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Pedagogy of the Personal and Professional: Toward a Framework for Culturally Relevant Leadership

ABSTRACT: The social and cultural contexts of today's schools are diverse in ways that require greater attention to the educational philosophies, epistemologies, and perspectives of school leaders. In those environments where educators are not aptly prepared or willing to meet the sometimes unique needs of students who represent underserved racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, these matters move beyond the personal and become professional, as they are further complicated by high-stakes accountability standards and the prioritization of "closing the achievement gap" in schools and districts. As such, the purpose of this article is to explore more fully the research literature on culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy in ways that can inform the practice of school leadership and explore the yet-untapped possibilities of speaking across areas of theory, research, and practice within the field of education. Specifically, we offer a framework for culturally relevant leadership that includes the following four dimensions: the political context, a pedagogical approach, a personal journey, and professional duty. Finally, we conclude with implications for research and practice.

The social and cultural contexts of today's schools are diverse in ways that require greater attention to the educational philosophies, epistemologies, and perspectives of school leaders (Brooks & Miles, 2010; Dancy & Horsford, 2010; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Horsford, 2009, 2010; Marshall

& Oliva, 2006; Rusch & Horsford, 2009; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2008; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Tillman, 2002). Whether the classroom teacher or building principal, the cultural and racial identities of students and those who serve them have long continued to represent not only a demographic divide (Milner, 2007), but growing degrees of cultural mismatch, which occurs when students experience incompatibility between their school and home cultures (Boykin, 1986; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000, 2002; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1967; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In some instances, this mismatch results in cultural conflict (Delpit, 1995), cultural collision (Beachum & McCray, 2004, 2008), and, in more troubling scenarios, the practice of cultural collusion, where teachers and school leaders implicitly usher out those students whose culture is not recognized or valued in the classroom or school setting (Beachum & McCray, 2004). In other cases, schools actively attempt to erase or "subtract" students' cultures through what Valenzuela (1999) described as "subtractive schooling" in her ethnographic study of U.S. Mexican youth in a Texas high school.

In those environments where educators are not aptly prepared or willing to meet the sometimes unique needs of students who represent underserved racial, ethnic, and cultural groups, these matters move beyond the personal and become increasingly professional when further complicated by high-stakes accountability standards and the prioritization of "closing the achievement gap" in schools and districts. In this climate, teachers and administrators are preoccupied with "making AYP" (adequately yearly progress) to comply with a policy that is arguably designed to close these gaps in achievement and promote academic and educational excellence (i.e., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Subsequently, the strained relationships, discourse, and compromised learning opportunities in such sites of cultural conflict present an educational challenge that becomes critical not only for teachers to understand but also for school leaders to both recognize and manage successfully as education professionals. Add the complexity of multiple conceptualizations, definitions, and interpretations of what culture is generally and how it functions within schools specifically, and we discover how limited our knowledge and research base regarding culture is in the study and practice of educational leadership (Brooks & Miles, 2010). This is particularly troubling given what we already know about the significance of culture in organizations and how it informs the values, behaviors, and work of educational leaders, who in turn influence the organization, its members, and those it serves.

DEFINING CULTURE

In educational leadership, the research literature on organizational culture and school culture has dominated most discussion and analysis concerning what culture is and the role that it plays in schools and school leadership (Brooks & Miles, 2010). While organizational culture has been defined as "the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together" (Killman, Saxton, & Serpa, 1986, p. 89) and "the interwoven patterns of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that define for members who they are and how they are to do things" (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 217), its link to leadership, according to Schein (1992), is the ways in which leaders "create and manage culture . . . and their ability to understand and work with culture" (p. 5). Similarly, school culture has been defined using nearly identical terms and constructs, limited only by the characteristics and confines of the school context. For example, Deal and Peterson (1991) defined school culture as "the character of a school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs, and traditions that have been formed over the course of its history" (p. 7) and is largely developed, fostered, and sustained by the school leader. What the educational leadership research literature has not yet explored in deep and critical ways is how sociocultural differences at the individual and group levels inform leadership dispositions and behaviors and how failure to acknowledge such differences problematizes the knowledge base on which we study issues of culture in educational leadership (Brooks & Miles, 2010).

