School Leadership and the Experience of Education Under Oppression

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Abstract

Background: This qualitative study examined apartheid-era South Africa, from 1948 to 1994, which established social and administrative policies that deliberately curtailed the education of Indigenous and other South Africans as a means of oppressing non-European ethnic groups.

Analysis: In lieu of face-to-face interviews, the experience of education under apartheid is examined through stories and interviews submitted to the Apartheid Archives Project, curated by the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, South Africa. The central question asks how the personal experiences of an oppressive school system, as interpreted through the framework of Freirean education, informs school leaders.

Conclusion: Oppression infiltrates school systems, impinges on the educational process, and robs students of learning opportunities. In recognizing this, educators engage their responsibility as school leaders, and embrace the pivotal role education plays in social reconstruction, liberation, and humanization.

Keywords: Education, South Africa, School leadership, Apartheid; Oppression

Introduction

Given the opportunity to record their memories of life under apartheid, many contrib-

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utors to the Apartheid Archives Project (AAP), curated by the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, South Africa, framed their experiences in the context of schools and education. Those testimonials lend a personal voice to the experience of education under a government that aimed to establish a lower tier of society that was defined by racial characteristics and groomed to be a working class (Christopher, 1994). The most egregious transgressions of apartheid are common knowledge; less well known is the fact that a primary tool of the apartheid regime was education—in fact, no other portion of South African society displayed such an obvious degree of inequality as the education system (Christopher, 1994). The education provided to Black South Africans through to the final years of the twentieth century was engineered to establish a lower working class (Christie & Collins, 1982), instilling and reinforcing the cultural and social divisions that were the hallmarks of the apartheid era of South African history.

Contributors to the AAP explained that as children, they could sense those divisions, how they affected society, and the hierarchy they implied. The government's oppressive policies entered the school in many ways: high school students were forced to commute over long distances to specific schools; university students needed special permission to attend universities that catered to the dominant ethnic group; and schools were starved of funding and resources because they were intended for a particular skin color.

Those who could recall those divisions at a young age admitted they simply accepted them as the reality they were born into. Even into their tertiary education, students reported seeing racism, experiencing discrimination, or suffering humiliation, but they folded those experiences into their understanding of daily life. For some, it would be decades before they found the courage to unpack those experiences and ask relevant questions.

Educators and school leaders were similarly aware that apartheid seeped into the classroom. Pressure from beyond the school grounds was forcing them to re-evaluate their role within the system, and in some cases, to decide how to confront institutionalized oppression. Some faced the intrusion head-on, but others deflected, avoiding the issue with their students, who sensed their teachers' fear of retribution.

Fear was a recurring element in retellings of education during apartheid. In its desperate years, the apartheid police state leveraged harassment, abduction, detainment, torture, and even murder against citizens who opposed it, and those in the educational arena were not immune. Contributors to the AAP told of protests against the white government, of arrests, detention, and worse. Police harassed families and invaded the homes of students who joined opposition movements. There was little, if any, redress.

Education itself became a casualty in some cases. Submissions recounted interruptions to classes and even entire years of study lost as students rallied to oppose apartheid. Teachers moved away from schools in volatile regions or joined private institutions where much of apartheid's rancor could at least be deflected. Even those who did not move openly against the racist regime suffered long commutes, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, sparse funding, a dearth of teachers, and substandard facilities.

Few contemporary educators can claim to have suffered conditions akin to those imposed under the South African government of the late twentieth century.

While it is true in one sense that the apartheid government only institutionalized what had been social convention for generations (Nwandula, 1988), that does not excuse the intentional miseducation of generations of South Africans by a racist regime. Even though that regime reached its conclusion in 1994, many of the lessons of a government that used education to oppress its own citizens are still subject to inspection.

One of those lessons concerns how school leaders can maintain their professional integrity under a government that runs counter to the core mission of education. While much hackneyed, the elevation of education to a noble pursuit is not undeserved. At the same time, education and educational leadership theory generally assume that an organization or institution dovetails with the environment beyond its borders. Both expect schools are in step with their governing bodies, which align to the desires and needs of the community and reflect the policies and regulations of the larger society and government.

