



The Case For 21st Century Teacher Preparation: The Call To Serving The Most Vulnerable Students In K-12 Education Is Challenging The Status Quo And Realization Of The Promise Of Instructional Leadership

Dr. Erasmus Chirume

Assistant Professor, Graduate Program, Anchor, College of Education Faculty Research Talks ,Central State University ,1400 Brush Row Road ,PO Box 1004 Wilberforce, OH 45384

Abstract: *Education is a human endeavor through which nations seem to have demonstrated a common interest in the promise that education makes society better, and can improve the human condition. At the forefront of society-wide effort toward national development, are teachers. Through them, schools and universities--which constitute the most extended networks of human organization present in any country--are created to typically function as excel of society performing prophylactic and prognostic roles in wealthcreation and improved human condition. But in the modern society, some people experience limited accessto education that others take for granted. Among the inhabitants that cannot take advantage of the yellowbrick road to acquiring a good education, as well as attaining a satisfactory standard of living in America,typically belong to the lower socioeconomic status. Teachers constitute a foundation of untapped dynamism and insight to profoundly change schools and improve student outcomes. Therefore, in the 21st century,teacher preparation implies sufficiently equipping preservice teachers with distinctive capabilities to servethe most vulnerable students in K-12 schools to become empowered participants in national development.*

Keywords: *leadership and at-risk-students, teacher preparation, national development*

1. Introduction

A common interest in the promise that education makes society better, appears to be the *raison deter* for nations across the world, to provide formal education. Schools and universities--which constitute the most extended networks of human organization present in any country--are created typically to function as excel of society performing prophylactic and prognostic roles in social development. In the modern society, though, some people experience limited access to education. For instance, among the inhabitants that cannot take advantage of *the yellow brick road* to acquiring a good education, typically belong to the lower socioeconomic status (Goodland, 1990). Inequality of access, concomitant to discrepant educational

outcomes, ripples across the areas of employment, health, shelter, justice system, affecting the quality of life of the underserved (Cook, 2015). Therefore, in the 21st century, teacher preparation implies sufficiently equipping preservice teachers with distinctive capabilities to serve the most vulnerable students in K-12 schools to become productive members of society.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the improvements claimed by some school districts, processes of exclusion have increased and engagement with learning for low income students has decreased, thus producing subsequent declines in productivity (Kucsera, Orfield & Siegel-Hawley, 2014). Ultimately, poor

productivity diminishes life opportunities, indicting a significantly large number of youths to chronic poverty. By not realizing their human, social and economic potential, these young people represent a phenomenal waste to themselves, their families and the nation (Goodlad, 1990). In a study by Chirume (2009), which included 88 male and 131 female educators, the most disagreed survey statement was that the respondents believed that their preparation in universities equipped them to practice instructional leadership in K-12 with at-risk students. In this context, teacher preparation essentially occurs as a moral struggle, where the quality of engagement of pre-service teachers may or may not meet the requirements of preparing and equipping teachers with distinctive instructional leadership capabilities to diminish the invisible forces that lurk in schools, causing student-at-risk, while expanding opportunities for the advancement of students' wellbeing, empowering them to contribute to social and economic development.

3. The Research Question

What are the distinctive features of theory and practice of instructional leadership envisaged to be part of the 21st century teacher preparation program with a strong vision for the academic success of our most vulnerable students in the K-12 schools, which properly fulfil their prognostic and prophylactic roles in society?

4. Definition of Terms

The term *prognostic role* implies the human capability to fulfil a role of making a judgement about what is likely to occur, in a way that will optimize opportunities for the students, and society. The term *prophylactic role*, refers to a capability to fulfil a role in which measures are taken to reduce human catastrophe and optimize student wellbeing, turning learning into improved action in the development of society.

