Moral Leadership

Shifting the Management Paradigm

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Much of the thinking in the field of educational leadership has been shaped by the ideas and tenets of what is generally referred to as scientific management. Frederick W. Taylor is considered the father of this influential management theory. According to scientific management, the administration of organizations can be reduced to the replication of behaviors that have proved to be effective and efficient. Efficiency and effectiveness are evaluated by the use of hard data gained through quantifiable measurement. In fact, science and efficiency, according to the scientific management paradigm, serve as the quintessential elements of successful administrative behavior. Taylorism, as scientific management is sometimes called, stresses that there is always one best way to accomplish a job, and this is likely to be the fastest way to get the job done. Scientific management thus explores the quickest methods to accomplish a task, with the least number of body motions necessary to do a job efficiently. The role of the manager, then, is to discover the most time and cost-efficient way to accomplish tasks and then to provide specific training so that workers are able to reproduce the process. In this way, the results of workers’ labor can always be predicted and quantified.

While the tentacles of scientific management remain firmly affixed to the leadership practices of institutions such as schools, many educators are beginning to sense an ontological and personal meaning disconnect between themselves and what happens in schools and are framing inquiries and discourses that are juxtaposed to the practices promoted through the auspices of a Taylorist management approach.

This chapter will examine the tenets of scientific management as the traditional leadership paradigm, its roots in modernist thinking, and the rise of the concept of moral leadership
as an alternative to scientific management and an answer to the challenges that many in educational leadership now face. Moral or purpose-driven leadership is a way to situate school leadership in a broader social context. It not only is conscious of issues of race, class, and gender, but also perceives the work of schools as sites committed to social justice and more genuine demonstrations of democracy in our society. Moral and purpose-driven leadership takes seriously students’ academic achievement, demands a deep investment of the school leader’s genuine or authentic self, and dares to ask the hard questions regarding the purposes of schools and who are most ably served by them.

SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION

Scientific management holds that requiring workers to follow routine steps involving neither their imagination nor a great deal of their intellectual capability produces efficiency and effectiveness in accomplishing any task. In effect, each component of a specific task is clearly spelled out and monitored for accuracy in its execution by the manager. It thus becomes the responsibility of the organizational administrator to clearly delineate the discriminate steps essential to a task’s completion, provide appropriate training for the workers who are to complete the tasks, and finally, to monitor the process of the workers’ implementation. Management is seen as a rational way to sequence tasks so that predictable results occur. Inherent in the management paradigm is the assumed intellectual superiority of those who hold titular or positional power. Workers are considered to lack the internal motivation to get the work done. They are also assumed to lack the intellectual wherewithal to complete tasks without very close supervision or monitoring. Those who manage supposedly keep the ends of this mechanized process in mind and therefore create easy-to-implement steps enabling the workers they supervise to complete their assignments, thus leading to the successful conclusion of the project. Clearly, as a result of this kind of mind-set, hierarchies are crafted, rules and processes for inclusion and exclusion are developed, and corporations and even schools are able to legitimize and perpetuate society’s prejudices and traditions within their very walls. Concomitantly, the properties of bureaucracies are firmly established through the clear delineation of managers’ and workers’ responsibilities.

Early in the 20th century, scholars in educational administration, who were bound by a modernist context, found the ideas of scientific management useful when applied to the work of schools. W. W. Charters has been cited as one of those responsible for introducing the tenets of scientific management to the work of schools (Maxcy, 1995). The goal was to measure efficiency in the manufacturing of schools’ products, namely children. What seemed to be so appealing about scientific management was the way it embraced the concepts espoused by a positivist frame or perspective. Positivism, an offshoot of modernism, was founded on three primary principles: a preference for sanitized language, logical rigor, and value neutrality (Maxcy, 1995). Implicit in this acceptance of a positivist mind-set is the assumption that “peopled” endeavors are always linear in direction, rational, predictable, and consistent. Spencer Maxcy (1995) argues, “Where the scientific framework assumes that the interplay between concepts specified linguistically as variables matches point for point the interstices of human interaction in the life world, we have fallen heir to the fallacy of linguistic idealism” (p. 5). Essentially, Maxcy maintains that subscribing to notions such as sanitized language causes one to infer that the linguistic representation of life in schools is accurate and above discussion.

