Reading and creating critically leaderful schools that make a difference: the post-apartheid South African case

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My interest in critical leaderful educational practices emanated from my experiences as a researcher in a South African National Department of Education project that piloted the White Paper on Inclusive Education Policy from 2001–2003 and in 2006 when I worked as a volunteer consultant with Twenty30, an independent, not for profit organization that works with schools in disadvantaged communities in Johannesburg, South Africa. Based on my work with the National Department of Education and Twenty30, in this paper I briefly sketch the profiles of Sunshine Primary and Dullsville Primary, two schools which operate within similar contexts of social fragmentation but which display two very different sets of behaviours. I sketch the legacy of racial segregation in South African schools and the resource infrastructural climate that characterized apartheid South African education. The sketch is meant to serve as a contextual background to understand the behavioural patterns of Sunshine Primary and Dullsville Primary in terms of how they negotiate the discriminatory apartheid script: one school which has resisted the negative script conferred upon it by apartheid and its legacy and the other school which has habitualized and internalized the debilitating script of apartheid engineering. Through reflection on the ethos of these two schools I conceptualized a proposed research project that I will conduct with a group of principals in Johannesburg, South Africa. The proposed study aims to explore how women school principals navigate the complexities of educational leadership in disadvantaged communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS, poverty and child and woman abuse while also negotiating their status within the education fraternity that has historically relegated them to second-class citizenship.

The legacy of racial segregation in South African schools

Through the legislative provisions contained in the Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, the Coloured Persons Act of 1963, the Indian Education Act of 1965 and the National Education Act of 1967 education for black South Africans was explicitly linked to the political, economic and social domination of all black South Africans. Formal schooling in South Africa is rooted in both the mission and colonial systems of education. In the 1950s Verwoerd introduced the Bantu Education system of schooling for Africans, which replaced missionary control of education with that of apartheid state control. The apartheid
regime was committed to white supremacy and the pursuit of these policies through education. It was also committed to schooling black South Africans so as to ensure that their education would destine them to be hewers of wood and bearers of water. As Vervoed, the Prime Minister of South Africa who was the architect of the Bantu Education Act of 1953, conceived it:

There is no place for [the African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour. It is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim, absorption in the European community. (http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info_sa_glance/education/education.htm)

Primary, secondary and higher education for Africans in the 1960s and 1970s occurred in the context of the development of Bantustan Policy, in which educational funds were allocated unequally to children administered under ‘white’, ‘Indian’, ‘coloured’, ‘African’ and other Bantustan education departments. The expansion of poor quality education resulted in massive political resistance among youth, who resisted state-prescribed educational goals and regulation throughout the 1970s and 1980s (notably the Soweto Uprising). Reform efforts—the first of which was the 1981 de Lange Commission of Inquiry—recommended investment in an education that would equip blacks with technical skills so that they could participate in the flagging economy. In 1986 a 10 year plan to finance upgrading black education was announced. Thus, enrolments at primary and especially secondary levels increased sharply—this in the face of scarce resources.

In the 1980s the private provision of education grew in South Africa in response to the inability or unwillingness of state schools to admit black children. As a result private schools began opening their doors to increasing numbers of black children, but exorbitant school fees meant that they were restricted to children whose parents could afford the fees. In 1990 white schools were permitted to admit black students with the proviso that the school remained 51% white and that the ‘ethos and character’ of the school be maintained.

In black schools apartheid education meant minimal levels of resources, inadequately trained and few staff, poor quality of learning materials, shortages of classrooms and the absence of laboratories and libraries. Besides these tangible deprivations, pedagogical practices were characterized by unquestioning conformity, rote learning, autocratic teaching, authoritarian management styles, racist and sexist syllabi and antiquated forms of assessment and evaluation (Vally 1999).

