

Scholar-Practitioner Leadership: A Conceptual Foundation

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Abstract

The scholar-practitioner leader operates reflexively in the boundaries between theory and practice, striving to create exemplars of democracy and social justice within schools while simultaneously meeting modern accountability demands. This article outlines a theoretical underpinning for scholar-practitioner leadership and provides means of operationalizing it in context.

Keywords: Scholar-practitioner leadership, accountability, democracy and social justice

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“What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. . . .

A people without history
Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
Of timeless moments. . . .

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

T. S. Eliot
“Little Gidding”
from *The Four Quartets*

These words ring especially true for the many educational leaders who daily confront the myriad challenges encumbering America’s public schools. These challenges are not limited to local problems; rather, many of them are mandated challenges, difficulties handed down from controlling governmental agencies. Further, most of these challenges are presented as “reforms,” usually in the form of higher-stakes testing. School leaders, including principals and teachers, face growing pressure to ensure that these reforms are realized. Burdened by the growing pressure, many schools have begun to focus exclusively on maintaining and raising test scores in order to preserve school ratings. Too often, the effort to raise test scores translates into rote learning, teaching to the test and, sadly, a gradual decline in the overall diversity and quality of education that the schools provide (Anderson & Saavedra, 2002).

Overcoming the temptation to submit to the pressures of accountability to these new mandates requires a special kind of leadership, a kind of leadership that sees beginnings in ends, that both confronts and embraces the historicity of the circumstances, and that uses learned and discovered knowledge to bring continually fresh perspectives to seemingly tired and familiar situations. In a few schools and places, though, a different pattern is emerging: these schools are raising test scores *and* improving the overall quality of their students’ educations. The key to success for these schools lies in their ability to engage in school-wide inquiry and formulate beneficial derivatives from and within the mandates placed before them. Their success, then, is the product of research conducted and designed by practitioners, by doers generating theory (Anderson & Saavedra, 2002). These schools are guided by scholar-practitioner leaders, leaders who successfully blur the lines between theory and practice, synergistically combining the two to create a powerful precept for action. The purpose of this paper is to outline and operationalize a conceptual framework for scholar-practitioner leadership.

The Need for Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

For the purposes of this discussion, scholar-practitioner leadership, rather than being abstracted from educational leadership, will be treated as a particular form of educational leadership. Like any educational leader, the primary goal of the scholar-practitioner leader is to effectively transition the school to ever greater levels of student achievement and stakeholder satisfaction. The primary difference between the scholar-practitioner leader and other leaders, however, is the *way* the scholar-practitioner accomplishes that task.

Many modern educational leaders, guided by their training in positivistic administrative science, attempt to facilitate change in schools by treating the school as an organization, which,

undoubtedly, it is. Consequently, their method has led to reform efforts that center around changing schools' organizational structures. However, as Johnston (1994) postulates, "simply tinkering with the structural dynamics of schools" (p. 127) will probably not result in any significant change in the organization. Greenfield (1986) concurs, claiming that "administrative science does not work as a science; it has not brought us increased understanding and control of organizations" (p. 71). In fact, Bates (1989) goes so far as to label the results of the past several decades of research in administrative science as "either trivial or equivocal or both" (p. 133). He explains that in the natural sciences, the "abstractions used to define relationships between variables are defined reciprocally in terms of those variables and their interaction" (p. 132). Because of this relationship, any desired outcome can be achieved by precise manipulation of the affecting variables. He further relates that researchers have attempted to develop similar relationships for the social sciences, including the science of leadership, but, rather than producing a guiding set of principles, the researchers have merely created a simulation of control, "a theory built upon histrionics rather than substance" (p. 132). The result is a collection of confusing and non-replicable results which offer "no possibility of an axiomatic theory which specifies the reciprocal and systematic variations produced in one phenomenon through alteration in another. There is no calculus of leadership in the offing" (p. 132).