This is in keeping with the position of Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), a German philosopher and central figure in the Frankfurt
School of critical theorists, who maintained that language is one of the most powerful weapons in the armory of the Establishment. In his writings, Marcuse argues that the language that represents hegemonic thought is a mixture of unprecedented brutality and sweetness (Kellner, 2001). He refers to it as an Orwellian language, which monopolizes communication and “stifles the consciousness, obscures and defames the alternative possibilities of existence, implants the needs of the status quo in the mind and body of men and makes them all but immune against the need for change” (p. 118).

A further examination of Marcuse’s position on the power of language finds it contextualized in his deconstruction of the application of science in production and distribution. He admits that science has influenced social sciences, psychology, literature, and music, calling this a strange symbiosis of scientific humanistic thinking and a repressive society. He further notes that this symbiosis results in creativity and productivity actually serving the material culture, where imagination serves business and, ultimately, where scientific and humanistic thought actually serves as the driving force of social control.

SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE MODERNIST PARADIGM

Taylorism provides an extremely mechanized way to standardize the workplace (Foster, 1986). This standardization implies that there is a knowledge base that substantiates the creation of these standard ways of operation. The knowledge base of scientific management is found in what has been termed modernity. The idea of modernity defines a time in the early 20th century when life in Western civilization was characterized by capitalism, rationalism, individualism, and a move toward a secular culture. The fields of science, industry, and technology were perceived as arenas one needed to be conversant with if one were to achieve economic or social success. Cahoone (1996) considers that the self-image Western civilization portrayed through modernism was established on a scientific knowledge of the world and a rational knowledge of value. Inherent in modernist thinking was a belief in the virtue of rationality, control, individuality, and truth. Linear rationality was emphasized, and the validity of ideas was established only through empirical scrutiny. Patricia Hill-Collins (1998) defines modernity as a generally accepted new form of global social organization that developed when science and reason became the most important principles in European societies. She notes that philosophers tend to suggest that modernity originated during the 1600s, whereas many cultural critics would argue that the term modernism ought to be applied specifically to the literary and artistic productions of the early 20th century. Finally, Hill-Collins suggests that development theorists use modernization as a marker indicating a move toward industrialization, leading to capitalist market economies and political democracy in different societies.

Henry Giroux (1997) suggests a trinitarian approach to the definition of modernism, describing modernism through the context of three traditions: the social, the aesthetic, and the political. When articulating the tenets of modernism from the social tradition, Giroux states that modernism’s notions of social progress were deeply tied to the dynamics of capitalist production and economic growth. Giroux further argues that modernism took on what he calls the epistemological project of elevating reason and rationality to an ontological status. Essentially, modernism became the hegemonic mind-set for circumscribing civilization. He concludes that “reason is universalized in cognitive and instrumental terms as the basis for a model of industrial, cultural, and social progress” (p. 184). Clearly, as modernism established the parameters of the hegemony, a
systematic method of inclusion and exclusion of celebrated or legitimated thinking concomitantly constructed a grammar of dualisms that contextualized life at that time. The human subject became the ultimate source of meaning, according to Giroux, and “a notion of geographical and cultural territoriality is constructed in a hierarchy of domination and subordination marked by a center and margin legitimated through the civilizing knowledge/power of a privileged Eurocentric culture” (p. 184).

Modernism, as examined through the lens of the aesthetic tradition, according to Giroux (1997), was grounded in resistance. As displayed through art and literature, there was an expressed disdain for bourgeois values and traditions. Much of the creative work was a product of rebellion and critique that was best expressed, according to Giroux, “in avant-garde movements ranging from the surrealists and the futurists to the conceptivist artists of the 1970s” (p. 185). It is very interesting that the articulation of a different, resistant voice seems to have been the motivation for the modernist frame, although the systematic silencing of divergent voices, even to the new modernist discourse, also took place. For instance, modernism celebrated what had been termed high culture but denigrated or marginalized popular culture. It heralded a central truth as well as a central methodology by which the truth was unearthed. This notion of a universal truth was carried over into educational settings with the glorification of a core curriculum and a standard methodology or pedagogy with which to implement the core curriculum. Again, the modernist position demanded an epistemological high ground that promoted the passing on of accepted, hegemonic knowledge, while at the same time actively defaming any knowledge that was outside of the accepted canon. Indeed, critics of the modernist paradigm, including its emphasis on resistance, argued that its position simply celebrated an amalgam of the self and scientific technology, grounded in the reification of white European male notions of industrial technologies, rationalism, mastery, and even beauty.

