VALUES AND ETHICS IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

TOWARDS THE CULTIVATION OF FULL MEMBERSHIP IN SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Too frequently students of color, students with language differences, and students with disabilities are caught up in marginalizing institutional practices that continue uninterrupted in school communities where an anemic sense of membership is informed by technical literacy rather than moral literacy. In these schools, administrators, teachers, students, and community leaders are incapable and/or unwilling to disrupt values, labels, and assumptions that sustain non-membership (Capper & Frattura, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 1997). In this article, we seek to develop a conceptualization of full student membership in school communities. Educational communities characterized by full membership pay particular attention to inclusion, which we define not as an outcome, but rather a process concerned with "learning how to live with difference, and learning how to learn from difference" (Ainscrow, 2007, p.155). As such, inclusionary leadership does not solely strive to erase or assimilate difference, but rather it seeks to learn from difference. Learning from difference is fundamental to understanding who all of us are as a community of individuals that are continuously in relationship with other human beings.

This article contributes to the existing literature by promoting conceptualizations of full membership for marginalized students, such as those with disabilities. We write against the grain of clinical descriptions of variability, describe systemic barriers to full membership encountered by students with disabilities, and offer an orientation toward school-level decisions that encompasses a more broadly conceived set of possibilities that might assist school leaders in moving beyond the history of programmatic delivery of special education services in ways that engage rather than "tacitly and tactfully avoid ethical discussions" (Starratt, 2004, p. 10).

Membership in the School-Community

Where does membership in the world start? Becoming a member of the world is highly relational. Whoever gets to be the translator of the world within the family constellation begins sharing membership by engaging the younger members of the family through initiating the process of building social relationships. Subsequently, learning continues primarily as a social process that begins in the family, continues to the extended family (such as others in the neighborhood and friends encountered in play), and then more formally extends to the institutional contexts of pre-school and forward into school itself. Furthermore, all of these possibilities for activation of learning are embedded in the context of the community at large.

Starratt (2009) elicits the following set of questions to consider regarding membership. What does it mean as a student to have membership in the school community? What are my rights, privileges, and responsibilities as a student in relation to other students, teachers, coaches, parents, and school leaders at the district or the school-level? Who teaches me? How am I to be socialized as a community member? Who ensures that I receive the benefits of membership in addition to my rights to it? What are my responsibilities as student? What other school or community roles carry responsibility to support full membership benefits for any and all students? Who is accountable if one's rights are abridged? How can a school be ethical and play a role in creating a civil society that promotes moral literacy as well as academic and technology literacy?

Let us begin to probe for the desirable and ask what does it mean as a student to have membership in the school community. Burrello, Tracy, and Schultz (1973) argue that general education should always retain the responsibility for educating all students because as soon as students are separated and turned over to a separate group of professionals there are unintended consequences of institutional inertia for separation, and re-entry to an equal status is almost impossible to achieve. Ware (2002) asks why a newly born child with a label of disability already has scripts circulating around his or her body that mark him or her as aberrant. One of us has a son whose marginalization began at 4 months when an otherwise caring pediatrician stated in front of a waiting room, "I have a sneaking suspicion that your child is not normal." Without any action, this baby boy became engaged in institutionally marginalizing practices that sought to deny him full membership in society.

Although we are likely to find this story disturbing, often we fail to realize that the very same outcome happens when we place certain students with scripts of disability circulating around them in special education classrooms. As soon as students are placed outside the "typical" classroom their full membership in the school-community is compromised along with their learning potential as they start school with lower expectations and social relationships that circumscribe their learning with their achieving peers. Given the dynamics of sorting and exclusion and general sense of what are the responsibilities for "general education", we offer the following set of assumptions about membership in schools.

Membership means starting from difference and moving to community and the common. To this end, school leaders and community members are charged with acting with individual and group difference in ways that don't engage marginalizing labels and practices that treat some as systematically less privileged than others (Smyth, Angus, Down, & McInerney, 2009). All must start with the belief that individual differences are important and need to be recognized and used appropriately to facilitate each student's learning, yet all students should be treated more the same than different.