5. Theoretical framework

In this study, Constructivism, Critical Theory, and Theory of Social Change, blend into a theoretical framework that provides a set of lenses to capture, profoundly, the theme of the moral struggle in context of teacher preparation and the learning conditions in the public school system. Constructivism attempts to establish whether stakeholders maintain an empowered contact through which they share opportunities and responsibilities to utilize their personal expertise skills to solve the challenges confronting the schools and issues facing individuals (Moll, 2002). Meanwhile, a theory of critical approach to scientific investigation of the concept of leadership focuses on the forces that underlie the processes of the construction of reality in organizations. In educational organizations, for instance, a theory of critical approach to inquiry provides a lens that offers the school community a view of understanding how an elaborate and efficiently planned educational administration can also create a site of manipulation of stakeholders. That is why Apple (1982) believes that the major consideration of instructional leadership comprises determining how power penetrates school settings and how this energy shapes the social structures that distribute and evaluate knowledge to the advantage of some but at the expense of others. This paper also employs the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives of the theory of social change. The Proactive Social Change Theory argues that by conceptualizing, incorporating and implementing CSR initiatives into the strategic goals of organizational change has the potential to change not only the corporate culture of a school, but also to communicate true social change via a framework that leads each of the multiple actors/ stakeholders to push from moral motives a need for a meaningful existence of stewardship interests, as higher order values of collective responsibility and altruism for a

positive social change (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, Ganapathi, 2004).

6. Teacher preparation as a moral struggle, and teaching and learning in public schools

Teacher educators who were invited to assess teacher education and K-12 education at the turn of the turn of the 21st century, concluded that:

most of our undergraduate students are, like ourselves, limited to English proficiency (LTEP), women from middle – or upper –income families. Only occasionally do we have undergraduate students of color...We are not adequately preparing teachers for the diverse public schools in which they will teach. (Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004, p. 215) Nieto (2000) declares, “Nor are we preparing teachers to teach Hispanic students or children living in poverty, or other politically and economically disenfranchised groups” (pp. 214-215). According to Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004), these teachers’ “love of little children” seems to apply mostly to clean, well-dressed children, and only in the most patronizing way to, “those poor little Black/Mexican/White, trailer-park kids” (p. 214). Ladson-Billings (2000) charges that teacher preparation is culpable in the failure of teachers to teach minority students effectively.

7. What is at Stake in the Public School System

In their research, Burbules and Torres (2000) suggest that schooling ought to situate every learner, irrespective of socio-economic-class, in an immediate and familiar social context to meet the needs of identity, affiliation, affirmation, and citizenship in order to optimize learning and individual development. In classrooms where instructional leadership is provided, national standards need not drive students away from their communities. Students can be assisted to develop higher-order critical thinking skills and other 21st century skills by engaging in real-life community-

based issues and national problems (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999) Ashton-Warner (1963) discovered that the Maori drew upon the riches of their culture and speech when learning reading, writing, and mathematics. For this reason, researchers believe that reading, writing and math are academic tasks for which there is an innate motivation to learn. Every person who plays outdoors or can speak has overcome a monumental obstacle and is able to learn. To this end, Meirer (2002) asks, “Why were the self-confident voices I knew so well at home and on the playground muted in the school?” (p. 3).

According to Ashton-Warner speech is the voice the child can understand and the things the child can say. In this way, students do not understand speech as something distinct from themselves and their identities. In most written matters, there is a voice and when a child reads a written word with appropriate vibrancy, his or her understanding is adequate. Learning is inherently a spiritual, and a discrete process that touches on dreams and other highly charged experiences of a student. Ashton-Warner posits that to a White middle-class boy, the written word in school books evokes the voice that is familiar and is like *all talk*. He might think the words are much as the authors’ as they are his. To understand the language is to possess it. To possess it is to use it. To use it is to belong ever more deeply in the life of our country and the world. For marginalized students, reading and learning have few of the attributes of speech. Rather, they evoke negative feelings. The student cannot imagine his or her identity waiting to meet him or her in the books as it did on the streets and the playgrounds. Like many educators, Meier (2002) wonders how “schools in small and unconscious ways, silence these persistent playground intellectuals” (p. 3). Warner points out that for the marginalized, the school destroys the organic unity of feeling, speaking, reading, and learning, and increases the student’s vulnerability. Ashton-Warner explains that

reaching out for a book to read needs to become an organic action. Words alone will not suffice. "They must be words organically tied up, organically born from the dynamic life itself" (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 33).

Ashton-Warner hastens to say that the collapse of organic teaching and learning is not a mere negative phenomenon. It is taken for granted by many educators. There is something concealed within it. In most books, the identity of poor students is that of underclass citizens. Indeed, they are shunned where others are welcome, needy when others are comfortable, and denigrated where others are praised.