Robert Starratt (2003) summarizes the tenets of modernity from a different perspective, maintaining that modernity assumed that science and technology were intrinsically good and that these two fields served as the drivers of society’s engines. Furthermore, he maintains that the modernist frame contended that objective knowledge gleaned through scientific discovery and technological prowess was the only legitimate knowledge in the world. Starratt suggests that modernism held that “objective knowledge enables us to know all of life’s realities” (p. 46). Modernity also emphasized, according to Starratt, the primacy of the individual: Modernist thinking held that any theory of society must begin with the sanctity of the individual and must celebrate the rights as well as the responsibilities of individuals. He considers that modernity defined society’s happiness through the collective choices of reasonable and self-interested individuals, who were influenced by reason and self-interest to make certain economic choices. These economic choices were expected to combine to produce widespread societal happiness. Clearly, during the modernist era, happiness and economic well-being were almost synonymous.

Two other tenets of modernism also seem to have been exceptionally influential in shaping cultural thought. Starratt (2003) notes that modernist thinking particularly prized the contributions to progress made by an intellectual elite composed of those who were especially astute in the physical and social sciences and who were considered, because of their intellectual acumen, to be best suited to serve as managers in public affairs and private corporate institutions. Clearly, this was an age that celebrated cerebral activity, although only certain kinds of intellectual work were legitimated. Thought that was grounded in rationality and scientific, quantitative data was prized, whereas notions of intuition, perceptions, and “softer” mental musings were denigrated and
presumed to be comparatively useless. The final
tenet of modernism Starratt lists is the political
context within which this thinking flourished,
which applauded a democracy engaging capa-
bile elected representatives who were expected
to pursue and enact the common good.

Those who subscribe to a modernist perspec-
tive where school leadership is concerned
may question whether anything other than
academic endeavors should take place in
schools. There may be some doubt, on their
part, as to the possible connection between
student academic achievement and a sensitiv-
ity to issues of social class, race, gender, and
"otherness." Many prospective as well as
current school administrators see academic
achievement as the only purpose for a school’s
existence. What they fail to appreciate through
this myopic perspective is the friction that
exists between what they are trying to do in
their perceived pristine, antiseptic schoolhouse
and what is taking place in the real social con-
text in which the school functions. Within this
frame of modernist thinking, however, is a
perspective that takes into account the various
aspects of the community in which the school
is embedded. Some leadership and organiza-
tional theorists subscribe to an open systems
frame of thinking that views the system of the
school as situated in an environmental setting
where the boundaries of the school are actu-
ally permeable. The environment provides
inputs to the school such as the students them-
selves, community values, legislation, and
funding. The open systems model sees those
inputs as providing fodder for the transactions
that take place in the school, after which the
outputs, namely the students or graduates,
re-enter the environment changed for the better.

OPPOSITION TO THE MODERNIST
PARADIGM AND THE RISE OF MORAL
IMPERATIVES IN LEADERSHIP

Those who opposed this modernist thinking
condemned it as imperialist, anthropocentric,
and replete with notions of class, gender, and
race domination. In fact, these divergent
thinkers saw the modernist paradigm and the
resulting scientific management perspective
as catalysts for the rise of alienation and the
domination of the individual through bureau-
cracy. Max Weber (1864–1920), a German
thinker and one of the founders of sociology,
lamented that the modernist celebration of
science implied that there were no incalculable
forces at work in learning anything. That is,
Weber (1996) argued, the early 20th century’s
penchant for empiricism meant that mastery
came only through calculation:

This means that the world is disenchanted.
One need no longer have recourse to magical
means in order to master or implore the spir-
its, as did the savage, for whom such mys-
terious powers existed. Technical means and
calculations perform the service. (p. 170)

