

A Praxis-Oriented Framework for Educational Leadership

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Leadership and leadership theory are, in some ways, as old as society itself. From early days of social organization, and especially with the emergence of political or military institutions, one can find discussion of what makes for good leadership. Sun Tsu, writing in 6th Century China, for example, provides aphorisms of advice about leadership in times of war that still inform theories and business practices today. Other well-known writers, such as Plato or Machiavelli, are still commonly referenced in discussions of leadership. From Samuel Smiles in the Victorian era to Steven Covey's modern catalog of a leader's prerequisite "Seven Habits," everyone seems to have a working hypothesis about the how, why, who, and when of leadership. However, despite the myriad of pages written and seemingly endless number of volumes published on the subject, there is an ongoing interest in almost every field—with new theories, models, or approaches to the topic appear annually.

In education, the field of leadership studies, first known as administrative science, is relatively new, having its origins in a group known as the Vienna Circle in the early 1920s. In North America, it developed most fully in the 1950s, with the discussions of the Chicago Cooperative Program in Educational Administration (CPEA). Culbertson (1988) writes that "CPEA leaders agreed they should make greater use of the social sciences in training and inquiry" (p. 15a). One of the early seminal works in the field was Simon's (1945) *Administrative Behavior* in which he focused on decision-making, a task he considered to be central to administrative work.

Since those early days, when educational leadership was developing into both a science and a discipline, educators have been bombarded by theories related to decision-making, planning organizational change, personnel administration, teacher supervision and other tasks of leadership. There have been studies of leadership traits and behaviors (Caldwell & Wellman, 1926; Stogdill, 1974), leadership styles and approaches (Fiedler, 1967; McGregor, 1960) that extend from scientific to organic and from transactional to transformational. In recent years, the barrage continues unabated with work on feminist leadership, critical race theories and leadership, distributed or distributive leadership, servant leadership, spiritual leadership, emotional leadership and so on. It seems there would remain little to be said about the topic.

At the same time, of course, researchers in many countries have begun to demonstrate that leadership is important, that it does make a difference to such things as the quality of the workplace, the organizational culture, or its goal attainment (Morgan, 1997). Some (Hill, 1998; Silins & Mulford, 2002) have found that leadership also has a direct impact on student learning.

With the common press for accountability found in the United States, Britain, and other developed countries, the question as to leader efficacy has taken on new importance. As legislators, politicians, and the general public demand to know whether or not educational leaders and the schools which they

lead are actually making a difference to student learning, the subject has become crucial. With the increasing diversity in many schools, there is also indication of increasing disparities in student learning between groups of children who have traditionally comprised the dominant group and those who are in some ways minoritized or marginalized due to factors such as race, ethnicity, family socio-economic background, or home language—factors that are largely beyond their control. Accomplishing what is often referred to as “gap reduction”—enhancing the academic performance of traditionally lower performing sub-groups—has become the gold standard for success.

To address these latter demands for equity in terms of demonstrable improvement, studies of educational reforms and restructuring have also proliferated. Yet, some children still fail in today’s schools. Poor children and children of color are less likely to succeed in North America than white middle class children. Educational leaders are expected to cope with inadequate buildings, uncertified teachers, insufficient resources, and an uncertain and shifting political climate. They are expected to address and overcome many wider societal issues such as lack of early childhood education, poverty, lack of medical care, or substandard housing—all of which impinge on children’s ability to learn.

Purpose

This paper is based on insights acquired by the authors over years of engaging in educational leadership and of conducting educational leadership research. Here we present a framework for educational leadership that we posit has the ability to move us beyond models and prescriptions to focus on the (many and still contested) purposes and goals of the endeavor. We agree with many others who have found a lack of clear cut differentiation related to various leadership traits, styles, or approaches. We are convinced that there are highly successful hierarchical leaders as well as equally successful collaborative leaders; we have found as many highly regarded extroverted leaders as highly respected introverts. Some educational leaders seem to lead from the heart and shoot from the hip, while others appear to plan every move as if it were an elaborate military campaign.

In spite of this, we have found some common threads or themes, often in ways and places that were totally unexpected. We have found there to be a significant difference in the ability of educators to exercise leadership based on the clarity of their moral purpose, their willingness and ability to exercise agency, and the presence or lack thereof of something we are calling *savvy*. The purpose of this paper is to explore and develop this framework, drawing on examples from research sites we have studied over the past 15 years. This is, therefore, not an empirical piece per se, but draws from both theory and practice to develop a praxis-oriented framework for educational leadership.

Theories and Definitions: Some Clarification

We have used several terms in the previous section that warrant clarification (at least in how we are using them) before we proceed; they are *leadership*, *moral purpose*, *agency*, and *savvy*. In this section, we do not provide

short, dictionary-type definitions, but instead, describe some of the current theories that embody these terms and explain the ways in which we are thinking about them.

At the outset we also want to be clear that we are not creating yet another list of leadership traits, nor are we thinking of these as topics to be taught during a preparation program. We are also not very comfortable with words like attributes, components, or facets as they all seem to imply something relatively fixed that can be clearly defined and bounded. We do not suggest that the elements of our framework are innate—you either have them or you don't, nor that they are immutable—once you have acquired, learned, or demonstrated certain characteristics, you cannot change. These are essentializing ways of thinking about something we see as dynamic and interactive, aspects of leadership for which we seek an appropriate term.

