

White Paper - Preparing Socially Just School Leaders for Our Schools ¹

Randall B. Lindsey

Professor Emeritus

California State University, Los Angeles

Diversity is about bodies, and inclusion is about culture.

-DeRay Mckesson (Morris, 2016)

Preamble

This paper is a career-long work in progress. As I commenced final editing, I had been carefully viewing television coverage of the shootings of an African American man in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and an African American man in Falcon Heights, Minnesota as well as the sniper mass murder of police officers in Dallas.

The racial dynamics that underlie these tragic events informed my thinking and, ultimately, my writing. Early in my career as a new teacher, also while viewing television in the 1960s (with only 3 major channels in those days), I learned about violence that emanated from historical racial animus. After the spate of urban riots that began in Los Angeles and spread like wildfire across the country, I was more deeply and thoroughly informed by the post mortem on 1960's urban unrest, the Kerner Report (Report of the National Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968). An often used quote from that report has remained burned in my consciousness, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White – separate and unequal." Since that

¹ Portions of this paper are adapted from Terrell, Raymond D. & Lindsey, Randall B. *Culturally proficient leadership: Doing what's right for students – all students*. In Portelli, John P., & Griffiths, Darrin, Eds. (2015). *Key Questions for Educational Leaders*. Burlington, ON: Word & Deeds Publ. Inc, 2015.

time I have strived to continue to uncover and to describe issues of inequity in our society, in particular the manner in which issues of equity and inequity are displayed in our preK-12 schools.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to describe the manner in which I offer that we, representing colleges and universities, ensure an equity-based inclusive lens for preparing school leaders to lead our preK-12 schools. Though my focus is on preK-12 school leadership, I believe the lens described in this paper also applies to our programs that prepare leaders for higher education leadership.

I begin with this caveat:

- This paper presents no professional standards.
- This paper presents no curriculum.
- This paper presents no assessments.

Our profession has the standards we need, the curricula we need, and the assessments we need. So, I set those important elements aside to develop a way to ensure that our leadership preparation programs are socially just and inclusive. Most importantly, our profession has the responsibility of modeling and providing for an inclusivity with democratic ideals. As professors of educational leadership, I believe, our challenge is to ensure our preparation programs provide content and experiences that support basic human empathy that, in turn, extends to the human condition of our students' home communities and to the communities in which they will serve.

Dean Asa Hilliard offered an epigraph as lead in to an 1991 *Educational Leadership* article he authored about educating all students, and I issue it as a challenge here today - *do we*

have the will to educate all leaders? (Hilliard, 1991). This paper is about preparing educational leaders who embrace access and equity as means for attaining socially just outcomes in our ever evolving democracies. Many approaches are available for creating socially just schools (Banks, 1999, Freire, 1990, Fullan, 2003, Gilligan, 1983, Ladson-Billings, 1994). However, I use Cultural Proficiency to inform my work and, consequently, this paper (Cross, 1989, and Lindsey, Nuri Robins and Terrell, 2009). My belief is that holding expectations for socially just educational outcomes in our PreK-12 schools, and colleges and universities can have the impact and effect of democratizing society.

This paper has three distinct, yet overlapping and reinforcing, components. I begin with a brief historical overview of equity issues in the United States as a means of providing a context. Next, I describe transactional, transformational, and transformative change and the necessity of each process in the operation of our schools. Of these, leaders use transformative change processes to involve parents and community members in meaningful ways. Lastly, I describe a set of guiding principles (or core values), when used with fidelity, support educational leaders' values and behaviors and their district/school's policies and practices. My belief is that educational leadership preparation programs aligned with equity-based core values will be well-positioned to lead the way in closing access and equity gaps in the nation's preK-12 schools.

