

Equity Leadership in Schools¹

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Abstract

This article documents the initial results of a leadership preparation program in Northern California, at San Jose State University. While transforming schools into equitable learning communities may seem daunting, this paper shows that, not only is it doable, but also possible to sustain it for the long haul. The main thrust of this narrative is that making and sustaining change for equitable schools is directly linked to the existence of dense leadership in schools - a type of extensive network of leaders steeped in equity. This leadership falls on the shoulders of the school's administrative team whose work is articulated with and through the involvement of teacher leaders.

This paper, in fact, explains that equity leadership exists only when a considerable cadre of teacher leaders is present at a particular school. Equity leadership builds teacher capacity by on-going job embedded professional education, and by partnering with university and/or with technical assistant intermediate organizations. A key premise of this paper is, therefore, that meaningful partnerships between institutions of higher education and schools contain a strategic importance for both institutions.

From the viewpoint of the university, this article explores some general ideas and specific avenues for the creation of partnerships that might be replicated elsewhere. The paper is organized in two sections. The first section describes the change of the conceptual frame of leadership, and the second delineates the key components of a program that has the potential for implementation regardless of location.

Key terms: <Liderazgo> <igualdad en educación> <Universidad> <Estados Unidos de América>

Sinopsis

Este artículo documenta los resultados iniciales de un programa de preparación para el liderazgo en la Universidad Estatal de San José el norte de California. Mientras que el transformar a las escuelas en comunidades de aprendizaje igualitario puede parecer alarmante, este artículo muestra que no solamente es realizable sino también posible de sostener a través de las dificultades y el tiempo. Lo más importante de esta narración es que el hecho de llevar a cabo y sostener el cambio para escuelas igualitarias está directamente ligado a la existencia de un denso liderazgo en las escuelas -un tipo de red extensa de líderes fuertemente influenciados por la igualdad-. Este liderazgo cae en los hombros del equipo administrativo de la escuela, cuyo trabajo está claramente ligado al compromiso de los maestros líderes.

Este trabajo, de hecho, explica que el liderazgo de igualdad existe solamente cuando un considerable cuadro de maestros líderes está presente en una escuela en particular. El liderazgo de igualdad construye la capacidad del maestro mediante una educación profesional continua íntimamente conectada con el trabajo y mediante una asociación con la universidad y/o con organizaciones intermedias de asistentes técnicos.

Una premisa clave de este trabajo es, por lo tanto, que las asociaciones significativas entre las instituciones de educación superior y las escuelas contienen una importancia estratégica para ambas instituciones.

Desde el punto de vista de la universidad, este artículo explora algunas ideas generales y avenidas específicas para la creación de sociedades que puedan replicarse en otro lugar. El trabajo está organizado en dos secciones. La primera describe el cambio del marco conceptual del liderazgo, y la segunda delinea los componentes clave de un programa que tiene el potencial de implementación independientemente de la localización.

Términos clave: <Leadership> <equal education> <University> <USA>

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Changing Frames

The Context

Notions of scientific management dating back to Frederick Taylor's (1911) work pervade the way most schools are run today in the United States. As Evans (2001) has convincingly shown, the key features of this approach are:

- * The marked distinction between administrators, cast as professionals, and teachers, as unionized workers;
- * The need to maximize schools' economic efficiency;
- * Individual and depersonalized working relations.

Coupled with Taylor's approaches, most schools still function as fordist social institutions in that mass production marks teachers' and students' daily existence, particularly at the secondary school level (Darling-Hammond, 2002). It is considered that teachers in secondary schools have a daily contact with about 180 students, and counselors' caseload ranges from 250 to 400 students at best (Sizer, 1992; NSSP, 2004). School leaders, namely the principal, typically function as managers who, if time allows, will pay some attention to the actual business of the school: learning and teaching (Berlinger, 2005; Chubb, 1988). The managerial approach to educational leadership expects individualistic agency and heroic stances. As Murphy (2000) diagnosed, school systems look for school leaders to know everything, to take charge, amass power, and to display strong initiative, courage, and tenacity. The field of education runs, as a whole, on a predominantly autocratic and centralized style, but with the infusion of new management approaches (e.g. Deming, 1953; Argyris, 1976), some constructivist and inclusive approaches have lately flourished, such as, among others, team work, site based management, systems analysis,

data based management, and life-long learning (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; MacMullen, 1996; Fuhrman, 2003).

