Promoting Ethical Educational Leadership

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Public education leaders realize that all children deserve opportunities which lead to the full development of their potential; physically, emotionally, spiritually, as well as intellectually. Leaders sometimes assume that their own educational systems automatically create the best environment for their staff and students. They believe they are "ethical leaders." However, for administrators to be fully cognizant of ideal learning conditions for others, these administrators *must themselves be empowered to embark on a continued journey of personal growth throughout their tenure in public education.*

Webster's defines the word *ethical* as "conforming to accepted professional standards." The ethical leader will have to spend a considerable amount of time and energy exploring exactly what has encouraged their own belief systems. These leaders then need to identify their own optimum personal, spiritual and intellectual growth experiences, and learn how to encourage this growth within others. At that point, leaders can successfully work to shift the educational system so that the needs and capabilities of each individual child are identified and supported.

Children entering our educational systems today have greater capacities to understand relevancy, more intolerance toward stagnant settings, and increasing demands for authenticity. The "system" needs transformation to accommodate these learners. More and more young people today need different experiences to absorb school offerings. Many of their parents are active in advocating educational reform (L. Carroll, 1999). As Doreen Virtue describes in *The Indigo Children*, "Many gifted children are being destroyed in the public education system. Many gifted children are being incorrectly labeled with ADHD. And many parents are unaware that their child could be potentially gifted" (p. 23). The Indigo child, as described by Virtue, is a child who functions at a higher level of intelligence, senses when adults are not authentic, and tells us when what we are trying to teach them is no longer relevant. Some teachers resent the audacity of such students. These teachers are intimidated, and try to use authoritarian discipline to force these students into the teacher's idea of compliance. Indigo students will not succumb to such power plays, and resist these controlling measures. They often let the teacher know that their classroom management methods are no longer effective. Many teachers do not know how to handle the complaints voiced by these students, and interpret them as a lack of respect. They do not know how to direct the energy of these students into more positive, problem solving channels. What the teacher sees as a lack of respect is actually a refusal on the part of the student to be treated as a "less than" human being, just because they are "the student" and the teacher is "the teacher." Indigo children, and all children, need acknowledgement from the teacher that they are valuable and have things to offer. Children respond to a teacher who is fair, honest and genuine in expressing emotions, thoughts and expectations. All children thrive when both parties are free to admit mistakes, ask for help and strive to establish a relationship of trust where

student and teacher can work together through creation of learning projects which build skills, find answers, and solve problems. For many teachers, this scenario appears unrealistic. It evokes many feelings of vulnerability because, unfortunately, many teachers have not been given the opportunities to actually know themselves, their capabilities and their potential. They have simply been "trained" to do and be certain things in relationship to learners in the classroom. Hence, by not being genuine, they exemplify the very things that the Indigo children, in particular, most resent.

For schools to accommodate the Indigo children and serve all children most effectively, they need to have teachers who are holistically healthy and self-actualized. These teachers must serve as leaders who cultivate personal insight, demonstrate flexibility and promote creativity. These staff members can *respect* and *respond* to the child that questions, challenges, and is able to access more knowledge than has been able to be provided by some of the older, veteran instructors over a longer period of time. These teachers have physical stamina and emotional balance. These teachers "balance pragmatism with idealism" (M. Dickman, 2002). They have integrity, trust, honesty, and feel called to a higher purpose. Students recognize those teachers who exhibit these characteristics and respond to them. They also recognize when teachers are not connecting with them and only trying to pacify them. These situations are unnerving for the teacher and intolerable for a growing number of students.

Teaching is not easy. Providing learning opportunities for youth today takes a great deal of energy and a personal presence that precludes carrying any baggage to the job. Students today deserve whatever time and attention is necessary to help them develop their fullest potential. Teachers today also deserve the time and attention it takes to help them develop their fullest potential. All who touch the lives of children deserve this same time and attention. Educators in colleges spend a great deal of time and attention on intellectual and skill development. Once staff members secure their positions, staff development programs are available for license renewal and required units are mandated for continued employment. Courses staff select may or may not be relevant to students' needs today. Workshops may or may not apply to current best practices teaching strategies. It is critical that each teacher has the opportunity to participate in development that addresses mind, body, and spirit. These areas are not currently addressed in many staff development programs.

