

FROM ALLY TO ACTIVIST: EMBRACING ACTIVISM AS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP TO COMBAT INJUSTICE IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

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“Don’t be a witness. Be an activist”. – DaShanne Stokes

ABSTRACT

Educational leaders must embrace activism as central to their efforts to combat racism and other unjust policies in schools. Social justice activism is an intentional action with the goal of bringing about positive social change. It requires leaders to accept their responsibility to actively resist exclusion, prejudice and injustice in our educational system, despite internal or external pressure from others who may thwart their efforts to promote social justice. The aim of this article is to bring to the forefront how social justice education leadership and social activism must be coupled as essential tools within the blueprint to end injustice. This article begins with defining the terms: ally (alliance), advocate (advocacy) or activist (activism) as they relate to social justice leadership in education and places them upon a newly constructed continuum (Social Justice Action Continuum) to battle overt racism and the “New Racism”. The continuum recognizes that educational leaders need an objective measure of their level of commitment to lead social change to fully understand the benefits and consequences. The article proposes a paradigm shift in educational leader preparation, which focuses on social justice activism.

Keywords: Activism, social justice, educational leadership, racism, social justice action continuum

Introduction

The recent explosion of unrest and civil disobedience has again amplified calls for social, legal and economic justice in all of our American institutions; especially in our educational system. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote “Education without social action is a one-
form requires a cadre of social justice educational leaders who recognize that action or activism is a requirement for substantive change in our unjust educational system. Educational leaders must embrace activism as central to their efforts to combat racism and other unjust policies in schools. Social justice activism is an intentional action with the goal of bringing about positive social change. It requires educators to accept their responsibility to actively resist exclusion, prejudice and injustice in our educational system, despite internal or external pressure from others who may thwart their efforts to promote social justice (Sliwinski, 2016). This article begins with defining the terms: ally (alliance), advocate (advocacy) or activist (activism) as they relate to social justice leadership in education and places them upon a newly constructed continuum to battle

overt racism and the “New Racism”. The Social Justice Action Continuum, which is adapted from the Action Continuum developed by Adams, Bell, & Griffin, (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997) includes the range of actions that intensify from the role of ally to advocate and then to activist. The continuum recognizes that educational leaders need an objective measure of their level of commitment to lead social change to fully understand the benefits and consequences. It is a clarion call to action for principals and other educational leaders to address issues of equity by embracing the full spectrum of action including activism. This Social Justice Action Continuum can be utilized in Leadership preparation programs so that each can undergo a paradigm shift from preparing leaders to not only deal with overt acts of injustice but also confront the “New Racism” which are the institutionalized and structural systems that marginalize students and permeate our laws and school policies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this article and the development of the Social Justice Action Continuum is strongly influenced by Moyer (2001) eight stages of social movements and the four roles of activists. Moyer developed a classification of social movement participants: citizen, rebel, change agent and reformer (Moyer, 2001). The instrument also draws heavily from research on New Social Movement Theory conjoined with Social Movement Impact Theory. The New Social Movement (NSM) theory emphasizes how the focus shifts from specific changes in public policy to areas of social changes in identity, lifestyle and culture indicating that the social aspect is seen by the NSM as more important than the economic or political aspects. (Pichardo, 1997). While this theory does offer insight into how more contemporary social movements may have shifted from Marxist views of purely class-based economic social movements; it fails to understand that public policy and laws are inextricably linked to social identities like race, gender identity; and race. New Social Movements like the Right to Choose movement, the Ecology movement, LGBTQIA+ rights movement and Anti-Racist movements are perfect examples. The Social Movement Impact (SMI) theory accentuates the necessity for individuals and social movement organizations to promote four distinct types of change: Individual Change; Institutional Change; Cultural Change; and Political Change. Each of these types of change are essential to transformational reform (Soule, S. A., and Olzak, S., 2004). Activists can cause individual change in both the participants in the movement and those they are seeking to influence. Activists connect with others affiliated with their cause, causing new networks to form and shared values to be accentuated (Diani, 1997). They also undergo a process of empowerment, in which they become more apt for further activism (Hasso, 2001). Institutional Change often requires more targeted and direct engagement and are often the most resistant to relinquishing historical control. Institutional change tends to be slow and stately, but sometimes when confronted with the illumination of its inequities; they find it necessary to break decisively with the past or to respond rapidly to quickly changing circumstances. Institutional Change drives Political Change as our laws and policies are a direct reflection on of the cultural values promulgated by the social and economically elite ruling class. Political Change is best described as the “formal change” within society as it is accompanied by the weight of the legal system. History has numerous examples of how political change (laws passed) have not been accompanied by cultural and institutional change. The 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution are blatant examples. American history is also replete with social movements that only gained traction when individuals recognized the importance and utility of activism as an essential tool leading to social change. Social Justice