A battery of mandated norm-based, high stakes tests, standardized ranking of schools' performance, scripted curriculum, budgetary cuts, and xenophobic and obtuse initiatives (e.g. anti-bilingual education in several states, de-licensing some teaching areas), plus the demands coming down from restrictive state and federal legislation (such as No Child Left Behind of 2002) are but a few of the deluge of factors shaping the functions of today's school leaders. Within this context, the job of school leaders — i.e. the administrative staff — even if limited to Taylor's terms, has been rendered quite impossible. Moreover, in California for instance, credentialing programs for school administration have been deregulated and opened to the competition of the marketplace. This deregulation is such that today any individual can simply walk in from the street, take a state test and instantly become a school principal. As Levine's (2005) study shows, the effects of deregulation and other factors have dramatically lowered the quality of school administration programs, and doomed schools to failure.

Given the issues listed above, a drastic redefinition of both the notion and the preparation of school leadership are in order.

A new frame

Leading schools where students learn how to use their minds and hearts is a doable endeavor when and if those schools embody equity-based, dense leadership (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996; Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006). Two central assumptions guide this proposition:

1. The staff own and guide work following a clearly articulated vision.
2. Equitable academic performance for all students constitutes the focus of

the school.

The administration works as a team and breathe leadership into their staff by building school-wide capacity to lead. To achieve this, decision making is decentralized and simultaneously staff professional learning is promoted (Lieberman and Miller, 1999; Lambert, 2003). Teachers work as teams and make decisions on the specific issues of their areas, thus weaving from the bottom the school's vision. They delineate school-wide policy, and take care of pedagogical issues and challenges at the local classroom, i.e. department, grade, special subject area. A culture of intellectual rigor is promoted as staff conceives learning as an on-going necessity addressed through sharing of day to day experience; they visit and provide direct support to each other around concrete classroom challenges; they additionally organize purposeful inquiry, and by networking with the larger professional educational community, they also promote a healthy collegial environment. These leaders birth this culture through flexible scheduling, adequate time and money, and the unconditional support from students and parents.

Leaders who understand and work toward building internal capacity seek strong partnerships with external technical support. The next section narrates the particular case of a university program. It first describes its features, and then it illustrates the significance of partnerships; and the section ends profiling the type of roles and functions of teacher leaders.

Our Leadership Program

Features

While leading pertains to every teacher and leadership is forged

from within the informal confines of everyday conversation, it is true that intellectual habits and professional skills are formally acquired. In other words, leadership springs from both personal commitment, and professional capacity — i.e. habits and skills — learned and sharpened through informal and formal preparation. As Lave and Chaiklin, (1993 have noted, learning does not necessarily belong to individuals but to the multiple conversations of which they form part, informal learning is an intentional realm, but formally created as a course of study. In other words, schools ought to schedule learning sessions, encourage conversations around learning and teaching, and provide opportunities for the staff to learn from other institutions. This is precisely where partnering with outside organizations and institutions comes into play. As a university based program, for instance, the leadership program helps to prepare educational leaders with the explicit intent to transform schools into equitable institutions.

Our program works from the notion that social action occurs only when people have a chance to establish meaningful and sustained relationships; that ideas and skills constitute some of the most vital sources of professional strength, and that ideas and skills must also translate into intellectual discipline and professional habits. Hence, learning is a constant variable of every social interaction. This two-year Masters of Arts in Educational Leadership course of study features:

1. Organizing themes (see appendix graph 1):

- * Building equity in diverse communities.
- * Role of schooling in a democratic society.
- * Leadership concepts and management strategies.

- * Facilitating collaborative change.
- * Inquiry, research, learning and reflective practice.

