

Going against the Grain: Challenges to Peaceful Leadership Styles in A K-12/University Partnership

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Abstract

This article shares and examines the challenges, findings, and lessons learned associated with embracing peaceful leadership styles during the first two years of a partnership between a failing K-12 urban school district and a university in the United States. The ongoing daily leadership issues that influenced, but were beyond the scope of, the partnership are also explored. Through the individual and collective lens of six educational leaders (K-12 and higher education) who embraced leadership feminist practices embedded in structures of difference, Buddhist philosophies, equity, and social justice, this study examines and illustrates the administrative efforts associated with “going against one’s grain” when faced with the proverbial brick wall.

Keywords: Peace education, Leadership, Community, School reform, Learning environments

1. Introduction

1.1 *Going Against the Grain:*

Challenges to Peaceful Leadership Styles in a K-12/University Partnership

Freedom without opportunity is a devil’s gift (Chomsky, 1997).

Very soon, the baby boom generation of teachers around the world is going to be retiring. No matter how many teachers graduate from colleges of education in the next few years, it won’t be enough to meet the projected shortage. This fact, combined with rapidly changing technologies that continue to link and “flatten” the world, lead to questions about teacher education. Are we ready to change how we go about educating students to meet

the world's demographic shifts and economic needs? Are we ready to support our communities, parents, businesses, and classroom teachers by developing creative local partnerships? And are we ready to truly support women in leadership roles in the educational system?

In February 2005, six female educational leaders in the United States accepted the challenge implicit in some of these questions – focusing on how to promote change in a failing urban school district while embracing peaceful leadership styles that included practices of inclusion, equity, and honoring differences. The six teamed up to create an ongoing partnership with a K-12 (kindergarten through high school) school district in a Midwestern city. This partnership has continued to evolve in the intervening years and is still underway.

The individuals involved in its original creation included the dean, a professor, and an administrator from a local major university's school of education and human services; the dean and a professor from a college of education on the other side of the state; and the superintendent of the school district.

The urban school district had been hit hard by years of economic decline. By the time the local university campus "adopted" the school district in 2005, it had accumulated a track record of five years of documented failure under the requirements of the national No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

Under the partnership, professors and students from the local university work closely with administrators, teachers, staff, students, and families in the school district to enhance the curriculum, conduct research, create professional development opportunities for teachers, and develop programs that promote student success. Since the partnership began, the leaders from the college of education on the other side of the state have provided an "objective lens" through which the entire program can be professionally evaluated by peers and improved.

Within the first two years of its existence – the period of time for the study examined in this article – the partnership became a crucible for studying the possibilities and problems associated with the leadership styles of the six women leading the partnership. Could a school district with significant problems demonstrably improve its student outcomes under a peaceful, collaborative leadership model that would go against the grain of previous traditional approaches to change management?

The issue of peaceful, embracing leadership came to the forefront when we, as the partnership team, began focusing on the specific needs of the adopted school district and the university faculty resources necessary to support the initiative. Issues related to race, ongoing and seemingly endless collective bargaining, school violence, urban socioeconomic realities, shockingly low graduation rates, high dropout rates, and five years of failing AYP (adequate yearly progress) under NCLB painted the backdrop for the challenge. Apparently insurmountable, yet exciting, possibilities for real change became the motivation for the partnership.

We began specific initiatives that supported and embraced difference, inclusion, and voice. They included new teacher-leadership curriculum committees, town meetings, university faculty advisory boards, "brown bag" lunch meetings, and university faculty/K-12 teacher co-taught courses. We established practices that included equity of voices from across the heretofore traditional university and K-12 hierarchies. Traditional definitions of student achievement and student success were deconstructed, with practices of "what could be" taking their place.

The dream of "what could be" proved to be much more fun and promising in theory than its counterpart: reality. As the project began and open town meetings occurred (which included the K-12 school district, university, and community), stridency ruled the day in a barrage of historically-driven negativity. As administrators and teachers worked side by side to embrace collaborative styles of leadership and move toward change, feelings of losing control moved some leaders away from the peaceful leadership styles they wanted to utilize. The lure of "I'm going to have to pull rank to get things accomplished" was very strong. In fact, as faculty, teachers, guardians, and others on the sidelines became frustrated with what seemed to be the unending "voice of equity" process, they began to push their administrator to maintain traditional control. Their stance was, "Why don't you just use the power of your position and put an end to all this?"