Educational Leadership can embrace activism in its various forms and iterations to address inequity in American Schools. This is a critical step in creating a more just society.

Defining Social Justice Educational Leadership

A social justice leader is defined as someone who is fighting for positive change in society, so by extension, a social justice educational leader should embrace the tenets of social action which always upsets the status quo. Social justice educational leaders recognize the role race, ethnicity, family income, ability, gender, and sexual orientation play in predicting student success in school. They commit to creating schools that address societal inequalities by striving to help all students reach academic proficiency (Glickman, James et al, 2003).

Social Justice Activism

Social Justice Activism is an instrument for social movements. It is the vehicle and strategies that people can utilize to organize themselves and informs how they can participate in varied types of civil disobedience and/or protests. The degree of involvement in social justice activism is based upon decisions that reveal the degree of their participation in democratic efforts to create a more just society. Oliver and Marwell (1992) define social activists as “people who care enough about some issue that they are prepared to incur significant costs and act to achieve their goals”.

Essential to this effort is an analysis of the roots of discrimination followed by the development of a strategic plan to carry out participatory activism in which stakeholders collaboratively work as allies for equity and justice. An important initial step in this process is understanding that activism is an attempt to understand the range of actions that social justice educational leaders need to implement to ensure substantive change in American schools. It is not sufficient to produce leaders who are allies or even advocates – but rather a cadre of leaders who understand the value and importance of activism - a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to a controversial issue or policy; especially those that negatively impact or marginalize target groups of students and their communities.

Social Justice Ally

The term “Ally” can mean different things to different people but for this work, the term falls on at the beginning of the Social Justice Action Continuum. After an extensive research of the literature; an ally was identified as an individual from a dominant social group willing to forego some degree of their privileged status to support the activism of a marginalized group with the intent of dissolving oppressive systems in a society (Mizock & Page, 2016; Munin, 2010). The Ally Model identified in the research provided an approach to social justice built on social identity, which maintains that everyone can have a role to play in promoting social justice, regardless of their social identities in oppressed and oppressor groups (Anderson & Middleton, 2011; Bishop, 2002; Foster, 2011; Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 1997; Reason, Millar, & Scales 2005; Spencer, 2008). The 1960’s civil rights era introduced the popularized role of that ally with white allies in anti-racist activism, male allies in the struggle for women's rights, and straight allies in LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) rights advocacy (Brooks & Edwards, 2009). Since that time period, allies have been identified to support the civil liberties of additional groups including people with physical disabilities, serious mental illnesses, elderly, youth, transgender individuals, and other groups facing injustice. These movements have often been led by members of

disadvantaged groups, with allies from advantaged groups typically positioned to offer support and resources (Iyer & Leach, 2010).

Because this article focuses on the role of an educator within the social justice framework, it is possible for teachers, administrators and other educators to become allies, although that transition might look different depending on identity, experience and familiarity with issues of power and privilege. Because allies are often members of the privileged class, there are some risks but not as great as minority personnel who seek the same space. According to Ali Michael of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education. "A teacher ally is someone who has a strong sense of their own identity, as well as the ways in which their own identities are either privileged or oppressed," she says. Rather than being an ally to an individual the Ally for Social Justice is an ally to issues - such as classism, racism, or religious oppression (Kendall, 2012). An ally for social justice also sees the interconnectedness of forms of oppression supporting each other and recognizes the need to address intersecting forms of oppression (Bell & Griffin, 1997).

