

Teresa A. Wasonga (Assistant Professor)

Northern Illinois University

Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations

419 Graham Hall

DeKalb, IL 60115

Tel: 815-753-9356

Fax: 815-753-8750

E-mail: [twasonga@niu.edu](mailto:twasonga@niu.edu)

John F. Murphy (Assistant Professor)

Northern Illinois University

Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations

419 Graham Hall

DeKalb, IL 60115

Tel: 815-753-1561

Fax: 815-753-8750

E-mail – [jfmurphy@niu.edu](mailto:jfmurphy@niu.edu)

## **Co-created leadership: Looking within the organization**

Mary Parker Follett devoted a lifetime of searching for the true principles of organizational leadership which would “ensure a stable foundation for the steady, ordered progress of human well-being” (Metcalf & Urwick, 1940, p.7). Today, educators are searching for the same principles of leadership which would ensure a stable foundation for the steady, ordered progress of academic achievement in the face of rising standards and expectations. In distinguishing between leadership and decision-making, Follett (1927) indicated “that the leader has not always the largest share in decision-making, and yet he may not thereby be any less the leader” (p. 257). No one leader knows enough to make all the decisions. For this reason, Freire (1990) advocated the practice of co-intentional education where leaders and the led are both subjects not only in the task of unveiling reality, but also in the task of creating and recreating knowledge. Spillane (2006, p59) emphasized co-performance because it allowed for “the possibility that those performing the routine might, intentionally or unintentionally, pursue different or even contrary goals.” The imperative need of the moment is to search for the best methods of coordination for collective control in which leaders are guided by, are responsive to, and draw their authority from those whom they lead (Handy, 1997).

Previous conceptual models of school leadership have often focused on distributed or shared patterns of control where some of the leadership authority is transferred to staff, altering the balance of power (Ogawa & Bossert, 2000; Weiss & Cambone, 2000). Camburn (2004) reported that distributed or shared leadership places emphasis on “the distribution of leadership responsibilities to teachers” with a focus on how leadership activities or responsibilities are spread across multiple roles (p 2). Implicit in the process of distribution is hierarchy and ownership. Pertinent to the limitations of distributive and shared leadership are the findings by Weiss and Cambone (2000) in a study of the dilemmas of Shared Decision Making (SDM) in schools. When schools adopted SDM, principals’ authority was limited and they experienced a heightened level of conflict among the faculty. Whether SDM was used for purposes of realizing change or for its own sake, reform was at best modest. In brief, their study found that SDM enhanced teachers’ opportunities to influence decisions in the school, but a relatively small number of teachers became active in the process. SDM took a great deal of their time and energy and yet the decision with and without SDM were only modestly different. SDM schools discussed somewhat more innovative decisions, but the new ideas were more likely to have come from principals than from teachers.

While distributed and shared leadership approaches have proven useful, another premise that is both descriptive and prescriptive for school leaders in the field is co-created leadership. This concept recognizes the collaborative reality of the work place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the school as it is being redefined. Co-created leadership presumes that there is more capacity for leadership among teachers and school communities that could be utilized to create more opportunities for stakeholders to construct and maintain leadership in a continual conversation. To accomplish this, Bruffee (1993) suggested that we understand the “craft of interdependence,” which are the dispositions needed to foster constructive human interaction and conversation for learning and to become learned (p. xiii). The focal point of interdependence is the presence of dispositions that will enhance collaboration and empower members to contribute and take ownership. In this case, the

[leaders] become the agents of their members rather than their “bosses.” They manage because, in a sense, their workers want them to manage. They draw their authority from the people over whom it is to be exercised. Even though this makes the job of manager more difficult, it is much more legitimate (Handy, 1997). In terms of democracy, in subtle ways, true leaders are “elected” by their subordinates.

Such sentiments stand in stark contrast to the organizational world in which schools have so often operated. As Diana Chapman Walsh (1997) notes,

So much of leadership in our society is radically cut off from any inner voice. So much of leadership emphasizes form over content and style over substance. It trades on simplistic, cynical notions about how to lead: through manipulation, bullying, tactics, slickness, hollow rhetoric, image management, spin doctoring, sound bites. These manipulations are devices which leaders seize out of a need to paper over their unexamined fear of exposure, isolation, rejection (p.299).

Robert Greenleaf (1991) declared that “A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted to the leaders . . .” (p. 10). More specific to schools, Roland Barth (1990) inquires of leaders, “How can we unlock the extraordinary idealism, vision and energy that are sealed within teachers and principals and students?” (p.47). Max DePree (2004, p. xvi.) approaches this notion in still another way, which he describes as, “abandoning oneself to the strength of others.” DePree (2004) further “pushes the envelope” when he states, “True covenants, however, are risky because they require us to be abandoned to the talent and skills of others, and, therefore, to be vulnerable” (p.38). It is evident from these authors that leadership is a collective process and responsibility. How can research conceptualize this leadership? This survey research elicited teachers’ perceptions on the practice of dispositions that together lead to co-created efforts.

### **Conceptual framework**

It is generally recognized that there are different degrees and types of leadership, and that people have capacity for leadership. Recognizing the existence of degrees and types of leadership in an organization may lead to methods of management that make the most effective use of such leadership capacity (Follett, 1932). The leader may choose to guide the group and at the same time is himself guided by the group. Those led have not merely a passive role to follow and obey. They actually help to keep the leader in control of the situation. Mary Parker Follett referred to this leadership as “correlation control” in which the authority of the chief executive is not an arbitrary authority imposed from above, but the gathering up of many authorities found at different points in the organization (Follett, 1932, p. 296). This is democratic leadership that “works toward an honest integration of all points of view, to the end that every individuality may be mobilized and made to count both as a person and an effective part of his group and of society as a whole” (Metcalf & Urwick, 1940, p. 9). Follett’s thesis was that in organizations there is a reciprocal nature of interpenetration. Interpenetration occurs when the parties of interest evoke each others latent ideas based upon the facts of the situation, when they come to see each other’s viewpoints and to understand each other better, and when those view points are integrated to become united in the pursuit of their common goal. A central tenet of co-created leadership is integration - the interweaving and interpenetrating of the best ideas from both the leader and the led in continuously creating new responses and solutions to challenges. The leader then, has sufficient insight

not only to meet the next situation, but also to create the next situation. Quin (1992), Drucker (1993), Bruffee (1993) and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) have supported Follett in their shared view that the successes of organizations lie more in their integrative human resource (intellectual and service) capabilities than in hard assets. To capitalize on these human resource capabilities, leaders must acknowledge the potential of members and engage them in continual conversation and reculturation by marshalling interdependence (Bruffee, 1993). The value of intellectual abilities and service depends primarily on learning and creating collaboratively. Co-creating helps members learn more thoroughly, more deeply, more efficiently.

