



The Preparation of Inclusive Social Justice Education Leaders: An International Call

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Abstract

The need for inclusive educational leaders is significant at the global, international, and transnational levels. Calling for the preparation of educational leaders who are ready to build and maintain inclusive school communities; and work towards the elimination of racism, inequalities, and injustices. Although inclusion and inclusive education in the literature most often refers to students with disabilities, it also refers to race, class, gender, bilingual learners (most often referred to as English language learners), and other marginalized students. In this context inclusive education is about countering exclusionary schooling that isolates those who are othered.

A review of professional standards for educational leaders in the U.S. underscores a tendency to write and operate from a position of “colorblindness”, and highlights the importance of preparing inclusive social justice education leaders in a time of colorblindness. Additionally, a survey of extant literature related to transformational and transformative educational leadership, critical race theory and critical social theory, and the preparation of social justice principals and educational leaders resulted in the identification of three potentially valuable frameworks. Each of these frameworks challenges current practices and moves beyond the standards—making a significant contribution to the preparation of social justice educational leaders. This paper argues the global importance of inclusive social justice education, the utility of these extant frameworks, and the telling of one university’s experience in using these three frameworks to critique its program with the intent of sparking dialogue and debate about the current state of leadership preparation—and to argue for the importance of inclusive educational leadership, inclusive education and inclusive schools as a form of transformation.

1. Introduction

In our globalized world, inclusive education is a policy and practice consideration around much of the globe. “As of September 2013, 156 countries have signed the CRPD [2006 Convention in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities] and 134 countries have ratified it (United Nations, 2013)” [1, p. 21]. As the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century the Convention was written to protect the rights of people with disabilities to equality and non-discrimination in all areas of life, using a human rights approach to disability.

In this paper I argue the importance of preparing inclusive social justice educational leaders who have the dispositions, knowledge and skills necessary to move beyond the rhetoric of policy and engage productively in the praxis of building and maintaining inclusive school communities; while laboring to eliminate racism, inequalities, and all other forms of injustice. Although inclusion and inclusive education in the literature most often refers to students with disabilities; it also refers to race, class, gender, bilingual learners (most often referred to as English language learners), as well as other marginalized students. Locally and around the globe there is a need to be reflective and engage in honest and purposeful dialogue about inclusive education and what it ought to look like, and how it might best be understood.

Inclusive education values diversity—arguing the need to provide *all students* and learners, particularly those who have been marginalized and *othered*, with the space and opportunity to reflect, critique, and communicate their point of view as they develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and disposition needed to live in an interrelated and global society. At the heart of inclusive and global education is a value for diversity, inclusiveness, equity, justice, and Human Rights—while remaining mindful that there are challenges, dilemmas, tensions, uncertainties and different perceptions in education, and society.

Inclusion and inclusive education offer a way to move towards becoming an inclusive society at large. It is about countering exclusionary schooling that isolates those who are *othered* [2]. As Sapon-Shevin [3] asserts, inclusive education is not primarily about disability or schools, it is about social justice; leading him to ask, “What kind of world do we want and How should we educate students for that world?” (p. 25).

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2. Colorblindness as an endemic problem

In reviewing the professional standards for education leaders in the U.S. [2], it became clear to me that the way the standards are written and implemented, reflect *colorblindness* as a stance, and affirms the need for inclusive social justice education leaders. In this context, the preparation of such education leaders is an act of disrupting the normative practice of preparing and promoting education leaders who use a colorblind stance to maintain the status quo, exclusionary education. Education leaders who are unable or unwillingness to acknowledge or act upon the many *isms* closely connected with and White privilege and many other forms of privilege. “Many White teachers [and administrators have] little awareness of racism and a dysconscious understanding of their own Whiteness (Swartz, 2003)... creat[ing] internal obstacles to the implementation of both effective pedagogy, curriculum, [and leadership] and a transformative response to inequitable policies” (p. 302) [4, p. 1199].

In expanding my review of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 [5] and the Administrative Services Preliminary and Clear Induction Credential Program Standards [6] to include the use of *all students* and *all children* I noted the same vague language. *All students*, is used 39 times in the Administrative Services Preliminary and Clear Induction Credential Program Standards [6], and the use of *all children* only once in Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 [5].

The strongest use of *all students* occurred on pages four and ten [6]:

Learning to Lead provides a coherent, comprehensive, and robust system of professional preparation and development that will cultivate and support school leaders who can facilitate powerful instruction for *all students* and ongoing school improvement through effective management practices, a commitment to social justice and equity, ethical behavior, professional courage, and personal integrity... stimulate the conditions necessary for vibrant and effective public schools where *all children* can succeed (p. 4).

The program prepares candidates to improve schooling for *all students* with an emphasis on vulnerable and historically underserved students by examining teaching, learning, student engagement, student discipline, school culture, family involvement, and other programmatic supports in the school for the purposes of providing effective instruction and equitable access for *all students* (p. 10).

