MOVING BEYOND BEING NICE: TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL JUSTICE IN A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Joanne M. Marshall
Iowa State University

George Theoharis
Syracuse University

Educators tend to be nice people. So do Midwesterners. A classroom full of Midwestern educators, therefore, is bound to be full of good-hearted, salt-of-the-earth types, genuinely concerned about the well being of children and dismayed about inequity. However, this dismay is distinct from a deep understanding of social justice and equity issues, especially as those issues relate to race and ethnicity. Students from a predominantly White state at a predominantly White institution, working and living within predominantly White communities, have limited experience engaging with people of color. This lack of experience has at least two consequences.

First, students tend to define "diversity" simply as non-White racial and ethnic identity, failing to recognize their own White racial identity, and failing to recognize other diversity such as social class, religion, ability/disability, or sexual orientation. And second, students are reluctant to talk about racial identity, viewing such discussion as awkward lest they be perceived as racist, as well as somehow impolite. While other scholars (Banks, 1999; Delpit, 1988; Haymes, 1995; Helms, 1990; Howard, 1999; Ryan, 2003; Sleeter, 1995; Tatum, 1994; Young & Laible, 2000) have written extensively about White racial identity and the importance of engaging White students in discussions about it, fewer have addressed the awkwardness of students viewing such discussions as "not nice," particularly within Midwestern culture, where niceness is so highly valued. The work of Meadows and Lee (2002),

which specifically notes the interplay between conversations about race and the "hidden value" of niceness in Midwestern culture is a notable exception.

Classroom challenges in an educational leadership program with predominantly White students include: a lack of experience, ingrained niceness, maintaining a mutual teacher-student respect in the classroom, and violating the norms of niceness with uncomfortable discussions about culture and inequity. It is not nice, for example, to ask students to reflect critically upon how inequity and injustice occur and is perpetuated in their schools and in their hometowns. It also is not nice to point out the benefits of White privilege and the ways in which Whiteness is not culturally neutral. However, we agree with many others in our field (Anderson, 1990; Brown, 2004b; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Grogan & Andrews, 2002; Marshall, 2004; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002; Ryan, 2003; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Shields, 2004b; Theoharis, 2004; Wallace, 2000; Young & Laible, 2000) that critical inquiry and classroom conversations about it are vital for the preparation of future school leaders so that they work actively against inequity.

We face the additional challenge of asking students to reflect on and discuss these issues without coercing them (Sleeter, 1995) to try to please us through their discussion or assignments to say what they think we want to hear for the sake of their grade. Thus we strive to create a climate that allows space for saying what they truly believe while encouraging them to question those beliefs more thoroughly. We offer the following strategies as examples, which have seemed to work, though we wish to note that our teaching and thinking continues to be in progress.

Context: Social Justice in a Foundations Course

The stated mission of our principal preparation program is "to prepare reflective leaders who promote high quality schools that result in high levels of learning for every child." We interpret the notion of "for every child" as consistent

with other definitions of social justice, which presume working for inclusiveness against traditional school structures that have privileged some groups at the expense of others. Thus, a course that examines leadership for social justice must include the history and contemporary realities of issues such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, and disability. As Scheurich and McKenzie (2006) point out, social justice is "not simply the function of some small group or of a recent time," but "began on the shoulders of others" (p. 10). Our course identifies some of who those "others" have been.

While the authors agree with Marshall (2004) that social justice should not be limited to discussion in one discrete course in a preparation program, it is logical to address social justice issues in our program's required foundations course, which requires that students reflect upon history and theoretical perspectives of schooling within the context of their own cultural identity. We apply Tozer's (1993) framework of what a foundations course should be: Foundations refers "to the cultural phenomena that underlie any society's educational ideas and practices" as well as to "the interdisciplinary field of study that was developed expressly to engage school practitioners in the study of those cultural phenomena" (p. 8). Its purpose is to assist educational leaders "in constructing meaning more adequately in their practice as educational decision-makers," with the result that the course should "engage students in studying the cultural dimensions of educational problems about which [they] may be called upon to make decisions in practice" (p. 8-9). While Tozer's framework is aimed at using social foundations to prepare teachers, we believe it is equally applicable to preparing school leaders, as is a justification of teaching social foundations in an accountability climate as explained by scholars such as Butin (2005) and Bredo (2005).

Our foundations course is the second course that our preservice administrators take, after an introductory leadership course. Thus, it literally lays a

historical, social, and political foundation for future courses in the principal preparation program, engaging students with question such as: *What are your cultural values? How do individual and collective cultural values shape schooling? How have American schools evolved historically?* Two additional shaping questions are: *How do these cultural forces impact my school life?* and *How am I as a future administrator going to respond to them?* For a sample syllabus, see the course website at http://www.public.iastate.edu/~jmars/556sp6/home.html. This foundation is not meant to be a single course on social justice leadership but an early introduction and infusion of critical social justice issues during the beginning of the preparation program. These issues and concepts are designed to be built upon and strengthened throughout the program. For example, another course requires students to make home visits to families unlike their own, and another requires an equity audit such as described in *Leadership for Equity and Excellence* (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). The foundations course provides some introduction to why these activities might be worthwhile.

Framing the Discussion: The First Class

After the usual opening-class introductions of people and materials, discussion opens with the role of schools: *What do we think schools should do?* (Sample responses: educate children, promote citizenship, help kids get jobs). *How do we know if we've been successful as educators?* (Sample responses: tests, community involvement, election participation). As the course continues, we refer back to themes generated from this introductory discussion – e.g., *How does desegregation relate to that list we generated during the first class about what schools should do?* or *How do the people in this particular situation define what schools should do? How do those conceptions differ from other people's*

conceptions? What could you as a school leader do to help minimize those differences?