Schools were fragmented into 19 different education departments and funding varied on the basis of race. In 1986 per capita subsidies for whites were R2365.00, compared with R572.00 for blacks in Department of Education and Training schools. Per capita subsidies in the homelands were even lower, with the province of KwaZulu-Natal the lowest, at R262.00. Although there was an increase in real spending per pupil between 1985 and 1992, as part of an attempt to close racial gaps in funding, by 1992 spending for white pupils was still four times that of spending for black pupils. In 1993 average spending per pupil was R4700.00 for whites, compared with R1440.00 for black pupils.
The ethos of post-apartheid education

The legacy of apartheid, which was a fortress that actively and systematically engendered and perpetuated racial, gender, sex, religious, ethnic and various other social fragmentation devices, left behind a challenging social justice redress agenda. The effects of such social fragmentation continue to be manifest in high levels of illiteracy among, especially, black South Africans, high rates of crime and violence (with women and children inevitably being the victims),\textsuperscript{3} high unemployment and poverty,\textsuperscript{4} extensive substance abuse and the scourge of HIV/AIDS\textsuperscript{5} and related opportunistic diseases which are fraying the fabric of large sections of South African society and are present in schools, which are a microcosm of wider society.

The democratization of South Africa in 1994 heralded a political dispensation that, of necessity, had to heal the inequities and inequalities of apartheid. For the very first time the education system, which had previously been distinguished and differentiated by racial categories, was expected to operate under a national education system. An outcomes-based education (OBE) system (which continues to weather harsh and sometimes justified criticism) was adopted as an educational philosophy that would best serve the massive educational needs of the country. OBE strives for a holistic education of the child by focusing on the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. Thus, OBE as defined, and as implemented in the South African context, has effected the following broad changes:

- a move from a content-driven curriculum to one that promotes the teaching of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes;
- a move from a teacher-centred pedagogy to dialogic student-centred pedagogies, which is seen as one way to ensure that the tenets of democracy enshrined in the South African Constitution and other legislation (education and other) enable a functional realization of democracy that can be practiced and experienced in the classroom, rather than remain a theoretically abstract concept;
- a move from one-off examinations to continuous assessment.

After 13 years of democracy the introduction of a new curriculum, which has since undergone revision, with a healthy education budget that is approximately 20% of total government expenditure (in the 2006 Budget education received R92.1 billion, amounting to 17% of total spending) South African education for the most part has not been able to shake off the ravages of apartheid. (http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info_sa_glance/education/education.htm). The features which defined apartheid education continue to define many schools in post-apartheid South Africa, rendering them dysfunctional. On the other hand, there are resilient schools that have made a conscious and concerted effort to resist the negative script that apartheid handed down to them and have initiated ways to rewrite their destinies.
Anecdotes of resilient and dysfunctional schools

Dysfunctional schools: the case of Dullsville

From 2001 to 2003 I was involved in a research project conducted by the National Department of Education, South Africa. The research piloted the White Paper on Inclusive Education in South Africa. I worked with several rural schools in Rustenburg in the Northwest Province of South Africa. Employment in the province largely revolves around a declining mining industry and the gambling/gaming industry. The majority of parents who are able to secure work in these industries invariably have to relocate closer to their places of employment. One school in particular stood out as being dysfunctional. The school had a population of approximately 300 students. There were approximately eight dilapidated classrooms which catered for multiple grade levels. Thus, for example, Grades 2 and 3 would share the same classroom and the same teacher would teach the two grades ‘simultaneously’. The extent to which the school had habituated to its breakdown and the lack of a sense of responsibility among the principal, teachers and students was evident in the atmosphere and in the infrastructure of the school. One was immediately struck by the neglect of the school (from the principal’s office to the staffroom to classrooms, with broken windows, gaping holes in the ceilings, defaced chalkboards, broken doors and neglected gardens framing the identity of the school). Mindless rote learning that confused rather than intellectually stimulating the students characterized the lessons. More often than not teachers abandoned their classrooms to sit out in the sun and read magazines. Teachers who had indicated that they would participate in the study were generally not at school on the day the researchers arrived for the research project. Apathy, depression, a lack of a sense of effectiveness, anxiety about physical safety and projection of blame onto others were the result. In an environment where poverty was rampant, where female students (as young as 10 years) were lured by older men to cohabit with them in exchange for economic security (the parents of these girls did not object because the arrangement was a source of income), where the myth that sleeping with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS and where young girls became rape victims the dysfunctional school became defined by the absence or non-existence of meaningful teaching and learning, which undermined the very purpose by which schools justify their existence. Dullsville Primary had internalized the negative script that apartheid education had destined for it.