9.0 Theories of Instructional Leadership and Meeting Ethical Responsibilities of Advancing the Students' Wellbeing

9.1 *The Concept Leadership and At-risk-Students*

As an application of influence in a human context, leadership in the school system entails providing education that induces the students' desire to remain in school and a sense of empowerment to complete expected levels of education. Over the last four decades, the literature on school leadership has examined instructional leadership as principalship, on one hand, and teacher leadership, on the other, in relation to instructional improvement (Darling-Hammond, 1997). The former conceptualization relates to the Effective Theory of Teaching, promoted by the neo-traditional practitioners. The latter relates to the Reflective Theory of Teaching sponsored by the neo-progressive practitioners.

9.2.2 *The Effective School Movement and Views of Instructional Leadership*

The Effective School Movement views school principals as the primary source of educational expertise. Thus, teachers and students have to rely on the principal for effective practice and

leadership in their building, a philosophy supported by proponents of No Child Left Behind, and the Common Core Standards. The neo-traditionalists argue that the underlying problem of poor instruction is the lack of consensus on and an understanding of what constitutes effective teaching. Their strategy for improving students' performance is based on establishing research-based performance indicators regarding effective instruction (Willmott, 1999), and principals, ought to train and evaluate and make teachers accountable according to set standards in order to create effective schools. In this context of a one-directional process of instructional improvement, teachers cannot challenge pre-existing knowledge and practices even when they see that the imposed practices are out of sync with student anxieties nor expectations to attain distinctive capabilities in communication, technical and human domains to effectively play developmental roles in the 21st century world.

In this structural framework, the school head assumes a monopoly of knowledge, control, and decision-making power in all issues affecting students. According to Weber (1947) an organization must have officials with the right to command others to ensure stability, order, prediction, and coordination of efforts toward goal attainment. This notion of legitimacy shaped the industrial image of leadership, which has been imported into education. Hoy and Miskel (1991) reveal that the students who enroll in graduate courses in educational administration, and teachers who join a school organization do so under the assumption that they accept the formal authority relations of their school. Therefore, these teachers enter into contractual agreements to obey commands from top officials, and hence are socialized not lead in their classrooms.

At the school level, this means that teachers are accountable not to the students and parents that they serve, but to the principal whom the neo-traditionalists regard as the primary source of

instructional leadership. When Jones, Jones, Hardin, Chapman, Yarbrough, and Davis (1999) asked teachers, whether their morale had changed as a result of mandated testing, more than 77% reported that their morale was lower, and 66% of the respondents stated that the accountability program would not improve the quality of education in their schools. The emphasis on tests encourages schools and individual students not only to cheat, but that schools and students are becoming vulnerable to the inaccuracies and corrupt practices of commercial testing firms (Karp, 2003). Rather than exalting and building character, we as a society doom these students to moral decline, experience encounters with the justice system sometimes getting incarcerated. In schools where the norm of hierarchy is prioritized, the dilemma for teachers is that they walk in the principal's shadow, disconnected alienated from their students. Murphy (1988) contends that in a state of disempowerment, teachers cannot take responsibility for the failure school to educate.

9.2.3 The Reflective Movement and Instructional Leadership

Reflective theorists view the existing model of instructional leadership as paternalistic, archaic, and dependent on docile followers. With competent and committed teachers, the traditional forms of instructional leadership are inappropriate. Rather, from a staff position, school heads should be concerned with providing material and technical resources and services in support of teacher initiative and responsibility in instructional matters. In a pedagogical context, teachers exercise a leadership prerogative and responsibility to respond to the needs of individual students (Gullatt & Ballard, 1998). This approach is consistent with an educational transformation that seeks to professionalize the teaching profession, by providing teachers with increased opportunities to lead and learn, and impact both programing policies to increase student

achievement. The professionalization of teaching entails recognizing teachers as the main agents of student success, and bringing the divided worlds of teaching and leading together in a conceptually sophisticated and strategically powerful way. Conceptualizing teaching and leading as simultaneous moral activities promotes the metaphor of normed adulthood.

In this regard, education is a moral accompaniment of students by adults toward adulthood, and no students, however, must be lost along the way. Teachers and students who enjoy empowered contact in their formal and informal roles. In their formal roles, empowered teachers can reach out to those in authority without restraint in order to provide their students. In their informal roles, teachers would interact as community leaders with other adults in the school community. In this sense, to be an adult is to be a leader. As adults, teachers and principals are co-leaders (Block, 1993) who encourage and inspire each other; collectively, they improve their professional practice and the lives of their students.

