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An examination of tension in the space between leadership philosophy and the cultural reality of schools

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Academic Leadership Journal

What better image to portray the multi facets of diversity than that of a diamond, this unremarkable piece of carbon that, when cut and polished in particular ways, transforms into a jewel that gives a sparkle to life. Diversity, as a biological phenomenon, is simply a fact of life. By “cutting” it and “polishing” it with our joys, hopes and fears, it transforms into something different, ranging from a reason for celebration to a source of trouble and tension. (Vriesendorp, 2007, p.14)

Diversity is what gives our society depth and arguably beauty but it also problematizes already complex social issues like the importance and value placed on the education. In part, this challenge exists because public education is founded on the “values and belief systems of the dominant cultural and linguistic class” (Goddard & Hart, 2007, p. 16) yet schools are a complex, heterogeneous weave of cultures (Murakami-Ramalho, 2008). According to Chambers (2003), Canadian students are “probably the most ethnically, racially, linguistically, and religiously diverse of any school population in the world” (p. 223). This is no less true in the United States where one third of the school population is considered ethnically, linguistically or culturally diverse (Ladson-Billings, 2005). In European countries, the growth of the population has also shifted towards greater diversity; Switzerland, for example is now 20% foreign born (Levin, 2008). Despite this reality, schools leaders struggle to find ways to address the needs of culturally diverse students and their families (Bazron, Osher & Fleischman, 2005; Goddard & Hart, 2007); this challenge creates conflict in schools, particularly for those charged with their leadership.

The literature confirms that ‘social, economic and demographic changes taking place in Canadian society have placed a tremendous amount of pressure on educational systems to respond to the accompanying growth in the diversity of student enrollment’ (Anisef & Kilbride, 2004, p. 10). As the key administrators at the school level, principals must take the lead role in meeting the demands of these social, economic and demographic changes. Principals exhibit varying degrees of success in providing the leadership required to adapt to the pluralistic society. (Goddard & Hart, 2007, p.8)

The focus of this review is to explore the theme of tension created in the space between the role of the school leader and the unique demands placed upon that role in settings where cultural diversity is prominent; specifically the nature of the tensions that emerge and how leaders respond and adapt. For this review, the notion of tension relates to the differences between the realities of the non-dominant culture and the dominant white Anglo-European majority culture of which school leaders are frequently members (Goddard & Foster, 2002).

Statement of Problem

Underlying the issue of tension created when school leadership and culture intersect is the philosophical foundation that informs how society views schools, how those schools function and how society views leadership. Walker and Dimmock (1999 as cited in Begley, 2006) assert that educational leadership has essentially developed along ethnocentric lines overshadowed by a Western ideology originating in the United States and United Kingdom. Further, schools continue to operate to “promote a common homogeneous culture (i.e. the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, rural culture of the

1800s)” (Villa and Thousand, 1995 as cited in Walker & Quong, 1998, p.86). So while leaders espouse the importance and value of diversity, their own cultural hegemony may constrain their ability to “enact positive strategies to build awareness and acceptance of all people” (Bruner, 2008, p. 494).

Like any organization, schools have “cultural ways” that operate on those who work in them and are usually created by those who founded the organization. Members of an organization learn its culture in a variety of “natural” ways, mostly through such hidden means as language, dress, tradition, covenants, history, structure, values, and rewards. We acquire cultural ways without even knowing that we are doing so; they are like the air we breathe. Not knowing that our behavior is governed by these cultural ways, we often do not see the need for change – even when such ways become dysfunctional and threaten the survival of our organization. (Parish & Aquila, 1996, p. 299)

As stated earlier, diversity in schools is a reality and I proceed as such; however, locating leadership that is culturally responsive or adaptive is problematized by the socialization of leaders who respond to diversity through an agenda of sameness. “Some managers insist that the best way to reduce conflict and maintain harmony is to focus on the ways in which people (and structures) are alike. It is argued that people work together best if they ignore their differences” (Walker, 1994 as cited in Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 90). When differences do emerge as they repeatedly do, forcing the common good in statements like “students are at the heart of our decisions” not only ignores the reality but furthers the status quo which serves the dominant culture, yet continues to keep those marginalized by cultural difference on the outside of the circle.

