Social justice for ALL students

A call for reflection and action
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A message from the editor

“. . . subtlety plays a quiet game. It was a lack of eye contact from some teachers, an oddly overwhelming amount of awe when my performance exceeded that of my classmates, and a lowered expectation of what success meant for me.” These are the words of our student author, Shane Campbell, whose article initiates this issue of *Curriculum in Context: Social Justice for ALL students—A call for reflection and action.* Social justice within the educational enterprise is about our students – every one of them. Injustice is often subtle, almost always pervasive, and even blatant. It sustains itself within the system of white privilege and the dominant class, and lives within our unexamined assumptions, deeply held biases, ignorance and fear, prevailing practices, and the overwhelming silence that surrounds it. Despite the NCLB slogan, there are millions of children being left behind by our educational system, and almost all of them are students of color, students who are poor, and students without voice or advocacy in our educational system. This issue, so capably launched and framed through a student’s eloquent voice, is a call for deep reflection as educators and community members, and a call to action.

As Alan Johnson (2001) described, we’re in trouble about differences because of an unexamined system of white privilege that we inherited. In the absence of understanding that being white, male, and heterosexual accrues unearned privilege, we all act out our parts in a pervasive set of social rules and interactions that unevenly distribute power. The educational system is a part of the overall social system, and it too distributes opportunity and access unevenly. Some students are given full access and opportunity through a combination of earned and unearned privilege, while other students are denied access and live without hope within a system that expects very little of them. It is all part of the “quiet game” of winners and losers in what should be an educational system that measures the progress of all of its students toward challenging academic standards while providing full access and support for educational opportunities to each and every child.

So what can be done to insure socially just schools? It will take extensive inner work and self-reflection. Mike Dunn, WSASCD president and superintendent of the Cheney School District, served as assistant editor for this issue. He describes his own reflective journey as an educator and as a doctoral student. Introspective work demands much of us, inclusive of readings, engaging in reflective practices, deep study and dialogue with colleagues, and a willingness to challenge personal beliefs and the status quo. Other authors in this issue echo their reflections in this process – Dennis Conners from the university perspective, Sara Ferris as our teacher’s voice, and Kathy Clayton as executive director for WSASCD. Each provides evidence of what Kathleen Brown (2004) describes as transformative learning that changes the way one sees him or herself and the world.

Carolyn Shields (2004) calls for formative leadership: leaders who attend to social justice as well as academic achievement. She elucidates the pathologies of silence that denote differences as deficits. She calls on each of us to break the silence, because our silence ignores and devalues differences and provides tacit approval of injustice. We must speak when there is injustice, and Josh Garcia, principal at Todd Beamer High School, names the unfulfilled dreams in our schools, and provides a vision to make equal access a reality. Other authors have studied policy and practice in pursuit of actions that can change the future for our students. Paul Pitre describes the state’s P-16 education policy and offers suggestions to create access to college for all. Two graduate students offer models that promote social justice in the classroom: Sue Feldman utilizes classroom narratives and four questions to test for justice in classroom routines; John Doty and other graduate fellows examined project-based learning in the mathematics classroom. Mike Poulatine suggests a relationship between isolation in schools and impediments to social justice. Shirley McCune provides an historical framework for the contextual changes that impact education today and an outline of next steps toward achieving equity. Each reinforces that “when educators begin to overcome deficit thinking, take responsibility for student outcomes, relate to students in positive and encouraging ways, and introduce more interactive pedagogical strategies, student achievement soars remarkably quickly” (Shields, 2004, p. 122).

Collectively, the articles provide thoughtful insight into the complex and compelling work of developing socially just schools. This is the work that educational leaders must do. It demands that we read, reflect, engage in discourse with others, and examine what is in our hearts and minds. And, it demands that we break our silence, and that we speak out and take action against injustice. It is the WSASCD board’s hope that this issue will contribute to the readings and discussions that are occurring about social justice, and that it will initiate the conversation in school communities where there is silence. If we really intend to educate ALL children, then each and every one of them deserves to enter schools and classrooms where differences are normal, and opportunity and access are automatically conferred. Along with many others, I share Josh Garcia’s dream of access and opportunity, and invite you to join in achieving social justice for ALL students. (References cited in Dunn article.)
A student’s voice

By Shane Campbell

For all of my life as a student, my parents have stressed the importance of education. My dad’s military career moved us from base to base and I began my education in an elementary school on a military base. My first years as a student were the fondest. In the elementary school I engaged in the purest sense of learning. My teacher’s intent to help every child learn a specific concept, catered to the different methods that individual students required. However a change occurred after elementary when I moved on to middle school and high school. One teacher became six and several hundred students were now numbered in the thousands. In this transition, my schooling had somehow become lifeless and I didn’t enjoy school like before. My personality and contributions seemed secondary to my ability to memorize and regurgitate information. Students that couldn’t memorize well or whose strengths leaned heavily towards analyzing and creating were seen as limited. There was not an equal opportunity for each student to engage in his or her own definitive learning experience. How did this happen and how can it be fixed?

As an African-American male I have broken every stereotype that confronts men like me when they enter a classroom. Period after period when I stepped into my class, other than me, there were usually only one or two minority students. In these classes there was no name calling, no glares, no physical separation between me and other students. In fact, I often got along just fine with most of my fellow students. But subtlety plays a quiet game. It was a lack of eye contact from some teachers, an oddly overwhelming amount of awe when my performance exceeded that of my classmates, and a lowered expectation of what success meant for me. My teachers often looked at my other classmates with an aura of interest and expectance of excellence. Their perception was clear. I was not worthy of their time. I was not likely to be an investment of energy from which they would ever reap the benefits. Too often they had seen others like me achieve little or nothing. It appeared that in the minds of most of my teachers, by aiming their hope and passion at me they were wasting their time. These teachers instead created a classroom operated on their own tangible definition of “reality”. They operated from an idea that things will never change so why fight them or believe that they can change? “Reality” to these teachers was sifting the group and focusing on the students whose sole appearance implied success, potential and intelligence.

After four years of high school I have experienced many different teachers. Of those, a select few permeate my learning experience today. Despite being uninspired by the majority of my teachers, I find these memorable teachers to all possess a similarity: uninhibited passion. These teachers loved their job in the most unconditional sense. Not taking into account the possibility of students failing in the future, these excited educators regarded every day, every student, every moment with the chance to pass on their enthusiasm and knowledge. These teachers did not link our race or income to our potential. Knowing a student was more than a glance or a name. Their classroom's reflected the way in which they attacked teaching…every student was engaged and finding relevance in the teachings in relation to their own experiences.

When I look back, these teachers had a passion and a fire they never lost sight of. By offering each student the same unabated excitement, all students were offered an equal chance to use what they had been taught. Everyone wants to reform education by different methods. But discussions and pep talks can’t accomplish equal opportunity for all children, especially students like me. Teachers must be the change they wish to see in education. Relentless passion and effort to change a classroom will provide each student with the opportunity to live out his or her potential. To accomplish social justice, every student must have a chance to feel the fire that is enthusiasm and hope. Only then, will all students feel confident as learners.

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The call to transformative leadership

I am at an interesting time in life and career. Far removed from the brashness of my 20s, I am still surprised when I stumble across an AARP card in my wallet and often wonder how the years could have passed so quickly. Importantly, as a long-time educator, I ponder more now than before whether I have addressed successfully or forcefully enough some significant questions and challenges that are continually present for those who serve young people.

I began a career in public education as a teacher in a small high school in an agricultural community in eastern Washington 29 years ago. With a freshly minted undergraduate degree, I was anxious to work with kids and believed I was ready and able to reach them all. If enthusiasm and confidence (deserved or not) count for anything, I was. What I recognize so much more clearly now, however, is that not only did I have an immense amount to learn about what genuine quality learning and teaching entails, but also that I had led a life in which I had not very closely examined significant differences that are realities for the diversity of young people who enter our classrooms, let alone sought to deeply understand or celebrate them.

Shields (2004) cites extensive documentation that the large majority of educators in developed countries come from the middle class and thus may find it difficult to communicate with, or develop meaningful relationships with students from working class families, children whose families receive social assistance, or those who live in other impoverished situations. She asserts the insidious part of this is that without even being aware of it, educators often make decisions about students’ ability, programs, and career paths based on class.

I am one of those educators whose background is decidedly middle class.

Both of my parents earned undergraduate and graduate college degrees, and both pursued careers in the social sector. The educational system treated them well, as it did me. In fact, it was designed for kids like me around the norms, values, and experiences of the middle class upbringing my parents worked hard to provide. Though we were by no means well-to-do, neither were we poor. Looking back on childhood and adolescence, I am sure I simply assumed that my experience was similar to that of most kids my age. Retrospection makes clear that was not true for many of my peers. Still, I simply did not give that reality much if any consideration, and when some of them faced greater struggles in school than I did, I am fairly sure my assumption was that they likely did not work hard enough, even as I assumed that teachers had the same expectations of them as they did of me.

Four years spent earning a degree at a state university did not change my perspective much. Though students came to the campus from many different places, and there was clearly more ethnic diversity in the student population than had been true in the several schools I had attended in eastern Washington communities, each student there either had or found the means to go to college. Thus, when in my early 20’s I first entered the classroom as a teacher, I carried with me a limited and not completely realistic view of all the students who filled the desks. As Delpit (2006) asserts, we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears but through our beliefs – and at the time mine were neither accurate nor genuinely informed.

As a brand new teacher I thought all meant all. Almost three decades of professional experiences as a teacher, principal, and central office administrator have helped me to figure out that all must really mean each. My journey toward understanding this fundamental concept has not solely been formed by experiences as a practitioner, but also by learning from and with faculty and fellow graduate students at Washington State University. I am perhaps a reflection of the true lifelong nature of learning, and the pursuit of earning a second graduate degree well into my career has included the benefit of being challenged to think about and to act upon important social justice issues.

Brown (2004) posits that if current and future educational leaders are to foster successful, equitable, and socially responsible learning and accountability practices for all students, substantive changes in educational leadership preparation and professional development programs are required. The graduate faculty in the Educational Leadership program at WSU has taken seriously her admonition, and they challenge students to deeply consider issues of...
social justice. My own thinking and my continued learning about issues of social justice as they affect each student has been altered through this engagement.

In two different yet often interwoven parts of my world, as educator/practitioner and as ongoing learner engaged in scholarship, I come face to face with the significant question of whether we as educators treat differences in the children we serve as deficits, a process that locates the responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of children, rather than situating responsibility in the educational system itself (Shields, 2004). Did I as a teacher and school principal, and do I in my current role of school district superintendent, implicitly assign blame for school failure to children and their families, thus causing some students to come to believe they are incapable of high level academic performance? Seeking honest answers to such significant questions requires critical reflection, as well as the ability and willingness to continue my learning. Mezirow (1998) described that adult learning occurs in four ways – elaborating existing frames of reference, learning frames of reference, transforming points of view, and transforming habits of mind. To be sure, my frame of reference has evolved and changed via the experiences I have had as a practitioner, and transformation in my perspectives and thinking have been stretched – necessarily so – through exposure to scholarly writings and thought.

Fundamentally, all of us as educators must think about privilege and its impact. As a white, middle-class male I, do I, benefit from a sense of privilege and power that accompanies such a station in life? Alternately, if such privilege has provided me some advantage and power, how has it disadvantaged others and how does it disadvantage me in effectively understanding and serving each student I serve? Johnson (2001) asserts that privilege and power and difference will continue to be troublesome until those who benefit from privilege and power acknowledge that it is problematic that not all peoples share privilege and power equally. He argues that if we take difference and diversity as reasons for fear and occasions for trouble, it is because we have learned to think about them in ways that make for fear and trouble. In a similar vein, Delpit (2006) highlights that important linguistic differences exist among the diverse populations of our national fabric, and says that when we approach all kids from only one predominant perspective, we not only do not well serve but can actually harm the learning of significant numbers of young people. A personal translation causes me to ascertain my own complicity in ineffectively or under serving differences. Has my failure to see, understand, appreciate and celebrate differences continued to cause learning inequities and ever-growing gaps in achievement that cannot be remedied with any number of reform efforts, when such efforts are still based solely around the linguistics of white or middle class peoples?

The school district for which I work is not unlike school districts across the state of Washington and the United States in whole; we are impacted by and are now organized around a standards-based reform movement that has dominated the educational landscape for the past fifteen years. Like fellow districts and educators, we sincerely want to help each child achieve academic success. Part of our lexicon has become the identification of students by levels associated with their progress to standard. Such identification has been based upon our commitment to understand where each student’s level of achievement is, and to follow this with strategies and programs designed to help kids achieve at and above standard. This practice is hardly designed to be harmful, yet reading the work of Kozol (2005) creates concern around what he criticizes as implementation of adaptive teaching and learning strategies in order to affect incremental achievement gains, instead of engaging in effective efforts to address the core of the achievement gap and access to early learning. He asserts that a predominant educational approach has been implemented in which learning is more a business than meaningful and fun, and argues that schools need to be places of discovery and joyful learning, and not places that reduce students to a test score.