(Mizock & Page, 2016) identified a number of limitations to the ally role finding that the ally position may not be the optimal position to achieve social change and may lead to conflicts with social justice values. They believe that many of the aforementioned benefits of the ally role fall short of being implemented successfully due to inherent constrictions. Allies are very often guilty of romanticizing how they will come to the aid of oppressed folks. These are the ally "saviors" who see victims as tokens instead of people. This often results in the development of a "teacher or principal as savior" complex. These educators incorrectly create a self-indulging cinematic fantasy of what it will be like to work with marginalized students. Their beliefs are informed more by the dominant media and a cultural lens shaped by their own lives and experiences. This results in strategies for serving these students being truncated by the limits of the allies' own experiences.

The educator ally sees the pro-social value of working with these students but imagines him or herself in a messianic role: "saving" the "problem student" by providing love, attention, connection or self-esteem in the belief that this will facilitate academic success. However, despite the very best of intentions, this "story" fails to name the structures of racism at work, instead locating the mechanisms of marginalization in the students and seeking to subsequently "save" them from themselves. The messianic script locates the "problem" in students, their families and their communities, when in reality blame should be laid at another door entirely. (Galman, 2007).

Social Justice Advocate

Not all advocacy is social justice advocacy. In fact, a great deal of advocacy happens without consideration of disadvantaged groups' needs or perspectives. The Advocacy Institute (2018) defined it as a range of strategies and tactics designed to move people to action - for example, to get a school district to adopt a particular reform strategy, to create a national movement for immigration reform, or to make sure economic development of a particular neighborhood does not eliminate access to affordable housing for current residents. Being an advocate is relatively more impactful when they acknowledge and utilize their privilege to engage in controversial situations on behalf of marginalized people and groups who can't afford to do so in order to make social and political change.

Advocates are often called "accomplices". For social justice advocates who use the term accomplice, they often see the site of focus as the main difference between the work of an ally and that of an advocate. An ally will mostly engage by standing with an individual or group in a

marginalized community. An advocate or accomplice will focus more on dismantling the structures that oppress that individual or group—and such work will be directed by the stakeholders in the marginalized group. Simply, ally work focuses on individuals, and advocates/accomplice work focuses on the structures of decision-making agency (Clemons, 2017).

The primary goal of educator advocates is to engage in authentic social justice strategies and avoid “performance advocacy”. Performance advocacy occurs when those with privileged identities view the action as more of a choreographed cinematic role – than true spiritual and impactful intervention. It is a story and the performance advocate wants to play a role but only if they can control the plot twists and the ending. Authentic social justice advocacy by those with privileged identities is necessary for truly transformative systemic change (Clemons, 2017). Authentic social justice advocacy means an educator must examine your own biases, power, and privilege—critical self-reflection—then engage in conversations with colleagues around inequities, educational or otherwise (Slesaransky-Poe & Garcia, 2014). The role of a social justice advocate is to call out inequitable and oppressive practices and make them perceivable to those perpetuating and complicit in those systems (Clemons, 2017).

When authentic social justice advocacy is modeled by educators, students pay attention and learn what true advocacy is all about (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2014). By bringing to light the inequities of the status quo and demystifying issues that are usually not talked about in our polite society; social justice advocates engage in the authentic work of transformational change towards a more just school and community environment (Clemons, 2017).

Social Justice Activist

Activism is action on behalf of a cause; action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine. The work of dismantling structural racism in education demands bold, strategic, and sometimes revolutionary acts that, by their nature, conflict with mainstream, lauded approaches to educational leadership (Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Perlstein, 2005; Richards & Lemelle, 2005). Educational activists are leaders who contribute to and protect democratic education through their use of grassroots strategies both inside and outside of school systems and by their professional savvy within. Their varied strategies challenge structural racism in schools and advocate for children in their communities. Activists are more strategically engaged to combat racism and build effective school-to-community relationships that improve education for marginalized students.

Teacher as an Activist.