Cornel West (1982) suggests that the
decay of modernism launched the culture
into a postmodern frame of thinking. What
West finds interesting are the results of this
demythologizing of science, which places
scientific explanations and theoretical perspec-
tives of the self, world, and God in the same
contested terrain of religious, artistic, and
moral accounts of the self, world, and God.
According to West, the demythologizing
process resulted in a deep crisis in knowledge
positions, which unraveled the heretofore
hegemonic notions that science and truth were
monogamous and actually formed the basis
for the policies and actual practices in the
marketplace. Another vestige of modernism is
what West calls the degeneration of modern
paganism into various forms of cynicism,
fatalism, hedonism, and narcissism. West
describes this degeneration as being repre-
sented by "impotent irony, barren skepticism,
and paralyzing self-parody" (p. 42). He con-
cludes: "It raises the prospect of a possible
plurality of epistemic authorities on truth and
reality as well as a frightening full-blown
relativism or laissez-faire policy regarding access to truth and reality” (p. 42).

West (1982) characterizes the modernist period and the successive era of postmodernism as a time devoid of spiritual anchors. Along with scientific grounding and a concomitant critical interrogation of traditions and hegemonic forms came a vacuum in ontological and spiritual matters. The third indicator of a postmodern shift is what West calls philosophical attacks on the primacy of the subject, including the fact that the avant-garde has been absorbed or domesticated into the mainstream market. Market values, grounded in conspicuous consumption, undergird most of the thinking and behavior in this postmodern era. It is as if the thinking of the individual can only be legitimated if it can be viewed as leading to some market profitability. Radical voices, or ideas and images outside the status quo, become commodified or co-opted by burgeoning market forces determined to consume ideas, trends, and even movements that may portend a profit and enhance a capitalist position. West argues that a nihilistic sense pervades this era. Feelings of hopelessness and vanity are ubiquitous because so much value is placed on making a profit and enhancing the market. Those who are outside the mainstream thoughts or tenets of market values are assumed to be non-contributors and thus devalued by those who espouse this bias toward capitalism and profit. This is the context those who are in leadership positions in schools face every day.

Fortunately, the field of educational leadership currently must also contend with a more critical, progressive language that questions the hidden meanings and intentions of the curriculum and the other trappings of the American system of education. This questioning is framed in terms of a moral imperative that dares to include what happens in schools in the critical question of who ultimately benefits from what takes place in America’s schools. This moral emphasis, embedded in a critical theoretical context, interrogates the American system of education through one of several fundamental inquiries, namely who actually profits or whose social capital is enhanced through what occurs in America’s schools. This is a moral inquisition because it dares to assume that discrepancies and inequities abound among the thousands of schools and school districts in this country. It is moral because after asserting such a position, this sense of critique goes further, motivated by a spirit of possibility, to project that these undemocratic practices in places called schools can be altered. It is moral because this emphasis on matters of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation is bathed in what Paulo Freire (1998) calls the universal human ethic, that is, the ethic grounded in the liberation of all peoples from the bondage of systemic oppression and marginalization. As a result, moral educational leadership contextualizes the teaching and learning process in the societal realities where “otherness” and undemocratic practices are celebrated. Moral leadership is not complete in its ability to lodge critique but goes on to facilitate a creative environment where agendas for change and purer demonstrations of democratic principles are embedded in the curriculum and pedagogy of morally driven schools.

MORAL LEADERSHIP: A NECESSARY RESPONSE FOR THOSE TRAPPED IN THE MODERN/POSTMODERN CROSSFIRE

Educational leadership that is built on the tenets of scientific management is guilty of operating in an assumed frictionless environment that is fanciful at best. Wise students of educational leadership can place what happens in schools in a broader cultural context. They are also judicious if they realize that schools often serve as spaces for social reproduction. In fact, schools have historically been used either to solidify the status quo or to bring about societal change legislated by either federal or local governmental agencies, for
example, school desegregation. Schools have become the purveyors of the culture that those who wield political and economic power deem legitimate. School leaders have been assigned to monitor pedagogical methods and curricula that convey these messages, which are often bathed in racist, sexist, and ageist language.