Purpose of Review

This review seeks to identify in current literature where the role of the leader in culturally diverse schools is dissonant with the culture of the school and how those leaders respond and adapt to that dissonance. Hallinger and Leithwood (1996 as cited in Goddard & Foster, 2002, p. 3) assert that societal culture “exerts a significant influence on administrators beyond that of the specific organization’s culture” (p.3). The significance of their argument speaks directly to tensions that emerge in schools where philosophy and ideology of the principal are at odds with the beliefs, values and expectations of particular cultural groups that do not reside in the dominant culture. Situations such as these become particularly problematic when the actions of that principal fail to respond to or address the cultural needs of non-dominant groups, often the students and parents. While teachers are frequently members of the dominant culture whose philosophy and action in relation to those constituents is of importance, it is not the focus of this review. Instead, I focus on the school leader as principal, director, head-teacher or chief administrative officer in kindergarten to grade 12 schools similar to those schools in British Columbia that offer educational programs for children ages five to eighteen and are fully or partially financed with public funds.

My lens focuses on the interplay between the role of leadership as it relates to cultural diversity and the theory employed to address those tensions. My aim is to assess the contribution to knowledge made by these studies by understanding more clearly both the theoretical frameworks used to inform school leadership and cultural diversity and scholarly research. Through an analysis of pertinent literature, the purposes of this paper, therefore, are threefold: first, to examine the relevant theoretical frameworks of professional knowledge in its approach to leadership in contexts of cultural diversity; second, to discuss the tensions that emerge from the intersection of leadership and cultural diversity; and third to present evidence linking cultural competence to effective leadership practice that creates space for

leaders to meaningfully respond to and address cultural tensions in schools. In addressing these purposes, two research questions guide this review: (a) what tensions exist that may impede the efforts of leaders to facilitate cultural inclusiveness? And (b) how do leaders respond and adapt to those tensions?

I begin by discussing the perspective for this review and tensions that concern school leaders with respect to the impact of administrative leadership in schools with prominent cultural diversity; the context for understanding leadership and cultural diversity are explained in later sections. I briefly examine how this emerging concern was addressed by researchers between 1995 and 2009. Next, I consider conceptual issues or tensions identified through my analysis of the literature. The paper concludes with an attempt to frame a meaningful response for the school leader operating in contexts of cultural diversity for a future generation of studies.

The Perspective for this Review

Three lenses are critical to this review: the authentic purpose of leadership, the meaning of culture, and the emergence of tension when leadership and culture intersect. While contemporary literature pertaining to leadership focuses such leadership on the role of the individual, the impact of the individual and the role of the individual in terms of the organization, the focus of this review is narrower. An authentic purpose of leadership acknowledges that leading in and for diversity is based on multiple meanings that are socially constructed. Such a purpose acknowledges that authenticity is built on the recognition of the unique values, beliefs, needs and wishes of local professionals and citizens who best know the conditions needed for a particular group of students in a particular context (Sergiovanni, 2000). The aforementioned view of leadership is in line with *values-informed leadership* which “acknowledges and accommodates, in an integrative way, the legitimate needs of individuals, groups, organizations, communities and cultures – not just the organizational perspectives” (Begley, 2006, p.570). This philosophical approach to leadership is one of many; however, I have chosen to focus on authentic leadership because its ideological stance towards the importance of uniqueness is responsive to the inimitable needs of culturally diverse groups regardless of the origins of said diversity (Chemers & Murphy, 1995). However, the pragmatic verity of schooling and the lives of those who operate in it remain at odds with such a philosophy; leaders struggle to break away from the Western dominance of both leadership and schooling leaving members of culturally diverse populations underserved. The reality of cultural diversity in schools requires leaders to rise to the responsibility of addressing values conflicts in order to respond and adapt (Begley, 2004 as cited in Lumby & Coleman, 2007); I will address the necessity of such action later in this review.

Framing culture.