Teaching for social justice at the PK–12 level is not easy, however, and is rife with challenges (Bell, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Kumashiro, 2015). Cochran-Smith (1997) asserts that teachers who work for social justice also work for the transformation of society’s “fundamental inequities.” When a teacher becomes an activist they understand fully that the activity of teaching is an inescapably political process (Bartolome & Trueba, 2000; Cochran-Smith, 1997; Darder, 1998; Freire, 1998a; Shor, 2000; & Zeichner, 1993). The teacher’s participation in communities of practice which support social justice inevitably leads to the development of skills and dispositions associated with activism and becoming a critical educator (Lave & Wenger, 1991). A critical educator who defines social justice as a call to social action is a teacher activist. It is for this reason that the term “teacher activist” is used as opposed to “critical educator” or “social justice teacher” (Bell, 2002). A teacher activist criticizes those who are social justice teachers in thought only. These teachers are allies or advocates, who believe in the

central tenets of critical pedagogy but who do not enact them in their own teaching and who are not active in social justice movements. A teacher activist argues that “believing in the importance of social and political change is one thing. Doing it is another” (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997, p. 126).

Teacher activists are full participants in a transformative social movement in which they work on issues related to education, health care, labor, the struggle for affordable housing, and other issues of political and social relevance. Their activism causes them to understand that social issues not only reside in the schools but also the school community. Teacher activists promote a culturally and socially relevant curriculum but also seeks to transform an unequal and unjust society beyond the immediate school community. A teacher activist who engages in a social movement enacts a social justice philosophy by choosing a curriculum and activities that invite students to challenge educational and social inequities in their schools and in their communities. The research on the critical pedagogy affirms the expectation that teacher activists feel compelled to take up transformative politics and to struggle alongside their students against oppressive conditions, both inside their classrooms and beyond the confines of the school in which they teach. Social justice activism has an impact on learning in the classroom. Social justice activism does not sacrifice content knowledge or competence; rather it enhances this knowledge and makes it real.

Principal as an Activist

Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) asserted that the principal as a social justice educational leaders is required to “question the assumptions that drive school policies and practices to create more equitable schooling” (p. 204). These educational leaders for social justice interrogate systems and structures that shape the school and contribute to the achievement and opportunity gap (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Furman, 2012; Moule, 2012; Reihl, 2000). School-based leaders must be willing to examine existing institutional structures and the deficit paradigm of schools that contribute to the achievement gap by creating “expectation gaps” (Delpit, 2012, p. 25). Theoharis (2008) called this the work of “addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools” (p. 5). These social justice leaders must use their position and influence to take on a more activist-oriented leadership role for social justice to meet the needs of students (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Theoharis, 2009). Marshall and Ward (2006) stated that social justice leadership builds upon instructional leadership and takes on an “activist, interventionist stance” (p. 7). Shields (2010) argued for the link between education and the “wider social context” (p. 559) and contended in 2004 that educational leaders are expected to be “transformative, to attend to social justice as well as academic achievement” (p. 110).

The core principle of Social Justice Educational Leadership is to create and promote equitable schooling and education by examining and understanding the issues of race, diversity, marginalization, gender, spirituality, age, ability, sexual orientation and identity. A significant amount of educational reform in the United States has consistently failed to improve the educational outcomes of marginalized students because they have been strategies that are largely based upon a reorganization of the same interventions. Despite so much reform, however, there is still too much failure. As Payne (2008) explained, “There is a mammoth disconnect between what we know about the complex, self-reinforcing character of failure in bottom-tier schools and the ultimately simplistic thinking behind many of the most popular reform proposals” (p. 46). Moreover, there appears to be an assertive and pervasive unwillingness from our society to engage fully with the fact that sociocultural factors such as race, ethnicity, and poverty can and do matter greatly in schools which serve high-needs students.

The post-Brown decision era has bred a “new racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Fiske, 1993) that has supplemented while not totally replacing the overt and blatant discriminatory policies and practices of the past with covert and more subtle beliefs and behaviors, reflecting the persistent and pervasive nature of racism that R. L. Carter (1968) described. Educational leaders must embrace Social Justice Activism to combat the “New Racism” in American Schools.

