

Leadership for diversity: Intercultural communication competence as professional development

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Introduction

In the increasingly complex and diverse educational landscapes of contemporary schooling, leading with a strong sense of moral purpose seems essential for ensuring equity, inclusion and social justice for all students. Indeed, Kaser and Halbert (2009) suggest that securing equity and quality in education requires that leaders change their mindsets and refocus on core educational values. The authors argue, “leading the shift away from a sorting system where there is success for some towards a learning system where there is deep learning for all is at the heart of moral purpose” (p. 40). Developing the skills and capacities necessary for the kinds of reflective practice required to engage in cycles of inquiry about beliefs and practices is a challenge for many school leaders (Woods, 2007). Professional development in the area of educational leadership preparation programs could be one opportunity for providing school leaders with the space, time and structure for becoming aware of and interrogating their assumptions about their beliefs and how these play out in terms of their practices. Educational leaders could be challenged to learn about the ways in which they relate to their colleagues and their students, in terms of intercultural competence, for example, as a first step towards recognizing and working with values, beliefs and practices for shaping inclusive education in our schools.

The following sections provide an overview of professional development emphasizing the importance of leadership for inclusion, leadership for diversity, and concluding with a brief overview of a model for intercultural communication competence training.

Leading inclusive learning communities.

The learning community model of school improvement has become common language and practice among educators as a paradigm that offers potential for providing conditions that foster learning and renewal for the organization and their members (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Huffman & Hip, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009; Stoll & Louis, 2007). While not the only driver in the success of implementing and sustaining learning community practices in schools, the formal school leader's orientation to leadership has been identified as a key factor in learning community development (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Lambert, 2003; Leithwood, 2007). Moreover, in schools where principals work to create a culture of trust

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and respect, teachers and students are more apt to embrace diversity as an essential aspect of their system (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). As noted, while principals play an important role in setting the tone for a school culture that embraces diversity and promotes inclusion, the role of teacher leadership is increasingly recognized as an essential aspect of successful school improvement initiatives. For example, Lieberman and Miller (2004) suggested that teacher leaders have a unique role to play in reshaping school culture from individualism to professional community where community members take an active role in their professional development to generate learning and leadership capacity among many in the school.

Establishing structures in the school that support teacher learning and leadership does not necessarily mean that this will support notions of social justice, equity and inclusion, however. For school leaders to establish practices, policies and organizational cultures that value and respect inclusion, they first must be able to recognize the existing conditions, climates, behaviours and assumptions that privilege certain groups and marginalize others (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). The use of tools and strategies such as culture audits, equity audits and cultural competence questionnaires has proven useful for making more explicit the tacit assumptions and practices that may hinder inclusion in schools (Bustamante, Nelson & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Skrla et al., 2004). However, Bustamante et al (2009) found that there remains a need “to focus school leader preparation on examining personal biases, privilege, and beliefs about others who are different, as well as guiding leaders to develop culturally responsive skills and knowledge and the ability to assess school wide cultural competence” (p. 794). Research findings show that culturally responsive educational leadership positively influences educational experiences for all students (Klingner et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Riehl, 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2010). How to prepare aspiring leaders and provide professional development support for practicing administrators to build the necessary skills and capacities to engage as culturally responsive leaders is, however, much less clear.

Over a decade ago, Ryan (2002) noted that research on inclusive leadership for diversity is in a nascent stage, with few studies directly exploring the role of leadership in establishing inclusive education. With the growing diversity of Canadian schools and the challenges to provide inclusive educational experiences for all students, there is a need for continued and sustained inquiry into the practices of inclusive leadership. In this article, we argue that educational leadership preparation programs can play an important role in shifting the leadership landscape toward culturally responsive and inclusive leadership in schools. We suggest that providing opportunities for student to inquire into, challenge and confront their own intercultural competence and to learn how to dialogue with others about the need for inclusion in our schools is an integral component of shifting mindsets towards a learning community perspective that embraces more inclusive notions of leadership.