The whole notion of moral leadership moves educational administration from the realm of minimum competencies and high-stakes testing, which are grounded in a modernist frame, to a position of influence where the broader society is concerned. In *The Moral and Spiritual Crisis in Education*, David Purpel (1989) persuasively argues that educators have long emphasized the minutia of schooling to the neglect of weightier matters. Essentially, the more substantive, ontological discussions regarding American education focus on many of the moral issues Purpel outlines. He maintains that our cultural crisis is a crisis in meaning and that the current crisis in education is not appropriately localized in pedagogical technique, funding issues, and organizational or structural concerns. Rather, Purpel suggests that like the cultural crisis, the educational crisis is one of meaning. Some may misunderstand or not be familiar with the concept of meaning; when we have meaning in our lives, it satisfies an essential introspective inquiry centering on why we exist and why we are doing what we are doing. Having meaning in our lives ties our behavior to a purpose. It inextricably aligns our profession to an avocation and provides the reason why we adopt certain professional stances and practices. Meaning causes us to understand that our positions as educational leaders are not simply placeholders or the mechanisms by which we perpetuate commerce and the prevailing economic system but an active ingredient in defining what is significant to us and to what we have a heartfelt commitment. Educational leaders who grasp this fundamentally moral or spiritual concept also understand that schools are not merely places that are committed to academic pursuits but are also spaces where human imagination and creativity can be used to re-create our world. Schools are terrains of struggle between the status quo, with all of its issues, and the fabrication of a different existence where undemocratic forms, structures, and rituals have been systemically denuded and have become the intentional focus of democratic projects of change. Purpel and others have voiced their displeasure over the fact that in the midst of a contemporary absence of meaning, with the culture crying out for more substantive ways to feel connected and to deal with the ills of poverty, drug addiction, legislative and judicial faux pas, child abuse, racism, gender disparities, and wars, schools are merely offering more measures of accountability and standardized tests as remedies to prevent any child being “left behind.” There is hardly ever a discussion of substance that critically examines how schools perpetuate these societal diseases and how school leaders are compensated for leading the effort to maintain the hegemony.

When schools, school districts, and even individual school leaders attempt to implement scientific management or some other empirically based management system, without being cognizant of their social implications, then the kinds of successes they are looking for become few and far between. In fact, it is actively immoral for school leaders to attempt to embrace any genre of administration without first grappling with the social, political, and cultural contexts in which their schools exist. Foster (1986, p. 94) poses questions that school leaders must answer if they are to morally lead their schools. He asks administrators to reflect on a series of questions that address the radical reconstruction of schools:

1. How are society and culture reproduced through schooling?

2. Why are the sons and daughters of the underclass apt to be fathers and mothers of underclass children, too?
3. How is a culture of sexism and violence perpetuated?
4. Why can’t schools break the cycle of class reproduction?

Parker and Shapiro (1993) argue that school leaders have to ground their work in theoretical frameworks that lend themselves to engaging questions such as those Foster raises. They maintain that the positivist framework that has traditionally informed the labor of school administrators is not open to such inquiries. In fact, the bureaucratic models of administration that celebrate logical positivism simply ignore the cultural realities experienced by their schools. What is needed is a more critical theoretical framework undergirding school leadership that dares to ask the moral questions about schools’ agendas. Parker and Shapiro contend that “clearly, school leaders need to reflect upon social class issues within a changing economy and how these issues impact on curriculum, instruction, school culture, and the surrounding community” (p. 54). They believe that the moral thing for school leaders to do is to identify the detailed demographics of their school, school district, and community as they relate to social class. This demographic profile should be used to assist the school’s administrators to ensure that there is an equitable representation on school committees, advisory teams, and other groups that inform what actually takes place in the schoolhouse. A leadership that engages these demographic issues can be described as purpose driven.

PURPOSE-DRIVEN MORAL LEADERSHIP

A school leader who is committed to purpose-driven moral leadership demythologizes the educational process and critiques, from a critical theoretical insight, the structures, forms, and rituals that have traditionally characterized life in schools. I (2003) argue:

The purpose of schools, especially for urban youth, is deconstructed by the purpose-driven leader who has the spiritual wherewithal to critically contextualize the conditions that define the lives of many of our youth from America’s urban core. These leaders become a prophet of sorts in that the purpose-driven leaders ground their work in an effort to “bring an urgent and compassionate critique to bear on the evils of their day” (West, 1999, p.171). (p.281)

Purposive leaders contend with the agenda of the hegemony while at the same time challenging those in the learning community “to rise above the nihilistic predispositions that are pervasive throughout the community” (Dantley, 2003, p.281).