2. Our program braids these themes through every single course. Thus, from the first day to the end of the program students learn and practice how to build a professional learning community. The course work is characterized by an on-going action research project (see appendix graph 2), problem-solving learning, evidence based decision-making, negotiating social relations, and collaboration. Additionally, curriculum and instruction design, policy and advocacy, budgeting, and educational law complement the study

4. Cohort Model. Students attend primarily as school teams and remain together as cohorts for the entire two-year program. It is through the cohort model that students learn to work as a professional community. They work collaboratively to complete assignments

and engage in a collaborative action research project, which is the capstone event for their master's degree. The program has grown into strong partnerships with numerous districts in the San José area, California. Tables 1 and 2 below display the number of students from each of these districts computed from 2000 to 2005. Districts were sorted into "High-Participation" and "Moderate-Participation" according to the number of students per district. As noted in Table 1, of the 599 students from the 11 "high-participation" school district; 103 (17%) are from one school district (Santa Clara).

Table 1
Students in Cohorts from High Participation Districts.

District	Number of students	%
Santa Clara	103	17.1
Pajaro Valley	57	9.5
Tremont Union High	58	9.6
Citroy	54	9.0
Berryessa	52	8.6
Alum Rock	50	8.3
Oak Grove	48	8.0
San Jose Unified	46	7.6
Evergreen	46	7.6
Camposel	42	7.0
East Side Union High	41	6.8
Total	599	100.0

As noted in Table 1, of the 599 students from the 11 "high-participation" school district; 103 (17%) are from one school district (Santa Clara). The remaining 496 students are almost evenly divided between ten remaining school districts. Based on this data,

our program has intensified recruiting efforts in these other ten districts, many of which have been identified as "low-performing" according to current federal law guidelines.

Table 2
Students in Cohorts from Moderate-Participation Districts.

District	Number of students	%
Fremont	25	12.2
Salinas	23	13.9
Saratoga	22	13.3
Morgan Hill	17	11.2
Albany	17	10.0
Cupertino	17	10.0
Milpitas	17	10.0
Los Gatos	17	10.0
Santa Teresa	11	6.6
Total		100.0

Table 2 displays the data from the nine (9) school districts identified as "moderate-participation" districts. Of these, 70 students (41%) are from three districts in our region. The remaining 98 students are evenly divided among six (6) other school districts.

5. Graduation by exhibition. Students present a professional portfolio (see appendix document 1) and a scholarly report on the action research project, both initiated at the start of the program.

6. Partnerships. When our program makes decisions about where to sponsor classes we take into consideration several issues. For example, we are intentional about partnering with districts that are considered "highly impacted"

and/or "underperforming" in terms of current federal law language.

As shown in tables 1 and 2 above, it is these districts that we want to support. We make a practice to recruit administrators from these partnerships as adjunct faculty to teach in the cohorts. We partner department faculty with adjunct faculty in order to give students both inside and outside expertise. Students in these cohorts represent 64 school districts from our San José region. As Table 3 displays, we have worked with a total of 64 districts over the last five years.

Table 3
University/District Partnerships for 2000-2005.

Participation level	Number of Districts	Number of Students	%
High-Participation Districts	11	434	54.7
Moderate-Participation Districts	9	213	26.2
Low-Participation Districts	11	86	10.4
Districts with 5 or less Graduates	33	74	8.9
Total	64	827	100.0

As reported in Table 3, 826 students from 64 school districts completed our program between 2000-2005. Of these, 11 districts were identified as "high-participation" and nine (9) districts were identified as "moderate-participation". As Table 1 shows, more than one-half (54%) of our students were from these 11 neighboring school districts while one fourth (26%) of our students were from nine (9) additional school districts identified as "moderate-participation". When combined, more than three fourths (80%) of our students were from high-and moderate-participation districts. The majority of the high-participation districts were identified as low-performing districts, according to federal law guidelines.