Delpit (2006) questions the process-oriented approach to the teaching of literacy that has become embedded in educational reform efforts. She notes that such an approach ignores or at least fails to account for or respect the background that many students of color bring with them through the schoolhouse doors, and their need to be provided a more concerted focus on product. Further, she illuminates that in all organizations there are rules of power that operate to the inclusion of some people and the exclusion of others, and advocates that it is those who have little or no power who are most in need of having the rules made explicit. As a practitioner I have always intended that all students have the opportunity to fully and actively participate in their own learning, yet engaging the scholarly perspectives and criticisms causes me to re-think how well our “system” really facilitates such a reality. Have I been able to see with open eyes, or hear with open ears – regardless of how open I might like to think my heart has been – the lived experiences of each child in our care? And, do I genuinely understand how each perceives and is impacted by those experiences? Educators who remain silent about important issues, fail to understand how to deliberately intervene in the educational processes toward the value ends of socially just learning communities (Shields, 2004).

Brown (2004) encourages a number of transformative pedagogical strategies helpful to educational leaders in opening and deepening our awareness of the lived realities of each child we serve. Through my graduate studies,
I have had direct experience with several of them. I have explored and written a personal cultural autobiography, recorded a life history of a person older than 65 years of age whose education was provided in the United States; and have engaged in cross-cultural interviews with individuals who differ from me with regard to ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation. Each of these intentional endeavors, which I may not have otherwise pursued, enlightened perspectives and understandings I had not fully considered and have been the impetus for both retrospective questions about previous experiences in my professional leadership as well as important questions about my current practices and beliefs.

While on some level I want to think I have always recognized that the relationships that we develop with children are central to their positive school experiences and ultimate academic success, I better understand now that genuine relationships must be developed and fostered with each child – not just with all our children in general – and that real relationships can only be forged and sustained around a deep desire to truly understand one another’s lived realities and experiences. Both Noddings (1986) and Wheatley (1992) have underscored the centrality of caring and relationships as a requisite foundation for any curricula or instructional strategy, and highlight that as individuals from any background or life station we cannot understand facts and information in isolation, but only in relation to ourselves as we bring our own experiences and perspectives filter our impressions and understanding. Shield (2004) clarifies that affecting an outcome of deep understanding of differences among human beings begins and must continue with making contact with and establishing relational dialogue between and among ourselves and others. Through asking questions and honestly seeking to understand, as educators we open ourselves to differing realities and world views. Personally, my greatest learning over the journey of my career and education has been that asking questions with an open heart and mind, and open ears and eyes, is central to the development of real understandings about myself, and of each child we serve.

With an acknowledgment that I continue to learn the critical differences between all and each, and that my own experiences and perspectives filter how I do or do not understand others and myself, a commitment to facilitating quality learning and school success takes on deeper meaning and greater imperative. While it is possible to talk about achievement gaps without delving into contributing factors, it is impossible to address them without exploring issues of social justice for each child and adult in the educational enterprise. As educators, I think this means we must not only reflect on and continually learn from our experiences as practitioners, but additionally that we continue to learn from others. We must be exposed and open to learning from those who observe and research the beautiful rainbow of children who attend our schools and study the curricular, instructional, and assessment practices we implement, and their effects on each child.

My own reflective learning has taught me that especially with important issues I don’t deeply or inherently understand, intentionality around furthering such learning is necessary and mandatory. Kendall (2006) asserts that those of us who are white and, by definition, have white privilege, must engage in sustained self-examination about how our race reflects our lives. Accepting her premise that we don’t fully understand our individual and collective roles in maintaining a system of white superiority, our relationships with people of color remain superficial, our ability to function in diverse workplaces is greatly diminished, and we fail to create a world in which everyone has an equitable opportunity to contribute and thrive. In our particular school district we are on a journey to learn more about differences and privilege, so that we might better utilize whatever of the latter we may possess to more effectively understand and serve the former. Along with educational colleagues across the state and nation, we share an imperative to move beyond teaching so that all may learn, and fundamentally toward an assurance that each child can and will learn via approaches that account for, celebrate, and serve the cherished differences that make them uniquely who they are.

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References


Equal access: The unfulfilled dream

Are we still trying to live up to Martin Luther King’s Dream? As I reflect on the changes we make in education, I am reminded of a scene from Disney’s “Snow White: “Mirror, mirror on the wall...” When we look into the mirror of history, can we say that our schools are accessible to all? How far have we really come from the days of Brown versus the Board of Education? Each year school leaders welcome new staff and share new and improved programs to help students achieve at higher levels. Often we explain how we will help students learn how to be successful. Although these conversations are important, we must not forget to have courageous conversations about the unspoken practices that still promote segregation in our schools.

School leaders need to be willing to discuss how all students will have access to the curriculum. On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared its decision that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” According to the Brown Foundation, “the decision effectively denied the legal basis for segregation in Kansas and 20 other states with segregated classrooms and would forever change race relations in the United States” (Brown Foundation, 2007). This historic verdict came as a great flare of aspiration to millions of minority students, who had been continually denied access to the “American Dream”. It came as an opportunity to right the wrongs of years of suffering, oppression and injustice for our students of color. However, fifty years later, are we still closing the doors of opportunity to our students? Fifty years later, how many of our students are still denied access to a better life?

Fifty years later, many of our children sit at the doorstep of public education. As they grip the handle of opportunity, they look back at what has become a vast ocean of poverty. According to the United States Census Bureau, 17.4% percent of our population under the age of 18 years old lived in poverty in 2006, 14.1% of white children, 33.4% of black children, and 26.9% of Hispanic children (US Census Bureau, 2007). Fifty years later, the child of color is now suffering at the doorstep of American society and finds himself unable to open the door to his own home. So today, we are looking in the mirror at what continues to be a shameful reflection.

A missed opportunity

In many ways, public education has failed to open the door of opportunity for our students. When the Supreme Court reached its verdict in 1954, they were making a new proclamation by which every student would be granted access to the golden ticket of a high quality education. This proclamation was that all students, regardless of the color of their skin, would be guaranteed the opportunity to pursue a high quality education. Yet according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in 2000, only 7% of Hispanic and 11% of blacks in comparison to 71% of whites enrolled in four-year universities (NCES, 2007a).

It is obvious today that many of our schools have shut the door on this opportunity insofar as our students of color are concerned. Instead of keeping the promise of desegregation, schools have posted a new sign on their doors, a sign that has been marked “insufficient pre-requisites or teacher recommendation needed or service boundary school”. The NCES reported that, “In 1998, about one-quarter of Hispanic, black, and American Indian/Alaska Native students (26, 30 and 27 percent, respectively) completed advanced mathematics courses, whereas about one-half of white and Asian/Pacific Islander students (45 and 56 percent, respectively) did so” (NCES, 2007b). Now more than ever we must lead our nation by changing the way children see access to their future. Robert Moses writes, “Today, I want to argue, the most urgent social issue affecting poor people and people of color is economic access. In today’s world, economic access and full citizenship depend crucially on math and science literacy” (Moses, 2001, p.5).

A call to action

Now is the time to make real the promises of access. It is time to open the door from the cold pressures of un-funded mandates to the warmth of prosperity for ALL students, for the Whole Child. By examining success stories from across the nation, we can begin to lift the blindfolds from the curtains of racial injustice to the sun-drenched affection of rigorous classrooms for all. Finally, it is time to make access to our great higher education learning institutions a reality for all of our students. The NCES reported that in 1999-2000, 75% of the bachelors degrees were granted to white students, which was considerably less for black (8.7%) and Hispanic (6.1%) peers (NCES, 2007c).

It would be fatal for the public educators of our nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. The bitter cold that the children of color face at the doorsteps of our classrooms will not pass until there is a revitalizing commitment to access. May 17, 1954 was not an end but a beginning. Those who hoped that the decision in Brown versus Board of education would solve segregation in our schools and have been content will have a rude awakening if the nation continues its business as usual.
Annette Fuentes, Columbia University Professor argues that “In a post-civil rights era, many people believe that segregated schools are no longer a concern and that conscious efforts to create integrated classrooms are misguided. Sad to say, but segregation is alive and becoming more pronounced in public schools in many cities than it was after decades of integration” (Fuentes, 2007).

There can be neither ease nor serenity in our schools until all students are granted access to high quality education. School leaders can no longer be shackled by an inability to do what is right and just. We should not let others attempt to quench our thirst for access by drinking from the crystal glass of acceptance and history. As educators, we must not allow our ethical calling to sink into acceptance that good, not great, is good enough. Again and again we must rise to a higher moral plane, where we continue to ask ourselves, does all truly mean ALL?

No longer us vs. them

The forces which have overcome our political community must not lead us to a distrust of all politicians, for many of our political partners have come to realize that their destiny is integrally tied to our students’ destiny. Leaders in our communities have come to realize that their freedom and prosperity is inextricably bound to our students’ ability to compete in a global workplace. We cannot walk alone, and as we walk, we must swear an oath that we shall always do what is best for the whole child, for each child. We must be willing to engage the whole community in courageous conversations, answering a series of tough questions:

• Can we ever be satisfied as long as any of our students are the victims of denied access?
• Should we be satisfied as long as our voices, weakened without advocacy, cannot gain a seat at the table of decision-making?
• How can we be satisfied as long as disadvantaged students experience barriers to opportunity, and doors that are forever closed to them?
• Should we ever be satisfied as long as we mask our data with games of inclusion and exclusion?
• How can we be satisfied until access is so open that we will see the ocean through its vast doorway?

Educators should be mindful that many of us are surrounded by trials and tribulations. Some of us have come fresh from the narrow jail cells of Annual Yearly Progress. Some of us have come from areas where our quest for access left us battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of No Child Left Behind brutality.

We have no time to drown in this sea of despair. Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, we must carry Martin Luther King’s Dream forward. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

My dream

I have a dream that one day our schools will rise up and lead our great nation. Lead you ask, yes lead! For if it is not us, then who shall lead? Although we as educators know that not all children come to school equally prepared, we know it is our job to create equitable opportunities for all our children. This is the true intent of our great nation, and access to the dream, the American Dream. I have a dream that my two little boys will one day attend schools where they will not be judged by the AYP cell to which they are assigned, but by the content of their character and their ability to create their own new knowledge.

I still share the “Dream” today! I share the “Dream” that one day educators will open the doors of gifted and talented, honors and other college preparatory curriculum; one day in each of our towns, all students will be able to engage in the richness of Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and Cambridge; one day in every school house, students will have one adult that believes that they deserve to and can achieve at the highest levels. I still share the “Dream” today! I share the “Dream” that one day every hidden curriculum will be revealed, every lesson will be scaffolded, teachers will work collaboratively to provide portals to language, instructional strategies will the topic of conversation around the staff room table and the glory of new knowledge shall be revealed and all students will create it for themselves.

This is our chance. This is the conviction that we all must bring to our schools. With this conviction we will be able open the locked doors of promise for all students and be able to transform the clattering dissension of our profession into a picturesque web of support for our students. Then we will be able to collaborate together, to learn together, to struggle together, to walk the steps of the capital together, to stand up for access together, knowing that we will ALL be free one day.
Imagine if each of our schools:

Let the doorbell ring for all students to have access to a **healthy** education. These schools build partnerships with quality health care, provide healthy nourishment, and a quality health curriculum (ASCD, 2004).

Let the doorbell ring for all students to have access to a physically and mentally **safe** schoolhouse. In safe schools, all constituents participate in developing and maintaining social expectations and routines (ASCD, 2004).

Let the doorbell ring for all students to have access to an **engaging** and active curriculum. Such curriculum provides project based learning, extracurricular activities and community based learning opportunities (ASCD, 2004).

Let the doorbell ring for all students to have access to a **supportive** adult and support systems. In these schools, all students have mentors and social services (ASCD, 2004)

Let the doorbell ring for all students to have access to a **challenging** academic experience, an experience that prepares all students to enter our advanced science and math curriculums (ASCD, 2004).

From promise to practice

In his famous speech, *I Have a Dream*, Martin Luther King said, “this will be the day, this will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning ‘My country ’tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim’s pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring!” (King, 1963).