Providing inclusive education for student populations that are increasingly diverse ethnically, racially, and linguistically remains a challenge for school leaders. The work of critical theorists has helped to broaden the notion of inclusive education to encompass more than students with physical and mental disabilities (Thomas et al., 1997). From a critical theory perspective, any notion of inclusive schooling must encompass students who are excluded based on race, culture, gender, language, and sexual orientation. In this way, critical theorists challenge us to examine the practices and processes of schooling that exclude those

outside of the dominant culture (Dei, 1998; Marshall & Olivia, 2010; Robinson, 1996), and to notice, specifically, the role of the principal in shaping an inclusive culture in the school (Derkatz, 1996). At the school level, administrators need to engage in inquiry-oriented practices to examine their own beliefs, behaviours and practices for biases and cultural incompetence and to understand their role in shaping a school culture that values and reflects inclusion. Bustamente et al., (2009) suggest that leadership preparation programs can be the opportunities for developing these capacities for self-reflection in relation to leadership for inclusion and diversity and caution that “those leaders who are not prepared may unknowingly encourage or continue destructive practices that negatively affect the future academic success of children and adolescents, particularly those who are traditionally marginalized within the societal context” (p. 820). Indeed, in their writing on the need for including knowledge about race and its effect on school in terms of preparing school leaders, Gooden and Dantley (2012) note that the capacity for critical reflective practice, among four other necessary capacities, is essential for cultivating leadership for social justice in schools. This critical self-reflectivity is the practice of making explicit the behaviours, policies, practices, norms and beliefs that characterize the culture of the school to notice how this perpetuates privilege for certain groups and marginalize others. They contend transformative action must accompany this reflection in order to move forward toward positive change and that this is possible as aspiring leaders develop their capacities for racial awareness (their own and others) through a social justice framework of leadership preparation.

Similarly, Furman (2012) suggests a critical framework for developing leaders who will work for social justice in schools predicated on this notion of praxis, the Freireian sense of reflection connected with action (Freire, 1973/2002). Furman argues that although there is increasingly research and writing on the need for improving how leadership preparation programs attend to social justice as an integral component of how we prepare school principals, these tend to encompass a theoretical understanding and awareness of leadership for social justice (Brown, 2004; Capper et al. (2006); McKenzie et al., 2008). Furman argues for developing frameworks that attend to preparing school leaders with the necessary skills and capacities needed to both reflect and then act in ways that promote and provide for social justice in schools.

Furman (2012) builds a framework from her conceptualization of praxis as “the continual, dynamic interaction among knowledge acquisition, deep reflection, and action at two levels—the intrapersonal and the extrapersonal—with the purpose of transformation and liberation” (p. 203). At the intrapersonal level, school leaders reflect on and act for personal transformation. At the extrapersonal level the focus is reflection for action in the systems within which one works and lives. Furman provides multiple examples for activities to build capacities for social justice leadership, such as reflective writing, listening, interviewing and other concrete and practical ways of engaging with self and others in critical reflection leading to action across multiple domains of the educational organization. As formal school leaders engage in their own professional development for improving intercultural competence they open a space for modeling and sharing support and resources with teachers for engaging in their own work towards improving and enhancing their capacities and competencies for teaching for diversity with their students. We know from research that principals have an effect on student learning through their instructional leadership with teachers (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). We see the associated connection in terms of how school leaders may positively influence teaching for

diversity and suggest that principals can positively influence teaching for diversity in classrooms through developing, improving and enhancing their own capacities for intercultural communication to serve as leaders for diversity for teachers and others in the school.

Leadership for diversity

In terms of initiating deep reflection and action in leadership for diversity, the British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education, has recently redesigned all content specific curricula to respond to the diverse realities present in contemporary society by addressing identifiable core competencies (<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/home>). Core competencies are recognized as sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all educators and students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning. The core competencies of the new British Columbia curriculum, *Communication, Thinking, and Personal and Social Development*, directs practice towards a diverse, inclusive, sustainable and globalized curriculum. Such practice requires culturally responsive educators. Being a culturally responsive educator is not just an issue of relating instructional techniques or adapting instruction to integrate assumed traits or customs of specific culture groups, it is acquiring a mindset that consciously seeks out and promotes diversity in the learning experience. In keeping with this progression, Ladson-Billings' (1995) intellection of culturally relevant pedagogy has been reconceptualized as culturally sustaining pedagogy (2014), representing a contemporary approach to critical engagement in the intercultural landscapes inclusive schools.

The idea of educational leadership for diversity in an increasingly globalised and diversified world, assumes the pressing need for educational leaders to participate in, and to promote, intercultural communication competence as professional development. With the ongoing increase of international students arriving in urban centers, school leaders may notice an increase in academic and sociocultural challenges for teachers and institutions particularly in contexts where intercultural differences can be treated as sources of dissension (Egbo, 2009). As such, providing professional development for school leaders in terms of improving their own intercultural competence is an important first step in establishing positive models of leadership for diversity in and across schools.

