

## **Levelling the Playing Field in Racialized Contexts: Leaders Speaking out about Difficult Issues**

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### **Abstract:**

The paper starts with the premise that although legal barriers to discrimination may have been overcome in both the United States and South Africa, the reality for many racialized individuals in both countries is quite different. The ongoing presence of disparity in educational achievement between white, middle class students and their minoritized peers attests, not only to inequitable access, but also to continued experiences of marginalization, prejudice, discrimination, and racism, that lead inevitably to disparities in outcomes and in opportunities beyond school. Although dialogue is not a panacea, this paper argues that until and unless school leaders learn to become comfortable naming and addressing issues of racism (as well as discrimination based on other cultural identity markers such as socio-economic status, sexual orientation, religion), education will fall short of its potential to become an important agent for societal change. Drawing on studies of schooling in both countries and of school leaders striving to use social justice to promote equity, this paper will demonstrate the need for educators to acknowledge issues of power and privilege, to create spaces in which difficult conversations may occur, and to become expert in bringing together, listening to, and truly hearing the inevitably conflicting perspectives that arise.

### **Levelling the Playing Field in Racialized Contexts: Leaders Speaking out about Difficult Issues**

Almost two centuries ago in the United States, Horace Mann and other education reformers believed that universal schooling would be the “‘great equalizer’ of human conditions, the ‘balance wheel of the social machinery’ and the creator of wealth undreamed of” (Oakes & Power, 2006, p. 7). Unfortunately, the promise of universal schooling in the United States and in much of the rest of the world remains unrealized. In fact, according to UNESCO, even access to universal schooling remains an illusionary goal, with the achievement of quality education for all even further from realization (Global, 2000).

Despite hundreds of educational reforms focused on changes in curriculum, new forms of accountability, new requirements for teacher training and certification, the disparities in achievement between rich and poor, students from dominant cultures (in the developed world at least, often white middle class students), and students from minoritized groups (often students of colour) persist and, in some cases, continue to widen. It is therefore incumbent on educational leaders and policy makers to stop advocating and implementing more of the same, to resist appealing for additional funds to shore up current unsuccessful reforms, and to critically reflect on the reasons for the lack of success of current approaches.

The premise of this paper is that although legal barriers to discrimination have been overcome in both S. Africa and the US, the reality for racialized individuals in both countries is quite different. A second premise is that, as Oakes and Rogers (2006) state,

the vast change literature says little about strategies for disrupting social inequality through school reform. Theorists and change agents have not treated equity reforms as distinctly different from other school improvement initiatives. (p. 30)

Their statement is striking for both the apparent simplicity and the concomitant complexity. An equity reform is one that takes into account equity on a number of difference dimensions; Farrell (1999) would argue the need for equitable access, sustainability of placement, as well as equitable outputs and outcomes (in other words both performance at school and later opportunities).

Perlstein (2004), discussing the continued impact of the *Brown* desegregation decision in the US, wrote that “Reliance on technical expertise to address social problems had been a central tenet of liberal reform and of school administration” (p. 32). He continued, “By demonstrating the inability of technocrats alone to create equitable schools, desegregation catalyzed the development of a new, more openly political vision of educational leadership” (p. 32). Shindler and Fleisch (2007) likewise argued that “access to education in South Africa is not as widespread as published sources note” (p. 135). Thus, my argument is that instituting reforms intended to achieve equity requires change of a different nature from other kinds of school improvement initiatives as well as a new kind of educational leadership. This need for a different kind of reform and a less technocratic leadership approach was also expressed in S. Africa. Jansen (2005) wrote that from the onset, “the so-called South African “miracle” was, in fact, an elite settlement” (p. 203). He further argued that if a leader “is preoccupied with narrow administrative tasks, the cost is huge in terms of broader strategic and positioning functions that are crucial in a globalizing world” (p. 205).

The obvious question therefore is: What kind of broader functions and reforms are necessary? To address that question, I will begin by arguing that educational leaders need to understand their roles primarily in terms of transformative leadership (as opposed to transactional and transformational leadership). Second, as part of transformative leadership, educators need to explicitly tackle the role of racism in perpetuating inequity. Finally, I will suggest that to be successful in achieving equitable educational reform, transformative leaders require a robust understanding of dialogue, moral courage, and an activist understanding of their role.