Education, however, is a tool, and akin to many other tools, it can be put to other purposes. The educational system of apartheid South Africa stands as a sharp illustration of living, working, and studying in an institution bounded by a system that obstructs student success. As a system that was openly intent on preventing the majority of its citizens from succeeding, apartheid-era education is a strong example of policies twisted against the traditional role of education.

Methodology

This study employed a phenomenological approach to investigate the essence of education as it was practiced under extremely oppressive conditions in apartheid-era South Africa, with a goal of informing teachers, students, and school leaders who face similarly challenging situations. The central question was: "how do personal experiences of an oppressive school system, as interpreted through the framework of Freirean education, inform school leaders?"

Ideally, phenomenological research relies on focused face-to-face interviews to collect data from people who experienced the phenomenon. This, in turn, contributes to a composite description of what they experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In lieu of that, this research relied on testimonials and interviews published as part of the AAP to understand the lived experiences of those involved in education in apartheid-era South Africa. The AAP began at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, and represents the personal memories of participants who volunteered to submit their experiences in a written format, answering a prompt for "stories of their earliest and/or most significant experiences of race and racism in apartheid South Africa" (Stevens, Duncan, & Sonn, 2010, p. 16). Contributors were invited to provide as much information about the location of the event as they were comfortable revealing and some measure of the effect the event had on their lives (Stevens, Duncan, & Hook, 2013). As of summer 2020, 113 submissions were available as portable document files downloadable from the university's Historical Papers Research Archive (2009); 97 were stories, and 16 were interviews. Unless the participant elected to include it, stories and interviews contained no personally identifiable information.

Not every submission to the AAP was focused on educational leadership, let alone education. To maintain those two focus points, the NVivo (QSR, 2018) software suite was employed to filter submissions based on the appearance of the following words, as they connect to education: *school*, *teach*, *student*, *leader*, *educate*, and *learn*. The software also flagged terms that derive from those words—for example, *teaching* or *teacher* as derivatives of *teach*—and words with a similar connotation, such as *instruct*, which implies *teach*.

The results were previewed. In some cases, the key words appeared only in passing and the submission was dropped. This preview for suitability generated 53 submissions for consideration. No submission was excluded on the grounds of privilege or a preferred viewpoint; this permits the results to be interpreted without additional delimitations. In some cases, submissions held viewpoints counter to the majority; these were accepted as negative case analyses and should provide "a realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 341).

Eight of the 53 submissions under consideration were interviews, and the remainder were stories. Of the submissions that provided demographic data, nine authors identified as "Black" or "African;" 17 as "white;" four as "coloured"; and three as "Indian." Eleven authors labeled their submission with "male," and 19 included "female" or "woman" as an identifier. In some cases, more demographic information could be inferred from the text of the story, but this was avoided because many of the submissions exhibited a creative quality.

Some interviews included a pseudonym for the participant, for those cases, the name was retained here. For materials that did not provide a pseudonym, one has been assigned, in alphabetical order, without regard for any available demographic data. Names were gleaned from Statistics South Africa lists of live birth occurrences and registrations for 2017. The most popular of those names were expressions of "pride, joy, and thankfulness" (Statistics South Africa, 2017, p. 28).

The trustworthiness of this study—the quality that Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba (1985) framed as the question, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences … that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (p. 290)—is in its accuracy and validation. Accuracy satisfies the reader on the methods of recording or transforming data; validation combines strategies to prepare the study for criticism (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The protocols of the original project contribute to the accuracy of this study: project coordinators solicited voluntary testimonials through an internet portal as well as through professional and personal networks (Stevens, Duncan, & Hook, 2013). The content is largely "unmediated," but passages reproduced here can be corroborated through the University of Witwatersrand archive (Ratele & Laubscher, 2013; Stevens, Duncan, & Hook, 2013).