What we often neglected to consider was the context and events that were occurring beyond the partnership. While extraneous to the initiative itself, daily realities often intruded, creating an intensity that overwhelmed all other decisions (e.g., two of our educational leaders were going through their institution's NCATE accreditation review). Ultimately, the partnership added layers of unimaginable political dynamics that helped to complicate daily decision-making.

Winston Churchill once stated, "We are shaping the world faster than we can change ourselves, and we are applying to the present the habits of the past." In an effort to resist falling back on traditional hierarchical

leadership patterns, we took to heart Fullen's (2001) statement that "the key to developing leadership is to develop knowledge and share it" (p. 132). Gardner (1995) states that:

The less well defined the domain, the institution, or the constituency, the more necessary it is for the exemplary leader to invent a life for herself [*sic*], to reflect on its implications, and then to share the resultant stories with others. (p. 287).

Thus, keeping in mind Fullen's and Gardner's push toward inclusion and the transparent sharing of stories, this article is meant to help inform best practices as the initiative's partnership and leadership efforts continue.

2. Theoretical Framework

In embracing individual leadership styles based on equity, difference, social justice, and Buddhist principles, it was not surprising those involved also held similar research perspectives for the study that emerged from the first two years of this university/K-12 partnership. Collectively, the theoretical frameworks used in this study included organizational theory, sociolinguistics, feminist theory, change theory, Eastern philosophies, postmodern theory, critical theory, and constructivist positions.

To an amazing degree, all of these frameworks demonstrated how individual roles affect and/or are affected by the "other" (e.g., systems, language in use, gender, agency, positioning of power versus notions of force, empowerment, and difference). But they also offered distinctive variations that allowed for the inclusion of crucial questions. For example, how did the language used by the administration affect the implementation of the peace initiative? Which administrative leadership frame(s) was primarily utilized for decision-making? In what ways was difference supported and/or constrained throughout the reform process?

Bahktin (1986) and his works on language in use helped guide our beliefs that inclusionary practices require dialogic rather than monologic consideration. Organizational theorists Bolman and Deal (1997) provide frameworks for considering leadership styles and problem-solving (e.g., managers are most consistently associated with a structural orientation, while leadership effectiveness is consistently associated with an orientation toward symbols and politics). Morgan (1986) shares that organizations are cultures. Fullen (2001), Weber (1947), Senge et al (2000), and others offer additional ideas for reform and/or changing a culture.

But the theory that became the overarching framework for this study was that of peace education, or what is often referred to as supportive learning communities. Ultimately a cultural pursuit, peace education incorporates personal peacemaking, teaching peace, and living with peace. It includes an examination of personal values and how they contribute to respect, open-mindedness, empathy, and social justice. Peace education contains four core elements: (a) community/family involvement, (b) standards/measures to support continuous improvement, (c) systematic approaches to support safety and positive behavior, and (d) building a supportive learning community (Learning First Alliance, 2001).

Although it was perhaps a counter-intuitive choice for a violent, poverty-stricken environment, peace education was the guiding framework that accommodated the primary goal defined in the university's "adoption" of the failing school district: to help create a sustainable, peaceful learning community so that students could succeed. The Learning First Alliance (2001) states that "schools which students experience as safe and supportive will be more successful at promoting student achievement and developing such qualities as good character and citizenship" (p. vii).

In brief, research (Resnick et al, 1997; Verdugo & Schneider, 1999; Gottfredson, 2001; Shouse, 1996) shows that by providing the core elements for safe and supportive learning environments, academic motivation and achievement are likely outcomes. Research on safe and supportive learning environments (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Stigler & Heibert, 1999; Ragland et al, 1999) also shows that increased student learning is obtained when the entire school community embraces collective responsibility for developing and meeting educational goals.

3. Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Approach

This study's focus was primarily on leadership practices related to the development of K-12 school reform initiatives that modeled, implemented, and sustained positive and safe learning environments. The study included an analysis of daily leadership practices in conjunction with and/or beyond the school partnership itself. We determined that the best methodology for this two-year study was a mixed-mode or mixed-methods approach that focused on systems theory/cultural (i.e., anthropological) systems (Patton, 1990). We considered this approach useful for this study because it helped to make sense of the relational and qualitative types of data used.