The instructor writes the word *school* on the board or overhead and asks, "What forces impact schools?" This question generates a list of about 30 items, some of which are linked (e.g., families→ involvement, income, education, race). (For two helpful frameworks of how schools are impacted by culture, see Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). The next question is, "Which of these forces, as an administrator, can you control?" Silence. The eventual response of "none" leads to a mini-lecture on why this course is required:

- Schools are social institutions: both contributors to societal norms and influenced by societal norms
- It is important to understand how we got here and where we might go next
- Future administrators need to know how to work with forces beyond our control.

Follow-up readings for the next class include historical readings from *Lessons of a Century* (Education Week, 2000). We also view the first episode ("The Common School, 1770-1890") in PBS's video series, *School: The Story of American Public Education* (Mondale, 2001). Finally, this first class concludes with an overview of the concept of social justice including definitions (e.g., distributive justice) and a rationale from educational leadership literature (e.g., Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Brown, 2004b; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Marshall, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). From definitions, we move to a framework for doing, including a four-item pedagogy of justice cycle (experience, understand, imagine, create) developed by Hartnett (2001), and what we call a critical-questioning framework. We ask students to apply these questions to situations they encounter:

- *What is going on here?*
- *What are key assumptions?*
- *Who is in charge? Who is not in charge?*
- *Who is being heard? Who is not being heard?*
- *Why? How did we get here?* and *What can I do about it?*

We ask students to describe tensions they have seen between equity (fairness) and equality (sameness). We discuss: *What is just? What is socially just?* For the following week, we assign two readings about the moral purpose of schooling and leadership. The first is Goodlad's "Teaching What We Hold Sacred" (2003/2004) and students are asked to consider two questions: *What* do *schools hold sacred?* and *What* should *schools hold sacred?* The second is Fullan's "Moral Purpose Writ Large" (2002), with the guiding questions of *What does "moral purpose" mean?* and *What kind of moral purpose would you like your school to have? What obstacles occur when implementing such a moral purpose?* We briefly touch on other leadership literature such as Sergiovanni's *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* (1992), Dantley and Tillman's "Social Justice and Moral Transformative Leadership" (2006), and Shields' "Creating a Community of Difference" (2004a).

Practicing Reflective Analysis

Brown (2004b) suggests reflective analysis journals as one way in which to make "the invisible thoughts invisible" (p. 100). Instructors require students to post short weekly reflections on an online discussion forum (e.g., Blackboard, WebCT). Students may respond to readings, to each other, or to situations occurring in their schools. Because this reflective analysis is semi-public online, students have the opportunity to start conversations that can be continued in class, and we as

instructors have the opportunity to prepare some more in-depth questions to foster such discussion.

In addition, we require a weekly written reflection for the eyes of the instructor only. This offers both a second round of thinking about the various potentially uncomfortable and complex topics (e.g., desegregation, gender equity, sexuality) and a chance to enter into a private conversation about these topics without the public scrutiny of classmates/colleagues. As others who have used this technique have demonstrated (Brown, 2004a, 2005a; Milner, 2003; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003), both of these reflection opportunities can be productive and important in deepening student's thinking about social justice.

Social Construction of Family/Diversity

One of the key aspects of preparing future leaders for social justice in a largely White, homogeneous leadership preparation program, is to ground discussion in the social construction of family and family diversity. This provides an entry point for examining an array of aspects of difference: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, poverty, religion, disability, and language.

We discuss the concept of family by discussing social construction. The instructor first places a map of the world on a slide. The map does not have country boundaries but has the continents marked in different colors. The map is displayed "upside down." Students are invited to brainstorm what they see. Responses include, "North America is in the middle," "Upside down," "Seven continents are marked." Students are then asked to interrogate the map construction with questions like: *Why is the largest and most populated continent split on two sides of the map?, What would it look like if Australia were in the middle?,* and *If space is three-dimensional, how is this upside down?*

After this discussion, definitions of social construction are provided (Cox, 2004; Gergen & Gergen, 2003; Singleton, 2002-2003; Wikipedia, 2005) and discussed. Students identify and discuss how social construction fits with the topics/issues of the class. This activity provides a concrete introduction into understanding social construction.

At this point, the class moves into discussing families – working with and understanding diverse families. The topic is introduced with a short clip from the TV show *Leave it to Beaver* or *The Brady Bunch*. Students discuss the image of family that this show provided and how/in what ways this image dominates White Midwestern thinking about family.

***Family Activity*.** Next, in partners, students create a list of all of the family configurations with which they have had personal experience. They describe each family as precisely as possible, for example – African American biological heterosexual Dad, White biological, heterosexual Mom, two mixed-race biological kids.

Partnered groups are then asked to share one configuration at a time, round robin style, going from group to group, until all configurations that groups had recorded are shared. This creates a huge list of diverse families. All of these family configurations are recorded visually for all to see, and the class discusses and reflects on this activity using the following guiding questions.

- What did you notice/what struck you about the families listed?
- What can you generalize about families?
- Looking at this list of families, what implications does this have on school administration?

