

## ***The moral life of schools revisited: Preparing educational leaders to “build a new social order” for social justice and democratic community***

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*Not only does this paper describe the evolution of an educational leadership doctoral program, it also focuses on the author’s attempt to assist its students in learning how to become reflective leaders through the application of critical theory and inquiry. The work also illustrates how voice and choice decisions were used to demonstrate key democratic principles in class assignments. It portrays the struggle to define the moral purpose of school while also delineating the leader’s role in achieving a new type of schooling. In building a new social order for an increasingly diverse student population, leaders must know how to provide access to and to teach all how to be participants in the educational process that so necessary to sustain a democratic community. Finally, the paper also offers future directions for leadership preparation programs.*

### **The Challenge for a New Social Order**

University leadership preparation programs have experienced years of attacks from politicians and practitioners alike who claim that ivory tower professors are out of touch with the reality of practitioners and schools. As student populations grow increasingly more diverse, perhaps now it is time for theorists and educational leaders to develop a common understanding of how this dramatic change has implications for educational leaders concerned with student learning. Surely, in light of the new accountability standards this may well be education’s greatest challenge (Orozco, 2001). Therefore, if we agree with Skrla et al.’s (2004) contention that “the work of school leaders is vital to linking accountability to equity” (p. 134), then we, as professors in leadership preparation programs, must be mindful that our students need the tools and strategies to be successful in that work as Hallinger and Heck (1998) and Skrla (2003) assert.

In attempting to be responsive to these demands and with state legislatures looking at new methods of dealing with failing schools and failing students, along with the new alternative certification procedures available outside of educational institutions, university preparation programs may be at a crossroads. University educators need to reexamine how school leaders are prepared to address the complexity of culture and schooling by helping them to reframe the issues surrounding education, developing in them skills that assist in examining how they think about schools, and also cultivating in them a more insightful understanding of social justice and equity.

Giroux (1997) and other scholars assert that schools, and the author of this paper also contends that their leaders, have a special responsibility to practice democratic principles. To further support this contention, there is recent research that connects improved student achievement in schools that embrace democratic learning structures (see Bryk et al., 1993; Glickman, 1993; Lee

& Smith, 1994). It would seem to make sense then that public schools should be places where democracy is lived and practiced with all stakeholders included in the governance process.

Possibly this was Dewey's (1927) intent when he stated that for a public school to be truly public, all concerned parties must have free access to information, to the exchange of ideas, and to the shaping of common aims and purposes. But how can schools be truly public, as Dewey has defined them, unless university programs foster democratic leadership among students, while preparing them to contend with the increased complexity of culture and schooling? And how do school leaders then create these kinds of schools in an era of standardization among the growing diversity of students?

In 1995, Scheurich and Laible reviewed the UCEA Knowledge Base and determined that "what we need to do to make the necessary changes to our preparation programs is not in question...[but rather], are we willing to make changes" (p. 319). This paper seeks to document the evolution of a program willing to do just that—to make changes based upon a conscious and intentional use of research gathered through two evaluations. Grounded in feminist and critical theory, Lather's (1991) advocacy inquiry calls for this application of data in such a way that assists participants "to understand and change their situations" (p. 57) by engaging in projects which immersed students in the study of inequities (Marshall, 2004). This paper provides an overview of how the faculty used evaluation data in an attempt to create safe classrooms where critical thought and reflection were practiced, teaching leaders to develop the habit of conscientization. Freire (1985) asserts that this is the constant and deep examination by all stakeholders of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and the lives of their students.

First, this paper will provide a brief overview of the data gathered in an evaluation of an educational leadership program on its fifth anniversary (Allen, 2001a)<sup>1</sup>, and it will also report the perceptions of currently enrolled doctoral students that were gathered in a second study (Allen, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Then it will document how these changes were implemented in two specific courses where democratic authority and critical theory/inquiry were studied and practiced with a specific cohort. Finally, this paper will offer future directions for educational leadership programs and their professors in creating dynamic learning communities that can assist in building a new social order, in much the same manner as George Counts' clarion call pleaded for in 1932.

At the Baltimore meeting of the Progressive Education Association, Counts called progressive educators members of a superior breed, and he challenged them to confront the social issues that the Great Depression had made visible (Allen, 2001b). Having studied schools for ten years, Counts found that schools were serving the selected few where "education was contingent on social and economic standing" (Kleibard, 1995, p. 159). Certainly society and education today reflect some of the same societal conditions of the Great Depression, with the middle class shrinking and the number of families living below the poverty level increasing. How can we build a new social order that will maintain our democratic way of life if all schools do not teach, model, and cultivate the necessary behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge to do so?