9.2.4 The Emerging Theory of Instructional Leadership and At-Risk Students

According to Meier (2002), organizing schools around collective decision making, with teachers having responsibility for one another's work and inviting parents and other stakeholders into the life of the school, balances professional authority with lay leadership. Rather than diminishing the essential energy of the organization, bringing lay-people into the praxis paradoxically create potential for long-term benefits for the school and its students. Distributed leadership acknowledges that leadership is present in the flow of human inventiveness and activities in which members find themselves enmeshed in pursuit of organizational objectives and human development. Acknowledging teacher leadership would shape and transform classroom and school

goals and cultures. Teachers possess critical information about their students and how they learn. At the same time, Frieman (1993) reported that at-risk students would study better in school if their teachers were aware of the adversities of their personal lives and acted accordingly. In an empowered capacity, teachers could, based on information about their students, deliver high-quality instruction, with the power to retain at-risk students. Empowerment would improve the teachers' work lives, and increase student retention and achievement.

Keegan and Crescenta (2006) contend that "many dropouts telegraph their intentions by repeatedly skipping classes" (p. 37). Early identification allows schools to intervene in the lives of at-risk students in time. In the school system, leaders must work collaboratively and expand their knowledge and skills in order to successfully manage and retain at-risk students. In a school, leadership flows from student to teacher and the principal, and from teacher to students and principal, and from the principal (who is a steward) to teacher and students. In this form, leadership is an emergent set of beliefs, norms, and principles of action taken by social actors to influence the organizational direction rather than an application of a set of management rules and techniques.

10. Examples of Teacher Preparation Programs

Bushman (1998) conducted a study on two different elementary teacher education programs at a large state university. One of the teacher preparation programs followed a traditional model. This was a one-year post-graduate credential program that comprised university coursework and student teaching. The other program was similar but was conducted at an elementary school site to enable the student teachers to interact with elementary school

students. Both programs offered a standard curriculum, which also espoused new ideas about learning and multiculturalism. However, it turned out that espoused theory in both teacher education programs was out of sync with theory in use. Classroom management and control was the primary theory that teacher preparation programs emphasized while they ignored new ideas about learning and multiculturalism.

Both programs provided an example of programs with a weaker influence rather a stronger vision of advancing the wellbeing of at risk students. The study found that the student teachers guided by conventional wisdom entered their respective programs strongly concerned with classroom management and control and, indeed, that is what they primarily learned about teaching. Similar studies replicated these findings. Pajares (1992) charge that new teachers come out of their teacher preparation programs with traditional teaching beliefs in which management and control are the key issues and the students must just absorb information the teacher provides.

In this standardized model of management and control, considerable research suggests that low income students still absorb less from their high school and elementary experiences. Facing this challenge has become a dilemma for educators who would like to believe that the playing field is equitable for all students. The case in point is a Kohl's narration of Akmir, a young African American's experience with his high school history teacher who believed that "his students -- African American and Puerto Rican-- were stupid, lazy, and incapable of understanding complex ideas." In a condescending manner the teacher would say, "You people don't know how to hold a job. You...have never learned to adopt American values and that's why you can't compete in the marketplace" (Kohl, 1994, p. 16).

In Akmir's class, some students were content to not-learn what this teacher taught. They played

dumb, and few students actually complied with his instruction accepting the belief that they were stupid and incapable of productive lives. Akmir and his friend rejected the teachings and actively tried to change the official curriculum charging discrimination. Each time the teacher talked about American values, they pointed out that slavery was an American value according to the country's Constitution. Akmir and his friend would explain that discrimination and not lack of ability or intelligence was the root of poverty and minority failure in school. According to Kohl, schools that were created to separate, academic failure became the price to be paid by non-mainstream students without recourse to the laws of the country, for they reject the curriculum that invalidates their integrity and knowledge. In some ways this account reveals how prejudice may amount to an invisible force that some ethnic minority students have to struggle against in schools.

