or status to another level of commitment and action. While the strategies proposed in this article are specifically focused on preservice training, their applicability to ongoing development is viewed as an important and necessary complement. This practical, process-oriented model promotes awareness through critical reflection, acknowledgement through rational discourse, and action through policy praxis.

## Theoretical Framework

"Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Bell, 1997, p. 3). Teaching for social justice, according to Ayers (1998), "arouses students, engages them in a quest to identify obstacles to their full humanity, to their freedom" (p.xvii), and ends in action to move against those obstacles. Preparing transformative leaders to accept this challenge necessitates both a close examination of personal beliefs coupled with a critical analysis of professional behavior. Together, these processes can lead to a transformation of

one's own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others. The alternative pedagogy described in this paper is aimed at developing leaders for social justice and is framed within two interwoven theoretical perspectives—transformative learning theory and critical social theory. By weaving theory into practice, students can grow in their awareness, acknowledgement and action toward a more humane society that removes all forms of injustice.

## Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning changes the way people see themselves and their world. It attempts to explain how their expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning they derive from their experiences. Mezirow (1991), relying heavily on adult learning theory and Habermas' (1984) communicative theory, proposed a theory of transformative learning "that can explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they construe experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meanings themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional" (p. xii). Three common themes of Mezirow's theory are the centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse (see also Boyd, 1991; Cranton, 1994; Kegan, 1994).

Perspective transformation explains how the meaning structures that adults have acquired over a lifetime become transformed. These meaning structures, which are inclusive of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives, are frames of reference that are based on the totality of individuals' cultural and contextual experiences. Meaning schemes, the smaller components, are "made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience" (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 5-6). For learners to change their "meaning schemes," they must engage in critical reflection of their experiences, which in turns leads to a perspective transformation.

The purposes of critical reflection are to externalize and investigate power relationships and to uncover hegemonic assumptions. Critical reflection, according to Brookfield (1995), "focuses on three interrelated processes; (1) the process by which adults question and then replace or reframe an assumption that up to that point has been uncritically accepted as representing commonsense wisdom, (2) the process through which adults take alternative perspectives on previously taken for granted ideas, actions, forms of reasoning and ideologies, and (3) the process by which adults come to recognize the hegemonic aspects of dominant cultural values . . ." (p. 2). Mezirow (1998) posited that adult learning occurs in four ways—elaborating existing frames of reference, learning frames of references, transforming points of view, and transforming habits of mind—and named critical reflection as a component of all four. Mezirow argued that the overall purpose of adult development is to realize

one's agency through increasingly expanding awareness and critical reflection. He also argued that the educational tasks of critical reflection involve helping adults become aware of oppressive structures and practices, developing tactical awareness of how they might change these, and building the confidence and ability to work for collective change.

According to transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), rational discourse is a means for testing the validity of one's construction of meaning. It is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed. Rational discourse involves a commitment to extended and repeated conversations that evolve over time into a culture of careful listening and cautious openness to new perspectives, not shared understanding in the sense of consensus, but rather deeper and richer understandings of our own biases as well as where our colleagues are coming from on particular issues and how each of us differently constructs those issues. Given this, participation in extended and repeated discourse about justice and equity can provide unique opportunities for learner growth, transformation and empowerment.

> As we struggle to understand how issues of race and ethnicity affect the educational experiences for all students, we must work to overcome our prejudices by listening carefully to those whose backgrounds, perspectives, and understandings differ from our own. We must examine popular assumptions as well as the politically correct stereotypes that educators often use to explain what is happening in today's multicultural society and its increasingly ethnically heterogeneous schools. Engaging in socially just leadership requires us to maintain an open conversation, to examine and reexamine our perceptions and those of others, constantly looking beneath the surface and seeking alternative explanations and ways of understanding. (Shields et al., 2002, p.134)

## Critical Social Theory

Freire's (1970) work portrayed a practical and theoretical approach to emancipation through education. He wanted people to develop an "ontological vocation" (p.12); a theory of existence, which views people as subjects, not objects, who are constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation of their world so it can become a more equitable place for all to live. Unlike Mezirow's personal transformation, Freire was much more concerned about a social transformation, a demythologizing of reality and an awakening of critical consciousness whereby people perceive the social, political, and economic contradictions of their time and take action against the oppressive elements. "Like Mezirow, Freire sees critical reflection as central to transformation in context to problem-posing and dialogue with other learners. However, in contrast, Freire sees its purpose based on a rediscovery of power such that the more critically aware learners become the more they are able to transform society and subsequently their own reality" (Taylor, 1998, p.17).

Building on these Freirean interpretations of praxis, reflection only becomes truly critical when it leads to some form of transformative social action. hooks'

*Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994) echoed Freire's philosophy and highlighted the importance of an educational system that counteracts the propagation of ideological elements in a racist, sexist, and classist society by interrogating the political implications of "externally" imposed curriculum standards, "banking" pedagogical approaches, and "hierarchical" arrangements within educational settings.