Validation was supported through three specific strategies. The first was "clarifying researcher bias or engaging in reflexivity" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 341), which required the researcher to disclose biases, values, or experiences that affect the position the researcher takes in the inquiry. In addition to that disclosure, the researcher followed the advice of Clark Moustakas (1994) and practiced "bracketing" (p. 81) to further reduce bias. A second strategy was "generating a rich, thick de-

scription" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 343), where the detail offered in the study allowed readers to decide on transferability. Wherever possible, this study carries over as many details as were available in the primary source material, where it portrayed the essence of the central phenomenon. The final strategy, "negative case analyses" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 341), has been discussed.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed the methods and procedures described by Moustakas (1994) in *Phenomenological Research Methods* and condensed into a step-by-step procedure by John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018). While the bulk of those procedures were pertinent to this study, the nature of archive research required a few minor modifications. For example, phenomenological practices expect researchers will "collect data from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018) through a series of in-depth interviews. Because this research examined material submitted to an archive, there was no opportunity for interviews or follow-up conversations with participants. This was a mixed blessing: while the materials were transcribed, translated, and ready for examination, there was no chance to revisit participants.

Each of the 53 submissions was read in its entirety, then revisited in an effort to sense its "horizons" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 81). The analysis revealed two themes, with the second commonly appearing as a response to the first. The initial theme was an undeniable sense that apartheid intruded on education. Regardless of the school level or ethnic heritage of a student, the consistent thread was that government policy interrupted, interfered, or rerouted education to undesired ends. Some intrusions were benign and were described as little more than inconveniences but others implied irreversible damage to the author's education—or worse, their physical well-being. Esihle[1] described how her teachers prepared her and her classmates for a "terrorist" incident:

> We were told to hide under desks and instructed on how to leopard crawl across the playground. At the same time this way was scary— why would people want to hurt us? Of course, the terrorists were made out to be black men—as were all dangerous persons. In fact, this was never doubted—it was a given.

Esihle said hindsight revealed the incident's lasting effects: "It only occurred to me much later how warped this exercise had been. We were quite literally taught to fear blacks; they were painted as this enemy which as children, I feel we believed."

When students perceived the inequalities of apartheid society, they questioned their leaders about it. Tee[2] described a situation in high school when students became aware of the difference between the money spent on education for white and Black Africans. Students could see where Black African students waited in queues, hoping for a place in school, while white students paid no school fees and had free textbooks.

> Our class questioned our headmistress about the morality of this. She said, "We pay the taxes. Our taxes pay for our schools and those school books." She did not mention the fact that the reason poor people did not pay taxes was because they were so terribly paid,

nor the fact that company taxes—and profits—were high partly because of the availability of cheap labour.

Other submissions attested to the disparities of apartheid-era education. Thenjiwe[3] attended rural primary schools in the 1980s, explaining that up to standard seven, "it was just a normal school, no computers or anything like that, just a school." Her school was understaffed for learners at her level: "We didn't have our maths and science teachers because of the situation in rural areas."

For other Black South African students, apartheid intruded in other ways. Iminathi[4] described himself as a 50-year-old male born in a rural area of the Orange Free State and a native Sesotho speaker. At the age of 12, his admission into high school was complicated not only on the basis of his skin color but also because of his home language.

> I had to go to QwaQwa for my high school education as there was no school for the so-called non-whites in our home [village]. … What is interesting is that there was another high school about 30 kilometres from our home and I could not be admitted to that one either as that one admitted only Setswana-speaking children. QwaQwa, where I finally got my high school education, was about 300 kilometres away from my home. Back then it took a full 24 hours travelling to get to QwaQwa.

In spite of the arduous journey from home to school and back again, "the discomfort of this experience did not really get to me then, maybe because of my tender age." As with other authors, Iminathi would not question those experiences until many years later.

> This blatant discrimination did not matter then, or shall I say it was so rife that it looked normal and natural. … Nobody ever asked as to why we did not have high schools nearby while our white counterparts could literally walk to their high schools. Nobody ever asked as to why was it that the majority of the Black kids we started sub-standard A [, which] never went beyond standard six education. In fact, nobody asked why was it that none of my standard six classmates ever went to any high school at all, to further their education.

Students also recalled when teachers and school leaders brought political commentary into class—or failed to do so. Khayone[5] attended a private school and recalled teachers who spoke freely with students about political issues. What is more,

> I remember Mr. Beukes … taking down the Republic's flag on Republic day in 1976, denouncing the apartheid government and promptly stopping the whole ceremonies of Republic day from that year on. So, I actually have only my first school year memory of standing around the flagpole and singing [the national anthem]!

