



Posted February 28, 2003

**Exploring the Intersections of Leadership, Culture, and Schooling
as Narrative Inquirers**

by

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Paper presented at the Third Annual Curriculum & Pedagogy Conference, October
2003, Decatur, Georgia

This paper has been prepared with the support of
The Miami University Department of Educational Leadership's
Initiative on Leadership, Culture, and Schooling.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2002 Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University created a unique space to discuss the intersection of culture, leadership, and schooling. In response to its own proposal, funded by the State of Ohio, to strengthen its doctoral education programs locally and to transform the discourse on school leadership regionally and nationally, a course titled EDL 790N: Advanced Seminar on Narrative Inquiry, was offered as part of the Department's work. The purpose of the course on narrative inquiry and by extension the whole of the initiative was to create a scholarly learning community in which professors, side-by-side with doctoral students, would write, share their stories, conduct research, and study the intersection of culture, leadership, and schooling. A "narrative ring" (so named by the students) was formed in this course about narrative inquiry . . . seven fledgling scholars embarked on a qualitative research journey with a guiding professor.

The Department started its initiative on exploring the intersections of leadership, culture, and schooling by framing the discourse around cultural politics. Educational leadership needs to be situated within a cultural context. By culture the department refers to "historical discourses and practices, to the ritualistic production of everyday life, to technologies and apparatuses of control, and to the power relations constituted through and around those discourses . . . a cultural lens allows us to relate meaning making and power relations in educational settings to meaning making and power relations within other social contexts, and to the representation of leadership in everything from social theory to popular culture" (Quantz, McCabe, Carlson, & Dantley, 2001, p. 1).

In this sense, educational leadership "is a discursive practice, something that is produced or constituted in schools and other educational sites, rather than a quality or attribute of individuals. Leadership also is a performance more than an ascribed role. Finally, leadership is representational. It is constituted through and around narratives we tell of leadership. It emerges out of the battle between dominant narratives of leadership and counter-narratives of leadership" (p. 1). The Department intended through the initiative to create new discursive communities as a result of its course offerings, self-sponsored conferences, conference presentations, published articles, etc.

in order to generate new spaces for alternative discourses on school leadership. These "new" discourses would complement each other and offer a different set of heuristics from which to proceed in developing reactions, questions, responses, and policies for the problems of the day. For those looking for possibilities outside the mainstreams of scholarship and action in school leadership, perhaps this new conversation would be a place for participants to find supportive new ground.

To provide theoretical framework to support this narrative writing and interpreting process of our field texts (class notes, individual papers, oral stories) we used interdisciplinary textbooks. Clandinin and Connelly (2001) gave us an overview of narrative inquiry in *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Narrative Research*. Florio-Ruane (2001) provided us with an example of how to put theory into practice in *Teacher Education and the Cultural Imagination: Autobiography, Conversation, and Narrative*. Richardson's (1995) *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* and Tierney and Lincoln's (1999) anthology *Representation and the Text: Re-Framing the Narrative Voice* showed us how literature and mixed genres could be used to tie our field notes and exploration of the narrative inquiry process to social and cultural issues. We delved deeper into ourselves and experimented with new ways of expressing ourselves in writing.

This journey of narrative writing and the discourse it engendered helped to reveal the intersecting planes of the course participants' lives, both individually and collectively. It was a process characterized by an ongoing moving in and out of our various living "classrooms": our academic classroom characterized that semester by a rare scholarly intimacy; our everyday workplaces as educators—our own classrooms—which like tributaries of a river, are part of and yet separate from the life of school; and, finally, the "classroom" of society, where we have all sought to make cultural meaning from the complexities of our lived experiences. The process of writing, sharing our writing, and writing anew served at times to align our "classroom" spheres and at other times to cause serious philosophical and psychic conflict. According to anthropologist Geertz (1983), "What we can construct, if we keep notes and survive, are hindsight accounts of the connectedness of things that seem to have happened: pieced-together patterning, after the fact . . . the result, inevitably, is unsatisfactory, lumbering,

shaky, and badly formed: a grand contraption" (p.6).

The boundaries between our multiple identities and experiences produced tensions that prompted a critical "troubling" of the embedded and often hidden binaries in our lives: professional/personal, teacher/student, leader/follower, and cultural knowledge worker/social activist. We hoped this journey would navigate us through these intersecting planes of our lives and, in the end, enable us to create a "grand contraption," a research text developed as the product of the weaving of many "messy" field texts.

We are still unsettled. This is so messy:

The Fellowship of the Narrative Ring

By Neil, Brenda, Lori

Once an instructor gave us permission
 To join him on an initiative mission
 He rallied us round for an educational trip
 To locate the essence of true leadership

Our professor was wise and he thought us quite clever
 "We will create messy text an uncommon endeavor!"
 So we joined up, a band, a mixed group indeed
 Drawn in by his tale of narrative need

We discussed representation in all of its forms
 Threw out pre-concepts and confounding norms
 We waded through transcripts and numerous readings
 Some were quite clear but most were misleading
 We wrote and we read and we wrote once again
 Took voluminous minutes to help us explain
 The part that the department would most surely play
 When leadership was spoken and what they would say
 Through the gray pages we dove, eager to learn,

To find what he or she said and what was their concern
 Is it schooling, culture, spirituality, or leadership?
 Did any of it make sense or did our minds start to slip?
 Back to our pads, with pencils in hand,
 To make sense of it all the best that we can
 In the hope of depicting our department with pride
 And to match our colleagues stride for stride.
 Transgression, digression, and even regression
 Entice us to write of our own transformation
 Will narrative inquiry do all this and more?
 We don't know yet, we need more time to explore.