Where positivistic management science fails, scholar-practitioner leadership offers the potential for success because the scholar practitioner does not look for a "calculus of leadership." This type of leader recognizes that schools are merely products of human creation and are not things in their own right. As Greenfield (1986) notes, "organizations have reality only through human action, and it is that action (and the human will driving it) that we must come to understand" (p.71). Furthermore, he argues that administrative science has devalued the study of human choice and rationality. It has insisted that decision making be dealt with as though it were fully explainable in rational and logical terms. This has allowed administrative science to deal with values surreptitiously, behind a mask of objectivity and impartiality, while denying that it is doing so (p. 71).

The Goal of Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

The goal of the scholar-practitioner is to remove that mask and treat schools as places of human interaction, realizing that humans are ultimately unpredictable and no amount of scientific endeavor can quantify them (Foster, 1994). The leader can understand the school as an organization only if he/she understands the people in the school. As Johnston (1994) notes, the school leader must "address the cultural meanings and purposes that organizational participants bring with them to school and that develop as a consequence of participation in the daily routines of the institution" (p. 127). He further notes that this type of understanding will lead to research that combines the "story" of an event with its analysis, making it "more legitimate and useful" than the forms of quantitative research that "maintain separation between knowledge and the social occasion of knowledge use" (p. 127). Greenfield (1984) wraps up this notion most cogently when he observes that "the gist of this argument is that schools, and also organizations in general, are best understood in context, from a sense of the concrete events and personalities within them rather than from a set of abstractions or general laws" (p. 143). After all, "organizations are not things . . . They are an invented social reality of human creation. It is people who are responsible for organizations and people who change them" (Greenfield, 1986, p. 71). Understanding organizations in such a way—by taking into account their socio-historical context—is central to effective scholar-practitioner leadership. The perspective presented in this paper will align closely with that of Greenfield's (1984) argument that more consideration should be given to leaders rather than leadership and to "the character of leaders rather than their characteristics" (p. 143).

The Moral Arena of Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

Fazzaro, Walter, and McKerrow (1994) describe educational leadership, particularly in terms of educational administration, as a practice which is influenced by many factors, "including the study of and speculation about the practice itself" (p. 91). They describe it as an intricate mix of decisions and actions occurring on various levels and with varying time constraints. For instance, they concede

that no matter what is occurring in the outside world, the educational leader has the responsibility to make sure that teachers have adequate supplies, time, and facilities to fulfill their obligations to students. That task represents the technical aspect of school administration, and it is a given. However, the actual practice of school administration must necessarily address the “problematic” of education which includes issues of epistemology and transmission. Bates (as cited in Fazzaro, Walter, & McKerrow, 1994) delineates the problematic of education as encompassing the following six issues:

- (1) What counts as knowledge?
- (2) How is what counts as knowledge organized?
- (3) How is what counts as knowledge transmitted?
- (4) How is access to what counts as knowledge determined?
- (5) What are the processes of control?
- and (6) What ideological appeal justifies the system? (p. 91-92)

Though examining each of these questions in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, they are presented to exemplify the types of issues that engage scholar-practitioner leaders. These are questions that transcend the technical realm of educational administration and enter the realm of educational leadership. These questions escape attempts at answers promoted through formal policy or particular procedure. These questions are about values, and it is precisely these questions which force scholar-practitioner leaders into the value-debate arena.

As questions about values arise, Greenfield (1986) predicts that contention will result from groups or individuals who hold opposing values. An inevitable pattern of conflict emerges, with the responsibility of mediating the conflict falling on the leader. The consequence is that leaders “can be defined as those who articulate particular values within organizations and who negotiate those values into the organization;” as “representatives of values,” leaders are charged with “a moral task” (p. 73). Because participants will never agree on the absolute rightness or wrongness of values, leaders must assume the role of cultural arbitrators charged with developing a guiding value for the school. This responsibility lies far outside the technical managerial leadership qualities described above and requires a completely different orientation. All too often, however, as Fazzaro, Walter, and McKerrow (1994) note, educational leaders have gotten by with “disguising moral judgments as ‘management’ decisions (for example, Canter’s approach to discipline)” (p. 92). Further, because public education in America is a necessarily public function, any moral judgments must be based on available public knowledge. Thus, public education can provide a forum for a society to generate and legitimate public knowledge. Finally, because school administration (or preferably leadership) is located at the center of this practice of making moral decisions based on public knowledge, school leadership “must be a moral practice” (p. 92). Following Greenfield’s (1984) argument that a discussion of the leader overshadows any talk of generalized leadership is crucial to developing a model of a scholar-practitioner leader, for, in short, the scholar-practitioner is a moral leader.