However, it may be the format that is part of the problem in limiting teacher development. Elliot Eisner in the April 2002 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan* stresses that most assuredly "the process is not finished when teachers complete their teacher education program at age 21. Learning to teach is a lifetime endeavor. The growth of understanding and skill in teaching terminates only when we do" (p.577). Eisner suggests that instead of "inservice" as a

workshop every so often, the "kind of schools we need would provide time during the school day at least once a week for teachers to meet to discuss and share their works, their hopes, and their problems with their colleagues. State initiatives like Alternative Teacher Pay for Performance now encourages such inter-action. It is the daily environment of the school, not the university, that is the real center of teacher education"(p. 577, Eisner). So, perhaps the school itself is a key place for continued staff development as it is the site where staff members spend most of their time. Then for the additional reinforcement or the other areas of self-development, staff could go on Outward Bound excursions, life changing volcano drops in New Zealand, or sweats in a sacred ritual on an island in Canada. Staff could visit other schools in other places to observe and return to share. Ideally, staff could visit industry and service sites to see how their curriculum could be made more relevant to concerns of business and industry and the future workforce.

Present teacher preparation programs spend a great deal of time addressing the future educator's mind. Theory matches a certain amount of practice as content is studied for reiteration to future classes of open minds ready to be filled with information. Progressive programs use theories that exercise more of the multiple intelligences than simply mathematical and verbal (UMD's Professor Terrie Shannon, interview, 2002). However, intellectually, we may agree that future educational leaders are, indeed, prepared to a certain extent. How does this match to the method by which the teachers help provide the most optimum learning environments for our students? What is the point of knowing the different intelligences if we pointedly keep asking questions only concerning the verbal and numerical? How can an ethical educational leader be aware that there are multiple forms of providing instruction and yet continue to limit the opportunities to those most easily corrected or quantified?

Physically most of our students have been made aware from young ages that certain nutrition, exercise, rest, and recreation are needed to stay healthy. Some of our educational leaders have been athletes and remain in training as they progress through the teaching and coaching ranks. However, many may need renewal in one area or another to maintain maximum health. How do we model for our students that which we expect from them?

Emotionally, our educators are expected to remain balanced, fair, and loving. When individuals have respect for themselves and can create safe places for others to develop self-respect and respect for others, they are exhibiting an emotional balance that allows for sharing and learning to occur (K. Lindahl, 2002). In her book, *Brain Based Learning*, Leslie Hart emphasizes the importance of students feeling "safe" in order to learn at optimal levels. If they don't, she says, they retreat into their "reptilian brains" which are concerned primarily

with fight or flight. How often have we seen children react this way in a classroom that does not provide a safe, nurturing environment, free of teasing and harassment? Too often we have simply hoped that the people attracted to education have been emotionally balanced. This has not necessarily been the case**.** How do we help staff address emotional needs and support them as they deal with stress as great as that facing many people in military positions? Psycho-therapy may still be an answer, but additional ways of addressing emotional stability have developed. Life coaches can provide direct telephone contact with trained personnel to ask the tough questions that help a person make decisions otherwise hard to determine. Mental health issues have had greater study and alternative forms of healing have been proven to be successful complimentary treatments to medical models. Acupressure, acupuncture, chiropractics, massage, cranial/sacral treatments, and kinetic connections are a few complimentary procedures that also treat physical symptoms, in addition to emotional issues. Herbs, nutrients, and a variety of dietary supplements also come with testimonials that are fairly persuasive, in spite of the lack of scientific confirmation. Recovery programs for various addictions have proven extremely valuable as guidelines for productive living.

Spiritual development is rarely addressed at all on public campuses and sometimes only peripherally addressed at parochial campuses. Yet, the spiritual development of our educators may be the missing link to maintaining the energy, balance, and ethical stamina necessary to help teachers bring out the best in each student. Many authors are now extolling the virtues of love, compassion, ethics, and spirit in the work place as a solution to long-standing problems within that realm. "Lee Bolman and Terry Deal (1993**)** promote the benefits of ethical decision making by managers and the importance of caring for the corporate family with more soul, compassion, and understanding. Tom Sergiovanni (1992) stresses both professionalism and virtue in building school communities through moral leadership, which emphasizes service to others and making schools places of respect and devotion to doing the right things the right way. "Character Education" is currently making a splash in the United States, with efforts underway to integrate its elements into many American schools. Stephen Covey (1990) reminds us of the 'inviolate principles.' He believes, 'To the degree people recognize and live in harmony with such principles as fairness, equity, justice, integrity, honesty, and trust, they move toward either survival and stability on one hand or disintegration and destruction on the other' (p. 18). In *Leadership and Futuring: Making Visions Happen* (1995), (Hoyle) emphasizes that a vision for the future must be grounded in selflessness and a personal covenant to helping others succeed" (J. Hoyle, 2002).