A systems theory approach begins with the underlying idea that a system is not an independent entity. For example, systems theory recognizes that one part of a system (e.g., a peace curriculum) cannot be separated from other parts (e.g., school policy). The nature and consequences of one part affects and depends on what is happening to and within the other parts. This approach also begins with the understanding that the parts of a system are wholly interconnected and interdependent, rather than a simple cause-effect analysis.

Denzin (1989) states that one of the many functions of theory is to focus inquiry. In turn, findings from research often suggest new problems that help lead to new theories and/or refinement. Thus, in this study we used theory to guide the inquiry and as a method to compare findings. Grounded theory was used in the field to triangulate the findings. Data were continually analyzed against each other so as to substantiate their validity, truthfulness, and integrity.

Denzin (1989) also discusses four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation – the triangulation of data sources; (b) investigator triangulation – the use of multiple observers/data collectors; (c) theoretical triangulation – the use of multiple theoretical perspectives in research analysis and/or data collection; and (d) methodological triangulation – the use of multiple methods of data collection and data analysis. We used all four types of triangulation in this study, with a primary focus on three of the four: (a) data triangulation (content analysis, domain analysis, leadership decision-making framework analysis); (b) theoretical triangulation (organizational theory, leadership theory, political theory); and (c) methodological triangulation (multiple methods of obtaining data, including observations, interviews, and documents).

3.2 Data Sources

In this study we used a combination of data collection methods, primarily to ensure the integrity of our findings (i.e., through triangulation and repeated patterns), but also to gain a broader perspective from across the partnership's stakeholders. The data collection methods included: (a) documents (school, state, and national policies; minutes of relevant meetings), (b) field notes, (c) ethnographic interviews, (d) formal and informal observations, (e) process observations (outside observers), (f) journaling, and (g) anecdotal records (stories from the field, reflections, and dialogues).

As leaders engaged in this K-12 school district/university partnership, we met frequently to guide, consider, problem-solve, argue, and make decisions about issues and concerns within the partnership and about leadership in general. A plethora of other meetings occurred, including town meetings, faculty and curriculum meetings, workshops, dinners, lunches, professional development meetings, conferences, and board meetings. Although time-consuming, this created many opportunities for data collection. We met regularly to share, reflect, and sometimes grumble about what we had inadvertently said – or to laugh about what someone had said or done in the public forum. But discussion would always return to the peaceful leadership practices (or lack thereof) we were trying to embrace and model as we worked for school reform.

Field notes, journals, observation forms, anecdotal records, and other documents were individually collected in agreed-upon formats, and then shared at a weekly meeting. Records of events were also recorded on agreed-upon forms (e.g., shared data charts and tables). These also were shared and discussed at the weekly meetings.

3.3 Data Analysis

Anthropological comparative methods, under a cultural systems approach, were used for the data analysis (Agar, 1980; Denzin, 1989; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Analysis was an ongoing feature of the study. It began in the field and continued after the field work was brought to a conclusion. This allowed for greater triangulation throughout the study, bringing in our individual perspectives.

Spradley (1980) states that “analysis is a search for patterns” (p. 85) that exist in the data. A cultural domain analysis was the first step of data analysis for this study, so we could learn how those within the culture defined its elements. Content analysis of the study's documents was used primarily as a form of validation in comparison to all of the other types of data (e.g., oral conversation, theoretical). According to Smith (1989), the purpose of content analysis is “to identify the presence or absence of patterns, tendencies or recurring themes” (p. 66). We held to Smith's statement, using content analysis to help confirm or refute findings from participant observations.

3.4 Results and Findings

Bolman & Deal (1997) provide a four-frame organizational perspective of what leaders might consider when making decisions: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Within this structure, we first collected our decisions and then considered which frame(s) we might have considered or omitted in those decisions.