Critical social theory calls educators to activism. Activists stand between the constituent base and the powerholders. Their role is to organize constituents, articulate their concerns, and negotiate/advocate on their behalf with powerholders; to develop a repertoire of action strategies with the long-term aim of shifting power (Tilley, 1993). Educational activists recognize the ethical dimensions of teaching other people's children, they work to provide them with the highest quality of education they would desire for their own children, and they learn to work as an ally with the community. Educational activists share power with marginalized groups, they seek out networks, and they teach others to act politically and to advocate individually and collectively for themselves and other marginalized groups. Activism requires a "critical consciousness" and an ability to organize "reflectively for action rather than for passivity" (Freire, 1985, p. 82).

## Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of an alternative, transformative pedagogy aimed at increasing the awareness, acknowledgment, and action of future educational leaders for social justice. The related principal preparation literature supports the more traditional delivery methods of clinical experiences, internships, cohort groups, case studies, and problem-based learning. In this paper, I advocate for these strategies in addition to some more alternative approaches including cultural autobiographies, life histories, diversity workshops, cross-cultural interviews, educational plunges, diversity presentations and panels, reflective analysis journals, and activist assignments at the micro, meso and macro levels (see Table 1).

Forty graduate students of educational administration (two cohorts of preservice administrators) participated in this study (see Table 2 for demographic data). Both cohorts were recently enrolled as full-time students in the two-year Masters of School Administration (MSA) Program at the University. The MSA program prepares individuals to lead schools and other educational organizations. During the first year of study, the forty participants were enrolled in the required educational leadership course entitled, "The Social Context of Educational Leadership" (3 credit hours taught by the researcher). This course challenged students to explore various constructs from numerous, diverse, changing perspectives. Throughout the semester, the students were actively engaged in a number of assignments requiring the synthesis of such information (see Table 1), including the

**Table 1**
**Transformative Pedagogical Strategies for Preparing Leaders for Social Justice**

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| ***1) Cultural Autobiographies*** | Banks (1994) and others suggested that individuals do not become sensitive and open to different ethnic groups until and unless they develop a positive sense of self, including an awareness and acceptance of their own ethnic group. When adults learn about their heritage and contributions to society, they participate in a process of self-discovery and growth in social consciousness, what Freire (1970) called a "critical consciousness." By completing cultural autobiographies, candidates begin to identify and name particular vantage points through which all their experiences and perceptions have been filtered. What perhaps had previously been an "unexamined backdrop for everyday life" (Delpit, 1995, p.92) becomes more explicit as adults research their home culture, their language, their socioeconomic status, their formal and informal education (including the hidden curriculum), and their demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, abilities, etc.) relative to the dominant culture. |
| ***2) Life Histories*** | We need to understand what currently exists before we can begin to understand what *should* exist (Giroux, 1992). By providing a retrospective, contemporary, and prospective examination of the social, cultural, political, economical and philosophical contexts from which the current issues that affect schools and schooling have evolved, professors can help adult learners understand how many of the educational policies and practices have tended to benefit members of the dominant culture. Life histories are a means of fostering consciousness-raising and transformative, experiential learning. Life histories seek to "examine and analyze the subjective experience of individuals and their constructions of the social world" (Jones, 1983, p.147). By interviewing a person who is over the age of 65 and who attended school in the United States, adult learners enter vicariously into those same experiences and grow in their personal awareness of the historical context of contemporary education. |
| ***3) Prejudice Reduction Workshops*** | Leaders for social justice and equity are committed to lifelong learning and growth, to recognizing and eliminating prejudice and oppression, to increasing awareness, to facilitating change, and to building inclusive communities. Preparation programs in educational leadership can foster such skills and empower adults to integrate new information into the knowledge they already have (see Sleeter, 1996) through participation in welcoming diversity workshops. One example is the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) formula that relies on a unique blend of emotional healing, personal experience, and skill |