New Racism Defined

This article is not dismissing the fact that overt and blatant discriminatory acts of racism still exist in society and within our educational system because our national history has taught us that American racism transcends time. It is an attempt to shed light on the transmogrification of racism into legally accepted norms, practices which are producing equally horrific results. “It’s what one Duke University sociologist calls “racism without racists.” Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, who’s written a book by that title, says it’s a new way of maintaining white domination in places like Ferguson. “The main problem nowadays is not the folks with the hoods, but the folks dressed in suits,” says Bonilla-Silva (2016). “The more we assume that the problem of racism is limited to the Klan, the birthers, the tea party or to the Republican Party, the less we understand that racial domination is a collective process and we are all in this game.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2016).

Researchers have documented the ways our public schools deal with contemporary racism that disrupts the educational opportunities of students of color. Rita Kohli, Marcos Pizarro, Arturo Nevárez in their work: “*The “New Racism” of K–12 Schools: Centering Critical Research on Racism*” found there were three main patterns to how researchers identified racism in schools:

(1) Evaded racism; where equity-explicit discourse is divorced from institutional analyses or concrete discourse on race and racism (this type of racism is often used to avoid, silence, or invisibilize racism); (2) “Antiracist” racism, where racially inequitable policies and practice are actually masked as the solution to racism; and (3) Everyday racism where the racism manifests on a micro or interpersonal level, and thus is often unrecognized or viewed as insignificant.

An analysis of the research collectively points to the “new racism” of K–12 schools, a system of institutionalized power and domination that works best when invisible. This new racism or racism for non-racists has resulted in a number of policies that have done irreparable harm to marginalized students. These include: 1) Hyper-segregation of English Language Learners 2) Restrictive Environments for Students with Disabilities & 3) Zero Tolerance policies that feed the School to Prison Pipeline.

ESL Ghettos and Hyper-segregation

Latino immigrant students who are English learners are now the most segregated of all minority students in U.S. schools (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield, 2003; Gifford & Valdés, 2006; Arias, 2005). Faltis and Arias (2007) assert that schools react to the dramatic increase in their Latino student population by the “hyper-segregating” of these students into classes where the curriculum consists primarily of English as a second language (ESL) and sheltered content classes for most of their day. This nearly wholesale separation from the general population results in marginalization based upon ethnicity and language; essentially condemning them to what Valdés (1998) refers to as an ESL ghetto. Valdes argued that this segregation is largely a matter of language proficiency and racism, particularly the perception that because these students are brown-skinned, speak Spanish or worse, “Spanglish”. He advocates for strategies in which these students are not left to languish socially and linguistically in the ESL ghetto, but instead are invited into the whole school environment in ways that increase their chances for learning English and achieving academic

success. Beatriz Arias, Vice President of the Center for Applied Linguistics, concluded that many “Latino ELL students are on a dead-end street” because “they attend schools which are predominately Latino and [then] get ‘tracked’ into ESL ghettos, where their exposure to native English speaking peers is further compromised... Consequently, many students are limited in their access to the very medium they require to succeed.” Research has shown that standardized models of public education do not effectively address the needs of many students, particularly those who face forms of social marginalization. Studies relay a host of complex inter-related personal-familial, school-related and societal variables contributing to the lack of fit between students and schools (Spruck & Powrie, 2005; Stringfield, & Land, 2002). This reality requires that school leaders develop strategies to create a more inclusive educational environment that not only promotes successful language and content learning, but also positive intergroup relationships among Latinos and native born students.

Restrictive Environments for Students with Disabilities

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (2016), 70% of US public school students who are physically restrained or secluded have disabilities. Our schools systematically separate students with disabilities from their peers, even though there has been landmark legal decisions and legislation that was designed to ensure a least restrictive environment for them to learn. Clearly, both the landmark 1954 Brown decision and the historic Individuals with Disabilities Acts (IDEA) were dedicated to ensuring the successful integration of groups historically excluded from mainstream educational opportunities (Crockett, 1999). It is important to note that the intersectionality of race and disability has led to another calculated attempt to re-segregate schools but under the guise of improving services for minority children with learning disabilities. IDEA, despite its aspirational equality premise, has been interpreted and implemented in a manner that marginalizes disabled students from minority and economically disadvantaged groups (O'Malley, 2016). Black children ages 6 to 21 are 40 percent more likely to be identified with disabilities than their peers.