In groups, students then brainstorm and share the two lists, moving this uncomfortable theoretical discussion to practical administrative steps like the following:

- Specific steps/ways to effectively communicate with diverse families
- Specific ways to connect with/involve diverse families with your school

The following readings were used both before and after this session to expand and challenge students' thinking: "The Way We Never Were: Defying the Family Crisis"(Coontz, 1992), "Something Has Gone Very Wrong" and "Handicapped by History" (Loewen, 1995), "The Bridging Cultures Framework" (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001), and "Only For My Kid" (Kohn, 1998). We have found that these readings together provide various entrance points to explore the assumptions and myth about families. For example, it is common for students, in subtle and overt ways, to express that White middle-class and upper-class parent participation is the kind of school participation desired. Kohn provides an important lens for understanding the realities of particular kinds of participation. Additionally, we have found that "The Bridging Cultures Framework" provided students with important insights into cultural norms of diverse families through the description of collectivist and individualist family beliefs.

One student reflected on the readings/session on family diversity:

> I have a lot of things going in my head right now from class tonight and I'm not sure where I want to start. I love the term social construction. I have to admit, I have never heard it before but it totally makes sense . . . As the Dean of Students, I will be in a great position next year to work on these issues. On my drive home I was thinking of all the ways I could work to break down that "bubble" that keeps certain families and certain kids on the margins of our schools.

Another student observed:

> Seeing the different family configurations taught me to disengage my thought of normal. To me normal family configuration consisted of a genetically related father and mother with a child or two. While I was not oblivious to different family arrangement, seeing the many different configurations changed my perceptions and assumptions of what a family is in today's society. There is no "normal." Normal is not what I perceive it to be, but rather what is lived by those who are part of a given situation. The diversity of families is what is normal, yet we construct norms of schooling, family participation based on the values and belief that the *Leave it to Beaver* family is the norm . . . it is this growth in understanding [for me] that will help me to become a successful administrator.

While it is not "nice" to challenge and suggest that students' worldviews about family are incomplete, a more complete understanding of family diversity is a necessary step in becoming leaders for social justice. These students' reflections indicate that we might be one step closer.

Talking about Race within a Largely White Preparation Program

Delving into the topic of race is essential in getting past "niceness" and preparing leaders for social justice. As Ryan (2003) and others (Anderson, 1990; Delpit, 1988; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Love & Kruger, 2005; Nagda et al., 2003; Shields, 2004a; Young & Laible, 2000) have pointed out, administrators tend to want to ignore race in their own schools, but such ignoring leads only to continuing racist structures.

In order to start a discussion about race, we lay some groundwork for the necessity of talking about race and prejudice in the context of a social justice/cultural

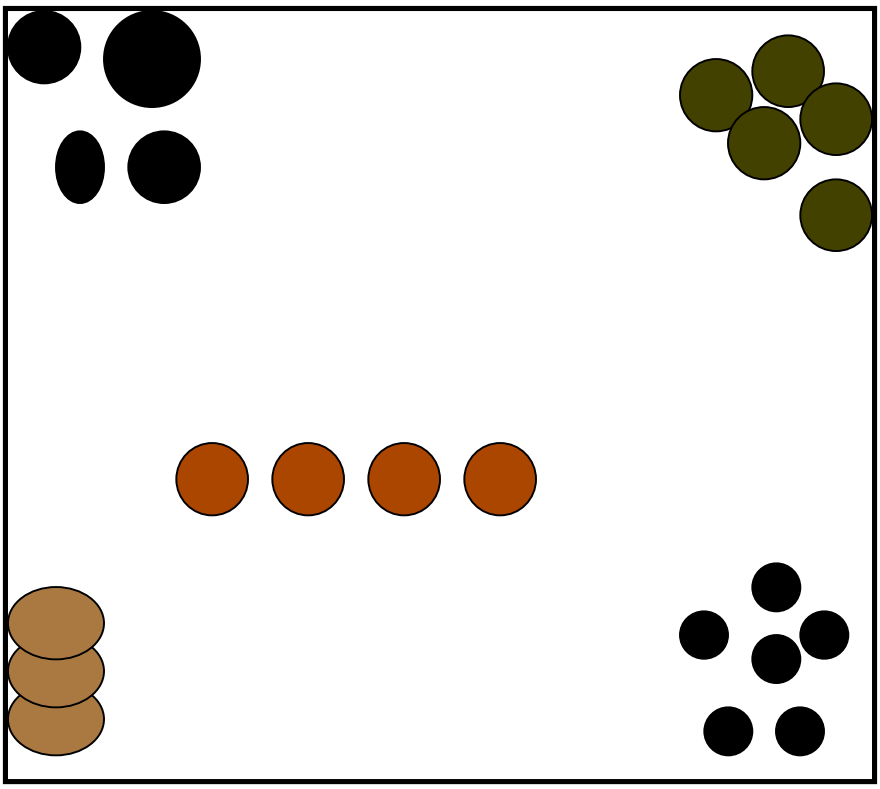
foundations course. We provide a short article from *The Economist* ("Racial prejudice: Thinking about it," 2003), which summarizes a study that found that people's ability to complete cognitive tasks slows down if they are trying to think while also trying not to say or do racist things. Similarly we assign students to take one of the online race-based "Implicit Association Tests" available at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.jsp.

As described in the popular book *Blink* (Gladwell, 2005), the Implicit Association Tests provide a series of words associated with concepts of good and bad, such as "glorious" or "hurt." In the Black/White race IAT, they also provide a series of Anglo and African American faces. Test-takers are to assign the faces and the words to the correct category (good/bad). The test-makers combine categories to include both race and value: "White/Good" versus "Black/Bad" and then combine "White/Bad" and "Black/Good." Taking too much time to assign the word "glorious," for example, to the category "Black/Good" would indicate that the test taker has a slight or strong preference for White faces. As Gladwell notes, "the disturbing thing about the test is that it shows that our unconscious attitudes may be utterly incompatible with our stated conscious values" (p. 85). Even the nicest of educators may discover that we are not as egalitarian and non-prejudicial as we thought. The questions for our students are: If you're prejudiced – and we all are – how do those prejudices affect your relationships with families and students in the school that you lead? And what do you do about them?

