Preparing School Leaders to Serve as Agents for Social Transformation

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The major priorities that should guide leadership education in preparing leaders for their work of leading schools in a democratic society are:

- Teaching leaders to understand the inequities of our society;
- Teaching leaders to serve as agents for social transformation;
- Teaching leaders to help each and every student learn and succeed!

Since various segments of our public school population experience negative and inequitable treatment on a daily basis, it is the duty of our educational system (and our democratic society) to end such oppression, to increase equity, and to make bold possibilities happen for all students. One reason that the "gaps" are so persistent, pervasive, and significantly disparate is that American schools have been pressured to preserve the status quo. As such, principals fill a role replete with contradictory demands. They are expected to "work actively to transform, restructure and redefine schools while they hold organizational positions historically and traditionally committed to resisting change and maintaining stability" (Murphy & Beck, 1994, p. 3).

There are principals who are facing these challenges everyday and despite countervailing pressures, they resist, survive, and transform schools. These leaders are willing and able to "leave the comforts and confines of professional codes and state mandates for the riskier waters of higher moral callings" (Rapp, 2002, p. 233). They understand that leadership is the enactment of values. As moral stewards, such leaders understand their ethical obligations and are much more heavily invested in purpose-defining activities and in reflective analysis and

active intervention than simply managing existing arrangements, safeguarding power and privilege, and permitting long-standing social inequalities to, not only proliferate but, become institutional ideological belief systems.

In the context of preparing such leaders, efforts by preparation programs to involve students in consciousness-raising activities and democratic-defining strategies can lead to reflective analysis and activist intervention. It is important for such programs to bridge theory and practice, to make connections between course material and the broader social context, to explain to pre-service leaders how they might take an active part in bringing about social change, and to validate and incorporate adult learners' personal knowledge and experience. People rarely change through a rational process of analyze–think–change. They are much more likely to change in a see–feel–change sequence. As such, 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 issues of student learning and equity. Respect for diversity and culturally inclusive education entails advocacy, solidarity, an awareness of societal structures of oppression, and critical social consciousness. Preparing educational leaders to accept this challenge necessitates both a close examination of personal beliefs coupled with a critical analysis of professional behavior. It requires the problematization of those taken-for-granted practices that we no longer notice, unless we are explicitly asked to do so.

Beliefs mediate knowledge, expectations, and actions. And, because beliefs can change as a result of experience, it is critical for preparation programs to examine the impact of their strategies on pre-service leaders' attitudes, perceptions, and practices. By being actively engaged in a number of transformative learning strategies requiring the examination of ontological and epistemological assumptions, values and beliefs, context and experience, and competing worldviews, future leaders will be better equipped to understand, critically analyze, and grow in their perceived ability to challenge various forms of social oppression including racism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, and classism. The goal is to help future leaders 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).

Leadership education needs to call educators to activism! Activists for social justice espouse a theory of social critique, embrace a greater sense of civic duty, and willingly become active agents for political and social change. They challenge exclusion, isolation, and marginalization of the stranger, respond to oppression with courage, empower the powerless, and transform existing social inequalities and injustices. Educational leaders committed to equity understand and create opportunities for learning of all students by dealing with issues of context and achievement. Socioeconomic and political discrepancies in the larger social order are analyzed in relationship to school routines, procedures,

standards, curriculum and textbook adoption, hierarchical arrangements, and classroom pedagogies. Leaders for social justice examine power relations within schools and society, scrutinize differential schooling, and critique social class stratifications. They are attuned to the complexities of changing demographics and are willing and able to engage in and facilitate critical and constructive inquiry. They oppose unfair and inequitable policies while simultaneously working to minimize their damage. They reject the status quo and move from rhetoric to a well thought-through analysis of democracy that might be taught and practiced in schools. These leaders leverage small changes in daily practice that begin to transform bigger systems.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of educational leaders, both practitioners and professors, remained wedded to technical drifting—a commitment to emphasize and act upon the technical, rational, instrumental components of one's work above the moral (Rapp, Silent, & Silent, 2001). Technical drifters fail to validate the cultural, intellectual, and emotional identities of people from underrepresented groups, they avoid situations where their values, leadership styles, and professional goals can be challenged and dismantled, and they use their positions of power to formally and informally reaffirm their own professional choices. The stress put on technical rather than on social, political, and moral issues is one way to avoid conflict and change. Their reluctance or inability to discuss philosophical values leads to avoidance and/or retreat into managerialism. As a result, moral forms of development are often jettisoned in favor of more narrowly defined agendas and Realpolitik (i.e., policy based on practicalities and power rather than on doctrine or ethical objectives) becomes the norm in an individualistic, competitive credentialing model of schooling. This is so unfortunate. Although no set of issues is as explosive, controversial, emotional, and threatening as moral disputes, none is more vital! When we take pains to avoid making a value judgment, we actually end up tacitly accepting the values of the status quo. We need to see the crisis in education as not primarily problems of technique, organization, and funding but as a reflection of the crisis in meaning! Given this disturbing reality, courageous, transformative leadership is needed.

If the fundamental moral imperative of schooling is to serve the best interests of all children, then moral leadership and democratic equality in education is needed. In an effort to develop the risk-taking, political, and human relations skills necessary to do this, preparation programs must expose pre-service leaders to critical social theory and its influence on the purposes of schooling. Through a wide array of roles, methods, and techniques, preparation programs must encourage adult learners to question their expectations, beliefs, and actions. Through critical reflection, rational discourse, and policy praxis, preparation programs must implement ways for future leaders to grow in awareness, acknowledgement, and action! According to Giroux (1992), "If students are going to learn how to take risks, to develop healthy skepticism towards all master narratives, to recognize the power relations that offer them the opportunity to speak in particular

ways, and be willing to critically confront their role as critical citizens who can animate a democratic culture, they need to see such behavior demonstrated in the social practices and subject positions that teachers live out and not merely propose" (p. 141).

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