There is a wide and expansive list of physical and mental disabilities that education utilizes to sort and often exclude these students from the mainstream of social and educational life. Over-representation of students of color special education programs is one of many factors that has produced a resurgence of segregated schools and an even greater incidence of segregated classrooms within schools. (O'Malley, 2016)

Zero Tolerance feeds the School to Prison Pipeline

The intersection of race and socioeconomic status has also produced “Zero-Tolerance” school policies that criminalize minor infractions of school rules, increased policing and surveillance in schools that create prison-like environments in schools, and overreliance on exclusionary disciplinary referrals to law enforcement and juvenile centers. The School to Prison Pipeline represents an institutionalized effort to accelerate the disproportionate tendency of minors and young adults from disadvantaged backgrounds to become incarcerated, because of increasingly harsh school and municipal policies. The American Civil Liberties Union (2013) correctly asserted that this pipeline reflects the prioritization of incarceration over education. The catalyst for this pipeline is sadly the disproportionate number of black and brown students who are removed from the educational setting through disciplinary suspensions and expulsions. The National Education Association (2016) states that: “the pipeline is the result of an array of policies and practices, fed by institutional racism, that disproportionately affect students of color, including

those who identify as LGBTQ, have disabilities, and/or are English Language Learners. A recent event in Michigan illustrates the confluence of institutional racism, school policies and the courts conspiring to knowingly perpetuate the school to pipeline. Jodi Cohen of ProPublica reported in June 2020; that a 15-year-old student was on probation for fighting with her mother and stealing. The student who has attention deficit disorder, was easily distracted when studying at home and fell behind during remote learning. A Michigan circuit court judge sent Grace to juvenile detention in May, citing the schoolwork as a probation violation (Cohen 2020). Grace is Black in a predominantly white community and in a county where a disproportionate percentage of Black youth are involved with the juvenile justice system. This a glaring example of systemic racial bias in the American educational system.

Social Justice Action Continuum

This Social Justice Action Continuum represents a paradigm shift from dealing with just the overt acts of racism but also confronting the institutionalized and structural systems that often permeate our laws and school policies. It is adapted from the Action Continuum developed by Adams, Bell, & Griffin, in 1997. It was developed to illustrate the range of action that educational teachers and leaders need to implement to ensure substantive change in our schools. It removes the part of the Action Continuum which lists behaviors that will not positively affect reform. In short; the Social Action Continuum is based upon actions leading to social change: changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions.

The Social Justice Action Continuum is seeking a degree of professional agreement on what constitutes substantive action which will lead to positive social change both in our schools and our society. It is also an attempt to agree upon what constitutes inaction or a level of action that in itself will not move the needle toward creating a more just educational environment for all students. This continuum proposes a model that illustrates the structure of limited action (alliance) to moderate action (advocacy) to effective action (activism); offers constructed definitions, and a comparative evaluation of the range from limited action to effective action within a social justice leadership context. These action ratings of behaviors seek to illustrate that a more definitive social agreement is necessary not only in how we prepare aspiring teachers and leaders, but also how we construct their evaluations and performance assessments when they enter the practice. This article is an attempt to develop socially shared construal of the definitions of effective teaching and leading in our schools. Traditionally, district and state performance appraisals have discounted or not even addressed social emotional learning and has often totally dismissed the proposition of linking these annual evaluation to how well teachers and leaders dealt with the factors of race, gender, socio-economic status, disability and others. Correlation of these rated behaviors with student achievement is essential to empirical gains but is also important in our quest to create more just school environments. This continuum allows for self-assessment as well as the ability to inform our leadership preparation programs that have been so resistant to addressing social justice. The curriculum for our leadership preparation programs must shift from the traditional principal as manager to principal as change agent. The social justice leadership discourse means that administrative preparation programs must encourage future school leaders to think very differently about organizational structures and leadership roles. Instead of continuing with incremental reforms that simply add more layers to existing structures, it is imperative to reconstruct roles and relationships at the school level around a vibrant core purpose focused on social justice and directed at improving student learning (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, 2005).

