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BUILDING CAPACITY IN SCHOOLS: SOME ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING ¹

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Over the past decade capacity building in schools has emerged as one of the most promising school improvement strategies to help all students meet more challenging standards. The press for accountability in public education, most notably anchored in No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) has spawned a wide variety of educational initiatives aimed at improving schools and enhancing student learning outcomes by increasing organizational capacity through professional development. In this paper I explore ethical considerations for school leaders as they build teacher / organizational capacity through professional development in their schools. To set the context for understanding the intersection of capacity building, professional development, principal leadership, and ethics, I begin the paper with a brief overview of literature on capacity building. Next I describe multiple roles principals take on to create and sustain productive and ethical environments for professional development and work. In the final section, I use Starratt's (2004) three ethical leadership virtues — *responsibility*, *authenticity*, and *presence* — first, to examine the intersection of professional development, capacity building, and leadership and second, to propose that school leaders need to be ethical architects as they work to build teacher capacity, improve student learning outcomes, and transform their schools.

Background

Though ubiquitous in the literature on organizational effectiveness and educational reform, the concept of capacity

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building remains as over-used as it is nebulous in today's reform environment. Thus, it is important to clarify what I mean by capacity and capacity building. Whether in "for-profit" or "non-profit" organizations, *capacity* refers to an organization's ability to use its collective resources in ways that help it achieve its primary mission effectively while sustaining the organization over time. Deborah Linnel (2003) notes in *Evaluation of Capacity Building: Lessons from the Field*: "capacity building, capacity itself, and organizational effectiveness are all related, but they are not the same."² *Capacity building* refers to all of the activities and strategies that improve an organization's ability to achieve its mission and goals or to help the people, individually and collectively in the organization. This includes enhancing their knowledge, skills, and commitments to improving performance, as well as achieving goals more effectively. "*Organizational effectiveness* relates to the capacity of an organization to sustain the people, strategies, learning, infrastructure, and resources it needs to continue to achieve its mission. It is a long-term outcome that some capacity building strategies may affect, while others may not."

Using case studies of 13 nonprofit organizations, McKinsey & Company (2001) identified seven critical elements for building capacity. These include: 1) *aspirations*-clear vision, mission, and goals, 2) *strategy*-coherent actions and programs designed to achieve goals, 3) *organizational skills*-planning, resource management, and assessment of performance, 4) *human resources*-individual and collective knowledge, skills, and dispositions, 5) *systems and infrastructure*-organizational processes (e.g., planning, knowledge management, and decision making), 6) *organizational structure* (e.g., governance, intra-organizational coordination and management structures), and 7) *culture*, shared values, norms of practice focused on performance, and traditions creating the connective tissue that binds the organization together. Despite the seductive allure of yet another facile taxonomy, the authors conclude. "There are few quick fixes when it comes to capacity building." Clear and driving aspirations, effective leadership, and hard work are the primary lessons learned from studying these organizations. I will return to this point later in the article.

In the field of education there is an emerging consensus among policymakers, scholars, and practitioners that capacity building in schools and districts is critical to successful implementation of

standards-based educational reform and for sustaining school improvement and effectiveness over time (O'Day, Goetz, & Floden, 1995; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000; Spillane & Seashore, 2002; Youngs & King, 2002; and Bredeson, 2004). Capacity building as defined earlier encompasses a wide range of individual and organizational activities to improve performance, achieve organizational goals, and sustain the organization over time. These activities focus on such diverse areas as policy and governance, infrastructure processes, culture, fiscal management, program coherence, and/or human resources. While I recognize the importance of all of these areas of capacity building activities and their contributions to organizational effectiveness, it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with all of them. I will limit my analysis and discussion to teacher professional development as a major strategy for building human resource capacity (teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions) in schools.

There is compelling evidence that links professional development, teacher capacity, and student learning outcomes. One of the primary reasons for investing in human capital in organizations is that these investments pay off in terms of organizational effectiveness and goal achievement. In the United States we currently spend \$20 billion annually on professional development (Bredeson, 2003). It seems reasonable then to ask: what do we know about the pay-off from this investment in teacher capacity building? There is strong empirical evidence on the impact of teacher capacity building and student achievement. Robert B. Cooter (2003) reviewed selected research findings indicating that professional development positively affects student learning, especially for students who traditionally struggle in schools. The findings include:

- Professional development leading to improvement in the quality of teachers in classrooms is more powerful in supporting student learning than such policies as specification of teacher/pupil ratios or of adopted materials. (Denson, 2001)
- Teachers who participated in high-quality professional development programs focusing on instructional coherence transferred their learning to the classroom using teaching methods that reflected instructional coherence. This in turn resulted in higher gains on achievement tests for their students (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, and Bryk, 2001, 2002).