One means of approaching difference is through learner-centered rather than exclusively curriculum or learning-centered approaches (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2001; Danzig, 2009). Learner centered approaches are derived from constructivist views of learning and seek "to create the conditions for student development and autonomy while establishing a pattern of support for continuous progress within a school community nurtured by a democratic ethic…with the aim of connecting individuals to the wider community of learners" (Lieberman, Falk, &

Alexander, 2007, pp. 26-27, as cited in Danzig, 2009, p. 2). Danzig and Chen (2007) posit that learner-centered leaders attend to organizational learning that is not technical, but rather guided by democratic principles and ethical discussions that balance "individual outcomes and self-direction with collective experience and professional wisdom" (p.10). Learner centered leaders "prioritize democratic structures and facilitate ways for individuals to negotiate the bases for successful practices" (Danzig, 2009, pp. 1-2).

This learner centered approach seeks to increase awareness of the world within an ethical community in ways that protect students, teachers, parents, and school leaders from what Starratt (1994) characterizes as a general "growing indifference to a common ethic" (p.7) in schools that "tacitly and tactfully avoid ethical discussions" (p.10). In these schools, values and morality are situated in the privacy of the home and curricular and pedagogical frameworks tend to more narrowly adhere to that which comes from further afar: the state-driven, learning centered curriculum mandates. Learner-centered approaches to a child's place in the school community requires moral literacy and leaders who catalyze conversation around how the child is good in relation to the environment that surrounds him or her.

Learner centered approaches use a broader and deeper understanding of differentiated instruction processes that go far beyond the normal commitments to system-wide relational and ethical obligations, which tend to focus on accommodationist *processes* for approaching teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same *class*. This broader understanding strives to meet each student where he or she is at rather than expecting the student to assimilate to the curriculum, which is a hallmark of learning or curriculum centered approaches (Huebner, 2010). Moreover, such differentiated instruction is generally proposed as a means to deal with growing diversity, and within contexts for inclusion of students with disabilities. Sapon-Shevin (2008) argues that inclusion "teaches us to think about we rather than I" (p. 51), provides students with ways to "develop fluency in addressing differences and to view themselves as interconnected … [as] inclusive classrooms put a premium on how people treat one another" (p. 52). This form of differentiated instruction can be an organizing approach for teachers to assume and plan "for diversity from the beginning rather than retrofitting

accommodations after initial design" (Sapon-Shevin, 2008, p. 49). Starting with difference translates into school practices that cultivate learning in ways that allow students to acquire and demonstrate their learning in different ways or at different rates, that plan for short or long periods of retention, and that enable the transfer of learning to situations and circumstances outside of the classroom.

Membership also means to be able to attend the neighborhood school or the school that my brothers and sisters might attend if I was otherwise not labeled as disabled, language challenged, or placed in some remedial program. This institutional practice foundationally values equity over equality through equal access to learning in a class and school that does not differentiate on the basis of ability in order to follow the values of predictability and efficiency. Here the goal is to challenge students and faculties in their assumption of responsibility for all students and to support the values of risk-taking and inventiveness in learning how to build the capacity for individualizing efforts for the benefit of each student, including those that are often seen as very challenging (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). The ability to acknowledge failure, deal with some level of uncertainty, design and support opportunities for purposeful teacher interaction that develops skills, and reflect on failure in a systematic way that help organizations and individuals learn are crucial components to helping schools successfully embed themselves in highly diverse and complex neighborhood environments (Fullan, 2008).