### **Program Evaluations**

Data for this program evaluation were collected in two parts. Part one data were gathered in 2001 (Allen, 2001b). Each of the stakeholder groups participated, including: current and past doctoral

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1 Please note that the author was new to the institution and was not known by the students or their mentors.

2 In this second program evaluation, the data were gathered by the doctoral student rather than the author. This was done in order to insure that students were responding openly and freely to the questions and not to the position of the questioner.

students, employers, supervisors, mentors, and program and other university faculty. Part two data were obtained through surveys and focus group interviews with 28 of the 32 doctoral students admitted since the programmatic changes were instituted (Allen, 2003).

In the first evaluation of the program, student data were gathered using surveys and interviews that focused on their experiences in the educational leadership doctoral program. While most responses were favorable about their doctoral program experiences, we learned that we needed to include either a minor outside of education or a minor in curriculum (Allen, 2001a). Data from employers and supervisors were also gathered using surveys that focused on how well the program prepared students to perform specific tasks and responsibilities.

The program subsequently was redesigned as a four-year model and was expanded to include three specialties: the superintendency, curriculum and instruction, and research and technology. While there were six recommendations from the 2001 evaluation report, please note that the research reported in the second program evaluation and in the remainder of this paper specifically addresses only the last item: Review the curriculum of the program to include other needed courses that focus on curriculum and cultural diversity issues.

Student data were gathered in the second evaluation through surveys that included questions about social justice, equity, student centered learning, No Child Left Behind, and critical pedagogy for school improvement. The survey was constructed to elicit responses on how their philosophical beliefs had been changed by their studies, and their understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.

Most survey responses were more than favorable about the program's focus on diversity, critical pedagogy, and democratic authority. Eighty-five percent of the twenty-eight respondents indicated that their doctoral studies had given them a clearer understanding of how diversity will play a huge role in educational settings in the United States for years to come; 88% said that educational leaders must strive to make sure all voices are heard in response to school and system wide changes; and 93% felt they had a duty to ensure equitable opportunities for all stakeholders in their respective schools (Allen, 2003).

Focus group interviews were also conducted for students to answer three questions that related to social justice, applications of the program in the LEA setting, and how to accomplish social justice in the age of accountability (Allen, 2003). Students offered comments that illustrated a connection between the program and social justice. They were very forthcoming about how unaware they were of social justice issues prior to entering the doctoral program. One student commented: "My understanding was embryonic; I tended to view injustices as isolated happenings; what I've come to understand is...social injustice is built into education as a whole...as long as you are part of the establishment you are part of that problem. And you have to break out of that mold to open your eyes." Another one stated: "One of the things that sparked our understanding is what we have read...and then we talked about things" (Allen, 2003, p.15). These comments indicate that the students knew they had developed a deeper understanding of social justice in their schools as a result of their doctoral work.

All of the students had made changes in their school programs from implementing book clubs, mentor meetings on diversity, to staff development in the areas of social justice in their schools. Others had also redesigned the teacher evaluation process to uphold and identify social justice practices among teachers, some were reevaluating exceptional children's referrals at the school site, and others were having important conversations with teachers about why they do what they do with children (Allen, 2003).

Responses to the question which addressed accomplishing social justice in the age of accountability were varied and laced with concerns and questions. While some students lauded

standardization for its focus on underserved groups, many others felt compelled to speak about social justice and standardization being diametrically opposed. In particular, one student wrote: “why would we expect standardized education when we do not have standardized medicine or income levels?” Some responses centered on whether social justice could be accomplished only in the margins of accountability or whether a true revolution led by educators was needed. The majority of students felt better prepared to accomplish social justice in the age of standardization as a result of their studies (Allen, 2003). Finally, the responses to the focus group questions reveal that these students believe that the study of social justice has a direct correlation to transforming educational leaders in their practitioner settings. All twenty-eight student responses indicate a thirst for more study of social justice research and that their work in the doctoral program always resulted in some social action in their own schools (Allen, 2003).