If our stories of self are to help us reform institutions or build new communities, we need to be willing to reinvent them, repeatedly, and in the company of others, embracing rather than defending ourselves from contact. (Florio-Ruane, 2001, p.150)

As with any classroom of students, the emergence of a democratic community of learners requires a commitment to open, constructivist discourse; a willingness to welcome and engage conflict; and dispositions toward inquiry and the patience that process requires. The classroom of the Narrative Ring was no exception. Part of the story of our writing is the story of our classroom: conversations that triggered ideas about what to write, conversations about the writing itself, and conversations that took us from the writing to the larger issues of power, domination, marginalization, and resistance. These conversations were dialogic. We shared a commitment to democratic pedagogy and experienced many moments of conflict, critique, poignancy, and genuine community. In fact, as can and probably should happen, the episodes of conflict and poignancy were often inseparable. Lori's story provided one such episode.

Lori began by simply sharing in conversation with those of us in the Narrative Ring regarding the frustration, anger, and pain she had experienced through a series of events at her school and in her community. Lori teaches in a culturally diverse, K-6

school where one hundred percent of the 350 students receive free breakfast and lunch each day, eighty percent learn English as their second language, and sixty percent have individual education plans (IEPs) and receive special education support. Last fall, at the high school where only one percent of the former students from Lori's school graduate each year, the President of the United States visited to sign a landmark education reform bill into law. This was an opportunity for some students from Lori's school to witness an historic visit of a President. Yet, the purpose of the President's visit and the manner in which students were selected or not selected to attend provided multiple and, at times, heart wrenching ironies.

Lori's Story: No Child Left Behind

Rumors of the impending presidential visit began to circulate. It had been decided, by whom it is still not clear, that only students from the intermediate grades would go, and that only students who had received no demerits that semester were eligible. We were told that names of eligible students would be drawn from a hat.

My class of fifth- and sixth-graders, all labeled either developmentally handicapped or learning disabled, make-up for the most part a group of well-mannered, well-behaved, and hard-working students. I anticipated that at least one student from my class would represent our school at the bill-signing ceremony. I was wrong.

The day before the presidential visit, our building principal called everyone to the gym for an assembly. The students selected to attend were introduced in front of the whole school. No one from my class was named. At that point in time, I was disappointed, but not upset, because as far as I knew the process had been fair and equitable. One of my students commented on the fact that no one from our class "got picked" and I told him that it was just the luck of the draw. We all clapped for the winners, both students and teachers, and happily made arrangements to cover their classes when they would be gone. There was a feeling of excitement and school spirit in the air that day.

Tuesday, the "big day" arrived. The students were drawn into the excitement as we watched the event on television; they themselves seemed to become part of the

"show." They stood for the national anthem, they recited the Pledge of Allegiance, and they clapped along with the audience after every speech. As they saw their schoolmates shake hands with the President, one student said that he still couldn't believe no one from our class got to go, since so many of them didn't have demerits. Another student picked up on this and agreed. She said she thought it would have been better if the President had come to our school so we could all meet him. I reminded them that the drawing had been fair and square, even though I was beginning to hear otherwise from staff members who had been included in the selection process.

Then something else was brought to my attention that made me begin to realize that the special education students and their teachers had been segregated and treated inequitably. Somehow, two more tickets had suddenly become available the night before and the principal gave them to two teachers from our school. I didn't know how they had been selected until several staff members came to me and said that they thought I had seniority among the intermediate teachers in our building. When teachers asked our principal how she had chosen the final two teachers to attend the ceremony, she told them that she had given them to the primary teacher and the intermediate teacher with the most seniority.

I decided that it was time for me to talk to the principal myself to clear up the feelings of marginalization that I felt for the special education students and special education teachers in our building. I was told by the principal that no special education students were chosen to go because she was afraid they wouldn't be able to sit and behave that long. The reason I wasn't chosen to go was because I teach special education and special education was already represented by a teacher chosen in the random drawing. When I replied that the "regular" education staff was already represented by four teachers, she had no reply, other than to say that I shouldn't question her integrity.

One More Thing . . .

In the weeks that followed the telling and writing of my story for class, everything was pretty much business as usual. Though I had finally been able to articulate a problem, I still felt powerless to rectify it. I shelved this line of writing in the course and turned to other, more innocuous topics in my assignments. Of course, the fellows of the

narrative ring prodded me back to the subject I must face. In one meeting I was gently yet firmly encouraged to revisit my earlier writing about the presidential visit. This struck a chord I could not ignore. My thinking and writing have undergone a transformation, so now must my actions. Though I may face a valid ethical dilemma by sharing this story with an ever-widening audience, it is a risk I must take. More people are being hurt by my silence than by my speaking out. Those for whom I speak do not have the opportunity or even necessarily the words to speak for themselves. Those who may feel slighted by my story are in positions of power, and have a voice and a chance to tell the story from their perspective if they so choose.

That brings me to *how*. How do I begin to put my convictions into practice in the school setting? I know that one person can make a difference, but a collaborative community has more power and opportunity to change the culture of a school. Susan Florio-Ruane (2001) explains that

When we tell, hear, and examine stories of self we are not blindly operating in terms of tacit narratives. In the proliferating of narratives of culture we begin to see that culture is not frozen or given, but made and open to negotiation. (p. 151)

The story of resistance cannot be the final story, or the story was told in vain. The power of creating a narrative of transformation and repeating it over and over again is imperative. It is important to make everyone in our school a part of this conversation. So many voices have been whispering, afraid to speak up. A sense of security and community must be reconstructed in order for each of us individually and all of us collectively to redefine our professional identity in such a way that allows us to raise our voices and be heard. This identity is not likely to be nurtured by those in institutionally recognized leadership roles, so we must take it upon ourselves to nurture each other and ourselves.