**Table 1 (continued)**

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| | training methodologies to identify and reduce prejudice and oppression and resolve inter-group conflict. Through a series of incremental, participatory activities, adults learn that guilt is the glue that holds prejudice in place, that every issue counts, that stories change attitudes, and that skill training leads to empowerment. |
| ***4) Reflective Analysis Journals*** | In preparation programs, self-reflection and transformative learning can be enhanced through the use of a dialogue journal and the use of self-analysis (Cranton, 1994). Journaling makes the invisible thoughts visible. Adult learners are encouraged to complete reflective analysis journals throughout the course of their graduate program as a means of identifying and clarifying thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perspectives, worldviews, challenges, hopes, and aspirations. Through journaling, adult learners expand their awareness, make connections, and generate new thoughts. They identify principles and approaches learned, explain how this new information might be applied, and explore these discoveries in light of personal and professional growth and development. |
| ***5) Cross Cultural Interviews*** | Because we, as a species, are apparently wired to listen to, engage in, and remember stories much better than we do with non-narrative discourses (Viadero, 1990), providing adults with a learning opportunity to interact with someone from another ethnic background is a useful strategy in supporting cross-cultural development and respect. In fact, critical social theory calls for the legitimization of counter-narratives that uncover various perspectives related to race, gender, and poverty. As such, this approach fosters positive relations and requires a greater depth of knowledge, introspection, and sincere intent than may be found in status quo, or even politically correct, reactions. This assignment involves a one-on-one encounter with an individual who is different from the adult learner in ethnicity/race. The purpose is to help students develop a greater understanding of alternative worldviews, to increase their comfort in discussing differences and similarities, and to better appreciate the educational experiences of someone from a different background. |
| ***6) Educational Plunges*** | "The worldviews of many in our society exist in protected cocoons. These individuals have never had to make an adjustment from home life to public life, as their public lives and the institutions they have encountered merely reflect a "reality" these individuals have been schooled in since birth" (Delpit, 1995, p.74). The purpose of the educational plunge is to help adults emerge from their cocoons. The contrast between other ways of education and their way of schooling raises adult awareness that their way is not the only normal way, and that their beliefs and assumptions are not universally shared. By encouraging adult learners to travel somewhat outside their usual |

**Table 1 (continued)**

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|---|---|
| | milieu, to visit an educational setting unlike any they've encountered, they experience this realization more directly. |
| ***7) Diversity Panels*** | Fraser (1997) argued that what is needed for more fully democratic social institutions is cultural re-valuation and political/economic re-distribution. Diversity panels can challenge the presumption of entitlement and highlight the reality of institutionalized oppression. By engaging in informed constructive discourse with people who are different from them, adult learners are forced to examine how power, privilege, and dominance are manifested and reinforced. Such discourse communities can provide the context in which future leaders learn about the origins of stereotypes and prejudices, thereby recognizing and experiencing the need to change. Diversity panels can help adults learners grasp a thorough understanding of the dynamics of power relations, as well as the responsibilities that correspond with each position of power. Through participation in diversity panels, adult learners begin to differentiate between individual racism and institutional racism and come to the realization that everyone is an integral part of both the problem and the solution. |
| ***8) Activist Action Plans*** | "Action is an integral and indispensable component of transformative learning" (Mezirow, 1991, p.209). A transformative pedagogy teaches future leaders to be proactive versus reactive, to embrace conflict rather than avoid it, and to engage in what Fine, Weiss, and Powell (1997) called opportunities for "creative analysis of difference, power and privilege" (p.249). Through the social-action approach (see Banks, 1997), adult learners are encouraged to make decisions on important social issues and to take actions to help solve them. Activists' action plans at the micro, meso and macro levels, can help leaders for social justice move beyond guilt for failure toward responsibility for success. By assessing and examining current procedures and then reordering and restructuring their practice according to a new agenda of social action, adult learners engage in a developmental process of "deconstruction and reconstruction." |

completion of a weekly reflective analysis journal. The journal was a means for identifying and clarifying thoughts, feelings, beliefs, perspectives, worldviews, challenges, hopes, and aspirations.

During the second year of study, the MSA students completed comprehensive, yearlong, full-time structured internships at different school sites. The cohorts met weekly for a corresponding, integrative seminar (six credit hours taught by the researcher). Conducted in a seminar format at various locations in the field, this course was designed to help students engage in reflective practice and apply internship experiences to current and future challenges of educational leaders.

**Table 2**
**Demographic Data of Participating Graduate Students (n=40)**

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|---|---|
| RACE/ETHNICITY | · White 17 (43%)<br>· Black 20 (50%)<br>· Asian 1 (2%)<br>· Hispanic 0 (0%)<br>· Other 2 (5%) |
| GENDER | · Male 13 (33%)<br>· Female 27 (67%) |
| AGE | · 25-29 years old 13 (33%)<br>· 30-34 years old 6 (15%)<br>· 35-39 years old 8 (20%)<br>· 40-44 years old 6 (15%)<br>· 45 and older 7 (17%) |
| LEVEL OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE | · Elementary 12 (30%)<br>· Middle School 5 (13%)<br>· High School 14 (35%)<br>· Central Office 4 (10%)<br>· Other 5 (12%) |

Throughout this experience, the study participants completed a weekly reflective analysis journal. Each reflection cycle followed the five steps outlined by Brown and Irby (1997)—select, describe, analyze, appraise, and transform.

Because journaling makes the invisible thoughts visible, data for this study were gathered from theses journals. Through the lens of transformative learning theory and critical social theory, qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the more than one thousand entries. The categories that emerged from the analysis focused primarily on an increase in student awareness through critical reflection, an increase in student acknowledgement through rational discourse, and an increase in student action through policy praxis. A code (a number indicating the student's age and ethnicity) appears at the rear of each verbatim journal entry to identify the source (see Table 2).