### **Diversity and critical theory/inquiry**

Most demographic projections estimate that the United States will contain 50 percent minority members by the year 2040 (Orozco, 2001). And yet, many university programs are not preparing school leaders to understand and embrace these changes and their implications for schools. We must also be mindful that diversity includes not only different cultures, but also different ideas. Hence we need to prepare school leaders who are able to read and critique ideas from other fields, who can collaborate and learn from various groups about leadership, and “who can establish structures that permit open dialogue among and between all stakeholders about policies, culture, children, teaching and learning” (Kochan, 2004, p. 3). By practicing a “language of critique” (Marshall & Rusch, 1996, p. 25) with our students, we can teach school leaders how to use critical theory to implement democratic authority within their institutions and local districts (McLaren, 1994).

While many school leadership programs have responded to criticism by making their educational programs more experience-based and their teaching more field-oriented, they may continue to rely on what already exists in schools. In other words, rather than looking at what could be and will be in the light of the growing diversity in our schools, many programs fail to provide educational leaders with the knowledge and skills to critically examine education’s great challenge. Critical theory provides leaders with such a lens, allowing them to reflect critically and analyze their assumptions and belief systems about diversity, while assisting them in finding new answers to better inform school practices (McLaren, 1994). Even though Capper (1993) claims it “stops short” (p. 17) of being able to effect real change, critical theory uses methodologies, such as interviews and observations of events, that allow students “to peer into their own belief systems attitudes, assumptions...underlying their educational practices (Capper, 1993, p. 12).

Rather than using outmoded and failed educational methods from the past to prepare school leaders, universities are now called upon to create a new type of program of study that is embedded in a social, cultural, and moral leadership based in democratic authority that is committed to a just and equitable school. Schools are not just bureaucracies but places of struggle for the different social and cultural groups whose children are educated there. We have come to this understanding through the works of researchers like Oakes (1985), Perlmann (1988), Klein (1992), Delpit (1995), and others. We also know from study after study that students from historically oppressed groups fail miserably in schools where achievement is defined in ways that separate the students from their culture, their families, and their own sense of self (e.g., Fordham, 1999; Phillips, 1983; Soto, 1997; Solomon, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999).

This paper argues that it is the responsibility of university professors to prepare school leaders to understand not only these groups, and the forces that buffet and shape their lives, but themselves and how the leader’s language and practices may legitimize one group while marginalizing

others. We must challenge ourselves and our students to examine our assumptions about how we think about school and its importance to oppressed groups. If we agree that schools are places of possibility rather than merely preservers of the status quo, then leaders must involve themselves and their institutions in social and cultural change as Kent State professor James Henderson suggests. He purports that it is the school's responsibility to work for the empowerment for all, while advancing an active democratic environment (Henderson & Kesson, 1999). But how can leaders do this unless they are taught how to do so?

While there are several seminal works in educational leadership that review issues of social justice and critical theory in the field (e.g., Capper, 1993; Marshall & McCarthy, 2002; Marshall, 2004), the author's work with doctoral students has also been influenced by the scholarship of several critical theorists of curriculum, including James Sears (2004) and William Pinar (1988), who both agree that the school is now the center of the next wave of reform in curriculum work with teachers and administrators. Therefore we must have leaders who understand what is happening with curriculum in schools due to the accountability push, and Henderson is another curriculum theorist who writes extensively about curriculum leadership and wisdom.

Guided by the view of critical inquiry as "looking at the big picture by investigating and gaining a sense of understanding about the social, economic and political context of issues" (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p. 52), course syllabi were reconstructed to reflect this need for a perspective on the big picture. Students were given assignments that helped them to explore "the overt, tacit, and covert power relations between people" (Henderson, 2001, p. 22). They were also asked to reexamine their beliefs through the lens of critical pedagogy which explores how social justice seeks to "transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations" (Burbeles & Berk, 1999, p. 57). Further, the students reviewed their actions by using praxis which is "action that is grounded in a serious examination of the root causes of injustice and that is oriented toward human liberation and inequity" (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p. 52). Foster (1986) and hooks (1994) contend that the intentional use of praxis in university classrooms will more likely transfer to democratic practices in schools. Consequently, leadership preparation programs may very well be the ideal place to model these ideas if we desire change in the social order.

To this point, this paper has presented a summary of evaluation data coupled with the relevant literature that supports the program changes which appear to have transformed both the practice and beliefs of these school leaders. The next section of this paper presents examples of how the students put these beliefs into practice through the assignments in two courses. By transforming both the curriculum and the instruction in these two courses, we intended to develop a more student-centered, school-centered perspective that would prepare the students to become scholarly practitioners who could transform schools within the context of the community's culture. They were asked to interact with the curriculum by participating in democratic decision-making practices and they also examined the moral leadership responsibilities needed to achieve just schools for all students.

