

# EDL PRINCIPLES

## *PREAMBLE*

*Approved by EDL faculty, 12/07*

WE BELIEVE a program should be constructed around a set of guiding ideas or principles. These principles should allow for multiple interpretations and multiple voices and yet clearly stand for something. They should not be equated with individual courses, but should be the basis upon which curricular, pedagogical, and administrative decisions are made. We must never confuse a series of courses with a set of principles, and a program should attempt to commit itself to recognizable principles. Our program should welcome a diverse group of people without trying to be all things to all people. Also, a principle-based rationality differs from an outcomes-based rationality in that individual decisions are made from a commitment to certain principles without always knowing exactly what the final outcome may look like rather than a commitment to achieving final outcomes that may not always understand the principles embedded in the processes that are required to arrive at those outcomes.

A graduate program should be a "program," not a series of disparate courses. An educational program should make coherency possible without imposing one acceptable coherency. When students complete a program of study, they should believe that the program works for them as a whole. That it has a coherent meaning for them. On the other hand, that coherency should arise out of the student's own experiences and intellectual and moral commitments rather than imposed from the faculty. The faculty must devise a program that makes the goal of student coherency possible and probable, without making it prescriptive.

In designing a curriculum, we must accept that we cannot teach everything that a practitioner needs to know in order to succeed. We must, therefore, select a series of experiences that result in the learning of knowledges, values, and skills that we are confident are important to the practice of educational leadership. A mistake is made in curriculum reform when a professional program analyzes the job of the practitioner and works backwards to devising the curriculum. That is to say, that the practice of analyzing everything that a particular individual needs to know in order to be a good superintendent, a student affairs educator, curriculum coordinator, or principal and then trying to teach all of those things in one graduate program is a mistake. There are too many things that a practitioner needs to know. To teach everything is to reduce each thing to a brief moment in the program resulting in failure to master anything. Furthermore, some of the skills that practitioners need to know are not well taught through a university experience (even when "in the field"). A good program will carefully select arenas that can best be taught and learned within the university (defined to include work in the field) so that which is studied is well learned. Yes, this means something like "less is often more."

While the primary focus of our department is on schooling at all levels, education should be considered broader than schooling. Given the expertise of our faculty and our mission within the university, our department's primary focus is on leadership in P-12 schools and student affairs in higher education. While this is our primary focus, we should always keep in mind that "education" and "schooling" are not the same thing and that there is room for those whose interest is broader than schooling in our department.

**Principle 1**

*The primary goal of education is to prepare leaders and students for the responsibilities of democracy and social justice.*

To prepare leaders for transformation, we must have a clear conception of the purposes of education. A sense of mission must undergird educational leadership programs if our graduates are to be purposefully engaged in the reform process.

Democracy implies both a process and a goal. The goals of a democratic society cannot ignore issues of justice and equity and focus only on process. A process (such as "majority rules") is not democratic if it results in an unjust or inequitable society. The reverse is also true. A society that achieves equality through undemocratic means may be "equal" but is not just or equitable.

Social justice is a contested terrain. It is an ongoing conversation among faculty and students in our department. Conversations focus on historically and currently marginalized, oppressed, disempowered individuals, including but not limited to, identities of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, (dis)ability, and religion.

**Principle 2**

*Education is situated in the cultural, political, and moral contexts of institutions and societies.*

The everyday life in educational institutions is constructed within a cultural context imbued with political and moral meanings. By its very nature education is about the political act of legitimating and failing to legitimate different group's cultures. As a result, one of the very central aspects of education is that it is the sites (i.e., arenas) of the struggle by different groups to get their culture (and, therefore, themselves) legitimated.

**Principle 3**

*Diversity is not only a positive good; it is an essential element of education.*

Diversity of ideas explored through the engagement of others who bring diverse personal and cultural histories is absolutely necessary for a vibrant education.

**Principle 4**

*While the central focus of educational leadership must be the transformation of educational institutions, leaders must not only be able to transform organizations but also navigate in the present environment.*

A growing consensus from disparate sectors exists that educational institutions and their leadership are not meeting society's expectations or needs. Present institutions are failing to meet the needs of society and yet present leadership is more oriented toward maintenance of the status quo than in transforming the institutions to meet the transforming society. It makes no sense to educate leaders for a future that does not yet exist but fail to educate them to survive and thrive until that future arrives.

### **Principle 5**

*Leadership is an intellectual, moral, and craft practice.*

Educational leadership must be both theoretical and applied. Whether one exercises one's leadership from a position within higher education or from a position within elementary and secondary schools, one must be well educated in both the theory and practice of professional education. School superintendents, principals, and directors of student activities must not only be good practitioners but good theorists. University professors and student affairs leaders must not only be good theorists but also good practitioners. Being either a good practitioner or a good theorist requires one to act within a consciously moral context with consciously moral commitments.

Educational practice must be informed by critical reflection—reflection situated in the cultural, political, and moral context of institutions. Leaders must be familiar with the major theoretical discourses around power and culture and ethics. Leadership occurs in a social and historical context. Educational institutions are not concrete realities divorced from the individuals who learn, teach, and lead within them. Educational goals must not only be democratically determined but continually interrogated; who established the goal, who benefits from it, whose interests are served, who is disadvantaged by it, how it contributes to the broader vision and purposes of education.

### **Principle 6**

*Leadership is a process of power-sharing rather than power-imposing; it works toward, collaboration, emancipation and empowerment.*

Leadership should not be equated with positions in a bureaucracy. Leaders may arise in any organizational position and many who are assigned to official "leadership positions" (e.g., administrators) often may not be leaders. Leadership is a quality of practice, not a quality of organizational position. We conceptualize our educational leadership programs as addressing the education of any person seeking to take a leadership role in education from k-12 through higher education.

Participatory democracy must replace the present hierarchical structure found in institutions. Leadership begets leaders--teachers, students, parents, and community--for democratic purposes. Leadership should work for emancipatory and democratic authority.

Instructors should adopt pedagogies that encourage active participation of students.

**Principle 7**

*Faculty and students must make a commitment to community. The building and development of community must not be assumed but must be continuously nurtured and supported.*

Community must be understood as a dynamic set of relations among people, where each individual is invited to participate in the struggle to construct the social. Community should never be mistaken for "thinking or looking alike" nor should it be understood as everyone doing everything together.