

DIALOGUES OF LEADERSHIP EDUCATION SECTION

Leadership Education Priorities for a Democratic Society

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Editor's Note: With the Dialogues of Leadership Education section in *Scholar-Practitioner Quarterly*, we invite our readers to join us in a venture to create a venue for giving voice to difficult problems of the day. Specifically, our purpose is to bring individuals together and engage in a meaningful, critical examination of selected topics that concern leadership, both in terms of preparation and practice. We hope the readership enjoys the dialogue on Leadership Education Priorities for a Democratic Society in this issue, and that our contributing authors stimulate important and needed conversations among leader educators, practitioners, policy makers, and other cultural workers concerned with improving leadership education and practice.

What are the priorities of leadership education for a democratic society? In today's society, preparing leaders for schools and the work of educating students necessarily requires a focus on the challenges of living in a democracy. And, it simultaneously emphasizes the difficult responsibility that leaders have, particularly in the face of partisan politics, the threat of global war, and the lull of better times in bygone eras. Being an educational leader in today's society is about advanced citizenship, it means that leaders must be prepared to be socially responsible citizens. Leadership education, then, means, in part, individuals learning to engage in citizenship, but equally importantly, it means practicing citizenship if we are to have a public ready to bridge the distance between the promise and the reality of democracy.

Determining the priorities for leadership education in a democratic society is a complex, challenging responsibility, not a task to be taken lightly. It is complex on one level, as Maxine Greene (1967) rightly argued, in that to be a leader in schools "today is to understand a profoundly human as well as a professional responsibility" (p. 3). It is challenging on another level in that preparing leaders

for the work of educating a democratic society draws to the foreground Dewey's (1916) argument that educators must always "remember that they above all others are consecrated servants of the democratic ideas in which alone this country is truly a distinctive nation" (p. 210). Understanding the complexity and the responsibilities of leading will require that leadership educators understand the priorities of preparing leaders for a democratic society, and in turn, it will require that leaders, as practitioners in schools, be clear, without being doctrinaire, about the pedagogical and political projects through which they give meaning to their roles as leaders and the purpose of schooling itself in a democratic society (Giroux, 2003).

Setting the priorities for democratic society is or should be guided by an understanding that leadership education's work at its best in a democratic society represents, as Giroux (2004) argues, "a response to questions and issues posed by the tensions and contradictions of the broader society" (p. 41), particularly a society under siege by neoliberalist ideologies. By extension, then, preparing leaders "becomes performative and contextual" (p. 41) in the sense of recognizing and addressing the value of democracy juxtaposed to the deleterious influence of neoliberalism. And it highlights the consideration, on the part of leader educators and "their pedagogical practices, of power, politics, and ethics fundamental to any form of teacher–student–text interaction" (Giroux, 2004, p. 41).

Leadership education serves many functions in contemporary democratic society, but perhaps most importantly is the function of leadership education in preparing leaders to consider how schools play into facilitating an alternative discourse grounded in a critique of war, terrorism, oppression, and abuse to focus on the elements of society we would choose not to pass on to the next generations. Concomitantly, leadership education must necessarily facilitate this alternative discourse by preparing leaders who, as citizens, are socially engaged in the pedagogical work of democracy; leadership must become a public pedagogy.

The priorities of leadership education in a democratic society are priorities that translate, through program curricula, pedagogical practices and policies, as a form of socially engaged citizenship. That is, it speaks to democratic, professional practice in schools; to the school as a cultural and social agency charged with the responsibility of educating children to become, in turn, socially engaged citizens. Importantly, leadership education is concerned with preparing leaders for the work of leading as socially engaged citizenship. It exemplifies the responsibility of and the need for aligning priorities to pedagogy that is concerned, first and foremost, with preparing individuals who understand the challenge of being a democratic citizen, the challenge of advanced citizenship with the not so subtle reminder that the responsible actions of citizenship, as difficult as they are, are at the very heart of an active and responsive democracy. Nowhere in the free world is the enormity of this responsibility and challenge felt more than it is felt in a country where democracy is constantly challenged from the outside by competing nations, and unfortunately challenged from within by individuals who have forgotten how, or never had the opportunity, to practice advanced citizenship.

Necessarily, for leadership faculty in universities and practitioners alike, the identification and ordering of priorities that are aligned with the ideals of a democratic society must represent, in large part, a moral and political attentiveness to preparing students for the public life. At stake here is the call not only to link leadership education to the democratic public, but to link leadership education as a public pedagogy to practices that are interdisciplinary, transformative, creative, and oppositional. It is also to connect such practices to broader projects designed to further cultural, economic, and political democracy; democratic projects designed to create a new symmetry and expand the “individual and social dimensions of citizenship rights” (Hall & Held, 1990, p. 179).

When democracy is linked to education, it then demands that the central purpose of education be the nurturing and development of a powerful sense of agency and voice among all practitioners who enter schools, and by extension all students in schools. It is not enough for democratic schools to successfully transmit a static culture to all students, or to give all students the skills needed for successful future employment. Lest we are lulled into a false sense of finishedness as a democratic society, the questions that framed the body of this text must remain ever present in our minds as socially responsible citizens, and as educators: What are the priorities of leadership education for a democratic society? It is in the constant working toward an answer that the distance between the promise and the reality of democracy may be bridged.

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