- In a comparison of highly successful schools with lower achieving schools, teachers in lower achieving schools had only limited professional development and they lacked a common vision for their students and schools. (Mosenthal, Lipson, Mekkelsen, Russ, & Sortino, 2001).
- In Connecticut the development of four-week institutes with follow-up coaching for teachers at all grade levels was considered by state officials to be the primary factor for huge student gains in reading and mathematics on the U.S. Assessment of Educational Progress in 1992 and 1996 respectively. (Mosenthal, Lipson, Mekkelsen, Russ, & Sortino, 2001).
- The return on investments in teacher capacity-building far exceeds those in teacher experience or class size. (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996).

Together these research findings communicate a clear message. Investing in teacher capacity through professional development has significant, positive pay-offs for student learning and school improvement. In addition, capacity building through professional development has important implications for school leaders. Next I describe the link between leadership and capacity building focusing in particular on various roles principals take on as capacity builders in their schools. These roles are more than a new taxonomy of functional leadership tasks. Principal leadership to build teacher capacity has a moral dimension at its core.

Principal leadership to build teacher capacity

I now return to one of the important lessons in the McKinsey study (2001). Leadership is critical to successful capacity building. This will come as no surprise to anyone in the field of educational leadership. We currently have decades of empirical research that documents the positive impact principals have on such things as setting the direction for the school, creating positive organizational cultures (Deal & Peterson, 1999), designing instructional organization (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee (1982), clarifying and communicating values (Begley & Johansson, 2003), establishing a healthy and positive school climate (Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Hart & Bredeson, 1996) and creating and sustaining supportive environments for teacher learning (Bredeson, 2003; Scribner, 1999). Clearly, principals take on a variety of roles to support and build teacher capacity in their schools.

There is a large body of literature that provides substantial evidence that principal leadership is critical to professional development, teacher capacity, school improvement, and ultimately to equitable and enhanced student learning (Kochan, Bredeson, & Riehl, 2002). Youngs & King (2002) report that, “Effective principals can sustain high levels of capacity by establishing trust, creating structures that promote teacher learning, and either (a) connecting faculties to external expertise or (b) helping teachers generate reforms internally” (p. 665). Bredeson & Johansson (2000) argue that,

There is little doubt that school principals exercise significant influence on teacher professional development. Knowing that principals are busy and often overloaded with administrative tasks in their daily work, we believe it is important to identify specific and highly effective ways in which they can maximize their impact on teacher professional development. There are four areas where principals have opportunities to positively affect teacher learning in schools: 1) the principal as an instructional leader and learner, 2) the creation of a learning environment, 3) direct involvement in the design, delivery, and content of professional development, and 4) the assessment of professional development outcomes. (p. 398)

Lindstrom and Speck (2004) identified four interdependent, cyclical roles for principals leading high quality professional development in schools. These include the builder, designer, implementer, and reflective leader. Cosner (2005) in a study of 11 high school principals described how these leaders built social and human capital development through seven macro-level leadership functions. These include:

- (a) cultivating trust, (b) cultivating and shaping the distribution of leadership, (c) expanding and shaping the time for teacher learning, (d) shaping the focus of teacher learning, (e) shaping the approaches used to support teacher learning, (f) engaging secondary settings to support teacher learning, and (g) communicating expectations for teacher learning. (p. ii)

Kose (2005) in a multi-case study of school principals who advanced social justice while building teacher and organizational capacity enacted five critical roles — visionary, learning leader, engineer, cultural leader,

and political leader. Kose concluded:

The school principal is in a unique position to design and encourage contexts for optimal professional learning. By seeking and building expertise, creating coherence through the nuts and bolts of organizational learning and structuring learning groups for collaboration, school principals can galvanize the professional learning potential of the school. But the impression these three principals make on the literature will be less about the brushstrokes they offer for maximizing professional learning, which blend in with an important body of research lying in the recent past. Rather, these principals brighten, reveal, and transform the colorblindness and illusory neutrality of standards-based rhetoric into a vibrant vision of hope and purpose that lights the long road and struggle toward diversity, equity, and social justice. (p. 390)

In sum, these studies indicate that principal leadership, as expressed in the variety of roles described above, is critical to professional development that builds teacher capacity in schools. Notwithstanding the importance of the various leadership roles principals take on to build capacity, Starratt (2004) reminds us that principal leadership is more than efficient and effective implementation of technical tasks and instructional roles. Principal leadership has a moral dimension at its core. “Moral leadership invites others to transform each day into something special, something wonderful, something unforgettable, something that enables their human spirit to soar and, giddy with joy of the moment, know who they are.” (p. 145) Principals are moral leaders, builders, designers, and architects. Next I use the metaphor of architecture, an ethical architecture, to describe the moral dimensions of leadership expressed in the work of leaders to build capacity in their organizations.