## Discussion of the Findings

### Awareness through Critical Reflection

Developing as a critically reflective administrator encompasses both the capacity for critical inquiry and self-reflection (Larrivee, 2000; Schon, 1987). Critical inquiry involves the conscious consideration of the moral and ethical implications and consequences of schooling practices on students. Self-reflection adds the dimension of deep examination of personal assumptions, values and

beliefs. Critical reflection merges the two terms and involves the examination of personal and professional belief systems, as well as the deliberate consideration of the ethical implications and impact of practices. Through self-reflection, critical inquiry, and the completion of cultural autobiographies, students began to question and modify previously taken-for-granted frames of reference.

**Self-Reflection**

Analysis of the data indicated that as students examined and re-evaluated their experiences and expectations, they grew in a deeper understanding of themselves and others. They reportedly valued the alternative pedagogical strategies employed as growth inducing, perspective shifting, and life changing.

> I see myself as one who is enlightened, yet the biggest surprise is my heightened awareness of my prejudices, my perceptions, and my "close-minded" liberalism that shapes the way I live my life. I realized how biased I really am deep down inside. I realized that many of my beliefs are racist and many of my thoughts are close-minded. Although this self-realization is a hard pill to swallow, there is nothing but positive that can come from this discovery. (29WM)

> While it is easier to see the practicality of our graduate classes in supervision, leadership, and curriculum alignment, my societal perceptions, my understanding of education's root problems, and the way in which I interact with others has really changed. (31WM)

> I delight in stretching myself and discovering things, misconceptions, ideas, thoughts, assumptions that need to be dealt with. (37BF)

The process of transforming meaning structures is a complex, arduous task. While several students reported being "exhausted on many fronts, physically and emotionally" (40WF), they were also "grateful for this class because it made me 'push through' both academically and personally" (27BM). Recognizing that race is a difficult topic to discuss, that their comfort zones were being tested, and that they were learning a "cathartic lesson" (36BM), a few students became more acutely aware of their deeply engrained fears. One young male wrote, "I am afraid that if I shared how I felt on certain issues that I might be mistakenly referred to as inflexible and possibly, even indirectly racist" (30WM). Other students articulated similar sentiments.

> I am really nervous now. Some of my views concerning some aspects of education are not the same as what I think I am going to be taught. I am getting a little confused. (42BF)

> Today's class was definitely the most difficult for me to be open in my participation to date. Discussions along the lines of race have always been difficult for me to partake in due to my fear of saying something that might be interpreted the wrong way by a member of the minority group and it resulting in me being labeled

> thereafter. Class discussions definitely get heated at times. And yet, in relation to my preparation as an administrator, my ability to lead discussions on topics of race and the obstacles that minorities have been forced to overcome in past and current U.S. educational history is vital to my success as a school leader. (25WM)
>
> Unfortunately, as I was learning to listen openly to others and to love the diversity around me, I shuddered at the thought of allowing people to get to know me. What if I said the wrong things? What if they judged me by my skin color or dialect? What if many of these good people born in the Bible belt lost respect in me because I said that I was questioning my faith? Will they accept who I was yesterday, who I am today, and who I will be tomorrow? (32BF)

### Critical Inquiry

As students grew in awareness of themselves and their inner thoughts and feelings, they began to question the treatment of others. According to one student, "I have been awakened to the whole idea of schools being used to socialize, train, and pigeon-hole people. I am 45 years old and still so naïve" (45WF). Through reflection, many of the participants became more critically conscious of oppressive practices and their responsibility to change them.

> Is it possible that I have been participating in a system that sorts, chooses, and places members of ethnic and socioeconomic groups into pre-destined positions in our society? I learned that the answer could be "absolutely" and that it will be my job to be more aware of these trends as I enter my role as an administrator. (33WM)
>
> I look at myself in the scheme of things and realize that I am very guilty of upholding some of the very biases that I read about indirectly by not saying or doing more. (41BF)
>
> It has taken almost half the semester for me to "get it." I finally understand why we are learning about the history of minority groups and their educational experience. I thought and believed that because I am a member of a minority group and I empathize with their struggles, that I was already committed to equitable education for all. Having said all of that, I have learned a tremendous amount of information about minority groups. (28BF)
>
> Maybe my first thoughts of what I could learn about "our" plight were wrong or misguided because now I feel a growing responsibility to learn about others' plights and how I can end some of the "drama" for them. (37BF)
>
> I was at first enthralled by the info, next came anger, and lastly sadness as I realized that this agenda is still in effect and I am on some level aware of it and have used it to my advantage. Am I just as guilty for/of somehow upholding the biased standard of "maintaining the status quo?" Will I be able to change the system? (41BF)

### Cultural Autobiographies

Through the completion of cultural autobiographies, students identified their

ethnic/cultural group membership and reflected upon advice that has been handed down through their family by their ancestors (i.e., "family motto"). When recalling specific incidents in their life that affected their thinking and/or feelings about people who are culturally or ethnically different from them, many students realized that "my past is still so prevalent in my decisions about myself, my career, my family, and my interactions with others" (40BF). Data analysis indicated that, as students grew in an understanding of their cultural assumptions and presuppositions, they engaged in perspective transformation.