A discussion of race in a largely White preparation program necessitates beginning with Whiteness, using purposeful and structured conversations/activities. We begin this discussion with the use of a visual slide (Figure 1). Students are asked to silently write what they see. Students share their observations. They typically include statements like, I see, "A series of dots," "Different clusters of colored circles," "Colored patterns, one looks like a paw print." We validate what people see

and redirect the discussion to focus on the background of the slide. For the purposes of beginning a serious investigation about race, we discuss the need to start with the white background. We connect the students' observations about the colored dots on the slide to the all too often and erroneous assumptions about race in the White Midwestern United States, that race is an issue for African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and is not about Whiteness. We conclude this short activity with the point that our discussion about race and prejudice begins with focusing on Whiteness.

Figure 1.



Next we establish ground rules for the conversations about race. These were adapted from *Beyond Diversity* (Singleton, 2002-2003) and *Courageous Conversations about Race* (Singleton & Linton, 2006): 1) Keep it personal, local and immediate; 2) Isolate race (race, not socio-economic status, not culture, not ethnicity, not nationality, not gender); 3) Agree to be uncomfortable and accept non-closure; 4) Examine the presence of Whiteness and its impact; and 5) Stay engaged. We also provide "Distancing Behaviors Often Used by White People" (Edler & Irons, 2002), which has led once to a student half-jokingly asking another, after the other had referred to his friends of color, if he was "being an expert," which is one of the

behaviors Edler and Irons list.

Using a technique called "Four-Minute Writing," students respond to 1 of 4 different quotes on race[i]. Each student shares his or her response, but can only share what each has written. Next students read "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege" by McIntosh (1990) in class using a "Say Something"[ii] (adapted from Harmin, 1994) activity. Following the reading, they fill out a White privilege checklist (Singleton, 2002-2003). The class shares their scores, how they felt, and what struck them about it. Following this they read "White Privilege in Schools" (Olson, 2002) and upon completion they go on a *Talk Walk*[iii] (adapted from Harmin, 1994) with a new partner to discuss their reactions to White privilege, where they have seen or experienced White privilege in their lives, and where they see it in schools. After sharing with the class the talk walk discussion, the class watches the video *The Color of Fear* (Wah, 1994).

Upon finishing this intense film, students are asked to write about reactions, gut response, and to probe why they think they reacted that way. Students are also asked to pose two discussion questions for the group. As a follow-up assignment, students are expected to complete the White privilege checklist with someone of a different race than they are and have a conversation about it. Additional readings include: *Other People's Children* (Delpit, 1995), "Unmet Promise: Raising Minority Achievement" (Johnston & Viadero, 2000), *Crossing over to Canaan* (Ladson-Billings, 2001), "The Canary in the Mine" (Singham, 1998), "Breaking the Silence: White Students' Perspectives on Race in Multiracial Schools" (Lewis-Charp, 2003), "The New White Flight" (Hwang, 2005), "White Racism, Anti-Racism, and School Leadership Preparation" (Young & Laible, 2000), selections on White privilege from *White Like Me* (Wise, 2005), and selections on race from *Adolescents at School* (Sadowski, 2003).

The following class session students share their experiences with the White privilege survey, share/comment on important passages from the readings, and watch the video *The Difference Between Us* from the *Race, the Power of an Illusion* series (Herbes-Sommers, 2003). Students discuss how this topic of race and Whiteness applies to future leadership and what they can do to alleviate the White privilege in schools. While this is not a complete course on race and Whiteness, the goal of including this topic in the foundations course is to create a beginning understanding of Whiteness and for students to see and confront privilege in their schools. Additional goals are for students to understand that race is not a topic with a final resting point, that there is no magic bullet that nice White educators can adopt to achieve racial equity in schools. We stress that through the discomfort of and engaging in discussions of race, we build our language and capacity to see, address, and speak to these issues.

While the instructors have no "hard" data indicating that these sessions are effective for students, we look to students' comments from evaluations, reflections, and on-line discussion. One student commented:

> I honestly don't really know where to begin [about the session on race]. It was disturbing, upsetting, uncomfortable, and eye opening. [In the video *The Color of Fear*] as the White man kept expressing his views I kept seeing myself, my parents, or other people I know. I used to believe that I wasn't racist, but now I know I am. I think of my interactions with parents and students. I am sure I didn't say "racist" things, but I am sure I probably thought them, and it never even crossed my mind that the entire school system was based on middle class, White values, and I am sure I imposed those beliefs on my parents and students.

Another student reflected:

> I find myself a little disgusted with my own race. It amazes me that we can be so blind to the needs of others and so arrogant that even when we see those needs we blame the "others" for having those needs . . . I realize now that if I want to reach all children, it will be MY responsibility to open MY eyes, ears, and heart . . . All of these things let me see the mistakes that I have made in the past and the words, actions and thoughts that I have used that are inherently racist. I was very disappointed with myself for these faults. However, I have also come to realize, hopefully without being cliché, that knowing is half the battle. At least these discussions have opened my eyes and with this new knowledge I can find even more information and continues my progression towards more equitable behaviors on my and my school's part.

Examining Whiteness, privilege, and racial inequity is clearly not a comfortable experience for White students in leadership preparation programs. But getting past a veneer of niceness allows for the possibility of becoming leaders capable of enacting justice.