Toward an ethical architecture for building teacher capacity³

What is an ethical architecture for professional development designed to build teacher capacity? To be quite honest, this is an emerging concept for me; one animated by writing this paper. Of course, I have always known that values and ethics were part of the leadership landscape, but they had remained for me vague features in a distant backdrop. Christopher Hodgkinson, Gabriele Lakomski, Jerry Starratt, and Paul Begley, to name a few leading scholars, have made important contributions to the field of ethics and leadership. With genuine modesty and no small measure of trepidation then, I have attempted in

this section of my paper to examine ethics, architecture, leadership, and professional learning more consciously and carefully. I would like to share some of my nascent observations regarding salient features of an ethical architecture for professional development to build capacity in schools. I begin with a description of what I mean by an ethical architecture for professional development. Next, I use Starratt’s three ethical leadership virtues to deepen the analysis of the intersection of professional development, leadership, teacher capacity building, and ethical leadership.

An ethical architecture of professional development is one that is good. That is, it is humane, sensitive to client needs, and purposeful in structure. An ethical architecture expresses beauty through the artistic arrangement and use of materials, resources, and systems to create learning spaces that engage educators in experiences that meet their needs and change them as people and as professionals. An ethical architecture for professional development conveys such values as equity, social justice, an ethic of caring, accountability, integrity, individuality, utility, choice, and democratic values.

Peter Lynch (2000) at the Technical University of Monterrey-Mexico offers an intriguing observation regarding ethics and architecture. He argues that architects, unlike physicians, have no equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath — *First, do no harm*. He goes on to describe what such an oath might be like for architects. “First, do no harm to the natural world. Second, do nothing to increase, misery, injustice, or inequity. Third, do nothing to perpetuate ignorance, passivity, forgetfulness, dispiritedness, or disbelief in change.” What would a Hippocratic Oath mean for school leaders as architects of professional development in schools? What are the implications of such an oath for school leaders and for professors of educational leadership?

To begin, there are clearly strong admonitions to avoid making things worse than they currently are. Think about top-down staff development programs and sundry incoherent, after-school activities masquerading as professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators. Many of these ill-designed staff development activities disregard organizational history, culture, and aspirations, trivialize professional integrity, and ignore principles of adult cognition not to mention professional autonomy. It is not difficult to claim that many in-service meetings for teachers have done more harm than good. How many times, for example, have over zealous policy makers, top-down administrators, and plainly ignorant staff developers made things worse by

perpetuating ignorance and contributing to inequity, dispiritedness, and disbelief in change within the very organizations they purport to improve? Understanding the complex weave of culture, cognition, professional work, and educational goals is critical to an ethical architecture for professional learning in schools.

In addition to “doing no harm,” advancing an ethical architecture for professional development requires sustainability, i.e., good stewardship of human and material resources as well as an understanding that architecture as both a process and a product. “Ethically the **process** of architecture should be to design **with** people, not for them, enabling the users to achieve their desired ends and meet their aspirations” (Goldschmeid, 2002). I believe Goldschmeid’s observation serves well as a guide to school leaders and their role as ethical leaders in building teacher capacity. For example, responsible stewardship of resources by school leaders requires them to be accountable for the use of faculty time, financial resources, materials, and outcomes of professional learning in their schools. Next, I examine three ethical leadership virtues as touchstones for principals as they design opportunities and environments that nurture and sustain teacher capacity. I believe each has the potential to enrich, deepen, and transform teachers, principals, and the schools in which they work.

Ethical leadership for building teacher capacity

In his recent book, *Ethical Leadership*, Jerry Starratt (2004) argues that the leadership virtues of responsibility, authenticity, and presence are “needed to infuse and energize the work of schools and hence the work of leaders in schools.” (p. 9) Ethical leadership for capacity building through professional development requires more than a new taxonomy of “to do’s” for school principals. Ethical leadership for building teacher capacity requires deep commitment to moral purpose guided by leadership virtues. In the final section of the paper, I examine the way(s) in which three leadership virtues infuse and energize the principal’s work in the areas of professional development, capacity building, and school improvement. What are the implications for those of us who prepare and provide on-going professional learning for school leaders?