The Means of Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

Facilitating school dialogue and improvement in the face of conflicting values is the “moral practice” that directs the “practitioner” half of a scholar-practitioner. The “scholar” half of the same individual is consumed by a desire to understand and uncover the very best way(s) to accomplish the task. Importantly, what the scholar-practitioner actually does is found at the hyphen that joins the two words, where the two aspects of the same individual conjoin, where actions are guided by theory and theory is tempered by actions. Scholar-practitioners make meaning, create practice, and generate understanding at that hyphen, the place which Kincheloe and Steinberg (1999) call the “the frontier where the information of the disciplines intersects with the understandings and experiences that individuals carry with them” (p. 61). How they do this—their means, their actions—should be of great interest to aspiring scholar-practitioners.

Educational leaders, whatever their personal philosophical stance, must ultimately act—that is, after all, their job—and they must be aware that their actions have real consequences for real people. These leaders may derive the stimuli for their actions from one of three ways: they may select from a menu of theories developed by the scholars of educational administration (a choice which may prove

insensitive to those upon whom they act) ; they may act on impulse, guided by intuition, experience, and common sense (which minimizes the “information of the disciplines”); or, they may develop a “philosophical critique of practice in which deliberative action is derived from a combination of empirical and interpretive modes of inquiry that have been brought to bear upon both the public domain of extant theory and the private domain of common sense” (Codd, 1989, p. 168). It is this last alternative that allows the leader to meet the demands of Kincheloe and Steinberg (1999) by blurring the lines between theory and practice, bringing to bear their “information of the disciplines,” their personal experience, and their sensitivity towards others.

The type of leader that Codd (1989, p. 6) describes is now commonly referred to as a scholar-practitioner leader, and for the moment, Horn’s (2002) definition of scholar-practitioners as those who “engage in the interplay between theory and practice,” allowing them to “recognize the ubiquity of their interaction with others and that this is mediated and informed by conversation” (p. 83) will suffice. Additionally, Jenlink (2003) states that the work of a scholar-practitioner leader is “that of the public intellectual, work which is situated in cultural and political contexts of difference” (p. 3). The definitions of both scholar-practitioners and their work reaffirm Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1999) notions of decentralization of self and understanding in the socio-historical context.

However, for this discussion, it is important to understand how scholar-practitioners go about their work, the means of scholar-practitioner leadership. One primary means that faces every educational leader is through problem-solving and subsequently acting on the proposed solutions (Glasman & Glasman, 1997). In the context of solving problems, Jenlink (2002) describes the scholar-practitioner as a bricoleur, “an individual who must work with what she/he has at hand, most importantly the methods and types of knowledge necessary to working within a complex array of social and cultural dynamics.” Moreover, the “bricoleur’s means for accomplishing her/his work is determined in part on the basis of professional preparation (in our case as a scholarly practitioner) and past experiences” (p. 3). Thus, the scholar-practitioner is a sort of intellectual handyman, able to bring a variety of viewpoints, reflections, understandings, and ways of knowing to each problem. These tools enable the scholar-practitioner to accomplish all jobs successfully, combining theory with practice to direct purposive action.

The scholar-practitioner is much more interested in solving problems than creating new ones. To avoid creating new problems, the scholar-practitioner is careful not to separate thinking from doing, theory from practice. Dewey (as cited in Menand, 1997) viewed knowing (thinking) and doing as indivisible aspects of the same, essentially constructivist, process. By taking a piece of acquired knowledge into a new situation, the individual allows that knowledge to be reformed and made ready to carry over into the next encounter. Knowledge is not some mental copy of an external reality, but rather, a means or instrument of successful action. Enfolded Dewey’s idea with the definitions already provided by Horn (2002) and Jenlink (2003) results in a scholar-practitioner with a pragmatic flair, an individual motivated to achieve the best possible solutions, but cognizant of all mitigating circumstances and the personal, social, and historical factors which limit those solutions.