Several of these partner school districts have shown considerable improvement in the last few years. Indeed, one of the school districts has recently been named one of several "exemplary" school districts statewide. Both of these have had many teachers graduate from our program. We can argue that this improvement may, in part, be due to building "dense leadership" in these schools.

Profile of equity leaders

Teacher leaders embody two funda-

mental traits.

1. They derive authority first and foremost from knowing themselves well. Teacher leaders understand that one's lived experience provides a general map leading to either transform or perpetuate the injustices and inequities one has lived. Understanding and critically embracing one's biography, therefore, takes on a crucial meaning when in positions of leadership. We have learned that when a person on a leadership role clearly knows her background and is capable of constructive critique about it, that person can indeed build deep and meaningful relations, and muster the necessary resources to enact equity grounded change.

2. They guide their actions from an explicit and solid equity agenda. Teacher leaders conceive themselves as change agents whose purpose is to aid schools to become institutions that serve all children well. Not only teacher leaders believe in these ideals but strive to materialize them on a daily basis.

Results

Our cohort model has existed for nine years now, and thus we are now in the position to see how the above traits and habits manifest in teacher leaders'

everyday work. This section reports on graduates' data accumulated in their portfolios, surveys and focus-group interviews.

Most graduates have remained as school and district level leaders, and very few have become administrators, particularly principals and vice-principals. Graduates lead teaching and learning responsibilities closely tied to the classroom, either because they split their position between classroom teaching and other leadership responsibilities, or because they stay almost exclusively in the classroom, albeit playing some school leadership role, usually via the school's leadership team.

Teacher leaders serve in the following areas:

- Subject matter resource teachers (literacy, math, and natural sciences specialists),
- Professional development experts at the school level, and at times district-wide ,
- School led-teams in charge of developing and implementing policy and long term visioning,
- Union representatives,
- Accreditation committee leaders,
- Community liaisons,
- New teacher mentors in their districts.
- Leadership coaches
- Literacy and/or Math Coaches
- Ad hoc committees

Teacher leaders perform at least four different functions:

1. As indispensable members of their educational communities. As Paul Beltranena an elementary principal, writes:

"They [teacher leaders] lead others to observe [...] the past for what it was and go for what could be. They help others identify matters of true consequence. They know what truly matters, and they keep

others focusing on possibilities. They are "grown-ups" who understand and lead others to share that understanding. They are a rare breed. I am lucky to have met them on my personal and professional journey because Jolynn, Louise, Tom and Sandra are not only my colleagues, but [also] my friends. Together, we can follow our students to the stars and back." (Survey written responses)

2. As leaders they take on important school responsibilities. Thomasine Steward a high school math coach and vice-principal, expressed the following:

" When I'm pulled aside to do something, I easily designate one of our teacher leaders as a VP for the day, just like this. They hit the road running. They know what to do immediately, with no questions asked. They know how to evaluate a program, triangulate data, et cetera."
(Focus-group interview series).

3. As multitasking activists (even those who have opted for the classroom full time) they often work in several committees. Ruth Ross a 5th grade teacher explains:

" I have thirty-three kids in my homeroom, and it's there where I need to use my [leadership] skills. I feel that my voice, and that of my students, is way more powerful at that level."

While Ms. Ross' professional identity is determined by her classroom work, she participates in school-wide leadership as a staff meeting facilitator, as a member of the school's leadership team, and as a mentor to

new teachers.

They also volunteer their time and energy to do community outreach, assessment, and fundraising, and to support their students' learning beyond the normative time. This commitment to social service bares the question, Why do they do it? Some engage this area of work out of their conviction that teaching is political, and thus they see their work as a way to enact justice and amend social wrongs. Susan Barnes, a high school teacher, articulates such a perspective this way:

" This is a political job. At Morgan Hill it was an issue of ethnicity and race. Now that I'm in a white school," stresses Ms. Barnes, "it's about social class. It's always bringing up those below."

4. As mavens. In the very few cases where teacher leaders have reduced their workload (e.g., teaching part-time) or have purposefully stepped down from a leadership function, staff members still seek their advice and often request their involvement.