> One of the many important things that I am learning from your class is how I have been caught up in only my culture and have taken for granted all the wonderful cultures around me. There is so much more to learn and understand about other cultures that I really am beginning to feel like I have been blind for a great portion of my life. (44BM)

> Being effective administrators means that we remember to consider the needs of all students and make no assumptions based on our own past experiences. This class is teaching us to recognize when those assumptions are at the core of our decision-making and to make amendments to those assumptions when necessary. (32BF)

> My Dad believes that all gays/lesbians are disgusting and if they don't get their lives together, they will not enter the "kingdom." He believes that all white Americans are nasty and are not to be trusted because they will steal your ideas and take credit. I realize now how important it is for me to identify and combat these negative "records" in my head. I must first be so conscious of these "tapes" in order to deal with them. (32BM)

### Acknowledgement through Rational Discourse

Rational discourse validates meaning by assessing reasons. It involves the weighing of supporting evidence, examining alternative perspectives, and critically assessing assumptions. Engaging in the critical self-reflection that may lead to change in perspective is, in itself, a process that requires self-awareness, planning, skill, support, and discourse with others. Through participation in rational discourse strategies, the students in this study were able to "find their voice" in constructive dialogue with others. Analysis of the data confirmed their ability to carry on "learningful conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others" (Senge, 1990, p. 9).

### Life Histories

As a means of fostering consciousness-raising and transformative, experiential learning, students identified and interviewed a person who is over 65 years of age and attended school in the United States. By probing the interviewees' memories regarding the major political, social, philosophical and economic events during the

interviewees' school years and how these happenings affected their education and career path, study findings indicated that students grew in their acknowledgement of what previous generations have experienced. They were "amazed at how many of the educational issues and problems from back in the day are still so prevalent and unresolved today" (41BF). Another student added, "I tend to think that until we can look boldly at the real issues plaguing our profession, we will operate in the same fashion as our predecessors" (32BF). Comments such as these could be found throughout the students' journal entries. They acknowledged that "older people are our best connections to the past" (25WF), that "the historical information shared was directly related to the readings" (47BF), and that "oral histories are an enjoyable, rich way of sharing information that seems dull on paper" (27WF).

> A great way to honor my dad, and see how he lived out many of the issues in education we discussed and read about. (35WM)

> This class really opened my eyes to the importance of having a solid foundation of the history of the United States. I have begun to gain a greater sense of inquiry about how the events of the past influence the decisions made today. The interview made me realize the reactive nature of education in comparison to societal happenings. I am starting to take a more holistic view of education, which is what I will have to do as an administrator. (31BM)

> I am not usually a history person but the facts are so very informative and hauntingly relevant still today. How do you counteract or fight against the very structure and system that our country's educational foundation was built upon? (37BF)

> For the historical interview, I interviewed my father who is 91 years old. It was an interesting experience to find out new things about him, but even more interesting was to view his personal history as a reflection of national history. I tended to think of my family's history as somehow "out of touch" and idiosyncratic. Some of my father's comments were things I'd heard before, but thought of as his own oddball, sarcastic ideas. In researching the history, his comments make a lot more sense now. (46WF)

### Diversity Workshops

"We must keep in mind, however, that if the issues are not discussed, and the dialogue not begun, then urgent changes will not occur" (32BF). This journal entry is typical of many of the students' thoughts regarding discussions of race, diversity, social justice and equity. The workshops helped the students acknowledge the difficulty and uneasiness of such conversations, while simultaneously encouraging them to commit to extended and repeated conversations. "It definitely made us aware of the need for action. It also caused us to acknowledge our own shortcomings. We can talk the talk, but can we walk the walk?" (25WM).