Talking about Social Class

While race has been "invisible" to our students because of their Whiteness, social class has been invisible simply because "we don't like to talk about it." It is one of the last social taboos; Fussell (1983) says that most Americans would far rather talk about sex. For homework before our first session, we assign a reading from Fussell ("A Touchy Subject") and ask students to visit the "You Are Where You Live" section of the Claritas/PRIZM website

(http://www.claritas.com/MyBestSegments/Default.jsp?ID=20) and enter the zip code of the school they work in as well as the town they grew up in and the town in which they live in now. Claritas/PRIZM is a marketing website which surveys neighborhoods, categorizes each by "segments" and then identifies each segment's typical ethnicity, income, and choices of restaurant, entertainment, and vehicle. To open our class discussion, we ask:

- How accurate was the Claritas/PRIZM site for your lifestyle? For that of your school?
- What similarities or differences do you see between the lifestyles of where you grew up, where you live now, and the school you work in?
- What implications do they (either similarities or differences) have for your practice as an educational leader?
- How does your own social class define who you are and how you interact with the people in your school?

We continue this discussion about social class by asking students, in groups, to define what class means, as well as to devise some criteria for what "middle class" means in their school community: *How are such people recognized? What do they have in common?* Since most of our students consider themselves "middle class," we ask, "How are you more or less receptive to families who are not like yourselves?" We also use Payne's (2005) "Could you survive in poverty?," "Could you survive in the middle class?," and "Could you survive in wealth?" handouts to further the discussion about class differences and middle class norms in the United States and in public schools. We follow this discussion with a case available from the Harvard Family Research Project, "School Won't Let Mom Talk about Her Casino Job"

(McCown, 2001), which asks our students to determine what kind of occupations are considered "okay" in a particular schooling context, and why.

From a discussion of social class in general, we talk about poverty in particular. We ask students to watch a short online media clip, "Budgeting for Poverty" (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), which provides facts about the current poverty level for a family of four ($19,307 yearly) and average costs of necessities such as housing, utilities, transportation, etc. We have also taken the data from this media clip and made it into a budgeting activity. For this activity, students are put together in various simulated configurations of a family of four and are asked to submit a budget plan. They are given the average costs provided in "Budgeting for Poverty" and are asked to make a decision about what they will afford, what they would want to afford, and what else they need that they could not afford. While we recognize this is a very didactic activity, it has proven useful in opening students' eyes to the economic realities many families face daily.

One student wrote about the video:

> The poverty video really made me think about myself and the people around me. As teachers we know we are not paid enough for what we do in the classroom and for the preparation we do outside of the classroom. After watching this video it really made me think about how much I make and how much worse I could be off. I couldn't imagine having a family of four and only living on $19,307 a year.

We also discuss Elizabeth Warren's research on the increasing bankruptcy of the middle class: one in seven families file for bankruptcy, and the greatest predictor of filing is whether or not families have a child (Potier, 2003; Warren & Tyagi, 2003). Students are floored by the idea that bankruptcy is due not to overspending on

luxury items, but to overspending, for the sake of children, on a nice house in a good school district. Students who teach in an affluent district are sure that such is the case for the families they serve. One says, for example:

> I sometimes assume there are not financial burdens on my students because I never hear anyone complain about them, but I know now that this is not the case. There are poverty situations and families everywhere amongst us.

Because our Midwestern institution serves primarily rural populations, we also address rural poverty with readings such as *Adolescent Lives in Transition* (San Antonio, 2004), *Children of the Land* (Elder & Conger, 2000), and *Growing Up Empty* (Schwartz-Nobel, 2002). Our ongoing questions from these readings and in these discussions are: *What does poverty mean for the families in your schools?* and *What does poverty mean for you as an educational leader?* To enhance our discussion we use a mini-lecture that includes statistics from state, federal, and non-profit agencies on the condition of poverty, who in the state/country is poor, and myths vs. realities of low-income families.

We have also discussed a *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* case entitled "Advanced Placement Courses: Do Prohibitive Costs Exclude Financially Disadvantaged Students?" (Brimstein, Milgate, O'Donaghue, & Yunker, 2000). In discussing the case, we interrogate our own school practices that privilege or disadvantage certain economic status. During these reflective discussions, one student shared about the lunch program at his school. He also wrote about it for a reflection:

> I never had realized this before, but our lunch program really discriminates against our low-income students. At the middle school, all the kids who

> received free or reduced lunch get the "pre-pack." [The standard, pre-packaged hot lunch.] They get no choice unless they bring money from somewhere. Middle class and rich kids can buy the pre-pack but they can also buy a la cart. They get to buy pizza, fries, granola bars, you know the stuff the kids want to eat. I never thought about how this is really stigmatizing and even mean. I mean come on, what middle-schooler wants hot turkey with nasty gravy when they could have pizza?

Talking about Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues

An essential component to an introduction to social justice in our foundations class is purposeful time and attention to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) issues. While it has not been "nice" to discuss White privilege, and not "nice" to challenge erroneous assumptions about family, and not "nice" to question collective understanding of social class, GLBT topics often have been the most challenging and most uncomfortable for students. Given the reality that GLBT students are victims of verbal and physical harassment at significantly higher rates than their peers, faculty and administration "never or rarely" intervene about this harassment even when present, and that GLBT students attempt suicide at higher rates than peer adolescents (Kosciw, 2004a, 2004b), there is significant work to be done in providing safe and nurturing schools. We recognize that we use very similar curriculum and instruction in this area to that described in great detail in "Integrating Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Topics and Their Intersections with Other Areas of Difference into the Leadership Preparation Curriculum: Practical Ideas and Strategies" (Capper et al., 2006). We refer readers to this work for important pedagogy and content in addressing these issues. After one initial discussion of GLBT issues (before we had truly gotten into this curriculum), a cohort of students commented they had heard from a prominent state administrator that they should

"avoid" and "not touch" these issues. While this is disheartening, it solidifies in our minds the need to create time and intellectual space to learn and wrestle with GLBT issues.