For the purposes of this article, we frame our discussion on culture in educational leadership by using Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell's (2009) definition of culture as "everything you believe and everything you do that enables you to identify with people who are like you and that distinguishes you from people who differ from you" (pp. 24–25). We recognize that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, language, social class, and faith tradition are just a few examples of what shapes a person's individual and group culture and, in turn, are significant to one's multiple constructions of identity and representation (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Tatum, 2000; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Due to our respective research interests on race and racism in education, however, we focus much of our discussion in the article on the construction of race as an aspect of culture, recognizing the words of Beverly Tatum (2000), who in her book chapter entitled "The Multiplicity of Identity: Who Am I?" wrote, "Even as I focus on race and racism in my own writing and teaching, it is helpful to remind myself and my students of the other distortions around difference that I (and they) may be practicing" (p. 11).

Unlike the field of teacher education, which has engaged in research that considers sociocultural contexts and factors, as evidenced in the literature on multicultural education (Banks, 1993, 2005; Banks & Banks, 1988; Grant, 1992; Nieto, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1996; Sleeter & McClaren, 1996), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1998), culturally responsive instruction (Gay, 2000, 2002), and antiracist pedagogy (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Kailin, 2002; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Lee, 1998, 2006; Trepagnier, 2006), such considerations remain understudied in the field of educational leadership. There is, however, as Bustamante, Nelson, and Onwuegbuzie (2009) noted in their work on schoolwide cultural competence and leadership preparation, a growing body of research that documents how "culturally responsive educational leadership positively influences academic achievement and students' engagement with the school environment" (p. 794). Although we do not entirely attribute persistently racialized gaps in educational achievement and student performance to cultural mismatch, conflict, or collusion, we do believe such contexts warrant serious attention to the ways that such manifestations of cultural and racial incongruence affect and inform the work of not only teachers but the administrators who lead them and, through action or inaction, shape school culture (Brooks & Miles, 2010; Deal & Peterson, 1999).

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of this conceptual project is to explore more fully the research literature on culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy in ways that can inform the practice of school leadership. As Brooks and Miles (2010) explained, it is important that we "connect our research and practice more directly to that of our colleagues in other fields of education and in the social sciences" (p. 23). And as emerging scholars representing the fields of educational leadership and teacher education, we seek to make these connections by exploring the yet-untapped possibilities of speaking across educational contexts in ways that result in improved leadership practice for school leaders. Through a selected review of the teacher education research literature on culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy and cultural proficiency in educational leadership, we endeavor to further strengthen emergent connections between these fields of study in ways that advance culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy in leadership research and practice. To better contextualize and emphasize the significance of such a review of literature, the next section offers a brief discussion of culture and its multiple conceptualizations in present-day U.S.

schooling contexts, with attention to demographic trends and data as they inform and relate to the cultures of students, teachers, and school leaders.

CULTURAL CONFLICT AND RACIAL INCONGRUENCE IN U.S. SCHOOLS: CRITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDE

The increasing significance of culturally relevant, responsive, and competent leadership in schools is made clear given the sheer increases in the number and percentages of schoolchildren representing a diversity of racial, ethnic, and linguistic populations in the United States. While the White population is expected to increase by only 7% by 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau projects an 188% among the Hispanic population, 213% among Asians, and 71% among Blacks. As a result, in 40 years, Whites will only make up roughly one half of the U.S. population (Young & Brooks, 2008). Furthermore, the demographic divide (Milner, 2007) between students and educators in the United States presents unique challenges for teaching, learning, and leading in these diverse educational contexts. Children, families, teachers, and school leaders bring varied cultural assumptions, perspectives, experiences, and expectations to the school environment, and as a result, "subcultures in schools often develop naturally around content areas, grade levels, and among educated and students who share specific values not fully held by the larger group" (Brooks & Normore, 2010, p. 58). Thus, the potential for cultural conflict resulting from conflicting values among subcultures as well as the racial incongruence that occurs given the significant demographic differences among schoolchildren and families and the teachers and leaders who serve them require school leaders to "be mindful of how their practice and decisions helps create an environment where subcultures can collaborate synergistically or potentially pit them in adversarial stances" (p. 58). In this section, we briefly present data on the racial and ethnic demography of students, teachers, and school leaders in U.S. public schools to contextualize our discussion of culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy and approaches to school leadership.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

According to U.S. data from the 2006–2007 school year, as reported by the Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles at University of California, Los Angeles, "continued declines in the proportion of white students,

increase in minority growth, particularly of Latino and Asian students, and deepening segregation of black and Latinos by race and poverty" (Orfield, 2009, p. 9) reflect the changing demography of U.S. public schools. At the national level, during the 2006–2007 school year, White students represented 56.5% of the public school population, followed by 20.5% Latino, 17.1% Black, 4.7% Asian, and 1.2% American Indian. This demonstrates a dramatic shift from the 1988–1989 school year, where 68.6% of students were White, 15.5% Black, 11.5% Latino, and 3.4% Asian.