### **Creating a democratic classroom**

As noted above, the results of first program evaluation indicated that the students needed to be better prepared to deal with diversity. The starting point for teaching about diversity and its facets was in the introductory course, an interdisciplinary seminar where several objectives addressed "ideas, values, cultures, and contemporary issues affecting society generally and education particularly" and "to enhance students' knowledge of multiculturalism; racial, ethnic, and gender diversity; and individuals with handicaps" (ADMN 8610 Course syllabus). While seemingly broad enough to encompass the various aspects of diversity, the syllabus was openly structured

enough for an instructor to choose not to focus on what diversity is; what its impact is on schools; and how leaders can shape and mold that into success for all students and school communities. In fact, we had been told by a university faculty member that “Most of your doctoral students are not knowledgeable about many of the key broader debates in education...” (Allen, 2001a, p. 20). Thus, we knew we needed to be purposeful in how we taught aspiring school leaders about these broader issues.

Course readings were paired with syllabus objectives that were reflective of critical theory/inquiry. Further, the final project in this introductory course was to develop an annotated bibliography of current literature about each facet of diversity. Developed by groups of students who chose which facet of diversity they wanted to investigate, this project was presented (in whatever format the students chose) at the last class meeting. While the topic of the class project was chosen by the professor, students chose their group members and how to frame it within their own interests and responsibilities. Please note that as the semester advanced students reported out on the progress of their research, and as a consequence provided us with rich discussions about their growing understanding of the interplay between diversity with the values and culture of their school communities.

An additional intent of the instruction was the hope to instill in these leaders Dewey’s concept of democratic education that grew out of his desire to understand the major changes that were transforming the social fabric of the country at the end of the twentieth century. While he was concerned by the tremendous industrialization in the Northeast and Midwest, leading to a shift from a rural to an urban economy, he was also interested in understanding the changes created by the massive waves of immigrants who swarmed into the public schools of the North and Midwest at the same time. These immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived with languages and customs dramatically different from the nation’s earlier settlers. Seeking to make sense of how these transitions changed schools and the nation’s democratic way of life, Dewey believed that “only an equally radical change in education” would suffice in meeting these challenges. There are tremendous parallels to the country’s and education’s challenges then and now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Allen, 2002).

Dewey provides educators with some powerful lessons in transforming schools if we believe that schools should be miniature examples of democratic communities that involve “intercourse, communication and cooperation” which would lead to changes in instructional methods. Just as at the turn of the last century when traditional schools were failing children with the prescribed curriculum taught through memorization and rote exercises, it is also the case today and it is exacerbated by standardization. Our university classrooms must be places that model the best of progressive learning principles where students are offered choices of readings from multiple sources, where they work in groups, and where they must continually interact with their peers and their professor while all are learning together through discourse and critical reflection that centers on making connections between theories and practices.

Leaders who know and understand democratic principles can create communities that practice self-criticism, ethics (Foster, 1989), and openness to being public about the business of education as Dewey (1927) called for in *The Public and Its Problems*. What would it be like if we saw children not “as products being processed through a system” and teachers, not as test-givers, but both “as participants in an active practicing democracy, where each has the chance to live out...their own lives...?” (Foster, 1989, p. 59). If we want to see teachers and students as these kinds of participants, then we have to prepare leaders who nurture them in these roles. We also must prepare these leaders to be public about their decisions and to be skilled in practicing democratic principles in leading schools and systems that embrace diversity.

Dewey contended that for authentic learning to take place, it must be real to the student, and it becomes real only when the learner is actively engaged in the process. While Dewey concluded that individual growth from authentic learning was important not only for the sake of each child, he knew that it was “even more important for the good of the community” (Zilversmit, 1993, p.1). This concept of “community permeated Dewey’s educational thought” (p. 1), and he believed that schools should reflect the community, where the American ideal of democracy should be taught, modeled, and lived. In an effort to model these principles, these doctoral classes became miniature communities where students’ weekly reflections were posted on electronic bulletin boards which served as a form of democratic joint inquiry. This process taught students and instructors how to negotiate spaces, how to express their views respectfully, and how to listen and problem solve together.