One question that we have found especially fruitful for students to ponder has been: *How do you as an administrator balance moral, community, and religious concerns with protecting your students and faculty?* Such a question was provocative in class and led to an expanded discussion on the electronic discussion board. Additional readings to inform students include the 2003 School Climate Survey from the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, selections from *Adolescents at School*, and a case from the Harvard Family Research Project about a gay teacher called "Reaching Out to the Only One There" (Berges, 2001).

Educational Plunge

Brown refers to "educational plunges" (2004b, pp. 95, 101), where students are asked to choose a setting outside their experience to visit and upon which to reflect. The assignment for this course gives students the option of either experiencing something outside their own experience or reading a non-fictional book outside of their own tradition. The options of either experiencing something "other" or reading someone else's story provides students with some comfort of choice. Students have chosen, for example, to visit a Buddhist temple, read *All Souls, a Family Story from Southie* (MacDonald, 1999), or attend campus events related to Black History Month or Women's History Month. They are then asked to reflect upon the experience and do a short presentation in class with these questions as a guide:

- Provide a context for what you did, when, and why
- What did you expect of this experience and/or this other culture?
- What do you notice is different from the way people of your own background would do things?

- What seem to be some of this culture's underlying assumptions?
- How do those underlying assumptions compare to those of your own culture?
- How would or how do the assumptions of both your culture and that of this "other" culture get enacted in school? (You can use secondary sources if you don't know.) What conflicts could ensue?
- How did you wrestle with any stereotypes that may have been reinforced/rejected during this experience?
- How would you as an administrator work with or provide cultural diversity within your school?

As an extra incentive, students can count their time during this cultural experience towards their field experience hours. Presentations have prompted discussion about current examples of cultural conflict in students' schools as well as what students would do as future administrators to encourage embracing of cultural diversity. One important outcome from these cultural plunges has been that many students have shared that this experience was one of the only times in their lives when they felt they were in the cultural minority. This has consistently prompted engaging discussion about how this feels, the behavior we employ in these circumstances, and an opportunity to unpack our gut reactions. After going to a variety of Asian grocery stores, one student reflected:

> Once I walked in I felt isolated, alone, different (and not in a good way), and kind of stupid. I could not recognize most of what was being sold. I wanted to buy the one thing I knew I liked and leave. I could feel my behavior changing. I did not want to make eye contact. I did not want to ask questions. I did not want to let on that I was ignorant about this place. It was a quick slap in the

> face about feeling like a fish out of water. I couldn't help thinking that this might be a fraction of what minority students feel everyday in schools.

We have noticed that some students choose decidedly less adventurous and more convenient educational plunges – for example, eating in a Mexican restaurant – but in the spirit of non-coercion alluded to at the beginning of this article, we grade assignments based on students' depth of reflection about an experience rather than on what we think might challenge a student most. We have wrestled and continue to wrestle with this decision. This helps, we think, to create a sense that students, rather than we, are responsible for their own educational growth.

Case Study: Applying Theory to Practice

As a final project, students develop a case study of an issue in their own schools, relate that issue to the course readings and discussions, prepare at least two possible courses of action for an administrator in that situation, and present their case and analysis to the class. This assignment has helped students apply course themes to their own schooling practice. Students have written, for example, about a conflict between a special education team and the parents of a special education student, and of an increase of families of color in a small town and the impact on extracurricular activities. Students have found it instructive to hear about and consider what other districts are doing.

Students have said, for example, "The case study allowed me to develop a greater understanding of White privilege and to examine the realities of privilege resulting from written and unwritten policies." Another student reflected,

> The case study was a good way of getting practical experience with the concepts discussed in class. Knowing what to do in a given situation is made

> easier when you have had the opportunity to practice . . . often people jump to make decisions without thinking through the issue from multiple (i.e., racial, gender, familial) perspectives. This case study was an excellent opportunity to apply the issues from class into my school. I had to look at things in a whole new way.

Students present a synopsis of their cases the last day of class, and we find that these real-life stories provide yet one more example for us all of ways in which social justice and cultural issues continue to be present in school life.

Conclusions

Meadows and Lee (2002), who have researched challenges of preparing White educators to work with primarily White populations, specifically mention the difficulties of discussing concepts such as White privilege because of their students' Midwestern self-image of themselves as "nice, fair, and polite" (p. 111), which contradicts assumptions of privilege. We acknowledge these difficulties as well, and call for further discussion and research about how educators can encourage future educational leaders to move beyond inherent niceness to work for social justice. Further, we acknowledge the difficulty in assessing (Brown, 2005b; Hafner, 2005), even through reflections, whether students actually have moved to a social justice disposition or are simply spouting what they think their instructors wish to hear. In acknowledging this difficulty, we challenge ourselves, and the educational leadership field, to move beyond only investigating dispositions, and into examining knowledge and skills. Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (in press) call us to include and assess dispositions as well as look to addressing and assessing what leaders know and do with their knowledge. For this reason, we include these essential disposition components into our preparation program at the very beginning stage. Students are

then expected at the completion of the course to use the knowledge they have gained and apply it to a case study, but also to use it in future courses and field work.

