SWiFT
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Research to Practice Brief:

Anti-Racist Solidarity and Educational Leadership

This brief summarizes the following article:

10 Point Paradigm Connection: Collective Identity

The concept of collective identity emphasizes the importance of solidarity, collective strength, and coalition building among social groups in order to establish empowering educational systems, while still critically acknowledging the role that intersectionality, privilege, and power play in society and in students' lives.

In their article, Genao et al. (2021) make the case that much of the work in the areas of community and coalition building among diverse groups tends to follow color-evasive (color blind) approaches and centers the needs and experiences of those in power (i.e., white people). Therefore, in order to better prepare school leaders for today's socio-political climate, the authors call for the reconceptualization of solidarity as work that is committed

to anti-racism and centers the identities of those most marginalized.

Research Summary

What

For diverse groups to collectively work toward shared goals, acknowledging and challenging ongoing injustices in the U.S. schooling system that affects some students more than others is important. School leaders and other partners need to engage in critical self-reflection and work together to try to ensure that their schools are disrupting larger patterns of inequity seen in society.

Anti-racist solidarity is defined by Genao et al. (2021) as humanizing practices that bring people together to improve the schooling conditions of all students, while re-envisioning community as a collective that acknowledges differences across groups and interrogates racist practices. While the authors specifically draw out the importance of anti-Blackness and critical race theory (CRT) in solidarity work, they also make the case that these concepts can be applied to other multiracial and diverse contexts where people are working to create spaces of freedom and justice. This new form of solidarity pushes against divisiveness among racial and other intersectional groups that is a direct consequence of the legacy of colonialism, and argues that everyone benefits from the common goal of challenging anti-Blackness and other forms of oppression.

Who

This article focuses on school leadership preparation programs and the need to better prepare principals and other educational leaders who are committed to solidarity work with their diverse school communities.

How

This theoretical piece applies the concepts of anti-racism and solidarity to effective, equity-centered school leadership practices. Although not a formal study, the authors draw from the research on identity and coalition building and several examples of initiatives doing this work in school settings. Examples include forming committees whose purpose is to implement schoolwide anti-racism initiatives and developing a collective mission committed to justice and equity to which all school community members are accountable. This work can also be supported by outside community resources, critical readings, and close alignment to strategic plans and assessments aimed at improving the schooling conditions of marginalized students.

Major Findings

Key findings in the article that connect to leadership practices include:

1. **Anti-racist leadership requires building coalitions across multiracial communities *while* understanding the varying identities and stakes for those involved.** The transformation of schools to become more equitable spaces that move away from racial and other forms of division depends on *everyone* in the school community taking active roles in the shared goal of student success and empowerment. However, the authors warn that "an uncareful insistence of communion can mask the differential risks of cross racial alliance and political action for people of color as opposed to Whites" (p. 132). People of color and other intersectional identities (women, Queer people, immigrants, and marginalized communities) historically suffered greater professional and personal consequences for speaking up and working toward racial and other forms of justice. School leaders can recognize

the power differentials across diverse communities and consider the real and perceived risks those with minoritized backgrounds may be contemplating that may inhibit their initial participation in coalition building. To avoid color-evasize approaches to their practices, the authors suggest that leaders carefully challenge the ways that larger societal hierarchies or power dynamics impact their schools and community efforts.

2. **A new humanizing vision of solidarity and community that acknowledges differences in people's existing knowledge and experiences is needed.** Current practices of solidarity and community-building across diverse communities in schools often do not recognize or address the varying schooling experiences and knowledge of those involved. School leaders can move to recognize how racial and other intersectional identities (e.g., gender, ability, sexual orientation, immigration status) affect community members' views on schooling systems and how these communities might provide unique insights into developing more equity-centered policies and practices. Leaders can work to center the voices of those most affected by inequitable schooling and societal conditions in their coalition-building.

3. **School leaders must be prepared with the knowledge and skills to engage in anti-racist solidarity work with others.** Effective leadership preparation and development includes learning about the ways that educational systems affect the lives of Black and other minoritized student populations. However, many school leaders feel inadequately prepared with the necessary tools to help lead anti-racist initiatives or conversations with their school communities and fear

making mistakes. Knowing the importance of anti-racist solidarity, school leaders can actively engage in self reflection and in their own [un]learning and education to mitigate the risk of upholding damaging color-evasive practices that, by default, center whiteness.

Conclusion

The authors demonstrate the importance of school leaders engaging in critical solidarity work with community members. Three key implications are suggested for school leaders. First, school leaders (and preparation programs) can build upon their skill sets to engage in deep-dive inquiry practices to learn about the histories of Black and other intersectional identities, and examine the ways that their schools may be inherently reproducing larger social inequities. Second, school leaders can facilitate and engage other staff and faculty in these shared practices to re-envision a school community that is humanizing and serves all students. This work requires setting clear parameters around expectations, trust, accountability, and community building. Lastly, leaders can leverage pedagogy and resources to invite all members of the school community to take part in larger conversations around equity and justice for the shared vision of student success, while ensuring they center the voices of those most at the margins at their schools. The authors make the case that while these conversations may at times be challenging and bring up feelings of discomfort, they are necessary to move toward humanizing, collective coalition building among communities.

Additional Reference

Genao, S. (2021). Recasting solidarity: A call for radical engagement and academic unification. *International Journal of*

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