If democracy is more than a form of government, and is really “a form of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Schutz, 2001, p. 274), then schools and their leaders should provide this experience for students. Dewey maintained that the democratic way of life required that students be able to assume societal roles, learning both democratic and cooperative work values so that as adults they could change society. These behaviors need to be taught and modeled in school leadership courses, so classes in this program were taught in a seminar setting, using the Socratic method, with most of the talk generated by the students while the instructor posed questions and prodded as needed, rather than lectured. In these university classes, the role of leader was passed around and among all the class participants and did not rest solely with the instructor. Dewey also believed that the curriculum had to be carefully developed but flexible enough to respond to the needs and interests of the learner. Accordingly, the lessons in the classroom (whether university or primary) should be intended to teach the concept of community where students “...could learn skills experientially as well as from books...which would enable them to work cooperatively in a democratic society” (Semel, 1999, p. 6).

### **The Moral Life of Schools Revisited**

Cohort VII was enrolled in a curriculum strategies course in their third term of study. Looking for a class project that would allow the students to develop a sense of community through a real-life opportunity to “analyze existing practices in school settings” and to “identify societal and political issues and dilemmas that affect curriculum” (ADMN 8121 Syllabus), the author used *The Moral Life of Schools* as a frame of reference for re-examining the priorities of schools through the lens of moral leadership. This book documents the investigation of Jackson, Boostrom, and Hanson (1993) into how moral issues were addressed in the curriculum, classrooms, and school culture of several different schools. The class project was based upon the book, with this cohort of thirteen doctoral students constructing a qualitative project of inquiry into the expressive morality of social justice issues in the curricular subculture of particular schools.

Having read the book as a mid-term assignment, the school leaders of Cohort VII were challenged to first reflect upon and then define morality in schools, then to identify what practices promote morality within schools, and finally to individually develop a conceptual framework for practicing moral leadership as school leaders. Using voice and choice decision-making activities, these students negotiated the design and implementation of a mini- research project that reviewed the moral implications of activities and artifacts found in schools. Self-selected into collaborative groups, they decided how many school observations were required and what their portfolios would include. They had to maintain a metacognitive log whereby they recorded what they observed during these classroom visits and what they thought about what they had observed.

They shared their observations and their reflections with their collaborative groups, and then created a group reflection for each of the two observations.

Many of these administrators entered classrooms for the first time without using a state mandated observation instrument. This was not easy to do as a school principal who has thirty years of experience in public education tells us:

The project was very difficult because we soon realized that everything we do, say or not say, teach or not teach, has moral implications. Reading about the project did not impact [us] the way our own visits did. We became personally involved in the moral issues in schools, and questioned not only what we observed, but what we did and stood for in our own schools. We also began to understand how our own mental model[s] and experiences influenced...us. We grew as a cohort in understanding and building trust. (C. Hammond, personal communication, March 14, 2004)

Individual students and collective groups described their growth in similar terms: The project “opened my eyes to the profound impact...teacher behavior can have on student learning” (L. Williams, personal communication, April 2, 2004; ‘[I] began to take a different view when observing classrooms in my own school” (Patterson, 2003, n.p.); and “The project forced me to reflect on my on personal biases and recognize other biases throughout the school and the school system” (P. Gibbs, personal communication, March 30, 2004). “[We became] more astute in identifying the moral implications of school practices. Collectively, we are seeing our schools through new eyes as we reflect on the moral overtones of all that is said and done as well as seen and heard by our school family” (Miller, Moose, & Pringle, 2003, p. 7).

It was the classroom observations conducted during the last eight weeks of the public school year that proved to be the most problematical for they posed real moral dilemmas for these educational leaders. While a few classroom observations were rich and thought provoking, many of the students found little being taught that was worthwhile or authentic, for there was no sense of wonder or inquiry; they found classrooms where teachers and students were disengaged; and they saw classroom materials used that were of poor quality and hopefully unintentionally perpetuated the status quo (Gibbs, Graham, Hammond, & Karney, 2003). Having been sensitized to the facets of diversity and issues of social justice through their coursework, they also witnessed more than a few instances where students were marginalized because of tracking practices, their race, or special learning needs (Karney, 2003a; Graham, 2003).