Flagrant defiance of the apartheid monolith was unusual; more stories ran counter to that episode, describing instances when teachers shied away from social commentary. As Tee explained,

> at school we were actively discouraged from discussing "politics;" i.e., the government policies, in class. I think teachers feared that

they could get into trouble or lose their jobs if they were seen to be encouraging or permitting dissent at school.

Other authors corroborated this, suggesting that the government manipulated teacher-student interactions, even in the classroom. Asemahle[6] described an experience from the 1970s, "in one of my early years of primary school, the two white teachers at our school had to leave, they couldn't teach at our school—because they were white, I assumed."

The second theme appeared as a counteraction to the first: activism had roots in education. This theme received varying degrees of attention; some authors mentioned in passing that students participated in counter-apartheid efforts while others directly connected their own individual struggle against apartheid to their education. Testimonials from the early days of apartheid described opposition as "amateurish," to use Lethabo's[7] words, adding that students of the early 1960s joined protest marches "almost as a game" or in defiance of parental authority.

But lurking in many later stories—particularly in passages from the 1970s and 1980s—was the suggestion that opposing apartheid invited a serious risk. Samkelo[8] said politics and racial separation were legitimate topics for family discussion in her youth, but "we were warned, to keep it to ourselves." The reason, Samkelo explained, was

> the brutality of the police—you never know who would tell and should the police know that you talk about it, then you'd be in big trouble. Fear of victimisation perhaps? Fear of the unknown—disappearing from your family and friends forever. In short, fear was inflicted in us—you can never survive the brutality of the police.

Police intimidation became a key feature of education under apartheid, with many authors recalling their school years against the shadow of the police or the threat of violence. This was the case for Blessing,[9] whose brother was involved in anti-apartheid efforts. She described how security officials harassed her brother even after he became a teacher, for a feeling among local parents "that he was politising [*sic*] their children." Eventually her brother departed South Africa for the United Kingdom, but her family's troubles with the security branch were not over. In 1980, her younger brother went missing while the police were looking for him. Officers ransacked her family's home, interrogated her father, and detained her mother.

In spite of this, Blessing took part in university protests, but she admitted that she "kept a low profile because of my family involvement in the political struggle" and because "being overtly involved in the protests may jeopardize" her studies. Those emotions did not seem to prevent her success so much as fuel it:

> This struggle for recognition of human dignity only made me more determined to be all I can be and more. It added value to my character, and I also wanted to work with and build confidence in others irrespective of race, colour, or creed. These incidents were stepping stones in an inward journey.

This sense of a noble struggle appeared in submissions from other authors as well. Bandile[10] listed her profession as "anti-racism activist," and she traced much of her school-age experiences to that occupation.

> Supper times in our family were spent talking about injustice, equal-
> ity, fairness, responsibility, courage, oppression, and exploitation. We
> were taught that while we were impacted by apartheid there were
> others even worse off than us. We were taught that we had a respon-
> sibility to act and speak out against injustice, apartheid, and racism.

This sense of heightened social justice in her family meant that "by the time I was 13, I saw myself not as a teenager but as a political activist." In 1976, when the Soweto uprising occurred, Bandile remembered "how surprised my teachers and fellow students were that I as a 9-year-old was so 'political.'"

For Happiness,[11] her youth and education were "filled with many stories of humiliation, insults, and exclusion because of the colour of my skin." But she added that "some of these stories are interspersed with brave struggle, standing up, and speaking out against ill-treatment—on my own behalf as well as on behalf of others." Similar to Bandile, Happiness traced her experiences as a student to her opposition to apartheid. "I was the only one expelled in September 1971 when I was doing Std 9 (grade 11) [*sic*] after leading a strike and refused to name others." By the mid- to late-1970s, when she entered university, "I was right in the centre of student activism, and the academic pursuits of 1976 and 1977 were 'interrupted' by events that unfolded violently in the country."

Many of the authors connected student activism to a newfound sense of community. Philasande[12] summarized this neatly, describing how anti-apartheid efforts built into a feeling of solidarity with other South Africans.