All students also occurred in the following ways: “...ensuring equitable, democratic public education for *all students*” (p. 30); “...equitable decisions on behalf of *all students*” (p. 24); and “...equitable access for all students (p.10).

Perhaps the most significant problem with the way *all students* is used, is that it fails to acknowledge the current disparities in our educational systems related to the access and opportunity afforded students who are marginalized and *othered*.

In contrast to the Administrative Services Preliminary and Clear Induction Credential Program Standards [6], the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) [7] agenda to “...promote lifelong learning... [and] the ‘unfinished business’ of EFA (Education for All)” is situated in “...a humanistic vision of education and development based on human rights and dignity; social justice; inclusion; protection; cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity; and shared responsibility and accountability” (p. 6). According to the Incheon Declaration:

Inclusion and equity...is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we therefore commit to addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes (p. 7).

3. Program Considerations

The current professional standards for educational leaders and education administrators in the U.S., do not adequately acknowledge the impact of education policy when it comes discriminating against and marginalizing those who are *othered*, nor the educational systems responsibility for the historic and current exclusion of marginalized and *othered* students and their families. Negating the preparation of inclusive social justice leaders, while reinforcing the position of those who are privileged.

Given the inadequacies of the professional educational leader standards, when it comes to the preparation of inclusive social justice leaders and the necessity for accredited programs to be aligned with these standards. It is essential to have an operational social justice framework that provides clarity,



structure, and purpose. Enabling programs to support aspiring educational leaders and administrators develop the self-awareness, dispositions, knowledge and skills necessary to build and maintain inclusive school communities; and work towards the elimination of racism, inequalities, and injustices.

Oddly enough, it was while reviewing the educational leadership standards against our program—using a social justice lens, that we were forced to stop, reflect, and be honest enough to admit that the standards were lifeless without being attached to a social justice framework, as well as adequate time for reflection and action at a programmatic level, course level, professional level, and personal level.

What we learned at the program level was the need to take a step back and the importance of anchoring our work on a social justice framework. Which reinforced what we had intuited. That is, the need to create the space for reflection, productive conversations, and discourse as a first step in the preparation of educational leaders who are equipped to counter injustices and exclusionary practices in our schools that isolate those who are *othered*. Without this it is not possible for our educational leadership program to support aspiring leaders in developing the disposition, knowledge, and skills necessary to address inequities and marginalization related to class, language, gender, race, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, and economic status in a program aligned with the U.S. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders [2].

The frameworks developed by Furman [8], Brown [9], and Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian [10] was highly useful in framing an understanding and critique of our program and the standards. Each asserted the importance of self-reflection; and the need to attend to critical consciousness, knowledge, and a practical skills focus. As a whole the three frameworks went a long way in enabling our principal preparation program to use the required standards in a socially just manner.

In the end, our program elected to use Furman's framework [8] to guide our work as we aligned our program with the Administrative Services Preliminary and Clear Induction Credential Program Standards [6] with leadership conceived as praxis in the Freireian sense, linking both reflection and action involving—the personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological. Drawing on the work of Capper et al. [10] we considered how to best support aspiring leaders develop the dispositions, knowledge, and skills that result in deliberate and effective action to end exclusionary practices and the *othering* of students.

We also realized that our program needed to use specific educational practices in all of our courses more purposefully. Practices “that enable participants to challenge their own assumptions, clarify and strengthen their own values, and work on aligning their own behaviors and practice with these beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies” [9, p. 81]. These practices include the use of cultural autobiographies, life histories, prejudice reduction activities, cross-cultural interviews, reflective analysis journals, and activist assignments—allowing students and professors to acquire and expand their ability to reflect, act, and be more successful.

4. Discussion

In this paper I strategically position the conversation of inclusion and inclusiveness for inclusive social justice educational leaders to reflect the need to rethink education leadership preparation from global, international, and transnational levels. Arguing for the preparation of education leaders who understand that all *isms* are endemic and engrained in the fiber of our society and schooling, and are both prepared and committed to work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination, prejudice, and *othering*. While embracing internationalism, as a form of inclusiveness that involves a movement in peoples, thinking, or ideas across political and cultural borders. Who understand concepts such as global interconnectivity, transnationalism, and deterritorialization and their impact on education and inclusiveness Carney [11].

In closing I would like to encourage us to collectively consider “justice, just justice”. Speaking at AERA Gloria Ladson-Billings (2015) troubled the term “social justice”, suggesting that it has far too often become a buzzword, and what we should be seeking and fighting for is “justice, just justice”. Because “...social justice is not expansive enough to help us confront the tremendous injustice, that has a deafening grip on our society and keeps us so far away from everything that we know as right and fair and just... and that invoking social justice we risk “loosing site of the big picture ‘justice’ issues and the injustice that prevails across the country and throughout the world.”

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