Many of these percentage changes can be attributed to the overall decrease in the number of White students as part of the overall school-age population, the increase in the number of students of color (primarily Latino and Asian students), and demographic trends of suburbanization, resegregation, immigration, and migration (Clotfelter, Vigdor, & Ladd, 2005; Horsford, 2010; Orfield, 2009). It is also important to note that these percentages look very different when disaggregated by geographic region. For example, in 2007, the largest numbers of Black, Hispanic, Asian/ Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Native Alaskan students were in the West, surpassing the percentage of White students enrolled in that region (Planty et al., 2009). In fact, projections show that between the years 2000 and 2020, the White student population is expected to decline from 64.8% to 55.6% while the Hispanic population will grow from 15.3% to 22.9% and the Asian population, from 4.1% to 6.3% (Fowler, 2009). As Fowler (2009) warned, "in thinking about the demographic policy environment, school leaders are truly dealing with a moving target. Those who do not stay abreast of these changes risk creating the impression that they are hopelessly out of date" (p. 68), and in turn, unable to meet the educational needs of their students and their families.

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS

As the U.S. student population in public schools becomes increasingly Latino, Asian, and African American, the racial and ethnic demographic data on U.S. schoolteachers reveal a much different picture. For example, while the percentage increase of non-White full-time teachers increased from 13% to 17% between 1993–1994 and 2003–2004, the teaching force remains overwhelmingly White and female, with a 2003–2004 teaching staff that was 83.3% White and 74.8% female, representing only a fairly subtle shift from data collected 10 years prior (i.e., 86.6% White and 72.9% female; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Specifically, during the 2003–2004 school year, only 7.8% of full-time teachers were Black, 6.2% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% American Indian/Alaska

Native, numbers starkly different from those of the student populations that teachers serve. While we know that the racial or ethnic identity of a teacher does not solely determine the ability of that teacher to meet the needs of students representing historically and perpetually underserved racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (see Ladson-Billings, 1994), the demographic divide in the classroom underscores the importance of culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogical practices that work to bridge the divide in meaningful ways.

Research demonstrates the critical role that classroom teachers play in delivering curriculum, engaging students, and influencing, either positively or negatively, student learning and academic success (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Marzano, 2003; Nieto, 2000). While traditional teacher education programs work diligently to produce graduates who are "highly qualified" (meaning they have completed required coursework and earned passing scores on certification exams), many traditionally trained teachers soon discover they are not adequately prepared for the challenges of the diverse classroom. Haberman (2005) argued, "Traditional university-based teacher education has demonstrated over half a century that it cannot provide teachers who will be effective and who will remain in these schools for longer than brief periods" (p. 35). Thus, this growing racialized demographic divide between students and teachers, coupled with limited training in culturally relevant and antiracist epistemologies and educational practices, has significant implications for student learning, engagement, and achievement in cultural and racially incongruent contexts.

SCHOOL LEADER DEMOGRAPHICS

This demographic divide is not limited to the racial and cultural backgrounds of students and teachers. The race and ethnicity of U.S. school administrators not only fail to reflect the students and families they serve but offer a similarly stark contrast to the increasingly racially diverse student body in our nation's public schools. For example, during the 2003–2004 school year, 84.2% of school principals were White, only 9.3% were Black, 4.8% were Hispanic, and less than 1% were Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaskan Native, reflecting percentages overwhelmingly similar to the 1993–1994 school year data (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Because educational administrators at the school and district level and building principals in particular are key to establishing and fostering the culture and climate of their schools, their epistemologies, attitudes, and assumptions concerning race and

culture, and their implications for learning, must be an important part of the discourse concerning culturally relevant and antiracist education. Also important to this discussion is the empirical research that has documented the characteristics, cultures, and practices of high-achieving and high-impact schools that have successfully educated students representing historically underserved racial, ethnic, and cultural groups and that often reflect equity-minded, culturally relevant, and antiracist attitudes, approaches, and practices (see Hilliard, 2003; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000).