Earlier in the paper, I described the ways in which a Hippocratic Oath, *First, do no harm*, might be expressed in professional development to build teacher capacity. I believe the virtue of responsibility speaks directly to school leaders as they carry out varied roles

in building teacher capacity in schools. To begin, principals are in a unique and influential formal position in schools. They have access to and control over critical organizational resources, have formal power and authority to make decisions, and a network of relationships with staff, students, and other organizational and community leaders. In addition to access and control,

Educational leaders must be morally responsible not only in preventing and alleviating harm but also in a proactive sense of who the leader is, what the leader is responsible as, whom the leader is responsible to, and what the leader is responsible for. (Starratt, 2004, p. 49)

Starratt goes on to describe two general orientations to the virtue of responsibility — ex post and ex ante. Ex post responsibility is similar to the notion of “the buck stops here.” Schools leaders are held responsible for past actions, decisions, and their outcomes. Ex ante responsibility is a proactive orientation in which a school leader assumes a moral responsibility for thinking about, planning, and taking actions as human beings, professional educators, and member of a larger civic community.

Responsibility

The ethic of responsibility influences school leaders’ efforts to build teacher capacity in four broad areas — leadership and learning, creation of a learning environment, construction of learning opportunities, and evaluation of outcomes.

First, as stewards of learning, principals value and are committed to their own learning as well as the learning of others. Because schools are constantly under siege by external political, economic, and social forces, principals are responsible for keeping staff and students focused on authentic learning and the achievement of school goals. Principals are also responsible for their own professional development and contribution to organizational capacity. They establish learning as the core of their being and practice by setting the tone, direction, and expectations for learning in the school. Proactive responsibility toward learning, one’s own and that of others, has important implications in terms of addressing two persistent and nettlesome issues in building teacher capacity through professional development — time and money (Bredeson, 2001). The ethic of responsibility requires school leaders to create conditions and opportunities for learning through

allocation of limited resources (ex ante responsibility) and to be held accountable (ex post responsibility) for whether or not time and money was indeed a worthwhile investment based on measurable outcomes. When, for example, administrators hijack staff development time and resources to hold meetings focused on managerial issues and governance they have not been responsible stewards of the time and money committed to teacher learning, improvement in professional practice, and enriched and authentic learning for students. Similarly, when principals passively agree to staff development time being used to complete grade reports or for teachers to work alone in their rooms, they have abdicated the ethical responsibility for using resources to support professional development and capacity building in their schools. The ethic of responsibility requires principals to be stewards, models, experts, instructional leaders, communicators, managers, supporters, and evaluators of professional learning and its attendant outcomes in their schools. (Bredeson & Johansson, 2000)

Like their counterparts in physical architecture, school leaders as architects of professional development to build teacher capacity have an ethical responsibility to their clients. This prompts us to ask, whose interests are being served when building teacher capacity? The most obvious client is the teacher. Yet school leaders build teacher capacity believing that enhanced teacher knowledge, skills, and commitments to authentic teaching and learning also serve the interests of students, other staff, parents, the school, community and the larger society. Starratt (2004) concludes:

Those in positions of responsibility — in this book, educational leaders — have to carry the burdens of being proactively responsible for changing those things over which they have some control in order to alleviate disadvantage and promote the deeply human fulfillment of people. (p. 144)

Authenticity

Authenticity is a second leadership virtue that deepens school leaders' understanding of and commitment to teacher capacity building in their schools. "The authentic leader always acts with the good of others in view." (Starratt, 2004, p. 71) What would this look like in the area of capacity building? Acting with the good of others in constant view,

obliges school leaders to respect the freedom of teachers as learners to freely express and construct their own authentic selves. Thus, authenticity is relational in that school leaders express their own true selves while at the same time respecting and affirming how teachers construct authenticity in their lives and professional work. However, the ethic of authenticity is not rampant, unchecked individualism that perpetuates chaos and self-absorption. No teachers or administrators have the freedom to ignore their prescribed duties as specified in contracts or to dismiss organizational mission, goals, and collective values because they want to be true to themselves and do their own thing. The ethic of authenticity requires school leaders focused on building individual and collective capacity through professional development to first think about teachers as people, appreciating and affirming their uniqueness and needs.