Connections

Lori's story came to be woven in and around our other conversations about culture, leadership, equity, and power. These conversations served as the horizon of our inquiry and the story that Lori shared colored in much of the landscape. The work and structure of our narrative ring provided the impetus and opportunity for Lori to enter what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) call a "metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 50). This space allowed her to examine the President's visit, its impact and its context, from multiple directions: **inward**, examining her own feelings, anxieties, hopes, and fears, **outward**, to the real world forces facing herself, her students, and the community around her, **backward** and **forward**, moving temporally as events continued to unfold, as positions of privilege and marginalization became naturalized through institutional rituals and narrative (p. 50). Moving from the narrative form on paper to the dialogic allowed for further expansion of her story and the meanings embedded within it. Clandinin and Connelly remind us that

As narrative inquirers, we share our writing on a work-in-progress basis with response communities. By this, we mean that we ask others to read our work and to respond in ways that help us see other meanings that might lead to further retelling. (p. 60)

In this process of sharing and re-telling, Lori began to break through the dominant narrative and to identify the "contact points" where "power works at both macro (deep structural) and micro (particularistic) levels to shape our understanding of the world" (Kincheloe, 1997, p. 58). Despite President Bush's empty promise of "No Child Left Behind" or her own school's illusory commitment to "inclusion," Lori's writings and dialogue gave rise to the deeper "knowing" of her experience within the matrix of power manifested in her school and career. From this she returned to her students, unwilling to fulfill the professionally prescribed role of ideological shield, deflecting away from students their own insights and intuitions about relations of power and conditions of inequity. Rather she "vowed . . . to help them learn to assert their rights." A powerful aspect of narrative rests in its capacity to give voice to those who

would be silenced (Richardson, 1993, p. 33). Lori's narrative offers this capacity and reminds us that morally the craft of teacher leadership rests not with the politics of accountability or the discourse of normalization but in the day-to-day, person-to-person building of relationships within the classroom, school community, and beyond (Noddings, 1984).

We are called, all of us, to critically examine the marginalization taking place in the discourse of equity. As those students who were chosen to meet the President were recognized and honored over and over we see an institutionalization of advantage, a recycling of privilege and, with it, a recycling of marginalization for those students and staff who fell outside of the normalizing gaze (Foucault, 1977/1995). We see children silenced through their "inclusion," a veil that covers the practical injustices of their everyday lives; their voices and their futures are stifled by the language of equity as they applaud their peers and invest themselves in the processes of openness and fairness, which are neither actually open nor fair. We see a teacher muted, victimized by her own professional ethic of cooperation. Yet, layered beneath is an unfolding story of struggle and "coming to be," an uncovering of self-power, of transformative community. The message that President Bush delivered will resonate in law and the educational experiences of the children long after his brief visit to Lori's community. State proficiency tests are a reality for every teacher in Ohio and reflect precisely what President Bush is pressing for across the country. While proficiency testing can serve as a lightning rod for many groups, for different reasons, the discussions and writings of our Narrative Ring repeatedly came back to issues of inequity, marginalization, school culture, and leadership. These are issues that contain assumptions, structures, and practices embedded in and reflective of the "accountability" movement in education. Recognizing these connections and choosing to challenge them was a critical step. For Lori, it has changed her interactions with students and colleagues, her personal and professional goals, and, most important, her own sense of power and possibility. Recognizing the power relations embedded in schooling and structures of school leadership and then choosing to challenge those relations requires a challenge to the dominant "common sense" narratives that serve to naturalize the status quo, that is the creation of "counternarratives,"

In Catherine's story, she also struggles with the issues of equity and marginalization within the context of educational reform in Ohio. Many view standards and high-stakes testing as ways to ensure that all children receive a quality education; they are sold as a way to guarantee that previously marginalized students will receive the same education that others have always received. Curriculum is constructed and packaged to ensure that teachers will cover the same material for all students, regardless of their ethnic background or socio-economic status, and regardless of students' individual educational needs: give the same education to everyone. No child left behind. The rhetoric of equity, however, masks built-in *inequities* in systems and practices that privilege some cultural knowledge over others. The focus on test scores and pass rates severely affects educational settings: some teachers and administrators fear for their jobs, some communities fear for the future existence of their neighborhood schools, and students. Some students wear their fear and anxiety as disengagement, some as disruption, and far too many as a silent badge of their own sense of inadequacy. Catherine's story suggests that a system of accountability that seeks to "quantify" equity and excellence needs to be "troubled" and that the collected evidence supports a counternarrative that challenges the assumptions embedded in the discourse of testing and accountability. The techno-rational paradigm of high stakes proficiency testing not only disguises institutionally maintained inequities, it also misrepresents the construct of excellence. We must create an empowering counternarrative that unmasks marginalization and positions us to engage issues of justice and equity meaningfully and convincingly. As a first step to challenging accountability myths, Catherine suggests we "check the graphs."

Catherine's Story: Check the Graphs

I teach sixth grade in one of those "excellent" suburban school districts in Southwest Ohio. Every August, just before school starts, we have a staff meeting and each teacher in my building is given **the envelope**. Inside is a chart of the pass rates on the Ohio sixth grade proficiency test for each of the twenty sixth-grade homerooms in the building. None of the homerooms are identified except **yours**. The pass rates are ranked, highest to lowest, so you can see exactly where your class falls on

each test: Writing, Reading, Math, Citizenship, and Science. The charts are color-coded, too. The highest pass rate for each subject is in yellow; the building average is green; the individual teacher's is red. It's almost like getting your report card in elementary school. Do I share my results with my neighbor? Can I show it to my friends on the bus? Will my parents be upset when I get home?

Never mind the fact that we are semi-departmentalized in my school. Never mind that the only subject I teach to all of my homeroom students is science, that I only teach language arts to those not pulled out for gifted or special education programs. Never mind that I teach no Social Studies and we ability group for math so I teach math to just a third or fourth of my homeroom students. No matter; these are **my** students, **my** scores.