Membership also means parents or guardians in these neighborhood schools are able to fully participate in the life of the school. In communities striving for full membership, siblings go to the neighborhood schools together so that the opportunity for parent engagement in each sibling's life is not compromised. Additionally, siblings can often function as an advocate and helpmate as well as a parent surrogate in the school. In full membership communities, parents and principals may have conflicts, but parents' lives are not nearly as consumed as they have historically been with mediating actual and potential conflicts in the special education settings (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2001; Zaretsky, 2004). Nevertheless, a questioning and critical disposition on the part of parents is encouraged, as different perspectives on disability and inclusive practices are more likely to be formed

through dialogue and the awareness of principals

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about sources of potential conflicts is informed by appropriate values, training, and lived experience. Through meaningful, respectful, and even conflictual discussions about the political dimensions of special education, parents, teachers, and school leaders address issues in ways that can lead to organizational learning, more productive responses, and greater trust and motivation to do collective work (Fullan, 2008; Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Seashore-Lewis, 2007; Swick & Hooks, 2005; Zaretsky, 2004).

Epstein's (2003) framework of six types of involvement can be a helpful guide to understanding the ways parent involvement is essential for often it is the parent who maintains the best record of the school system's commitments and the continuity of purpose in front of all those with whom she or he interacts. The first type is parenting in which the school is extended in its commitment to help establish home environments that support children as students, thus making the school community aware of individual strengths and attributes of students with disabilities. The second type is communicating in which people-first language and values can be expressed and parents can be made aware of inclusive programs and policies, while the school learns from the parents and other caregivers expertise. Thirdly, schools actively recruit parent volunteers (and train them) in order to provide support in inclusive settings. Fourthly, schools provide information beyond the IEP meeting on how to support curriculum-related activities at home. Fifthly, schools must include parents in the decision-making process. Schools must constantly examine the process of partnership, gauge the feeling of ownership parents have, and explicitly address power imbalances between schools and parents. Finally, schools need to identify and integrate resources and services from the community, including summer programs and other inclusive programs for students with disabilities.

In addition, Sanders (2008) posits that specifically designating a parent liaison person (fully funded when possible) can be very helpful to developing a comprehensive parent involvement effort that moves a school community toward full membership. This person can direct services to families, support and build the capacity of teachers to reach out effectively to parents and the community, coordinate partnership activities, and help gather and use data for both formatively assessing comprehensive community partnerships and sparking discussions with teachers, administrators and parents around what the data says

about whether of not all students are members of the school community.

Here, we are suggesting a re-centering of traditional notions of "parent involvement" so as to reinforce complete professional autonomy within the responsibilities that a distinct notion of full membership infers for more authentic collaboration. This means that representations of families in district communications, student curricular materials, and informal conversations would need to be examined and critically analyzed. Educational discourses that normalize exclusivizing and othering terms, which devalue community funds of knowledge and culturally-bound and complex identity formation visible, must be subjected to critical re-examination and co-construction among school community members (Miller Marsh & Turner-Vorbek, 2010). Efforts to stringently control, monitor, and structure parent input would need to be reshaped in order to emphasize meaning and engagement with parents in ways that allow all individuals to work and struggle in the creation of a democratic life in the school (Meier, 2003; Olivos, 2006). Zaretsky (2005) also cogently argues that the overemphasis on psychometric testing on students during parent-school personnel interactions, and functionalist paradigms oriented toward appropriate interventions and cures, is inadequate for understanding "what might constitute valid knowledge and expertise in special education" (p. 66). Instead, she argues for a multi-perspective approach where socio-cultural frameworks are engaged that recognize parent and community members lived experiences with the individuals with disabilities as valid forms of knowledge that are also constituted relationally, that is, within important and enduring relationships of full membership that significantly influence the experiences of children.

Membership also means that while schools recognize and center differences, school members demand high expectations for all students and reject statements and positions that lower expectations. Students continuously gain access to the general education curriculum through meaningful instruction and assessment leading to post-school success however defined for individual students; be it by themselves, their families, and/or school representatives. Equity and access arguments grounded in federal law demand that one curriculum prevail to guide learner-centered learning regardless of ability. This is an important stance because the history of special education programming is fraught with low

expectations held by teachers of labeled students who were consistently excluded from the conversation on standards and rich curriculum content driven by general educators. As Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggest, it often takes a generation of laws, such as the generation from Public Law 94-142 to IDEA 2004, to get any significant level of implementation of value-centered reforms and protections. It is our contention that the challenge presented in IDEA 2004 is to ensure access to the general education curriculum, yet often the continuum of service discourse has hindered full membership in schools. At intersections of potential rupture in the full membership community, students have legal frameworks that can be invoked. Due process protections are in place to prevent the arbitrary and capricious assessment, assignment, or suspension or expulsion of a student out of the school. Nevertheless, membership can be revoked at any time if students are dangerous to themselves or others for a short period followed by review before re-admittance. As important as these protections are as sanctions, in full membership communities they are also utilized as a means to conduct joint work through deliberative democratic processes (Marsh, 2007).

