

The New DEEL: A Path Toward More Authentic Leadership. Conceptualizing Leadership in Relation to Students' Role as Active Agents in Improving Learning

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The theoretical foundation underpinning this paper is the intersection of democracy and educational administration. Cementing the foundation is the spirit of the New DEEL (Democratic Ethical Educational Leadership), a movement advocating a liberating education, enabling students to make intelligent and moral decisions as future citizens. The paper advocates a transformational school structure which perceives leadership as a relational process of influence rather than hierarchical power. This relationship characterized as emancipatory democracy endeavors to utilize the potential of students as active agents in improving learning.

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The reader is encouraged to reflect on their teaching, their school and their students; and those successful times when they have rejoiced in the satisfaction of being an educator, their chosen profession, in contrast to the dark times when being an educational professional seemed a masochistic pursuit. Is one feeling beginning to

predominate? Is one side of the scales becoming increasingly weighty? Are the scales reaching their tipping point?

Many educators feel that the balance today is indeed unequal. To meet the challenge of reestablishing equilibrium, colleagues from leading UCEA members joined committed practitioners to take action (Shapiro, 2005. p.1). A movement known as Democratic Ethical Educational Leadership (The New DEEL) has evolved. The New DEEL is a dynamic and growing movement among educators who wish to promote democracy in schools, in higher education and in the wider community. Membership comes from educators who have a passion for the profession; who believe that concerns and issues articulated during informal sessions at national and international conferences have found an outlet in New DEEL. A movement that is prepared to confront issues of inequality, and injustice in the field (Storey & Beeman, 2006).

During the 2004-2005 academic year representatives from university faculty, administration, Superintendents and school practitioners representing the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK united under an umbrella of shared concerns to demonstrate how research, status, and influence can be utilized to transform our profession, taking democratic-ethical-educational-leadership (DEEL) into schools and the wider community.

Where does the balance lie?

The weight of accountability

The pressures of accountability are not unique to individual teachers, but emanate throughout the educational administration professorate and today's practitioners as they face increasing demands, in the current era of high-stakes testing and standardization.

Furthermore, pressures to conform to federal and state-wide education reform are forcing many educators to question their *raison d'être*. Teaching students to be good citizens and to take a full role in our democratic community is being overlooked as teacher priorities become influenced by efforts to raise student achievement on the high stakes tests (Beeman & Storey, 2006).

Shapiro (1979) refers to “accountability” as a disease that has metastasized over time. Although the term has become synonymous with the late twentieth century¹ it has been integral to the American system for centuries, specifically as a driver for school reform. Germs began to multiply back in the nineteenth century. Tyack, in describing the development of the “one best school system,” described the situation in Boston in 1844 where there was a feeling that because of the “haphazard evaluation of school” (Tyack, 1974, p.35) no one knew what teachers were doing or how to use available data to inform policy. Consequently, Samuel Gridley Howe (a friend and fellow-reformer of Horace Mann) and colleagues on the Boston school committee devised:

Uniform written tests for the top class in each of the grammar schools—a single standard by which to judge and compare the output of each school, “positive information, in black and white,” to replace the intuitive. (Tyack, 1974, p.35)

The use of data from standardized tests to drive school reform is just one strategy being increasingly advocated in recent years. The established education system has had to ensure that teachers understand the data and how to utilize it. School districts, schools and teachers have experienced increased stress as they have been critically pounded from both the public and private sector in their endeavor to respond to the rapid changes called for by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Many experienced teachers recognize

initiatives introduced with the best of intentions as “old wine in new skin,” rolled out again with enthusiasm to meet an evident need. Under the “halo effect” improvement may be referenced anecdotally and eventual empirical evidence produced to verify the program’s validity before the program leader leaves for fields and promotion anew and the program quietly dies. Or the funding runs out. Or a plateau of improvement is reached.

The weight of democracy

Democracy may be in various forms: Liberal Democracy, Conservative Democracy, Communitarian Democracy, etc. And subject to many interpretations in education. Its most common meaning is usually tied to the idea of the nation-state and the American version of democracy. Underpinning the framework of this paper is “emancipatory democracy.” Advocates of this theory argue for democratization through extending human rights to more people and to a wider set of social relations and institutions. Rights can both exclude and empower. In the emancipatory tradition, rights are seen as inclusive, thereby appearing to have a radical thrust.