Like the school in the above narrative, dysfunctional schools in general display the following features (see Hayes et al. 2004):

- poor physical and social facilities, which have a negative impact on teaching and learning;
- serious organizational problems, including weak and unaccountable leadership, administrative dysfunction (for example, difficulties in drawing up timetables), poor communication and inadequate disciplinary and grievance procedures;
- poor relationships with the surrounding community;
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- poor communication and interactions with the education department;
- questionable pedagogic practices;
- unqualified/under-qualified teaching staff.

Resilient schools: the case of Sunshine Primary

Sunshine Primary is located in inner city Johannesburg, South Africa. When it was first opened the school was a kindergarten serving white students. This was in the heyday of apartheid, when downtown Johannesburg was an affluent city boasting the economic wealth of the ‘city of gold’. However, over the years inner city Johannesburg has deteriorated and fallen into squalor, with the attendant maladies of crime, sexual and gender violence, poverty, a housing scarcity and HIV/AIDS plaguing the community. Many of the children attending Sunshine Primary are refugees and illegal immigrants from across the African continent. While South Africa has education legislation that ensures the inclusion of refugee and immigrant students in its schooling system, in a country that is battling its way towards redress for the black South African majority Sunshine Primary is among those schools that refuse to shun the refugee children who arrive at its door in search of an education.

Today Sunshine Primary has moved from being a kindergarten to being a primary school. Despite the fact that it now serves 400 primary school children, aged between 5 and 15 years old, the school has not been upgraded in terms of its categorization so as to qualify for greater state funding. The increasing number of students seeking admission to the school poses the challenge of adequate space. Cramped between rapidly dilapidating high-rise apartments, Sunshine Primary is battling to accommodate an increasing number of students. This presents added challenges to a school that already suffers several socio-economic challenges. Coupled with infrastructural, financial and general resource shortages, the school also has to deal with a teacher shortage and has to raise its own funds in order to hire additional staff. Rather than habitualize/endorse the negative script, as Sunshine Primary could justifiably do, the principal and staff have chosen to be resilient in the face of daunting and mounting odds.

I became acquainted with Sunshine Primary through a professional volunteer programme initiated by the non-profit organization Twenty30. In 2005 Twenty30, which comprises professional volunteers from all sectors of the South African economy, was launched to work in collaborative teams with schools that applied to be part of the initiative. Schools that were selected to be a part of the Twenty30 initiative qualified on the basis of the principal’s and staff’s vision for the school. Top of the school’s list of priorities was the need to create more classroom space for the increasing number of students that are seeking admission to the school. Refusing to turn students away because of a lack of space, the principal had negotiated the use of a portion of the property of the high school across the road on which to erect two trailers furnished to serve as classrooms. This means that the school can now accommodate 80 more students. Using her social contacts, the principal was able to secure 30 used computers from a law firm. The
principal, who has made it an integral part of her duties to write fund-raising proposals, was able to secure a sizeable sum of money from Microsoft to equip a proposed computer laboratory. In partnership with the team from Twenty30 the principal and teachers were able to extend its already growing network of community help. Some of the activities that the volunteer consultants were able to involve the school in included: engaging the staff in family and life counselling workshops so as to equip them with the skills to deal with domestic violence, woman and child abuse; offering computer training to teachers; securing help from the READ Educational Foundation. The READ Educational Foundation donated books and curriculum material to the school. READ also offered a two day workshop to the school staff on setting up a classroom box library. Since the school did not have a librarian or a dedicated library, equipping teachers with the knowledge of how to set up a portable box library served the dual purposes of encouraging reading and short-circuiting complex book cataloguing processes.