For example, when we found ourselves stridently resisting attempts toward holistic, peaceful leadership styles of decision-making, we clearly saw that we had omitted the human resource, symbolic, and political frames – opting for the easy but top-down structural approach. We recognized that using one frame significantly influenced the other frames if that frame was used for a foundational decision. As one example, the superintendent of the adopted school district firmly stated repeatedly that the students were her priority, thus using the human resource frame. She made all budget, curriculum, and schedule decisions (i.e., structural frame) with them foremost in mind. With the students in the center of her decisions, she used the symbolic and political frames to enhance and strengthen her resolve and commitment to the students through her decisions.

During the study, however, we learned that even using the same frame as a main referent for decision-making did not automatically bring cohesion and agreement. The understanding of a frame had many different permutations across our six study group members. One person's idea of a student-centered decision often was in direct opposition to another's. For example, one of the study group members stated that, to be truly student-centered, all classroom equipment and resources should be appropriate to the age level. The superintendent's version of the human resource frame was that AYP and student success were paramount; the rest would have to follow as the budget allowed. We thus learned that priorities and various constraints tilted the frames toward entirely different outcomes, even when our ideas were similar.

We also examined various elements of our own decision-making process, trying to determine what types of decisions and occurrences forced us to think and act “against the grain” personally. Specifically, when did each of us feel cornered into making the type of decision we typically fought against? To do this, we examined our theoretical assumptions individually and as a group (“What beliefs do we share in common?”). We also discussed what had brought us to our current positions of leadership (“Why do we do what we do?”).

In general, during the creation of the partnership itself and throughout the study it generated, we examined what we did and why we did it. As previously mentioned, we explored questions relating to how language affected the implementation of the peace initiative, which leadership frames were utilized for decision-making, and how difference was supported or constrained.

Specifically, as leaders involved in a high-stakes need for school reform, we wanted a better understanding of what moments moved us to go against our grain in decision-making. Ultimately, we learned that we went against our grain in the following seven circumstances.

(1) We went against our grain when busyness consumed the day with do, do, and do more, and when the purpose of what we did and why we did it became of little importance.

The failing AYP school district had many critical needs in terms of change and professional development, so meeting agendas typically included 15 or more items for action or discussion. Too often, after the extended discussions needed to make difficult decisions, the meeting ended before achieving conclusion on more than two of the agenda items. This meant that administrative issues fell even further behind. It was noted by the superintendent of the school district that:

Our system is archaic. We move at a snail's pace, so when the university enters and does what they label “little things” (e.g., ongoing math professional development) or little changes, it's monumental to us because it's a forward movement. We are so into busyness that the little positive changes become huge forces for possibility.

For the university-based participants, the time involved in organizing the logistics of the partnership was overwhelming. Within the university setting, communication most often means quick responses via e-mail regarding calendar negotiations. The amount of time involved in obtaining responses from busy school administrators and teachers was a surprise. Success for engaging communication between the partnership constituencies was heavily impaired due to the lack of time.

(2) We went against our grain when busyness forced reactive decisions. We often felt forced to do reactive decision-making rather than actively embracing decisions.

We found that reactive decision-making became necessary when busyness consumed the day, further frustrating our attempts at an alternative, proactive, positive decision-making process. We learned that we moved to reactive decisions when trying to stanch wounds, putting bandages over urgent situations that we knew needed far better responses. These types of reactive decisions were frightening because they forced us toward the status quo, but no real solutions.

(3) We went against our grain when the partnership offered up its own difficulties within the study group.

The six of us often held differing viewpoints on actions and decisions. But even when we held different frames initially, we came to find heated discussions as vital to the process – forcing us out of those individual frames.

For example, in the partnership it was agreed to begin an experimental classroom with a focus on peace. Five elementary teachers volunteered, and the project was begun in collaboration with the university faculty expert on peace education. As the faculty member began to develop closer ties with the teachers and listened to their stories, she began to question the motives and actions of the superintendent during our research study group meetings. While these moments were often tense, the superintendent stated repeatedly how valuable it was to have the university faculty member's views to help keep her grounded. The superintendent stated:

I can't help but think how meaningful this is to me when I sit with 26 other administrators who pontificate on education in meaningless ways. This partnership and [research study] group is the kind of dialogue we need to be having with schools of education whether we are in partnership or not.