### **Transformative Leadership**

Transformative leadership (as opposed to either transactional or transformational leadership) takes seriously Burns (1978) belief that “transcending leadership is leadership *engaged*” (p. 20, italics mine); it recognizes, with Freire (1998), “that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur” (p. 37). Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others. It inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider diverse social context within which it is embedded.

Over the years, a number of scholars and educators have called for education to be more “revolutionary,” to play a greater role as a societal agent of change. In 1978, Burns stated that “revolution is a complete and pervasive transformation of an entire social system” (p. 202) and later emphasized the need for “*real change*—that is, a transformation to the marked degree in the attitudes, norms, institutions, and behaviors that structure our daily lives” (p. 414). A quarter of a century later, Stromquist (2006) argued that

If education is such a powerful tool for economic and social betterment, we would expect that public policy would seek to make education accessible to all, to provide education of high quality and to distribute education equitably at all levels. (p. 145)

MacKinnon (2000) explained that to fulfil this goal, transformative educational practice must be based on a *pedagogy of social justice* (p. 11).

The common elements in these transformative approaches include the need for social betterment, for enhancing equity, and for a thorough reshaping of knowledge and belief structures—elements that are central tenets in the concept of transformative (although not so necessarily in transformational) leadership. Transformative concepts and social justice are closely connected through the shared goal of identifying and restructuring frameworks that generate inequity and disadvantage. Transformative ideals also owe much to the work of Freire (1970, 1998) who used the terms transform, transformation, and transformative to describe the changes that may occur as a result of education. Freire calls for personal, dialogic relationships to undergird education, because without such relationships, he argues, education acts to deform rather than to transform.

One of the first writers to use the term *transformative* in relation to educational leadership was William Foster (1986). His belief was that leadership “must be critically educative; it cannot only look at the conditions in which we live, but it must also decide how to change them” (p. 185). In 1991, Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley posited that schools are sites of cultural politics that serve both to reproduce and perpetuate the inequities inherent in gender, race, and class constructs and which “confirm and legitimate some cultures while disconfirming and delegitimizing others” (p. 98). They went on to argue that because organizations must be based on democratic authority, transformative educational leaders must learn to diminish “*undemocratic power relationships*” (p. 102, italics in original) and use their “power to transform present social relations” (p. 103). Transformative leadership, they assert, “requires a language of critique and possibility” (p. 105); a “transformative leader must introduce the mechanisms necessary for various groups to begin conversations around issues of emancipation and domination” (p. 112). And in 2003, Weiner wrote;

transformative leadership is an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility. (p. 89)

He goes on to delineate the responsibilities of the transformative leader to instigate structural transformations, to reorganize the political space, to understand the relationship between leaders and the led dialectically (and not hierarchically). He also calls for leaders to

confront more than just what is, and work toward creating an alternative political and social imagination that does not rest solely on the rule of capital or the hollow moralism of neoconservatives, but is rooted in radical democratic struggle. (p. 97)

At about the same time, other educational researchers and theorists took up the task of articulating, and advocating for, transformative educational leadership (see Anderson, 2004; Dantley, 2003; Shields, 2003a; Tillman, 2005). For example, Shields (2003b) critiqued the typical silence of educational leaders that tends to pathologize differences, stating that

transformative educators and educational leaders must address issues of power, control, and inequity; they must adopt a set of guiding criteria [...] to act as benchmarks for the development of socially just education; and they must engage in dialogue, examine current practice, and create pedagogical conversations and communities that critically build on, and do not devalue, students’ lived experiences. (p. 128)

Transformative leadership, therefore, goes well beyond the traditional understandings of leadership for school improvement, as well as beyond rational and technical approaches to educational change, in that its focus is on promoting a form of education that may achieve its transformative potential. To accomplish this, transformative leaders, in addition to other more traditional aspects of their work (creating budgets, overseeing instruction, achieving accountability, etc.) need to balance both critique and promise; to effect deep and equitable changes; to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge frameworks that generate inequity; to challenge inappropriate uses of power and privilege; to emphasize both individual achievement and the public good; to focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; and finally, to demonstrate moral courage and activism.