WHEN THE PEDAGOGY IS PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL

The positionality of each of the authors, coupled with our personal and professional narratives and experiences, has contributed greatly to our respective interests in exploring culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy in our scholarship and professional practice. As emerging scholars (at the time of this writing, two faculty members in educational leadership, one doctoral candidate in teacher education), all of us self-identified as Black and female, and all of us are particularly concerned with issues of educational equity, cultural affirmation, and racial justice in schools. These shared aspects of our identity, with our concern for equity and justice in education, inform our research questions and interests in important ways, particularly as they relate to better meeting the needs of Black children and families and members of similarly historically marginalized communities. We agree with Tatum (2007) that racial identity development is the "process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group" (p. 16), and we believe this socially constructed aspect of our identity has greatly informed our respective interests in culturally relevant, antiracist, and socially just education. Through these connections, we find in our own experiences the pedagogical to be both personal and professional.

We also acknowledge the privileged space we occupy as "formally" educated middle-class U.S. Americans, which has also informed our individual desires and commitments to advancing equitable educational opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for students from racial, ethnic, and cultural groups that are underserved. Because our personal and professional identities have informed our respective interests in culturally relevant and antiracist work, we wanted to explore how these pedagogical approaches not only reflect and our affirm our personal beliefs and values concerning the importance of culturally relevant and antiracist education in curriculum and

instruction but also, as a professional duty, serve racially and culturally diverse school communities through effective leadership practice. Thus, while the examination of our identity and positionality are not central to this project, it has compelled us to forge scholarly connections between the fields of teacher and leadership education in ways that better prepare all education professionals to create and sustain meaningful and effective student learning experiences and achievement in diverse educational contexts.

A SELECTED REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY AND ANTIRACIST PEDAGOGY

As early as the 1970s, the field of teacher education has developed and extended research on multicultural education and the importance of culture in learning, literacy, curriculum, and instruction as reflected in works by scholars such as James Banks, Sonia Nieto, Carl Grant, and Christine Sleeter and, more recently, by researchers such as Thandeka Chapman and H. Rich Milner IV. Since the introduction of culturally relevant pedagogy by Ladson-Billings in 1992, culturally responsive pedagogy by Gay in 2000, and antiracist pedagogy and education in 1995 by Cochran-Smith, scholars of educational leadership have considered and applied these theories in their work but usually within the larger umbrellas of transformative leadership and leadership for social justice (Cooper, 2009; Dantley, Beachum, & McCray, 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2009). Thus, while educational leadership work has framed issues of cultural and racial incongruence in the terms *equity, diversity, transformational leadership,* and *achievement gap* (Marshall & Oliva, 2006), the research literature on *culturally relevant pedagogy* and *antiracist education* frame this article's examination and discussion of improving student learning, engagement, and experiences through proficient and sustainable leadership at the education leadership faculty and administration levels. While we recognize the much larger body of research literature that is relevant to issues of race and culture in teacher and leadership education and practice (e.g., cultural and racial identity development, multiculturalism, critical race theory in education), we have decided to focus exclusively on these two concepts to provide a richer exploration of how they can potentially connect to leadership and, in turn, student learning and achievement.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Defined as a pedagogy that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowl-

edge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18), culturally relevant pedagogy (also referred to as *culturally relevant teaching* and *culturally relevant instruction*) seeks to support students academically while affirming their cultural identity. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), "culturally relevant teaching is not a series of steps that teachers can follow or a recipe for being effective with African-American students" (p. 26) but a way of thinking whereby teachers value the experiences, cultures, and values of their students. In turn, teachers take what they know about their students to adapt the curriculum to fit their students. As a result, culturally relevant teaching does not modify the content being delivered but rather how that content is delivered.

In her seminal book *The Dreamkeeper*s, which studied the characteristics and practices of successful teachers of African American children, Ladson-Billings (1994) identified six tenets of culturally relevant teaching and six characteristics of culturally relevant teachers:

1. They have high self-esteem and high regard for others.
2. They see themselves as part of the community; they see teaching as giving back to the community; and they encourage their students to do the same.
3. They see teaching as an art and themselves as artists.
4. They help students make connections among their community, national, and global identities.
5. They believe that all students can succeed.
6. They see teaching as "digging knowledge out" of students.

By examining the dominant culture and student's own culture through cultural referents embedded in the curriculum, culturally relevant pedagogy establishes the student's ability to develop a skill necessary for school and life success. Similarly, Geneva Gay's (1995, 2000, 2002) work conceptualizes culturally responsive teaching as teaching "to and through the strengths of these students" by "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them." Not only is it "validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory" (Gay, 2000), but its emphasis on the sociocultural awareness and ability of teachers to identify, accept, and affirm their own cultural identities as well as those of their students creates a genuine trust in the inherent quality of human nature that manifests itself as a teacher's respect and faith in all students (Gay, 1995; Haberman, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Zeichner, 1993).