For educational leadership preparation programs to promote a social justice orientation, they must develop in their students what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) have called practiced reflexivity, where individuals consciously take responsibility for their actions—recognizing that all actions have an impact on the community. McKenzie and Scheurich further have noted that the school leader’s job requires a constant, vigilant critical perspective that always asks the questions. Education reforms have frequently been explicitly presented as urgent moral imperatives by policy actors at the highest levels (Gillborn, 2001; Hernández, 2016; Mulderrig, 2003; Stovall, 2013; Windle & Stratton, 2013). But most reforms, both nationally and locally, have not enabled strides toward social justice and educational equity. To the contrary, they have perpetuated, and in most instances intensified, racial inequality in schools (Adamson & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Buras, 2011; Connell, 2013; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Gillborn, 2008, 2017; Hursh, 2005, 2007). It is imperative that teachers and leaders embrace social justice activism as a major and integral component of educational reform. Rapp (2002, p. 233) argues that preparation programs have an obligation to instill in teachers and leaders a need to resist injustice and must “provide opportunities for university students preparing to enter the educational profession to leave the comforts and confines of professional codes and state mandates for the riskier waters of “high moral callings”.

Preparing School Leaders to Combat Student Marginalization

Educational leaders must be equipped to meet the needs of marginalized students (Theoharis, 2007). Social justice leadership explicitly works to reduce marginalization in schools. A growing concern among educators is whether emerging school leaders are prepared to face these pressures and create schools that advocate for education that advances the rights and education for all children (Spring, 2001). Furthermore, studies suggest that leadership preparation programs need to better prepare school leaders to promote a broader and deeper understanding of social justice, democracy, and equity (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Educational Leadership Preparation programs should be based upon the core principles of social justice and understand how activism plays an essential role in school leadership

Understanding of the concepts of social justice and social injustice activism

All Educational Leadership personnel should be able to clearly and explicitly articulate their distinctive understanding of social justice and social justice activism in addition to operationalizing these important concepts in particular facets of their program. Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) provide a framework for educational leadership programs to that “leadership development for social justice can only take place if professors intentionally create an atmosphere of emotional safety for social justice risk taking in their programs and in courses and other learning experiences in those programs” (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006, p. 220).

Kottkamp (2002) has cautioned that “the largest problem in changing our programs, making them more effective, lies in changing ourselves” (p. 3). Faculty cannot teach about creating and leading socially just schools with credibility if they are not modeling these principles in their own departments, which includes working with practitioners on the front lines to reform schools. Perhaps it is most important for professors to undertake an advocacy role in influencing educational policy to achieve social justice (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, 2005). School leaders and those preparing them will need to be creative and proactive to address current challenges, drawing on the past as well as multiple disciplines for new perspectives to shift their thinking. If graduates of educational administration programs are expected to take on new roles, faculty must

be active participants in the political arena when state policies affect social justice issues; mentoring from a distance does not prepare educational leaders for this difficult work (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, 2005 p.217).

Educational Leadership Curriculum based upon Social Justice Leadership discourse

The curriculum for leadership preparation programs should shift from the traditional principal as manager to principal as change agent. The social justice leadership discourse means that administrative preparation programs will encourage future school leaders to think very differently about organizational structures and leadership roles. Instead of continuing with incremental reforms that simply add more layers to existing structures, it is imperative to reconstruct roles and relationships at the school level around a vibrant core purpose focused on social justice and directed at improving student learning (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy, 2005). For educational leadership preparation programs to promote a social justice orientation, they should develop in their students what McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) have called practiced reflexivity, where individuals consciously take responsibility for their actions—recognizing that all actions have an impact on the community. McKenzie and Scheurich further have noted that the school leader’s job requires a constant, vigilant critical perspective that always asks the questions. Rapp (2002, p. 233) argues that preparation programs have an obligation to instill in leaders a need to resist injustice and must “provide opportunities for administration students to leave the comforts and confines of professional codes and state mandates for the riskier waters of high moral callings”.

Conclusion

At the heart of this discussion is whether leadership preparation programs actually understand how to operationalize the concept of Social Justice Activism as a central and driving force within their curriculum. Another central discussion is that current and past efforts to reform educational leadership programs without these basic tenets as guiding beacons are/have also been doomed to fail. Simply redesigning coursework based on updated core professional standards will not lead to substantive reform – but rather a “reordering of the deck chairs on the Titanic”.

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