> We as Indians made a stand against this injustice during the most
> important years of our lives. We boycotted schools during our stan-
> dard four year. In standard ten we were arrested on several occa-
> sions and were showed no mercy by the police. Tear gas and rubber
> bullets were used against us during protests. … It was at this time
> we realised the importance of fighting this injust [*sic*] system to-
> gether with the Blacks and Coloureds.

Some writers could not offer direct experiences with student activism against apartheid but could still speak to its effects—and not all were positive. Samkelo described how June 16, 1976, began like a usual day, but without warning at 10 a.m., "high school students came to our school—forcibly removing us out of the classrooms and telling us that we're at war with the government." The education department of the day "had opened a can of worms," Samkelo explained, and the Soweto uprising had begun.

By Samkelo's account, that was not the only day school was interrupted; classes continued through the rest of the year, but "the high school pupils wanted answers from the government so they would now and then disrupt classes." For much of 1976, Samkelo said, students "stayed at home—no school and no play—just stayed indoors." The fallout from the uprising spilled into later years as well; by 1977, disillusioned teachers and students had begun to look elsewhere for effective instruction.

The effects of these experiences could linger long afterward. Of all the boys he grew up with, Tshepo[13] was the first to go to university and graduate. Born in 1979, he went to a teachers' college after leaving the South African public school system,

then studied pharmacy, and eventually found employment in pharmaceutical research. By any measure, Tshepo was a successful young man—and yet, he suggested his schooling hindered even greater successes. If not for the "level of education we received as small children," he explained, "I mean, I could have been becoming a genius or something." A math problem he encountered in university illustrates his point.

> I went there and we were given a maths assignment and there was one sum I couldn't do. So, I went to my former school to ask my teacher if he could solve it, and he couldn't. So, he referred me to another teacher who couldn't do it, and they referred me to a teacher at a primary school. She couldn't do it and they finally referred me to another teacher at another school, and that guy solved the problem. And to me, it told me something. … I started to ask myself, how come this person couldn't work it out?

His disappointment in his education under the nationalist government of South Africa clearly remained long after the government had dissipated. "You feel bad," he added. "You feel like this was just a total waste of time for you. … If you had had a better school, things could be different." In spite of his education, Tshepo had succeeded—but in spite of his success, he resented his education.

Interpretation

These experiences portray oppression and liberation within the context of education under apartheid. Freirean education not only corresponds to the experiences and emotions reported in the AAP, it validates what former students, teachers, and school leaders described. At the core is the apartheid prescription. In any situation where an individual imposes his choice on another, with an aim to erode consciousness and force conformity, a prescription has occurred (Freire, 2000). When the oppressed accept the state of society, they adopt a prescribed behavior that submits to the demands of the oppressor (Freire, 2000).

Apartheid relied on prescription to persist—this is clear in some of the AAP's submissions, which recount contributors' earliest memories of racism. Children grew up in a divided society and subscribed by default to the apartheid prescription of a society split by color. To be fair, young South Africans were not responsible for adopting the oppressor's policies and instructions; they learned the prescription from their parents, teachers, and other adults, and they accepted it as they found their place in the world around them.

As these young South Africans grew older, they faced a dilemma: the internalized prescription would not permit freedom. Conscious of how oppression derived and persisted, and painfully aware that the apartheid government intended to employ violence to prevent its own demise, they could not propel themselves to freedom by individual desire alone—the risk was too great (Freire, 2000). That desire could only be realized when it also appeared among their family, friends, classmates, and teachers. Their dialogue revealed common ideas and aspirations, became a genuine communication of shared goals, and established a communion determined to cooperate to realize their own humanity.

Conclusion

The central question of this study—"how do personal experiences of an oppressive school system, as interpreted through the framework of Freirean education, inform school leaders?"—finds its answer in the essence of education under apartheid, as it is portrayed in submissions to the AAP. No single story directly reported the concrete experience of a formal school leader under apartheid. However, many writers recalled experiences with educators or students who demonstrated leadership, and several offered experiences with leadership in an educational context. Those episodes influenced the experience of education under an oppressive government by highlighting the need for leadership, providing a demonstration of leadership in practice, and presenting an opportunity to evaluate that leadership under adverse conditions.