Historical Overview

It is no longer a surprise that America was **not** discovered in 1492 (Mann, 2005, Dunbar Ortiz, 2014). In fact, in 1492 the Americas were fully occupied and in use from the Arctic Sea on the North to The Straits of Magellan to the South and from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans! No evidence exists that people indigenous to the Americas either solicited or otherwise invited

migration from other continents. However, we now know that visits from Nordic sailors occurred in the 11th century and by the 15th century, full-scale immigration from throughout Europe was underway. Migrants included people seeking religious freedom, people seeking earth's valuable resources, people seeking affordable arable land, and those seeking to convert indigenous people to Christian beliefs and practices. The point here is that issues of equity and its implied partner, inequity, are foundational realities to the United States and the other countries of the Americas that have and continue to shape political, economic, social, and educational disparities that persist throughout the Americas

Let me be clear, I recognize that the United States of 2016 is a mechanism of great and unprecedented accomplishments – our representative form of government, our economic system, our public education system, and, yes, even our evolving accomplishments in human rights. At the same time benefits from the evolution of United States have been and continue to this day to be unevenly distributed across demographic groups of our citizenry and is most evident in the achievement disparities on display in our preK-12 schools. In fact, much of the social and economic unevenness is systemic in our political, social, economic, and educational mechanism. Even within this context, reason exists for hope that have guided socially just actions, both intended and unintended and albeit much too slowly. Consider this representative list of actions and events that are hallmarks of a painstakingly slow evolving society:

- **3/5 Compromise, 1783** – agreement between slave holding states and non-slave holding states to count slaves as 3/5 person for purposes of apportionment. Slaves have no citizen rights.

- **Indian Removal Act, 1830** – President Jackson signs bill to remove Indians from land coveted by settlers to what is today the state of Oklahoma. Indians lose all civil rights. Many history books acknowledge this as the ‘Trail of Tears.’
- **Emancipation Proclamation, 13th Amendment** – federal actions to end slavery.
- **Civil Rights Act of 1866** – effectively extended citizenship to former slaves.
- **19th Amendment, 1920** – federal government grants voting rights to women throughout the country.
- **Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education, 1954** – U.S. Supreme Court effectively over turned racial segregation in schools.
- **Civil Rights Act of 1964** – banned discrimination due to a person’s color, race, national origin, religion or sex. In addition to gaining the right to vote, people could not be discriminated against in use of public conveyances.
- **ESEA, 1965** – provided funding for elementary and secondary schools with the intent of ensuring equity across the country and to reduce achievement gaps.
- **PL 94-142, 1975** – required free and appropriate education for students with disabilities.
- **NCLB, 2002** – reauthorization of ESEA with enhanced focus on providing resources intended to close achievement gaps and provide for accountability measures.
- **ESSA, 2016** – reauthorization of ESEA that continues focus on increased opportunities for all students in ways that prepares them for college and career readiness.

Legacy in Part

This set of selected events from the human rights portion of our country’s history is presented to illustrate two points – a slowly unfolding of the human rights benefits of democratic values and

actions has evolved to ever increasing proportions of the national citizenry; and, the only demographic group that did not have to be ‘amended into the social contract’ has been property-owning white males.

I believe it is important to acknowledge that the slow, evolutionary pace of extending and expanding human rights in the United States in many ways illustrates underlying tensions that give rise to incidents such as those that occurred recently in Baton Rouge, Falcon Heights, and Dallas. In mainstream PreK-12 education there has been a tendency to minimize the negative aspects of our history and to glorify the positive aspects of that same history. This tendency to marginalize the memory of destructive and unpleasant events reminds me of the quote often attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte, *History is written by the victors*. I submit that such an observation might be valuable in supporting authoritarian rule, but certainly can not and must not apply to democratic countries such as ours. In sharp contrast, consider how the U.S. responded to those defeated on the battle fields of Europe and Asia. The U.S. and its allies poured massive resources into developing successful democracies in the formerly and highly authoritarian regimes of 1930s and 1940s Germany, Italy and Japan. Yet, in our country we have experienced massive social upheaval at almost predictable 30 year cycles and, it seems, we are destined to endlessly repeat the cycle of oppression and marginalization that leads to blowback that often leads to both recriminations and progress. Kenneth Burke (1967) describes this cycle aptly in terms of those not directly impacted by systemic oppression or marginalization and are often puzzled and terrified by reactions to real and perceived oppression:

You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got

there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers you: you answer her: another comes to your defense, another aligns herself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress (3).