Although teachers who engage culturally relevant pedagogy value and integrate the lived experiences and cultural referents of their students in important ways, one limitation of this approach to instruction is its failure

to explicitly address power and privilege, White supremacy, and institutional racism. As a result, some educators may romanticize or exoticize other cultures rather than recognize and legitimize them as equally acceptable ways of living, knowing, and being. In fact, in 1996 Ladson-Billings called on multicultural education scholars and practitioners to keep issues of racism as part of its agenda (Carlson, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Cross, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1996) in light of efforts to limit racism as an undiscussable site of struggle. In fact, her subsequent work on critical race theory in education demonstrates the importance of centering race and racism in education research to expose the racialized hierarchies and racist practices that perpetuate disparities in education and extend the ways in which we examine and understand other forms of oppression, rather than pit it again issues of class or gender as one of many forms of oppression.

ANTIRACIST PEDAGOGY

Given the controversial nature of racism, particularly in a "nice field like education" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), educators have been leery about addressing racist practices in schools pedagogically. Another early call to focus on racism in teacher education came in Cochran-Smith's (1995) article "Color Blindness and Basket Making Are Not the Answers: Confronting the Dilemmas of Race, Culture and Language Diversity in Teacher Education." She argued that teacher educators must consider their own assumptions about race and create pedagogy that makes issues such as racism more explicit, helping to set the stage, along with other scholars, for a clearer delineation of antiracist pedagogy. In 2005, Jennings and Lynn responded to the call by proposing critical race pedagogy as a way to move beyond critical pedagogy's emphasis on class and apply the tenets of critical race theory to address the lack of discourse about racism in schools. Similarly, Lee (2006) explained that using the word *antiracist* to describe teaching and learning gives educators some language to begin the work of closely examining racist structures in educational settings. According to Lee, antiracism must be embedded in school curriculum, instruction, and policies and serve as "a proactive strategy for dismantling racist structures and for building racial justice and equality" (p. 5).

But how do we teach controversial and upsetting topics such as racism in education to students without disengaging them? (Kumashiro, 2000). Disengagement is a major concern for educators because the explicit nature of terms such as *racism* and *racist* turn people away, as evidence by Lee's (2006) account of teacher reactions to her workshop presentation

entitled "Building an Antiracist, Multicultural Curriculum." After giving her presentation, teachers later revealed that they believed the word *antiracist* was too "severe" but ignored that part of the title and decided to attend anyway because it included the more nonthreatening term *multicultural*. Antiracism reflects how we question our assumptions about race. According to Trepagnier (2006), "if one claims to be antiracist but takes no action against racism, the claim is false" since "antiracism is active by definition—the opposite of passivity, which colludes with racism" (p. 104). She further explained that identifying as an antiracist is a reference to an individual's behavior, not the antiracist organizations or community activist affiliations one may claim or possess. The reason is that an individual stand against racism is more concrete, a notion important in education because although teachers and administrators may participate in multicultural professional development courses and antiracist workshops, they must actively engage in antiracist practices to become antiracist educators.

Despite a growing body of empirical research on antiracist pedagogy and practices in preK–12 settings (DeLeon, 2006; Hughes, Bigler, & Levy, 2007; Lee, 2006; Roberts, Bell, & Murphy, 2008; Rogers & Mosely, 2006) and postsecondary teacher education programs (Gaine, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1996; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; Milner, 2007), modeling antiracist pedagogy and practices for students remains the critical challenge to this work (e.g., Gay, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billing, 1995, 1998, 2005; Milner, 2007). According to Ladson-Billings (2005), teacher educators often demand that their students work successfully with culturally diverse groups of students but are unable to model the practices they teach.