The ethic of authenticity also requires school leaders to examine why teacher capacity building is a major focus in their schools. For instance, if teacher capacity building is limited to instructing teachers in test preparation strategies for students to perform well on standardized tests, it is unlikely that teachers will view this as "good" for them or their students as authentic learners. Such training events masquerading as capacity building often do more harm than good by contributing to teacher cynicism and reinforcing teachers' sense of being objects of professional development rather than agents of their own learning, growth, and improved practice. Unlike scripted in-service sessions often times held after school for teachers, many times with little to no impact on teaching practice not to mention student outcomes, authentic leadership for building teacher capacity serves teachers' in, at, outside, and beyond their daily work.

Presence

The third virtue, the ethic of presence, mediates the relationship between the ethics of authenticity and responsibility. Starratt (2004) argues that school leaders can be present in at least three ways: an affirming presence, a critical presence, and an enabling presence. In what ways are school leaders present as they work to build teacher capacity in their schools? An affirming presence is a clear message from the principal to teachers that they are valued, will be listened too, and not judged as they make themselves vulnerable to new learning and take the risks to change

deeply routinized practices. An affirming presence by principals acknowledges the anxiety, struggle, and limitations that individual teachers bring to new learning opportunities.

A critical presence also serves principals in building teacher capacity. For example, we know that teachers may resist professional learning opportunities because they have had little input into what learning opportunities would serve their needs and help them improve their practice. Well-meaning principals often plan staff development days for their staff thinking they are exercising leadership for building teacher capacity to support school improvement. These same principals are surprised when they find out in post-workshop evaluations that most teachers found little or no value in the training event. Thus, a critical presence in this instance by the principal would include reflection on the outcomes and self-appraisal as to what he/she had done to contribute to resistance, to negative reactions to the learning, and to cynicism toward future capacity building activities. A critical presence by principals as they work to build teacher capacity is to understand teachers' authentic and understandable reactions to professional development that makes them objects of programmed activities as opposed to agents of individual professional development and improved practice. A critical presence acknowledges that teacher resistance may be anchored in not knowing what to learn, not knowing how to learn, not knowing why it's important to learn, not having the skills, abilities and prior knowledge to learn, and/or not being committed to learning as a professional responsibility.

A third type of presence in teacher capacity building is an enabling presence. An enabling presence is more proactive, often times focusing on building specific capacities (knowledge, skills, and dispositions). An enabling presence in capacity building encourages teachers to look at various examples of research-grounded exemplary practices that might be adapted for use in their own teaching and learning environments. An enabling presence views teachers as agents of their growth and development not simply objects of training activities. "Capacity building is not simply a matter of policy implementation. It is also a matter of deep conviction about the ways in which human beings ought to be present to one another and bringing that conviction into the institutional setting of the school — whether or not the state policymakers think it is a good idea." (Starratt, 2004, p.100) An enabling presence helps principals negotiate the terrain of reform, accountability,

professional autonomy and responsibility, and authentic teaching and learning. Lastly, an enabling presence is one that helps teachers engage their creative and reflective capacities in new learning opportunities leading to improved practice aimed at authentic teaching and learning for students. Building teacher capacity is more than filling them with new knowledge and skills. Teachers do not simply imitate what they learn. Their creative and reflective capacities transform new knowledge and skills into appropriate and authentic teaching and learning opportunities constructed for use in unique contexts of practice.

The virtues of responsibility, authenticity, and presence have deepened and enriched my understanding of ethical leadership for building teacher capacity in schools. As I argued in earlier works, (Bredeson, 2003) professional development and capacity building is essentially about people and learning. Too many times traditional staff development programs and workshops founder in a quagmire of "right answers" and "best practices" suggesting that teachers simply need to gain more knowledge and greater skills as they confront persistent problems of practice. The ethics of responsibility, authenticity, and presence provide opportunities for leaders to address the wholeness of teachers in building organizational capacity. Given the stress and role overload that characterizes the current work of school principals, my purpose is not to present yet another set of demands to intensify principals' daily work. Building teacher capacity through professional development when guided by virtues of responsibility, authenticity, and presence enhances all aspects of the organization by strengthening potential, achieving goals, and sustaining accomplishments in a humane, caring, and successful school community.

Notes

¹ This article is a record of proceedings based on the keynote presentation delivered at the 10th annual values and leadership conference held at Penn State during October 2005.

² http://www.allianceonline.org/about/capacity_building_and_1.page

³ This section is from an invited address presented in Toronto, Canada at the Values and Leadership Conference in October 2002.

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