It is that 'discussion' that, I believe, must be foundational to our educational leadership programs that are authentically equity focused. Progress has been and is being made; however, progress and innovation are too often sporadic and uneven across our society and, in particular, in our schools. In our preK-12 schools the remnants of historical and institutional oppression and marginalization linger in terms of persistent achievement gaps, chronic uneven access of students of color into higher order thinking courses and access to technology, over representation of students of color in special education, and disproportional demographic rates of students experiencing suspensions and expulsions. We must ensure in our leadership preparation programs that issues of equity are the focus all faculty, not developed as specialty courses to some faculty. I believe it incumbent in our professional role as preparers of leaders of PreK-12 schools and as leaders of colleges and universities to ensure that our leadership programs embrace their constituent preK-12 schools and school districts in ways that the challenges and successes of our leadership program candidates become **our** challenges and **our** successes.

Leadership is what we do as educational administration/leadership faculty and instruction in change processes are the DNA of effective leadership. Carolyn Shields, Professor, School of

Education Wayne State University here in Detroit, provides a frame I find useful in taking social justice deep into Educational Leadership programs and, by extension, into our constituent PreK-12 schools, college and universities.

Transformative Leadership IS Inclusive Leadership

Shields (2010) describes three types of leaders that illustrate a progression of ever-deepening change processes. Each leadership type is necessary to the operation of preK-12 schools and school districts committed to inclusive equity-based practices and outcomes and is to be embraced with mindful intent:

- Transactional leadership involves a reciprocal interaction in which the intention is for agreement where both parties benefit from the decision. For example, a decision in which faculty and principal agree to twice-monthly meetings that focus on improving literacy skills for all students is transactional leading in that each partner in the decision contributes something to the decision. In this case, faculty provide their time and administration arranges for the professional learning experience.
- Transformational leadership focuses on improving organizational effectiveness. In improving student literacy, faculty agrees with their principal to engage in professional development for instructional improvement that focuses on literacy literature and skill development in service of students.
- Transformative leadership recognizes that gaps in student literacy are found in inequities that are generational and correlated with students' demographic groupings. Continuing with the literacy examples, faculty and principals, collaboratively challenge practices that marginalize students and press for equitable academic access and outcomes (Lindsey, Kearney, Estrada,

Terrell & Lindsey, 2015).

Equity-based leadership integrates Shields' descriptions of leadership into a seamless approach that recognizes day-to-day realities of school management and leadership alongside future-focused systemic transformative change in the manner of how students' cultures are embraced as assets in providing for their educational needs – a true measure of inclusivity, I believe. Equity-based leadership serves as a socially just approach to school leadership centered in a moral purpose that schools and schooling can be successful places for students *because* of their cultural memberships and not in spite of them. Effectively leading in today's preK-12 schools is both a daunting challenge and a rewarding experience for the administrator, the school, and the community being served. Being an equity-focused leader in a school that serves diverse communities well provides rich opportunities for educators and communities alike.

Equity-based leaders pose questions to self and the school community in ways that open themselves and their colleagues to being curious about school-based factors that facilitate or hinder student access and achievement. Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs (1989) in their seminal work on cultural competence and cultural proficiency identified this sense of openness to curiosity as an *inside-out process* of reflection and dialogue that leads to personal and organizational change. These leaders are not naïve; they fully recognize the external realities of community socio-economics, local and national political climates, and the assessment trends that continuously buffet schools. These leaders neither pretend to have all the answers nor shirk their responsibility for keeping focused on what is best for students. Inclusive, equity-based school leaders are guided by a belief that their students deserve high quality education and that they and their colleagues have the capacity to learn how to provide it.

Equity-based, inclusive school leaders know how to work with formal and non-formal leaders within schools and across school districts. At the formal level, district- and site-level administrators embrace their primary function of exerting moral leadership at the district and school level. Non-formal leaders are valued and supported at the school and classroom levels. The journey to establishing an equity-based school begins with those in formal leadership positions closely examining internal policies, practices, and procedures to ensure that they are aligned in ways that affords all students and community members equitable access to all areas of the curriculum.

Systemic Leadership and Tools of Cultural Proficiency

Gleason and Gerzon (2013) hold that “Equity is the fundamental value, visible through public commitments and specific practices. Supporting values - continuous learning for all, collaboration, and collective responsibility for everyone learning - further enliven equity at each school. These values together are non-negotiable drivers of improvement (p. 120). Gleason & Gerzon’s arrived at this application of equity in their study of four Title I schools to identify common themes for all students achieving at high performance levels. They found that educators at these four schools *lived* their values that supported equitable learning for their students. Their values were not only their *espoused* values but also their ways of being, ways of teaching and ways of learning.