Instead, we will be talking about *moral purpose*, *agency*, and *savvy* as aspects or elements of a praxis-oriented leadership framework in order to acknowledge their fluidity and imprecision. At most, we consider them to be dispositions, not in a fixed sense of one's usual mood or temperament, but more as a combination of qualities, inclinations, or tendencies that help to shape and define an approach to leadership. Taken together they represent manifestations of beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices learned over time through interaction with our social groups and the "discursive culture that these people inhabit" (Burr, 1995, p. 50). Tendencies toward one or another of these dispositions may even be inborn—a little like the tendency for extroversion or introversion. They are ways of thinking and acting that may be both inherited and learned, but are undoubtedly shaped by the dominant discourses (words and practices) of the societies in which we have lived (Foucault, 1980).

Leadership

We do not attempt to define leadership, but take as a starting point, Bogotch's (2000) suggestion that it is "deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power." Implicit in this statement are a number of ideas we tease out as we talk about a framework that includes moral purpose, agency, and savvy. For example, the notion of deliberate intervention implies action. Here the statement does not suggest the kind of intervention: it might be top down and mandated; it might come from the grassroots; it might be instigated by a large pressure group or by a single individual. We are making explicit the notion that there are many ways to exercise leadership. Bogotch suggests that a leader (or leaders) need to deliberately intervene—in other words, they need to act in order to exercise leadership. Action, too, is fundamental to our concept of agency. Bogotch then introduces the concept of morality related to a leader's use of power. As we will elaborate later, moral purpose is an intrinsic component of the framework we develop in this paper and power is inherent in one's ability to act, either for good or ill. As we will demonstrate later, our findings clearly demonstrate that a component missing in much of the literature is that of savvy; yet, we posit that without what we are calling savvy, moral purpose and willingness to intervene are less likely to succeed.

However defined, there is considerable evidence emerging about the importance of educational leaders. Silins and Mulford (2002) state that “the contributions of school leadership to past and current ... school reform efforts have been found to be undeniably significant, even if these contributions are indirect” (p. 564). Some have suggested that one of the most promising approaches to leadership that makes a difference to student outcomes is transformational leadership. Slegers, Geijsel, and van den Berg (2002) indicate that “transformational leadership has emerged as one alternative model with potential for enriching our understanding of innovation in schooling” (p. 84). Drawing on the work of Leithwood and colleagues, they identify six dimensions of transformational leadership (vision building, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, fostering the acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, and modeling important values and practices) (p. 86). In addition to these organizational dimensions to which leaders attend, some approaches to leadership are more broadly focused. Astin and Astin (2000) describe transformative leadership in the following terms:

We believe that the value ends of leadership should be to enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life; to expand access and opportunity; to encourage respect for difference and diversity; to strengthen democracy, civic life, and civic responsibility; and to promote cultural enrichment, creative expression, intellectual honesty, the advancement of knowledge, and personal freedom coupled with responsibility. (p. 6)

This emphasis on leadership that enhances equity and social justice, that is interested in enhancing the quality of life for students and their families and in increasing access and opportunity, is closely related to our understanding of moral purpose.

Moral Purpose

While the ways in which moral purpose is exhibited may vary according to context, here we adopt Fullan’s (2003) framework. Fullan identifies four levels of what he calls the moral imperative—the individual, school, regional, and societal (p. 30). In talking about what connotes a moral purpose for schools, he states:

The criteria of moral purpose are the following: that all students and teachers benefit in term of identified desirable goals, that the gap between high and low performers becomes less as the bar for all is raised, that ever-deeper educational goals are pursued, and that the culture of the school becomes so transformed that continuous improvement relative to the previous three components becomes built in (p.31).

Fullan sums up what this means by saying, “Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society” (p. 29).

Purpose itself suggests a clear relationship between the goals of educational leadership and the ways in which it is practiced. In our conception of moral purpose related to *educational* leadership, the goal is closely tied to what some would describe as social justice: instituting equitable and inclusive learning environments in which all children reach their highest potential.

Brown (2005) declares that “at times there has been little relationship between the expressed goals of education and actual educational practices” (p. 110). Leading with moral purpose would require a groundedness in which there is congruence between expressed purpose and practice. Some (for example Evans, 1996; Terry, 1993) call this authentic leadership. Terry says that authentic leadership is not just action but ethical action—being “true to ourselves and true to the world, real in ourselves and real in the world” (p. 139). Dantley (2005) summarizes many of these themes when he says that

Moral leadership, therefore, is broader than traditional school management. It demands a deep investment of the genuine or authentic self of the educational leader. Moral leaders have the courage to locate their work in a broader as well as deeper space as they work to bring about societal transformation. Moral leadership is problematic because it interrogates what school systems and communities have essentialized. It is problematic because it dares to demystify those structures and rituals that have become almost reified after so many years of acceptance. (p. 45).

It is important to recognize, however, as Fairholm (2000) does, that moral leadership is not new. He explains: “the problem is we have not *thought* of our leadership in values terms. So the *idea* of values leadership is “new,” while the *practice* is much more common” (p. xxi).

We note here that when we suggest a leader is lacking moral purpose, we are not implying that that leader is immoral or amoral. For the purposes of this paper, we are saying that educational moral purpose necessarily focuses on providing the optimal environment to enhance student learning. Naturally, there are other moral purposes. We recognize that all too frequently disparate moral purposes compete with each other for an educational leader’s attention. Our argument for moral purpose sides with that of enhanced student learning, whether it be intellectual, emotional, social, or spiritual.