We do not wish to make a claim, nor could we make such a claim, that we have achieved the right balance of curriculum and instruction to facilitate our students becoming social justice leaders. However, it is our intent that in our predominantly White preparation, program our "nice" students must begin to wrestle with these issues at the onset and continue that process throughout their program. It is also the intent that the faculty in our program wrestles together with these same issues in designing, delivering, and assessing our work.

As a faculty and as a field, we have a responsibility to build experiences and assessments that indicate if we are actually preparing leaders who not only possess particular dispositions and say they believe in social justice, but can and do enact justice in their schools. Dispositions cannot be seen as the final and only goal for developing K-12 administrators committed to social justice. We have the obligation to consider our effectiveness as it relates to our graduates and whether or not they create more socially just schools. That is the ultimate assessment of our preparation programs: whether or not our graduates move beyond being "nice" as leaders and take critical, and often uncomfortable, steps to building more socially just schools.

References

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching for diversity and social justice: A sourcebook*. New York: Routledge.

Anderson, G. (1990). Toward a critical constructivist approach to school administration: Invisibility, legitimation and the study of non-events. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 26*, 38-59.

Ayers, W., Hunt, J. A., & Quinn, T. (Eds.). (1998). *Teaching for social justice*. New York: The New Press and Teachers College Press.

Banks, J. A. (1999). *An introduction to multicultural education* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Berges, E. (2001). *Reaching out to the only one out there: Teaching case*. Cambridge, MA: FINE Network at Harvard Family Research Project.

Bredo, E. (2005). Addressing the social foundations "accountability" dilemma. *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association, 38*(3), 230-241.

Brimstein, P., Milgate, D., O'Donaghue, L., & Yunker, T. (2000). Advanced placement courses: Do prohibitive costs exclude financially disadvantaged students? *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 3*(2).

Brown, K. M. (2004a). Assessing preservice leaders' beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding issues of diversity, social justice, and equity: A review of existing measures. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 37*, 332-342.

Brown, K. M. (2004b). Leadership for social justice and equity: Weaving a transformative framework and pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 77-108.

Brown, K. M. (2005a). Social justice education for preservice leaders: Evaluating transformative learning strategies. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 38*(2), 155-167.

Brown, K. M. (2005b). Transformative adult learning strategies: Assessing the impact on pre-service administrators' beliefs. *Educational Considerations, 22*(2), 19-32.

Butin, D. W. (2005). Guest editor's introduction: How social foundations of education matters to teacher preparation: A policy brief. *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association, 38*(3), 214-229.

Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M. M. (2005). Educating school leaders for social justice. *Education Policy, 19*(1), 201-222.

Capper, C. A., Alston, J. A., Gause, C. P., Koschoreck, J. W., Lopez, G., Lugg, C. A., et al. (2006). Integrating lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender topics and their intersections with other areas of difference into the leadership preparation

curriculum: Practical ideas and strategies. *Journal of School Leadership, 16*(2).

Coontz, S. (1992). The way we wish we were: Defining the family crisis. In S. Coontz (Ed.), *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap* (pp. 8-22). New York: Harper Collins.

Dantley, M. E., & Tillman, L. C. (2006). Social justice and moral transformative leadership. In C. Marshall & M. Oliva (Eds.), *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education* (pp. 16-30). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Delpit, L. D. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.

Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review, 58*(3), 280-298.

Edler, J., & Irons, B. (2002). Distancing behaviors often used by White people. In E. Lee, D. Menkart & M. Okazawa-Rey (Eds.), *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K-12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development* (pp. 113). Washington, D.C.: Teaching for Change.

Education Week. (2000). *Lessons of a century: A nation's school's come of age*. Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education.

Elder, G. H., & Conger, R. (2000). *Children of the land: Adversity and success in rural America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Fullan, M. (2002). Moral purpose writ large. *School Administrator, 59*(8), 14.

Fussell, P. (1983). *Class: A guide through the American status system*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and Co.

Goodlad, J. I. (2003/2004). Teaching what we hold sacred. *Educational Leadership, 61*(4), 18-21.

Grogan, M., & Andrews, R. (2002). Defining preparation and professional development for the future. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 38*(2), 233-256.

Hafner, M. M. (2005, April). *Preparing school leaders to ensure equity and work toward social justice: An exploratory study of leadership dispositions.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal.

Hallinger, P., & Leithwood, K. A. (1996). Culture and educational administration: A case of finding out what you don't know you don't know. *Journal of Educational Administration, 34*(5), 98-116.

Hartnett, D. (2001). Arm-in-arm for justice. *Loyola Magazine, Summer*.

Haymes, S. N. (1995). White culture and the politics of racial difference: Implications for multiculturalism. In C. E. Sleeter & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference* (pp. 105-127). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Helms, J. E. (1990). *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Greenwood Press.

Howard, G. R. (1999). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hwang, S. (2005, November 19). The new White flight. *Wall Street Journal,* p. A.1.

Johnston, R. C., & Viadero, D. (2000, March 15). Unmet promise: Raising minority achievement. *Education Week, 19,* 1, 18-19.

Kohn, A. (1998). Only for my kid: How privileged parents undermine school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan, 79*(8), 568-578.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Canaan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lewis-Charp, H. (2003). Breaking the silence: White students' perspectives on race in multiracial schools. *Phi Delta Kappan,85*(4), 279-285.

Loewen, J. L. (1995). Handicapped by history. In *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong* (pp. 18-36). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Love, A., & Kruger, A. C. (2005). Teacher beliefs and student achievement in urban schools serving African American students. *The Journal of Educational Research, 99*(2), 87-98.

MacDonald, M. P. (1999). *All souls: A family story from Southie*. Boston: Beacon.

Marshall, C. (2004). Social justice challenges to educational administration: Introduction to a special issue. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 3-13.