As Kristin Sapiens, an elementary school teacher working now half-time, points out: "many teachers still look to me for suggestions, ideas for teaching strategies, help with kids."

One wonders what is in these teachers that motivates and sustains them to do what they do. What is it that transcends them? During one of the focus group interviews we asked the question --What moves you?" The answers were not easy in coming. Maybe they did not expect a query of this sort -so wide and so intimate at the same time. After a pause that lasted a few minutes the responses started to bubble up. Perhaps the one answer that encapsulates all the others was

offered by John Perales, a high school principal: "The kids," he said slowly, then stopped, and after collecting his thoughts, Mr. Perales added, "you're accountable to them, that they're getting a good education." The truth is as simple and profound as that. We are convinced, that, ultimately, in that sentence resides the beginning and the end of why skillful and courageous teacher leaders exist.

Conclusion

This article has reported on how one leadership preparation program has challenged the status quo of who can lead a school and what can happen when university leadership programs grounded on equity and social justice principles partner with school districts to build internal capacity.

No longer can one person, namely the school principal, be held responsible for building a successful school. Transforming schools into equitable learning communities requires a re-framing of how to effectively lead schools. Dense leadership allows the principal to call on his most valued resource, the teachers at his/her school, to work together to transform schools so that all children can succeed. The data from the students and districts enrolled in our program demonstrate that administrator preparation programs can expand the notion of school leadership.

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Document 1

Portfolio Organization

- Section I - Personal Growth

Each team member will complete the following required elements.

1. A reflective paper (three pages single-spaced) that indicates ways you feel you have grown as a leader, with specific references to your growth in the areas of administrative concepts and management strategies and building equity in diverse communities. Reflect on other portfolio entries, school related leadership activities, lessons learned by working as a leadership team and on school change issues. Include at least some specific data from your school, including input from selected staff and the principal regarding your growth as a leader. Each piece of evidence referred to must back up assertions made regarding growth in each area. Examples of substantiating evidence may be:
 - entries from your journal
 - the variety of assessment tools used in class
 - course assignments
 - individual writing prompt you did for admission to the program
 - references from course readings
 - references to Essential Questions for the MA program

This section works best when you organize your writing around a metaphor that speaks to your leadership style or leadership situation.

2. Personal narrative "story from the heart" (2 pages single-spaced) around a compelling issue dealing with administrative concepts and management strategies and building equity in diverse communities from which you learned much more about yourself as a leader.

- Section II - Team Growth

To be done as a group endeavor. The following elements are required:

1. A case (2-3 pages single-spaced) that describes one dilemma based leadership activity of substance taken by your leadership team which dealt with the role of schooling in a democratic society and building equity in diverse communities. what you did and the impact of these actions, problems that arose, the process used to solve the problems, what you learned about working as a team, and what you would do next time.
2. A reflective paper (2-3 pages single-spaced) that indicates how your action research project influenced your growth as a leadership team, with specific references to the action research project processes. Kinds of substantiating evidence from which to draw your assertions include:
 - selected entries from your journal and/or entries from a team journal
 - course assignments
 - entries from the team writing prompt you did for admission to the program

- references from course readings
- references to Essential Questions of the MA program

- *Section III - School Growth*

1. A case study (3-5 pages single-spaced) that describes one significant issue around systemic reform/managing and leading change and building equity in diverse communities. at your school. Write a summary of how your school has changed over the last two years and the impact of your leadership team on the change. In your explanation draw on and refer to concepts and themes from course readings.

Your summary should include an explanation of what happened and an analysis of the change supported by concepts from your readings and experiences. How was the issue dealt with? What was the involvement of your team and each member of the team? What was the outcome? What were the lessons learned? What will your team continue to do to insure that this work continues at your site? Examples of substantiating evidence may be:

- entries from your journal and/or entries from a team journal
- course assignments
- assessment tools used in class
- Resiliency Questionnaire
- your action research project

- *Section IV - Action Research Project*

Include the final draft of your action research project. Be sure that you have clearly demonstrated each of your abilities to research and reflect on practice.