> I think that it is important that we begin to step out of the comfort zone of being nice to each other and be honest, especially on issues of race. For me it is a learning process, and I would much rather learn here than as a principal. (28BF)

> I have always been open to other people's opinions and viewpoints, but yesterday proved to me that perception and understanding are in constant evolution, changing and morphing with the relationship one has with others. (29OM)
>
> The workshop discussions and activities helped me stretch myself and make some good discoveries. It really made me think about how groups of people have certain stereotypes and how other groups use and manipulate those very stereotypes. (41BF)
>
> The world would be such a better place if people could just sit down and talk about their differences and voice their concerns. Some of the stories from my cohort members were very interesting and some were very sad. Darrell's story really made me emotional. (34BM)

This last quote relates to one story in particular that many of the students wrote about in their journals. During the diversity workshops, students identify the information and misinformation they learned about other groups, they identify and express pride in the groups to which they belong, they learn how groups other than their own experience mistreatment, and they learn about the personal impact of specific incidents of discrimination. Darrell's story of being misidentified and profiled for crimes totally based on his racial heritage was extremely compelling. Darrell is a 31 year-old black male with dreadlocks who has been arrested twice because he "fit the profile." He is considering the possibility of cutting his hair in order to increase his job prospects as an assistant principal. Comments in student journals included the following: "That is something I have never had to worry about " (30WM), "I too was shocked that Darrell was arrested twice. He is such an upstanding citizen! He values other peoples' opinion of him. Surprisingly, he did not seem angry. That would be terribly difficult to get over" (27WF), and "Wow! I never thought about what it might be like to be a black male in today's world. I'm exhausted" (45WF).

> Most would agree that one of the pinnacles of the workshop was the "black male" testimony. The first thought that comes to mind when beginning this learning experience is a paraphrase of a quote by Jesse Jackson. He made the comment that he knew it was becoming a dire situation for African Americans if and when he was walking alone at night and heard footsteps…and he turned around and would be relieved that it was a white person behind him. Many of us know that apprehension. Our society and our cultural perceptions have been shaped into the belief that the black male is violent, is untrustworthy, and is worthy to be feared. With these thoughts in place, I heard Darrell and Chad's story. To preface their accounts, I have never met two more admirable human beings—men whom I actually put on a pedestal. Their commitment to their careers and their family and their understanding of themselves place their maturity much further along than mine. Yet, it did not matter in our American society. Out from their mouths flowed stories and predicaments of racial type-casting and prejudicial treatment from the majority. Hardships that I had never faced emanated from their lives, and I shuddered for them and their role in this society. (29WM)

### Cross-Cultural Interviews

This assignment involved a one-on-one encounter with an individual who was different from the student in ethnicity/race. The purpose was to help students develop a greater understanding of alternative worldviews, to increase their comfort in discussing differences and similarities, and to better appreciate the educational experiences of someone from a different background. When describing their emotional response to the cross-cultural interview, students described it as a "tough but quite valuable assignment" (25WM). It "pushed my boundaries, forced me to go beyond what I familiar with, helped me see my blind spots, tested the amount of fortitude that I had within myself, and made me have to stretch myself so thin I thought I was going to have to go into therapy just to debrief" (28WF).

> Loved it and hated it. Loved it because it forced me to recognize my own biases, misconceptions, and ignorance. Hated it for the same reason. Definitely the most memorable (and probably the most valuable) experience this entire semester. Thanks for encouraging us to broaden our horizons. (30WM)

> It was a real challenge, thus, really rewarding—a great experience. It was a chance for me to risk a little and to deepen a friendship that wasn't as developed as I thought. (35WM)

> I believe by examining issues from various perspectives we get a much truer image of the reality. What I got from this cross-cultural interview was the great intellectual challenge of making valid decisions based on holistic views. (30BF)

### Educational Plunges

The purpose of the educational plunge assignment was to provide adult learners with an opportunity to visit an educational setting unlike any they have ever experienced. Based on self-assessment regarding level of comfort, awareness, and knowledge, students decided which activity would be most beneficial to them in terms of furthering their awareness. The goal was to select an activity that would challenge the students to move beyond their present level of comfort and yet not be so uncomfortable or threatening that they were unable to be open to the "minority experience." This direct contact plunge involved a cross-cultural encounter "up close and personal." In their journals, the students described the experience, their reasons for selecting the experience, their assumptions and biases about the focal community members and how they were challenged by this experience (if they were), their emotional response to the plunge (e.g., before, during and after such as fear, anxiety, surprise, shock, disturbed, comfort/discomfort, joy, elation), the value of the experience (e.g., lessons, understandings, changes), and the relationship of experience to specific class readings and discussions, including implications for them as educational leaders for social justice and equity.

> Loved this. By far, produced the most meaningful insight for me personally. (40WF)

> An eye-opening day. I appreciate the assignment because it gave me an opportunity to go someplace I would not have gone otherwise. (35WM)

> I'm really glad we were assigned this activity. I have always wondered what adult ESL classes look and feel like. This assignment gave me an excuse to go. Wow! I will never be the same as a result. My admiration for people who don't speak English has increased 100%. I will never look at them the same. This experience has given me some first hand knowledge that I can share with others who are ignorant or prejudice. (38WF)

> It is fascinating to me that with the three papers I have written for this class that the same lesson has come through as the lesson learned—treat children as individuals! (47BF)