What in fact are the leadership dispositions that lead to the co-created leadership “moment”? First, consider the work of William Ouchi (1981) in *Theory Z* in which he places freedom and trust in workers as long as those workers have a strong loyalty and interest in team-work and the organization. The qualities cited in the successful organizations he studied include patience, subtlety and trust. Bruffee (1993) emphasized collaborative learning as it helps people learn to construct knowledge and the craft of interdependence necessary to succeed in a complex world. Follett (1927) espoused honesty, listening, co-operation, and endurance as features of collective control. Freire (1990) explained that trust is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change and that a real humanist can be identified more by his trust in people. Collins (2001) explained that great leaders have humility, will and are resolute. These dispositions enable a leader to recognize that power and authority are derived from many sources. To believe that power and authority descends from above assumes that they are divinely given. Even though such divine rights may apply to kings, such “divinity” seems remote from school leaders.

Based on literature Murpy, Hunt, and Wasonga, (2004) identified eight dispositions as exemplars of co-created leadership: Collaboration; Active Listening; Cultural Anthropology; Egalitarianism; Patience; Humbleness; Trust and Trustworthiness; and Resiliency. These dispositions were believed to enable leaders to exercise collective power to lead and recognize the importance of inviting the organization’s members into the leadership dynamic.

### **Method and Data Source**

A deductive qualitative analysis research method where data is analyzed based on an existing framework was used in this study (Patton, 2002). Twenty five aspiring school leaders were invited to participate in the study. They were provided with an article describing the dispositions identified as exemplars necessary to practice the concept of co-created leadership (Murpy, Hunt, & Wasonga, 2004) to study and respond to a set of questions. The article provided an existing framework and expanded on the identified dispositions which included: Collaboration; Active Listening; Cultural Anthropology; Egalitarianism; Patience; Humbleness; Trusted and Trustworthiness. Twenty one aspiring school leaders returned their written responses to the survey questions regarding their perceptions of the practice of these dispositions in their schools. All of the respondents had worked in their school district for at least five years. Seven of the respondents were elementary school teachers, eight were middle or junior high school teachers and five high school teachers. Respondents were requested to provide written responses to the following questions for each of the dispositions.

- 1) Describe instances where you have witnessed the practice of this disposition in your school?
- 2) Explain why this disposition is important to a successful leader?
- 3) Describe instances where the application/practice of this disposition has been especially successful? Give examples.
- 4) Describe instances where the absence/misapplication of this disposition has caused negative effects. Give examples.
- 5) List the top three of these dispositions of leadership that you feel are most essential to impact student outcomes?
- 6) How would you explain co-created leadership?

The written responses were analyzed to match the existing framework and to discover “what is important, and what is to be learned and deciding what you (we) will tell others” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998).

### **Findings and Discussion**

Data indicated that participants recognized the presence of all of the cited dispositions in their schools. The findings also indicated that the absence of patience, trust and trust worthiness, and active listening led to negative outcomes.

Some respondents were intrigued by the idea of co-created leadership. One respondent wrote, “it is very moving and powerful to think that, ‘giving away power actually makes one more powerful,’ and that this shared power actually makes more leaders around you.” “Co-created leadership is a wonderful idea...a great way to define the true meaning of leadership and not just that of a leader. Leadership is a process not a person.” Still, others were skeptical, “it is not easy to let someone else take the lead,” “the theory is interesting and optimistic, but one must wonder about the possibility of it truly existing.” “I believe all leaders who are successful have these traits, but many have difficulty demonstrating these traits consistently.”

The value of co-created leadership was captured in the following reflections: “Co-created leadership takes into account the ideas of not only those in charge of a group, but those that contribute to the group, and allows leadership to develop amongst the entire group for the betterment of the whole.” And, “Being able to have faith in those you work with and allowing them the opportunity to develop. With this concept in place, schools can become places where we utilize everyone’s strengths and knowledge-base to the fullest.” The top three qualities of leadership that respondents listed as the most essential to impact student outcomes were collaboration, active listening, and trust and trustworthiness. These qualities were found to empower others so that the organization is not dependent upon one person; “the school has to run effectively even in the absence of the administrator.”

### **How did these dispositions for co-created leadership impact school leadership?**

Collaborators. According to Lunenburg & Ornstein (2004), there is an assumption that administrators know what collaboration means, how it is practiced and what actually happens. DePree (2004) described collaboration as abandoning self “to the strengths of others, admitting that we cannot know nor do everything” (p. 9). Bruffee (1993) described collaboration as the “willingness to grant authority to peers, courage to accept the authority granted to oneself by peers, and skill in the craft of interdependence” (p. 12). Collaboration begins with the leaders’ understanding of the diversity of peoples’

gifts, talents, and skills. Since power, information, authority, and talents reside throughout the school community, leaders must engage many resource, just as the members must engage the leader. Collaboration assumes that schools are organized as communities that value interaction and provide opportunities for colleagues to work together. It requires that professional teams, and/or committee members interact with mutual respect and open communication, and that they jointly consider issues or problems, shared decision making, and joint ownership of purpose or programs (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004, p. 523). Collaborative exchanges in a school may cut across grades, departments, and programs to engage a greater amount of communication and collegiality. Thus, it requires the replacement of traditional power roles with collegial-peer relationships that rely on “conditions of trust, openness, risk-taking, problem identification, problem-solving and goal setting” (Hansen & Mathews, 2002, p 31).