Banks (2002) argues the importance of identifying that how “knowledge constructed within a society reflects the social, political, and economic contexts in which it is created as well as the subsocieties” (p. 7). Thus, educational leaders who wish to transform educational systems to promote equity and social justice must attend to how knowledge is constructed and how it is legitimized to perpetuate norms that permit some groups to dominate and others to be marginalized within a given social system. Courageous and activist leadership permits implementation of an equity agenda that is inclusive of all racialized groups in society—an agenda that, in many countries, continues to elude educational leaders and policy makers who continue to rely on previous technical approaches to leading reform.

### **Race and Racism in 21st Century Education**

In societies in which race has historically been one of the dominant bases for discrimination and segregation, it is incumbent on educational leaders to address racism head on. Nevertheless, as the July 2008 debates in California concerning the enforced integration of its prison system or the belated apology for slavery offered by the US House of Representatives have indicated (Congress, 2008), conversations about race are still difficult to enjoin, in part because they continue to be fraught with emotional overtones.

In the United States, for example, the legacy of racism related to the age of slavery has not been totally overcome. Ample evidence is found in an examination of statistics in almost any sector of society: educational attainment, health and welfare statistics, family and social service data, insurance and income levels, access to housing, incarceration statistics and so forth. Disaggregation of data continues to show evidence of disparities according to racial classification. In the United States, for example, recent data show that math and reading skills of African-American 12th graders are about the same as those of White eighth graders and that the White-Black gaps are approximately 10 points wider, about a year’s worth of learning, than they were a decade ago (Education Trust, 2003). Further, 57% of fourth grade Hispanic students did not attain “basic” reading level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test (see ECS, 2004).

In South Africa, my understanding is, of course, based on limited data, perusal of scholarly articles and analyses, and not on first-hand knowledge. Nevertheless, I am convinced that, despite the considerable progress made since the democratic elections of 1994 (a much shorter time frame than America’s 50 years of integration), similar disparities persist as well. Dunn (1998) indicated that the percentage of students successful on matriculation exams declined following integration, while Schuler (2000) reported, for example, that only “48.9% of South Africa’s would-be graduates passed matriculation tests” (p. 2).

Statistics, however, do not tell the whole story. Personal experiences and narratives also offer powerful evidence of the persistence of racism in American society.<sup>1</sup> Following my reading of *Sundown Towns* (Loewen, 2005), in which the author describes the pervasiveness of racial fear, discrimination, and segregation throughout the United States even after the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. I discussed these data with several African American doctoral students who confirmed the extent of continued prejudice and shared personal stories. When I mentioned the book's assertion that a town called Anna was so named to imply "Ain't no niggers allowed," my White students expressed amazement, while my African American students not only confirmed the statement, they, in turn, were surprised that their White peers were not aware of it. They further explained that still, in 2008, they try to avoid passing through Anna and many other Illinois towns that have a long history of racial segregation and discrimination, and if their travels require it, they ensure their cars have enough gas so they won't have to face the task of refuelling in a place where they still are unwelcome and may actually be refused service.

Here, the issue is that attitudes and perceptions (including racism) endure considerably longer than laws outlawing discrimination and hence must be addressed by school leaders working for equity. Tatum (2007) perhaps best described the current situation in the United States:

despite the courage and sacrifice of many others, more than fifty years later we find ourselves still confronting the legacy of race and racism in our society, particularly in our schools, a reality that undermines the quality of education for all students and represents an ongoing threat to the fabric of our democracy. (p. x)

Bush and Moloji (2007), for example, report an assumption often heard in both countries: segregation is voluntary and is often perpetuated by Blacks themselves who prefer to live and work where they feel comfortable (p. 42). Although this statement may be true on one level, it ignores the historic legacy of discrimination that has prevented subgroups from feeling "comfortable" in integrated settings. Similarly, it ignores the continued disparities in social situations and material conditions that prevent people from easily and voluntarily living comfortably in an integrated setting.

Tatum (2007) reported that under segregation in many states, significant differences could be found "in the quality of facilities, the training of the teachers, the equipment available, the size of the classes, and the courses offered" (p. 3). Moreover, Kozol (2005) described unsanitary conditions in many inner city and rural schools—rats, moulds, plugged toilets that continued to go unaddressed, and schools in which many students reported feeling unsafe. Further, he reported huge inequities in funding between schools with predominantly White and predominantly Black populations. In the Chicago area, for example, the highest per pupil expenditure of \$17,291 is to be found in Highland Park and Deerfield, districts with a 90% White population and only 8% low income students, while in Chicago itself, with 85% low income students and 87% Black and Hispanic, the per pupil expenditure is \$8,482 (p. 312). In like fashion, he reports a \$17,261 per pupil expenditure in Lower Merion, PA where less than 10% of the population is Black or Hispanic and only 4% are low income. This is compared to Philadelphia in which 71% of students live in poverty, 79% are either Black or Hispanic, and where the per pupil expenditure is \$9,299.