For example, one of the most obvious difficulties in culturally diverse pedagogical institutions is the strong tendency for student-peer and student-teacher miscommunications. These misunderstandings tend to result from culturally differential communication patterns. When educational personnel and domestic students work with people who differ from themselves in culture, race or ethnicity, positive educational experiences do not always occur. These boundaries stem from the disconnect in values, in language proficiency, and in behavioural expectations between teachers, their students and their peers. Making assumptions about what people from other cultures are trying to say and to write can lead to erroneous conclusions. Since peoples' interactions with the world begin with their culture, understanding cultural differences among students is essential for successful teaching and learning (Egbo, 2009). School leaders can provide support and resources for teachers to improve their intercultural communication when they are secure in their own understanding of the challenges and opportunities that emerge with intercultural communication. As we describe below, there are frameworks and models that can be used as professional

development for improving intercultural communication for educators at all levels of leadership in schools, whether that be at the classroom, school or even district level. We provide a theoretical overview of culturally responsive educators followed by a description of a workshop that we suggest as a possible professional development opportunity for teachers and other school leaders.

Culture and intercultural communication

Considering the concept of *leadership for diversity* requires us to distinguish between organizational aims and the development of individual competencies. For example, in addition to the institutional mission (stated in collective terms), explicit direction emphasizing individual ability in the area of intercultural communication is required. Foundational components of professional development aimed at increasing the intercultural communication reside in Ogbu's conceptualization of culture and cultural discontinuity. Ogbu (1982) defines "culture (as) a framework in which members of a population see the world around them, interpret events in that world, behave according to acceptable standards, and react to their perceived reality" (p. 192). Each person, Ogbu continues, has a "cultural frame of reference that dictates their attitudes, beliefs, preferences, and practices" (p. 195). When people from different cultures come into contact these frames of reference may be similar, differing in places, oppositional, or a blend of these three. It is when they are dissimilar that "cultural discontinuity", or a lack of cohesion between cultures, takes place (Ogbu, 1990).

Recognizing that many educators often have had little preparation for working in culturally diverse classrooms and thus even less exposure to the concept of global, multicultural education (Johnston, 2003; Kea et al, 2006; Shariff, 2008), Villegas & Lucas (2002; 2007) view six prominent characteristics that define the culturally responsive educator:

1. *Sociocultural consciousness*: recognizes that there are multiple ways of perceiving reality and that these ways are influenced by one's location in the social order;
2. *Affirming attitudes towards students of culturally diverse backgrounds*: seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be overcome;
3. *Commitment and skills to act as agents of change*: sees themselves as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students;
4. *Constructive views of learning*: understands how learners construct knowledge and is capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction;
5. *Learning about students*: knows about the lives of his or her students; and
6. *Culturally responsive teaching practices*: uses his or her knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar (p. 21).

Villegas and Lucas (2002; 2007) state that these six qualities constitute the central themes that allow for conceptual coherence when developing culturally responsive practices. By developing a vision of teaching and learning based on these six themes, educational leaders can facilitate the integration of multicultural and intercultural issues throughout the curriculum. As indicated, Ladson-Billings (2014) refers to this approach as culturally

sustainable pedagogy, providing educators and their leadership with opportunities to acquire plurilingual, pluricultural and intercultural competencies (Manjarrés, 2009).

Referred to as “the fifth skill,” following reading, writing, listening and speaking (Kramersch, 1993), intercultural communication competence is a type of communication which supports the interlocuter’s ability to respond appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts. It requires culturally sensitive knowledge and focuses on the attributes and language skills needed by the educator to communicate effectively in diverse contexts (Hammer & Bennett, 1998). In culturally diverse contexts, Bennett (2007) suggests that knowledge and awareness of the following five orientations are important pedagogical considerations: verbal communication, nonverbal communication, orientation modes, social values, intellectual modes. We know that teachers benefit from more direct professional learning to develop, incorporate and sustain the intercultural competencies that are foundational for teaching for diversity (Egbo, 2009). We argue that educational leaders set the moral tone and purpose for establishing a school culture that values and respects diversity, and therefore suggest that educational leaders require professional development opportunities to establish and model competencies that promote intercultural competence. In the next section we outline the theoretical framework for intercultural workshops that could be provided in teacher education programs for aspiring educational leaders.