If Dewey’s notion that knowing and doing are inseparable, then it follows that learning and doing are also indivisible aspects of the same thing, for knowledge is procured only through learning. For scholar-practitioners, learning is a continuous, life-long, transformative process through which the meaning of everyday life is made. As Anderson and Saavedra (2002) relate, when scholar-practitioners encounter “obstacles or dissonance within their current understandings, they find ways to alter those meanings and construct new interpretations” (p. 33). The scholar-practitioner takes this unknown and begins a process of exploration, formulating hypotheses based on current knowledge about the situation. All sorts of data are gathered, including formal knowledge gained from study, observations, interviews, past experiences, and social encounters: nothing is off-limits. This data becomes the point of a spear with which the scholar-practitioner probes into the unknown. As the scholar-practitioner reaches further into the unknown, the data continues to be interpreted, analyzed, and compared to previous understandings which begin to alter or expand. At the same time, new meanings and new understandings begin to form, and these lead to more questions. New questions

require more data and more probing, and soon, the cycle begins again. “Transformative learning occurs as a result of consistent engagement in inquiry” (Anderson & Saavedra, 2002). This engagement represents the truest form of constructivist action- or practitioner-research and is at the heart of scholar-practitioner leadership: it is the constant expansion of Kincheloe and Steinberg’s (1999) “frontier.”

As Jenlink (2001) states, leadership based on the scholar-practitioner model focuses primarily on a “‘new scholarship’ wherein the practitioner as a scholar of practice, seeks to mediate professional practice and formal knowledge and theory through disciplined inquiry, and uses scholarly inquiry and practice to guide decisions on all levels of educational activity” (p. 7). Further, scholar-practitioners are uniquely situated in relation to their field because the subject of their research is always intimately connected with their actual practice. Such a reflexive relationship permits a “sustained interactivity” between theory, place, person, and practice. Due to this interactivity, scholar-practitioners have distinctive methods of inquiry because the methods, “in effect, become practice and vice versa; inquiry and practice stand in a reciprocal, recursive, and mutually informing relationship” (p. 8). Anderson and Saavedra (2002) extend the argument, pointing out that whatever the means, “knowledge production is never neutral, but rather is always pursued with some vested interest in mind” (p. 32). Because of this, they argue, “there is nothing in current approaches to action research that might interrupt the mere reproduction of best practices”; consequently, unless scholar-practitioners consciously and explicitly build a “reflexive component” into their research, “pressures to maintain and defend the status quo may discourage the problematization of current policies and practices” (p. 32).

The Theoretical Basis of Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

With the warning of Anderson and Saavedra (2002) in mind, the scholar-practitioner must discover a way to resist tendencies that encourage the preservation of the status quo. This resistance can be readily maintained if the scholar-practitioner develops a critical world-view, “becoming, as Jenlink (2003) would say, a “critical-bricoleur.” The critical-bricoleur would rely on his or her “scholarly practice to engage as a criticalist leader concerned with social justice, equity, power, ‘Truth,’ difference, and caring” (p. 3). The critical-bricoleur would also utilize practice to “overcome the marginalization and oppression experienced in schools and academic settings, challenging cultural reproduction that advantages one population while disadvantaging others” (p. 3-4). In short, as Ryan (1998) notes, critical scholar-practitioners “‘are concerned less with matters of efficiency and positional authority’ and more with ‘finding ways to help schools improve the life situations of disadvantaged groups’” (p. 257). The scholar-practitioner views overcoming these obstacles and meeting these challenges as a moral responsibility.