Similarly, in South Africa, Dunn (1998) reported that "for every dollar spent on a black student, seven were spent on each white" (p. 2). She identified numerous additional inequities including the fact that "as many as 80 children may be in a classroom,...51 percent of schools lack textbooks, and 57 percent have no electricity" (p. 3). Moreover, a 1996 survey of school needs found that "40% of schools did not

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term American, and primarily write here about the situation in the United States, although I am painfully aware that similar disparities permeate the neighboring North American societies of Canada and Mexico as well.

have access to piped water, 57% did not have electricity; over 50% had pit latrine toilets, 13% had no ablution facilities at all and 72% had no library book collections” (Fleisch & Christie, 2004, p. 99).

Troup (1976) cited Dr. Vwerwoerd, former Nationalist Minister of Native Affairs, who stated in 1976 that “People who believe in equality are not desirable teachers for natives.” It is little wonder, therefore, that Nkukwana (2006) states that Vwerwoerd’s belief that “there was no need to teach Blacks Mathematics and Science” (p. 3) is still in evidence today. She continues to describe current education conditions in some South African schools, saying that “some classes have over 100 learners, there is hardly any space for the educator to stand and write on the chalkboard. The rearranging of desks to suit the group work which is characteristic of the new curriculum is impossible” (p. 13).

Given these continued inequitable conditions in both countries, it is time to take a radically different approach to thinking about educational reform strategies and to conceptualizing educational leadership.

### **Some Current Reform Initiatives**

Most educators and policy makers world-wide are familiar with the American Elementary and Secondary Education Act, reauthorized in 2002, and commonly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The subtitle of the first part of this Act is actually “Title I—improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged.” Overall, the Act exemplifies many of the reforms that presently hold currency in the United States: programs such as Reading First and Even Start; new standards for administrator and teacher training; programs to address drop-outs, discipline issues, and drug and alcohol abuse; guidelines regarding information parents must have; and provisions for making academic results public. One of the best known and most publicized aspects of the Bill is the requirement that all students be held to similar high standards (as measured by a single standardized test) and that all schools be required to disaggregate achievement data by sub-group (economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency) and to have 100% of students meeting expectations by roughly 2013. When schools fail to meet the designated expectations, there are possible penalties that range from withholding finances, to the imposition of new governance arrangements.

In South Africa, strategies for school reform seem uncannily similar to much of what has been imposed in the United States and elsewhere. A series of legislative acts and new frameworks have been introduced—beginning in 1994—all intended to result in educational transformation. Early changes included restructuring of the previous numerous departments responsible for education into one and a national syllabus revision process. Jansen (1999), however, studying the effect of this syllabus project, found that the “alterations reflected, and deepened, a crisis within the state which had little to do with changing the school curriculum and much more to do with the politics of transition” (p. 57). Among more recent changes, those most often perceived as having “a negative impact on educational leadership” included the curriculum changes, the abolition of corporal punishment, the introduction of school governing bodies, the no fee schools, the inclusive education policy, the redeployment of educators and the language policy” (Nkukwana, 2006, p. 1). Space does not permit discussion of all of these reforms; nevertheless, cursory comment about two is in order.

The first is the elimination of corporal punishment—a move perceived by leaders’ responses in the study conducted by Nkukwana (2006) as negative in that “learners have become very unruly and it is difficult to maintain discipline at schools because there are no alternative measures stipulated by the policy makers” (p. 15). She further reports that most of her 37 respondents believed that “discipline can only be maintained in schools through the use of corporal punishment” (p. 15). This attitude is, unfortunately, similar to that found in many American schools in which, although corporal punishment is

no longer the norm, a strict and complex code of punitive measures is in place to cover all possible student behaviour infractions.