Spiritual development is for the most part ignored in teacher preparation courses. Yet, more and more of our students are reflecting unusual gifts and talents that are often rebuffed or denied by those in charge (L. Carroll, 1999). Students are able to gain from character

education, restorative justice, and reality therapy. But additional efforts to assist students in developing spiritually as well as intellectually, physically, and emotionally are needed. The ethical leader can no longer ignore this vital area of development.

The ethical leader is also forced to look at the entire system in which education occurs. Individualized instruction will shift the educational delivery system incredibly. Educational funding resources must evolve dramatically. Diminished resources in the past resulted in cut backs in services, staff or programs that needed to be replaced. Just as antiquated mindsets and long-standing practices have perpetuated the status quo, these same mindsets must be challenged and changed to support our new corps of learners. The ethical leader needs to *change the energy* of the situation. This needs to be more than a paradigm shift. A dramatic change of consciousness must occur.

Joseph Jaworski (1998) addresses the shift in consciousness needed for seeing systems beyond **their** composite parts. He advises "seeing things whole, stepping back and seeing the big picture" (pp. 116-117). He warns us not to fall into the traps of dependency, responsibility, and overactivity. The trap of dependency springs from feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. We feel we need to depend on others' opinions, expertise, or approval rather than our own, even when we may be quite complete in and of ourselves. The trap of responsibility makes us worry rather than have concern about projects and people who work with us. The trap of overactivity can bog us down in details. "The key to overcoming the trap of overactivity is in doing the inner, reflective work, individually and collectively necessary to regain our balance. In the heat of the creative process, we end up having so much to do that we lose the necessary orientation to stay in the flow. Unless we have the individual and collective discipline to continually stay anchored, we will eventually lose the flow." (J. Jaworski,1998).

Jaworski stresses the importance of the discipline of "dialogue" vs. that of "discussion." He explains that the act of discussing means to *pull apart themes and ideas*. He prefers that in solving problems, *dialogue*, or talking together for mutual understanding, should be our goal. Taking time to come together on a regular basis in true dialogue gives everyone a chance to maintain a reflective space at the heart of the activity--a space where all people can continue to be re-nurtured *together* by whatever wants to happen, to unfold. How many of us engage in dialogue and how many of us engage in discussion or lecture? Language does not describe reality. It creates reality and thus we need to engage in *dialogues* that bring diverse opinions and views together to create the best future. "Language and our nervous system combine to constantly construct our environment...unless we understand this, we cannot begin to

understand how we interact with the world and how 'predictable miracles' occur" (J. Jaworski, 1998).

The ethical leader needs to be able to divest self from systems' operations to the extent that his or her ego does not get in the way of optimal decision-making and problem solving. Assuring the development of ethical leaders entails a great deal of personal development, along with professional development. A total evolution in our thinking and habits must come about before economic improvements, global responsibility for environmental protection, and improved states of health care will ever occur. How we go about encouraging personal and professional development of this type of leader may be very different from prior "staff development" efforts. Indeed, perhaps they must. College preparatory programs must change to reflect the importance of personal growth**,** spirituality, and examination of traditional beliefs. Physical challenges, travel, body/energy work, nutrition, psychic development, research with Indigo children, and meditation provide glimpses into realms which will most probably be the vehicle for change in our development of future ethical leaders.

When people who are able to see a future full of possibilities gather and become part of creative synchronicity that allows the best of all possible worlds to unfold, we are witnessing a predictable miracle. Forums around the Richard Green Scholar, Round Tables, or Leadership Seminars present the opportunities for such miracles, gathering like-minded individuals for a higher purpose to dialogue on ideas that will create the language of change for the new reality of public education.

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