Culturally proficient leaders focus on equitable access and outcomes as they build a systemic culture that takes into account all aspects of the school’s educational processes. The leader’s continuing focus is on the demographic composition of the students, staff, and community to ensure that diverse voices are represented throughout the formal and informal

decision-making processes of the school. The school's curriculum is designed to provide relevance and rigor inclusive of all demographic groups of students. Long-range assessment processes are used to benchmark progress toward student outcome measures to focus on narrowing and closing access and achievement gaps. Similarly, policies and practices are monitored and analyzed to ensure that disproportional representation by race, ethnicity, gender, or social class are narrowed, reduced and eliminated over time.

Achievement Gaps, Disproportionality and Our Preparation Programs

Educational leadership preparation programs that hold a high value for inclusivity, diversity and equity-based approaches are poised to serve well our PreK-12 schools – urban, suburban, and rural. Only a few years ago, much of our professional conversation was about our country's 'changing demographics.' That phrase may appear to be in the past as our demographics have 'changed' – but, not really! While there is reason to believe that our national demographics will continue to evolve through immigration from outside the country and migration within the country, in the past two decades we have 'discovered' a new demographic, namely, those who have been historically marginalized by society and underserved in our PreK-12 schools – disproportionately, African American, Native American, English-learning, and special need students as well as students from low-income families. Of course, these students have been in our public schools historically but it took the National Assessment of Educational Progress's disaggregation of data to render these students and their educational needs visible (Perie, Moran & Lutkus, 2005). The tragedy here is that we in the education profession did not lead in assuming responsibility for making these data known or, in too many cases, to responding being

proactive in pointing out readily identifiable educational disparities in educational access and outcomes.

Access and achievement gaps along with issues of disproportionality are now front and center for our PreK-12 schools to address and on which to make continuous progress. It is incumbent that our educational leadership programs ensure we constructively respond to the educational needs of preK-12 students schools served by our program's candidates today, not the schools and in the uneven manner in which we may have developed leaders for preK-12 schools in the past.

The Tools of Cultural Proficiency enable educational leaders to acknowledge individual and institutional barriers and to ensure core values to respond inclusively with diverse student and community environments to guide equity-focused personal and organizational transformation (Cross, 1989, Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Culturally proficient leadership practices focus on the cultural assets students bring into school in ways that overcome barriers to PreK-12 student access and equitable outcomes.

Recognition and acknowledgment of systemic and institutional barriers to student access and achievement provides educators opportunities to embrace inclusive core values derived from **guiding principles of cultural proficiency**. These guiding principles are grounded in deeply held assumptions and values for diverse cultures. A leader must be intentional in asking *why* questions and choosing to counter the barriers to serving diverse communities of students. The work of equity and inclusion requires intention and focus on closing the education gaps for students who have not been served well or need to be served differently.

School leaders in our preK-12 schools face individual, institutional, and systemic limitations as roadblocks to change intended to meet the needs of historically marginalized students. It is imperative for school leaders to consider the various –isms (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, heterosexism) and how they are present in their own values and behaviors, as well as in their school’s policies and practices. This type of self-assessment is often a difficult process for some leaders, as they might feel blamed for historically based and systemic -isms. However, once they understand they, like the students and their parents, did not create the conditions that foster inequity, they can see more clearly that they have responsibility to recognize students’ capacity to learn and educators’ capacity to learn how to educate the students. At that point, leaders consider how more inclusive core values can be developed. The guiding principles of cultural proficiency provide a template for devising truly inclusive core values and overcoming personal, institutional and systemic barriers to closing access and achievement disparities that persist among demographic groups of students in our preK-12 schools.

To this point, my intent has been to develop a rationale for our PreK-12 schools embracing equity-focused approaches to educating all students to high levels. An inclusive equity focus for our PreK-12 schools is consistent with previous ESEA legislation known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as well as the current iteration, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). From this point, I turn my attention to you and me as professors of educational leadership programs. As acknowledged at the opening of this paper, in my opinion, we do not need additional professional standards, curricula, or assessments in order to ensure that our programs have an equity-focus that enables our graduates to serve well the schools that they will and do lead.