Designated as "excellent" by the standards set by the Ohio Department of Education, the suburban school district where I work has a staff with impressive credentials. There are fifteen National Board Certified teachers, one building principal who is a past Ohio Principal of the Year, and the U.S. Department of Education has recognized two schools in the district as a Blue Ribbon Schools. This year each teacher in my district received a congratulatory email from our assistant superintendent. Our district has met 27 of the 27 performance indicators set by the state of Ohio. Twenty-five of those indicators are pass rates at or above 75% on the proficiency tests; the other two are student attendance rate and graduation rate. We've met all 27. By all measures of "accountability," we are an "excellent" school district.

Last spring we received a copy of the latest data report from the state. Our pass rates on the proficiency tests are broken down by race. Apparently it is just our White and Asian students who have contributed to our district's excellent rating in all five subject areas. Our African American students have met the state minimum only in writing. What does this say about the intersection of leadership, culture, and schooling in this "excellent" suburban school district in Ohio? What does this say about leadership in education in Ohio? How can this district be considered an excellent school district?

The test scores in Ohio show, in district after district, regardless of the district's "state rating" that the previously marginalized students (now being exposed to the same high standards set by the state) are not meeting the state minimum pass rates on the

proficiency tests. The results are the same in districts across the state. African American students' scores do not meet the state standards. Our marginalized students are not receiving a quality education, according to our own state standards.

We could tell this before. Marginalized students were not being well served by our educational system. Now we have (quantitative) proof. Ohio school districts continue to underserve African American students. We have fallen short. We have not made a cultural connection, a connection to family and community for our African American students within our educational system. So where is the leadership in Ohio? Can it be found in raising the bar, revising standards, defining school success based on pass rates on high-stakes tests?

Connections

Catherine's story suggests the importance of critically examining the dominant narrative and uncovering the values embedded within. What are the ways schools and teachers can avoid "falling short?" How can teachers and schools make the necessary cultural connections to avoid, and maybe reverse, marginalization? Tom's and Linda's stories which follow help us move in that direction. If we can drop down from theory to practice we can see the critical role, positive and negative, of day-to-day, personal interactions between educators and students. But we can also see the complexities of competing values systems and the contradictions and ironies they can pose for teachers and students.

Tom's story repeatedly dropped us into practice and the world of "school culture" and the inevitable conflicts created by the cultural values held by students. Tom's story was one that served as a check-in point throughout the course, as we heard the unfolding of his work with his high school students. What was at first mostly about Tom's enthusiasm (going back to the K-12 classroom), engagement, and imagination increasingly became about values; our values, values of power (dominant values) imbedded in curriculum expectations. Initially his stories were full of enthusiasm and his connections to the students as individuals. As time went on, the expectations embedded in the pedagogical culture of schooling came between Tom and his connections to his students. As Tom's story unfolded in our class, it raised questions

about the options he did and didn't have and whether he privileged certain values over others.

Tom's Story: Weigh Stations

I spent several of my first weeks back in high school this semester teaching a sophomore English class and constantly worrying about my inability to reach Brett. Brett is an 18 year-old sophomore who has never passed an academic class in high school. But he keeps coming back; he attends school. He cares most of all for his car; he keeps a taxing (in terms of time) job to pay for it and his insurance. He says little in class, but at times is belligerent when I press him to participate or simply try to keep him from sleeping.

We had it out one day earlier in the term, mainly about his "poor behavior" and "lack of academic performance" in class. He said he wouldn't be back after he turned 18 anyway, that he could keep his car, according to the law, and safely drop out then without losing it (a county law keeps youth from keeping a car if they drop out of school before age 18). He turned 18 in March, and he hasn't stopped attending.

Brett is near the end of the third nine weeks of English 2 (March 22), and there really isn't any hope of his passing the course. I can't give him an incomplete, that's not something the school is set up to do. I don't think he really deserves an incomplete anyway. He just hasn't done anything (or enough) to pass the course.

This position doesn't reflect the fact, however, that we have been working together over the past several weeks in a much more collegial way. I know that he read Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* all the way through. I was proud of him for that, and told him so. He has been getting reading support. He has benefited, but it just hasn't been enough. Brett did have a short period (about a week) where he had read several stories and did well on quizzes and other assignments. Then he got sidetracked with another family crisis and then he missed almost a whole week to retake state proficiency tests he hadn't passed yet. When he did come back to class after the tests, he slept. He has done very few of the assignments in the course and no writing. The students' writing overall is improving so much, I can actually see it from paper to paper. But nothing for Brett in this area. I actually tailored the whole last set of meaningful (to me) assignments for the

nine weeks for him. This turned out great for the other students, but not for him.

So I'll have to fail Brett. I think he could pass if he were in school and if he got the support he needs. But in all fairness, I do think the school is trying to respond; I also think we could do so much more. For instance, for sophomores there is no net. If they fail the academic classes in the sophomore year, they don't qualify for vocational programs the junior year. Brett would like to go to the vocational school or into another type of work related program through the school. But he won't qualify because he hasn't passed any classes. So he will stay in academic classes (ironic) until he drops out, or worse, spend three more years in school and never pass a class or the proficiency test. No diploma. Nothing but wasted time, and difficult, angry confrontations with adults who think he is a loser.

I know students like Brett aren't losers, but in this system, well, there's no way out. And they will confront overworked, harried, seen-it-all-before teachers who won't cut them any bit of slack in a million years. I may be one of the few who see them and their potential. This doesn't make me anything special, but I really do see them, and all that they have and could be. We constrict with time, and programs, and rigorous demands – everything that the system says is good. But they suffer and the system, of course, fails. What could the system do to help? What more could I do?