Sunshine Primary was also in partnership with four members from CityYear. CityYear is a non-profit making organization comprising young, unemployed school graduates aged between 18 and 25 years who, during their period of unemployment, attend training programmes which are intended to provide skills development in curriculum support, computing and information technology, public relations, arts, crafts and drama. The CityYear members then partner with schools, helping children with their homework, engaging students in sports and recreational activities and helping with fund raising. A small cohort of parents, among them those who cannot afford to pay their children’s or ward’s school fees, contribute ‘labour’ (e.g. helping cover library books) to offset their children’s fees.

Sunshine Primary, like other resilient schools, has a sense of agency and demonstrates the characteristics of leaderful schools, which draw on the help and expertise of people from the wider community to tackle at least some of their problems. As is characteristic of resilient leaderful schools, it displays:

- flexible and purposive leadership;
- a focus on learning and teaching as the central activities of the school, the day revolving around the rhythms of teaching and learning;
- teachers and students working in their classrooms;
- a stable and motivated teaching staff who see their work as important and derive satisfaction from it;
- a safe and organizationally functioning school environment;
- a culture of concern within the school;
- a functioning relationship with the surrounding community, drawing support from external sources close to the school.

What becomes evident from reflecting on economically poor schools in post-apartheid South Africa is that the extremely harsh circumstances of poverty and deprivation do not inevitably produce dysfunctional schools. This suggests that leadership is a dynamic process, involving individuals, organizations and broader society making a concerted and committed effort to resist negative scripts and to aspire to making a difference in the lives of students, staff and the community within which the schools are located.
Conceptualizing critical leaderful practice as a conceptual narrative

Reflecting on the operational ethoses of Dullsville Primary and Sunshine Primary three key theoretical analytical frameworks emerge, namely: (i) understanding educational leadership as a conceptual narrative; (ii) recognizing the need for analyses of schools to extend beyond the school itself into the wider community; and (iii) exploring the potential that critical leaderful practices offer in redefining school leadership.

First, the functionality of Sunshine Primary and the dysfunctionality of Dullsville Primary, respectively, show that leadership is a complex interplay of different forces and fields, which create a communitarian or a conflictual referential circle. The nature and degree of complexity of the forces acting upon leadership within particular time and space frameworks was elucidated by Bourdieu’s (cited in Connolly 1997) insightful conceptualization of habitus operating as an interplay across a number of fields, comprising differences in philosophies of power, authority and leadership, different notions of identity politics and different visions and goals for the school. The interplay of habitus, capital and field reinforces the idea that educational leadership is better understood as a conceptual narrative that involves the combined narratives of individuals (staff, students and significant partners of the school), the micro and macro contexts of the school and the activities that happen and do not happen within this community of practice.

School leadership is enacted within particular socio-economic and political contexts and cultures. Even as various contextual variables, such as geographical, political and socio-economic factors, reconfigure individuals in a myriad of complex, complementary and contradictory ways, these same variables also reconfigure the identities of institutions. In turn, educational leadership practices are formed and transformed in relation to spatial and temporal variables. Personal, professional and institutional (schools’) identities are embedded in time and space frameworks, thus a core conception of personal and institutional identity should include dimensions of time and space relationality so that identity can be understood as a conceptual narrativity. In this regard, the legacies of colonialism and post-colonialism, apartheid and post-apartheid, for example, serve as useful tropes in framing and reflecting on the temporal and contextual situatedness of education in general and the challenges of educational leadership in particular. Without suggesting that individuals or institutions (schools) located within particular temporal and spatial frameworks are inevitably predestined to be products of their time and space frameworks, there may be connections between individual and institutional identity formation.