Intercultural communication competence workshops

Professional development in the area of intercultural communication competence can provide the first step towards recognizing and working with values, beliefs and practices for shaping inclusive education in our schools. This type of training could support educational leadership preparation programs by providing school leaders with the space, time and structure for becoming aware of and interrogating their assumptions about their beliefs and how these play out in terms of their practices. Intercultural sensitivity, “the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences”, and intercultural competence, the “ability to think and act in intercultural appropriate ways”, are central to understanding and improving relations across cultures in a globalised world and in an educational context (Hammer & Bennett, 1998), Bennett’s (2007) orientations relating to verbal communication, nonverbal communication, orientation modes, social values and intellectual modes facilitate new cultural learning. Recognizing that “capability in one’s own culture is a necessary starting point for developing cross-cultural capability” (Jordan 1998), intercultural awareness begins with an awareness of oneself and one’s own culture. This implies an awareness of the role of the self in interaction and the ability to learn from interaction (Toll, 2000). Skills learned in intercultural competency programs include the following: observing, identifying and recognizing, comparing and contrasting, negotiating meaning, dealing with or accepting ambiguity, effectively interpreting messages, limiting the possibility of misinterpretation, defending one's own point of view while acknowledging the legitimacy of others and accepting difference.

In keeping with Bennett’s (2007) model, intercultural communication competence workshops in educational leadership can provide the following parameters to:

1. Understand the concepts of culture and intercultural awareness
2. Recognize the origins of participants' own cultural values, assumptions and attitudes and the way in which their values affect their perception of other
3. Identify types and causes of intercultural misunderstandings
4. Explore participants' perception of how their own character, attitudes and behaviour might influence their cultural learning
5. Recognize personal skills affecting one's ability to adapt to cultural diversity
6. Develop attitudes and strategies which support intercultural awareness
7. Observe, monitor and report on participants' own cultural learning
8. Transfer participants' intercultural competence into the workplace

To support these conceptualizations, the four *Savoirs* from Byram and Zarate's (1997) model of Intercultural Competence can be integrated into Bennett's (2007) professional development model:

1. *Savoirs*: Cultural knowledge, including sociolinguistic competence; awareness of non-explicit reference points such as values, beliefs, meanings.
2. *Savoir apprendre*: Understanding otherness; using and creating opportunities for observation, analysis and interpretation.
3. *Savoir être*: Understanding how an identity and a culture are socially constructed; setting aside ethnocentric attitudes and perceptions; openness and interest towards others; Intercultural mediation
4. *Savoir faire*: Integration of the three previous *savoirs* into practical applications

Led by a qualified cultural mediator, assessment of these workshops include a formative evaluation based on portfolio activities (brief report on personal development, cultural identity, stereotypes and assumptions), analytical diary entries, and an auto-evaluation report based on specific criteria determined by the workshop developer.

Based on the above, professional development in the area of intercultural communication competence for educational leaders can promote inclusive notions of schooling and society. As previously indicated, Ryan (2002) supports a continued and sustained inquiry into the practices of inclusive leadership. Furman (2012) arguing for the development of a critical framework steeped in social justice, proposes that transformation and action can occur at two levels: intrapersonal (reflection) and extrapersonal (action). In particular, the conceptualization of intercultural communication competence workshops based on Bennett's (2007), Byram and Zarate's (1997) models can contribute to social justice leadership necessary for cultivating learning communities in which all members may thrive.

Conclusion

If we hope to foster inclusive schooling for the diverse cultures of our 21st- century schools, we must support teachers and other school leaders to inquire into the beliefs, values and mindsets that shape and focus their leadership practices and processes. In their writing about educational leadership and social justice, Marshall and Olivia (2010) offer that providing educators with tools and opportunities to translate theory about diversity in schools into real practice is essential to achieving inclusion in schools. Moreover, Stewart (2010) recognizes

the enduring reality of diversity in our schools and communities as the speed of globalization of our world continues its fast pace. She suggests that life in North America “increasingly involves interacting and working with individuals from vastly different backgrounds and cultures—a challenge and an opportunity that requires new skills and perspectives” (p. 100). However, providing the necessary opportunities for school leaders at all levels to cultivate the capacities and skills required for social justice leadership praxis (Furman, 2012) remains a challenge. The development of intercultural communication competence is an example of skills which can provide opportunities for building capacity for social justice leadership.

As a case in point, principals play an important, and perhaps central, role in establishing school cultures that embrace and respond to diversity (Derkatz, 1996). Communication (Ryan, 2002), connecting and establishing relationships (Derkatz, 1996), and modelling appropriate and acceptable intercultural behaviours are several key practices for establishing inclusive school cultures. Schools can be important sites for transforming our societies to reflect social justice and inclusion, and this can happen as school leaders at all levels work to cultivate school cultures that reflect a belief in equitable education for all students. (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Nonetheless, educators at all levels of the system need the time, space and practice to develop the necessary skills, capacities and habits of mind to enact leadership for social justice in and through their work. As outlined in the overview of the intercultural competence workshop, we see how this type of professional development provides the opportunity for participants to notice, make sense of and challenge their beliefs, values, and competencies when engaging with people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We suggest that this opportunity to become critically self-reflective is essential in contemporary educational leadership.

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