In this study, collaboration was found to allow access to more ideas, and to encourage innovation and input from a variety of sources. For example, “it allowed others to involve themselves as a contributor and in the process gain ‘ownership.’” However, respondents indicated that collaboration that is not genuine led to negative effects; “our principal created a collaborative project for reading, and then decided to go a different direction without informing the committee leaving them with a lot of completed work and no audience.” Collaborative efforts must be and must be seen to be of value, sanctioned and supported by the leader. Respondents indicated that collaboration without conviction about the people’s efforts and gifts were seen as counterproductive.

Active listeners. That co-created leaders should be good listeners may be obvious. Yet it was reported that very little high-quality listening went on in the respondents’ schools. Listening is often a challenge because the traditional heroic image of leaders may cause some to believe that they possess the important information and knowledge and they do not see listening to others as essential (Murphy, 2000). These leaders would rather persuade than engage others, make assumptions about others, and underestimate the value of listening. Good listening involves an active effort to understand the world from another’s’ perspective. It requires both an analysis of what has been said and a sense of what has been left out, testing out-loud what one has heard to make certain that the speakers’ meaning has been captured, and acting as if the speakers’ topic is central (Murphy, 2000). To listen well takes practice, energy, and hard work. But it is essential for gathering information about organizational activities.

Listening skills affect the quality of colleague and superordinate-subordinate relationships in schools (Freshour, 1989). It is not enough to know just the facts; a leader also needs to understand the feelings, the meanings, and the perceptions that are tied to these facts (Murphy, 2000). At an emotional level, listening is frequently the best thing that an administrator can do. A participant in this study wrote “Murphy has given the one rule of thumb about listening, “if you don’t listen to others, they won’t listen to you.”

Respondents’ reflections indicated that active listening demonstrates empathy, an understanding of others and their thoughts allowing the leader to address their real concerns. An active listener does not assume to know the speaker’s intention. Rather, the listener probes, repeats, rephrases and asks for suggestions. As stated by a respondent, “Educators do not need someone just to listen to them; they need support on their ideas,

reflections on the thought processes, or a pointer in a given direction.” Co-created leaders realize that every exchange with a school community member is an opportunity to extend understanding of the organization and to reinforce the leadership of both parties. One respondent explained active listening by wondering “why we have two ears and one mouth. Because we are supposed to listen twice as much as we talk.” “Listening is an opportunity for a leader to improve knowledge on issues affecting school.” Another respondent indicated that “listening is one of the single most important qualities of a leader. You have to listen if you want to co-create leadership.”

Cultural anthropologists. A leader who is a cultural anthropologist studies, understands and uses the cultural context of the school in creating the future. “The ability to ‘read’ and understand what is happening in one’s organization is a key managerial competence” (Morgan, 1997, p.355). Morgan advises leaders to broaden their understanding of culture as this makes it possible to broaden the range of actions through which they approach key issues. In this process leaders learn to generate, integrate, and use insights of competing metaphors to understand and shape the situations they are seeking to organize and manage.

Effective school leaders consider the nuances of the culture of the organization, its membership and goals in order to respond, influence and disseminate information to the school community. Such leaders recognize and participate in the informal cultural network in order to gain members’ trust and support. All of these forces are dynamic and powerful. Too often they may be overlooked and rejected. The informal network or the “grapevine” is one example of the subtle yet powerful dynamics within an organization. “If a person is to be an effective leader, they must understand the inner workings of the organization, including the jokes. A lot of us pass information through jokes.” Therefore, rather than simply influencing faculty, leaders should also allow themselves to be influenced by the group. This is a process where leaders gather the combined capacities of the staff through development of effective relationships and the relation of individuals’ wills to create a powerful united team.

As cultural anthropologists, leaders attempt to deal with issues through exploration of many possible solutions while recognizing the different values and varying opinions. A respondent in writing about reading and writing said,

“every teacher at our site has been involved in a series of in-service workshops to explore how they [sic] can implement reading and writing in the curriculum. The English department has developed a uniform five-trait evaluation process that will be used throughout the building to grade student writing.”

Egalitarian. Co-created leadership invites the very best of every member of the organization. The leadership recognizes that all members of the school community have something to contribute. At the center of these dynamic interactions are those who disagree with the leader. Resistance can be highly instructive. Educators are often challenged that school administrators should strive to become leaders of leaders, wherein they will “work hard to build up the capacities of teachers and others, so that direct leadership will no longer be needed” (Sergiovani, 2000, p. 273). This may be achieved through team building, leadership development and collegiality. Egalitarianism was reported by respondents through the examples of a school where the position of Department Chair was made rotational in an attempt to facilitate more faculty members to take leadership roles. In such cases the results were feelings of connectedness to the

school process by a larger number of faculty and opportunities for infusion of new ideas. In another school, a respondent reported that the new principal extended leadership roles to “those that were originally negative.” These invitations had a positive effect on their attitudes to the extent that their morale was boosted and they started volunteering to take on extra work. In this case, co-created leadership incorporates the elements of McGregor’s Theory Y which requires the widening of the span of control in order to provide greater freedom and opportunities for growth and fulfillment. One respondent called it “cultivating leaders.”

Patience. Organizational change is often a glacial, requiring patience, rather than a volcanic process (Fullan, 1999; 2001). Teachers are may be reluctant to embrace matters of structure, administrative issues, rules, regulations or even group processes for a variety of reasons. Most believe that these are the administrators’ responsibility and are skeptical about promises that leadership will be co-created in their hierarchically organized schools. Teachers’ resistance towards shared decision making (SDM) was found to cast doubts about these realities (Weiss & Cambone, 2000). Weis and Combone found that SDM leaders encouraged creative ideas from teachers and allowed them to take charge, but when new ideas were not forthcoming or they provoked controversy, the administrator became impatient and turned to their own “blue prints.” Such impatience and the return to traditional ways tended to disrupt the accumulation of teachers trust.

It was evident from the respondents that patience is an essential ingredient for success. Patience is needed to “make rational, unemotional decisions.” “I have seen so many fires put out by having the patience to wait instead of being reactionary.” The importance of patience, analogized as “haste makes waste,” was evident in the following respondents reactions: “Rushing through a new policy without giving enough time for discussion prevented the faculty from exploring possible benefits and negatives”; “a program was implemented and soon replaced before the effects were truly realized, leaving the teachers confused and wondering if the plan might have worked,” and “usually her impatience causes the student to shut down, react in a violent manner or be disrespectful.” From these responses it would appear that exercising patience was a challenge, especially when change was gradual. Immediate results were demanded when problems were long-term, while administrators worked short-term. Patient leaders recognize that change is a deliberate, thoughtful, and inclusive process that takes time. Leaders in times of change require patience in order to effectively listen to the organization’s inner voice. In the words of one respondent, “if you are going to let the inner voices be heard, then you have to exercise patience with members of the organization.”