Connections

Relationships do make a difference, especially the ones made when everything else in a person's life seems to be holding that person back: poverty; dangerous, unproductive relationships with loved ones; family squabbles; racism; lack of educational opportunity and achievement; poor financial decisions; being exploited by the system; etc. Society, people themselves, seem to line up against some folks and rip the possibilities from reach. Life is unfair, and then some.

But teachers and other school leaders can step in. In the story that follows, Linda steps in, making herself available and more, purposefully pushing education as an option for students who find themselves in her office, sitting before her desk. Linda goes even further. She works with students where they are, countering their perspectives with

other perspectives and other possible choices, forcefully playing every hand she has to keep them in school, pushing toward goals, making way for them on their way.

Linda's Story: Beginning a college branch . . . The Northfield story

Moving the Northfield branch of our community college from an urban Appalachian neighborhood to an urban African American neighborhood proved to be more complicated than I had imagined. The community was in the process of revitalization and was thrilled to have the college branch. I began bringing the students, who were mostly white Appalachian, in small groups over to the new facility. Many felt that since this was a black neighborhood there would be drugs, crime, and their cars would be broken into. They also had strong opinions about black people and their cultures. I began running this new branch alone and began learning lessons about a world so different from my own.

That first fall an incredible phenomenon occurred . . . half of the enrollment was African American and the other half was Appalachian and European-American. The college continues to have incredible diversity among its students, a true sense of pride among students. This is where I began my education . . .

LaShonda's story is amazing and so different from my own. She was a teen parent who lived with her grandmother, and graduated from high school. She began college, or what she thought was college. The parish nurse brought LaShonda to Northfield when she was pregnant with her fourth child.

I'd like you to meet LaShonda. She's just moved here from Toledo and wants to return to college.

When is your baby due?

In the beginning of September.

Have you gone to college before?

Well, yes. But it really wasn't a college.

What do you mean?

Well, I signed up for a program after graduation, but when I went there was a classroom with mostly drunk men sitting there. I went a few times and then stopped going, it was terrible and we were not learning anything.

How did you pay for this program?

I was eligible for financial aid.

Do you mean aid or loans?

I thought that I was signing for tuition, but it was also for a student loan.

Did you pay the money back for your student loan?

I started to, but I have three children and was not able to keep up with the payments.

So you didn't pay all of the money back?

Yes.

Do you know that you have a defaulted loan, have they sent you notices for payment?

Yes, but I can't pay all of it at one time, it is \$3000.

Well, you cannot get financial aid until you begin paying this back. If you begin to make monthly payments for six months, you will be eligible for financial aid as long as you keep paying.

LaShonda really wanted to go to college and I made her a deal. An Ohio Incentive Grant would pay for one class, and Northfield would pay for another. She began classes in August and had her baby in September, missing just one class. I am in awe of her strength and determination. She paid monthly payments on her defaulted loan and continued at Northfield taking a full-time schedule, received her associate degree, became my assistant, and continues her education at a four-year liberal arts college. I could not have done my job without her and she would not have this degree if a college did not give her another chance.

She is so smart, especially in financial matters, yet continues to live in my idea of "dysfunction." She lives with the man who is the father of her two daughters; he works sporadically, something that makes me crazy. Her children are in counseling because of sexual abuse from an uncle. She says that she is going to be the one to stop this cycle of abuse in her family. All of this would have put me under as a person, and yet she goes on. Most of my students have similar stories, and I became the Mom to all of them.

I knew that this was a great place for students who needed smaller class size, personal attention, and other advantages, but guidance counselors were not buying it . .

. they would not look beyond location. Our college name was not known and didn't fit our name-brand society.

One day at a college fair, I finally made a connection that I was looking for; it was with a teacher involved in a program that works with pregnant and parenting teens, a population that I wanted to recruit because of our unique size and for the childcare that we had available. I had been searching for this connection and now I am beginning to understand why I am so passionate about working with these young women. I wanted to work with parenting teens and help them get a college education. Most of my students were single moms, but they were older, ranging in age from late 20s to 40s, and wished they had gone to college earlier. Perhaps if we could work with teen parents . . .

"I'm pregnant," she said to me. Our worlds would change forever. We lived in a blue-collar neighborhood, with three-bedroom, one-bathroom houses, where fathers worked at the local steel plant. Her mom stayed at home and went to bingo, my mom worked and my grandparents lived with us. We did everything together since kindergarten and were making plans for going to college. We took college prep classes and five years of French. I would be the only one in my neighborhood to go to college.

She got pregnant in her senior year and her mother made her marry. How could she have gotten pregnant? We had had sex and learned about protection. "We used the condom twice," she told me.

Not one guidance counselor or teacher talked with her about college! It was 1974 and girls that got pregnant were allowed to stay in school and graduate but all of them got married. She eventually had another baby, never went to college, got

divorced, and continued to make poor choices where men were concerned. I heard she was living in Florida and her husband was in prison for drug trafficking . . .

Now 25 years later, I find myself obsessed with working with parenting teens. Is education the answer? Will going to college provide a better life? Will this college experience help them make wise decisions . . . my idea of wise decisions? Many want to go to college but do not know how to get there and guidance counselors and many teachers are not encouraging them . . . they are written off. How can this still be happening?

I have learned that if we want to work with populations that are . . . underserved, oppressed, at risk, or any of the other labels we put upon them, then education must come to them in their neighborhood. For whatever reasons, these students do not seek out opportunities or perhaps they don't know how. I've also learned that it takes a lot of nurturing and encouragement to keep students in school. I've also learned that I have a lot to learn . . . my ways are not the only ways.