In this respect, Ryan (1998) delineates two important functions of leadership: these responsibilities “include helping people to *understand* theirs and other’s situations and providing them with the capacity to *resist* situations that penalize certain individuals and groups” (p. 275). Thus, scholar-practitioner leaders, while constructing their own knowledge, must guide others to new knowledge as well. The purpose of this new knowledge is to help them formulate new ways to resist both overt and covert forms of oppression. In this process, however, Foster (1994) reminds leaders that all organizations “have a history which serves to inform how individuals can construct their realities; the possibilities are not limitless and are constrained by particular social and economic factors”; mitigating these factors within a system results in the role of the leaders being “less one of regulation and more one of transformation” (p. 38).

As noted above, the scholar-practitioner is commonly viewed as one who blends theory and practice, but as the subsequent discussion made evident, such blending is not always possible. The scholar-practitioner is in a position of acting in ways that immediately and powerfully affect the lives of people. Taking such actions must be informed by knowledge of the system and those within it. Even though leaders can amass a wealth of theoretical knowledge, they must rely on the input of others to guide them through the socio-historical context of a given situation and to mitigate the

effectiveness, the fairness, the equity, and the justice of the decisions they make.

Scholar-practitioner leadership, rather than being abstracted from educational leadership, is a particular form of educational leadership. Furthermore, the term will be used in a way that reflects and assumes the leader's awareness of the socio-historical context of a situation. Like any educational leader, the primary goal of the scholar-practitioner leader is to effectively transition the school to ever greater levels of student achievement and stakeholder satisfaction. The primary difference between the scholar-practitioner leader—particularly one who is sensitive to the nature and importance of his position—and other leaders, however, is the *way* the scholar-practitioner accomplishes that task. Examining how a scholar-practitioner moves a school forward is essential to understanding the value of scholar-practitioner leadership.

The Means of Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

Scholar-practitioners should have a sufficient theoretical knowledge base to give them a commanding view of the field in which they operate. Additionally, they should be cognizant of and responsive to the social milieu of the organization in which they operate. In brief, they must know something about organizations, about the role of individuals within those organizations, and about how the organization impinges upon the lives of those individuals. To that end, the scholar-practitioner must surround him/herself with individuals who can contribute that knowledge, which, in itself, connotes a democratic ideal. These demands require the scholar-practitioner to be familiar with principles affecting organizations and the people who operate within them. An examination of these factors will contribute to that understanding.

The nature of organizations. Greenfield (1984) argues that organizations, particularly schools, are not a result of some natural order; rather, they are product of human invention. As a result, they are also prone to human capriciousness and are best understood in that context, “from a sense of the concrete events and personalities within them rather than from a set of abstractions or general laws” (p. 143). Furthermore, viewing organizations as “non-natural entities” grounds them “in meanings, in human intentions, actions, and experience” instead of some “ultimate reality” or unifying, controlling theory (p. 150). Essentially, then, organizations are no more than the collective experiences, personalities, and consciousnesses of the people who comprise them; they are the sum of the collective participant-knowledge within the system.

Wheatley (1999), however, contends that organizations are more than just the sum of their parts, however endemic those parts are to the organization. In fact, summing the parts yields an entity, whether natural or not, that far transcends the parts. This concept is evident in every aspect of school, as the learning community, acting in common, regularly achieves much more than could be achieved through individual efforts. Importantly, though, valuing the individual's contribution to the whole remains important, for without those efforts, the whole would cease to exist. Ideally, Wheatley (1999) adds, “Each organism maintains a clear sense of individual identity within the larger network of relationships that helps shape its identity. Each being is noticeable as a separate entity, yet is simultaneously a part of the whole system” (p. 80). The organizational leader's responsibility becomes “one of providing the opportunity for the organization to grow naturally, not coercively. As the leader *allows* nature to take its course, creativity will emerge” (p. 83). Removing barriers and debris from the leader's and followers' surroundings allows for the natural transcendence of each individual to occur; consequently, the organization becomes stronger.