Rosenhead’s (1998) description of complexity theory in conjunction with Bourdieu’s (1986) theory regarding the interrelation of habitus, capital and field is useful in exploring the deep intricacies that shape leadership as a complex conceptual narrative. According to Rosenhead (1998) complexity theory posits that:

systems under certain conditions, perform in regular, predictable ways; under other conditions they exhibit behaviour in which regularity and predictability is lost. Almost undetectable differences in
initial conditions lead to gradually diverging system reactions until eventually the evolution of behaviour is quite dissimilar.

Against the fluid contextuality of systems behaviour, individual and institutional scripts are further elucidated by Bourdieu's (1986) interrelated concepts of habitus, capital and field. According to Bourdieu habitus refers to the way we have developed and internalized ways of approaching, thinking about and acting upon our social world. Human beings' agentic potential allows them to endorse/legitimize/internalize their socialization or to resist and rescript their social conditioning. Capital refers to scarce economic, cultural, social and symbolic goods and resources that individuals may or may not have at their disposal, and field may be understood as an arena of contesting stratified forces where skirmishes over limited capital resources occur. Only when the concept of habitus is contextualized in relation to the concepts economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital and fields (e.g. socio-political contexts) does the contingent and reflexive nature of personal and institutional identity become apparent.

The essence of the interrelationships between these concepts within the South African context means that school leaders, teachers, students and significant partners within the schooling community of practice can internalize and habitulize the negative scripts that apartheid education attempted to impose upon black South Africans, as is evident in the behavioural patterns in Dullsville Primary, or they can enact resistance identities that defy the debilitating and dehumanizing legacy of apartheid, as is evident from the behavioural patterns in Sunshine Primary. As reflexive social actors they can rename, reconstruct and compose positive social scripts rather than appropriate negative subjectivities associated with signifiers of deficit, omission and erasure.

Secondly, the critical or emancipatory approach to social analysis entails a critique of existing social relationships and an advance towards desired ones. The critical or emancipatory approach encompasses a variety of perspectives, such as feminist, neo-Marxist, gender studies, cultural studies, and participatory research. These approaches extend beyond the notion of sense making within schools into the surrounding society. The critical approach questions the often legitimating role that school leaders play in endorsing existing social arrangements within society (Heck 1998: 61–62, Strachan 1999, Grace 2000).

Thirdly, Raelin (2003: 5–16) proposes leaderful practice as an integrative model that has been in the making for some time, but has not been integrated into a coherent discourse. We have heard people refer to a team as leaderless, but Raelin introduces the term leaderful as a way to re-imagine leadership from a positive transformational perspective.

As a way of illustrating the two ends of the continuum, Raelin (2003: 10–11) encapsulated the dominant technical-managerial approach to leadership by identifying the following four tenets (see also Burlingame 1986, Blackmore 1989, Lincoln 1989, Leithwood and Duke 1998, Morris 1999):

i. leadership is serial;
ii. leadership is individual;
iii. leadership is controlling;
iv. leadership is dispassionate.

He contended that leaderful practice, in contrast to the technical-managerial approach and other empowerment models, is unique in that it does not merely present a consultative model wherein leaders in authority allow ‘followers’ to participate in their leadership nor does it equate to stewardship approaches that see the leader step aside to allow others to take over when necessary. Instead, it offers a true mutual model that transforms leadership from an individual property into a collective practice. The following are the four tenets of leaderful practice.

(i) **Leadership is concurrent.** This suggests that in any community more than one leader can operate at the same time, so leaders willingly and naturally share power with others.

(ii) **Leadership is collective.** This means that many people within the community may operate as leaders. Leadership may thus emerge from multiple members of the community—everyone participates in leadership.

(iii) **Leadership is collaborative.** All members of the community, not just the position leader, are in control of and may speak for the entire community. Collaborative leaders realize that everyone counts, every opinion and contribution matters.

(iv) **Leadership is compassionate.** By demonstrating compassion, one extends the commitment to preserving the dignity of others. Compassionate leaders recognize that values are intrinsically interconnected with leadership and that there is no higher value than democratic participation.