If America is to continue to be a great nation, then we must hear a new “ring.” This new “ring”, a bell to the door of access, will ring loud and often in our schools. So let access ring from the extraordinary hilltops of our capitol cities. Let access ring from our small and large communities so that all children have access to enter Pre-Kindergarten programs. This bell will not only support each child, but will support what the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) defines as the “Whole Child.”

Let us begin to answer the doorbell

The doorbell is ringing deafeningly loud - can you hear it? Now is the time for all educators to stand up and lead our schools. When this happens, and when we finally open the doors now closed to access, when we finally answer the call of the doorbell chime, we will be able to hold our heads high. All students, poor and rich and regardless of the color of their skin, will be able to sit in a common classroom and learn at high levels. When this happens, we the educators of the greatest nation in the world will be able to stand up and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last. Thank God Almighty, we are free at last.”

References


In two reports, Hodgkinson argues that there is an inherent connection between educational institutions even though they appear to act independently.

“Over a decade ago, this author published *All One System* (1985) which presented the argument that a nation’s graduate schools were dependent in part on the quality of its kindergartens, that there was a single system underlying all of the segments, and that only the students ever saw the whole thing” (p. 1).

Since Hodgkinson’s first publication, many states have moved toward implementing P-16 education policy as a “college for all” model aimed at providing greater access to higher education. By standardizing the transition processes students experience, P-16 education policy provides the means by which this end can be achieved. Policies, programs, and practices aimed at easing the strain that all students experience in mapping the course from high school to college are adopted. While the notion of P-16 education encompasses an array of policies and programs that range from early childhood learning to teacher preparation and training, the ultimate goal of P-16 education is the standardization of college attendance, academic success, and degree attainment. Many states have adopted various forms of P-16 education policy aimed at increasing college attendance. These efforts have met with varying levels of success. This is due, in part, to varying levels of commitment given P-16 related initiatives in state level policy arenas (Lutz & Chance, 2005). One caution on the P-16 model: The focus on collaboration and creating partnerships in education flushes out in the open what the Education Commission of the States (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2006) refers to as “turf issues.”

The need for the P-16 education policy in Washington State may be more crucial than in many other states because of its unique characteristics. For example, Washington has a very small, but growing, minority population. Looking to the future, this population will begin to play an increasingly larger role in expanding the state’s pool of “college ready” students. As Washington continues to expand its four-year educational system by adding new campuses, it becomes clear that the students that will populate these campuses will be students of color. Another reason it is important for Washington to move fast forward on its P-16 approach is that it has only recently begun to move in this direction. According to an Education Commission of the States report (Kruger, 2006) 30 states have similar initiatives underway and some of them started as early and 1998. As a late entrant into the P-16 policy arena, Washington is also delayed in analyzing its educational system and its effectiveness as a whole. The positive side of the state being a late entrant to the P-16 education policy arena is that it is now uniquely positioned to gain from...
the successes and problems experienced by other states. Taken together, these circumstances put Washington in the position to become a model state with respect to overall academic achievement, access for all, and educational attainment.

As the state of Washington attempts to move toward implementing a P-16 education policy approach to creating stronger ties between the K-12 system, higher education, and other education related agencies, organizations and services, key questions still remain. Can the different cultures that exist at different levels of education be brought together in a common bond?

By integrating academic planning, mentoring, and college preparation within the curriculum, Washington seems to have found a set of ingredients for improving college transitions.

The argument for improving access

The economic arguments for improving access to higher education are many and have been argued consistently. For instance, a study by the U.S. Department of Education found that the types of jobs being created in our new global and technology based economy will be beyond the reach of many Americans given their current level of training.

One report from the Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research projected that 385,000 jobs demanding high levels of skill would be created by 2010 and that the existing workforce probably could not do them (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001, p. 5). This finding illustrates the economic significance of the college education as a prerequisite for solid labor force participation.

The bachelor’s degree has become an important entry-level credential in the current labor market. When compared with individuals with only the high school diploma, college graduates take home salaries that nearly double their high school graduate counterparts (Henschel, Kirshstein, O’Malley, & Rhodes, 2000). It has been argued that the college degree serves the function of an entry level credential in the new information economy in the same way that the high school diploma did during the industrial era (Pitre, 2004).

A common argument against focusing too heavily on preparing all students for college is that not all students want to go to college or that not all students need to go to college. To the contrary, today’s economy dictates that all students need to at least be prepared to attend college. The low-skill/high-wage labor jobs that were once a staple in the United States labor market during the height of the industrial era are not only decreasing in availability, many of these jobs now require workers to have the same high school curricular background as those students who intend to go on to college (Orfield & Paul, 1994).

While the focus on the economic return on educational investment is one that is well known and widely discussed, what has not been considered with the same rigor are the issues of equity and social justice. Washington’s commitment to equity and social justice has been called into question because of its recent stand against affirmative action. As one of very few states that have ended affirmative action in college admissions, a key barrier to increasing access to higher education in Washington is a commitment to providing “college for all.”

The disconnect in Washington

In 1998 voters in Washington State passed Initiative 200, which brought an end to the use of affirmative action in college and university admission decisions. Five years after the passage of I-200, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a narrow definition of affirmative action in college admission and held that it is of compelling governmental interest (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003), confirming that race does play a significant role in American society. These legal and political developments have put the state of Washington in an interesting and somewhat unique position given that the higher education system is growing while affirmative action has been banned through the initiative process. This has caused a disconnect between

Will the priorities of the state support broader access to higher education, given its history? This article reports on Washington State’s move to implement P-16 education policy, some of the challenges it is facing and challenges it will face in the future, and offers additional analysis of how the state can prosper educationally through a focus on P-16 education and the effective implementation of policy that supports and strengthens an infrastructure that is already in existence.
where the state claims it wants to be and where it currently is with respect to social justice, equity, and diversity. An added component to the disconnect that exists in Washington is that the number of racial and ethnic minority students in the state is growing, while the repeal of affirmative action policy has exerted a chilling effect on college admission.

Prior to the passage of I-200, more than half of all students in the state, including racial and ethnic minority students, went on to some form of post-secondary education. After the passage of I-200, only Asian American students increased their numbers and white students remained constant, while African American, Hispanic, and Native American students lost ground (HEC Board, 2006). As of the 2002-2003 academic year racial and ethnic minority students were beginning to make up lost ground with respect to postsecondary enrollments (HEC Board, 2006). Even with the increasing numbers, both Hispanic and Black college age students attending college in Washington represent a considerably lower percentage in the college population when compared to the overall percentage they represent in their age cohort within the state. Consequently, the same low numbers hold true for minority student participation in graduate programs. The merit-based approach to college access perpetuated by this major policy decision does not account for the inherent biases that exist in the education system.

Social justice and equity in student transitions
Research on student school to college transitions has expanded to include a focus on the role of social and cultural capital on student college aspirations, academic success, and the role of schools in reproducing social inequality (Deil-Amenn & Turley, 2007). Social capital refers to “hidden rules” in high, middle, and low SES cultural groups (Payne, 1995, p. 21). Social capital can also “take the form of information-sharing channels and networks, as well as social norms, values, and expected behaviors” (Perna, 2000, p.3). These hidden forms of capital exist within ethnic and racial minority cultural groups as well. Social capital provides clues to cultural group members as to whether a given individual is actually a member of their cultural group (Payne, 1995). Similarly, cultural capital refers to the middle and upper middle class transmission of knowledge, skills, and social insight from generation to generation (MacLeod, 1995; McDonough, 1997). Students from different socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds will have different types of cultural capital, but the capital of lower classes will tend to carry a lesser value (MacLeod, 1995) within certain institutional social structures such as schools. In the college preparation and transition processes, lack of cultural capital translates into lower levels of academic achievement, education, and wasted potential and is manifested as a barrier to opportunity (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), all classes of people transact cultural capital. But within the educational system, high SES cultural capital is esteemed while low SES cultural capital is devalued. Schools’ “sanction” and “ratify” and distribute knowledge that is translated into academic achievement (MacLeod, 1995). The academic achievement of high SES students is eventually translated into economic wealth. According to Apple (1982): “Students with access to such cultural capital, primarily through their families, do well in school since educational achievement is determined by the ability to perform in meritocratic tests that measure those skills which the cultural capital provides” (p. 57).

In essence, some differences in academic achievement, test scores, or other measures of merit, can be attributed to social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital cannot explain all of the gaps that exist in academic achievement and college attendance that are aligned to race and ethnicity, but they do provide clues to closing these gaps.

Washington’s opportunity to lead
With an intensified focus on specific P-16 related initiatives and Washington’s unique characteristics, policy makers, agency officials, and other key stakeholders may have an opportunity to move Washington to the forefront of academic achievement and educational attainment. At the very least, they have a clear opportunity to enhance student transitions from high school to college while strengthening the educational system as a whole. P-16 education policy initiatives have the potential to expand access for all students and especially those students from racial and ethnic minority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

A recent study of student transitions in Washington State (Pitre, 2008) found that Washington is no stranger to programs that intend to help students make the successful transition from high school to college. The landscape is rich with resources that have the ability to foster student transitions. That landscape includes 20 different college transition related programs in three categories: 1) Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment, 2) Early Outreach, and 3) Curriculum and Instruction (Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2005). What the study did not find to be present in Washington is the type of coordination of these individual efforts to improve college access in the state that would enhance the overall effectiveness of its educational systems. The Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board (2005) reported twenty different transition related programs serving the nearly 300 school districts in the state of Washington, but did not
mention any coordination mechanism.

The state’s history, culture, and political values, the operating relationships that exist between educational systems, the array of transition related programs, and a tripartite system of programs that do not necessarily work in coordination are key pieces for consideration in moving to a P-16 system that works. It is also important for Washington to consider a mechanism for evaluating these important programs. Without rigorous evaluation, it will be difficult for these programs to reach maximum effectiveness.

**Enhancing system effectiveness**

In looking to enhance coordination and evaluation of transition related programs in Washington under the umbrella of P-16 education policy, some existing organizations can provide an advantage to the state in its move toward a coordinated P-16 system which includes policies and programs designed to enhance student transitions. For example, the Washington Council is an organization with a record of coordinating, planning, and collaborating with key educational agencies and has been in the business of student transitions for a number of years. It can, potentially, enhance Washington’s P-16 related initiatives by leveraging its “street-level” knowledge, programs, and networks that span the various educational systems in the state.

Along with the Washington Council, the K-12 system in Washington clearly has one initiative with potential to have substantial impact on student college preparation in the **Navigation 101** project. By integrating academic planning, mentoring, and college preparation within the curriculum, Washington seems to have found a set of ingredients for improving college transitions. More involvement from colleges and universities in the state seems to be needed to cement the validity of this program, but it is still an important construct. It is important to note that teachers will be a key to improving student transitions, an element addressed in the **Navigation 101** model.

With the pending issues related to graduation and WASL mathematics scores, programs like **Navigation 101** become even more crucial in that they help students to focus on the reality of meeting the academic challenges that lie in front of them. Similarly, the **Transition Math Project** seeks to develop mutual understandings on the level and type of mathematics that students should know and be prepared to do by the time they reach college. This particular project provides a potential answer to questions that have arisen over the lack of cohesion and alignment in the mathematics in the K-12, community college, and 4-year systems, and the assortment of tests students must take. The 2006 scores on the mathematics portion of the WASL served as further notice that the types of rationality proposed by P-16 education policy is not only needed, but necessary for Washington to be successful in the current accountability environment. Local control of curriculum is an important value, but the type of standardization forced upon schools and school districts by the outcomes movement calls for more well thought out approach to curriculum planning and the development of a common core of knowledge that students are expected to command. By including the community college and four-year college systems in conversations with the K-12 system, additional leverage can be gained by sharing more knowledge in the area of mathematics and cultivating additional understandings of what students should know. The goal here should be creating additional alignment within the educational system. A major concern is the variance of ideas that the actors influencing mathematics in Washington have about what students should know. Without collaboration, agreement, and alignment in this key area, many students will be set up for failure. In fact, the lack of alignment could be a partial explanation for academic problems experienced by current and past students.

**Conclusion**

The vestiges of I-200, the changing demographics, graduation rates, and other structural issues pertaining to transition programs and policies make up the unique policy landscape in Washington State. That landscape presents a variety of challenges to implementing P-16 education policy because of the lack of coordination and collaboration between education agencies (Lutz and Chance, 2005). What is at stake is an opportunity for the state to become a national leader. As a late entrant into the P-16 policy arena, Washington is now uniquely positioned to gain from the successes and problems experienced by other states that have moved in the direction of stronger coordination within and between the various components of their education systems.

