

REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP: LEADERSHIP AS CONSTANCY IN CHANGE

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This paper discusses the continued need for transformational leadership as a vehicle for managing beneficial and energized change within a framework of critical educational theory. The principal is recognized throughout the literature as the pivotal person in a school. The principal as transformational leader shares authority and empowers others, giving them voice. This shift in authority, from bureaucratic and autocratic to participatory, creates an emancipatory agenda of social change based upon the principles of Democracy and community. The principal as transformational leader, anchored in critical theory, is a change leader who holds the form, the vision, while empowering others to seek the attainment of a school process that is in the best interest of all participants in the educational process. Accordingly, transformational leadership becomes leadership as constancy in change, that is, leadership that maintains the individuals' integrity, essence, and consensual co-evolved vision within the constantly flowing patterns of change.

INTRODUCTION

Public education continues to be the target of criticism. The criticism grows. Various reform movements have called for changes in schools. People at all levels, politicians, business and community members, parents, and even educators themselves, call for increased performance, accountability, and change. Educators are caught between demands for excellence and efficiency and the constraints of decreased resources and changing student demographics (Owens, 1999). Due to more conservative changes in the political climate, educators have increasingly limited resources for reform. Central to the conflict has been the call for change in principal and teacher roles. Bureaucratic authority and management are no longer the accepted norm. New models of leadership are emerging that encourage broadly based responsibility for decision making and school effectiveness. One such model of leadership as espoused by James Burns (1978) is transformational leadership. This paper defines transformational leadership and then goes on to discuss why there is a continued need for transformational leadership as a vehicle for managing beneficial and energizing change, within the framework of critical education theory.

CRITICAL THEORIES IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

One assumption made by critical theorists in educational administration is that society is cloaked in suffering and oppression (Capper, 1993). Consequently, critical educational leaders perceive themselves as being dedicated to uncovering sources of suffering and oppression, while legitimating social practices that uphold principles of sociality and community that are dedicated to improving the quality of human life (Giroux, 1988a).

A majority of the effective schools surveys and reform literature view the building principal as the pivotal person in a school (Lieberman & Miller, 1978; Lipham, 1981; Kozberg, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Iannocone & Jamgochian, 1985; Chubb & Moe, 1987; Firestone & Corbett, 1988; AASA, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1993; Sage & Burrello, 1994), particularly in schools that serve students from oppressed groups (Sizemore, 1990). Capper (1993) contends that critical theorists do not question the necessity of a "leader" or a position of authority in schools.

What is imperative to critical theorists is that a school leader empowers others to lead. The principal's emergent role is one of change leader. Sharing power and empowering others (parents, students, and teachers) gives them voice. Giving

voice to others creates an agenda of social change that includes freedom, equity, and the principles of a democratic society (Capper, 1993). A democracy involves the informed participation and consent of people. Accordingly, creation of democratic school communities implies a shift in the use of authority. A change leader grounded in critical theory reflects a shift in his or her agenda from maintainer of the status quo to promoter of social change (Capper, 1993). A change leader or transformation leader, according to Burns (1978), rests authority on a foundation that is morally based. Burns (1978) argues that fundamental to transformational leadership is moral leadership. Moreover, it follows that an agenda of social change through empowerment and voice must be morally based.

Moral leaders, anchored in critical theory, also are called transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988b). Transformative intellectuals are those who can "analyze critically modern forms of discourse which disguise power relationships and who can bring to a specific site the ability to inform and educate" (Giroux, 1988b, p. 18). Furthermore, transformative intellectuals, "can provide the moral, political and pedagogical leadership for those groups which take as their starting point the transformative critique of the conditions of oppression" (Giroux, 1988, p. 151-152). Gramsci (1971) claims that transformative intellectuals "provide the pedagogical and political skills that are necessary to raise political awareness in the working class, and to help it develop leadership and engage in collective struggle" (pp. 5-27). Sirotnik and Oakes (1986) suggest that the goal of transformative intellectuals is "the attainment of a schooling process that is in the best interest of every student" (p. 38). Change leadership, by whatever name, seeks the attainment of a schooling process that is in the best interest of all participants in the educational process.

LEADERSHIP

A definition of leadership is certainly not agreed upon in the literature. Over 20 years ago, Stogdill (1974, pp. 7-16) reported and classified over 70 definitions of leadership. Early attempts at

defining leadership did little more than identify individuals as leaders or indicate the means by which they acquired their positions. Early theorists tried to explain leadership through the study of individual attributes such as hereditary background, cultural circumstance, unique qualities of leadership styles, management behaviors, organizational contexts, and personal traits.