How would such radicalism look in a school? Primarily, power and authority would be decentralized and participatory. In its broadest sense, emancipatory democracy is the whole process of changing power relations into relations of shared authority: a redistribution of power to influence decision-making, the involvement of the total school body in strategic planning and decision making, reminiscent of the approach promulgated by Dewey more than one hundred years ago (Luneburh & Ornstein, 2004) that schools that could prepare people to live within and maintain a healthy, democratic society.

At the beginning of the last century Dewey was focusing on meeting the needs of individual students. At the end of the century, Hargreaves (1997) built upon Dewey’s

ideas suggesting that the cultivation of “openness, informality, care and attentiveness, lateral working relationships, reciprocal collaboration, candid and vibrant dialogue, and the willingness to face uncertainty together” (Hargreaves, 1997, p.22) is a central purpose of schooling. In contrast to this rhetoric, the reality is that educators perceive the emphasis in schooling moving away from service and the personalizing of education to a more standard view of one fit for all. The unease is further reinforced by a feeling among the profession that there is a loss of voice at the grassroots level as the drive towards standardization gains impetus. For some, this unease has had a tangentially, beneficial effect. It acted as a catalyst, causing them to reflect, not only on what their students need to learn, but also on what they as teachers now feel compelled to teach in order for their students to succeed in the international arena.

Learning as the fulcrum

There is an emergent and articulated need to reculturate the profession, to promote democratic action using a moral framework, concentrating on people rather than measurable outcomes. To think not of reform within the current education system but to create a new system of personalized learning design which meets individual needs. To develop pedagogy that utilizes at its core recent technological and cognitive science advances, specifically focusing on a renewed understanding of how the brain develops and how individuals learn. Recent findings from research on learning, signpost roles for teachers that differ from their roles in the past. Education reform efforts in the United States cannot succeed without an effort to help teachers and administrators assume these new roles (Bransford, Brown, Cockings, 2000).

Adjusting the balance: Adding voice to both sides

The classic bureaucratic model of leadership is one where knowledge and expertise resides with those with power and authority, who then transmit to those on the lower rungs of the hierarchical ladder. In our model of emancipatory democracy, teachers adopt new leadership roles as do students. By adding both the voice of the teacher and the student to the scales, then by default, the school structure becomes one of distributive leadership “practice stretched over the school’s social and situational context” (Lumby, 2006). In this model (*see Figure 1*) leadership is perceived as a relational process of influence rather than hierarchical power and strengthens the possibility of recognizing the potential of students as leaders. Adoption of the model is more likely to ensure that schools are lead in a democratic and ethical manner. Although there are many different models of distributive leadership, taken together, they suggest that, not only is leadership distributed throughout the school, but that leadership “multiplies” through this type of interactions. In other words, leadership is not the purview solely of administrators, but also exercised by people in many positions (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002).

As teachers take on roles that might previously have been seen as beyond the scope of the regular classroom for which they were prepared, new understandings are evolving concerning democratic ethical administrations. Today, the transition from teacher to leader involves a shift in ‘cultural positioning’ wherein processes and procedures normally associated with the role of classroom teacher change, and subsequently, the teacher’s own perception of self, changes. Thus, teacher leadership has

the potential to upset the status quo within a school as roles become blurred or merged as evidence of sharedness become more avert.

This proposed transition may initially be viewed with suspicion by some teachers as they perceive their authority and power to be under threat. But many educators view such an approach as an exciting opportunity to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and student achievement in their school. This strategy appears innovative but in fact increasing the involvement of students in their learning is an approach which builds upon the rich traditions of previous decades.

At the beginning of the last century, Ella Flagg Young (John Dewey's colleague, and the first woman to become superintendent of a major American city school system), promoted teacher councils that empowered classroom faculty to share in power and decision-making (Webb & McCarthy 1998). Dewey's own work (1903), also, centered on the vital connection between education and democratic life (Shapiro, 2005, p.3). Educational leaders such as Alice Miel (1943) and Harold Rugg of Teachers College worked to build a new movement among educators termed democratic school administration. These foundations served education well and are evidenced in schools today where this ideology has been absorbed into and become an essential integer of school culture.