The testimonials submitted to the AAP depict how oppression infiltrates school systems, impinges on the educational process, and robs students of learning opportunities. At the same time, they show how others within the school institution—students and teachers—can rise to challenge oppression. Therein lies the answer to the central question: school leaders must recognize and embrace the role of schools and education in social change, as it contributes to the recognition of oppression and a means of liberation for both students and educators.

For educators, this challenge may be a difficult proposition, but it is not a new one. Long before Freirean education made its debut, George S. Counts (1932) had issued the same challenge: "Any individual or group that would aspire to lead society must be ready to pay the costs of leadership: to accept responsibility, to suffer calumny, to surrender security, to risk both reputation and fortune" (p. 4). Even with those costs put aside, there remains a philosophical challenge: How does a school leader maintain the ethical underpinnings of the profession if morality is vacated beyond the gates of the schoolyard? What do we know about educational leadership that even applies in this situation?

That last question may produce the least insight. In an atmosphere of police intimidation, fractured social structures, racist government policies, and student opposition to oppression, conventional leadership theories seem quaint. It is difficult to prescribe any singular leadership theory when so many witnesses describe an educational environment saddled with crippling social problems.

There may be an added complication in the term *leadership*, as it was used in different contexts and different cultures in different eras. Retrospective discussions of educational leadership in the apartheid era tied the concept to the position, status, and authority imbued in a formal title (Grant, 2006). That, in turn, evoked Max Weber's (1964) definitions for power and authority. Power is "the probability that one actor within a social arrangement will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (p. 152) and authority is the "probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) from a given source will be obeyed by a given group of persons" (p. 324) These definitions more resemble John French and Bertram Raven's (1959) idea of legitimate power than Joseph Rost's (1991) influence-based concept of leadership, which this study employed.

If the environment was as dire as historians and witnesses describe, and if the prevailing understanding of leadership was rooted in legitimate power, then many

of the leadership theories of recent decades might not approach the experience of education under apartheid. To compound this issue, many conventional leadership theories carry their own cultural baggage, as they are products of Western ideologies, and may not transfer well into cultures that embrace their own standards or imperatives. It would be, for example, somewhat misguided to recommend authentic leadership and insist that school leaders cultivate an inner ring of Western values matched to outer behaviors (George, 2003) while their students are being attacked and abducted by a police force imposing the racist ideology of a minority regime. The situation is quite possibly more toxic than those leadership theories intended for their philosophies.

But the term *toxic* does provide a step forward. Jean Lipman-Blumen's (2010) conceptual framework defined toxic leadership against a series of destructive behaviors, and those same behaviors could be creatively inverted and accurately describe apartheid. Where Lipman-Blumen (2010) accused toxic leaders of "playing to the basest fears" (p. 3) of followers, nationalists played on white supremacists' fears of Black African domination (Dubow, 2014). Toxic leaders maliciously set constituents against one another (Lipman-Bluman, 2010); apartheid policy splintered South African society into a hierarchy of competing ethnic groups (Beck, 2014; Thompson, 2001). Even Lipman-Bluman's (2010) laundry list of toxic misdeeds resembled a catalog of apartheid transgressions: "undermining, demeaning, seducing, marginalizing, intimidating, demoralizing, disenfranchising, incapacitating, imprisoning, torturing, terrorizing, or killing" (p. 2).

The net effect of this comparison is to describe a "toxic environment" that expands from Lipman-Blumen's (2010) concept of a toxic leader. Where the toxic leader exhibited qualities and behaviors that contorted leadership to serve amoral purposes, a toxic environment would feature qualities and conditions that create a moral vacuum and threaten to rob an institution of its ethical compass. This concept appears to be useful in this discussion because it encapsulates both the historical analyses of apartheid and stories shared in the AAP.