Based on the argument thus far, if organizations are to move forward, then the individuals within them must also move forward. To that end, Donaldson (2001) contends that there must be sufficient unity and cohesion within the organization so that once individuals start moving forward they are able to all move in the same general direction. Similarly, Senge (1990) discusses the importance of shared vision among the members of the organization: “When there is a shared vision (as opposed to the all-too-familiar “vision statement”), people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to” (p. 9). Carrying forward the spirit of learning organizations, he adds that “organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee

organizational learning. But without it, no organizational learning occurs” (p. 9). The school leader accepts that schools are learning organizations and strives to cultivate learning throughout.

Unfortunately, many times in organizations learning is stifled and human needs are sacrificed upon the altar of managerial accountability. The result is a loss of ownership by members of the group. Members become, at best, dissatisfied or, at worst, completely disenfranchised. As a result, the potential to achieve greatness is minimized and the organization as a whole as well as the individuals who comprise it suffer. The organization’s collective success must derive from and be a product of the individual member’s successes (Senge, 1990). In that regard, celebrating even the smallest achievements of members fosters natural desires within the individual, pushing them and the entire organization forward.

The role of the individual within the school. Fazzaro, Walter, and McKerrow (1994) argue that “American public education is not an island unto itself in a dynamic social sea” (p. 92). Rather, the public schools are an integral part of the fabric of society. At one time or another, practically every individual in this society will play some role in a public school. As a result, schools have the responsibility to simultaneously meet the needs of individual students, such as preparing them for valuable, productive futures, and also to promote the “sociopolitical good.” To that end, the “original theoretical purpose of universal public education in America included the perpetuation of the democratic ideals upon which the republic was founded” (p. 85). Ideally, then, the perpetuation of democratic ideals will include some practice with the basic process of democracy. The inclusion of democratic practices facilitates the inclusion of diverse individuals and groups which increases the store of participant-knowledge from which the scholar-practitioner can draw.

Democracy. Based in part on the above arguments, there is a call for democracy within today’s schools. As society becomes more diverse, so do the needs of its members, and a primary need is practice and training in the art of democracy. Starrat (2001) points out that in the United States democracy takes two forms: first, there is the representative form of the government, in which citizens elect leaders to represent their views at various levels in the government; second, there is “the traditional usage of the word that refers to social forms of living together as equals under the law, citizens with moral bonds to one another, yet each free to pursue their own interests” (p. 334). However, conflict often arises from competing interests within the society, leading Taylor (1998) to ask how “people can associate and be bonded together in difference, without abstracting from these differences” (p. 214). As a partial answer, consider Starrat’s (2001) suggestion “that a qualified form of democratic leadership of schools is not only possible, but also necessary” (p. 335) in order to model successful democratic behavior and ameliorate the potentially divisive effects of diversity.

In order to model democracy in action effectively, Apple and Beane (1995) purport that “in a democratic school it is true that all of those directly involved in the school, including the young people, have the right to participate in the process of decision making.” Ideally, this sort of arrangement provides everyone with a chance to promote individual interests and to share their personal participant-knowledge with others. The successful democratic leader values and utilizes the authentic input offered by both school and community members. Thus, a sense of ownership materializes and stakeholders feel validated through the process.

Schools should be designed to educate all students and, in the process, teach and model true participatory democracy. Codd (1989) agrees, noting that “if schools are to educate for a democracy, they must embody within their own structures such central moral principles as justice, freedom, and respect for persons, combined with an overriding concern for truth” (p. 177). This authentic modeling of the desired results is essential. Every group and individual is important to the organizational makeup. “In the ideal democratic state, education should promote social criticism, not reinforce, for example, any elitist, racist, or sexist practices that might exist” (Fazzaro, Walter, & McKerrow, 1994, p. 89). A collaborative effort can only be achieved if all stakeholders feel valued.

Democratic participation, as argued by Anderson (1998), “is justifiable on the grounds that it

is educative and provides a development process in which social actors become more knowledgeable about their choices and aware of their own beliefs” (pp. 584-585). As members come to participate democratically in the organization, educational leaders facilitate multiple layers of authentic learning for everyone. The participant knowledge gained through the participation process is shared by individuals and will ultimately spread to affect the entire group.