Adding weights to the scales: student voice

Democratic education also requires empowering children to participate in, and take responsibility for, their own learning (Shields, 2004). "It is argued that a perception of leadership as a relational process of influence rather than of hierarchical power strengthens the possibility of recognizing the potential of students as leaders" (McGregor,

2006, p.1). “Students themselves have a huge potential contribution to make, not as passive objects but as active players in the education system. ‘Students can and should participate, not only in the construction of their own learning environments, but as research partners in examining questions of learning and anything else that happens in and around schools.’”ⁱⁱ

New practice and emerging research knowledge indicates the potential for the student voice movement to transform education processes. Student voice covers a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students but also by implication, school staff and the communities they serve (Fielding & Mc Gregor, 2005). Recent research suggests that student voice can serve as a catalyst for change in schools, in relationships and teacher-education, and lead to moves in assessment, the curriculum and the organization of schools (McGregor, 2006; Mitra, 2005; Ruddock & Flutter, 2004; Macbeath et al, 2003; Levin, 2000). Such is the rapidly growing body of research literature (Fielding 2001) that the term ‘the new sociology of childhood’ has been coined to cover this area of research involving academics from across disciplines (McGregor, 2006).

Giving students a voice at the leadership and management level, i.e. the decision making table, on strategic planning augments the focus on equity; presenting opportunities to raise and discuss contentious issues thereby reducing issues of dissonance between teacher and student. This alternative way of conceptualizing leadership necessitates active teacher/student dialogue outside the classroom while not totally eliminating the perceived power roles collaborative dialogue does allow the student a degree of freedom to participate in school strategy and planning as an equal

partner (Fielding, 2002; Ruddock, & Flutter, 2004; Mitra, 2006). Involving students in strategic planning and the construction of their learning environment requires listening to their voices in a consultative capacity. It may involve: conversations about teaching and learning; seeking advice from students about new initiatives; inviting comment on ways of solving problems that are affecting the teacher's right to teach and the student's right to learn; inviting evaluative comment on recent developments in school or classroom policy and practice (Ruddick, 2006).

There are growing networks of schools that are actively working on ways to extend opportunities for students to be involved in school improvement projects: these range from one off consultations to ongoing participation in the cycle of school review and planning. Some schools have initiated new kinds of student governance via Student Councils and the allocation of formal student places on school committees and task groups. In addition many schools now routinely include students as part of the process of appointing new school staff (McGregor, 2006). In the UK students are encouraged to be school governors. The elections process is sophisticated. The essential aspect here is not necessarily that the student voice is being raised at the site management and leadership levels but that path ways are in place for the student governor to clearly communicate with fellow students; acting as a conduit. Putting forward issues of student concern and adding voice to ensure a two way dialogue is in place which facilitates involvement from the school body in relation to management and leadership, teaching and learning.

But why should educators want to listen to the voice of students when we have academics, practitioners and policy makers? In addressing the reason for engaging in dialogue with students, Noyes suggests that there may be greater receptivity to student

voice when “adults are more willing to critique prescribed policy and dominant...pedagogic practices” (Noyes, 2005, p.537). Taking up this point, Ruddock (2006), Director of the Economic & Social Research Council/ Teaching & Learning Research Program (ESRC/TLRP) Project: *Consulting Students about Teaching and Learning*, University of Cambridge, UK said that there are three predominant arguments generally referenced in support of student voice:

Argument 1: We need a better fit between young people’s capabilities and their standing and responsibility in school; talking to students can help us bridge the gap. The qualities that we look for in young people are those that participation and consultation can help develop.

Argument 2: The Children’s Rights movement is behind it and ‘everybody’s doing it!’

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the subsequent Children’s Act highlight the importance of young people having their say on matters that concern them, both in and out of school.

Argument 3: School improvement gains from student participation.

New research emanating from Australia examined the practice rather than the rhetoric of student educational participation (Thomson and Holdsworth, 2003). They argued that student participation most often meant either the involvement of an elite group of students in high profile governance, the sporadic consultation of students more generally through consultation or the engagement of students in danger of school and social exclusion in activities that re-engaged them in formal schooling. There was little equation in policy or practice of the notion of student participation or ‘voice’ as integral

to school ‘capacity-building’ – and even less knowledge of the debates about what ‘capacities’ might actually be. A warning frequently reiterated (Fielding, 2005; Mitra, 2006; McGregor, 2006) that schools must guard against involving only those students who speak the same language as teachers. There is an obvious need to guard against the inclusion of a few “elite voices.”

Fielding in his review of the literature came to the conclusion that “work on student voice is at an interesting crossroads” (p.100). He suggests that the movement to increase student voice has a dual capacity to either reinforce the current *status quo*, or “develop genuinely transformative practices that offer the possibility of more creative, more fulfilling alternatives” (p.100). He presents two different scenarios for increasing the advocacy of student voice:

***In the first scenario:** the student becomes the voice of the customer disciplining the teacher into the pre-ordained, imperfectly internalized competences of government edict and market responsiveness. Here the rigors of performance culture deepen the accountability and responsiveness of teachers as pedagogic technicians and sustain a notion of students as the collectors of educational products (test results, certificates, saleable skills) that ‘add value’ to their employment prospects (Fielding, p.107).*

***In the second scenario:** teachers and students: go beyond what is currently required to create a quite different present, a present that has within it a future that is more securely centered on the development of persons in and through community, rather than the growth of consumers in and through the market. Insofar as students and teachers do this together, their practices are ‘transitive’,*

transgressive, emancipatory, creative of quite different realities to those we are currently required emulating (Fielding, p.108).