Agency

Agency, as we are using it, implies both the willingness and the ability to act in order to achieve one’s mission, goals, and objectives in a proactive way. Ogawa (2005) suggests that agency is held in balance by forces outside of individual control but also acknowledges the individual responsibility to exercise agency. He adopts the concept of human agency

as a heuristic for examining theory and research on educational leadership. Agency involves the control that people exert over their

destiny, which is matched against deterministic forces assumed to lie largely beyond their control. (p. 90)

Ogawa further states that much current theory treats organizations as a constraint on leadership, but argues for the alternative approach of Katz and Kahn (1966) who think of leadership as “outside the bounds of organization’s routine directives, or structures” (2005, p. 93). He goes on to quote Schein (1992) who defines leadership as “the ability to step outside the [organization’s] culture” (p. 93). Rather than think about leadership as constrained by the norms of the institution in some way, an agentic perspective on leadership takes the leader outside the bounds of the organization’s culture in such a way as to take deliberate action that may make a difference.

We have not chosen to add power as a separate component in our framework, because it permeates both moral purpose and agency. For the most part, power has become perceived as a negative element of human interaction. Senge and colleagues (2000) believe that today too much of the

discussion around school reform takes place in a power-coercive framework. State legislatures announce that, in effect, “These children *will* achieve.” Regardless of whether they have been fed well, live in safe neighborhoods, have parents at home, have good medical care, or live in a peaceful and tranquil environment, they will be judged against children who have those things. Teachers, similarly, are told, “You *will* have high test scores or we will close you down.” ... The results they want are laudable but they show no awareness of the process that must occur naturally to produce those results. (p. 393-394).

Obviously, this is not the use of power that generates successful educational reform. But it is the type of power, too often seen in educational reform processes, and the one that gives the term power itself negative connotations and implications.

One of Foucault’s contributions to our understanding of power was the notion that “the effective exercise of power [may] be disguised” (in Seidman & Alexander, 2001, p. 72). He asserts that power is exercised, not just through sovereignty, but also through techniques and discourses. Power, as Foucault conceptualized it, is neither inherently negative nor positive. His argument is that its discourses must be interrogated to determine who is served and who is oppressed. To understand power, one must examine its social and historical contexts, the regimes of “truth” of any given society (Rainbow, 1984, p. 73).

There is little doubt that power, whether personal, positional, or discursive may perpetuate inequities or may be used to overcome them. Hence it is closely tied to our concepts of moral purpose and agency.

Savvy

Savvy is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as “practical understanding or shrewdness.” It is widely used to describe knowledge about such mundane things as shoes, sunscreen, or technology. Terry (2006), with no definition or explanation, uses the term *administrative savvy*. Barton (2005) says that nurses “must become savvy in the use of informatics” and students must become savvy in evidence-based practice” –again without any further comment or explanation of the term. Rivero (2005) talks about “web savvy K-12 students” and the need to “develop a new generation of tech-savvy leaders” (p. 33). Johnson (2005) asks, “What does a tech-savvy administrator look like” and concludes he is one who incorporates the six Technology Standards for School Administrators (TSSA) adopted in 2002 by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2). This person therefore understands leadership and vision, learning and teaching, productivity and professional practice, support, management and operations; assessment and evaluation; and social, legal and ethical issues—a vague list of terms, with no direction about how to get there. In these and most other references one can find to savvy, the authors simply assume that people know what it is—some sort of practical knowledge related to a topic.

There are a few references to savvy in which there are implicit if not explicit explanations. Gregory (2005) argues that because liberal education is in a battle for survival, it “needs fewer friends who are merely well meaning and more friends who train themselves to flight for liberal education’s distinctive goals—not to mention its very survival—the way they train themselves to be smart, savvy, and successful in their disciplines” (p. 56). He further says that because “no one within universities receives any particular training in how to think critically, comprehensively, or philosophically about it,” They do not know how to talk about liberal education. Moreover, few would know “where to *begin* to bring themselves up to speed” To adequately and intelligently discuss the topic. The implication is that to be savvy, one needs to be more than well intentioned. One needs to know how to think critically, comprehensively, and philosophically about a given topic. One needs to be “up to speed” so to speak.

In *The Survival of the Savvy* (Seldman & Thomas-Williams, 2004), an “organizational savvy model” is introduced in which a savvy leader is described as one who is receptive to feedback and challenge, admits mistakes, changes the risks and rewards equation for candor, detects deception, and exposes and eliminates closed shops—those situations in which “an overly political leader gets into power or a pocket of power in an organization and established control over information” (Seldman & Thomas-Williams, 2005, p. 61). We could find no comparable discussions in educational leadership literature, although we find mention of “professional savvy” regarding the processes and politics of change (see Fullan, 2003; Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995). For our purposes, the ideas outlined by Selman and Thomas-Williams are constructive in helping us to begin to clarify our use of the term. We combine these ideas with the notion of being

shrewd and having practical insight as a starting point for what we mean by savvy.