**Diversity Presentations and Panels**

Together with others in the cohort who chose the same non-monolithic group to study in depth, adult learners conducted the class on a given day. Students presented the history of that group's educational experience in the U.S. (including the circumstances that brought or made them inhabitants of the U.S.), and how they have been treated. Insights included the following:

> I know these presentations are very beneficial to my understanding of becoming "a needed change agent" but they surely cause me a lot of stress! Presenting these groups in isolation gives me a broader perspective on the same injustices going on today that have traveled through history with certain groups. (41BF)

> To a certain degree, the information that I heard was painful. History is becoming more and more insufferable. My ancestors did this damage to these people. The effect is still being felt today. I have a responsibility to help correct the situation. I need to research, read, dig for information in all aspects of other races to help understand how I will be able to make the greatest impact as an administrator. (25WM)

> I am beginning to realize how much of a hypocrite I have been. I mean by me being a minority you would think that I would not fall into stereotyping other minorities. You would also think because of my education and experience that I would know better. This class is really making me take a deeper look at people that are from different cultures. I am beginning to go beyond the surface and take the time to develop a true interest. I have never taken the time to look at Hispanic-Americans individually. I would always put them into one group. (37BM)

As part of this particular class, students also facilitated a one-hour panel presentation from at least three people from the non-monolithic group being studied that day. Panel members introduced themselves, engaged in a sharing of their educational experiences, and participated in an informal question and answer session with all members of the cohort. Cultural values, lessons taught, schooling experiences and misperceptions experienced were discussed. Panel members were also asked for suggestions in working more effectively with students from all cultures. Findings indicated an increase in awareness and

acknowledgment as students reflected on what they heard, learned, and felt during the diversity panels.

> I was astonished at the terrified feelings one of the panel members shared about riding the bus with American children of different cultural backgrounds than herself. This helped me to realize that as an administrator it is important that I make all children and staff feel safe at school and comfortable so their learning environment can be as productive as possible. (30WM)

> At the close of the class, during the panel I really began to understand this problem. I feel for every adult and child that may be homeless. I began to think about my own students. I wonder if any of them are homeless? I wonder if they are, what can I do about it, how can I tell, and how do I know? I finally resolved in my mind that it is important to treat students with respect. It is even more important to nurture every child. When children know you care, they trust you. Even if they do not disclose information, they should always know that you believe in them and their potential to be successful. (28BF)

> Today's class was one that was most insightful to me. I think back to what Carla stated when she said she has been referred to as Gal, Nigga, and other derogatory remarks in her hometown. This was surprising to me, not because this is supposed to be the 'new age,' but simply for the reason that people still have the audacity to do and say things to your face. I could really hear the hurt in her voice. (32BM)

## Action through Policy Praxis

Praxis is a Greek word that means moving back and forth in a critical way between reflecting and acting on the world. It involves inductive and deductive forms of reasoning. It also involves dialogue as social process with the objective of "dismantling oppressive structures and mechanisms prevalent both in education and society" (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 383). By increasing their tactical awareness and acknowledgement of what "is" and what "ought to be," students built a confidence and ability to work for collective change. Analysis of the data revealed an increase in their willingness to engage in and facilitate critical, constructive inquiry regarding issues of social justice and equity. As students realized their own agency, findings indicated that they increased their commitment and ability to validate the cultural, intellectual, and emotional identities of people from underrepresented groups through policy praxis.

"How will I make the changes happen that I know need to occur?" (38WF). "Do my ideas represent the school's populations, even those who are not in the majority?" (32BF). "Will all the silenced voices be heard? How in the world will I advocate for everyone that needs it? Will I remember and apply what I've learned? Will I be bold enough?" (44BM). "How do I totally erase the guilt and move forward?" (25WM). Questions such as these sprinkled the pages of the students' journals. In moving from increased awareness and acknowledgment to increased action, they reflected on their ability to be change agents and even questioned the goals of the MSA program.

> Dr. B., if you're watching (and I know you are!), after reading Delpit and Spring I think it would make a fantastic discussion to look at the goals of the Ed Leadership program at UNC-CH ... it has some pretty lofty, revolutionary, social justice goals. Are these goals more pipe dreams, while American culture continues to put more and more power and wealth in fewer and fewer (mostly white) hands? Or does the department really feel it is sending change agents out to lead the public schools of this area? (35WM)

> These changes in which I view the world must be a catalyst for action. It is working too. This becomes evident each day when I promote new conversations, when I find myself offering new arguments in the presence of racist comments, and when I envision my multi-cultural role as an educational administrator. (28BF)

During their comprehensive, yearlong, full-time structured internship, some of the students were able to put their action plans into practice. Their implementation efforts yielded mixed results in terms of behaviors, boundaries, alternatives, and consequences. The students struggled with their role as student-intern, with their ability to be proactive versus reactive, and with their willingness to embrace conflict rather than avoid it. Here are just a few samples, of many, illustrating the students' desire and capability to take action when needed.