When applying the term, culture, multiple definitions, conceptions and beliefs are found throughout in the field of education. Anthropologically, culture is conceptualized as “the ideals, values and assumptions that are widely shared among people that guide specific behaviour” (p.45); essentially culture is the glue that both holds people together and distinguishes them from others (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). However, Tierney (1996, as cited in Dimmock & Walker, 2005) makes a critical point relating the reality of culture, “any cultural system is likely comprised of multiple and competing realities, rather than ordered systems that make intuitive sense to members” (p. 45). What makes this conception of culture particularly problematic is when we apply it to school contexts where “we may

potentially be describing a myriad of shared actions, behaviours, beliefs, norms, and understandings held by the collective of students, parents and staff of that particular school community” (Billot, Goddard & Cranston, 2007, p. 4). Acknowledging this profusion of beliefs, values and norms is central to understanding the experience of members of the non-dominant culture.

Different cultures generate different paradigms of reality, and each is protected and defended as if a threat to it is a threat to a group member’s existence. From this perspective, it is easy to understand why the imposition of one group’s cultural paradigm upon members of another cultural group – as occurs in most classrooms, where the Northern European cultural paradigm is the standard against which Students of Colour, who view their world through different cultural paradigms, are measured – is experienced so negatively (Diller & Moule, 2005, p.67)

Of note, when using the term culture in conjunction with diversity, a connection can be made to “minority (non-white, non-Anglo) ethnicity” (Wilkinson, 2008, p. 102). While it is true that many cultures are representative of minority groups, particularly in North American educational contexts, the intention of this review is not to further the assumption that diversity is synonymous with minority. I adopt a broader stance in the attempt to problematize cultural diversity and its relationship to leadership recognizing that the use of the term culture is not without its critics. Of equal importance is acknowledging that the implication of culture as consisting of consensus about the ‘proper’ way to do things and how to make meanings about the events of the world (Seel, 2000) represents a philosophical chimera more than a practical reality.

I frame the term culture around the concept of ethnicity as “any distinguishable people whose members share a common culture and see themselves as separate and different from the majority culture” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 67). Common terms used in reference to culture are pluralism and multiculturalism. Both are worthy of explanation for contextual and practical purposes. Pluralism implies coexistence, living together at the same time and the same place, and is considered legitimate when distinct groups function within the parameters set by the dominant host culture. In contrast, multiculturalism has a more ideological basis in “freedom, justice, equality, equity and human dignity” (p. 96) that implies interdependence and interconnectedness (Norton, Gaskill & Holzman, 2007). In this review, the concept of culture is driven by an acceptance of a pluralistic view and the existence of a multiplicity of cultures in schools. Other diversity perspectives such as gender, race, religion, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation are excluded noting that in some cases, culture cannot be considered as exclusively independent of these other variables.

Methodology

Search procedures.

Through the University of Victoria library list of educational databases, I chose to search Academic Search Complete, ERIC (EBSCO) and JSTOR using the search terms “leadership AND diversity”, “leadership AND culture”, and “leadership AND cultural diversity” (see Figure 1.). Excluded from consideration were articles that had not been published as peer-reviewed in scholarly journals or provided as full text. Articles that did not appear as full-text in the search were excluded in order to keep the search process to a manageable time frame dictated by course requirement. Further refinement of the search to include only those articles published between 1995 and 2009 yielded 560 papers. Research on principal leadership prior to 1995, demonstrated the principal’s impact on school

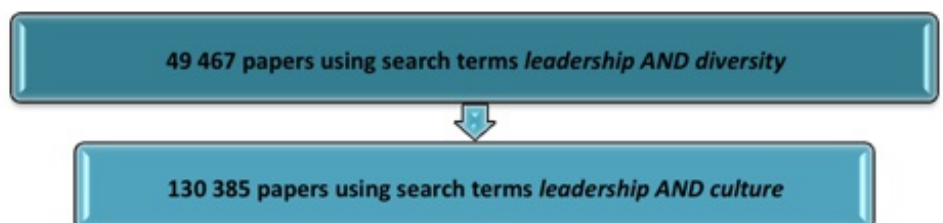
process, but that research did not investigate how “their interactions with others contribute to shaping organizational processes and outcomes on a day-to-day basis” (Heck, 1998, p. 53). As a result, the study of leadership shifted towards greater study of the impact of those processes across different cultural settings, particularly in relation to privilege concerning power, gender and culture (Heck, 1998). Furthermore, the mid-90’s marked a philosophical shift in leadership; a democratic philosophy concerned with “equity and justice” replaced the traditionally authoritarian conception of leadership that characterized a good leader as one who “presides over a machinelike organization where everything runs like clockwork and things are ‘under control’ (Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 89). What remains is the question of whether such a shift in philosophy has made the voices of members of different communities any less marginalized (Blair, 2002).