Their reflections also show that most classroom instruction focused on rote practice and drill and kill activities. “Many of the teachers were using canned curriculum and more disturbingly, most of what we saw was End-of-Grade test preparation...students were expected to answer only close-ended literal questions while few used problem solving and application type questions” (Karney, 2003b, n.p.). Another student writes: “At each one of our schools, teachers were exposing their children to curriculum that was not worth teaching...lessons were isolated attempts at preparing students for the impending tests....These lessons were not designed to extend and refine student learning” (Graham, 2003, n.p.). Another student observed in a classroom where there were few smiles but lots of rules to insure that students would act the same as they prepared for the end-of-grade tests. She writes: “It is as if all aspects have been reduced to this one thing” (Evans, 2003, n.p.). These reflections exemplify Grumet’s (1995) assertion that “curriculum is never the text, or the topic, never the method or the syllabus,” but “the conversation that makes sense of things...It is the process of making sense with a group of people” (p. 19). By contrast, what Cohort VII found was disconnected students and teachers—disconnected from each other and from the learning. In the schools where there was a premium on the test, they found moral education absent. No one was teaching perseverance, patience, dispositions, virtues, values, or certainly not how to exercise one’s voice—all necessary skills to sustain a democratic society whose citizens can grapple intelligently with problems.

This project provided the school leaders of Cohort VII with another “approach to studying the crisis in our schools. Sheer reporting of numbers alone does not reveal the real depth of our current educational crisis...By utilizing the reflective techniques demonstrated throughout...we can look to close the chasm and provide real quality learning experiences for our children (Evans, Maerz, & Reichert, 2003a, n.p.). They came to realize that “the culture of schools is wrought with moral dimensions, [with] moral lessons conveyed in every aspect of a school’s life, from the implicit curriculum to the custodian’s cleaning schedule” (Evans, Maerz, & Reichert, 2003b, n.p.).

### **Future Directions**

There is no guarantee that the curricular and program changes made in this educational leadership doctoral program may ultimately impact more than just these students. But if we are seeking to build a new social order with more socially just schools, we must begin somewhere. Clearly, educators need to work differently now by critically analyzing current practices that marginalize some students and while privileging others, but how can leaders do this unless preparation program teach them how to do so?

Currently, there is a grand canyon between how schools are structured and the practice of democratic principles (Shor, 1996). In order to bridge that abyss, we must begin to teach others how to share power and engage in decision-making about learning (Wade, 1999). We must create university classrooms and schools that are reflective of Dewey’s vision of a dynamic society where gender, race and social class are not barriers to participation in learning. Foster (1986), Mabokela and Madsen (2003) assert that “what academics do in classrooms transfers to words and actions in schools” (cited in Rusch, 2004, p. 21). Where better to effect this change than in a graduate program for educational leaders who then can teach and model for others responsible for teaching an increasingly diverse student body?

It is the relationships that we develop and model for our students that are key in transforming schools. In fact, Wheatley’s (1992) work in quantum physics and leadership points to relationships as the key to understanding the universe and human interactions. She maintains that we “should stop teaching facts—the things of knowledge—and focus, instead on relationships as the basis for all definitions” (p. 34). As noted earlier, Grumet (1995) agrees with this contention that relationships are central to the curriculum. But NCLB and state mandates are forcing teachers into a narrowly defined standardized course of study—therefore circumscribing the very relationships students and educators need to create a democratic community.

As schools absorb the overwhelming changes in the student population, it is imperative that all educators, and especially its leaders, understand diversity and its implications for student learning. Further, school leaders must be educated about schools as sites of social and cultural politics. Their orientation toward their work with at-risk children must not be deficit-based, but situated in the understanding that “there are substantial and persistent patterns of inequity internal to schools” (Skrla et al., 2004, p. 141). Indeed, the discourse in the university classroom must “expose the stereotypes, generalizations, and myths that perpetuate the inequities and injustices” (Rusch, 2004, p. 17), and through the use of praxis, students and professors can examine how words and actions empower or oppress.

Perhaps if administrators learn to practice critical inquiry/theory in university classrooms they will better understand how their decisions at the school site must be both moral, just and inclusive of those who most need access to the educational process that is imperative to sustaining a democratic community. This transformation of their own schooling should help leaders to educate staff and other stakeholders about school as a vehicle for social change. By responding to Counts’ challenge—one now more than seventy years old, maybe we can offer a better future for

ourselves, our children, and our nation if we insure through our work as university professors that schools will provide a public education that is committed to the perpetuation of American values of equity, justice, and democracy (Dewey, 1916).

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