10.1 Promising Teacher Preparation Strategies

The efficacy of self-reflection and renewed enthusiasm in offering multicultural education as part of teacher preparation, is a strategy for populating the teaching profession with excellent multicultural and culturally responsive teachers (Sleeter, 2001). The courses usually include a service-learning project from which students acquire some hands-on learning experiences in working with people from cultural backgrounds other than their own. Sleeter (2001) acknowledges that the ability on the part of teacher educators, together with preservice teachers to interrogate our life stories, to challenge the processes, policies and institutional regulations and address the bad news of our belief systems and to learn from and lead our students is progressive. Irrespective of the varying outcomes regarding the impact of multicultural education of preservice teachers, teacher educators are wary about coercing unity over discord. The approach

to teaching multicultural education is based on the view that cultural life “consists of multiple voices, of unity as well as discord” (Moll, 2000 p. 257) consistent with the practice of critical theory.

Sleeter (2001) urges colleagues to work at a pragmatic level and deconstruct the status quo by means exploring and researching multiple voices of students as they engage, resist, and respond to efforts to establish cultural construction zones as a way of actuating engaged pedagogy defined by hooks (1994) as teaching to transgress. This is practicing, teaching, that moves beyond boundaries in order to make education the practice of freedom. Engaged pedagogy values students' expressions. But this is not a unidirectional empowering occurrence. The teacher grows and develops as well, and is empowered in the process.

Sleeter (2001) reviewed 80 studies and concluded that among the most promising strategies, improving education for all our students in schools were recruitment and retention of a more diverse preservice pool, along with the inclusion among teacher educators, of people who bring knowledge, experience, and dispositions to enable preservice teachers to bring leadership in culturally diverse schools. Perry, Steel, & Hilliard, (2003) called such people “gap-closers,” as those with insight and can communicate across the racial and cultural divide. Minority teachers are especially effective in this direction. Unlike their mainstream counterparts “limited to English proficiency” (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004, p. 215), they have a personal experience with different cultures and possess a complex social capital, not just deriving from their minority status but also from dominant groups who have taught them. This multiple world experience provides them with a competitive edge to relate to all students across all racial and ethnic groups. Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004) further argue that such teachers are less inhibited in their teaching “and are more willing to work outside the box and

take risks [leadership] that ensure all their students learn in ways that work best for them” (p. 215). Hence, matching and complementing the skills of teachers of minority and dominant backgrounds, as well as under represented groups in all institutions and at all levels of society so as to reflect the national, racial texture in the population, can help address students’ needs and also create a community in every public place to share cultures providing themselves the social capital to engage in productive community, and national activities.

Larson and Murtadha (2002) allege that many well intentioned leaders inadvertently maintain institutionalized inequity through commitment to hierarchical logics that not only fail to question established norms, which may keep others out of decision making and meaningful participation and expropriation purpose and ownership the learning enterprise. Good teacher educators who see their alumni struggling in economically, linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms must ask themselves what they are doing or not doing that contributes to the teachers’ failure. Nieto (2000) argues that teacher educators must challenge the process, be willing to share the blame, and keep placing diversity “front and center” in the preservice pedagogy as a way of helping preservice teachers see culture, their own as well as their students as a prerequisite for culturally responsive teaching as envisaged in a constructivist learning teaching environment.

To avoid patronizing the poor little White, Black/Mexican/ trailer-park kids and recognizing and creating a space for the social capital that these students bring from their disadvantaged home backgrounds. It means allowing classrooms to be the terrain for celebrating different cultures as parallel, but equally complex systems of attitudes, beliefs, and norms as an example of (CSR) initiative. Challenging the status quo, including implicating oneself in one’s own narratives of learning and teaching means turning habituated

knowledge back on itself to experience unflattering moments of insight that might influence the character development of the professors and the preservice teachers themselves. The act of self-examination and reflection of the social structure of the school and practices is an extension of the Reflective Movement school of thought. Reflective practice is part of higher-order cognitive skills significantly responsible for the cultivation of critical thinking as an asset in advancing academia, society.

11. Conclusion

The pride of every school system lies in its ability to turn out to society students who possess academic readiness and motivation to either pursue higher education or enter careers to contribute to the development of the nation. Modern society now expects virtually everyone in the population to function beyond the minimum standards of literacy and numeracy. Harkavy (2006) reminds that if America is to realize the democratic mission and promise of America for all Americans, then, an ability to serve mankind, one’s country, friends and family, should be the goal of all learning.

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