More importantly, however, is the opportunity to provide increased educational access for the state’s increasingly diverse student population. Washington’s recent move toward creating a system of education that provides maximum educational benefit through the coordination and alignment of its key education functions comes at an important time in the state’s history. Washington holds key advantages in that it already has a strong base of programs in place that, with additional coordination, direction, and evaluation have the potential to enhance student transitions.

With the tools in place and momentum building in the legislative and executive branches of the state’s government, there is an opportunity for Washington to move to the forefront of P-16 education policy and, subse-
sequently, academic achievement, college transition, and educational attainment. As with any worthwhile opportunity, there are many challenges to overcome. The core question that still remains that will have a decisive effect on whether Washington is able to successfully implement P-16 education policy that enhances transition for all students is: Do Washingtonians value “college for some” or “college for all?”

References


Dr. Paul Pitre is assistant professor at Washington State University.
It was 2004, and due to a number of serendipitous events, I was able to join a group at the Schweitzer Mountain Resort near Sandpoint, Idaho for “The Courage to Teach,” a professional retreat on vocational clarity and renewal.

As a primary level teacher in a Title I school, I was already feeling stretched and spent by the multi-leveled needs of 20+ students. It was not an atypical year regarding the students in my classroom. As usual, many of the children came to school early for free breakfast; some came too late for any breakfast. Many came from single parent homes; at least two children lived with an adult other than a parent. Some slept in a home without their own bed; at least one child shared a home with a methamphetamine addict. It was also a typical year regarding expanding curriculum, instructional “best practices” and assessments—in response to increasing accountability, high expectations, and the “No Child Left Behind” legislation.

With great hope, and perhaps the same amount of naiveté, I desperately wanted the weekend to answer my questions, fill me up, and give me back my sanity. I wanted so much to believe that I could truly make a difference in the lives of children who did not always come “ready to learn.” I wanted to trust that even with all the needs that I saw on a daily basis, I could be a part of helping students see themselves as literate and able to solve problems. I was hoping that this one weekend would calm my doubts of being “enough.”

Ultimately, I was not disappointed but, of course, my immediate needs would not be met in one short weekend. Among other things, I was introduced to the simple, yet complex concept of paradox, the ability to hold two opposites at the same time. That weekend I began exploring professional and personal issues from a both - and perspective, rather than either - or. I was intrigued, especially considering my less than appealing tendency to look at problems and solutions as right or wrong, yes or no, win or lose (regardless of how crazy-making!).

The other participants and I were encouraged to consider some typical opposites (solitude and community, love and discipline, freedom and responsibility), what they looked like in our classrooms, and the sensibility of holding them together. We even considered our own lives: how recognizing our personal strengths also represented certain limitations, and how a weakness could reveal a remarkable strength. It was not only instructive, but also deeply powerful. “Thinking the world together” (Palmer, 1998, p.65) rather than apart continued to unfold and positively transform how I looked at teaching and life. I began to have hope again of making a difference in the lives of my students.

As time went on, long after leaving the retreat, examples of paradox began to show up and reveal their subtle beauty and power. For example, it was not unusual for me to idealistically believe that with the right amount of planning I could actually prevent disruptions and disorder from occurring in my classroom. (Yeah, right!) However, during an unplanned and uncharacteristically long 25-minute fire drill one snowy day, my young students demonstrated how well they could adapt to the interruption. One wise student suggested they all huddle together to keep warm while another recommended they sing songs from their poetry folders to pass the time. Instead of complaining, the children snuggled, sang, and giggled. Eventually, the all-clear bell sounded that cold day and the students filed back into the classroom and most went back to where they left off with their writing. Not only had we made a class memory, the children had something fresh and authentic about which to write! It dawned on me that a plan is only as good as its ability to handle disruption.

Later that spring, many of my children and I witnessed Dillon, a bright, street-wise, sarcastic young boy mumble
one of his usual disparaging remarks to Marty, who had just been complimented on his great speed on the playground. “I’m faster,” Dillon had said. I felt so discouraged and frustrated that after several months of proclaiming and practicing our community building activities, I had still not been able to impact Dillon’s behavior. For some reason, instead of harshly confronting Dillon myself, I decided to take an opportunity for a class discussion. I asked the class to help me out in sharing their own thoughts and feelings. Several of the children told Dillon directly, clearly, yet respectfully that they thought his comments to Marty were unkind and selfish. They reminded Dillon that Marty was just as special as he was. It was a powerful moment as Dillon seemed to listen and hear. Perhaps he had not internalized our months of community building attempts, but many others had. I saw that it was much more effective for the children to be the teachers, and for me to watch and learn. What a pleasure, not to mention a relief, to share that responsibility.

Finally, summer break happened and I woke up on June 16 almost giddy, visualizing how I would accomplish all the typical, yet unrealistic, plans and expectations for the days ahead. As usual, the warmer days went by quickly. All of a sudden, it seemed, I noticed some familiar yet unwelcome feelings of depression, sadness, and letdown. Oh yeah - August must have arrived. All the plans and expectations flashed before my eyes, some fulfilled, most not! On the other hand, I noticed those August days marked with opposite feelings: excitement, anticipation, fresh ideas, and energy. I started visualizing a newly decorated classroom, new children’s faces, and different, if not still unrealistic, plans and expectations for another school year. As usual, I felt the familiar spring-in-my-step that always came with a clean start. It dawned on me once again that paradox had become the story of my personal and professional life. Who would guess that I could embrace both the longing for what could have been and the eagerness of what could be?

I am forever grateful for the weekend at Schweitzer in October of 2004. The introduction to the concept of paradox set me on a lasting and meaningful journey, and as a result, I have experienced more hope for myself and my students. Parker Palmer’s writing has reminded me that “when we think things together, we reclaim the life force in the world, in our students, in ourselves” (1998). My desire to make a significant impact on the learning and well-being of my students has not changed, but my approach has. Who knows what new challenges might come? Who knows what new insights might develop? I do know that I have learned a deeply profound idea yet I have only scratched the surface. My personal and professional life will never be the same.

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*In 1996, the Courage to Teach retreat program was created by The Fetzer Institute, under the guidance of Parker J. Palmer, author of The Courage to Teach. In Washington, the organization is now called Washington Courage and Renewal and includes outreach to other professionals serving children, families, and communities as well as over 700 educators. For more information, visit www.CourageRenewal.org.
Narrative in education: Toward a heuristic for classroom based justice

“[Y]ou might remember that in America following 9/11 there was an immediate press to construct some narrative about what happened. A need for an explanation for why and what for, and so all over the country in 100’s of school districts educators set to work trying to pull together the few facts they had and assemble them into a plausible argument.” (*This American Life*, Dec. 16, 2006.) Educators construct narratives everyday as they talk with each other and their students about the social life of their school. These narratives help sort and arrange experiences to make sense of them. Educator’s accounts, or narratives, about their school’s social life are rich with information about the social qualities of education (Toulan, 2005). This paper illustrates how a narrative might be used to make sense of what is socially just and unjust inside of classroom practice. For this paper I use a portion of a narrative that aired on the National Public Radio program, *This American Life* (Dec. 16, 2006), to illustrate what might be learned from analyzing narratives about classroom practice. This carefully crafted narrative was chosen over a real time narrative, because it provides an extreme case of classroom-based injustice, making it easy to illuminate.

**Conceptual framework**

I use two central ideas to frame the analysis of this narrative: social practice theory and classroom based justice.

**Social practice theory**

Social practice theory grew out of other theories that work to explain the relationship between the individual and their social life (e.g., Bourdieu, 1972; Giddens, 1984; Wenger, 1999; Engstrom, 1999). Theories used in education commonly focus on individuals rather than on social life. These theories explain individuals as socially neutral. Classroom situations rather than being social are commonly explained and described in terms of the intra-personal psychology of individuals, characteristics of individual personalities, beliefs, or dispositions. An example of this is the commonly used term “free and reduced lunch students.” This term takes a socioeconomic characteristic of our capitalist social life, and makes it a personality trait of a group of students. This labeling process neutralizes the social-political character of poverty and instead makes poverty a personality issue of individuals.

In contrast, social practice theories explain individuals as the result of social life. Social practice theories highlight the role of the social in the construction of the self. The individual is understood first as a social construction. For example, high school teachers participate in the social practice of grading student’s work. The shared practice of grading is an example of a social practice in which each teacher participates uniquely but to not participate would mean not being a teacher. The distinction I am making here is that it isn’t the individual teacher who invents grading, it is the social practice of grading that invents “the teacher.” Grading is an example of a social practice.

What makes a social practice is open to debate, but in this paper all purposeful routine or repeated human activity is treated as social practice. People participate in multiple and overlapping social practices at any moment (Feldman, 2004).

**Classroom based justice**

Justice and injustice in classrooms and schools is social. It transpires between people and is generated in interactions. This conception of justice is contrasted with the idea of justice as a personal characteristic, an intra-personal decision, a virtue or a disposition.

Classroom-based justice and injustice are generated in interactions between people. For justice to transpire in interactions, participants must demonstrate and discern respect and mutual benefit during their interaction. (Kelly, Rawls, 1979). In classrooms, justice is generated in respectful interaction between people who are always different from each other. Respect is demonstrated and discerned as a genuine interest in other people’s points of view (Bryk, Schneider, 2002). When the teacher in the narrative that follows does not demonstrate a genuine interest in her student’s point’s of view, or in the point of view of the parent of a student but instead imposes one point of view, injustice is generated through disrespect.

Justice implies a fair flow of power. Injustice implies an unfair flow of power. In classrooms power flows multi-directionally through situated interaction. In any one classroom interaction power flows in multiple and changing directions. Who gets listened to, who speaks, what is said, which ideas are reinforced, what forms of interaction are recognized, and which objects are legitimized are all activities in which power flows in multiple directions in a classroom (Fairclough, 1989). Interactions in which respect is demonstrated and discerned are interactions in which
power is balanced. Mutual benefits are realized in situations of balanced power (Solomon, 1990; Moore, 1996).

In summary, justice and injustice are generated in social practices in classrooms. Social practices like talking, listening, observing, discussing, reading aloud, and working on a group project may generate justice or injustice. If participants demonstrate and discern a genuine interest in each other’s points of view and the interaction provides mutual benefits for the participants, justice is generated. Beista (2006) argues that education is how we are social. Classroom experience is not exempted or neutralized social life. Classroom experience is how we are social, moment-to-moment. Even though the habits and routines in one classroom may be similar to another classroom, the interactions may enact different social lives (Habermas, 1990).

Narrative
Following, I present a short section of narrative to illustrate how narrative about classroom practice can be used to analyze justice and injustice in the classroom. Cloe, a fourth grader, and Sari, her mother, are telling the narrative about an incident that transpired on September 11, 2002, one year after the World Trade Center came down. Presented first is the text as it flowed in the narrative, followed by an analysis that highlights the social practice and illuminates the injustice:

S= Sari, Cloe’s mom;
N= Alex Seigel, the narrator; and
C= Cloe, Sari’s oldest daughter and the student.

C. I got to meet my teacher and she seemed nice the first day, the first week but it all changed on September 11, that one day.

S. I picked up the children from school that day and she was in tears, she was inconsolable, she wasn’t even making sense she just was crying and crying.

N. Apparently as part of the lesson for the 9/11 anniversary the teacher in Cloe’s class had passed out a book. A slim paperback intended to educate the students about the 9/11 tragedy.

S. On the cover there was a picture of the World Trade Center in flames.

C. The first thing in the book was like September 11 was a horrible day hundreds and thousands of people died and then it said, who did it? We don’t know but here’s a clue. Muslims hate Christians. Muslims hate Americans. Muslims believe that anyone who doesn’t practice Islam is evil and that the Qur’an teaches war and hate.

N. Naturally after hearing about her daughter’s day Sari called the principal who was sympathetic but explained to Sari that there just wasn’t much she could do.

S. It turns out that this was a district-wide lesson meaning that there was a book presented to all the fourth grades in the district.

S. The teacher really didn’t have any problem with it. She actually shrugged her shoulders and said well this is the district-wide lesson.

N. At that point Sari’s kids were the only practicing Muslims in the school. There was one other Middle-Eastern family but they were secular and their children were younger, still in kindergarten. In fact it was pointed out to Sari by school administrators she was the only parent of any child in the school who had a problem with the 9/11 materials and then the matter was pretty much dropped by the administration.

C. They all saw me as a different person like before reading the book I was just a normal child and then I turned into an Islamic extremist who hated the world and wanted to kill everybody and there is a big difference there.