The Framework

In the next section, we want to illustrate the tendencies, dispositions, and inclinations that together seem to provide a sound framework for effective educational leadership. Based on our observations of leaders over time, and the data from the sample for this paper (see Table 1), we have found that despite other differences, where leaders consistently demonstrate all three inclinations, they are prone to success; whereas if any one of the three is missing, success is elusive. We reiterate that among the principals with whom we have worked and whom we have studied, some were introverts, some extroverts; some were male, some female; some white, some black; some straight, some gay. Some were implementing reforms that they had conceived or developed; others were implementing reforms mandated from an outside jurisdiction. None of these differences could consistently be associated with success or failure. In this section, we will illustrate the importance of our framework for a praxis-oriented approach to educational leadership using data from only five respondents.

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Learning from Practice

As one examines Table 1, it is readily apparent that each principal was able to make some changes in his or her school, most exercised considerable agency related to the changes they wanted, but that only two demonstrated clear and consistent connections among the goal of adequate student achievement, the action they took, and their ability to achieve success. In this section, using pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality, we will give a flavor of the leadership of each in turn, before turning, in the last section, to a discussion of some of the implications for leadership praxis.

Alisha: A Voracious Innovator

Alisha has been a dedicated educator: classroom teacher, guidance counselor, and principal, for over 25 years. As principal of a small (200 students in grades 7-12) Navajo school in the United States, she has instituted numerous positive changes. Among other things, she has overseen multiple facility renovations to provide a bigger library, excellent computer and technology labs, and a well-equipped art room. She has been instrumental in changing the look of her school from a “school just like any other,” to one that reflects the dominant Navajo culture at every turn. Pillars and walls display Navajo art and images, posters in the building display pictures of successful Navajo people and their guiding Beauty Way; and outside, there is a traditional Hogan, a shade house, a Churro sheep project, and an ethno-botany garden.

Indicative of Alisha’s agency is the story of how she worked to install lights in her football stadium. As one can imagine with such a small school, the football team is generally small (sometimes only 8-10 students) and rarely very successful—in one recent season it lost every game.

Table 1. Overview of participants.

Person	Demographics & Context	Reform Particulars	Moral Purpose	Agency	Savvy
Alisha female, white principal	small Navajo HS, low performing	multiple annual reforms, many physical changes, cultural programs, football lights, unrealistic low expectations Both top down & bottom-up reforms, NCLB	Mixed All students do not learn – disconnect between explicit goal & activities	Active interaction with community, fund raising, failure to address poor teaching, football lights	Mixed Knows how to get things done, understands culture, No risks, ignores feedback, does not explicitly admit mistakes
Luke male, white principal	inner city urban school, diverse, low income, failing	Extra personnel, parents, culture change, low adult- student ratio. Bottom-up	XX Did not focus on student achievement but a culture of safety & security	Mixed Worked within BCTF structure, surface changes	XX Desire to be liked, safe, burnt- out, did not challenge BCTF, personal interest in students & families
Naomi female, white principal	large JHS, diverse, low income	MY-YRS, flexible groups, learning leaders, multiple reforms	Instituted to make a difference for students	Able to get resources, permission to innovate, overcame structures, new policies	XX Too much going on, too much flexibility, freedom, risks, lack of attention to feedback
Sandy female, white, principal	40%poverty, diverse, award for achievement	Rejection of deficit thinking, fun, collaboration, staff study , use of data Bottom-up, but NCLB,	Clear focus on achievement, inclusion, empowerment	Active leadership, parent & community involvement, advocacy with board	Risks, feedback, pro-active, rewards candor, effort, no closed shop
Esther female, black, principal	large school, high minority , low income	MT-YRS, parent programs, intersession, class size, teacher training, focus on learning, high expectations, Both top down & bottom- up, NCLB	Dramatic improvement, disbelief in state capital	Active interaction with community, Willing to take a stand, move teachers on	Risks, feedback, admits mistakes,

Yet, Alisha was convinced that, like other schools, hers should be able to host evening games and thus needed stadium lights. In part, she believed this could send a positive message of valuing the community. For over five years, she worked to raise enough money and finally the lights had arrived. When she contacted the district to arrange installation, she was told there would be an additional charge of several thousand dollars. After bargaining with the district and arranging some cost sharing, she was still short. Undaunted, she wrote a letter to Tony Hillerman, the famous Southwestern fiction writer, who had often set his novels in her area, asking if he might be interested in donating enough money to install the lights. To her surprise, Hillerman soon contacted her and arranged for the donation. The lights were installed and inaugurated in a celebratory evening that concluded with many students and community members dancing and singing spontaneously on the field.

Alisha is extensively involved in her community in many ways. Parents and students knock on her door at all hours seeking assistance and her home is a designated emergency care home. She cares deeply about her community and exhibits strong and positive relationships with them. She can muster the resources to make significant physical changes in her building. However, despite multiple changes in the organization of classes and the grouping of students over 13 years of her principalship academic achievement has barely changed. Less than 50% of students still meet or exceed statewide expectations in language arts, less than 40% in math, and less than 33% in science. One of Alisha's difficulties is that although she talks about wanting all students to achieve, she expends considerable energy on making changes in areas in which she feels competent and in which change is more visible and concrete.