Marshall, C., & Oliva, M. (2006). Building the capacities of social justice leaders. In C. Marshall & M. Oliva (Eds.), *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education* (pp. 1-15). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

McCown, C. (2001). *School won't let mom talk about her casino job*. Retrieved September 18, 2003, from http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/teaching-case/casino.html.

Meadows, M., & Lee, J. H. (2002). The challenge of using multicultural education in predominately White early childhood classrooms. *International Journal of Early Childhood Education, 8*(2), 105-124.

Milner, H. R. (2003). Reflection, racial competence, and critical pedagogy: How do we prepare pre-service teachers to pose tough questions? *Race, Ethnicity, and Education, 6*(2), 193-208.

Mondale, S. (Writer) (2001). Episode 1: The common school (1770-1890). In S. B. Patton (Producer), *School: The Story of American Public Education*. U.S.: Stone Lantern Films.

Nagda, B. R. A., Gurin, P., & Lopez, G. E. (2003). Transformative pedagogy for democracy and social justice. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 6*(2), 165-191.

Payne, R. K. (2005). *A framework for understanding poverty* (4th ed.). Highlands, TX: Aha Process.

Potier, B. (2003, October 30). Middle-class income doesn't buy middle-class lifestyle. *Harvard Gazette*.

Pounder, D., Reitzug, U., & Young, M. D. (2002). Preparing school leaders for school improvement, social justice, and community. In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The educational leadership challenge: Redefining leadership for the 21st century* (pp. 261-288). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Racial prejudice: Thinking about it. (2003, November 22). *The Economist,* 78.

Ryan, J. (2003). Educational administrators' perceptions of racism in diverse school contexts. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 6*(2), 145-164.

Sadowski, M. (Ed.). (2003). *Adolescents at school: Perspectives on youth, identity, and education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group.

San Antonio, D. M. (2004). *Adolescent lives in transition: How social class influences the adjustment to middle school*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Scheurich, J. J., & McKenzie, K. B. (2006). The continuing struggle for social justice: 2006 politics of education association yearbook. *Educational Policy, 20*(1), 8-12.

Scheurich, J. J., & Skrla, L. (2003). *Leadership for equity and excellence: Creating high-achievement classrooms, schools, and districts*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin/Sage.

Schwartz-Nobel, L. (2002). *Growing up empty: The hunger epidemic in America* (1st ed.). New York: HarperCollins.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1992). *Moral leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shields, C. M. (2004a). Creating a community of difference. *Educational Leadership, 61*(7), 38-41.

Shields, C. M. (2004b). Dialogic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 109-132.

Singham, M. (1998). The canary in the mine. *Phi Delta Kappan, 80*(1), 9-15.

Singleton, G. E. (2002-2003). *Beyond diversity: A strategy for de-institutionalizing racism and improving student achievement*. San Francisco: Pacific Education Group.

Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Sleeter, C. E. (1995). Reflections on my use of multicultural and critical pedagogy when students are White. In C. E. Sleeter & P. McLaren (Eds.), *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference* (pp. 415-437). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Tatum, B. D. (1994). Teaching White students about racism: The search for White allies and the restoration of hope. *Teachers College Record, 95*(4), 462-476.

Theoharis, G. T. (2004). *At no small cost: Social justice leaders and their response to resistance.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Tozer, S. (1993). Toward a new consensus among social foundations educators: Draft position paper of the American educational studies association committee on academic standards and accreditation. *Educational Foundations, 7*(4), 5-22.

Trumbell, E., Rothstein-Fisch, C., Greenfield, P. M., & Quiroz, B. (2001). The bridging cultures framework. In *Bridging cultures between home and school: A guide for teachers: With a special focus on immigrant Latino families* (pp. 1-27). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2005). *Budgeting for poverty*. Retrieved January 31, 2006, from http://www.nccbuscc.org/cchd/povertyusa/tour.htm.

Wallace, B. (2000). A call for change in multicultural training at graduate schools of education: Educating to end oppression and for social justice. *Teachers College Record, 102*(6), 1086-1111.

Warren, E., & Tyagi, A. W. (2003). *The two-income trap: Why middle-class mothers and fathers are going broke*. New York: Basic Books.

Wise, T. (2005). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press.

Young, M. D., & Laible, J. (2000). White racism, anti-racism, and school leadership preparation. *Journal of School Leadership, 10*(5), 374-415.

---

[i] The four quotes students respond to for this writing activity are: 1) "Playing the race card." (Anonymous), 2) "I treat all my students the same, race does not matter."-Anonymous teacher, 3) "Why can't we all just get along?" (Rodney King), and 4) "Sometimes the way I choose to identify myself makes it difficult for you to hear me." (Audrey Lorde)

[ii] *Say Something* strategy is a reading strategy that keeps readers active with the text. The class is placed in partners or small groups, they read the text independently, and stop every section or couple of paragraphs to "say something." Each person gets to say something, recap, clarify, ask a question, point out something that struck her/him, etc. This happens throughout the entire reading.

[iii] A *Talk Walk* is an interactive active strategy. Students are paired up and discuss the given topics/address the questions provided while walking. Students are given a limited amount of time *must* continue to walk and talk the entire time.

Joanne M. Marshall is an assistant professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University. She is a former high school teacher and researches the relationship between spirituality and public schooling, particularly the experiences of students, teachers, and administrators.

George Theoharis is an assistant professor of Educational Leadership and Inclusive Education at Syracuse University. A former teacher and urban school principal, his research focuses on leadership, public school leaders committed to equity and justice, and the education of marginalized students.