Criteria for inclusion.

I began this review with the assumption that the number of studies to be included would be limited by the constraints of the assigned criteria given to the paper as a course requirement. At the same time, I sought to conduct an inclusive, scholarly review. Papers with a primary focus on language and culture, post secondary leadership, social justice and/or leadership policy were excluded because their focus diverged too far from the role of the school leader. At this stage, 26 articles including position papers, literature reviews and qualitative research studies that addressed the role of the school leader in settings of cultural diversity remained from the original search; no quantitative studies of leadership and cultural diversity were found. I did not include editorials, dissertations or theses because these were not subject to the same peer-review process required for publication in scholarly journals. Six book chapters were used to provide context for this review. These chapters were selected based on the identification of *key players* in the field of leadership and cultural diversity including James Ryan, Clive Dimmock, Allan Walker, Jack Lumby and Brenda Beattie, as recommended of Dr. Jason Price, assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. Although I do not undertake comparative analysis in this paper, I have included papers and chapters conducted in a diverse set of cultural contexts including North America, East Asia and Western Europe.

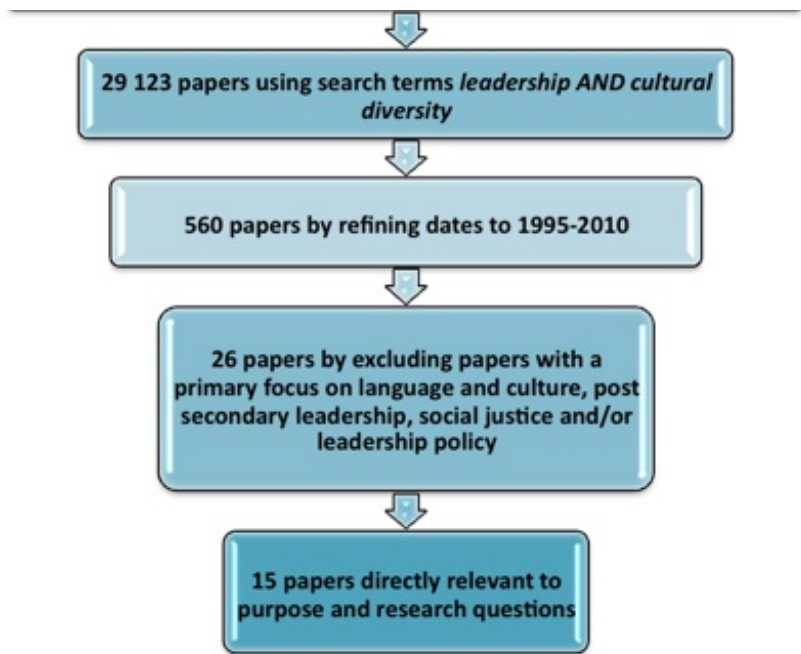
Finally, to be included as a subject of this review, the research must have explicitly recognized the relationship between leadership and culture as a focus; eleven articles that did not adequately address this theme were excluded. While my assumption was that these studies share some measure of authentic leadership as a philosophy, I acknowledge that the wider definition of leadership is not restricted to this conceptualization in the field. Second, the articles and chapters included make explicit reference to conflicts, tensions and/or dilemmas that emerge in the relationship between leadership and culture. Third, given both the focus of the course and my academic interest in the impact of leadership in international settings, I sought out studies that examined the impact of cultural diversity without restricting them to a North American context. Despite this intention, all articles and chapters included in this review were published in journals based in the United States or Canada.

Figure 1. Selection of literature relevant to the relationship between leadership and culture in peer-reviewed scholarly journals appearing as full-text



Tensions, Conflicts and Dilemmas

Examination of the literature outlined in this review reveals three themes that speak to the tensions created for leading in cultural diverse school settings: the view of how to lead, the influence of emotion/values and the pressure to conform. I discuss these from the perspective generated by the respective authors.



The view of how to lead.