S. That’s when the taunting began, just overnight.

Analysis
Tools from critical discourse analysis are used to analyze this narrative for justice and injustice, to analyze the narrated routines and habits of the classroom, typical of critical discourse analysis, a heuristic or a list of progressive questions was built on the main ideas in the definition of classroom-based justice (Gee, 2002; Johnstone, 2002; Mills, 2004). The key to this list of questions is that it expects justice to be the standard situation in a classroom. This way, if an interaction is tested with these questions, it is quickly apparent if the interaction meets the standard for justice or not.

1. In this text, where are the habits and routines of school?
2. In these habits and routines, where are the interactions?
3. How are these interactions respectful?
4. How are these interactions mututally beneficiaill for the actors?

This narrative moves the reader through a consolidated temporal view that includes recognizable social practices from a fourth grade classroom almost anywhere in the United States. A couple of clear examples are the student meeting the teacher on the first day, the parent picking up her student from school, the teacher passing out a book, students reading the book, students talking to each other about the book, the parent calling the principal, all fourth grade teachers presenting the book, the parent talking to the teacher, the administrator talking to the parents, and students teasing each other. These social practices
make the narrative recognizable as school almost anywhere.

With a closer read of the situation, we find the unique enactment of these routines that make up the social life of the classroom. Below is an example of how the heuristic helps untangle justice and injustice in interactions.

A teacher passing out a book for students to read. The reader can see that in this activity the teacher and students are participating in common social practices. The normalness of this activity in a classroom gives it the impression of being socially neutral, until the application of the heuristic. How is this a mutually beneficial interaction for the actors? This particular book did not demonstrate a genuine interest in multiple points of view, which is the definition of respectful. This set of questions makes it clear that injustice transpired through this interaction. What this heuristic offers is a fairly direct analysis, interaction by interaction, of where justice or injustice transpires. This analytic process easily circumvents the common arguments about what is just and unjust in the classroom.

As the narrative unfolds, the audience learns that this family took this case all the way through the Federal Department of Justice before the school district recognized that injustice had transpired. Four years and enormous resources were spent establishing that this simple interaction was unjust. It would have been more expedient for the teacher herself to have a four question test to apply to the interaction. What are the routines? Where are the interactions in the routines? How are these interactions respectful? How are these interactions mutually beneficial for the actors?

In the final interaction between Cloe and her peers, it is learned that within one lesson Cloe has been transformed, “They all saw me as a different person like before reading the book I was just a normal child and then I turned into an Islamic extremist who hated the world and wanted to kill everybody and there is a big difference there,” and “That’s when the taunting began, just overnight.” Moment-to-moment social justice and injustice is lived in classrooms. Here the social life of injustice was generated when it could have easily been avoided if the teacher had been expected to run her choice through the simple test: does this instruction demonstrate and allow students to discern a genuine interest in multiple points of view?

Conclusion
As the reader can see, this extreme case made it easy to analyze the interactions for justice and injustice. There were no extraordinary activities in this narrative. The regular routines of school including passing out a book, asking students to read, seating students in table groupings together enacted injustice in this classroom. These routines could have just as easily been utilized to create justice in the classroom.

The claim that the teacher was simply doing her job or that nothing unusual was happening was clearly not the indication of whether classroom practices are just or unjust. Nor was intention an adequate indicator. Nothing out of the ordinary was going on in the classroom practice and yet clearly, injustice transpired. Rather than claiming that injustice is the normal condition of classrooms, it is suggested that it is useful for teachers to have and use a heuristic like the one above to apply to any close reading or listening to their own and their colleagues’ narratives of classroom practice. Perhaps if educators developed the habit of analyzing their own narratives we could get closer to creating social practices that promote justice inside of classrooms as routine practice.

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References


Conjectures of a guilty bystander

After graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy, and serving seven years as a C-130 pilot, my son Michael believed his true calling was the teaching profession.

Acting on that belief, he is now a second-year, full-time English-language Learner (ELL) teacher at Bell Multicultural High School in the inner-city of Washington, D.C. In addition, he is a candidate in the DC Fellow’s Program through American University.

During a visit to his home in the nation’s capital last fall, his mother and I sat with rapt attention at his dining room table as he regaled us with the following story that brought to me both tears of pride, and at the same time, a number of “conjectures” from this “guilty bystander.”

The story

Over dessert, Michael eagerly shared the story of an encounter with Jonathan Kozol, author of the recently published Letters to a Young Teacher. Our son learned that Kozol was scheduled to appear at a local Washington, D.C. bookstore to lecture about Letters and then do a book signing. While in the Air Force, Michael’s older sister, Maggie, a literacy coach in the Edmonds School District, recommended to her brother a number of Kozol’s books. On deployments in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, he read the provocative author and was taken by his views on testing, vouchers, and their impact on public schools and the children they serve. A chance to hear the author in person and get his signature on the two recently purchased books – one for himself and one for his sister – would be a wonderful way, thought Michael, to hear this powerful voice for social justice.

As parents we laughed and shook our heads as Michael recounted that particular day’s principle activity: teaching three, 80-minute, block scheduled sections of ELL to predominantly Spanish-speaking ninth-graders ranging in age from 14 to 18. He told of his last-minute attempts to assure that the lesson’s standard and learning outcomes were posted prominently for students and, more importantly, for building administrator’s who might be conducting “walk-throughs.” He went on to explain that every day’s planning period at Bell is taken up with mandatory meetings of some sort or another. One day it might be ELL teachers working on curriculum alignment, the next it could be grade-level teachers creating practice assessments, another day it would be all English department members reviewing data. Michael told how, as one of the newer staff, he often took it upon himself to run up the block to Starbucks to provide coffee and tea for his harried colleagues during some of those meetings.

In addition to his teaching duties, Michael also volunteered to coach cross-country. His charges were bussed to a local city park to practice, returned to the school to shower, change, and head for home and part-time jobs. As it turned out, the night of Kozol’s lecture conflicted with one of Michael’s graduate classes at American University. He made up his mind to choose the lecture over learning assessment techniques for ELL students and e-mailed his instructor to let her know he would miss class. With this part of his day behind him, he looked forward to an evening of intellectual challenge.

Moving from point A to point B in Washington, D.C. is similar to strategizing how one gets from one place to another in any large, urban center -- or like flying into a war zone -- you must carefully plan for any and all contingencies. Kozol’s presentation was at a very large local bookstore; or so Michael thought. He described how he drove to the bookstore through rush-hour traffic only to learn that, because of the number of people expected, the event had been switched to a nearby synagogue. This meant finding a different place to park, an ATM for cash, and a frantic run to the synagogue. The only seat left was in the first pew directly in front of Jonathan Kozol’s lectern.

Michael’s eyes shone as he spoke of Kozol describing his visits to Francesca, a first grade teacher at an inner-city school in Boston. The issues raised during the lecture covered the mania of high-stakes testing that turns many classrooms into test-prep factories, where spontaneity and critical intelligence are no longer valued, and where the inequalities of urban schools are once again as segregated as they were a century ago. He heard Kozol tell of his lost friendship with Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts over the
The first assumption has to do with the oppressive nature of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Michael also learned that Kozol had begun a hunger strike, vowing not to take solid food until the NCLB law was struck down. It was then that our son smiled, and told us that at the conclusion of the lecture, Kozol would only take two questions from the audience. He sat back and said, “The microphone was right next to my seat and I found myself standing ready to ask a question that I had not really formulated. All of a sudden, I was in front of the microphone and looking up at Kozol.”

Our son then leaned forward at the dining room table and said, “I heard myself telling Jonathan Kozol my name, and that I was a second-year teacher at Bell Multicultural High School in D.C.; that I had been a pilot in the Air Force and had chosen ELL and Bell because I believed in the mission of the school committed to a rigorous curriculum and social justice.” He went on to explain to Kozol that virtually all of his students, both last year and this year, were immigrants to this country. They were mostly from Central America and Mexico, with a few from African countries. Michael’s face grew serious as he told us that he said to Kozol that all of his ninth-grade students came to this country for a better way of life. Yet, as the year progressed, he began to see that many of his students feared they would never qualify for college. “I could tell by their eyes,” Michael said to Kozol, “that they slowly came to the realization that because of either language, immigration status, economics, or other circumstances, access to college and a good paying job – what we call the American Dream – was not possible for them. I also knew that I played a part in their loss of hope.”

Kozol interrupted him by saying, “Michael, ask your question.” Our son told us that he was not sure at that moment what his question really was and that Kozol then said in a quiet voice, “Michael, I know what your question is…ask your question.” There wasn’t a sound in the dining room as we waited for his response. Finally, Michael whispered, “I said, ‘Jonathan, how do I stand before my students each day and not lie to them?’”

Needless to say, Michael’s story made a deep impression on me. Over the last two months I have turned it over in my mind, and the more I do so, the more it calls me to turn my son’s question around and ask: Do I stand in front of my graduate educational leadership classes and lie to them? In my “bystander” role of professor am I “guilty” of being complicit with the vast majority of my professional colleagues, who often frame the issues of leading for educational change as a series of clinical or simulated problems school leaders and teachers have to solve for the good of other people? Do I make it appear that it is only a matter of finding the right levers and technical fixes that will set the system right? Do I imply that the important educational problems are fiscal, or structural, or that kids cannot pass the tests? Or do I make it clear that the root problem is really our failure to support the people who do the work?

These are the persistent questions that constantly plague me since I heard Michael’s story last November. What follows are my “conjectures;” my views on today’s educational reform initiatives and how they affect my work and the work of practitioners like my son, and perhaps, a different way to view such work.

Conjectures
What Michael and his students experience each day at Bell Multicultural High School in the name of school reform is fundamentally misguided because of the flaws in the rationale and assumptions underlying state and national standards and testing programs.

The first assumption has to do with goals and the often deep, unexamined belief that it is possible and desirable to agree on a single definition of what constitutes a well-educated individual, and the concomitant demand that every school be held to that same definition. Another assumption is that the task of defining “well-educated” is usually left to the experts – educators, political officials, leaders from industry and the major academic disciplines – operating with a system of political checks and balances. This is the assumption that there needs to be an authority responsible for the definition. A third is that with a single definition in place, it is then be possible to measure and compare individuals and schools across communities – local, state, national and international. State-wide assessments fill this bill and those scores will permit public comparisons between and among students, schools, districts, and states at any point in time.

In order to protect the child from those who have become most accustomed to low standards, an assumption aimed at local teachers, administrators, boards of education, and parents, enforcement is needed. The assumption is that only a more centralized and distant system can enforce the testing of standards. Expert-designed standards, imposed through tests, are the best way to achieve educational equity. Standardization with remotely controlled sanctions thus offers the best chance for schools like Bell. The last assumption is that clear-cut expectations, accompanied by automatic rewards and punishments, will produce greater effort, and effort – whether induced by the desire for rewards, fear of punishment, or shame – is the key to learning. This reasoning implies that automatic penalties work for schooling as much as they do for crime and punishment: consistency and certainty are the keys.

These five assumptions serve as the foundation for NCLB and have real consequences for real people like...
my son and his immigrant students at Bell Multicultural High School. Yet as Richard Rothstein (2007) pointed out this past summer at Gonzaga University, NCLB was flawed from the start, ignoring well-established statistical and management theories predicting perverse consequences for test-based accountability. One such consequence is goal distortion which warns against measuring any institution’s performance by quantitative indicators that reflect only some institutional goals. Schools have many goals for students: basic math and reading skills, but also critical thinking, citizenship, physical- and emotional-health habits, arts appreciation, self-discipline, responsibility, and conflict resolution. Schools threatened with sanctions for failure in only one goal will inevitably divert attention from others. We know that one NCLB consequence is less social studies, science, art, music, and physical education – particularly for low-income children, whose math and reading scores are lowest. It is telling that most experts agree that we are in the midst of an obesity epidemic, yet many schools have eliminated physical education and even recess to “help” students prepare to meet the math or reading standards.

Test reliability is another issue. NCLB relies on an annual test, but single tests can be misleading. Every parent knows children have good and bad days. Every teacher knows particular classes can be talented or difficult. Entire classes can be attentive or distracted, so accurate measurement requires multiple retesting. We also know that because a school’s subgroups of minority or low-income children are smaller than a full-grade cohort, the margin of error for subgroup achievement is even larger. The more integrated a school, with more subgroups, the more inaccurate accountability becomes. Even with our inordinate attention to math and reading, it is practically and conceptually ludicrous to expect all students to be proficient at challenging levels. Even if we eliminate all disparities based on socioeconomic status, human variability prevents a single standard from challenging all.

We have all heard about “bubble kids,” a term from poker and basketball, where bubble players or teams are those just on the cusp of elimination. School policies in some districts demand that teachers ignore already-proficient children to focus only on bubble kids, because inching the “bubbles” past the standard is all that matters for “adequate yearly progress.” For these kids, schools have substituted test prep for good instruction, sacrificing a deep understanding of math or reading for test content and test-taking skills. This strategy sacrifices low achievers and guarantees that more disadvantaged children will be left further behind, especially in states with higher standards.