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**The aims of and rationale for new educational research**

South Africa’s struggle against racial discrimination has received international exposure. A focus on gender disenfranchisement was subsequently eclipsed by the struggle for racial redress. In the current climate of redress post-apartheid South Africa has made an unequivocal commitment to the promotion of a unitary, non-sexist, non-racist education system. Several national enabling policies have been promulgated to promote equity and access for those previously excluded by virtue of race and gender from participating and assuming leadership roles in key public domains. Despite women’s exclusion from other areas of public social engagement, teaching has remained a women-dominated profession. The affirmative action policy initiative in South Africa, to appoint women to school leadership posts, necessitates educating women to unlearn myths about their lack of abilities and capabilities to ensure that they assume school leadership roles confidently and competently. Assuming leadership roles in educational contexts ravaged by the scourge of HIV/AIDS, poverty, gender-based violence and other social maladies call for extraordinary leadership skills among educators.
As a complement to the move towards a unitary, non-sexist, non-racist education system new research, founded on a new research paradigm, must be undertaken to inform this movement.

As a point of entry into new research on educational leadership the anecdotes of resilient and dysfunctional schools in the South African school context might be employed as a sensitizing agent to explore the following research questions.

i. What are some of the theories, images and metaphors of leadership that have defined the field of educational leadership studies? How has critical scholarship, notably feminist sensibilities, reconfigured the field of educational leadership studies?

ii. Does conceiving of school leadership as a conceptual narrative that is shaped by an interplay of autobiographical, organizational and cultural contextual, and temporal, complexities demythologize conceptions of the rights, roles and responsibilities of the school leader and significant others within the educational community of practice, especially as these pertain to teaching and learning?

iii. What are the merits and demerits of creating critically leaderful practices in schools? Is leaderful practice sufficiently cognizant of power differentials mediated by race, gender, socio-economic class, age, language, etc?

iv. What are some of the methodological and ethical considerations that need to be acknowledged when conducting new research into educational leadership?

v. What insights and implications does new scholarship suggest for the development of educational leadership academic programmes?

As more and more women aspire to educational leadership positions research has examined how women have fared in corporate organizations, and what their career involvement has meant for their private lives and their personal development, as well as how they manage their personal and professional lives. The majority of these studies have documented the experiences of white women, especially women from developed countries. However, the experience of women principals within the South African context remains largely unresearched. This is not an unusual phenomenon, as the experiences of South African women in all spheres are still a blind spot of sociological investigation. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly for many women assuming educational leadership roles, this is largely unchartered territory. We do not know whether their experiences are similar to or different from that of their counterparts in the developed world, we do not know whether different social contexts and cultural frameworks make their experience qualitatively different. As the socio-political context of South Africa changes established educational leadership practices will need to change. The critical question is what will shape these new patterns and what forms will they take?

Furthermore, the new research proposed here has implications for the development of educational leadership academic programmes. As lecturers of women in school leadership and management my colleagues and I are reviewing the curriculum we offer to principals who enrol at the university
for in-service professional development. The proposed new research will provide insights into the challenges that educational leaders have to navigate in their varying school contexts. There is a consensus that continuous in-service professional development is beneficial in ensuring that professionals stay abreast of development in their community of practice. There is also a need for these in-service and professional development programmes to provide courses that encompass the development of core knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are grounded in practice. Being cognizant of the repertoire of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that school leaders are called upon to play emphasizes the complexity of the leadership role, the importance of a moral and ethical grounding, the value of working closely with parents and community and the importance of teaching and learning as the primary functions of schools. The changing face of education calls for the deconstruction and reconstruction of new professional and pedagogic identities (see Bernstein 1996) capable of realizing the full potential of the educational experience for pupils and for society.