LEADING IN DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS: A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEADERSHIP

School leaders with the capacity to lead culturally diverse school communities are critical to the future of the field. While the call to identify, recruit, and prepare educational leaders able to foster and sustain socially just and equitable schools has been heralded for more than a decade, there yet remains "a distance between the way educational leaders and researchers generally discuss social and cultural dynamics and how said dynamics operate in practice" (Brooks & Miles, 2010, p. 21). Building on the body of scholarship that seeks to promote equity, engagement, and excellence in education through culturally relevant leadership (Brooks & Miles, 2010, culturally responsive leadership (Bustamante et al., 2009), and culturally

proficient leadership (Terrell & Campbell, 2009), we present a framework for culturally relevant leadership, which speaks across selected research literature from teacher education (culturally relevant pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy) and educational leadership to assist aspiring and practicing school leaders and, in turn, those who prepare school leaders, by emphasizing four dimensions critical to the successful leadership of schools in diverse educational contexts: the political context, a pedagogical approach, a personal journey, and professional duty (see Figure 1).
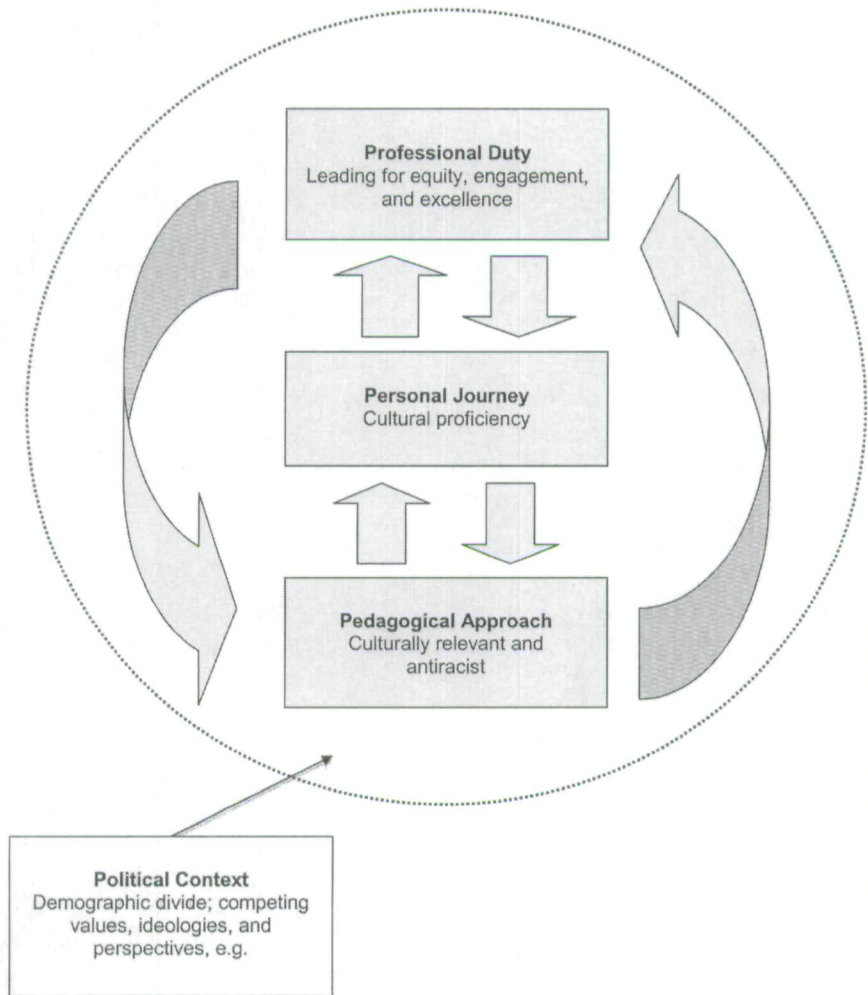

Figure 1. Framework for culturally relevant leadership.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT: GAPS, DIVIDES, DISPARITIES, AND DEFICIENCIES

Sadly, the state of public education in the United States remains characterized by achievement gaps, demographic divides, racial disparities, and cultural deficits and deficiencies (Horsford, 2010; Kozol, 2005; Milner, 2007; Valencia, 1997). Despite the fact that there is no collective difference in mental aptitude or intellectual ability among children of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds before reaching Year 1, a gap between students according to race exists in practically every measure and evaluation of academic achievement. As such, mainstream and traditional education research documenting and examining the education of children of color is usually discussed within the context of "the Black–White achievement gap" (Jencks & Phillips, 1998), "within-school" segregation (Eyler, Cook, & Ward, 1983; Oakes, 1995), and unequal resource distribution among schools within the same community (Kozol, 1991, 2005).