NCLB and how it is implemented insists that school improvement alone can raise all children to high proficiency. The premise is that if my son only espouses high expectations, if Bell only hires better teachers, improves its curriculum, and provides more testing, all children in his school will attain full academic competence, poised for college and professional success. But what happens when students and teachers fall short of the mark? Professionals may achieve exceptional results with disadvantaged children, but when the standards are not met, these efforts are
labeled failures. Many dedicated and talented teachers are abandoning education – the turnover at Bell is very high according to our son.

If my conjectures, informed by Rothstein’s research, that NCLB should not and will not be reauthorized, then the question for teachers like my son is: After NCLB, what will it be like to teach in schools serving low-income children? The short answer is, not much different. Schools like Bell will still be labeled a failure because the underlyng assumptions have not changed. The question for this “bystander” is: What is it I can do to change my own assumptions and practices so that I speak the truth to those educational leaders I stand before?

Another way of thinking
A promising approach for me is Linda C. Powell’s (2002) call for a “theology” for systemic school improvement that draws on professionals’ faith, wisdom, and discipline to address complex adult relationships at the heart of the school system. The root problems are not fiscal, nor structural, nor about kids not passing the tests — these are the symptoms. The root problem is the failure by professionals, professors, and communities to support the people who do the work at the deepest levels of their lives. Because teaching is so demanding, it requires the development of the heart as well as the mind.

In her article, Powell asks that we imagine a theology of school improvement around three principles: presence, silence, and nonviolence. Those of us in higher education must go beyond our ivied walls to be physically present, as both a witness to and a support for students, teachers, and administrators in the field. This will be difficult work, for it is much easier to do our research and teaching from a distance. Powell argues that in the actual presence of poor children, stressed and unsupported teachers and administrators, and schools overwhelmed by the impossible tasks before them, we in higher education run the risk of seeing and feeling things that will change us. We may find that our “answers” fall short and that the only thing we can do is to be present, to show up, to learn.

Silence calls for us to hold our inner life in a disciplined way. Our public pronouncements about education are often too loud with too little substance. We talk too often with those with whom we agree and listen too seldom to those with whom we disagree. Silence, according to Powell, creates a space that harnesses the power of the human spirit. The inner work of slowing down may strengthen the educators and the system's ability to manage the new and complex information that school reform initiatives generate.

Lastly, Powell calls for nonviolence. A potent political tactic taken from the civil rights movement, it reminds us of Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. Yet the notion is that the practice and philosophy of nonviolence may cultivate the belief that difficult organizational processes can be overcome; that we are more than pawns in some organizational game. It provides a human way to disagree and resist oppression. Just as King and Parks became change agents with commitment, potential, and perseverance, so will educators who have the capacity to peacefully withstand the inhospitable, fearful, and contested spaces we inhabit every day.

In my own practice, to thoughtfully move from the technical to the theological, from the position of “guilty bystander” to partner, will take time, and not an inconsiderable amount of courage. However, I am convinced that such movement is what is necessary. When I consider my life’s work as a professor from this perspective, I now think of Michael’s story as an image for Gandhi’s words:

“Recall the face of the poorest and most helpless whom you have seen and consider if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything from it? Will it restore him to control over his life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj, self-rule for the hungry and spiritually starved millions of our countrymen? Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away” (Powell, 2002, p. 259).

References

Bringing project-based learning into your mathematics classroom

by John Doty

Four graduate students in mathematics and engineering, partnering with classroom teachers and education and engineering professors, working in three separate and diverse Eastern Washington communities—Pasco, Omak, and Pullman. What emerged? CREAM—Culturally Relevant Engineering Applications in Mathematics. CREAM is a three-year project to raise middle and high school students’ interests in mathematics and engineering by bringing engineering-based mathematics projects such as music and student-made instruments in “the sounds of mathematics” and water, five-gallon buckets and spigots in “buckets of functions.”

Social justice was an important component in the formation of our CREAM project. We worked to teach our graduate fellows how students learn (Donovan and Bransford), the opportunities they may or may not have to learn (NSF, 2004; NCTM, 2000), and ways to increase their interest and participation in learning (Au, 2006).

A strong emphasis was placed on study research related to issues like multiple literacies and cultural literacies, and English Language Learners, as well as building relationships and learning the cultures of the communities in which we are involved. We targeted sites in Washington State where minorities comprise a significant portion of the cities’ schools. Omak, on the edge of an Indian Reservation, is 27 percent American Indian and 13 percent Hispanic, and Pasco is 90 percent Hispanic. Our third site, Pullman was chosen for its proximity to the university and relationships with the mathematics teachers and one of CREAM professors, Dr. G. H. “Jerry” Maring.

National Science Foundation (Olson, 1999) statistics show that the over all participation of minorities and women in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines is not equal to their numbers in the population. African Americans were 12 percent of the population, yet only eight percent earned STEM bachelor’s degrees; Hispanics were 13 percent of the population, yet only six percent earned STEM bachelor’s degrees.

By involving minority populations we sought to raise the likelihood that more of these students would consider careers in the STEM fields. As future engineers, teachers, business people, and knowledgeable citizens these students would in turn bring more opportunities for equity and participation in society to their own communities. In addition, our graduate fellows included three women (one a native of Viet Nam) in mathematics education, and a native of India, in electrical engineering.

My role was the graduate student who designed and implemented a STEM literacy seminar for our graduate fellows. I was interested in their response to research in content area literacy, cognitive science and mathematics reform, how they would engage in learning in the intentional setting of a graduate seminar, and what, if any, of their learning would be applied as they brought engineering based projects into secondary mathematics classrooms. This article is an effort to capture the heart of what become more than a graduate course in STEM literacy, but as one grad student put it “a fellowship, a CREAM fellowship of fellows!”

Overview of CREAM seminar

Our seminar was a collaborative learning experience, including a mixture of readings from content literacy, multiple literacies, mathematics reform, English language learning, and cognitive psychology. Our fellows had spent one semester in their secondary mathematics classrooms, and were more receptive to learning how to integrate their knowledge with the goals of CREAM, including raising student interest, motivation and learning.

From our surveys of school districts and teachers we found that one of our challenges was to move instruction beyond simply teaching to the test, the WASL. For the fellows this meant working with teachers to help them welcome project-based learning as part of a holistic approach toward improving student learning.

Theoretical framework

Our seminar included a three-fold theoretical framework comprised of social constructivism via the new literacy (Vacc and Vacc, 2007), quantitative literacy (Steen, 2001, Bruning, Schraw, Norby and Ronning, 2004) and social justice (Au, 2006). Social constructivism in literacy asserts that students “construct” knowledge, adding to and modifying their understandings as they engage in reading, writing, speaking and listening in dialogue, viewing and hands-on doing.

Quantitative literacy is a component of content area reading and the ability to use numbers, formulas, graphic representations and words to describe a phenomenon, solve a problem, and explain one’s answer to others. QL’s goal is to equip students for problem solving, decision making, economic productivity and real world applications (Mount St. Mary’s college, 2007).

Social justice was a driving factor in our work through the National Science Foundation grant, in their nation-wide “Graduate Students in Kindergarten through 12th” (GK-12). CREAM sought through “culturally relevant engineering applications in mathematics” to move into minority schools and raise interest in mathematics and engineering.

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through special projects built around the students' own lives. Our focus on music from multiple cultures touches every culture, and the study of water flows equally connect with students’ everyday and life-related activities.

Omak and Pasco, situated on rivers are both affected by the dam system, water, energy and natural resource issues in the state of Washington, while many wheat farmers rely on the dam on the Snake river, to provide moorage for loading of their harvests to go to market.

**STEM literacy seminar overview**

Graduate fellows from engineering and mathematics have little or no training in content area reading or teaching. They are tasked to develop engineering-based mathematics projects to collaborate with teachers in teaching mathematics in middle and high schools. This seminar provided a collaborative learning environment where together we engage, understand and apply the theory, research and practice in content area reading as it pertains to mathematics and STEM Literacy.

**Insights**

In retrospect, we share with you some of the major insights from our STEM Literacy seminar, using our acronym CREAM. A complete syllabus with an annotated bibliography is available for downloading at http://eerc.wsu.edu/CREAM/docs/TL555-syllabus.pdf.

C—Content Culture Clash. Our CREAM seminar grew out of our realization that the graduate fellows didn’t think they had anything to learn about content literacy. After all, fellows were highly trained in the traditional methods of STEM education, they were in graduate school in their chosen fields, and what more could we teach them? Unfortunately, they were missing the insights of reading research, mathematics reform and cognitive science, and it showed—they “didn’t know what they didn’t know.” Not until Dr. Maring and I discussed the culture clash together did we come up with a solution, a required STEM literacy course.

R—Required coursework. Graduate work in engineering and mathematics is a challenge in itself, with its own courses and research agenda. Not every advising professor appreciated our fellows’ outside work in the CREAM grant. When we wanted them to participate in extra meetings and study groups, even the fellows resisted. We decided a required graduate course would be the only way we could leverage our fellows to participate.

E—Educational Content. We were pressured to hurry and put the fellows into classrooms, come up with a project in consultation with their site instructors, and let them do engineering. Our strong conviction was that if the fellows were to design culturally relevant engineering applications in mathematics, they needed to know much more than engineering, and do more than classroom show and tell.

A—Assessment. Determining what we wanted our fellows to learn, how they would demonstrate their learning mastery, and ways we could measure the results were an ongoing challenge in our project. Our assessment was a mutual learning process, both as we explored our content and as we went through the cycle of interacting in the secondary classroom, then reporting back and evaluating those experiences in light of our learning.

M—Mentoring. Mentoring went beyond meeting weekly for a seminar. I shared with the fellows in many after-class discussions ranging from STEM literacy, to students' and teachers' behavior in the classrooms, to time management, to “life” in general. We also conducted weekly video conferencing sessions to report in and share experiences.

Our projects—the sound of mathematics and bucket ‘o functions.

Our projects had three vital elements in common. First, the materials were easily and cheaply obtainable, second, the themes—music and water flow—were common to all our students, and third students worked in groups and made reports to the whole class.

**Project: The sounds of mathematics**

Sounds of mathematics covered varieties of cultures, music and instruments. Some instruments were quite complicated, like stringed instruments, while others were simple, like flutes, but each required a connection to the culture of the instrument, the type of scale being used, and accuracy of pitch, in alignment with “concert A” being 440 mHZ. Students learned about Japanese culture, and five-tone scales for example, as they created flutes, while others, in the Western tradition with its eight note scale pondered the difficulties of building a guitar that would hold its tune. Students had to calculate where to put holes in a flute, or how long to make the guitar strings, then data was collected as the notes were calibrated against an electronic tuning meter.

**Project: Buckets of functions**

According to the teacher’s explanation, “Students in small groups use water in buckets to generate a series of flow conditions. They collect data which they fit it to different functional forms—linear, quadratic, radical, exponential, logarithmic, periodic, rational—as they explore flow and power relationships. Students use calculators, spreadsheets, and devices to measure electrical power generation. They also share their findings with the class following small group discussion and report preparation” (McAleeer, 2007).

Andy got the buckets and plastic plumbing spigots from a hardware store. Spigots were inserted through a hole drilled in the bucket, and the buckets were filled with water from a hose, outside the math classrooms in the breezeway. Some buckets were on tables, some on benches, a few on
concrete abutments, or walls for height. Each bucket had a wooden rule affixed inside to measure the internal height of the water. Students were responsible for timing, observing and noting changes in water dropping, or pressure decreasing from spigots in appropriate units. Typical data charts included two vertical columns, one for time and the other for inches. Later students plotted points, and used calculators for curve fitting, and identifying the type of function they recorded—linear, quadratic, exponential, and so on.

As part of the mathematics reform communication and literacy emphasis, students then made PowerPoint presentations on what they did, the data they collected and the function(s) that resulted. Many students were amazed that several options could be possible for choosing a function, and that their data was always “messy,” with many unknown variables, never yielding a perfect scenario.

Lessons learned

C—Culture of collaboration. Whether in our class, sharing “math-talk,” or in the projects in the schools, we found that a spirit of collegiality and collaboration opened the doors to students taking risks, sharing their thinking, being willing to learn even if they made mistakes. A typical seminar would have very little lecture, with a lot of rapid-fire question and answer, elaboration, examples, and drawing on the white board to explain things.