When asked about what she wanted to accomplish before she retired, for example, she stated that she wanted to enlarge the parking lot and fix the tennis courts. There was no sense that she wanted to improve overall student achievement. Herein lies Alisha's difficulty. She has, over the years, hired several teachers with inadequate skills or experience to promote academic success among students. After an intensive year-long staff development program in which an outside consultative team provided intensive training, classroom support and mentoring, and regular feedback to teachers and to Alisha, both she and the team sat down to discuss the next steps to be taken. Despite every indication that one probationary teacher was incompetent, had not responded to feedback, and had been unsuccessful in helping students to achieve academically, Alisha renewed the teacher's contract. She needed a teacher to oversee the yearbook; the teacher had voluntarily taken on some staff responsibilities; and the teacher's mother sat in the state legislature.

The foregoing is one illustration of many of Alisha's lack of savvy. She seems unaware of the disconnect between her advocacy and support of the community in tangible ways and her lack of ability to focus on what is best to promote student learning in her school. She tends to discount external feedback if it requires risk-taking on her part or if it demands that she institute deep and difficult changes in teacher position, pedagogy, and practice. On the other hand, Alisha demonstrated a remarkable degree of savvy regarding the installation on lights on the school football field. She negotiated with the district to get the extra prohibitive costs down, and then turned to an outside source to get financial assistance on the balance.

In this instance, Alisha does not demonstrate a clear focus on what we have identified (with Fullan, 2003) as the central moral purposes of schooling. Where she has a clear and definable goal, she is purposeful and successful in achieving it. Where there is less clarity and where the goal seems more remote, she does not seem to have the ability—the savvy—to take the risks.

Luke: A Well-Intentioned Care-Giver

We first met Luke when his school was selected to participate in a longitudinal study about student engagement in learning and school life. He was a friendly, dedicated educator, who, like Alisha, had developed positive relationships with his students and who cared deeply about their welfare. According to census data, the students (67% of whom speak English as a second language), live in one of the poorest areas of British Columbia. Like Alisha, Luke had worked hard to change the appearance and culture of the school from “one of violence to one of community.” He created an inviting space with a carpet, couches, and toys in which elders (40% of the students are indigenous) and parents could come and sit and talk to one another. He developed a strong volunteer program in which adults came and read to students and in which community members volunteered to teach crafts or tell stories in classrooms. The school had a food bank, a clothing depot, and a community and family worker to assist parents with shopping, nutrition, and other needs. A local artist involved parents and students in the creation and painting of a large multicultural mural for the foyer. Another group instituted Native Indian drumming in the foyer each morning intended to “drum the children to school” in a culturally appropriate manner.

Luke was so successful in creating an inviting climate that during the first year of our study, the school had an adult-student ratio of one to four (50 staff members + some volunteers for a student population of under 250). But, students still failed to achieve academically. Students were pulled out of so many classes that teachers sought to institute a mentor program in which each child might have a positive interaction with the same caring adult on a daily basis. Luke responded to each teacher request sympathetically, but failed to exercise the leadership required to stabilize instruction and to institute high expectations and standards. On one occasion, when a particularly ineffective and somewhat obstreperous teacher whose position was funded from a special district fund targeted for inner city schools, Luke indicated that as much as he might want to reassign other classroom teachers in the light of the availability of a new staff member, his hands were tied by the Teachers’ Union and the contract. He was unwilling and apparently unable to seek permission to try something different to promote success among his students.

At the time of Luke’s leadership, a commonly heard phrase in the school was, “These students have so many problems.” In fact, most teachers expressed a deficit perspective (see Valencia, 1997; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005) in which they stated that with the poverty and crime in the area all they could do was provide a safe place for students; academic goals were unrealistic. On one occasion, during a professional development workshop held for teachers in April, one teacher stated, “I finally began teaching the 5th grade curriculum this week.” When asked what she had been doing until then, she replied that she had “been helping the students to feel safe.”

Several other comments provide a sense of the deficit thinking and lack of expectations at the school. On one occasion, when a child refused a teacher's request that she "get a book," the teacher backed down saying "It's okay then, if you want to lie down, lie down. I'm glad you came." The teacher explained to the researcher that she chose to give the girl the power rather than engage in an inappropriate power struggle. On another occasion, a teacher commented:

There's nothing to do about those kids; there's no back-up for you anymore; the Youth Worker can't manage them, Social Services can't manage them, they can't be in the classroom, they can't be in the hallway, and the administrators are not managing them so you're basically having kids that are just running around and you can't really make that progress any more; and that happens a lot in this kind of school....Their homes are always in a disaster, ... they won't work, they won't work for anybody; you can't send them home because there's nobody at home; and if you send them home, they come back.

There is clear indication here of a general lack of moral purpose. Nowhere did we find a sense that these students could achieve academic success if teachers actually taught them and expected them to do well. There was no attempt on the part of the administrator to make changes that might have turned the school around, except to make it a safe and welcoming place. Perhaps most importantly, Luke seemed to be unaware that this could or should occur.

It is worthy of note that several administrators later, and with a similar student demographic, the students are achieving above provincial levels in every subject area tested. For example, at the 7th grade level, 85% meet or exceed expectations in reading, 100% in writing, and 100% in math, compared to previous provincial achievement levels of 77%, 90%, and 83% respectively (under Luke's administration).

This narrative demonstrates clearly that Luke's focus on safety, although a necessary precondition for learning, is insufficient in and of itself and is not consistent with the way we are defining moral purpose. He demonstrated agency in terms of developer closer relations with the community and in bringing parents into the school. Where it was a question of acting with respect to school organization, class assignments, and ensuring appropriate instruction and pedagogy, he failed to act. Moreover, he seemed to believe that he had little agency apart from fulfilling the regulations of his district or of the teacher's federation. Moreover, he did not believe in the capacity of his students to succeed. His inability to make the requisite changes, when seen in the light of the subsequent success of similar populations of students in the school, is strong indication of lack of savvy.