Membership also means developing schools where students with Individual Education Plans (IEP) are placed with peers in natural proportion and are not in clustered programs of like students (Sailor, 1991). Learner-centered approaches are more likely to engage discussions of what is good in support of inclusive rather than overly differentiating practices, such as institutionalizing resource rooms or other forms of pull-out services that often compromise full membership in the classroom and school. It also means that core values of inclusion grounded in moral literacy and ethical leadership create spaces where a singular view of inclusion is not imposed, but rather "where multiple and varied interpretations of inclusion [can] be expressed and accepted" (Zaretsky, 2005, p. 74). Ware (2002) argues that this is best approached through a moral imagination that suspects our own complicity in past constructions of disability that limits our view of humanity and an intellectual commitment to counteracts hegemonic and, thus, often unseen marginalizing discourses. For example, the dichotomous construction of independence versus dependence serves to privilege and define the able and marginalize and exclude the disabled. Instead Ware argues that all in a community are dependent on each other and perhaps imagining

dependence as a central membership construct allows for the possibility of full membership in a school community.

Membership also means communities choose to define disability as a central feature of the human experience. This requires planning for additional supports needed for authentic academic and social learning to occur in inclusive settings in schools and classrooms with the use of child-first language, rather than supporting pathologizing and disabling labels sustained and supported through segregationist educational structures, or medical and rehabilitative discourses that situate pathologies in individuals. In full membership schools no "handicapped" child exists and there are no places that are referred to as the "autism" class or "learning disabled" class. Counter-narratives to disability as pathology narratives become important when disability is viewed as a central feature of the human experience. The perspective of each community member is not necessarily judged, but is frequently explored through creating spaces for all students to tell their stories of difference. Students previously considered "dis" abled tell their life narratives as part of the normal range of human experience in which students' ability is highlighted without being relegated as a "supercrip" narrative of "believe it or not disability" (Ware, 2002, p. 144).

Membership also means being prepared to center purpose and, at times, to work against bureaucratic inertia. Although we come to know differences between students well, the general purpose of maximizing opportunities to learn in order to be prepared for life with others after school is essentially the same for all students regardless of how ability is constructed. All students deserve a range of opportunities for successful post-school life, from post-secondary school, a military career, career-technical training, or direct participation in the workforce. Ware (2002) argues that shifting "the management focus away from bureaucratic convenience to individual need, access, and accommodation, impacting fundamental changes in both the structural and cultural purposes of schooling" (p.145). The big picture for each child is larger than the annual IEP meeting and its segmented, annual objectives. Membership means advocacy in contesting the discourses of Least Restrictive Environment and imagining different spaces for conversations other than the discursive settings of IEP meetings that elevate compliance rather than community discourses and encourage technicist

practices such as counting the number of hours in a special education service classification with "no consideration for understanding the moral dimensions and demands of educational inclusion" (Ware, 2002, p. 154). These special education approaches tend to privilege "a particular unitary conception of special education" that do not create a language of values from which to operate as a community (Zaretsky, 2005, p.67). Therefore, families and students in a community that values full membership might find themselves mutually energized by engaging in what Strike (2007) refers to as collegial conversations that lead to collectively achieved conceptions of a good education. Strike further argues for the development of a different kind of accountability that does not rely on benchmarks and incentives, but rather develops "internalized norms rooted in a deep understanding of subject matter, the foundational purposes of education, and the love of students" (p. 144). Similarly, Skrtic (1991) argues for a distinct conceptualization of organization, an adhocracy, as a means for leadership work to become distributed and centered on learning for individual children rather than for bureaucratic efficiency.