Stogdill (1974) suggested that more recently, theorists believed that "characteristics of the individual and demands of the situation interact" and enable a person or persons to emerge as leader (p. 23). In other words, more recent theorists tend to define leadership by examining the interrelationships between the demands of a situation and the behavior of the individual in the leadership position. Immegart (1988) supported this focus. He commented, "the study of leadership ought to shift clearly to one on leading, or the act of providing leadership" (p. 274). In short, a definition offered by Gardner (1990) captures the essence of this interactive view of leadership. He states, "Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers" (p. 1). This implies a shift from the more traditional image of a leader as one who directs the drive and force behind a group to an image of shared leadership. Yukl (1994) suggests that the effectiveness of a group may depend more on the overall quality of leadership than on who performs the leadership function.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Central to shared leadership is the concept of transformational leadership. Burns (1978) coined the terms transformational and transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is the type of leadership exemplified by principals in the past. Transactional leadership describes a person who "reacts to immediate situations and pressures, strikes bargains with allies and adversaries, follows limited short-run goals and seeks to maintain equilibrium and avoid fundamental change" (Burns, 1978, p. 409). Transformational leadership, on the other

hand, is analogous to Giroux's transformative intellectual. Transformational leadership is "leadership. . . that is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological and other resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of follower" (Burns, 1978, p. 18). The transformational leader's mission is to create a relationship with colleagues, community, and students of "mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" (p. 4). An integral aspect of transformational leadership is the moral component. The transformational leader is a moral leader. Burns (1978) defines moral leadership as a situation in which:

Leader and led have a relationship not only of power but of mutual needs, aspirations, and values; second, that in responding to leaders, followers have adequate knowledge of alternatives; and third, that leaders take responsibility for their commitments (p. 4).

Transformational leadership is moral leadership. Both the leader and the led are transformed by higher levels of conduct and ethical aspiration (Burns, 1978).

Burns (1978) suggests that moral leadership is "concerned with end values such as liberty, justice, equity" (p. 426). Leader and led have a moral relationship. Within this context of relationship and shared authority, a basis for the "moral quality of everyday existence is linked to the essence of democracy" in schools (Giroux, 1983a, pp. 257-293). The link between morality and leadership is not new.

According to Ratner (1939), Dewey believed that schools are places where the moral relationships are of paramount importance. Barnard (1939), the recognized father of organizational theory, understood the significance of morality as a component of leadership. He argued that ". . . the endurance of organization depends upon the quality of leadership; and that quality derives from the breadth of the morality upon which it

rests" (p.282). Foster (1991) defined moral relationships as "based on the possibilities in formation of one's own life and its meaningfulness in the process of the world" (pp. 2-3). Transformational leadership, moral leadership, is the vehicle by which the mutual needs, aspirations, and values of the individual are translated into community.

Individuals cannot separate themselves from the problems and increasing diversity of our global society. Transformational leaders can be the link through which individuals are transformed in order to transform our institutions, and in turn, transform our society. The power of leadership, according to Giroux (1992) needs to be linked to possibilities. Maxcy (1991) believes that "any theory of leadership must be nested in some notion of a social and political way of life" (p. 51).

Schools, as democratic communities, strive to become socially responsible, to question, to participate, and to embrace their cultural diversity. Multiple languages and diverse literacy are used so that people are able to communicate with and understand each other. Transformational leadership, according to Foster (1991),

. . . is a relationship oriented toward fundamental change, the object of which is the raising of the consciousness of leader and follower alike. Such leadership is concerned largely with end values, particularly the establishment of democratic communities where diverse voices may be heard (p. 9).

In this light, Boyd (1992) contends, to the extent that we are captives of particular paradigms, that we are prisoners of their vision. "How we think about our problems determines both what we see and what we fail to see" (p. 505). Accordingly, Sullivan (1986) asserts that

. . . ethics is grounded in practice with the community. The protection of human dignity depends on the moral quality of social relationships and this is finally a public and political concern. Citizenship is a shared initiative and responsibility among persons committed to mutual care (p. 22).

Bellah, et al. (1985) calls for a reaffirmation of the classic role of education as a way to articulate pri-

vate aspirations with common cultural meanings so that individuals simultaneously become more fully developed people and citizens for a free society.

It is suggested here that an expanded theoretical and operational foundation for leadership, anchored in critical theory, is capable of balancing the full range of values and sources of authority found in a school community. Transformational leadership provides a basis for such a critical educational community in which "the school is an endless cycle of diagnosis, and assessment, planning and implementation, evaluation and further diagnosis" (Finn, 1983, p. 14).

It is through collaborative exploration and critical determination of each individual's moral values that consensus will be reached. Implicit to this consensus are schools in which parties involved are emancipated, empowered, and dedicated to improving the quality of human life (Giroux, 1983b), grounded in the constancy of change.

THE CONSTANCY OF CHANGE

Today more than ever, people are faced with change. Change is an ongoing process encountered by all. It is often subtle. It is often imposed by outside forces or influences. Sometimes change is initiated from within. People cannot stop change. Similarly, people cannot predict the implications of change for the future. Moreover, people cannot predict the implications of change for themselves. In fact, as Toffler (1970) comments, people and groups can become so overwhelmed by change that it influences every aspect of their existence. When change accelerates to the degree that the gap between images and realities widen to the extreme, people cannot cope and may become psychotic or ultimately die. When properly managed, however, Toffler believed that change can be beneficial and energizing, and can aid people in becoming effective men and women in action.