Given the highly politicized and racialized contexts of school performance and student achievement (e.g., the Coleman report of 1966, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top Competition of 2010) at the federal level, with significant implications for education policy at the state and district levels, educational leaders are under increased pressure to advance educational equity and improve performance outcomes among all racial and ethnic student populations. These expectations, as articulated by educators, policymakers, business leaders, parents, citizens, and other community stakeholders, require educational leaders who can effectively serve students and communities representing a variety of background and life experiences and within diverse sociocultural contexts (Cooper, 2009, 2010; Dancy & Horsford, 2010; Horsford, 2010; Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Thus, the first dimension of our framework for culturally relevant leadership centers on the educational leader's consciousness of the political context in which they are operating.

As policy implementers, school and district leaders must not only be capable of administering federal, state, district, and school-based policies and procedures but also equipped to discern and analyze the educational ideologies, philosophical assumptions, and political perspectives that both underlie and frame such policies and practices (Aleman, 2010; Fowler, 2009; Spring, 2005; Stout, Tallerico, & Scribner, 1995). The heated and highly politicized debates concerning high-stakes accountability in schools, school choice policy, race-conscious assignment plans, special

education placements, the education of undocumented students, and funding for English-language learner programs are but a few examples of the highly controversial and value-laden issues that have important implications for school leaders and their ability to serve diverse student populations and school communities.

Schools and school systems are not isolated from this larger political context. In fact, they often serve as the sites for such controversy, reinforcing the notion that culturally relevant educational leaders must be sophisticated in their ability to both recognize and negotiate the political terrain inextricably tied to everyday education policy and practices. Because of the increasing external demands, educational leaders must often play the role of "manager as politician" (Bolman & Deal, 1997). As Fowler (2009) explained, situations that require school and district leaders to engage and build alliances with leaders of other agencies and organizations (e.g., state legislators, professional association presidents, local government directors) require school leaders to serve as "public leaders" (Bryson & Crosby, 1992) and "rely on such leadership tools as persuasion, coalition building, and political strategies" (p. 13), which may not have been expected of the public school administrator 20 years ago. In addition to being attuned to the political environment inherent to education, educational leaders must be cognizant of the political and pedagogical significance of engaging in culturally relevant and antiracist work in schools.

A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH: CULTURAL RELEVANCE AND ANTIRACISM

In recognizing that the politics of education are never racially or culturally neutral (López, 2003), culturally capable school leaders successfully integrate the pedagogical approaches of culturally relevant and antiracist education in ways that inform their professional duty to serve culturally diverse populations to provide an equitable and excellent education to their students. As Brooks and Miles (2010) observed,

> the possibilities and ideas advanced in the area of culturally relevant pedagogy might ultimately suggest a culturally relevant leadership that could revolutionize the way administrators are trained and developed" and "begin to understand the way the social and cultural dynamics of educational leadership shape the lives of children in ways we have not yet discovered. (p. 24)

Just as teachers must understand how culture operates daily in the classroom, foster learning environments that value cultural and ethnic diversity, and understand how these environments inform student achievement, educational leaders must also gain this awareness to assist their teachers

in establishing a school culture and climate that advance student learning and engagement through cultural affirmation and social support (Horsford, 2010; Morris, 2008). Gay (2000) explained that, in the context of teaching and learning, "opportunities must be provided for students from different ethnic backgrounds to have free personal and cultural expression so that their voices and experiences can be incorporated into teaching and learning processes on a regular basis" (p. 43).

The effect that culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy has on student instruction, engagement, and achievement are no less important to the work of educational administrators, given their role as instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; McKenzie & Locke, 2010; McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006), and culturally relevant leaders recognize how important their pedagogical approach is to their ability to successfully lead teachers and students representing diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and experiences. Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) demonstrated the interrelated aspects within their framework for instructional leadership for social justice, which they defined as a leadership approach that "not only focuses on the 'business of teaching and learning,' but also ensures that teaching and learning is occurring for all students" (McKenzie & Locke, 2010, p. 51) through equity consciousness and high-equality teaching. Thus, these opportunities must also be expanded to teachers, families, and other school community stakeholders who operate within the school community context, which is greatly informed and sustained according to the cultural capacity of school leaders. When the learning styles and perspectives of all students and the pedagogical practices and experiences of all teachers are considered and embraced by educational leaders, the ability for such leaders to meaningfully educate and serve their diverse school community is greatly improved.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY:
THE PATH TO CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