In theory, many leaders express a desire for democracy within their schools; moreover, many even claim to operate within a democratic organization, but hidden below the verbiage lies a different truth. Many schools continue to function through authoritarian leadership with a top-down hierarchal structure. Anderson (1996) shares that many administrators do not want a vocal majority; they actually prefer to silence any “disruptive” voices so that elite power is not questioned. The inability or lack of desire to practice democracy creates disconnect among the members of the organization. It is important to note, however, that such an experience could prove to be negative and harmful when the democracy is discovered to be inauthentic (Anderson, 1998). Participants may become disillusioned with, disinterested in, and disconnected from the process. Participation and connection are two key components of democracy. Wheatley (1999) stresses the importance of keeping every member interconnected throughout the organization. Other authors (Donaldson, 2001; Duffy, 2003; Fullan, 2001) reinforce the point, stressing the importance of maintaining strong, healthy connections and relationships as a way to facilitate success and cultivate authentic democratic participation.

Social Justice. All of the discourse on democracy ultimately leads to the question: Who participates, in what areas and under what conditions, and to ask: Participation toward what end? To answer, Anderson (1998) insists that to be authentic, participation must “include relevant stakeholders and create relatively safe, structured spaces for voices to be heard” (p. 575). He further argues that even though these measures address the nature of participation, they fail to address the ultimate ends of participation. For Anderson (1998), the ultimate ends of democracy should be “the constitution of a democratic citizenry and redistributive justice for disenfranchised groups.” In educational terms, this equates to “more equal levels of student achievement and improved social and academic outcomes for all students” (p. 575). Thus, authentic participation should result in “the strengthening of habits of direct democratic participation and the achievement of greater learning outcomes and social justice for all participants” (p. 576).

The first step toward increasing participation and re-enfranchising those who have been pushed to the sides of the system is to determine exactly who those people are. Friere (2004) maintains that, regardless of the reasons, the poor and people of color are most likely to be silenced within organizations. Often historical and structural forces work to reinforce this isolation; in fact, the origin of much of it can be traced back to the schools. Oakes (1986) points out that, as schools struggled to educate diverse groups of learners, they turned to tracking as an answer. Standardized testing became the primary tool of sorting, providing a seemingly scientific and equitable solution to the problem; at the time, “this solution defined student differences and appropriate educational treatments in social as well as educational terms” (p. 150). Importantly, however, Oakes (1986) argues that tracking was more than a solution to an instructional problem—it provided a means of social control. Ultimately, tracking “helped to institutionalize beliefs about race and class differences in intellectual abilities and to erect structural obstacles to the future social, political, and economic opportunities of those who were not white and native-born” (p. 150).

Successful scholar-practitioners believe in and are capable of breaking down the class structures and diversity issues that provide obstacles to social justice. They do this by looking through a lens which allows them to view all as equals. Leaders who believe in this ideology also believe the walls of class structure and diversity should be dismantled to allow for more growth and knowledge. To illustrate the difference social class can make, Bates (1984) notices that the children of the working class are often seen as inferior, as an enemy, and that when conflicts arise in schools, they predominately involve this group of children. The needs of these children are often not met. He further argues that the middle class children are often viewed as cogs in a machine, and these students meet stifling, bureaucratized relationships in school. Though their needs are met, most of the children

in this group are awash in a sea of anonymity. Meanwhile, children of the upper class are treated as negotiators, as rational adults. They are treated as individuals, with special attention aimed at meeting their needs; they represent a powerful manipulative force within the same organization (Bates, 1984). Ultimately, the responsibility of valuing all members equally and treating all members fairly falls in hands of the educational leader.