While Fielding advocates strongly for a communal transformative model of student voice he suggests that the need for implementation of supporting systems maybe an inhibiting factor and that in the era of accountability the model of student quality management will dominate.

Mitra (2006) in her advocacy of student voice envisages students working with administrators and teachers to co-create school reform (p.7). Recent evidence from her research suggests that such involvement enables students to meet their own developmental needs and strengthens student ownership of the change process. By building student capacity for leadership young people are able to work with teachers, administrators and members of their local community to co-create the path of reform, it enables students to meet their own developmental needs, and strengthens the understanding of the community for the values espoused by the school. It is envisioned that an outcome of the developing synergy will be to enhance pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, teacher training, and school culture.

A recent project in the UK, Networked Learning Communities (NLC) program was financed and managed by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). NLCs are described by McGregor (2006) as:

Clusters of six or more schools who have voluntarily joined together in a four year development and enquiry project to enhance the quality of pupil learning, professional development and school-to-school learning through collaborative enquiry –oriented approaches.

In total 1533 schools with a teacher population of over 235,000 and a student population of over 500,000 were involved in the project, and were representative of all state schools in England. Early analysis of cohort one networks suggested that networks of schools were engaging with different aspects of student voice. An outcome welcomed by the Networked Learning Group (NLG), who supported and developed the NLC program. NLG are advocates for the “potentially transformative power of pupil voice in networked learning, school improvement and to the democratic possibilities this engenders (McGregor, 2006, p.2). Dudley, Hadfield and Carter (2003) found that NLCs:

Show a rapidly growing organizational ability to listen and respond collaboratively to the perspectives of pupils in evaluating and designing their learning.

Dudley, Hadfield and Carter premise that a growing capacity for change is a likely outcome as educators increase their organization knowledge and understanding of what students believe really facilitates their learning. A greater understanding of learning styles, teaching styles and classroom management is likely to be of benefit to both student and educator.

McGregor (2006 p.3) reports that the first NLC Cohort (84 schools) 41% identified student voice as “a strong feature of their plans for networked learning ... and reported a significant amount of pupil involvement.

- Questionnaires inviting pupil perceptions;
- The encouragement of feedback on teaching and learning;
- Conferences run by and for young people;
- Pupil visits to other schools;

- Enquiries in which pupils acted as researchers or co-researchers.”

In all of the above activities the students are active respondents (Fielding, 2002). As a result of increased dialogue and interactions students are providing teachers with a better understanding of how they are learning. The development of new roles for students as peer mentors, buddies, teachers, researchers and ambassadors both in and between schools may further facilitate new student leadership roles and the opportunity to include their voice in strategic school planning dialogue.

The New DEEL: Letting our voice be heard

The New DEEL asks educational leaders to return to the historical mandate of the public schools to prepare citizens for participation in a democratic society. It also goes beyond that mandate by asking educational leaders to create schools that prepare *all* students to be intelligent and thoughtful citizens who are able to make wise, ethical decisions” (Shapiro, 2005. p.8). New DEEL’s mission is to:

Create an action-oriented partnership, dedicated to inquiry into the nature and practice of democratic, ethical educational leadership through sustained processes of open dialogue, right to voice, community inclusion, and responsible participation toward the common good. The group strives to create an environment to facilitate democratic ethical decision-making in educational theory and practice which acts in the best interests of all students. (Shapiro, 2005)

New DEEL does not refer to a specific policy or reform but rather to an ideology, unrestricted by international borders and domestic politics. Those committed to New DEEL have met together several times to wrestle with the question posed by Gross and Shapiro (2006). “Are educators in the 21st Century merely cogs in the wheel of the

accountability movement or is there a bolder and much more profound path to take?" Through New DEEL educators can be assured that as they follow the rough path rather than the established road their voices will be heard so that future teaching and learning once again implements a teaching and learning model that "prepares *all* students to be intelligent and thoughtful citizens who are able to make wise, ethical decisions" (Shapiro, 2006).