Connections

When you read Tom's and Linda's stories, you must be struck by how out of place these two people are: Linda, white, middle-class, master's degree, working in an ethnically diverse, urban poor community college; Tom, white, middle class, educationally progressive, college professor, teaching ninth grade high school English in a working/middle class, conservative community. In fact, all of us in the narrative ring are middle-class, well educated, white. These descriptors are unmistakable, part of the identities we carry to the table and to these pages. And we are "other," or surrounded by "others." We can't escape these boundaries or the bindings; they hold us here. The challenge, however, is to "trouble" these tensions as much as possible, for inside the tensions, perhaps, lie more questions and answers regarding this journey toward explicating an intersection among leadership, culture, and schooling.

While answers are scarce, questions abound. And so one of the questions becomes: Educational "leaders" step in, intervene; but at what cost? How does the fact

that we essentially indoctrinate students with our values shape how we see and interpret our stories of experience in the world? How does our own privilege color the actions we take on "behalf" of others? What happens to the identity of the other when interventions take place? What happens to their values, their cultural norms? At what point is the other an equal partner in the dialogue about life, about education, about options, about money, about pursuing dreams? At what point is the other simply the "other," incapable of doing anything on his or her own without our help unless we become mater/pater? At what point are his or her community and/or family incapable of loving him, of giving her what she needs? Linda herself calls herself a "mom" to the students. Tom fashions himself as father (Big Brother?), sometimes as teacher. Is this okay?

Haberman (1998, *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*) thinks not, that the purpose of schools and teachers is to introduce children to the cultural capital of schooling in a safe and secure place for learning through a rich curriculum and competent teachers. All the rest is a gross, misguided attempt at exerting certain cultural norms that get wrapped up in attempts at "loving" the students, especially when the dominant classes and racial groups do it all to the other. The thing is, the other is already loved in unique and meaningful ways by families and communities. They need to be taught, not dominated. Liberated, not imprisoned (or saved). Honored, not pitied. Is it really as clear-cut as Haberman suggests? It does give us pause.

We have been battling these questions all through this course. Asking the questions doesn't discount the contributions the person makes. Asking the questions doesn't mean the person is wrong to act, or immoral, or unethical, or bad. Asking the questions is as essential as breathing, reading, teaching, and being . . . Not to ask is to lose touch, to become a crusader, to colonize, to exploit further. What is lost when Linda "makes" LaShonda stay? What is gained? What is lost when Tom pushes the notion of school values into Brett's life? What is gained?

To learn about ourselves as we try to learn about others does not mean that we assume a stance of bland or "nihilistic" cultural relativism. Rather, Geertz (1983) argues that we learn about others and ourselves by taking our own values into account and critically examining them as we try to

understand the unfamiliar. In so doing, Geertz says, "one welds the processes of self-knowledge, self-perception, self-understanding to those of other-knowledge, other-perception, other-understanding" (pp. 181-182).

Joe's story suggests a view that offers the possibility of building a teacher culture that includes an empowering and democratic relationship with students. His story hints at such a possibility but also points to backlash that can await those who seek to work within such possibilities. Once we can see the incredible voids and nearly catastrophic lacks in our institutions, both in schools and in what we have come to know as educational leadership, and perhaps in ourselves as being incapable of changing the system, what are the next steps? If we aren't a part of the former culture any longer, what is our role in transforming it? How can we be agents of change if the distance is so great that we can't communicate any longer? What is the legacy of a life of cultural, social, and political resistance in an institutional entity as conservative and as unforgiving as the American public school?

In Joe's story, educational leadership lies within the efforts to create opportunities for students and teachers to critique the status quo, interact intellectually, and create a purposeful and shared community.

Joe's Story: The Cognitive Target Committee Incident

The North Central Association (NCA) Cognitive Target Committee at the high school where I taught was engaged in a multi-year school improvement process. The Cognitive Target Committee was looking to involve students in a process of helping to clarify the cognitive target goal. The announcement on the hallway bulletin boards throughout the school called for an after school meeting of faculty and students. Indeed, it was billed as a "LEARNING—What's the point?" meeting aimed specifically at eliciting student input.

An initial meeting with the same purpose had been held several weeks earlier, but had been poorly advertised and poorly attended (8 out of 3200 students). At that meeting students were presented with the Cognitive Target Goal developed by the faculty, "Students will demonstrate an ability to apply previously acquired knowledge."

The faculty facilitator asked students what the target goal meant to them. One student immediately remarked, "It makes no sense. What other kind of knowledge would you have except that which you have previously acquired?" This comment was quickly brushed aside as the question before the group was not whether the students agreed with the target goal but what they understood it to mean. The nature of this response was not lost on the small group of students present at this meeting: They articulately and passionately told the facilitators in that they wanted an education that would focus on critical thinking skills and would allow them to work with meaningful and significant information and ideas. The faculty facilitators deflected and marginalized these student points by making a list of "concerns" on the board amid assurances that these would be dealt with at subsequent meetings.

The Cognitive Target Committee advertised for a second meeting several weeks later. My colleague Dave Matthews (a pseudonym) and I saw an opportunity to encourage students to again raise the issues of democratic classrooms and meaningful curriculum reform that had been deflected in the earlier meeting. We felt the committee needed to follow through on its promise to allow for and listen to student voice. To our astonishment and delight the Cognitive Target Committee engaged in a much more aggressive promotion of this second meeting. These efforts included overhead announcements in the days preceding the meeting and hallway bulletin boards covered with posters that asked students "WHAT DO YOU THINK STUDENT LEARNING SHOULD LOOK LIKE AROUND HERE?" In the center of the bulletin board posters was the same question that was advertised for the first meeting: "LEARNING -- What's the point?"