Naomi St. John: A Go-Getter

When we first met Naomi, she had just opened a new school in a rapidly growing area of a mid-size western city. Having been appointed a year prior to the opening, she had worked with both builders and board members to achieve the kind of school she wanted: one that operated on a rotating, year-round schedule; specially constructed with pods or learning communities; and flexible spaces for various kinds of pedagogical interactions and student learning. She had convinced the district to permit her not to hire

the traditional vice-principal, but to identify a learning leader for each of the five “tracks” she would be operating in this multi-track year-round junior high school. Everyone was excited. The school had opened with no rules, no processes, and the opportunity for extensive participation on the part of all students, teachers, and parents. For example, at first washrooms were not designated male or female; there were no processes for reporting student achievement; and there were no rules—could the children wear hats? There were no elected members of the student council—it was open to all students (with the result that few attended meetings).

The school had been built to fill a perceived need in this rapidly growing, diverse, working class community and Naomi was convinced that giving everyone a voice and instituting a cutting edge middle school approach to teaching and learning would result in high levels of student achievement. She recognized that not all children learn in the same way and that not all activities needed the same 30 to 1 student teacher ratio with which most schools and classes in the district operated. So she introduced a system in which each learning team developed its curriculum, its schedule, and grouped and regrouped its students and teachers according to their perceived needs. In theory, the cutting edge approach was strong. Naomi had already proven she had a clear sense of moral purpose and singular focus on students by her inclusive and responsive approach. She had demonstrated clearly agentic behavior in her persuasive interactions with the builders and school board members. But somehow, things went wrong.

The collaborative approach began to polarize the community—staff, students, and parents. One original learning leader stated that

it was exciting. The teams were working together. The administration was working together. There were all the things that when you open a brand new school. There were no traditions. So expectations had to be set. Our principal was a strong advocate of stewardship and collaborative decision making. Then that process tends to take a little bit of time. ... We didn't have any infighting on the admin team. We're still close friends.... I still believe in it. I believe in the learning community approach. I believe in year-round schooling.

Many found it overwhelming, however, and expressed less positive impressions. recalled that

“The philosophy of the school looks so good on paper, total integration, total inclusion, total integration of subjects. We tried to do everything all at once ... one of the philosophies of the school was ‘student voice, student choice’... There was such destruction the first year. The walls, everything. Six months and the school looked like it had been lived in for thirty years.

In fact, at the end of the second year, we found that only 13 of the original 40+ teachers would return for the third year; one learning community had lost all of its teachers. At the same time, Naomi announced she would leave the school to take a position as CEO of a non-profit organization. There is no way to know if the original plan would have succeeded had she stayed, but many indications that the writing was already on the wall. By year five, when the school opened with its third principal, little

was left of the original plan: walls had been erected, the multi-age, multi-grade flexible learning communities had returned to fixed classes; a vice-principal had replaced the learning leaders; and the school calendar had moved from multi-track year-round to a single-track schedule.

It is our perception that Naomi's lack of success may be explained, at least in part, by a lack of savvy. There were signs of difficulty early in the first year, with many teachers expressing a high degree of stress and a sense of constantly being overwhelmed. Student involvement had not translated into students' taking responsibility for the school building; students and parents had expressed concern that the multi-age approach would not prepare them for High School. But Naomi persisted, claiming everything was going well, citing some positive feedback she had received but neglecting the negative. She was willing to take risks in terms of implementing an innovative program, but failed to attend to the details necessary to make it work. Further evidence of her lack of savvy is contained in this summation by a former teacher in the school: "The administration can really set the tone of the school. Not to say that Naomi didn't have the best interest of the students in mind, but I think she was too idealistic."

Sandy: A Community Success Story

Sandy's story has a happier ending. In contrast to Naomi, she did not come into a new school with exciting programs and permit them to slip away. She was appointed to a newly merged school in an older building, one in which the wealthier children were now forced to attend school with "white trash," African-Americans, and a rapidly growing Hispanic population. She set about to help teachers identify what kind of school they wanted to work in, constantly asking questions, and setting a tone of inquiry (Palmer, 1998). In fact, she was so successful that between her first and second years, student achievement as reported by the state under the NCLB mandate changed from 59% of students meeting or exceeding expectations to 76% at those levels.

Teachers report that she turned previously boring staff meetings into times of discussion, data-examination, and fun. Sandy kept her staff off-guard by introducing activities that she said were reminiscent of outdoor experiential education, as well as cartoons and unanticipated competitions with silly prizes. She engaged her teachers in processes of reflection, taught them the importance of using data to make decisions about children, and empowered them to make appropriate changes.

After carefully examining student achievement data, teachers noted that the children who were not achieving well in math at the end of the year were the same children who had begun the year with deficiencies in math. To overcome this, teachers decided to group and regroup children, testing them every eight weeks, and assigning them to flexible groups based on their prior knowledge and achievement level of the specific task at hand. For example, a child might have some advanced understanding of graphs but struggle with long division. It made no sense to them to place that child either in an advanced or a remedial class for the whole year, when the tasks and students' prior knowledge changed frequently. As part of this empowering, inquiry approach to change, she gave teachers a choice of group depending on what they felt most comfortable teaching, but expected that the levels they taught would also change frequently. Through additional probing, they came to the place where they all agreed

that the teacher with the lowest performing group at a given time would have the smallest number of students and first call on volunteers and school resources. When they instituted similar groups in reading, everyone participated enthusiastically—Sandy, the district personnel manager, and the district curriculum specialist all taught a group.