Humility. Humility is born of the leader’s understanding that the wisdom, knowledge, and talents required for the schools’ success do not reside solely within themselves (Murphy, Hunt, & Wasonga, 2004). Humility describes what servant-leadership means - providing leadership in ways that encourage others to be leaders in their own right and making decisions without regard to self-interest (Sergiovanni, 2006). According to Murphy (2000), a humble administrator acknowledges his/her weaknesses and the feelings that those weaknesses engender - forthright and critical self-disclosure on significant job-related issues. “A leader who is unwilling to treat subordinates as colleagues and to share self assessment feelings with them cannot expect shared confidences in return. Without candid exchanges, crucial intelligence will be withheld,

jeopardizing decision making and implementation efforts” (Murphy, 2000, p.120). Great leaders are humble and fearless (Collins, 2001).

Greenleaf (1991) explained that leadership is granted to those who are proven and trusted as servants. Such a leader cannot be too proud of his/her position of leadership. On the contrary, this study indicated that it is more difficult to show humility as leaders want to demonstrate authority, power, resourcefulness, and diligence. Respondents described as “rare moments” when “the leader steps aside and gives credit for success to teachers, even though doing so would show their faith, confidence and respect for teachers. I have seen many principals present teachers’ or teams’ work as their own.” Teachers explained that the school environment is one in which “the principals already have powers and responsibilities; they do not need to make others feel inferior. But that is what they do when all they let us do are routine matters.” However, wherever instances of leaders’ humility were found, they caused people to question prior (negative) beliefs and values, making people more receptive to engagement. One respondent indicated that involvement, productivity and innovation improved since an event in which the principal took blame for the failures of a committee while giving credit to the committee for the successes. This principal has since gained credibility with the staff and the staff is willing to put in more effort, time, and ideas into team work, staff development and leadership. What has been achieved by this principal is captured in Murphy’s (2000, p. 124) writing,

Perhaps it feels less than heroic to help develop a shared vision, to ask questions, to acknowledge weaknesses, to listen carefully, to depend on others, and to let go. Yet, where heroism is concerned, less can be more. To be a lamb is really to be a lion.

Trust and trustworthy. Trust is the essential link between leaders and the led (Evans, 2000, Freire, 1990). Many members of the school community do not always respond to opportunities to be involved and to practice leadership because of the absence of trust and negative experiences with such involvement (Sergiovanni, 2000). Sergiovanni found that trust was built by gently and firmly allowing others to assume leadership roles, and “power to.” People view “Power to ... as a source of energy for achieving shared goals and purposes” (p. 280) and that anyone who is committed to the schools’ goals and purposes can practice “power to.” For trust to be forthcoming, those led must have confidence in the leaders’ competence and values to let go of power. When developing co-created leadership, the leader is not concerned about leadership styles, or who does what. Instead, the leader worries about trust-values and ideals that shape the school as a covenantal community where members take responsibility for leadership.

Trust is not readily given nor easily gained (Murphy, Hunt, & Wasonga, 2004). Studies have emphasized the importance of trust in achieving a positive climate and accomplishing organizational goals (Ouchi, 1981; Fukuyama, 1996). The data indicate that trust was the most powerful but elusive quality of co-created leadership. Trust was earned based on confidentiality and consistency, what is said and done over time. One respondent remarked, “Leaders must follow through on what they say and say what they mean. ‘Double-talk’ destroys trust.” “We do not trust the principal all the time because she has been known to change things that she has said in meetings whenever they are not written.” Trust and trustworthiness are reciprocal. As explained by a respondent, “if you trust the people you work with, and they trust you, you know they will defend and support your decisions in all circumstances.”

These data indicated that trust is not commonly found in schools and the consequences have far reaching implications for school governance and co-created leadership. A trusted leader will be given the mandate to speak on behalf of an organization. The leader's opinions are accepted and respected. On the other hand, a leader who is not trusted will be subjected to constant scrutiny for power, control or sincerity. The lack of trust may be one of the reasons many teachers do not engage in contributing to school leadership. Evans (2000) points out that "when we have come to distrust people, either because they have lied to us or deceived us or let us down too often, we tend to stay suspicious of them, resisting their influence and discounting efforts they may make to reform themselves" (p. 287).

### **Conclusion**

As with the ideals of democracy, co-created leadership may be difficult to achieve, but the dispositions are potentials which may be nurtured, cultivated and practiced by leaders. Although, the co-created school leader invites members of the organization into the leadership dynamic knowing that, "giving away power makes one more powerful, while creating more leaders all around oneself can make one all the more a leader" (Useem, 1998, p. 271), the challenge of co-created leadership is a daunting and daring task. The challenges not only include the ability to invite each members' inner voice, and to tap into every members' ideas and ideals irrespective of their position/creed/color, but also to integrate ideals that are different or not in agreement with the leader. One must be secure enough to make oneself vulnerable. The rewards, however, can reach beyond the limits of distributive and shared leadership models. School leaders have an enormous pool of highly educated and talented members in schools. Recognizing that leadership is the co-creation of the leader and the led promises results that can far exceed those achieved by the leader alone.

Examples of co-created leadership dispositions and efforts were found in schools where leaders focused more attention on informal side of organizations. More studies of co-created leadership are needed in schools. Based on the finding of this study, it is recommended that more seamless, intentional efforts by school leaders are required in order to be inclusive in creating, not sharing the schools they want. Co-created leadership can provide an arena in which a growing leader can be made stronger by the organization and a strong leader can make a weaker organization stronger. The leader is not the only one that has worthy ideas about what is best for the organization; ideas reside in all the members of the organization in terms of their worth, wills and aims. Co-created leadership capitalizes on "growing" people and their ideals for collective ownership.