Strict and punitive approaches to school discipline however, fail to take account of students' backgrounds or of the circumstances in which they find themselves in schools. If, for example, African American students comprise 25% of the student body, but account for 80% of the disciplinary referrals, a transformative school leader might want to investigate what is happening at school to account for this. Surely, one might acknowledge that if a propensity to misbehave is not seen as genetically greater in Black than in White students, there must be another explanation—one that requires examination of historic inequities, prejudicial attitudes, and discriminatory practices that create communities that are not equally welcoming and inclusive of all students. This is not to say that dangerous student behaviour should not be addressed, but that an additional dose of “good old fashioned discipline” is not the answer. This is an excellent illustration of why a technical solution to address an inequitable situation has not succeeded, and likely will not succeed, in changing student behaviour.

A second example of technical reform intended to take care of inequities is to be found in curricular approaches. We have seen that under NCLB, many schools were encouraged to adopt new reading programs; additional time was spent on teaching the basics, and many new strategies intended to assist students with test taking skills were introduced. Nevertheless, the achievement gap between middle class students (largely White) and many minoritized students (largely Hispanic and African American) persists.

In South Africa, in 2005, after careful consideration of possible new curricular frameworks, the government selected a model known as Outcomes Based Education (OBE) as the model “most likely to address the crisis in South African education” (Botha, 2002, p. 362). Despite the fact that, as Botha, says, this model represented a considerable departure from the format in place at the time, OBE may be regarded as controversial; “its implementation in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA was not without problems” (p. 363). In fact, in each of those countries, OBE was ultimately discontinued as not having made the anticipated difference in equalizing and improving student outcomes. Despite this overall negative impact in other countries, OBE in S. Africa was hailed as “both ambitious and visionary” (p. 366), although Botha did qualify his praise by acknowledging that the impact of OBE “cannot be equal in unequal conditions” (p. 367). Indeed, one might well go further, arguing that a mere curricular (technical) change will never be successful in achieving equity goals of high standards and outcomes for all students. Instead, what is required is a new form of leadership—one that critically examines issues of power, domination, attitude, and positioning—and in the case of both the United States and South Africa—leadership that is willing to address, head on, the difficult issue of race and racism in 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

### **Courageous and Activist Dialogic Leadership**

Fleisch and Christie (2004) remind us that “within the literature on school change, leadership holds a central position” (p. 95). Moreover, they state uncontrovertibly that “Leadership and management, it seems, do make a difference” (p. 97). Nevertheless, it is critically important to distinguish between them. Hence, when Schuler (2000) reported that “Sebidi suggests principals be trained in management” (p. 6), it is critical to understand that this training must go beyond traditional training in facility and personnel management, and in instructional leadership, to understand, as Jansen (2005) stated, that “leadership is as much a spiritual connection to the hearts of people as it is a managerial concern about professional practice” (p. 204). In this section, I argue that the leadership required for substantive change in societies in which racial inequality persist, is a form of transformative leadership—leadership focused on identifying and addressing inappropriate uses of power and authority, leadership firmly

grounded in concepts of equity, democracy, and social justice, leadership that recognizes the central role of dialogue, activism, and moral courage.

### **The Role of Dialogue**

Dialogue, it has often been argued (Bahktin, 1984, 1986; Buber, 1970; Shields & Edwards, 2005; Sidorkin, 1999) is not simply talk; it is not simply a strategy to convince people of a particular position. Nor is dialogue so time consuming that it cannot be a basis for transformative leadership. Instead, dialogue is fundamental to leadership that has, as Nkukwana (2006) stated, the potential to be a catalyst of change...and to create linkages between theory and practice and policy and praxis” (p. 23).

Dialogue, some would posit, is fundamentally ontological. It is not simply words or talk, but a way of life, an attitude of openness to difference—one that recognizes the inherently rich and diverse nature of the world, and hence, the right of each person to be treated with “absolute regard” (Starratt, 1991).

Dialogue, Bakhtin (1986) argued, is a way of standing outside something or someone, seeking always deeper understanding. He wrote:

To live is to participate in dialogue, to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree ... In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life with his eyes, lips, hands, and spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life. (1984, p. 293)

To participate in the ongoing dialogue of life, therefore, requires every educational leader to be willing to engage, with his or her whole person, issues of inequity in order to introduce reform that has the potential to make significant change. In the racialized contexts of the US and South Africa, one of the issues that must be addressed dialogically is continuing racism.