> [Donuts with Dad Policy] Every year the PTA hosts "Donuts with Dad." This is a two-day event that takes place in the mornings in the school cafeteria. One of my normal daily duties is to escort my bus load of low income children (who have a 40 minute bus ride) to their free and reduced breakfast. This bunch of children is for the most part well behaved at school, they do their best, and they have supportive parents. However, many are from single parent families, they have limited financial resources, they lack private transportation, and they often face big challenges in their day-to-day family life. Well, on Thursday, half of the school students had "Donuts with Dad." I had to march my bus children in through the festivities to pick up their breakfast and then they were relocated outside to the picnic tables to eat. This troubled me tremendously. To be displaced out of the cafeteria so that everyone else can come and have a special breakfast with Dad was a mean and insensitive thing to do. Let me provide a mental image. Picture me leading a group of about 45 to 60 predominately African American children through a cafeteria full of predominately white children and their relatives and then having to sit outside at a picnic table so that those attending the breakfast would not be disturbed or crowded. I refused to parade those kids through their own cafeteria again like a herd of passing animals. With some help, and some kind folks, we changed the scene for Friday morning. I recruited all four of the available male faculty to act as stand-in relatives. I also recruited the male mentors already working with some of our students and I called the local churches to ask for a few volunteers. In addition, I talked with the PTA president and she assured me that there were enough donuts for every child in the school and that my bus kids were more than welcome to come. So Friday, when the bus arrived, I told the children that we had several community guests and some teachers who wanted donuts but had no

one to eat with and asked if they would be willing to escort some guests. Needless to say, the children were more than happy to oblige! (33WF)

[ESL Policy] I feel sorry for the students and staff who are involved with this program and how the district has let them down. It is no secret that the building sites were not given adequate support or resources for this program to work. Most of the time we feel overwhelmed, exhausted and would much rather give up and complain rather than do something about it. I need to let go of that attitude and remain committed to being an instructional leader for ALL students. With that being said, I have chosen to do some things to enhance the program and create more resources and awareness. I recruited undergrad teacher ed. volunteers to work with individual students in the ESL program and I have organized and planned monthly ESL workshops geared to helping the regular classroom teachers deal with ESL students. (28BF)

[Late Bus Duty] One of the duties that I have chosen for myself is being in the gym on a daily basis waiting for the late busses to arrive (3:55 pm – 4:20 pm). It is a duty I truly enjoy as I have found many opportunities to get to know students and staff on a more personal level. There are some staff members who chose this as the duty they preferred to be given and others who are clearly fulfilling an assigned responsibility only (two-week rotation). Most of the children waiting for the late busses are minority students who live on the other side of town. They are waiting for the busses to return from the first run of dropping off the local, neighborhood kids. Gazing across the gym, one of the teachers on duty remarked to me, "Well this is a completely different culture from the rest of the school, don't you think?" I was not sure what she was getting at so I suggested that it certainly was unique to see students of all different grade levels together in the gym. The teacher informed me that that was not what she meant. She said, "Look at all these troublemakers in the same room. This doesn't happen in any other area of the school." The conversation continued with the teacher telling me that cluster grouping (placing similarly situated minority students together in classrooms) was a bad idea and that she couldn't believe the administration had decided to try that this year. I let the teacher know that these were wonderful children, not troublemakers, and that we clearly had different ideas on the topic. This exchange lasted no longer than three minutes but I have been unable to get it out of my mind. With the district-wide goal of increasing minority student achievement and the emphasis on equity training for staff, I am completely dumbfounded by her remarks. My role as an intern places me in a difficult position in terms of how I can respond to these situations. But, as a future school leader, it is imperative that courageous conversations about race take place. In thinking about this situation, and others I have encountered thus far, I have many questions … these questions haunt my thoughts as I struggle to make sense of how a leader changes the mindset of the people he/she works with on both a personal and professional level. There are no easy answers here, at least I know that much! (45WF)

## Concluding Discussion

In the forward of Capper's *Educational Administration in a Pluralistic Society*,

Sleeter (1993) draws on Giroux's (1988) description of the type of administrator she would like to see advocating for equality and social justice in schools: "These are transformative intellectuals who are both active, reflective scholars and practitioners," who "engage in political interests that are emancipatory in nature" (p.ix). I argue that the strategies described herein can help future leaders for social justice and equity develop such skills. By being actively engaged in a number of assignments requiring the examination of ontological and epistemological assumptions, values and beliefs, context and experience, and competing worldviews, adult learners are better equipped to work with and guide others in translating their perspectives, perceptions, and goals into agendas for social change. The exploration of new understandings, the synthesis of new information, and the integration of these insights throughout personal and professional spheres can lead future educational leaders to a broader, more inclusive approach in addressing equity issues. When discussing educators' agency for transformation, Freire (1998) aptly explained, "It is true that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur" (p. 37).

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