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Teresa A. Wasonga (Assistant Professor)  
Northern Illinois University  
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations  
223 Graham Hall  
DeKalb, IL 60115  
Tel: 815-753-9356  
Fax: 815-753-8750  
E-mail: [twasonga@niu.edu](mailto:twasonga@niu.edu)

## **School Leaders' Perspectives on Democratic Leadership for Social Justice**

### **Introduction**

Wheatley (2000) argued that the failures in many organizations in the late 1990s reflected the metaphoric myth of running organizations like machines. Wheatley asked, “Do we know how to organize anything ... so that people want to engage in productive and contributing work?” (p. 339). This question challenges the traditional understanding of the authority of leaders, that they alone can provide energy and direction in organizations. As organizations have become more complex, participatory or democratic leadership has gained attention. At the same time, institutional theories, norms, and practices have continued to perpetuate social, political, economic, and educational inequities (Tillman, 2002) or injustices. These injustices have led to the call for social justice, the “deliberate intervention that challenges fundamental inequities that arise, in large part, due to the inappropriate use of power by one group over another” (Furman & Shields, 2005, p. 123). Thus, leadership for social justice “interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of otherness” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 19).

Democratic leadership for social justice is a process and a goal that recognizes the “interdependence and the importance of collective choices and actions in working for the common good” (Furman & Shields, 2005, p. 122). Furman and Shield have argued that concepts of social justice and democratic community are integrally interconnected. As such, democratic leadership for social justice can only be achieved through stakeholder consultation, collaboration, participation, and dialogue (Fraser, 1998; Gross & Shapiro, 2005). Gross and Shapiro have described the process of democratic ethical educational leadership as a “sustained process of open dialogue, right to voice, community inclusion, and responsible participation toward the common good” (p. 1). Such a process comes with challenges that include altering the balance of power and creating conflict (Weiss & Cambone, 2000), gaining skills to lead collaboratively while making quality decisions (Bruffee, 1999), losing control (Wheatley, 2000), and overcoming selfish interests (Guinier, 1994).

These challenges may negatively impact leadership for social justice unless democracy is understood both as process and goal. Quantz, Cambron-McCabe, and Dantley (1991, p. 6) explained,

There is often a confusion of democracy with pure process – the belief that as long as there is some form of participatory decision-making that democracy has been achieved. We argue, however, that democracy implies both a process and a goal, that the two, while often contradictory, cannot be separated. We believe that democratic processes cannot justify undemocratic ends.

For this reason, democratic leadership for social justice in schools should emphasize the imperative need for moral values, justice, equity, care, and investigation of the cultural impact on educational outcomes of all students (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Generally, democratic leadership presupposes that there is greater efficacy in decision making when

all groups and their interests are engaged and valued (Kramer, 2006). It also presumes that there is a correlation between participation and, representation and productivity in the organization. Researchers have reported that there is desire among people to participate more in decision-making, and that this participation leads to effectiveness and productivity (Bruffee, 1999; Short & Greer, 1997; Wheatley, 2000). Moreover, Grogan and Blackmon (2001) asserted that in an increasingly diverse society facing shortages of resources, democratic leadership is one of the better ways to access the expertise needed to meet the varied demands of organizations.

This qualitative study was part of a larger study in phase three of the *Voice 3 project* sponsored by University Council of Professors of Educational Administration (UCEA). The larger study examined the conceptions of educational leadership, specifically the school principals' and the superintendents' notions of school improvement, democratic community, and social justice. Although, these three concepts were found to resonate with scholars in the field, it was not clear how school improvement, democratic community, and social justice resonated with practitioners (Ivory & Acker-Hoever, 2003). This article focused on the practitioners' (Principals) conceptions of democratic leadership and social justice. The purpose of this article was to explore the conceptions of principals' about democratic leadership for social justice in middle schools. Reported in this article are the findings of one focus group discussion with five middle school principals in a Midwestern state in the United States of America. The research questions guiding this study were: How do middle school principals describe their conceptions of democratic leadership? How do they relate democratic leadership to the concept of social justice?

## Method

A qualitative method, focus group discussion, was used to investigate the conceptions of democratic leadership for social justice among middle school principals. Krueger and Casey (2000) wrote that the purpose of focus groups is to look, “for the range of ideas or feelings that people have about something” (p. 24). Thus, focus group discussions seemed an appropriate way to explore the principals’ conception of democratic leadership for social justice. Focus group discussions provided direct verbal interaction with and among participants, enabling the researchers to follow-up on statements made and provided opportunity for members of the forum to interact.

The *Voices 3* project coordinators developed a standardized focus-group protocol through a process of reviewing current literature, including Salsberry’s (1999) review of the original *Thousand Voices From the Firing Line*, and soliciting input from (a) the originators of *Voices*, (b) University Council of Educational Administration’s (UCEA) Executive Committee, (c) UCEA Centers for the Study of the Superintendency and the study of School Site Leadership, (d) Ohio school leaders at the UCEA Convention 2001, (e) colleagues at the American Educational Research association (AERA) 2002 Annual Meeting, and (f) colleagues at the UCEA Convention 2002. From this input, *Voices Phase 3* researchers drafted two sets of focus group questions. These were piloted with principals and superintendents (for each of the three concepts school improvement, democratic community, and social justice). After the pilot, questions and methods that appeared to be particularly useful were integrated into a protocol for a larger scale study involving more UCEA researchers and focus groups discussions.

The protocol for the focus group discussions was based on Krueger and Casey's (2000) work on how to conduct effective focus-group interviews. The protocol included Opening, Transitioning, Key, and Ending questions. The focus of this protocol emphasized the Key questions to elicit the most important information (Table 1).

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this data analysis was to discover how principals conceptualized and operationalised democratic leadership for social justice. The tape-recorded responses were transcribed verbatim and the resulting transcriptions formed the basis for the analysis. The responses were categorized and coded based on the frequency of responses on the identified category (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998). The categories formed the themes discussed in this study. All narrative responses were reviewed to find responses that matched the identified themes. Data analysis focused on how leaders deliberately created opportunities in their schools to address fundamental causes of inequities for children. The identified themes served as the primary units of analysis indicating the principals' conceptions and how they operationalised democratic leadership for social justice. Categorizing and coding were completed by the researcher. As a check on the reliability of the coding, a second coder unfamiliar with the data coded the same data set. The inter-rater reliability between the two coders was 80%.