When we visited the school, we had occasion to participate in one of the now weekly assemblies. It was a vibrant celebration of school life in which everyone sang the school song (a rap written by a teacher), the teachers taught the children a dance, first grade students performed a readers' theater, and awards of every description were distributed. Pride in the school was evident both in the enthusiastic response of teachers and students and, when appropriate, in their quiet and respectful behavior. What was interesting was that both principal and teachers told us that when the assemblies were first instituted, teachers had complained, worrying that the time away from instruction would negatively affect test scores. They had found however, that when the school came together as a community, the sense of belonging and pride in achievement was so enhanced that it become simply another vehicle for student learning.

Sandy is not a typical principal. She is outgoing, creative, and willing to take immense risks to achieve her goal of creating a warm and caring school community in which every child successfully acquires a deep understanding and mastery of the academic material. She knows when to push her teachers and when to back off. In her first year, although some sympathetic board members warned her she risked being fired; she challenged the closed shop of the principal meetings and superintendent's decisions. She received the lowest salary increases in the district but persisted because she constantly asked herself, "What am I really here for" and then "just did it." Here is a principal who showed evidence of all three interactive dispositions of our framework: a clear sense of moral purpose, agency, and savvy to accomplish what needed to be done.

Esther: A Principal with a Mission

Newly-appointed principal Esther Harwood found a sprawling, overcrowded school with two new wings and 28 portable classrooms. In response to a district mandate that if a school exceeded its designated capacity by at least 20%, the principal was to introduce multi-track year-round schooling. Although the mandate had not been enforced in more affluent areas, it was enforced for Jericho Elementary School, a low performing school in a low SES area. The school's population included 50% Hispanic students and a large group (33%) of children whose parents who were migrant workers. Jericho Elementary School was included on Florida's list of "critically low performing schools."

Esther threw herself into the change, believing it might be a way of shaking up the staff and helping the teachers think about new approaches to instruction and to involving the community in the programs of the school. She asked her teachers "Do you think kids can learn? Do you believe we can teach?" Upon receiving affirmative responses, she replied, "Well then let's do it." Despite the fact that the school had what she described as "real challenges, with some of the migrant kids coming in and out five

times a year as they follow the apples and the tomatoes,” her bottom line was that she “would accept no excuses.”

Esther made numerous changes such as GED tutoring Parents, Drive-Through Fridays when parents could drop off their children and pick up a cold breakfast with an accompanying sheet of parenting tips, Wonderful Wednesdays when breakfast was served to both parents and children, Make-and-Take for Parents--a room in which parents could make educational materials to use with their children. Esther and her staff worked to make the school the center of the community, but her focus was always primarily targeted on improving student academic achievement.

Recognizing the need for a great deal of support to meet her goal of success for all students, Esther made numerous changes. Among others, she used part of her school's Title 1 money to reduce class size, particularly in the problem area of math. Teachers decided to introduce extra tutoring programs to meet individual needs even when it meant finding a room in an adjacent apartment complex or church basement because there were no spare facilities on the school premises. Esther then assigned some special education teachers to a four day week, and then asked them to teach classes to small groups of students who needed remediation. This instruction was supplemented by a three hour Saturday school held on Saturday mornings and staffed by teachers she hired from around the district (Esther's husband, a teacher in another district school, taught for free).

After one year, Esther submitted her school's test results as required to the State Office of Education. Although not every principal whose scores increased considerably was asked to do so, she was “called to Tallahassee” to defend her school's results. She explained that she thought part of the reason was that the others were white and there is still a lot of racism in the state and district. She recounted the dramatic tale:

I took a van to Tallahassee with some teachers, our test scores, enrollment lists, and videos of the school, and I responded to their concerns by saying, ‘You told us *to* do it, you told us we *could* do it, and we *did* it and now you don't *believe* us!’ I told them to come to see for themselves and not waste my time driving all that way. Only two of them ever came.

The state did, however, send a team to her school because her math scores had gone “over the top,” even higher than most of the other schools' math scores and they wouldn't accept them. She continued,

They came in one day and told me to take a day off and go to Orlando and shop. While I was in Orlando, unsuspecting, they took 12 of my fourth graders and re-tested them. They thought I had cheated but they tested just as well as they had before!

Esther's story is dramatic in that not only did she achieve success; she had to prove several times over that she had done so ethically and honestly. She turned around a school in which deficit thinking and failure had been the norm. Her clear sense of moral purpose, her ability to act proactively, and having enough savvy to withstand the skepticism of the state legislators and implicit personal attacks, won the day.

Implications and Discussion

We began this paper conscious that many people talk about a divide between theory and practice or between scholars and practitioners in ways that are unproductive and that unnecessarily polarize the discourse about education. In most developed countries, public education is being played out in a political climate of high stakes testing, intense demands for accountability, and increased concern over sub-groups of children who continuously seem to be underachieving. We acknowledge that much prior research has resulted in useful models, strategies, and approaches to educational leadership. At the same time, we are concerned about the ongoing proliferation of studies and the concomitant inability of educational reform efforts and educational leaders to achieve sustained and positive change. For that reason, we revisited all of our data, gathered over 15 years of research in educational leadership, coded interviews and observations of dozens of school-based and district leaders, and identified what we believe to be three underlying essential and inseparable dispositions: agency, savvy, and moral purpose.