In her review of contemporary literature, Beatty (2009) asserts that despite the philosophical shift away from authoritarian leadership, the current climate of performativity and standards draw school leaders back towards hierarchical management, in part because the behaviour associated with the leader as being in charge has for so long been viewed as important. The “school leader has traditionally meant someone particularly proficient at command-and-control tactics, the all powerful, all knowing, larger than life heroic commander-in-chief. These qualities have been well-respected and rewarded in days gone by” (p. 153). Responding to the needs of the culturally diverse requires school leaders to create collaborative, empowering, and transparent environments that make space for difference, yet what is sometimes desired of the authentic leader is at odds with what is expected from an effective manager. To be a leader is to create space to address and respond to the needs of culturally diverse leaders while being a manager tends to advance the ethnocentric Anglo-American status quo. The conflict is that the principal must be both.

Blair (2002) presents a similar perspective on the contradictions of expectations placed on head teachers in Britain. Her paper draws on research commissioned by the U.K. Department for Education and Employment and conducted by the Open University. Head teachers feel pressure to develop policies that reflect new ways of thinking and working removed from the authoritarian position as a ‘strong’ leader, in response to multiethnic contexts, but the straightforward writing of the policies does not ensure the enactment of the policies is as guileless. The execution of policies belies the “collaborative, democratic philosophy that might underpin the school’s ethos” (Blair, 2002, p. 184). The contradiction in Blair’s work is in the necessity of head teacher to adopt a ‘hard’, or rational-technical approach necessary to change overt and subtle forms of opposition yet also demonstrate a ‘soft’ approach conscious of “a social and pastoral environment that nurtured a desire to learn in students whose experiences in school as well as in the wider society encouraged rebellion and disaffection” (p. 184).

The influence of emotion/values.

A lesser theme taken up by Beatty (2002) speaks to the uncertainty created by emotional responses in

leadership. Principals feel pressured to seem “in control and emotionally detached” (p.156) yet such a stance fails to allow them to fully integrate with the culturally diverse who require an authentic response that is generated by their needs and not imposed upon them. Beatty reminds us that while such emotion can be vexatious, it is imperative to authentic leadership because it changes perceptions of both work and self, a necessary step in responding to the needs of the culturally diverse. Vedoy and Moller (2007) continue along this vein through the use of interviews and observation conducted over a nine month period in two Norwegian schools. The authors studied how the beliefs, attitudes, and focus of two school principals impacted education for diversity. Two key value-related terms were identified by Vedoy and Moller; the first was *respect* as synonymous to “appreciate, recognize, acknowledge, accept and value” (p. 63) while the second term, *caring*, was viewed in terms of “thoughtful, kind, helpful, considerate and compassionate” (p. 63). Foundational to an atmosphere of respect was power and worth for all parties where “all individuals act and speak on equal terms” (p.63). The desire of the school principal was to meet all minority groups on equal terms. The second school leader advocated for caring but that caring relationship was asymmetrical because it reinforced the leader as one who imposes care upon passive minority recipients.

In Begley’s (2006) research on the valuation processes of school principal, he points out that values can contradict professional expectations resulting in tension.

Our personal values as well as those of the profession, organization, community and society are not necessarily consistent or compatible with each other. As a result, these influences and values derived from the various arenas of our environment can generate inconsistencies and conflicts. (Begley, 2006, p. 578).

That contradiction perpetuates an unmitigated tradition of mistrust in leadership (Beatty, 2002). Begley goes further to state that because ethics, principles and values are subject to multiple interpretations, their application will vary significantly from one context to another. Administrators are discovering that some of the most foundational elements held by the dominant society must be systematically revisited because of how they are perceived. Despite this challenge, the “new reality” of school leadership demands attention and response to the value conflicts that are created by the collision and intersection of cultures (Lumby & Coleman, 2007).

In an article based on keynote address delivered at the annual conference of the Australian Council for Educational Administration, Walker and Quong (1998) address the concept of values from a global perspective. They provide an example of how the western ideal of education is erroneously imported into Hong Kong without due consideration of local culture.

Educators appear to adhere to the principle of “West is best,” thus shaping behavior into a global-cultural sameness. Leaders tend to ignore the significance of culture in the formulation and adoption of educational ideals and their implementation in practice (see Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). Culture is often ignored when the same policies and practices are accepted regardless of cultural difference: ‘If it works for them, it will work for us’. (Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 85).