After the themes were determined, the data were further organized as follows:

- 1) The themes were put in rank order and coded numerically i.e. code 1 indicated that the theme had the largest corresponding responses.
- 2) The percentages of corresponding responses per theme were calculated.

- 3) Cumulative percentages of responses were also calculated (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998, p. 15).

This method of organizing data determined which of the themes were used more frequently by the participants or which combinations would yield the most benefits for principals trying to use democratic leadership for social justice.

### **Findings**

The findings of this study were generated from the responses to the key questions (Table 1). Four themes emerged from the principals' discussion on their conception of democratic leadership for social justice. Emerging themes coded as 1 (most frequently used) to 4 (least frequently used) included shared decision-making (1), advocacy (2), respect (3), and control (4). Table 2 presents the summary of the findings including themes, percentage of responses corresponding to each theme, and cumulative percentage of corresponding responses.

#### *Shared decision-making.*

The first theme emerging from the data was that democratic leadership for social justice involved **shared decision-making**. One principal emphasized this concept in saying, "leadership is stronger if you share the decision making process. Also the programs are stronger because of increased sense of ownership people hold when they are given a voice." Shared decision-making (SDM) has been described as the inclusion of others in the process of decision-making (Weiss & Cambone, 2000). In their research, Weiss and Cambone found that although a small number of teachers became active in the process, SDM enhanced teachers' opportunities to influence decisions in the school. Short and Greer (1997) noted that greater teacher involvement depended on their

perception of impact, that is whether their suggestions had an effect and influence on school life. If the teachers perceived that their input were respected and influenced decisions, they were more likely to participate in the process. They were also more likely to be creative, innovative, and thoughtful.

In this study, shared decision-making included attempts by school leaders to combine, interject, and adjust available perspectives and data that may impact optimum decision-making and actions in the school. The principals used SDM processes primarily to fold in members' contributions and suggestions in the decisions. According to participating principals, shared decision-making "broadened the conversation base and brought in new ideas." These principals emphasized that shared decision-making increased representation of the constituents' interest in the decisions. Similar findings were reported in other studies (Short & Greer, 1997; Weiss & Cambone, 2000). But did the principals use shared decision-making processes to enhance social justice? Guinier (1994) claimed that democracy that is focused on individual rights through majority rule may be tyrannical especially for minority groups. It is possible to exclude minority interest in a democratic process. Thus, for purposes of social justice, democratic leadership should be the "practice of deep democracy in schools, involving participation in deep democratic processes by all members of the school community in the interest of common good" (Furman & Shields, 2005). This ideal is difficult to achieve as articulated by the principals. They expressed concerns about "losing power," "people in the conversation diluting the purpose," or "losing control of the whole process." However, all the principals in the study engaged shared decision-making processes to find solutions to issues impacting all students, and especially marginalized students. They hired the

right people, empowered teachers and parents, looked for grant money to fund programs that would benefit needy students, provided extra and external help for teachers and students, and used data to create a complete and accurate picture of student outcomes. Data was used to instigate inquiry and inquiry is the fundamental tenet of social justice.

### *Advocacy*

**Advocacy** was mentioned repeatedly as an ingredient for enhancing leadership for social justice. One principal described advocacy as “facilitating teams or groups to work for the good of children in educational outcomes and decisions.” This included building “a culture that values children.” He gave the example of communication as an imperative skill for advocacy and democratic leadership. The principals also referenced caring and courage to take a stand for the integrity of children, as a necessity for advocacy. Other examples of advocacy skills discussed included listening, tolerance, confidence, consistency, trusting and trustworthy, and caring. This repertoire of qualities was found to reinforce moral values that are necessary for investigating the impact of culture (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, gender, disability) on educational outcomes and advocating for the marginalized (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). According to Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2005), leaders need “large repertoires of practices and the capacity to chose from that repertoire as needed” (p. 8) if they are to influence the learning outcomes of all students.

In this study, it was clear that without the process of democratic leadership, it would be difficult not only to engage others in decision-making but also to advocate fairly for students, especially the marginalized. The principals noted that the environment in which they work attracted attention from a variety of interest groups. In their

experience, the constraints associated with varying interests has mainly been the ability to decipher what is best in the interest of children, especially the marginalized, and what is possible to implement for the good of all students. For this reason, participating principals emphasized the need to develop skills that would enable them to work with the various interest groups inclusively while advocating for children. They also recognized the need of diversity in the teaching staff. This diversity would not only increase the diversity in perspectives, but increase representation especially that of marginalized students and their families.

How did the principals use the democratic process to enhance advocacy for children? All of the participating principals used teams mainly to deliberate on student issues impacting student outcomes. One principal outlined how the teaching staff as a team engaged in discussions to find solutions to the problem of eliminating the language arts and band from the curriculum for some students. Together, the teachers and the administrators spent hundreds of hours working on a formula that provided the students “a nine period day with 44 minute periods, study halls in the schedule, and band courses for students who needed it” without taking away from the academic programs. The principals’ sense of advocacy was reflected in the statement, “I just feel like we addressed something that we were forced to do that we knew was not good for the children.” Another principal explained how they have used teams to identify students with learning problems.

We do something we call “check point meeting,” prior to referral. These are about students who are hitting and pushing the buttons and getting people frustrated. The whole team gets together, we get the parents in, the social worker, the psychologist and their teachers and we problem solve as a team.

The principals emphasized that they advocated for students in terms of student outcomes not teacher in put. The principals' actions were interventions that mitigated for children and parents that are disadvantaged by the present structure of schools. For example, this principal explained,

I think a lot of us teachers might look at student performance and say, "well I presented it, if he didn't study for the test, well that is not may problem," and so the results is left only on the child rather than taking the honors on ourselves as teachers to recognize that maybe the playing field is not level for all the children. So it makes you think outside the box in terms of how to strategies for each child.