Tatum (2007) asks:

*Can we talk about race? Do we know how? Does the childhood segregation of our schools and neighbourhoods and the silence about race in our culture inhibit our capacity to have meaningful dialogue with others, particularly in the context of cross-racial relationships? (p. xiii)*

She is not suggesting, of course, that there is no talk or action about race in either North American or South African society. In both countries there are constant media reports of violence, often labelling the offender as “Black.” There are legal appeals regarding segregation. The American Congress has (finally) apologized for slavery and Jim Crow laws. In South Africa, the activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are well-known. Yet, for the most part, the (often superficial) coverage of such public events replaces a deep, meaningful, sometimes emotional and conflictual discussion of race and racism and the impact of the country’s history on students of today. It replaces the life lived in respectful openness to others.

Too often in schools in the United States, we hear comments suggesting that if only the African American or Hispanic sub-group had met their required academic standards, the school would also have been deemed to have successfully made “adequate yearly progress.” Too often, in South Africa, one hears and reads comments attributing the challenges faced by schools to students and their families. We have already seen that school leaders decry the loss of corporal punishment as a means of control. Similarly, Botha (2002) writes that “there is a lack of responsibility, dedication and commitment on the part of many teachers and learners” (p. 368); moreover, “South African learners have their life-chances determined by their ability to ‘cope’ at school” (p. 369).

Transformative school leaders will reject this purely individualist stance and begin to explore, with their teachers, parents, members of the community, and their students themselves, the ways in which race and racism and other institutional barriers constrain and constrict the opportunities and life chances of students in today's schools. They will institute dialogue—talk and action—aimed at examining and reflectively critiquing policies that perpetuate inequities, such as funding predominantly Black schools to lower levels, providing them with the least educated teachers, and the least adequate resources. They will examine the ways in which the implicit and unexamined norms of schooling continue to disadvantage those whose home customs, speech, and traditions are least similar to those valued in schools. And they will begin to actively, courageously, and persistently reject reforms that require predominantly technical changes.

### **Moral and Activist Leadership**

Living in respectful openness to others, as required by transformative leadership is never easy. Many, if not all, school leaders have been selected, in part, for their ability to maintain order, to support the status quo, and hence, to run a smooth and efficient organization. Nevertheless, I am persuaded by the arguments of Bourdieu (1977), Said (1994), and others, that educators enjoy a social location of power and privilege, one that requires us to take a stance as public intellectuals. Bourdieu, for example, argued that “the primary contribution of social scientists to society is to illuminate the mechanisms of domination and to show how these mechanisms reproduce social inequities, thus making the social sciences inherently critical” (p. 29). Said (1994) argued a similar position in the following words:

the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place it is publically to raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than to produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug. (p. 9)

Said went on to state that the intellectual engages this role on the “basis of universal principles: that all human beings are entitled to expect decent standards of behavior concerning freedom and justice from worldly powers or nations, and that deliberate or inadvertent violations of these standards need to be testified and fought against courageously.”

Taking an activist role does not permit us to abuse our power, but to use it morally in the interests of all members of our school communities—perhaps even in the interests of those who most need an advocate. Only when educational leaders begin to see their roles in this light will we be in a position to actively and successfully implement the kinds of equity reforms required in societies that continue to be deeply divided by prejudice about race and by persistent disparities.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

My argument here is that leaders who work in schools embedded in deeply divided racialized contexts, must take up the challenges to explicitly address the inequities in their contexts and work for change. This requires much more than technical reforms—whether Reading First, Outcome Based Education, or new accountability measures. It requires policies that go beyond addressing individual student behaviour to understand the wider historic and present societal influences on their behaviour. It certainly requires training, but training focused on attitudes, beliefs, and the moral purposes of the educational endeavour.

Further, I am arguing that to accomplish these equity reforms a new kind of leadership is also required—one that requires imagining and enjoining new reforms, difficult dialogues, and courageous actions. I am calling for the kind of leadership advocated over two decades ago by Foster (1986) who stated that good leadership requires careful and consistent attention to the needs of the community in which one serves and understanding both the conditions in which we live and how to change them.

The kind of change required to implement the promise of long-standing legislative mandates in both countries requires transformative leadership—leadership that takes seriously the deeply personal and the wholly public responsibility to use my power, privilege, and position in the field to promote justice and enlightenment for the welfare, not only of each student, but of society as a whole.

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