The stories of Sunshine Primary and Dullsville Primary presented here indicate that in-service professional development programmes should address the following emergent challenges.

i. Schools, like the public sector, are increasingly being governed by a corporatist mangerialist mentality. This is pushing school leaders towards being managers rather than educational leaders, or at least to prioritize management over educational functions. Evidence from resilient schools repeatedly confirms that valuing teaching and learning by those in leadership positions is central to good leadership in schools. How school leadership can manage multiple roles without marginalizing pedagogic leadership is worthy of exploration within educational leadership development and training programmes.

ii. One emergent trend in school reform is a move towards school self-management or school-based management (SBM). While some argue that self-management engenders flatter power relations, more fluid boundaries between schools and their environment and increased opportunities for multi-skilling of staff, critics argue that self-management reduces state funding and involvement in schools. Furthermore, the responsibilities under SBM are further accentuated by the contradictory dynamics of greater state centralization in the form of national educational policies (for example, the introduction of a national curriculum, formation of the educator accreditation council, etc.), while decentralizing school self-management. School leadership has thus to constantly negotiate centralization and decentralization.

iii. Another development that has had an impact on school leadership is changes in school governance, which include new forms of school–community relations. Through both formal governance and more informal local conditions there is a reconfiguration of parental/community/school corporate relationships and the involvement of parents and the community in governance of the school. Integrating the participation of parents, industry and the wider community (local and global) into the fabric of the school challenges school leadership in new ways.
iv. The discourse on identity politics, difference and diversity has become a defining feature of a globalized society. The complexity of race, gender, sex, ethnicity, multilingualism and multiculturalism need to be debated, discussed, dissected and dealt with at all levels of the school. School leaders need to be sensitized to the promise and perils of dealing with identity politics and diversity issues, not just at the level of policy but as a real and substantive issue that affects all players in its community of practice. The creation of better leaders for our schools requires not only better preparation programmes but a system for resisting socialization to old norms while simultaneously creating new ones. Leadership development programmes need to include discussions on leadership styles that advocate inclusive, democratic organizational cultures (see Williamson and Hudson 2001). For the purposes of the proposed new research, while I concur with Raelin (2003) that a leaderful approach to conceiving of and practising leadership is premised on a strong egalitarian ethic and I think that coinage of the word leaderful is clever and creative, especially when counterposed by the word leaderless, I want to argue for an explicitly critical conception of leaderful practice. Critical studies in general, and critical feminist educational leadership scholarship in particular, examine the complexities of identity politics as they relate to the power differentials that emerge from race, gender, age, experience, ethnicity, language, etc. in a robust and nuanced manner.

v. In addition to the ‘traditional’ inequalities of race, class and gender, new marginalizations are emerging, relating to globalization and new economic and social reconfigurations. The face of disadvantage is changing—for example, there is an increasing poor white population and an increasing refugee population in South Africa. Brown et al. (cited in Christie and Lingard 2001) referred to this phenomenon as the ‘new political arithmetic’ of poverty and disadvantage. The associated malady of HIV/AIDS and gender violence pose ongoing challenges for school leadership and curriculum intervention and programmes that prepare school leaders to respond promptly and sensitively to these social demands.

In cataloguing some of the debates that academic programmes could/should address so as to remain relevant to the emerging and continuing challenges of school leadership equal consideration needs to be given to the following two pertinent questions: (i) who will these programmes be directed at (the target audience); and (ii) where is the most appropriate site for these programmes to be taught?

The first question is inextricably linked to reconceptualized notions of school leadership. Critical leaderful practices centre the school principal as the central leader in the school. Notions of collaborative, consultative, distributed leadership necessitate that teachers also assume leadership roles. How then should academic programmes be structured to ensure that a spirit of critical leaderful practice centred on distributed leadership or the dispersal of leadership is translated into practice? Cascade models of knowledge, skills, values and attitude development have been critiqued for distorting and
watering down information to such an extent that they dilute the intention, purpose and substance of the programme. What are the alternatives for dispersal of educational leadership programmes?

The second question indicates a need for academic programmes to be directed away from a tendency to be ivory tower discourses that are decontextualized from the reality in which the trials, tribulations, challenges and joys and triumphs of school leadership occur. Would, perhaps, relocating school leadership training to school sites resolve the issue of who attends school leadership training, while also ensuring that academic programmes address the vernacular/local challenges experienced by specific schools following an action research paradigm? What are the infrastructural prerequisites that school site-based professional leadership development programmes require? Under what conditions would school site-based leadership be feasible and pragmatic?