Purposive leaders are fully cognizant of the cultural issues that prevail outside the school’s walls. They are also clearly aware of how class, race, gender, and other markers of difference play such a prominent role in what takes place in schools. These school leaders understand that in cooperation with other community agencies, the school is a site where the exigencies of societal change can be birthed. They see the work of schools as a moral imperative to serve as one of those critical voices addressing the meanings behind police and racial profiling, violence in the community, and the wholesale marketing and capitalist empire of drug trafficking, use, and abuse in many communities.

What this all means is that leaders who believe that their work should go beyond merely ensuring students’ acquisition of academic accolades must position the work of the school in the forefront of societal accountability and responsibility. They see the work of schools and their leadership through the gaze of a moral imperative. That is, purpose-driven school leaders not only use epistemologies as instruments that craft knowledge but also accept the reality of their dynamic nature in “remembering, proving, imagining, inferring, perceiving, and reflecting” (Rebore, 2001,
These leaders contextualize the work of the schoolhouse in an ever-changing, vibrant space. Furthermore, they understand a moral obligation to unravel and lay bare the often concretized notions of curriculum and pedagogy through a critical theoretical lens that keenly delineates the issues of power and culture and the asymmetrical power relationships that are often inherent in the teaching and learning process.

MORAL LEADERSHIP AND CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

It is thus clear that moral, purpose-driven leadership challenges educators to embrace much more than the rudiments of educational administration. Many preparatory programs of educational leadership do well in engaging prospective school leaders in the technocracy of administration but ignore what Ron Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) call the adaptive work, or challenges, that are also a part of school leadership. Heifetz and Linsky point out that leaders and organizations will find themselves in relatively safe and innocuous spaces if they simply contend with issues and problems for which they already know the answers. However, all leaders are bombarded with dilemmas for which they do not have a prepared technical solution. There is no adequate authoritative or procedural resolution to many of these issues. These are the challenges that Heifetz and Linsky call adaptive. These problems require that leaders and organizations such as school communities experiment with new ways of perceiving. They require examining and often relinquishing sedimented attitudes, values, and, ultimately, behaviors so that the essential changes needed to meet the demands may take place. Adaptive work dares to ask leaders to carefully examine values, attitudes, assumptions, and predispositions covering a whole host of issues. This process is a part of a leader’s development of what is called an idiographic morality (Dantley, 2003), which results from individuals’ personal journeys as they grapple with the meanings of what is just and right and how they personally see or evaluate themselves in actualizing those definitions.

It takes a keen introspective endeavor, essential for both current and prospective leaders, to unearth areas of dissonance that may exist between their demonstrated behavior and internal assumptions. That endeavor is critically reflective because it challenges leaders to engage themselves personally in issues of race, class, gender, ability, and markers of otherness. “Principled leadership is initiated when an individual questions the democratic efficacy of administrative decisions and procedures he or she is demanded to implement” (Dantley, 2003, pp. 187–188).

Contested terrains of thought for critical self-reflection could deal with issues such as the leader’s assumptions about power and authority, his or her predispositions toward the labor of teachers, and issues of patriarchy and positional privilege. Critical reflection would compel prospective as well as current educational leaders to wrestle with how schools and potentially their administration would perpetuate racial and class divides. How do schools implement the notions of accepted social and cultural capital and penalize those who operate outside these hegemonic distinctions? Critical self-reflection, an essential part of developing idiographic morality, forces school leaders to contend with themselves in a serious ontological and axiological debate. This process challenges leaders to see themselves within the whole social, political, and economic context within which schools are mired.