*Respect.*

All participating principals mentioned **respect** as a necessary quality for democratic leadership and effective advocacy. Respect has been described by Dillon (2003) as a responsive relation. Dillon explained that ordinary discourse about respect identifies four key elements of the response: attention, deference, valuing, and appropriate conduct. Respect often means trying to see the object clearly, as it really is in its own right, and not simply seeing it through the filter of one's own interpretations, desires, or fears. Furman and Shields (2005) have argued that democratic leadership that is appropriate for increasing diversity and social justice in schools should have "respect and absolute regard for the worth and dignity of individuals and their cultural traditions" (p. 122). Only then can school leaders "supplant a hegemonic or neocolonial use of power with the power of urgency and self-determination-not only for children, but also for parents and teachers" (123).

Participating principals viewed respect as a necessary ingredient for engaging and advocating for others. Respect was not limited to persons; it included other peoples' ideas, opinions, and cultures. To gain respect, one had to demonstrate it by taking the

time to understand diverse opinions. In the words of this principal, the importance of respect was explained, “there is nothing more insulting to people when you ask of their input and they walk away feeling they were not heard or their opinion did not really count.” Another principal said, “As leaders we have to demonstrate respect for what other people have to offer and recognize the fact that all people would want to be involved in whatever it is that impacts them.” Leadership that does not respect all people including children cannot have the moral obligations that meet the demands of social justice. According to Dantley and Tillman (2006), because the concept of social justice focuses on marginalized groups, groups that are most often underserved, underrepresented, and oppressed, respect is one of the imperative demands of leadership for social justice.

### *Control*

**Control** was the least mentioned of the four categories, but had significant implications. Although these educational leaders perceived that, “doing what is best for kids” is a shared value, it was not always an honored ideal through the democratic process, hence the need for control. One principal said,

I think that “doing what is best for kids” is an easy value to espouse, but until you can sit down and have a conversation with any teacher in the building and truly make decisions based on what is in the interest of kids not teachers, as the leader you have to take control or the kids will lose.

Participating principals indicated that sometimes they had to exercise control in order to achieve their objectives mostly for marginalized children. For example, they exercised control by providing incentives for students and teachers alike. One principal said, “Every time we raised the level [student achievement] in the system, there was an incentive, maybe a movie or lunch with a teacher or assistant principal or the principal” to motivate the students to participate. Another principal explained how she gets teachers

to participate in the “spring’s great moments.” “I tell them that if they don’t have any activities, they can stage one. In exchange I offer them, since I like baking, a stipend or chocolate chip cookies.” In these cases, although the principals controlled the actions of students and teachers through reward, the students’ and teachers’ the outcomes were positive.

In schools today, the tension between democratic leadership and control has been heightened by methods of accountability and authority. In a study of schools governed through shared decision making, teachers reported that authority was disguised by procedures of shared decision making (Weis & Cambone, 2000). “The fruits of their participation were not very visible” (p. 373). The study also noted that leaders were ultimately responsible for all the decisions made in the school irrespective of the process used. Moreover, as school administrators shared or gave up power in the decision-making processes, there was an escalation of tension between control and the participation of community. This tension may be the reason school administrators create procedures and boundaries within which others participate. In this study, the principals discussed those boundaries (control) as “creating parameters,” “giving directives,” “determining who is included in the committee,” and “making the final decision.” Further, the principals explained the need for control for purposes of accountability and what is best for children. Their perspective was captured in these statements, “I feel like I am helping in meeting the accountability piece and also the needs of the students” and “I am not saying it is easy, the teachers may not like what I am doing, but I think the end result is very good.” In other words the end justifies the means.

These principals espoused consistency as a function of control for the purpose of social justice. They explained consistency as letting the community know “what you stand for, what you value.” However, they noted the difficulties with consistency as it relates to social justice. One principal elaborated on the constraints of consistency saying, “sometimes what is good for kids can be viewed as an inconsistency, yes, but I am individualizing the decision based on what is best for this child and sometimes what is best is not a cookie cutter.” Another principal added to the conversation, “I think you hit it when you said what is best for kids as individuals versus kids in general.” Individualizing was assumed to be a social justice issue.

### **Discussion**

There are two implications of democratic school leadership. The first is that schools should prepare students to live and participate in a democracy. The second is that school administrators should lead democratically (Brunner, 2002; Grogan, 2000). Murphy (2002, p. 188) suggested that educational leaders “must learn to lead not from the apex of the organizational pyramid but from a web of interpersonal relationships.” The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (2002) argued that for leadership to be learning-focused, it must be distributed among all the members of the organization who have expertise in teaching and learning. Grogan and Blackmon (2001) contended that in an increasingly diverse society facing shortages of resources, distributed leadership was the only possible way to access the expertise needed. These authors emphasize the purpose of democratic leadership as a tool to engender the voices of every stakeholder through dialogue. Dialogue leads to the social construction of meaning, creation of

possibilities, and further inquiry. The process of dialogue is more likely to lead to a socially just society.

Brunner (2002) argued that “issues of social justice and the perspectives of the marginalized” needed to be essential elements in the reconception of school leadership. The National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation (NCAELP) (2002) took a similar stance with regard to leadership preparation. Bogotch (2002), however, warned that there is no fixed definition of social justice prior to engaging in it. He argued that the unity of any educational reform is dynamic and therefore cannot be held together without our beginning to see a need for reconstruction. From his perspective then, it would appear that scholars and practitioners could benefit in understanding different perspectives that would lead to engagement for social justice. Preparing leaders for social justice will entail coming to terms with numerous definitions of social justice. Nonetheless, leadership for moral stewardship requires addressing numerous ways of thinking about social justice and their corresponding descriptions for how to achieve it. School principals in this study expressed the dilemma in defining social justice. To them social justice was not about equality, it was about the differences among children who required differentiation and individualization for purposes of achieving positive outcomes for children and accountability for leaders. Thus, these principals’ conceptions of democratic leadership for social justice include respect, shared-decision making, advocacy, and control. It was apparent among participating principals that respect for people and ideas were the foundation of democratic leadership for social justice.