I have adapted from Cross' work, nine guiding principles set forth as reflective questions for our consideration, the responses to which can guide within our leadership preparation programs, core values that expressly embrace inclusivity, access and equity in service of our candidates as they lead the preK-12 schools of today and tomorrow. Professors can also use these questions for individual reflection and to guide dialogue with their program colleagues, the responses to which can foster inclusive core values that inform vision and mission statements to guide policy formulation and inclusive practices throughout our educational leadership programs:

- To what extent do you honor culture as a natural and normal part of the diverse communities in your service areas?
- To what extent do you recognize and understand the differential and historical treatment accorded to those least well served in the diverse schools/communities served by your programs?
- When working with a candidate whose culture is different from yours, to what extent do you see the candidate both as an individual and as a member of a cultural group?
- To what extent do you recognize and value the differences within the cultural communities served by the schools in your service area?
- To what extent do you know and respect the unique needs of cultural groups in the preK-12 communities served by the schools in your service area?
- To what extent do you know how cultural groups in the communities served by the preK-12 schools in your service area define family and the manner in which family serves as the primary system of support for the students (youth) of the community?
- To what extent do you recognize your role as a professor in an educational leadership program in acknowledging, adjusting to, and accepting cross-cultural interactions as necessary social and communications dynamics?
- To what extent do you recognize and understand the bi-cultural reality for cultural groups historically not well served in the preK-12 schools in your service area and the larger society?
- To what extent do you incorporate cultural knowledge into the policies, practices, and procedures of your leadership programs?

Educational leadership programs that *live* core values in valuing the diversity of preK-12 schools in their service areas are poised to provide a seamless leadership function in that they

demonstrate a commitment to being involved, responsible partners for equitable outcomes in our preK-12 schools.

Call to Action

Equity-based leadership in our programs is essential in today's context of PreK-12 schooling.

We must dedicate ourselves to ensuring our programs are inclusive and develop equity-focused school leaders committed to achieving excellence with and for PreK-12 children and youth at risk of school failure by intentionally, emphatically, systematically, vigorously, and effectively ensuring that we stand as partners with our candidates to ensure that preK-12 students can and will develop to their full potential. Professors of educational leadership programs must understand and recognize the importance of addressing inclusivity and diversity in all their cultural, linguistic, and human forms as assets for our preK-12 school communities rather than as deficits and problems to be solved.

School leaders can only care for the child when they understand what it is like to be part of that child's culture, what it is like to be unable to speak the language of the classroom, or what it is like to go home to a shelter every night. Our responsibility is to develop equity-focused, culturally proficient school leaders who connect with children and youth to get to know and better understand the learner's interests: what they care about, what gives them joy, and what they might wish for if they dared. I invite you to join me and others in the journey toward culturally proficient leadership practices.

References

- Banks, J. (1999). *An introduction to multicultural education* (3rd ed.). Needham, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Burke, K., *The Philosophy of the Literary Form*, 2nd Ed., (1967). Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press.
- Cross, T.L., Bazron, B.J., Dennis, K.W., & Isaacs, M.R. (1989). *Toward a culturally competent system of care*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Program, Child and Adolescent Service System Program.
- Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An Indigenous people's history of the United States*. City: Publisher.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Nyra Bergman Ramos, Trans.). New York: Seabury.
- Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1983). *In a different voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Hilliard, A. (1991). Do we have the will to educate all children? *Educational Leadership*, 40(1), 31-36.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lindsey, R.B., Nuri Robins, K., & Terrell, R.D. (2009). *Cultural proficiency: A manual for school leaders*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Mann, C. C. (2005). 1491: New revelations of the Americas before columbus. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Morris, Catherine, (2013). Black lives matter focuses on long-term sustainability. *Diverse Issues in Education*. June 13, 2016.
http://diverseeducation.com/article/84799/?utm_campaign=DIV1607%20DAILY%20JULY03&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Eloqua.
- Perie, M., Moran, R., & Lutkus, Anthony D. (2005). *NAEP 2004 trends in academic progress: Three decades of student performance in reading and mathematics (NCES 2005-464)*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

Shields, C.M. (2010). Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 558-589.

Terrell, R. & Lindsey, R. (2015). Culturally proficient leadership: Doing what's right for students – all students, In Portelli, John P., & Griffiths, Darrin, Eds., *Key Questions for Educational Leaders* (2015). Words and Deeds, Publishers, Inc.

Terrell, R.D., & Lindsey, R.B. (2009). *Culturally proficient leadership: The personal journey begins within*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.