The faculty facilitator opened the meeting by presenting the cognitive target goal on an overhead. She announced that the purpose of this meeting was to develop a student generated version of this target goal. According to the agenda that was distributed as she spoke, this was to be done by dividing the students into groups. Each group would take one word of the target statement and then, using poster paper, markers, and dictionaries, refashion the target statement—word for word. There was a noticeable murmur of dissatisfaction among the students even before the faculty facilitator could finish her description of the process: the agenda presented was in stark

contrast to the message of open dialogue advertised in the posted announcements. A number of students complained that they had come to the meeting with the expectation that they would be able to express their views about learning within the whole group. The facilitator responded to this criticism by referring to the presented agenda. As the frustration and noise level grew the facilitator shouted, "We need to keep consensus here!" The use of the word "consensus" for what was most certainly intended to be "order" is illustrative of the issues underlying the meeting.

In an effort to move the proceedings along, the facilitators divided students into groups, ushered the teaching staff into one part of the room so that we would not be working with the students, and handed out paper, markers, and dictionaries. Many students moved to the middle of room and continued to protest the process. The students argued that staff members were not listening to what they were saying. The facilitator suggested that students could have input on this issue by engaging in the planned activity. One student who attempted to restate her position was told that she had already made her point and was cut off. When she began to cry out of sheer frustration, another student came forward and told the facilitator, "I know you are doing what it is you know how to do, but it is keeping you from hearing what we are saying." In short, he was telling the facilitator that while she was, in fact, demonstrating an ability to "apply previously acquired knowledge," that skill was keeping her from learning from the situation at hand.

Frustrated and angry, many of the students left the meeting though a few remained to engage in the "activity" and others remained to talk among themselves about what had transpired. At the conclusion of the "activity" Dave Matthews left the meeting room in the company of several students. He later recalled that while some students seemed disillusioned with what had transpired, others were "energized" by the meeting. As he walked down the hall from the meeting room talking with some students, one of the committee members stuck her head out of the meeting room and asked if he would join the committee's debriefing session. On re-entering the room Dave found himself facing the committee members who had positioned their chairs in a semi-circle facing the entrance. As he took a step or two into the room, he was accused of "setting the committee up" by recruiting students to come to the meeting with the purpose of

subverting the process. The committee accused him of "orchestrating" student resistance, of "manipulating" students into pursuing a "political" agenda, and "brainwashing" students into conflict with the committee.

Though stunned by the attack, Dave acknowledged that he had strongly encouraged students to attend the meeting. He argued that it was the committee and not he who had misled students about the meeting and that the flyers encouraging students to "bring answers" established an offer of open discussion that never materialized at the meeting. He argued that students did not have to be "manipulated" in order to demand that they be heard at a meeting advertised as an opportunity to be heard. Dave's confidence in students' capacities to interpret the context of schooling and act accordingly was in stark contrast to the views of committee members who viewed students as far more passive and immature intellectually and politically. As Dave left the room he encountered several of his students in the hallway. Apparently the door to the meeting room had not been closed and the students in the hallway had heard the entire exchange between Dave and the committee.

At the end of the next day Dave found a two-page, single spaced letter of reprimand from the Assistant Principal in his school mailbox and copied to the principal. The letter accused Dave of unprofessional behavior due to his activist involvement with students in the previous day's meeting. Dave was called to meet with the principal and assistant principal within several days to discuss this letter of reprimand. Before that meeting took place, however, about half a dozen students arranged to meet with the assistant principal. These students challenged the assistant principal's interpretation of what had transpired at the NCA Cognitive Target Committee's invitational meeting and particularly the post-meeting treatment of Dave Matthews. The assistant principal argued that this "personnel matter" was not open to discussion with students. In response, students pointed to the inconsistency between the advertised agenda of the Cognitive Target meeting and the agenda actually presented at the meeting and suggested, therefore, that the treatment of Dave Matthews overheard by students was entirely inappropriate.

By the time Dave Matthews had his meeting with the principal and assistant principal, the assistant principal did admit to issues of "miscommunication." The

administration continued to assert that Dave needed to access "proper" channels of participation in school decision making. In other words, despite the open invitation to staff as well as students, Dave was told he should get involved with organized committees if he wished to propose and implement change in the school. In effect, the exercise of professionally constructed leadership should take place through formalized processes and structures.

Connections

What is it that keeps us from being able to create and thrive in open, intellectually stimulating, free cultures in schools? The answer to that question seems clear: power and control as barriers come to mind. Cultural, social, and political forces in the school, as they are embedded in the specific and systematic actions of individuals, including those of "school leaders," work to keep us from having anything close to democratic lives in most schools. In Joe's story, the administration and the committee work fervently to keep Joe and other like-minded teachers at bay, using intimidation and formal censures to drive their democratic wills and actions out. These others, nemeses of the first order, work as "school leaders" to give the impression that open inquiry and democratic processes are held central and dear, but these notions cannot withstand questioning, critique, revolt – all things that democratic lives, processes, and institutions can handle and even foster in schools and other societal institutions.

At the end of our course together, Joe went so far as to argue that we can't have a meaningful discussion about any of the topics at hand – democratic schooling, teacher and student empowerment, the impact of various manifestations of culture and difference in the school setting including a multicultural curriculum approach, et al. – if we continue to use the word "leadership." Our images and practices of leadership are so bound up in ideas about role, and management, and control, and the organization, that we have lost sight of any meaningful means and/or ends of purposeful time spent educating each other in the public sphere, let alone one that is "democratic." So what is educational leadership if we attempt to define it without naming it?