Critical self-reflection has the potential to be reduced to inane “navel gazing” unless it is partnered with a serious effort to develop strategies designed to resist the persistent policies, procedures, and personal as well as organizational behaviors that diligently maintain an undemocratic status quo in schools. Certainly, school leaders are bombarded by
immediate concerns that threaten to devour any time they may try to set aside for critical self-reflection; supervising lunchrooms, disciplining students, ordering books and supplies, and maintaining the budget are only a few of the areas clamoring for their attention. However, one of the main reasons that school transformation is so sporadic and often fleeting is that new technical devices are applied to deeply embedded adaptive issues while the underlying attitudinal and value challenges have never been addressed. For real change, moral change, to take place in our schools, leaders must seize the opportunity to situate themselves and what they have been asked to do outside the gated communities of hegemonic thinking when education is concerned. This whole notion of idiographic morality is generated as a result of leaders’ embracing their spiritual selves. This idiographic challenge places the individual leader’s personal sense of purpose and meaning within a system that often engages in immoral or undemocratic, marginalizing, and unethical behavior. Statistics on student achievement gaps and school dropout rates point to blatant discrepancies and unethical practices persistently tolerated in schools, practices that widen the academic achievement gap among students. Educational leadership preparatory programs would serve prospective school leaders well if they compelled them to undergo periods of critical self-reflection to equip them to deal forthrightly with those areas in their own attitudes and dispositions that may be problematic as they attempt to lead their schools in a democratic fashion. Rather than filling current school leaders’ heads with more technical knowledge, professional development opportunities might include times of reflection where leaders are compelled to deal with critical issues in a nontoxic environment. What is absolutely essential is a new way of perceiving the activities and responsibilities of school leadership in terms of purpose and learning.

DOUBLE-LOOP LEARNING AND PURPOSIVE LEADERSHIP

Although the open systems model, which is grounded in a modernist perspective, has some value and seems to offer some hope to schools touched by the exigencies of their communities, it is nonetheless laden with single-loop as opposed to double-loop thinking. Morgan (1997) defines single-loop learning as the ability to detect and correct errors in relation to a given set of operating norms. In open systems thinking about schools, those inputs that percolate through the permeable boundary of the school and are antagonistic to the hegemonic notions of school and its purpose are either dismissed or marginalized during the process of transaction. Such inputs are so divergent from the given set of operating norms that they must be corrected. Double-loop learning, however, depends on being able to take a second look at the situation by questioning the relevance of the operating norms. Morgan suggests that double-loop learning consists of sensing, scanning, and monitoring the environment, comparing this information against the traditional operating norms, questioning whether the operating norms are appropriate, and finally, initiating appropriate action. When comparing the two ways of dealing with contextual issues, Morgan argues:

Many organizations have become proficient at single-loop learning, developing an ability to scan the environment, set objectives, and monitor the general performance of the system in relation to these objectives. The basic skill is often institutionalized in the form of information systems designed to keep the organization “on course.” (p. 88)

In double-loop learning, the process of questioning whether the operating norms of an organization, and a school in particular, are appropriate allows for a moral interrogation to take place of schools and their administration. Such inquiries are grounded in ontological questions that penetrate to the heart of the
purpose as well as the function of schools. This reflective process opens the rather closed system of schools to a deeply spiritual interrogation whose aim is to lay bare the various ways schools and school leaders perpetuate the asymmetric power relationships and undemocratic practices inherent in the very fiber of our society. Double-loop learning can potentially help educators, and particularly educational leaders, open their systems to inquiry and change:

It also can assist educators in identifying deficiencies in the established norms of schools. In contrast to single-loop learning, double-loop processes embrace the need for an ongoing, reflective, and inclusive ethic of critique. Through double-loop learning, teachers and administrators use resistance or conflict arising within their schools as opportunities for inquiring into established norms and practices. For example, by critically examining the nonconforming and underperforming behaviors of students within our schools, as well as the context and circumstances in which those behaviors arise, educators can better determine the most appropriate and most ethically supportable institutional response. (Larson & Ovando, 2001, p. 183–184)

Double-loop learning is a reflective activity in which moral, purposive leaders (Dantley, 2003) engage.

BRINGING WHOLESNESS TO LEADERSHIP

So what does this all mean? Clearly, given the social environment in which schools are presently operating, using a theory of administration that is grounded on predictability, rationalism, and linear processing is useless. The “messiness” of the educational endeavor militates against using a model that assumes education takes place in an antiseptic and frictionless space. Today’s educators are faced with a plethora of social and political dilemmas. Ignoring them only deepens the divide between schools and the realities of the everyday lived experiences of the students they serve.