It may seem a daunting task but ideology is what moves people forward. It inspires actions which we might never have thought ourselves capable of. It requires vision, trust, confidence, stamina and indeed bravery as the New DEEL is likely to make some professionals uncomfortable. It demands that individual values and beliefs are questioned. It entails a commitment to proselytize the message through conference presentations, journal publications, and policy papers to ensure a growing and supportive network. Finally, it compels all those committed to the New DEEL vision to ensure that the values, voices, and scholarship of social justice permeate all actions, both personal and professional (Storey & Beeman, 2006).

Inevitably this requires a paradigm shift in ideology but New DEEL advocates articulate the need for a radical review of the system and structure of schooling, and to reconceptualizes pedagogy as learner-centered. We propose constructing new organizational possibilities to enhance active involvement for the whole school body to ensure all feel involved or represented in the leading and forward strategic planning of their school, personalizing teaching and learning to the student body. Each student will be presented with the opportunity to become involved in the process of decision making relating to their school and their personal learning, and of critically examining choices in

their learning process, personal expectations, interpersonal relationships, and personal lives.

While this may be regarded as transformational it is not unrealistic. The implementation of such structures will expand the notion of pedagogy from the four walls of the classroom to become a personalized, school-wide learning strategy. There is however a sense of urgency as a worrying concern is whether teachers entering the profession today, under the umbrella of NCLB, are equipped with the necessary skills and mindset to implement New DEEL ideology. Transformation unfortunately is hard work and often the tyranny of the urgent impedes collective thinking.

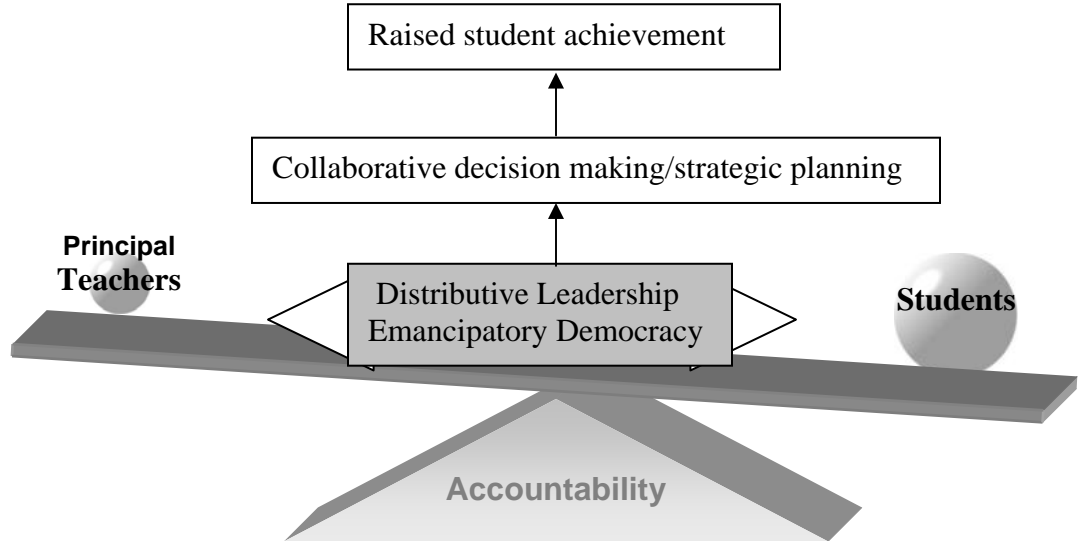
Conclusion

This paper emphasizes the need to realign the balance within education. It speaks to the importance of creating empowering opportunities for all members of the school body to engage in leadership activities designed to ensure that their voices are heard and that they make a strong contribution to strategic planning and the core activity of teaching and learning in their school. Consultation is never easy: it challenges traditional power relationships and both teachers and students may be uncertain what the boundaries are.

Advocates of New DEEL have a shared responsibility to make their voices heard, to re-establish an equilibrium within our schools. It is imperative that those involved in the preparation of school leaders participate in the dialogue to ensure that new ideas are discussed and implemented on a wide basis in the effort to prepare students to be democratic citizens. Challenging existing education structures and demonstrating how research, status, and influence can be utilized to transform our profession, and reassign democratic values to their rightful place, the heart of education.

Figure 1.

New DEEL in schools



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ⁱ *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), *America 2000* (1993) and *No Child Left Behind* (2002) were all influential in highlighting the need to hold educators accountable.

ⁱⁱ Fielding, M, and Bragg, S, *Students as researchers: making a difference*, Pearson, Cambridge, 2003.