R—Reading is the start of literacy. Whether it’s the research showing the difficulties of infusing content literacy into secondary classrooms, or the research that shows that teachers of mathematics do not believe it is their responsibility to teach reading-content area reading, if a student cannot read the math book, or take notes, their learning is greatly hindered. We came to describe reading in terms of the “new literacies” (Vacca and Vacca, 2007) that include the traditional reading and writing but also talking and listing, and viewing and hands-on doing. When the students were able to engage in this kind of holistic literacy their interest and their participation improved.

E—Enthusiastic experts enable projects. Having enthusiastic expert engineering students as part of the learning team along with the teachers and students made what might have been only dreams come into reality. Sometimes the fellows provided inspiration to step out and give a project a try, sometimes they provided perspiration as they did the preparation “grunt work,” setting up the project, supporting teacher and students during the project and cleaning up after the project.

A—Activating prior knowledge especially helps students who have no background in mathematics, science or engineering, but it helps everyone when the graduate fellow is able to show simple everyday phenomena (flute, guitar string, water flowing faster when its higher, or further when the spigot is smaller) and connect these to mathematical concepts and procedures.

M—Monitoring makes it happen. Especially during the bucket of functions project, with 10 stations, and students collecting data with all of these, the presence of graduate students along with the teacher meant that all students’ questions were answered, and difficulties overcome, whether a faulty spigot, or forgetting to notice the start level of the water, or missing a period of observation.

Conclusion

CREAM began a process of impacting graduate students who may one day become professors who have an influence on future teachers, and engaging secondary school students in creatively learning mathematics through engineering-based projects. Our teachers appreciated having new ways to motivate and involve the students, the students participated in their learning at deeper levels, and graduate fellows came to a new understanding of math literacy and connecting learning with involvement rather than passive note-taking and problem solving. With a solid first year under our belts, our next steps are to refine our process, with an even greater emphasis on cultural relevance and social justice.

References


Doing school alone: Isolation and social justice in schools

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were. Any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee...” (John Donne, Meditation XVII, 1624)

Justice is at its heart a social conception. Beyond the obvious implications of the word social, Sandel (1998) makes the point that a “plurality can be seen as a necessary pre-supposition for the possibility of justice” (pp. 50-51). In this, context plurality requires us to be engaged: we cannot actively work for justice at a distance. This is the reflection needed to answer John Donne’s immortal question asked in For Whom the Bell Tolls (Coffin, 1994). Working for social justice in any organization must be based on the nature of the social structure in which one operates; we need the ability and context to be social in order to work for justice. I will contend there are few places that this more true than schools.

I have always had an ingrained belief that schools were fundamentally social places. Parker Palmer observes, “In a community of truth [idealized classroom] knowing and teaching and learning look less like General Motors and more like a town meeting” (1998, p. 101). However, in my professional experience one of the deepest paradoxes is that the more one becomes immersed in the formal or positional aspects of school leadership, the further distant one becomes from the community being led. As put by one school superintendent I know, “I found with each promotion, the higher up in the district I rose, with each rung climbed my circle of friends became smaller, now the circle is just me.” This poignant observation begs the question: can school leaders lead for social justice in isolation?

**Phenomenon of school isolation**

The phenomenon of personal and professional isolation in schools is well documented in the literature (Barth, 1990; Bolin & Falk, 1987; Eisner, 1998; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Lieberman, 1994; Lortie, 1975; Sizer, 1992a). Intrator and Scribner (2002) argue that isolation magnifies the vulnerability of the vocational identity of teachers and school leaders. Intrator and Scribner state:

“The cost of this isolation exacts its toll and often gives teachers a distorted view of their own efficacy and of their sense of themselves as adults. These distortions become amplified because of fragile, uncertain rewards that teachers derive from their work” (p. xlvii).

Further, personal and professional isolation in schools seems to particularly plague those struggling to serve underserved populations in public schools (hooks, 1994, 2003; Kozol, 1991, 2005). Thus, it is often in the schools most in need of a social justice focus that we find the most isolated educators and school leaders. It is not clear, however, exactly how the experience of isolation impacts the school leader’s ability to lead, particularly to lead for justice.

**The study**

In a study, funded in part by the Braithmayer Foundation and Spokane Teacher’s Credit Union, a group of Gonzaga University faculty sought to investigate the lived experience of isolation in schools and to begin to forge authentic connections between those who work in isolation and the institutions and communities that support them. In addition to the isolation that stems from simply having geographically disparate schools and districts, the project sought to explore the experience of isolation in terms of professional identity and vocational vitality (Intrator & Kunzman, 2005, 2006). This included the concept of collegiality in schools, specifically where a dearth of colleagues or a lack of professional community leads to isolation. In our study of isolation we gathered data from 27 participants in retreats (between August and October of 2006) designed specifically to explore the nature of isolation in schools and school leadership. In addition, a conference was held (Doing School Alone Conference; December 2006) to present our initial findings and deepen our understanding of the findings. The core findings of this study offer some interesting insights into how personal and professional isolation can impact school leaders’ ability to lead, particularly their ability to lead for social justice.

**The nature of school isolation: Core findings**

These findings from the Isolation Project can be condensed into six thematic categories that adequately summarize the experience of many of the participants. The findings are:

[Continued...]

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*Curriculum in Context*
1. Types of isolation experienced in schools are interrelated; to be isolated geographically often means being isolated in other ways too.
2. Sometimes isolation in schools is a choice; sometimes it is forced upon us.
3. Isolation limits our understanding of professional life and work in schools; it requires community to construct meaning in our work.
4. The experience of isolation and the professional identity of educators are interrelated; as an educational leader I define myself and work both internally and through external referencing with colleagues.
5. Ideological differences can create isolation in schools; when I believe something different than my institution I become isolated.
6. Isolation is often experienced as paradoxical in schools; there are both advantages and disadvantages in isolation as a school leader, often experienced at the same time.

The study recognized that while these core understandings are reliably correlated to common experiences of the study participants, how isolation is experienced individually proved highly contextual. For example, while most of the participants recognized that they actually chose to isolate themselves in certain ways in the context of their working lives, how they chose to isolate themselves varied considerably among participants. Most salient to the discussion of social justice in schools are the findings related to how school leaders find and create meaning in their work.

**Isolation and social justice**

Perhaps the strongest finding from this study is that isolation often has a negative impact on educators’ ability to find meaning and purpose in their work. As one superintendent in the study put it, “There is one guy in my entire region I can call to bounce ideas off of, and he is 150 miles away, so I generally have to figure things out on my own – I am used to it now”. Most of the participants in this project noted that the inability to have conversations about the meaning and purpose of their work in schools severely limited their own ability to make meaning or find purpose of their lives in schools. This inability was attributed to many things. Study participants often felt that the role of school leader as defined by their school structure or community actually precluded them from having meaningful conversations in their schools or districts. Many also expressed a perception of a lack of a shared community value in conversations about the meaning of work in general.

Because of this, many of these educators and school leaders feel they are largely left alone to work and develop understandings of their practices. As one participant said, “I am surrounded by over 200 people [students and staff] in my building every day, but I work mostly alone”. Participants in this study echoed the sentiments of Sandel (1998), Noddings (2005) and Rawls and Kelly (2001) in noting how difficult it is to integrate foundational concepts of equity, access, social responsibility and justice in their schools when one “simply has no one to talk to about the things that really matter in school” (Principal with 20 years experience). This finding about how educators find and make meaning of their lives in schools was directly related to the finding concerning professional identity and isolation.

**The professional identity of educators**

For several of the participants in this project, the experience of isolation set in motion a vicious cycle of professional identity deformation (Palmer, 1998). For these participants being in an environment where they felt professionally isolated caused them to feel pressure to act in ways that increased the isolation and further support the isolative structures, which then increased the pressure toward isolation. As one participant noted, “If I am expected to make all the decisions by myself, that is what I do – and this in turn makes people less likely to talk to me about them in the future. Pretty soon I start making all my decisions without talking to anyone about them – this is not the leader I want to be.”

These participants pointed out that the dissociation with the leadership identity they want to embody serves to distance them from the ideals like trust, fairness and justice. “You can sort of forget what you stand for when you have no one but yourself to talk to about it” was a common idea amongst these study participants. This conception of a professional identity that is reinforced by strong community and the ability to articulate one’s purpose in that community is critical to a professional identity rooted in social justice. As stated by Sergiovanni, “with articulating the purposes of the community, we are more passionate about them, and more willing [and able] to take time to pursue them” (2007, pp. x-xi). This expression of isolation also carries with it an ideological component in that the “purposes” of the community and the purposes of the educational institution often were experienced as different things by these participants. This was expressed by some participants as an experience of ideological isolation.

**Isolation from a justice based ideology**

Several participants reported the experiences of ideological isolation; that is the isolation or distancing from the reasons we teach and what schools are supposed to be about (Apple, 1993). As stated by one participant, “in the day-to-day work of leading schools we can sometime forget what we are here for, pretty soon we are doing things to kids we shouldn’t be doing”. Many participants
reported that this ideological isolation seems to have become worse during the last five years. Some participants remarked about the growing “gap” they felt between what they wanted their work to be about [ideals such as justice and truth] and what educational leadership as well as local, state and federal policy seemed to require from them. Participants seemed to feel increasingly hindered from expressing and acting on their beliefs, to the point that many experienced fear of speaking or acting in ways that were critical of the current ideological focus of their schools or districts, even if such a focus conflicted with their own educational beliefs. “I mostly just keep my ideas to myself now,” said one participant. “You never know what might happen.” This response was commonly associated with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in the discussions. This reaction to NCLB seemed to be more a reaction to the perception of the ideology behind NCLB rather than to the policies themselves. There was a shared perception with some of these participants that they were being forced to adopt an externally imposed ideology of education and thus were forced to suspend their own ideology in favor of the imposed one.

In order to mitigate the effects of ideological isolation that seem connected to current standards-based expectations, some participants felt the need to examine the institutional climates of safety in schools and districts. One participant asked, “If we do not even feel [ideologically] safe in our schools, how can the kids?” This transfer of ideological distance from the institution to the experience of students in their schools clearly worried several participants. “I want kids to be good people, not good test takers” was a sentiment echoed by several participants. However these participants felt their professional isolation limited them from being able to act upon, or even voice, their ideas if they were counter to those they perceived were held by the institution. In an environment where voices are silenced by isolation and fear, there is little room for teaching social justice.

Implications for justice in an isolated world
The examination of the experience of isolation in schools and the suggested relationship that isolation has to social justice have several general implications for those who work and lead in schools. The development of networks that can mitigate the negative effects of isolation for teachers and leaders in schools is clearly needed. Further, the development of these communities or networks not only suggests a potential approach to making schools more effective, but perhaps even making schools more just. The most significant implication shown in this study is that the generation of intentional community can potentially mitigate or reduce some types of isolation, which in turn can create more just structures, policies and interactions in schools. This study by no means implies that the creation of intentional community is a sufficient condition for more socially just organizations to emerge, but it does clearly imply that the development of learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) is a necessary condition for developing more socially just educational institutions. If this is true then the larger implication follows that the mitigation of isolative structures and environments is not just an issue of creating stronger learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1992, 1998), but it becomes an issue of social justice with ethical implications and imperatives.

Conclusion
One study participant noted the deep irony she felt in her experience as a principal: “working in schools is simply a lonely business”. But why do schools have to be lonely when so many gather for the betterment of all? Further, how can we hope to work for safer, stronger, more truthful and more just schools, when we feel we “work alone most of the time” (Asst. Principal and study participant). The pursuit of greater equity and access in our schools is one that cannot be undertaken in isolation; plurality can be seen as a necessary presupposition for the possibility of justice. To make real progress towards justice in our schools requires the communal work of the many, not the isolated toils of the few. This study found that the experience of isolation is real and deep for those teachers and school leaders who participated in the retreats. To work for justice in our schools will require first that we work for deeper and more inclusive communities, places

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where we are known and accepted. If schools remain places of isolated individuals yearning for deeper connections, but rarely experiencing them, then I fear we relegate the principle of justice to merely a worthy dream that shall never manifest itself.

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Reference List


Changing perspectives of curriculum

Passage of the 2000 Reauthorization of the 1964 Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act could be considered a “perfect storm” as a convergence of economic, social, educational and political challenges. These changes were uppermost in the minds of legislators and a good deal of the public. K-12 education, once viewed as an activity for providing children with learning and preparation for adult life, has moved to a new level of importance as an important influence in determining not only the economic success of individual students, but also as a necessity for maintaining our national economic vitality in the world.

In 2000, when legislators were searching for ways to “fix” the problems, they were influenced by two unfinished movements: the standards-based reform activities of the previous federal reauthorization and the decades of activities to provide civil rights and social justice for low income and minority students. The political climate included liberal legislators discouraged that previous Title I legislations had not been more effective in reducing the achievement gaps among American Indian, African American, and Hispanic students and White and Asian students. Other legislators believed in a market approach and hoped to find ways to expand public funding of private education.