A powerful theme here is that despite multiple interpretations, school leadership comes from a decidedly western mindset that accentuates how cultural values cannot be taken at face value. This is not to say that any one set, if such a thing exists, is superior or inferior to another, but failing to examine how the contradictions emerge and why contributes to the tensions faced by leaders and cultural

constituents.

The pressure to conform.

The pressure of uniformity, sameness or conformity was a significant theme in three of the articles presented in this review. Blair (2002) contends that school leaders have a propensity to view cultural difference homogeneously, drawing on the example that South Asian students are often considered as one group despite distinctions between “religion, language and social class” (p.180). Walker and Quong (1998) assert that school leaders are expected to adapt to meet the global challenges of value differences demanded by culturally diverse school population, yet they must also respond to the conservative organizational demands of “standardized curriculum, national testing, and various accountability mechanisms” (p.87) as well as the orthodox expectations of school boards; an unavoidable paradox results from the contradiction between difference and sameness.

In this global era, nations throughout the developing world find themselves “copying” values and associated behaviors from Western countries. This adoption of so-called “global values” occurs despite important cultural differences between Western Judeo- Christian cultures and those of Asia and the Third World. At an organizational level, pressures toward cultural uniformity reveal themselves in beliefs, assumptions, and actions that treat one cultural perspective as more valid and appropriate than others. (Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 82-83)

The resulting pressures towards conformity sabotage a school leader’s ability and in some cases desire to respond to “new ways of leading, learning, and working in schools” (p.84).

In Oplatka’s (2004) review of studies and commentaries in refereed journals of comparative education and educational administration, he notes that literature relating to educational leadership and the principalship is slanted towards the west despite the varying educational systems around the world. The literature subsequently views leadership through a decidedly western lens that does not adequately address the dissimilarities of “western ideology cultural contexts impact on principals’ sets of attitudes, values and norms for behaviour which may be very different from those used by school leaders in other contexts (Heck, 1996; Dimmock & Walker, 1998 as cited in Oplatka, 2004, p.48). The philosophical pressure to lead contradicts the societal expectation of what it means to lead. Based on data from a qualitative pilot study identifying emergent themes of describing how schools respond to the changing demographics of the contemporary world from a Canadian perspective, Goddard and Hart (2007), noted a decidedly assimilationist approach to the leadership of schools. The principals interviewed contended that “all students were treated the same” (p.15) regardless of culture or ethnicity. Those same principals purposefully “resisted any attempts to recognize diversity and difference” (p.16) despite noteworthy research that indicates that students learn in culturally relevant ways (Orey, 1989; Swisher, 1994; Hughes & More, 1997 as cited in Goddard and Hart, 2007).

Future Directions for Cultural Competence and Authentic Leadership

Thus far, the literature reviewed here indicates that school leaders respond to cultural diversity by retreating into cultural norms, sameness and traditional approaches. This is an appropriate time to revisit one of the initial research questions pursued by this review: how do leaders respond and adapt to tensions that impede efforts towards cultural inclusiveness? Based on evidence found in the preceding discussion, perhaps the more appropriate question is how should school leaders respond?

Throughout the literature, little empirical evidence exists to describe how school leaders effectively or authentically respond and or adapt to the changing demographics of the contemporary world. Instead, the literature suggests that leaders do little to critically interrogate their role in perpetuating the inequalities and injustices common to the education of the culturally diverse. “When diversity is examined in relation to Anglocentric norms of leadership, most often it is constructed as the property of an (non-white, non-Anglo) ‘other’, which is to be managed by (white, frequently masculine and middle class) educational leaders” (Wilkinson, 2008, p. 101). Significant research focuses on the tensions as school leadership and cultural diversity converge; less research exists to indicate that school leaders are successfully creating culturally responsive learning communities. Nonetheless, several scholarly studies point school leaders in the direction of authentic, culturally responsive practice.

McAllister and Jordan-Irvine (2000) define cultural competence in terms of educating others about cultural values and how they influence people’s expectations.