Membership also means that principles of deliberative democracy are invoked by school leaders as they "seek to promote the common good and base decisions on reasoned argument and public discourse" (Marsh, 2007, p. 10). Members of the polity, in this case, a full membership school community, come to better decisions while improving democratic and citizenship skills. There is a shared understanding that all voices are heard, reasons given for an argument are open and public, and participants are responsible for the collective decisions that are made. Through inquiry, consensus is achieved, norms validated, and action is undertaken. These principles, in theory, allow for legitimization of decisions, minimize self-interest, enhance participants motivation to implement decisions and increase learning, and provides for more equal voice in deliberative processes and improves distributive justice (Marsh, 2007, pp. 10-11).

 Full membership school communities deliberate over how to care and distribute resources to those that might need the most help in order for all students to receive the supports they need to achieve in relationship-filled learning environments. For example, planning takes place to ensure that students with disabilities have access to social development opportunities including guidance and counseling,

transitional planning, as well as extra-curricular programming. Participants remind themselves that students' lives in schools always go beyond the academic, and they attend to citizenship and democratic goals that become crucial aspects of student success post-school. Schools provide the best opportunity to develop peer mentors and friendships for life that become a critical aspect of developing conceptions of disability as a part of the normal range of human experience that benefit both students marked with a disability and typically developing students within school. Additionally, this type of relatedness can later develop and normalize work opportunities and the chance for a quality social life for all members of the school-community.

Membership also means having access to quality teachers with moral literacy and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to promote high expectations for student success that engage students according to learning schemata and prior knowledge regardless of their learning need. Here, Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) offer four professional virtues which we believe form the basis of a moral community: (1) practicing in an exemplary way; (2) centering valued ends in practice; (2) improving the technical craft of the practice itself; and, (4) demonstrating an ethic of caring and justice. Each of these virtues requires commitment, creativity, risk-taking, and a type of knowledge or literacy that informs the construction of what is "good".

Concluding Perspectives

The focus of this article is on ensuring full membership of all marginalized students, especially students identified as having disabilities. We have come to believe in the promise of free and appropriate public education and the civil right for students and parents of children and youth identified with disabilities. This civil right, established in 1975, might be best interpreted as an ethical imperative rather than simply a legal mandate that demands compliance through potential sanctions. This imperative does not deny the research findings that have supported many children with disabilities in learning task appropriate strategies, even if the implications for practice may not be orderly arranged in full membership orientations (Zaretsky, 2005). However, this imperative does suggest that students with disabilities would be given full membership in their neighborhood school. It has been demonstrated in enough communities throughout the nation that educational communities that see all children as the

same, yet different, works. Yet those demonstrations compete with the accumulated binaries of ability and disability, general and special, separate and integrated, teacher and specialist, and even able and (dis)able that serve a bureaucratic structure and funding mechanisms but have little relationship to moral and ethical practice of educating children and youth in the spirit of full membership. In fact they have little relationship to student learning. As Capper and Frattura (2009) argue: until all students are considered gifted and challenged to learn in varying ways; until curriculum and instruction are restructured to the benefit of all students; until students do not need a label to receive educational services to match their learning schemas; until students do not have to fail in order to get services; and until all educators take responsibility as we have argued above, students will never have full membership in the school community.

Our own moral imaginings in this article makes the imperative of action toward full membership a complicated, but clearly just path for us. We suggest that the concept of full membership represents a more foundational proposition than those imagined in many discourses on inclusion, which focus on its tools (such as co-teaching). A learner-centered discourse of full membership respects and invites each student to come to school to build relationships with faculty prepared to teach them all as individual learners within a social milieu designed to value each of them for who they are and who they might become (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2001). As Ainscrow (2009) suggests, learning from difference is the only way we really understand normative learning at all. This article provides a significant challenge to school leaders and their communities to re-think and re-focus their energy and moral imagination towards making full membership for students, their teachers, and their families a reality.

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