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An Intellectual Space for Educational Leaders' Diversity and Social Justice Discourse

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EDITORIAL PIECE

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Educational leaders, particularly the campus leaders, have often defined their job and responsibilities as overwhelming. However, regardless of the endless tasks on school administrators' to do lists, ensuring that every child receives an excellent education should be at the forefront of everything educational leaders do. An excellent education is one that not only transfers knowledge to children but also one that develops the critical thinking skills that students will need to make sense of the world and be successful citizens of the democracy in which we exist. Educational leaders have the moral responsibility to understand, and hopefully embrace critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Educational leaders must value reflective assessments of the practices that are considered the norm, which often times do not meet the needs of our diverse students. To meet the needs of the millions of students, who live in poverty, have limited English language skills, have special academic needs or whose sexual identify does not meet the heterosexual norms, educational leaders must understand and be critical of the underlining beliefs and challenges these students face in their daily lives. The practices of the education system and the impact those practices have on diverse students must be examined and challenged. Educational leaders must explore the issues that perpetuate the alienation and disengagement of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

In order to achieve such a goal, educational leaders must understand the space in which they function, the needs of the students as well as their backgrounds, their struggles and strengths. While the campus principals could not know the details of the progress of every individual child in their schools, educational leaders must be aware and possess the knowledge to lead the effort to ensure that their teachers have an in depth understanding of their students and their needs. Furthermore, educational leaders must have an understanding of diverse students' needs and how to address those needs and use that knowledge to develop the teachers ' capacity and help them understand how to better meet the needs of all students. Educational leaders must possess the understanding of critical pedagogy to lead teachers in embracing change to give historically underperforming students a real chance at succeeding and breaking patterns of oppression and generational poverty.

The Need for This Intellectual Space

One will be hard-pressed to find an educational leader who works at a school with no diversity, where all students are White, from the same social-economic class, all speak English

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as their first language, with no unique academic needs, and where all students identify themselves as heterosexual. One could say that such a school does not exist anywhere in the United States; the reality is that U.S. schools are consistently becoming more diverse. The National Center for Education Statistics projects that by 2022 the enrollment of White students in public schools will decrease by 6 percent while the enrollment of Black, Hispanic, Asian and students who are two or more races will increase by 2, 33, 20 and 44 percent respectively (Hussar & Bailey, 2014). If educational leaders are going to critically question the practices used to address the needs of diverse students, first they must possess the same operational definition of diversity. Castania (1996), senior extension associate in the Cornell Migrant Program based in the Department of Human Development, New York State College of Human Ecology at Cornell University defined diversity "as differences among people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, and other human differences" (p. 2).

Diversity goes beyond race and ethnicity, it is multidimensional and complex. The people from diverse backgrounds, but who do not fall under the traditional definition of diversity, are negatively affected by the limiting "habit of construing diversity only in terms of race" (Haring-Smith, 2012, p. 8). When we think about our diverse students' needs we must include students with special needs, students who are gifted and talented and need advanced instruction to stay cognitively engaged, the LGBT students, children from economically disadvantaged homes, students from home with varied spiritual beliefs, as well as the culturally and linguistically diverse students. Cultural differences as described by Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005), include race/ethnicity (e.g., Latino, Caucasian, Asian/Pacific Islander, African American, American Indian), class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, first language, physical and learning ability, and learning style. Recognizing the range of perspectives and needs that our students bring to the school house is only the beginning. The statement made by Chief Justice Earl Warren back in 1954, in reference to *Brown v. Board of Education,* still holds true today, "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms." Educators must understand how to meet the needs of all students, but particularly those that do not come with a foundation on what are considered norms in the U.S. school system. Educators must embrace and engage in critical dialogue. They must challenge the current practices to begin to understand and effectively address the diversity within their schools while promoting social justice.

Arnie Duncan, past Secretary of Education petitions educators to consider, "The undeniable truth is that the everyday education experience for far too many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise. It is our collective duty to change that" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). By illuminating the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse student and emphasizing the importance of achieving educational equality, our desire is to deepen the school leaders' consciousness by helping to lay the groundwork for establishing an inclusive and culturally responsive school environments advantageous to the successful learning of all students.

The Institute of Education Sciences (2016) reported that 51.2% of students in the United States are students of color, over 40 million are English language learners, 13 percent of all public school students received special education services (IES, 2016), an estimated 3 million children are gifted and talented (NSGT, n.d.), and it is believed that 4 to 10% of students identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (PFLAG NYC, 2016). The reality is that

education takes place in a space where diversity is the norm. Therefore, educational leaders have the moral responsibility to lead the efforts to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population and create socially just schools. U.S. students are being served by teachers who are predominately White, over 80 percent of public school teachers are White (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), while our schools are led by leaders who are 80% Caucasian (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Given the disparity in the demographics of students and educators, educational leaders must create an awareness among educators about the variation in their perspective and the experiential differences that students and educators bring to the schools, and how their reality, their experiences impact teaching and learning. Being aware of these difference opens the door for discourse about the needs of our students that will inevitably benefit our students as well as our educators.

The Launch of a Journal: an Effort to Engage Educators in Critical Discourse

Diversity, Social Justice, and the Educational Leader was established with social theory as the theoretical framework. Social justice is the process through which people from all identity groups are able to fully and equitably participate in a society that respect diversity and differences, a society where people work together to create change (Bell in Adams & Bell, 2016). Boske (2012) describes the role of leading for social justice as "...highly emotional endeavor requiring courage, integrity, imaginative possibilities and self-awareness" while acknowledging "the ongoing debate and tensions regarding multiple meanings for social justice, what it means to lead for social justice, and pedagogies that encourage and support school leaders to lead for social justice" (p. 183). Effective educational leadership critically impacts not only climate, culture, and learning, but substantially influences the lives and perceptions of others. Understanding critical pedagogy, evaluative and inclusionary practices can assist in educators advocating for an egalitarian society where students are provided equal rights and opportunities in education.

Through this work the editors and the editorial board seek to expand the literature to help educational leaders understand the vast needs of diverse students. *Diversity, Social Justice, and the Educational Leader* aims to provide intellectual space for scholars and practitioners to engage in discourse about the implications the multitude of issues related to critical pedagogy, diversity and social justice have for educational leaders.

In this inaugural edition, two scholars begin the discourse about theoretical beliefs and practices that promote success among diverse students.

Dr. Hattie Hammonds, an English teacher in North Carolina with a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership, shares the findings of a qualitative, multi-case study focused on the work of early college high school principals in North Carolina and their efforts to promote the success of first generation, students of color and low-income students. She explores the implications the findings have for principals of diverse schools in order to effectively promote the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In a position paper, Cassandra M. Vara, a candidate for Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Mary-Hardin Simmons University, examines the historical and legal precedents of Latinx desegregation. She reviews the literature focused on the physical and cultural segregation of Latinx students. Ms. Vara provides suggestions for educational leaders to strengthen Latinx students' academic success.

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