The issues addressed by critical leaderful practices are crucial and relevant to the pressing contemporary challenges of school leadership identity. Discourses about and an understanding of leadership must be matched by a discourse about and understanding of the ethics, morality and spirituality of humane educative principles, of the praxis of democratic education, of the power relations of class, race and gender in education and some historical sense of the place of schooling in the formation of society. In these ways a critical scholarship of leaderful practice has the potential to meet the real needs of school leadership in contemporary society.

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Notes

1. Until 1991 South African law divided the population into four major racial categories: Africans (blacks), whites, coloureds and Asians. Although this law has been abolished, many South Africans still view themselves and each other according to these categories. Black Africans comprise about 79% of the population and are divided into a number of different ethnic groups. Whites comprise about 10% of the population. They are primarily descendants of Dutch, French, English and German settlers who began arriving at the Cape of Good Hope in the late seventeenth century. Coloureds are mixed race people primarily descended from the earliest settlers and the indigenous peoples. They comprise about 9% of the total population. Asians, descended from Indian workers brought to South Africa in the mid nineteenth century to work on the sugar estates in Natal, constitute about 2.5% of the population and are concentrated in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.

2. South Africa has 12.3 million learners, some 386,600 teachers and 26,292 schools, including 1098 registered independent or private schools. Of these schools approximately 6000 are high schools (Grades 7–12), with the rest being primary (Grades 0–6). In government funded public schools the average ratio of students (known as ‘learners’ in the terms of the country’s outcomes-based education system) to teachers (‘educators’) is 32.6 to 1, while private schools generally have 1 teacher for every 17.5 students (http://www.southafrica.info/ess_info_sa_glance/education/education.htm).
3. The statistics show that one in every four South African women, or 25%, are assaulted by their partner every week. The average age of girls who have been sexually abused is 11 years old (http://www.tricky.org/POWA/stats.htm). At a gathering organized jointly by the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa and ActionAid International in May 2006 to focus on the problem of gender violence in schools it was reported that girls in African schools are three times more likely to be abused than boys. Verbal and sexual abuse at the hands of male teachers, who often collude with male students, was one of the reasons for a high incidence of dropping out, pregnancy and HIV infection among girls. ActionAid studies announced at a conference in 2006 that across Africa and Asia girls' education was disrupted by the 'physical and emotional trauma, low self-esteem, anger, depression, anxiety, guilt, and hopelessness'. The findings also showed that girls were not encouraged to report abuse, and when they did they often experienced further victimization by teachers and parents or, in many cases, their allegations were dismissed. The dominance of a patriarchal system in the region was a major stumbling block. Rape is seen as illegitimate sex and, depending on the age of the abused girl, the community would frequently encourage the abuser, if a teacher, to marry the complainant because they perceive rape as an expression of love for the abused child (http://www.mopane-tree.com).

4. The level of unemployment in South Africa is 28% and approximately 60% of students who complete school cannot find jobs. Two out of every three South African women who are employed earn less than R500.00 (US$ 72) per month. In rural areas four out of every five South African women have no employment (http://www.tricky.org/POWA/stats.htm).

5. In the middle of 2006 it was estimated that seven million South Africans are living with HIV, with the highest prevalence rates among young people, especially teenage girls. This figure represents 11% of the national population of 48 million people. Since 1990 life expectancy in South Africa has fallen to below 50 years of age as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This life expectancy is 13 years lower than previously predicted for South Africa. Throughout South Africa the AIDS epidemic is affecting large numbers of adolescents, leading to serious psychological, social, economic and educational problems. When it is considered that 40% of the South African population is less than 15 years of age and that 15.64% of South African youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is infected with HIV, one recognizes that HIV/AIDS represents a devastating pandemic among the youth of South Africa. There were 885,000 AIDS orphans as of 2002 (Coombe 2002).

References