While a consciousness of the political context of schools and a leadership approach grounded in culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy serve as critical dimensions to a framework for culturally relevant leadership, Terrell and Lindsey's (2009) personalized conceptualization of cultural proficiency is an essential component for cultural capacity building and growth. The ability of educational leaders to measure and assess their effectiveness in working with student, family, and community populations are directly connected to their willingness to interrogate and acknowledge their deeply held beliefs and assumptions concerning students who represent racial, ethnic, economic, or linguistic backgrounds or life experiences different from their own. Thus, this conception of cultural

proficiency demonstrates a school leader's commitment to educate "all students to high levels through knowing, valuing, and using the student's cultural backgrounds, language, and learning styles within the selected curricular and instructional contexts." In addition to requiring "a personal journey," cultural proficiency provides a foundation for establishing "an ethical and professional frame for effective cross-cultural communication and problem solving" (p. 101) that not only requires individual reflection but also compels organizations to acknowledge how its policies and practices may create barriers and hostile conditions for historically excluded, segregated, and underserved students. As with any form of organizational change, efforts to demonstrate and engage culturally relevant leadership in schools will face challenge and resistance from those who prefer to keep things the way they are (Theoharis, 2009). Educational leaders must therefore become familiar with not only the guiding principles, continuum, and essential elements of cultural proficiency but also the obstacles and resistance they will face as they seek to dismantle oppression and reveal privilege and entitlement within their respective organizations. In fact, this type of response is anticipated by culturally capable leaders and is countered through strategies that reflect their professional duty to preserve and protect "the values of democracy, equity, and diversity" in schools (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2008).

A PROFESSIONAL DUTY: LEADERSHIP FOR EQUITY, ENGAGEMENT, AND EXCELLENCE

The task of preparing and supporting school administrators as leaders of increasingly diverse educational contexts is significant to both the preparation and the practice of school leaders (Brooks, 2007; Cooper, 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Scheurich & Laible, 1995). One response to these changing contexts is the updated National Policy Board for Educational Administration's Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards (2008), which outline essential functions in the field. In fact, the last three standards explicitly address issues of "diverse community needs," "promoting understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources," and the expectations that school leaders will "safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity," "promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling," and "promote the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context" (p. 15). As Murakami-Ramalho (2010) noted, "school leaders have the latitude to set the tone for school

operations, establish a school culture, situate the school in the contemporary context of district, state, and nation, and help stakeholders set goals and objectives conducive to the highest opportunities for student learning" (p. 208), and culturally relevant leaders recognize the significant implications of these responsibilities for student, teacher, and school success.

Challenges often emerge within those institutions that do not possess cultural knowledge, are not able to adapt to diversity, and do not incorporate the experiences and perspectives of diverse cultures into the character and culture of their organizations (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). As a result, these educational organizations become spaces where the cultural values, assumptions, and beliefs of some groups are engaged while the culture of other groups are either viewed as problematic or ignored. For these reasons, schools require culturally relevant leaders who can successfully monitor and mediate cultural conflict by modeling cross-cultural communication effectively and are able to navigate and negotiate opposing cultural perspectives and conflict through dialogue and mediation (Ryan, 2007; Shields, 2004) and by fostering positive cross-cultural relationships (Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2002). Consequently, we believe a framework for culturally relevant leadership emphasizes these approaches to promoting educational equity, engagement, and excellence as the duty of school leaders who recognize accept this charge both personally and professionally.

CONCLUSION

The rich cultural diversity of students and families represented in today's U.S. public school system requires school leaders who possess not only the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively educate and advocate for diverse communities but also the will to use them (Edmonds, 1979; Hilliard, 2003; Theoharis, 2009). The long-documented demographic divide among public school students, teachers, and administrators poses interesting challenges for educational professionals who may not be adequately prepared to successfully teach or lead in racially and ethnically diverse classrooms, schools, or districts. This is not to assume that cultural mismatch and racial incongruence naturally result in the inability to forge meaningful school–family–community connections, but it does point to the importance of an educational leader's ability to navigate the diversity of experiences and perspectives of which contemporary school contexts are often composed. By presenting a framework for culturally relevant leadership, we sought to inform and extend theory, research, and practice

in educational leadership by speaking across the educational contexts of teacher and leadership education to better serve schoolchildren through cultural affirmation and social support. Through a deeper consciousness of the politics of race, culture, and difference in educational contexts; research on the effectiveness of culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy; a willingness to embark on the personal journey of critical self-reflection and possible transformation; and honoring these aspects of their work as part of their professional duty as school leaders, we hope to be part of the movement toward culturally relevant leadership, because, for us, the pedagogy is both personal and professional.

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