# Preparing Leaders for the Work of Leading Schools in a Democratic Society

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A most important theme we should stress in our preparation programs is the leader's articulation and cultivation of a vision of learning that honors the three purposes behind the mission of public education: development of skills, understandings, and dispositions for (1) participation as a citizen in a democratic society; (2) employment or successful further education; (3) personal human flourishing. Besides all the lessons schools have to teach in their co-curricular, counseling, and student life programs, the learning of the academic curriculum should be seen as a primary contributor to those three areas of learning.

In their work with teachers, students, and parents, educational leaders need to highlight that learning an academic discipline involves three important goals. Students learn the major conceptual perspectives and the skills to employ the research methodologies of the scholar–researcher. For example, in the study of biology they learn the scientific methodology of doing research in the biology laboratory and reproduce the knowledge that biology researchers can produce. In this way, they can appreciate how biologists think about the living universe, and how they practice their science. In the nation's concern to produce more scientists to further the nation's production of new knowledge to benefit the health and welfare of its citizens and to advance the nation's prosperity in a competitive market for biological research, this approach to learning biology motivates some students for pursuing careers in scientific research.

However, there are other values to the learning of biology that should be *equally* emphasized in the school's curriculum and pedagogy, such as preparing

knowledgeable citizens who can debate on public policies dealing with environmental sustainability and public health. That kind of learning entails understanding what biological science teaches about healthy living; about medical options in treating illnesses; about biological effects of toxic chemicals in food, cosmetics, and pesticides; about the need for governments to cooperate on global environmental sustainability. Those issues have enormous implications for the personal and political choices of citizens to support public policies concerning public health and environmental sustainability. While encouraging careers in biological research is indeed important, most students will not become biologists. They will all, however, become citizens who should know enough basic biology to understand debates over government's policies that affect the public weal. Since nations invest huge sums of money to educate not only future scholars, but, equally as important, an educated citizenry that is capable of intelligent participation in governing the public welfare, that kind of learning should be promoted along with the focus on developing scholarly researchers.

The third value educational leaders should promote in the study of biology is the learners' gradual appreciation of the intelligence and intelligibility of all life forms in nature, including human nature, including the learners' own biological functioning. That learning legitimately connects to the learners' understandings of their own identity as biological organisms. It would seem as important to have this knowledge about one's person, about one's very self, as it would be about one's emotional make-up, or about one's spiritual longings and aspirations. The study of biology can help learners to appreciate themselves as biological persons, connected to humans everywhere who share the same complex, and marvelous history of biological evolution (Cf. M. Csikszentmihalyi's *The Evolving Self*, 1993).

Similarly, the study of psychology, while it might be useful to some students' search for fulfilling career as a research professor of psychology or a clinical professional, can serve these other two larger purposes—the relevance of a broad understanding of human psychology to their citizenship involvement in public policies around mental health, to managing their own emotions and motivations in dealing with others on the job. Indeed, human flourishing requires the self-knowledge derived from knowledge of one's defenses, one's fears, one's biases, one's need for love and to love, so as to develop a more intentional human agency in their human relationships and their work.

Indeed, all of the academic disciplines could take on a richness and a depth if the pedagogy and the curriculum were to deal with the potential embedded in all three dimensions of learning the academic curriculum. The arts and humanities have much to teach the young about the cultural worlds they inhabit, about the variety of expressions of taste, of virtue and vice, of courage and folly. Questions can be raised about their own preferred cultural expressions of themselves, again, to connect with their journey of constructing an identity, of learning how to be someone, to belong, to do some good (Starratt, 1998; Starratt, 2010). While

teachers love to see some of their students choose to become poets or journalists, the humanities also have value for students who will not become poets, composers, playwrights, or journalists, but whose lives as citizens are enriched by public involvement in the arts, and whose lives as individual human beings flourish in the self-knowledge and pleasures the arts and humanities convey.

Finally, prospective educational leaders need to consider that the pedagogical approach to these three areas of learning might, in most instances, *begin* with the significance of particular curriculum units to learners' personal flourishing, for that is the most important and immediate concern for them (though not for testing companies). To be sure, the expression of human flourishing may very well involve critique of and resistance to the picture of the world presented in the curriculum unit, seen by the students as distorted, biased, unintelligible, or oppressive. Human flourishing requires resistance to a perspective that demeans or excludes the learners' humanity. Teachers should help learners uncover the reasons and reasonableness of that resistance. In any event, placing the connection between the curriculum unit and learners' struggle to create their identities and to understand how *their* world works might considerably energize the other two important learning concerns.

As they address their role as leaders of learning in their preparation programs, prospective leaders need to be challenged to explore in greater depth how the learning process must give greater attention to citizenship and personal flourishing concerns within the current, exclusive policy emphasis on academic learning.

## References

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## About the Author

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