Current school leaders are called to facilitate spaces where cultural difference is not only celebrated but concomitantly deconstructed through a process of critical self-reflection and an ongoing discourse on issues of power and privilege. The moral context of school leadership moves beyond merely holding educational leaders responsible for doing things right. Rather, it compels them to do the right thing. This clearly means that school leadership cannot afford to be built on the tenets of positivism or, indeed, any other theoretical framework that assumes linearity, predictability, and fact/value neutrality as its guiding conceptual framework. For years, the glorification of objectivity has resulted in schools where the whole person has not been welcome. The false sense of empirical purity and unalloyed policies and procedures has lulled current as well as prospective leaders into the gossamer security of rationality and prescience, both of which are fleeting and whimsical at best.

Sergiovanni (1999) is helpful in this regard as he describes the work of school leaders as being both technical and moral. The technical side of school leadership focuses on the accumulation of knowledge, orderliness, efficiency, and productivity. For years, those who entered the field of educational leadership have been bombarded with an array of lists, technical aids that purport to make them successful in their work. The technical side of school administration certainly must be dealt with, but not at the expense of the moral dimension. Textbooks must be ordered, budgets must be kept, teachers and staff must be employed. All of these technical ventures must, however, be couched in a moral context. Indeed, Sergiovanni argues that the technical and moral dimensions of school leadership cannot be separated in practice. The moral image of leadership embraces developing attitudes and
dispositions within the learning community that undergird democratic practices, equity, and fairness in both the schoolhouse and society as a whole. Sergiovanni makes the point that every technical decision has moral implications and further delineates the essential differences in what he calls normative rationality and technical rationality. Although a critical theorist would problematize notions of empirical rationality, Sergiovanni’s division of these two facets of a leader’s work is nonetheless useful. Normative rationality involves behavior that is founded on what we believe and consider to be good. Technical rationality is concerned with behavior based on what is effective and efficient. Critical self-reflection, which is predisposed to examining the institution of education from a perspective of who has the power and how the maintenance of that power or status quo is operationalized, is one way to begin the work Sergiovanni outlines in normative rationality. He writes:

Normative rationality influences the practice of leadership in schools in two ways. Principals bring to their job biases and prejudices, ways of thinking, personality quirks, notions of what works and what doesn’t, and other factors that function as personal theories of practice governing what they are likely to do and not do, and school cultures are defined by a similar set of biases that represent the center of shared values and commitments that define the school as an institution. Both are sources of norms that function as standards and guidelines for what goes on in the school. (p. 28)

Moral leadership, then, accepts the arduous responsibility of sharing those predispositions and attitudes that form the basis of professional practice. These are examined through a critical theoretical lens that compels the person reflecting to consider the hegemonic ways schools and their leadership perpetuate undemocratic procedures and practices and marginalize those who are external to any accepted positionality, be it race, class, gender, or exceptionality.

The goal of moral leadership seems to be manifold. Unquestionably, academic achievement is one of the primary, overarching goals of educational leadership. A second goal, however, is the transformation of society so that democracy is operationalized. Clearly, this is not a task that the institution of education can accomplish by itself; it must partner with others in the community to see this goal come to pass. John Dewey (1859–1952) asserted that there cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for life within the school and the other for life outside the school. Dewey argued that conduct is singular, and therefore, the principles on which conduct is based are also singular. He urged educators and others to recognize the moral responsibility of the school to society, saying:

The school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work—to exercise a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society. The educational system which does not recognize that this fact entails upon it an ethical responsibility is derelict and a defaulter. (quoted in Hickman & Alexander, 1998, p. 246)

Moral leadership, therefore, is broader than traditional school management. It demands a deep investment of the genuine or authentic self of the educational leader. Moral leaders have the courage to locate their work in a broader as well as deeper space as they work to bring about societal transformation. Moral leadership is problematic because it interrogates what school systems and communities have essentialized. It is problematic because it dares to demystify those structures and rituals that have become almost reified after so many years of acceptance. Moral leadership does not critique for the sheer pleasure of raising issues with the prevailing insights and practices in school systems; it does so with a sense of
possibility that announces a more fair and democratic way to do school business. It offers alternatives to the marginalizing practices many schools use in selecting teachers, grouping students, and deciding which teachers they are assigned. Moral leadership is not timid about asking the hard questions of the purpose of schools and who are most ably served by them. It is a daunting task to be a moral school leader but one that must be embraced by more men and women in this 21st century.

REFERENCES