We have selected five exemplars from our data to emphasize that our discussion is both generalizable and context dependent. Although it is possible to state that educational moral purpose must focus on student achievement, it is not possible to provide a prescription for what the focus must look like in a specific setting. Alisha, in her Navajo setting, will have to find a different approach than Luke, in an urban inner city elementary school, or than Naomi, in a newly constructed middle school, for example. Although we can posit, with considerable assurance, the need for agency, the specific actions related to goal attainment will vary considerably, as Esther and Sandy clearly illustrate. Thus, it is savvy—the ability to identify, understand, and work with both the constraining and the supporting factors of one’s specific context that enables one to be successful in a given situation.

We defined moral purpose *in education* relatively narrowly, taking seriously Fullan’s (2003) assertion that “Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn” one in which the “gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced” and which prepares students for full participation and citizenship in a “morally based knowledge society” (p. 29). Once again, we acknowledge that there are other purposes one might describe as moral. Moreover, saying that someone lacks this particular moral purpose does not imply a general lack of morality. We do, however, believe that in today’s explosive political climate, educators must take seriously the requirement that schools help all children—no matter what their class, economic circumstances, ethnicity, or home language—to learn. Note here that learning is not narrowly defined only in terms of scores on standardized tests, but also in terms of citizenship and participation in a morally-based knowledge society. Esther demonstrated that this is possible despite the disbelief of legislators and policy makers. Sandy showed that when the community engages in dialogue about what is right, about what kind of learning students require, they achieve to high levels. Moreover, we have seen in the exemplars of Alisha, Luke, and Naomi that unless a leader focuses explicitly on developing high standards and rejecting deficit thinking (Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1995), it does not happen.

At the same time, explicit goals are not enough, no matter how often they are said. Having a stated desire to improve student learning but demonstrating implicitly that other goals take priority is a misuse and misunderstanding of agency. We have chosen five educators who demonstrated different kinds of agency. In some instances they were highly successful in some activities (as in Alisha and Naomi) but less successful in bringing about the conditions that promote student learning. Expending the majority of one's time and energy as a leader on tasks that are unrelated to student learning may change the physical plant, or even the culture of the school, but it does not enhance learning. A safe school, as Luke showed us, does not necessarily produce good students. Agency must, as Bogotch (2000) stated, and as Sandy and Esther demonstrated, must be "deliberate" if it is to work towards the fulfillment of moral purpose.

Finally, we discuss the notion of savvy. Although the term is widely used in both technical and colloquial settings, it is rarely defined. We believe savvy to be so important that it needs more investigation and clarification. At the very least, it underlies the notion of praxis—moral action that is theoretically grounded. Savvy requires, as we have seen, a combination of practical insight and shrewdness, a willingness to take risks, to step outside the bounds of tradition, to attend carefully to feedback that points to needed change, to discriminate what is important, or truthful, or desirable from what is not. It is the ability to think critically, comprehensively, and philosophically about what one is doing, to navigate the social, cultural, and political minefields that surround public education.

The savvy we have identified here is savvy that permits one to negotiate the social, cultural, and political environment in ways that permit consistent progress towards the goal of inclusive and equitable student achievement. As we saw with Sandy and Esther, savvy involves being willing to take flak, to stand firm even in the face of threats to one's job security. It is unfortunate that sometimes, as in the case of Naomi (and perhaps to a lesser extent both Alisha and Luke), idealism, charisma, and even achievement can masquerade as savvy.

Heilbrun (1996) traced the quest for a "scientific formula of leadership" (p. 3). It is our contention that there is no such thing. He concluded that to grow as a discipline, leadership studies needed to "cast a wider net" (p. 11), and that in doing so, one might "discover that the most important qualities about leadership lie far beyond the capabilities of science to analyze" (p. 11). Here, we posit what we have called a praxis-oriented framework for leadership. It is not "scientific" although its success may be empirically demonstrated. Moreover, we argue that unless these tendencies, qualities, dispositions are probed, explored, studied, and practiced in formal programs of leadership preparation, educational leaders will be ill-equipped to implement them in practice.

We recognize the obvious. There is a considerable overlap among the concepts of moral purpose, agency, and savvy—especially as we are using them. None of them really fully exists without the other two. Moral purpose cannot be said to be authentic if one is not willing to be agentic (to actually do something about one's beliefs), and must be informed by savvy to keep from lapsing into a kind of ineffectual idealism. Agency needs to be undergirded by both moral purpose and savvy about both the content and

context of a proposed change. Otherwise it can become—what we sometimes sadly see in education—change for the sake of change. And, of course, savvy itself, is nothing without both the will and ability to act and a good moral compass to point the way. Bottled wisdom lacking in moral foundation is no good to anyone. We, therefore, argue that whether one takes a hierarchical or distributed approach, whether one leads authoritatively or collaboratively, whether one is charismatic and outgoing or quiet and unassuming, to be successful, it is critically important to ensure the presence of moral purpose, agency, and savvy in educational leadership.

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