A person who is considered cross-culturally competent is one “who has achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural and whose cognitive, affective, and behavioral characteristics are not limited but are open to growth beyond the psychological parameters of only one culture The intercultural person possesses an intellectual and emotional commitment to the fundamental unity of all humans and, at the same time, accepts and appreciates the differences that lie between people of different cultures”. (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984 as cited in McAllister & Jordan-Irvine, 2000, p. 4).

If we accept that cultural diversity is the norm in schools, principals must be expected to lead “multiethnic, multiracial schools effectively, without marginalizing or alienating important parts of the similarly diverse school community” (p.15), understanding school culture and demonstrating cultural competence as well as recognizing the impact of each on school leadership is key. Because leadership is a “socially constructed process” (Goddard and Hart, 2007, p.15), it stands to reason that social culture influences values and norms shaping human behaviour. In the following section, I draw on examples found in the literature that offer insight into how leaders value difference, engage in dialect and undertake reflection,

Valuing difference.

Walker and Quong (1998) and Goddard and Hart (2007) emphasize bringing difference to the forefront; by valuing difference we assist people in seeing the validity of difference. “The more comfortable people are in working with and learning from others the more empowered they become—the more empowered people are, the more open they become to learning from differences in perspectives in others” (Walker, 1994 as cited in Walker & Quong, 1998, p. 92). The result is an increased desire to learn in schools which leads to improvement in practice. Of greatest importance is the necessary departure from simply recognizing difference. Authentic leaders committed to valuing difference interrogate the beliefs and values that shape school practices and use them as “the basis for learning new ways of working” (Walker & Quong, 1998, p.84). The merit of valuing difference is difficult to dispute but what do leaders need to do to shift the established hegemonic thinking in regard to difference? Goddard and Hart (2002) believe that leaders must be taught about cultural values and the implications for how those values inform expectations and influence action. One obvious venue for teaching leaders to value diversity without perpetuating marginalization is through post-secondary training. In British Columbia, an expectation for administrative officers in schools is to have or be in the process of completing a master’s degree in school leadership; however coursework that theorizes the

recognition or importance of diversity may not be enough to enact the type of change necessary. I propose an avenue of self-study in response to this obstacle later in the concluding section of this review.

Engaging in critical dialogue.

Begley (2006), Ryan (2007), and Walker and Quong (1998) agree that through critical dialogue space is created for school leaders and stakeholders to reconcile “tragically persistent values conflicts and breakdowns in communication between and within our societies” (Begley, 2006, p. 572) and to move beyond “pathologies of silence” (Shields, 2004 as cited in Ryan, 2007, p. 343). Failure to do so means that unexamined values are applied randomly which becomes detrimental to the democratic process. Engaging in critical dialogue leads to improved “knowledge, insight, or sensitivity” (p.343) enabling a broader, more enhanced, global perspectives. Walker and Quong offer a specific strategy to achieve critical dialogue: *double-loop learning*. In conventional *single-loop learning*, decision-making extends from the need to stated goals or objectives; if the need is addressed by a resource or strategy then it is used. In double-loop learning, the decision is weighed against values or “what the school exists to achieve” (p. 101) before change is undertaken which ensures that any approach, strategy or innovation is not uncritically adopted. In schools where cultural diversity is valued, the needs of those constituents weigh heavily into decision-making because critical dialogue is taken up.

Promoting reflection.

Begley (2006), Bruner (2008) and McDonald (2009) advocate for active and systematic reflection by school leaders as fundamental to success in leadership. Deficit thinking or admissions of colour blindness do not do enough to transform or lead schools. McDonald asserts that school leaders must painstakingly examine their own biases to which Begley is in agreement.

It is not enough for school leaders to merely emulate the values of other principals currently viewed as experts. Leaders in schools must become reflective and authentic in their leadership practices. There is no reliable catalogue of correct values that school leaders can adopt as some sort of silver bullet solution for the dilemmas of administration. School leadership situations are much too context-bound to permit this kind of quick fix. School leaders need to be reflective practitioners. (Begley, 2006, p. 584).