In an interview, Pedro Noguera noted that unlike middle and upper class schools, in many schools that serve students living in poverty, there is no sense that the schools are accountable to the parents. Therefore, parents and students are not treated with respect. Such schools lose the social capital - utilizing networks to obtain social benefits - that these parents have (UCEA Review, 2005, p. 12). This lack of respect may prevent people or stakeholders from working together, knowing one another, or forging the caring relationships that would allow them to share and understand diverse realities. Ultimately, lack of respect may prevent stakeholders from working as allies towards a socially just society (Seidl & Friend, 2002). In a study, Price (2002) found that when minority students did not experience respect or care from their teachers, they had limited connections with the teachers and therefore their perspectives were not likely to be included in the teachers' discussions unless there was a deliberate effort to do so. For this reason, Bogotch (2002) has added to the definition of social justice the aspect of "deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power" (p. 139). That is, to be socially just, educators need to act deliberately and morally within the democratic process. They should make conscious efforts to respect, care for, and make connections with all students in order to understand and represent their students' perspectives.

Share decision-making was most frequently used in operationalizing democratic leadership for social justice (31%) followed by advocacy (29%). Cumulatively, in this study, these two contributed 60% to the process of democratic leadership for social justice. Participating principals posited that social justice was enhanced when decision-making was a shared process through out the school hierarchy. They also noted that leaders, as catalysts were responsible for creating opportunities within their buildings for

stakeholders to come together to critically and explicitly examine outcomes through the lens of race and culture or any other factors that may lead to injustice.

According to Delpit (1995), “if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier” (p. 25). It is the differentials in power and access provided by the power that has been the source of injustices in schools especially when those with power are “frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existences” (p. 26). Power differentials may impact who is invited to the decision-making table and who is excluded, whose interests are discussed, and who gets resources. For this reason, democratic leadership for social justice has to be a moral and deliberate intervention critical of whom and what is represented. A democratic process that excludes some people or some interests is unjust in itself.

Advocacy made up 29% of the processes of democratic leadership for social justice. The American Heritage Dictionary defines advocacy as “The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.” Fullan (2001) and Sergiovanni (2001) suggest that advocacy is a moral purpose – acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of the people they lead. Sergiovanni (2001) has described the job of a principal as that of transforming “the school from being an ordinary organization concerned with technical functions in pursuit of objective outcomes into an institution” (p. 345). He argues that organizations are little more than technical instruments for effectiveness and efficiency (doing things right). Instead, organizations are institutions that are responsive, adaptive, and have value, enabling them to advocate and respect everybody (doing the right thing).

Pointing out that social justice for children was also achieved through respect and indirectly by empowering teachers through the democratic process, principals in this study agreed that doing what is best for students is not always the popular democratic choice even among teachers. In such a case, control was used to advocate for children in the interest of social justice – the right thing to do. This concept was captured in this principal's sentiments.

That even on the toughest day, with the most angry parent, with the most angry teacher, and the worst union meeting, if I keep it in the forefront of my head and I can look in the mirror and say, "I did what was best for kids," it is not easy, but I can live with the rest that comes down the pipe.

Although control was mentioned least, according to Sergiovani (2001), relationships between principals and others are inherently unequal and calls for respect. Principals typically have more power because of the greater access to information and people that their position affords them. And whether intended or not, leadership involves control. The moral imperative is how this control is used to benefit the school and the children it serves. Principals in this study were emphatic in their argument that to be just, they have to exercise respect and control of certain situations in the school. Such control was justified as good for student outcomes and accountability. One principal gave the example of re-assigning teachers because "these teachers were not good for particular children" and negatively impacted the educational outcomes of certain groups of students. Another principal gave directives on the processes of identifying children needing Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). In her words the "teachers are quick at labeling kids they do not want in their classrooms." And unless she was able to control the process, children became victims.

Although control may be viewed negatively, among participating principals, it is necessary leadership discretion for social justice. Sergiovanni (2001) concludes that discretion is necessary if principals are to function effectively. It is how the principals handle discretionary control that has moral consequences for the school, students, and their parents.

### **Conclusion**

This study assumed that there are values that school leaders need in order to negotiate boundaries among diverse people and diverse interests as they work to foster democratic leadership for social justice. Based on participating principals' responses, democratic leadership for social justice is a challenge that is complicated by inflexible federal, state, and local requirements of accountability and responsibility. It is also an ideal that requires concerted efforts and action from all stakeholders. Leadership for social justice also puts the leader "on a collision course with the harsh realities inherent in addressing issues of race and culture" (Nowlin & Gooden, 2005, p. 7).

However, this study indicated that principals can create processes and values through democratic leadership that lead to social justice for all children. The study concluded that democratic leadership for social justice, as defined by educational leaders, emphasized accountability for educational outcomes and decisions made in the best interest of children. In relating democratic leadership and social justice, Furman and Shields (2005) have clearly stated that "social justice is not possible without deep democracy; neither is deep democracy possible without social justice" (p.126). They explain that democratic processes in schools permit dialogue that enhances shared understandings of social justice. These democratic processes and values may include

respect, shared-decision making process, advocacy, and control as demonstrated in this study. The challenge for educational administration training programs is to prepare leaders who use democratic processes for social justice. And among practicing school leaders, the challenge is to overcome the structural institutional barriers to democratic leadership for social justice.

Table 1

*Protocol of Questions used to guide the focus group discussion.*

Type of Question	Questions
Opening Question:	Each of you please, tell me who you are, where your district is, and one of your interests outside school.
Transition Question:	Think back to an experience with school leadership that made a strong impression on you, either positive or negative. Please share it with us.
Key Questions:	Principals talk about doing what's best for students. Tell me about your experiences with that.
Key Questions:	What has "No Child Left Behind" meant for you as a leader in education?
Key Questions:	There is a piece of paper in front of you. Write an answer to this question and then we'll share our responses with one another: What does it mean that other people want to have a voice in decision making?
Key Question if needed and if time permits	Think back to an experience you've had with doing what's best for students or school accountability or other people having a voice in decision making that was outstanding. Describe it.
Key Question if needed and if time permits	What has been your greatest disappointment with doing what's best for students or school accountability or other people having a voice in decision making?
Ending Questions: Summary question	Moderator gives a two- to three-minute summary of the major issues covered and then asks, "How well does that capture what was said here?"
Ending Question: All things considered question	Of all the issues we discussed here today, which one is most important to you?
Ending Question: Final Question	Is there anything about educational leadership that we should have talked about but did not?

Table 2

*Summary of Responses*

Categories	Percent of responses assigned to each category	Cumulative percentage responses
1. Shared decision-making	31	31
2. Advocacy	29	60
3. Respect	25	85
4. Control	15	100

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