One answer is that it lives within the narratives we write that counter the traditional discourse. Joe said in class, "A lot of people talk about issues such as equity, fairness, and justice. But we don't have narratives that show what's really going on. Let's look at experience and tie it back to the theory." Yes, and Joe's story is an excellent place to begin. These things happen to Dave and Joe and the students as the result of "leadership" (that is, specific "subversive," democratic actions) provided by Joe and Dave Matthews and manifest in the commitments and lives of the students themselves! What to some is unprofessional and worthy of censure, what to some is an aberration and simply disrespectful behavior, we actually find to be leadership. What some count as lost opportunity, with students and teachers lives all embroiled in negativity we submit are examples of reflexivity in leadership, embedded forms of leadership that advance discourse, ideas, thinking, and conflict within the learning lives of citizens, especially in the lives of students. It is at times in the covert, the unseen, the indistinguishable or misinterpreted acts of the oppressed, abused, misled, dominated, revolutionary, and/or hopeless citizens that we find examples of educational leadership in schools.

What we can learn with peers and/or more experienced others (be they teachers who may be present at the table or authors who are present in their texts) is rooted in and related to our conversations. Implicit in the idea of such conversations is the development of a community within which learning from text can occur. (Florio-Ruane, 2000, p. 122)

Some Concluding Thoughts

When we began to put the stories together for this paper, we began the process of fashioning a heuristic framework for making meaning from these stories and our collective work. We laid out the stories and looked for patterns. How can we explain and interpret the transitional patterns from one to another to come up with a sense of our need to leap from analysis to action? Lori's story is about the

intersection between leadership and schooling. It is about her first effort at challenging the established structures, past practices, and institutional power structures that she has been a part of as a teacher for a long time, and in general, has supported through her professional career. She sees clearly through the power structures as a result of her telling, and how her colleagues and she and the school really aren't "all in this together." This step helps her take a position of voice and action to act against the structures that make tension between her concerns for her students and her concern for issues of social justice. The very dynamic going on in her school wasn't just about her students and educating them and working for their voice, it in fact was the very essence of social justice at work (or not) in her school and in society. Her story comes into the intersection between schooling and leadership. What is her role now as someone who sees her very practice and being as wrapped up in leadership and justice? How can she act more effectively in the future as a school leader and as an advocate for all who are marginalized in the school?

We had a most difficult time dealing with issues associated with standardized testing and its overwhelming impact on us as educators, teachers, and citizens. It wasn't so much about the oppression of the test on the lives of teachers and their classrooms, but through Catherine's story we see how this whole movement is about the disjuncture between culture and schooling. The test then isn't just about dealing with the cultural baggage of the "accountability" movement and its proponents, but about the insidious byproduct of the test itself creating an airtight way of marginalizing, even more officially than before, cultural groups who score low and continue to do so. Catherine shifts the conversation from "standards" and "accountability" to cultural differences so that we don't see the tests as producing a level playing field, anything but. The test tends to naturalize this notion of a level playing field, and by normalizing this discourse it provides room for those who would use the tests politically in this way to gloss the embedded issues of inequity and injustice.

In fact, schools and school people have been ineffectual at making these cultural connections and the result is a further distancing of teachers from really teaching the students by addressing their idiosyncratic, contextual needs by forcing them to teach a distanced, stark, test-based curriculum that further marginalizes cultural groups from

state's version of success. Culturally speaking, the distance between the reality of the test and the reality of raced, classed, and ethnic lives in real communities grows exponentially because the discourse around leadership and teaching and learning is mostly about meeting standards and not about meeting cultures. The distance works to the advantage of those who would have groups marginalized by the test, and silences those who know we are pursuing the wrong answers to the wrong questions through the wrong discourses altogether.

Tom and Linda's stories investigate the "personal" with regard to the cultural connections necessary to understand and improve practice in schools with marginalized students. It's not just about understanding the students' cultures and what they bring, but also about understanding the cultural lenses and values that educators bring and attend to as practitioners. We don't suggest that practitioners negate their own values, not at all. We suggest that they work to recognize that those values are there and that they generate a complex interplay as they come into contact with different students and communities. Joe's piece suggests that students have a powerful role to play in school leadership, not only in articulating their cultures but also in building classroom and school cultures. His story challenges the duality of teacher-student, since it reveals the intellectual power that resides in students and their capacities to make sense of the cultures in which they live, work, and learn. This perspective places students alongside teachers, especially those who are their advocates, and perhaps up against those who are not, who value a culture of control over a culture of freedom of expression. This brings to bear a counternarrative that floats throughout the pieces: teachers aren't there to help students get better test scores; they are there with students to confront, explore, recognize, and appreciate cultural differences. The discourse at hand then privileges the complex over the concrete, the dynamic over the mundane. It privileges as leaders those who are typically viewed as followers in the usual discourses about leadership and schooling.

We began this course with trepidation, and wondering what would the final document look like? Tom assured us that it didn't matter what the final paper would be; it was about the process. "Yeah, sure it is," we all thought, sometimes out loud. From experience, we all know that education/learning is not measured through the process; it

is measured through a product, which in a doctoral program is about a paper, and that paper is meant for future publication. It took us a few weeks to believe Tom, and we began to enjoy and embrace this dialoguing and writing and learning about culture, leadership, and schooling through each other. Our narrative ring brought many different perspectives, personalities, and experiences to these learning experiences.

These personalities, experiences, and differing perspectives added rich layers to our learning about narrative inquiry and changed the way we thought and viewed qualitative research. It introduced us to the concept of sharing our stories and the stories of others as the catalyst for our discussion of culture, leadership, and schooling and these discussions became the springboard for learning and our future writing. Our dialoguing provided opportunities to find and share our voices, sometimes giving us new insights and the courage to write about leadership, culture, and schooling from a new point of view. This process challenged us to think about theory and how to put theory into practice. Most important, it validated our fear . . . there are no easy answers for changing leadership in schools. We asked, "What do we do with what we learned from our discussions and writing?" Tom answered, "As scholars, we write about it." We still are wondering if this is enough. What actions must we take? What changes do we propose? We know that the dialogue must continue and that more stories must be told.

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