On closer inspection, however, many of the items in Lipman-Blumen's (2010) conceptual framework could be recategorized into the tactics of oppression that Paulo Freire (2000) established decades earlier. The "feeding their followers illusions" (Lipman-Blumen, 2010, p. 2) and the "misleading followers through deliberate untruths" (Lipman-Blumen, 2010, p. 3), bear a strong resemblance to the tactic of manipulation that Freire (2000) explored at length. Where Lipman-Blumen (2010) accused toxic leaders of setting constituents against one another, Freire (2000) listed "divide and rule" (p. 141) among his tactics of oppression. In another passage, the destructive behavior of "stifling constructive criticism and teaching supporters … to comply with, rather than to question, the leader's judgment and actions" (Lipman-Blumen, 2010, p. 2) mimics Freire's (2000) insistence that oppressors would "attempt to destroy in the oppressed their quality as 'considerers' of the world" (p. 139). The core contradiction is that "No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why?" (Freire, 2000, p. 86).

With very few exceptions, the idea of a toxic environment, as it arose from Lipman-Blumen's (2010) conceptual framework for toxic leadership, paralleled

Freire's (2000) discussions of oppression and the oppressed. Freire (2000) shaped his own discussions of leadership to resemble the antidote for that toxic environment. Freire (2000) insisted leadership must focus on change. He usually discussed leadership in the context of both education and revolution, in part because revolutionary leaders throughout history understood education to be a tool for both oppression and liberation.

With those three concepts—education, leadership, and revolution—in close orbit, teachers and students must be "co-intent on reality" (Freire, 2000, p. 69), with both groups actively unveiling their situation, reflecting on it critically, and acting to recreate it. Neither the leader nor the followers have a monopoly on revolution; instead, they must act "together in unshakable solidarity" (Freire, 2000, p. 129). This cooperation would allow leaders and followers to discover themselves as the permanent recreators of reality (Freire, 2000). In a cultural revolution, this bond "is so firm that the leaders and the people become like one body, checked by a permanent process of self-scrutiny" (Freire, 1998, p. 518). Ultimately, the relationship between a leader and followers requires a reciprocal state of trust, established only when the leader provides evidence of true, concrete intentions where words coincide with actions (Freire, 2000).

Walking backward from modern theories on leadership, it becomes clear that Freire (2000) was prepared to address the toxic environment that oppression creates and had a formula for challenging it. This is not a new challenge. Counts (1932) made a case for education as a tool of social reconstruction long before Freire (2000) explained how to wield that tool:

> Under certain conditions education may be as beneficent and as powerful as we are wont to think. But if it is to be so, teachers must abandon much of their easy optimism, subject the concept of education to the most rigorous scrutiny, and be prepared to deal much more fundamentally, realistically, and positively with the American social situation than has been their habit in the past. (Counts, 1932, p. 4)

Counts insisted that education, which encompasses teachers, students, and school leaders, had a role in sculpting society to better meet its responsibilities, which he annotated in a long list. Freire (2000) was in agreement on this point, but he extended that role to liberation and humanization. Describing the man or woman serving in the role of a "humanist, revolutionary educator," Freire (2000) explained that

> her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (p. 75)

Counts (1932) echoed that image of teachers as partners in the educational process working toward a common goal of humanization.

> Education as a force for social regeneration must march hand in hand with the living and creative forces of the social order. In their own lives teachers must bridge the gap between school and society

and play some part in the fashioning of those great common pur-
poses which should bind the two together. (pp. 30–31)

In the full swing of his argument, Counts escalated the imagery of social reform to
approach a revolutionary tone reminiscent of Freire.

> The power that teachers exercise in the schools can be no greater
> than the power they wield in society. … In order to be effective they
> must throw off completely the slave psychology that has dominated
> the mind of the pedagogue more or less since the days of ancient
> Greece. They must be prepared to stand on their own feet and win
> for their ideas the support of the masses of the people. (p. 30)

In light of these arguments, the answer to the central question of this study is neither
novel nor unexpected; rather, both Counts and Freire would likely agree that edu-
cational leadership has a mandate to recognize oppression, reflect on its effects, and
contemplate action against it. This is how this study implicates education as a whole:
an education that faces this challenge but does not step through that process has al-
ready made its decision to conform rather than transform—to domesticate students
rather than liberate them.