Begley further articulates that in order to understand and respond to the “value orientations of others” (p.575), the school leader must first understand their own “values and ethical predispositions” as well as their motivators (p.575). This process must be coupled with the active development of an appreciation for “how values reflect underlying human motivations and shape subsequent attitudes, speech and actions” (p.575). A characterization of Begley’s process is found in Bruner who used the film *Crash* to facilitate a transformative response to how school leaders interpret and respond to diversity. Bruner’s example elucidates Begley’s process as the careful examination of the cause and effect relationship between personal beliefs and professional actions. “Diversity encourages us to examine our values as leaders, as the concept implies the making of conscious and unconscious judgments about who is included and who is not” (Coleman and Cardno, 2002 as cited in Bruner, 2008, p. 486).

Concluding Thoughts for the Future

As demonstrated throughout this review school leadership and cultural diversity is a complex subject that is a convoluted hybrid of the personal and professional, institutional and organizational as well as local and global. In my own experience living and working overseas, I can attest to this complexity and if navigated using an authoritarian compass, the school leader can at best maintain what little ground is gained through arbitrary and superficial responses to the culturally diverse and at worst perpetuate the marginalization of others. The literature reviewed here confirms the importance of culturally competent, authentic leadership and offers approaches that may help the school leader develop a more culturally responsive stance; that same literature does not clearly articulate how this can be done. Engagement in reflexive dialogue is a time consuming, arduous process which school leaders have little time for if we respect the managerial realities of the position. To expect school leaders to engage in such a process mid-practice is too late. I offer a form of self-study, *autoethnography*, undertaken during leadership training as a meaningful response to overcoming the tensions and struggles that I have outlined here.

Engaging in autoethnography enables powerful examinations of the relationships between self and other underpinned by “nationality, religion, gender, education, ethnicity socioeconomic class, and geography” (Chang, 2008, p. 52). Understanding such forces enables leaders to “examine their preconceptions and feelings about others, whether they are “others of similarity”, “others of difference,” or even “other of opposition” (p.52). Drawing on the Freirian concept of *conscientization* as “the process of becoming aware” (Blackburn, 2000, p.7) where space is created to change one’s perception of reality, autoethnography in its study of the space between self and culture engages the individual in “mutually enriching and authentically human capabilities – action and reflection, or action based on reflection, and reflected based on action” (p.7). The emphasis on a cycle of enlightenment, reflection and action as a critical process of self analysis in relation to cultural and social discourses and therefore greater understanding, makes autoethnography a valuable tool in examining the complex, diverse and messy intersection of leadership and culture.

Boyd (2008) provides a description of how his autoethnographic research facilitated a transformative learning experience on a personal and professional level:

The difference now is that I am aware of those tendencies coming out of my place of White privilege, and I am seeking to forge a new way for myself. I am trying to live in that tension between cautious action and critical reflection, between the need to engage in dialogue for mutual understanding and the need to actively listen to the experiences of colleagues and friends of color. (p.223)

Another example is found in Pepper and Hamilton Thomas’ (2002) examination of leadership style and its impact on the school climate. As formerly subscribing to and enacting an authoritarian leadership style with a negative effect, Pepper through the use of journal writing as data collection, shifted her leadership style towards a more transformational style of leadership. The results had a positive impact on her ability to lead but also in creating a more positive and caring school environment where a climate of collaboration, including a cycle of support and feedback, was instrumental in establishing realistic, attainable school goals that all stakeholders, including those representing culturally diverse groups, were willing to invest in.

Hickey and Austin (2007) summarize the value and purpose of autoethnography as a means to create the critical dialogue advocated by Begley (2006), Ryan (2007), and Walker and Quong (1998), the intent of which is to deeply interrogate the lived experiences that shape our philosophical and

ideological practices; reflection is embedded in this engagement.

From these critical realizations of the processes of identity formation, conscientised approaches to understanding the world, critiquing the various power structures that moderate it and, perhaps most significantly, transforming these understandings into emancipatory professional practice feature as significant outcomes. (p.27)

By creating space through required coursework at a graduate level, autoethnography can mobilize the theoretical intent of critical pedagogy, as a means of interrogating constructions of Self to enable emancipatory pedagogical practices. (Hickey and Austin, 2007, p. 27). Such an engagement at the very least presents the opportunity to engage with the existing tensions as leadership and culture intersect in schools. While autoethnography and/or self-study may not be the “silver bullet solution for the dilemmas of administration” (Begley, 2006, p.54), we know that failure to try is not enough. School leaders must become reflective and authentic in their practices in order to truly lead for the cultural responsiveness required of all.

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