The resulting legislation continued aspects of standards-based reform with a heavy emphasis on accountability and punishment for not meeting goals. It also provided a mandate to give greater attention to low-income and minority students by disaggregating state accountability assessments.

The positive implication of the legislation has been the wake-up call for communities and educators. These are initial improvements in the academic achievement of children, especially those in elementary schools across the nation. In a sense, however, neither legislators nor educational systems have caught up with the complexities that the changes which globalization and the Knowledge Age have produced. The contexts of our society, of education and the needs of children have changed dramatically and we find ourselves struggling to make the adaptations needed in nearly every aspect of our educational systems.

The changing context

Contextual changes impacting education include the following:

1. An expanded understanding of the importance of education for individuals and nations. Educational research of the past 25 years has helped us understand the importance of early childhood education, critical areas of knowledge and skills which are essential for life success, and the economic impact of human resource development. This understanding has not been limited to children and youth but also to adult lifetime learning which has received a new emphasis as corporations and business have increased resources for adult learning.

2. The continuing prevalence of White privilege and perspectives in organizations and individual behaviors. Despite federal and state nondiscrimination laws and increased opportunities for minorities, women and those with disabilities, inequities remain in education policies and programs at all levels.

Minority students and others often have to live within a toxic environment when they are not welcomed, respected, or expected to achieve.

3. Changing demographics. Immigration and in-migration patterns of the U.S. population have resulted in racial and cultural diversity being felt in most areas of the country. In Washington State, some 30 percent of the K-12 population are minority students and some 37 percent are eligible for free and reduced food services. The changing demographics have a profound impact on all levels and functions of education systems. Educators and communities have begun to gain a deeper understanding of cultures and how they influence student learning and achievement.

4. Standards-based reform efforts have been incomplete and underfunded. Explanations of standards-based education emphasize the importance of standards (which are a framework, not a complete curriculum), grade level benchmarks, assessments and accountability. The pressures for achieving state criteria on assessments for all subgroups place many schools in a stressful effort to focus on reading and mathematics. Some have summarized the need for relationships, rigor and relevance throughout all phases of implementation of reform (Daggett, 2001). Yet, teachers and administrators seldom have training and support in understanding diversity concerns, in modifying their relationships, in developing curriculum which is both aligned with standards and appropriate for the unique needs of their students, or understanding in depth the specific aspects of curriculum to be assessed.

5. Social Nature of Changes. Perhaps one of the more difficult changes is the social nature of effective curriculum. Schools which have been able to respond to the array of challenges are those where staff has been able to work together to create a positive learning environment for staff and students. This
is a shift from the traditional independence of the teacher in the classroom.

Similarly, curriculum is a social process. Curriculum is not static but it continues to evolve over time as research findings, demographic shifts and societal changes call for adaptations. When teachers work together on a consistent basis to share their learning and to expand their perspectives, they are better able to provide learning coherence and personalization of students' needs, to build on each other's work, and to stay in touch with the needs of their students.

The challenges facing educators are primarily related to accelerating the learning of ways to respond effectively to the changed context of our society and its implications for policy, curriculum, relationships, instruction, classroom assessments, and cultural responsiveness. These needs will require consistent and effective efforts at federal, state, regional, and district and school levels.

**Next steps**

Learning to work with a diverse population of students and families is a challenge for many schools. There are many perspectives which need to be considered. These include reducing overt forms of bias to developing positive levels of cultural competency, the provision of interventions to meet special needs, and ultimately personalizing children's educational programs. Moving staff to being able to meet these needs for optimal learning can seldom be achieved without ongoing efforts, training sessions, multicultural experiences, coaching, and conversations. Although individual staff members will be knowledgeable and skilled at different levels, it is important for a staff group to have some common experiences in order to achieve a positive school climate. The figure outlines the areas where staff needs support to achieve equity for all students.

How can local schools and districts become more responsive to the transformed context of our communities and nation? If schools are to prepare all students for their adult lives, attention must be given to the climate of the school and district. This requires a series of intentional activities designed to involve students and staff in the creation of a positive learning environment for all students. Examples of a progression of steps to be taken are provided below.

1. **Work to establish a climate of openness and trust.** A foundation of the intent to be open to the full implementation of federal and state nondiscrimination laws must be established. The attention given to informing employees, students and their families of their rights to nondiscrimination and the training of staff to implement the provision of the laws and the handling of complaints sets the expectation of fairness and a willingness to make it a reality. In Washington State, the requirement for affirmative action plans and activities calls on districts to make efforts to develop a workforce which begins to match the demographics of the community and student population. This may not be as easy a task in some communities or areas, but the active efforts of the district to reach out and make a “good faith” effort do not go unnoticed in the community. The handling of employee and student complaints can set an environment of trust and fairness or if not handled well, the perpetuation of bias and inequality.

2. **Involving staff in creating a positive climate.** In many cases it is important to involve staff in activities to help them understand the subtle inequities found throughout the operations of the school. This may take the form of insightful analysis of data, observation of efforts other schools are undertaking, development of equity teams, and interactions with community groups and students. These awareness activi-
ties should be directed toward helping staff to “see” the ways that systemic racism and sexism are inherent in the school or district and the ways that the needs of children with disabilities and other groups of students are not being met. This should move toward some expression of policy or plan to begin to improve and transform the learning opportunities for all students.

3. Implementing training and activities to inform staff. There are few educators who wish to perpetuate inequities or limit the achievement of certain children, but most of us are unaware of the degree to which our expectations, beliefs, experiences and behaviors support the perpetuation of inequalities. Even when staff may recognize problems, it is often difficult to discuss them openly. This is a time when training should focus on bias and stereotyping.

The plans and activities of this phase should initially focus on personal behaviors which can be changed. Every child needs to feel safe, included and respected. Students need to feel that teachers and staff care for them, will treat them fairly, and believe that they are capable of learning at high levels. Much of the reform effort has focused on curriculum content, instruction, and assessment to the point that we have neglected the requirement of effective relationships which are required for optimal learning. It is essential that teachers make the effort to know their students, their experiences, and sources of motivation.

The use of data should be emphasized. Staff should look for patterns of students’ achievement, their strengths, and their areas for improvement. In one Washington elementary school, a room was set aside for assisting the personalization of each student’s learning. One wall was covered with Velcro and sticks representing each student, providing a visual view of where students were on statewide and classroom assessments. Teachers and staff update and extend this information and use it to identify learning needs and develop coordinated strategies for meeting these needs. Other activities may involve analyzing student’s course taking patterns, providing needed interventions, and working with community groups to enhance and supplement student learning.

4. Implementing cultural competency work. Becoming culturally competent is an ongoing process over time. It requires an internal and an external set of tasks. At the internal level, we examine the ways that race, ethnicity, poverty, language, gender, disability and classism have and may continue to be influences in educational programs and outcomes. This requires us to move outside the White privilege which we or others may have experienced.

We also need to examine the nature, beliefs and norms of other cultures. This may be done in a variety of ways. Studies of the history of other cultures, meeting with different cultural groups, visits to student’s homes, and discussions with parents, can increase our knowledge and understandings. Staff needs to begin to incorporate multicultural content in the curriculum and their interactions with students. Instructional methods should be varied to meet the needs of children’s learning styles and to strengthen the ability of all children to learn effectively in a variety of ways.

It is important that schools and districts sponsor and reward these activities. While individuals may engage in them, it is important that such activities are common to as many members of the staff as possible. These experiences should lead to what have been called Courageous Conversations where staff can discuss difficult issues with honesty, openness and caring. These conversations may be unsettling or difficult, but they are important ways we learn to provide relationships, rigor and relevance for our students.

These steps may be viewed as nice but impractical when we have the difficult work of organizing and providing curriculum content as well as learning how to improve instruction and classroom management. The ultimate goal is the integration of these understandings into our personal and professional activities and behaviors. When that happens, the mantra of relationships, rigor and relevance will be achieved and our curriculum will truly be consistent with the context of our ever changing world.

Dr. Shirley McCune is Federal liaison for the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Reference

One of the many highlights of our annual conference this past November was Dr. Gene Carter’s keynote address related to ASCD’s Whole Child Campaign. He spoke of how educators must focus on ensuring that each child has access to educational, health, social, emotional and cultural experiences, as well as services and support essential for the whole child. Dr. Carter’s message was speaking of education in the United States. But I have learned that as the executive director and CEO of ASCD International, Dr. Carter’s message spreads beyond our country to many other countries around the world.

Recently, I had the opportunity to travel to Cairo, Egypt, with the People to People Citizen Ambassador Program. While this trip was neither funded nor sponsored by WSASCD, or ASCD International, what I learned had real significance for my role as executive director of WSASCD, as well as my own understanding of educating the whole child and the social justice issues inherent in educating all children.

There were close to 300 educators in our delegation, united with the purpose of establishing professional connections with our Egyptian counterparts, and learning more about the culture of Egypt. Our delegation included people from every area in education. I was part of the 60-member supervision and curriculum development delegation. While this was not an ASCD function, Dr. Gene Carter served as the leader of our sub-delegation.

During our orientation in Cairo, we heard from several Egyptian officials, including Dr. Yousry El Gamal, the minister of education, regarding their standards movement, which began three years ago. According to Dr. Gamal, the Egyptian government believes that in order to educate all children, and to reap the benefits for the country as a whole, the government has to take the lead to make education (primary and secondary) mandatory, cut its costs to families and improve its quality.

Their plan, which includes lowering class size (some class size ratios are 62 to 1), increasing more access for girls to schools, and educating all four-year olds, involves building an additional 3500 schools in the next five years.

To improve the quality of their educational programs, the ministry of education has focused on incorporating the principles of democracy, tolerance, and women’s rights into textbooks and the daily lesson plans. These principles are intended to complement new techniques designed to teach critical thinking and analytical skills. With the leadership of President and Mrs. Mubarak, the government has encouraged the ministry to foster an education system that feeds young minds, transmits ethical values, and encourages and rewards creativity.

Our delegation visited two experimental language schools in Cairo, where I was struck by the physical look of the schools and their furnishings. Libraries had very few books and they were outdated. There was a dichotomy between the old, rundown buildings and furniture and the new, state-of-the-art technology in each building. The ministry of education and Microsoft have provided all K-12 schools with Microsoft desktop products, giving Egyptian students access to the latest and most innovative technology.

Students in the schools we visited were actively involved in specialty classes—singing, dancing, playing instruments, acting out the scene of a play in English, exercising and playing a ball game in a physical education class, drawing, and creating pottery. What we did not see was much interaction between students in the regular subject-area classroom; and the level of thinking seemed to be at the recall level. According to one head teacher, learning to utilize active engagement is the challenge for the teachers in the public schools, as they were formerly trained in rote learning.

Our delegation visited the ministry of education’s Teacher Training Center at Mubarak City, a resident facility much like a university, where they are teaching the principles of active learning and critical thinking to pre-service and practicing teachers. It is one example of the steps they are taking to strengthen teachers’ instructional skills to meet performance standards.

Training from the ministry of education seeks to build management and leadership skills to support education decentralization efforts. During our visit to the teacher training facility, we learned that the ministry uses the Franklin Covey 8th Habit materials and a wide variety of ASCD materials for their value-centered leadership and teacher training sessions. A value the school staffs and students hold most dear is being Egyptian. They have a pride in their heritage that is as old as their country. With their standards movement in education, the ministry hopes to revitalize the creativity and ingenuity that sustained them as an early civilization and to transform their society into one that can compete and excel in the global community.

Egyptians also value their relationship with the United States and other countries around the world. They value freedom and democracy. One of the teachers, with whom I spoke, expressed her pride in being in a free country “like America.”

My visit to Cairo was short and involved visiting only two schools. Consequently, there is so much more I’d like to know, such as the challenges they face in their rural schools. But what I did learn was that professional development is a key to school improvement, whether it is in Washington State, across America, or around the world. I am proud to be associated with ASCD, an organization that provides quality materials and services to our global community.
ARE YOU AND YOUR COLLEAGUES serving K-12 students in creative ways? Can you shed light on legislative trends that might benefit educators across the state? Can you illustrate recent educational research claims through stories from schools and classrooms on the front lines? If so, consider taking some time to clearly and persuasively contribute to the intellectual life of the WSASCD community. Please e-mail a 50-100 word preview of your contribution to kingrey@wsu.edu and we will promptly send a submission guidelines form for your 1000-2500 word article. If you have questions, please e-mail editor Joan Kingrey at the above address.

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