Fullan (1993) reminds us that change is relentless. Echoing Toffler, Fullan (1993) contends that learning to deal with the forces of change is the secret to growth and development. We are each

faced with change daily. We each cope with change differently. Bateson (1994) comments that: "At some deep level of the personality, perhaps all change evokes the terrors of abandonment and dissolution, loss of those others who define self, or confrontation with a self become a stranger. During states of high vulnerability, panic is sometimes triggered by minute changes, so we arm ourselves with tokens of continuity" (p. 85).

Furthermore, Bateson (1994) states, "Death and extinction are the discontinuities avoided by the capacity to change" (p. 90).

Because dealing with change is such a personal issue, Fullan (1993) warns us that we "... should never trust a change agent, or never assume that others, especially leaders, know what they are doing" (p. viii). Perhaps the transformational leader, the moral leader, grounded in critical theory, vested in the goal of empowerment and equity for all, extending values that enable others to do the same, working in tandem with others toward a shared purpose which accepts both individualism and collectivism as essential to organizational learning, may provide the leadership necessary for the establishment of the constancy in change that will support the creation of community in schools and facilitate generative learning for the continued life of all. In this context, the transformational leader becomes the bearer of possibility through learning. Bateson (1994) suggests that "learning is welcome when it affirms a continuing sense of self. What is learned then becomes a part of that system of self-definition that filters all future perceptions and possibilities of learning. It is only from a sense of continuing truths that we can draw the courage, even for the constant, day-to-day changes of growth and aging" (p. 79). The ability to recognize both continuity and change in any situation empowers the individual to be attuned to changing needs (Bateson, 1994). To avoid this recognition reduces the flexibility of the learning community to the necessities of survival. Recognition of both continuity and change provides for the reframing of the process of learning as one proceeds. This is the creation of a style of relating to the world throughout a lifetime (Bateson, 1994). Key for the transformational leader and his or her

community, is learning to face change by “living in ambiguity and learning along the way” (p. 235).

Public education is everywhere in turmoil. “Visions of promise are countered with proposals for increasing rigidity” (Bateson, 1994, p. 9). She continues that, “ways of understanding are integrated works of art created by many minds. . . . Human beings construct meaning as spiders make webs. . . .” (p. 52).

DISCUSSION

Presently, in the United States, education is the scene of change from the state level to the classroom. For schools to realize the beneficial and energizing change Toffler describes, change must be properly managed. When confronting change, people are never fully prepared for the demands of the moment. Bateson (1994) reflects that “The self is constructed from continuing uncertainty, but it can include or reflect a community or even the entire biosphere, can be both fluid and stable, can be fulfilled in learning rather than in control” (p. 235).

The world of schools should be a free and just community wherein credence is given to the human aspects of life. Schools should be a place where real people, in life contexts, struggle with the problems of life and attempt to articulate those struggles in a language common to the learning community and based on the community’s shared values, experiences, and contextual metaphors. There is a continued need for transformational leadership, especially in the constancy of change.

Schools need strong leaders. Schools need leaders who are grounded, able to manage change, and be moral and ethical. School boards, communities, parents, teachers, and students look to the principal to focus a school’s mission toward what is in the agreed upon best interest of the students. It is to this point that the principal must demonstrate his or her steadfastness as a transformational leader. He or she must identify and empower others to lead. It is through transformational leadership, anchored in critical theory, that people can achieve higher levels of participation and work toward the successful achievement of the school’s goals—lifelong learning for everyone. Schools

need to be places that prepare people to participate critically in a democratic society.

Such schools should, likewise, be open to participation by school members in the decision-making process. The educational leader of this type of school can no longer be the bureaucrat, the manager, or the power broker. The mutual needs, aspirations, and values that Burns (1978) framed in transformational leadership must be determined within the individual school and community. It is through collaborative exploration and critical determination of each individual’s moral values that consensus may be reached. Implicit to this consensus are schools in which the parties involved are emancipated, empowered, and dedicated to improving the quality of human life (Giroux, 1988a). Paramount to the process of improving the quality of human life in schools, is the principal as moral leader.

As moral leader—transformational leader—the principal, rather than being disenfranchised from the guidance of a transformational leader, creates a support system of inclusion, shared caring, safety, and continuity, within which people learn and continually reframe the process of learning as they go along. Burns’ model of leadership engages all people in a given society, whether that society is a school, a community, or a nation. The transformational leader becomes the constancy in change. Accordingly, “. . . people can be lifted into their better selves—the secret of transforming moral leadership” (Bleedorn, 1983, p. 3). The transformational leader holds the form, that is, maintains the organization’s integrity, essence, and consensual vision in the constantly flowing patterns of change. The continued and growing need for transformational leaders is evident in a changing world where there are few forms of leadership through which new visions of critical school community can be formed.

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