This places the responsibility to answer the collective call for action on teachers and
school leaders and, somewhat, on students. If education is a tool of reform, as Counts
(1932) and Freire (2000) argued, and if an institution senses an environment or policies
that oppose or endanger the philosophical foundations of the profession, then it becomes
the responsibility—not just the role but the responsibility—of educators to strive toward
a restructuring of society. Education is, after all, the ideal vehicle for the task:

> To the extent that [teachers] are permitted to fashion the curriculum
> and the procedures of the school they will definitely and positively
> influence the social attitudes, ideals, and behavior of the coming
> generation. … Representing as they do, not the interests of the mo-
> ment or of any special class, but rather the common and abiding
> interests of the people, teachers are under heavy social obligation
> to protect and further those interests. In this they occupy a relatively
> unique position in society. (Counts, 1932, pp. 28–29)

Freire (2015) also placed schools at the critical juncture of education, politics,
and ethics:

> There is no educative practice that is not political; there is no edu-
> cative practice that is not involved in dreams; there is no educative
> practice that does not involve values, visions, utopias. There is, thus,
> no educative practice without ethics. (p. 22)

With education poised at this nexus of change, teachers must strive to build genera-
tions of students prepared for the tasks of liberation and humanization: "We have the
responsibility not to try to mold our students, but to challenge them so that they will
participate as subjects in their own formative process" (Freire, 2015, p. 22). Educators
who vacate this responsibility risk diminishing their aptitude for the profession. While
they direct social attitudes and behavior in coming generations, teachers

should resort to no subterfuge or false modesty. They should say neither that they are merely teaching the truth nor that they are unwilling to wield power in their own right. The first position is false and the second is a confession of incompetence. (Counts, 1932, p. 29)

For Counts, this was the consequence for teachers who abdicate their responsibility for social reconstruction.

For school leaders, the added responsibility is to catalyze the moment of change and liberation that both Counts and Freire predicted. Through history, leadership has consistently recognized that the oppressed must accept their struggle for liberation, but at the same time, leadership has admitted the role of education in that struggle (Freire, 2000). If neither the school community nor its leadership embraces that opportunity, then the institution and its leadership have entered into a tacit acceptance of the role of the oppressed. Freire (2000) summarized this risk and how education is tied to it:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized.… This is the tragic dilemma of the oppressed which their education must take into account. (p. 48)

Counts (1932) dismissed leaders who avoided that risk. If the "cost of leadership," the threats to security, reputation, and fortune, is not being paid, "then the chances are that the claim to leadership is fraudulent. Society is never redeemed without effort, struggle, and sacrifice. Authentic leaders are never found breathing that rarefied atmosphere lying above the dust and smoke of battle" (p. 4).

Freire (2000) was equally emphatic that leaders acknowledge their praxis and own their experience with oppression—or risk their authenticity as leaders.

The revolutionary leaders must realize that their own conviction of the necessity for struggle … was not given to them by anyone else – if it is authentic. This conviction cannot be packaged and sold; it is reached, rather, by means of a totality of reflection and action. Only the leaders' own involvement in reality, within an historical situation, led them to criticize this situation and to wish to change it. (p. 67)

This becomes the final implication for school leadership: education must play a role in social change and teachers occupy a premium vantage for social reform, liberation, and humanization. It remains for school leaders to recognize and accept their position in that transformation.

Notes
1. Item N27: AG3275-B-1-21-30-text.pdf
2. Item SN36: AG3275-B-2-21-32-text.pdf
3. Item SI10: AG3275-C-1-6-10-text.pdf
4. Item N44: AG3275-B-1-41-50-text.pdf
5. Item N54: AG3275-B-1-51-60-text.pdf

6. Item N5: AG3275-B-1-1-10-text.pdf
7. Item N64: AG3275-B-1-61-66-text.pdf
8. Item SN26: AG3275-B-2-11-20-text.pdf
9. Item N17: AG3275-B-1-11-20-text.pdf
10. Item N9: AG3275-B-1-1-10-text.pdf
11. Item N41: AG3275-B-1-41-50-text.pdf
12. Item SN19: AG3275-B-2-11-20-text.pdf
13. Item SI8: AG3275-C-1-6-10-text.pdf

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