The oppression of the poor and working class is not limited to children, but is a problem that runs rampant throughout the lives of poor and minority adults as well. Anderson (1998) states that “many advocates of poor and disenfranchised groups claim that participation of any form holds out the possibility of greater accountability from educational institutions that have tended to at best ignore them and at worst to pathologize them” (p. 582). People should not be labeled as good or bad based on the environment they come from or what color of skin they have. Giroux (1994) argues that, unfortunately, “many educators view different languages and backgrounds in students as deficits to be corrected rather than as strengths to build upon” (p. 41.) Every individual possesses the capability to learn and contribute as a productive member of the organization or school and should be afforded the opportunity to do so. Individuals from the working class can think creatively just like those from the upper class. Each person offers a unique perspective on and knowledge of various issues and should be validated as important.

Voice. If each individual offers a unique perspective, then, according to Greenfield (1984) it is because each individual experiences a unique, perspectival reality, a reality that is “woven by human will from stuff created from our imagination and colored by our personal interests” (p. 142). Because there is no objective means of determining the legitimacy of anyone’s “reality,” in a democratic system each person should be free to express his or her own perspective, unhindered by issues or race, class, or gender. In fact, “the crux of this argument is that we can do nothing to validate our perceptions of reality other than to describe it as we see it and argue for the truth of our description” (p. 142). This the participant-knowledge that can be shared, but cannot be experienced by another.

Making this critical argument, however, requires that each individual has free and legitimate access to the political process. As noted in the discussion above, this is not always the case. Often, certain individuals and/or groups have lost their “voice.” McElroy-Johnson (1993) does a remarkable job of explaining the concept of voice and all that it entails. Just as each individual has a unique fingerprint, each individual has a unique and distinguishing voice. Moreover, each person actually possesses two voices: an outer voice heard by others and an inner voice heard only by the self. Due to personal and cultural factors, many people—particularly those who are members of oppressed groups—find that even contacting the inner voice becomes difficult (if not uncomfortable), much less expressing and heeding it. Consequently, these people become so accustomed to hearing the voices of others that they lose touch with their personal voices, sometimes even displacing someone else’s voice for their own. When this displacement occurs, social justice is denied.

When an individual allows someone else to speak for him or her, that individual retreats from and loses a place in the political process. Voices become silenced; identity fades; injustices emerge; and, oppression begins. McElroy-Johnson (1993) uses the term voice when she references the “strong sense of identity within an individual, an ability to express a personal point of view, and a sense of personal well-being.” Moreover, “voice is identity, a sense of self, a sense of relationship to others, and a sense of purpose. Voice is power—power to express ideas and convictions, power to direct and shape an individual life towards a productive and positive fulfillment for self, family, community, nation, and the world” (pp. 85-86). Working from such an articulate, cogent, and powerful definition of voice, it naturally follows that establishing and maintaining legitimate, genuine voice is fundamental to ensuring social justice and democracy.

Conclusions Regarding Scholar-Practitioner Leadership

Much has been said about what scholar-practitioners are, what they do, how they do it, and why society needs them. Scholar-practitioners have been shown to be intimately connected to the

world around them, striving, by any means, to make it a better place. They are pragmatists, concerned about consequences, and bricoleurs, able to utilize a multitude of methods to achieve the best consequences. They constantly rely on theory to guide their practice and use their experiences gained through practice to develop new theories. Additionally, coupled with a thorough understanding of organizational realities, an awareness of the socio-historical context enables leaders to empower individuals within the schools, simultaneously fostering democratic principles, ensuring social justice, and giving voice to all. Moreover, Mills (1959) describes scholar-practitioners best when he identifies them as “the most admirable thinkers” because they “do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both much too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other” (p.195). From that statement springs the essence of scholar-practitioner leadership.

Greenfield (1984) wraps up the notion most cogently when he observes that “the gist of this argument is that schools, and also organizations in general, are best understood in context, from a sense of the concrete events and personalities [and particular participant-knowledge] within them rather than from a set of abstractions or general laws [provided by theoretical knowledge]” (p. 143).). Understanding organizations and the individuals who comprise them in such a way—by taking into account their socio-historical context and unique realities—is central to our new model of effective scholar-practitioner leadership. Doing this, completing the understanding, brings us back around, positioning the leader to see and understand that place from which he departed for the very first time.

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