While the partnership was primarily focused on helping a failing school district, a surprising amount of struggle occurred within the study group as the university members began to learn about the frustrating details of working through non-university barriers. They began to understand the complexities of federal regulations for school meals, budget line limitations, union/contractual issues, school board politics, public complaints, and other issues. The question, "Why don't you just...?" soon became seen as a stupid question.

(4) We went against our grain when we began to understand that policies and legislation often create deficit-only opportunities.

The one question that, in many ways, began the partnership remains unanswered: how could a school district remain on the "in trouble," take-over list for five years with no state response? While trying to avoid sounding paranoid, somewhere after the end of the first year of the partnership, we began to wonder if the school district involved had been expected to fail. More than two years later, we still can find no conclusive answers. But recently, a question emerged from the area's Intermediate School District (ISD – the county-based educational system governing authority), asking the local university dean if the adopted school district had yet been asked by a neighboring school district to consolidate with them. Inquiries have not led us to answers, but the notion of consolidation into another district keeps surfacing enough to make us wonder.

What occurs if such a school district does emerge from its failing status? All the extra resources (e.g., professional development, consultants, and content specialists) are removed that were initially given to help the district achieve AYP. So, just as a district achieves AYP, the very funds that have helped it meet the necessary scores under NCLB suddenly are gone, leaving a district even more in need than when they were failing. The absurdity of this actually led us to wonder if we should attempt to keep the district in the failing category for one or two more years. We saw that we would need a clear, long-term strategy to not just reach AYP, but to remain successful.

A change in the definition of the poverty index created another type of deficit model. The definition was changed from including only the populations eligible for free and reduced-fee lunches within a school district, to including the entire district's population. This kind of poverty index redefinition limits the availability of grant dollars, regardless of the poverty level of the school district. In theory, if a district is poor, more monies are available. However, the dollars are short-term only, and they are ear-marked for specific things that are often irrelevant to the needs of the district. Then, even if the school district manages to improve, because the monies are one-time only, the school district is unable to reapply.

Poverty has been noted as dictating the level of a student's success in learning. NCLB, in saying that all students are to perform at the same level, creates a contradictory reality for failing school districts, because the Act allows for no distinction between socioeconomic classes. In essence, NCLB ignores the differing needs of school districts with high numbers of students living in poverty.

(5) We went against our grain when we saw that backlash to social justice issues, such as race, gender, and social class, is endemic and embedded, both personally and through legislation.

The African-American female superintendent in our partnership experienced direct backlash as both a female administrator and as a superintendent of color. A representative from the state's teachers union was heard to say, "She came in and brought in all black administrators." After the superintendent was hired, two openings for school principals occurred in the district. Search committees were formed, which included community members, teachers, and school board members. Finalists were selected – all African-American – and two were subsequently hired. Regardless of the search committees' work, the African-American superintendent was accused of reverse racism, even though three other administrators were white, and even though another white principal was added during year two.

The school district involved in this partnership has a student population living in significant poverty. For example, the stated percentage of high school students in poverty (which is known to be under-reported) is 61%. The middle school student poverty percentage is 78%, and the two elementary schools are 78% and 80%. Yet, because of the redefinition of the poverty index, the overall district is rated at only 16.4%. This falls short of the 20% requirement needed for additional fiscal funding. Apparently, social class is no longer considered to be an issue, regardless of the needs of the students.

Cultural and social incongruity has occurred in the school district through many decades, often causing racial barriers and tensions between the teachers and staff and the community. Currently, fewer than 5% of the teachers live in the school district, which is 85% African-American. Well over 90% of the teachers are white. Although the district experiences a 55% turnover, the racial/socioeconomic teacher makeup has remained the same through the decades. The community has high respect for many of the teachers, but some of the teachers quite openly express their dismay at what can be done for the children of poverty or impoverished educational backgrounds.

(6) We went against our grain when we were confounded by unexpected barriers in our attempts to do the simplest good things on behalf of the students.

When the superintendent was hired, she was asked to be a change agent. At the time she felt she could do good things for the school district. As she came up against unexpected brick walls, she was determined to meet with, and enlist the help of, experts at the local university. After receiving positive signals from the university, she went to the school board to ask if a partnership could be supported. But the state teachers union was against it. (In one newspaper article, a union representative stated that the resulting student teachers would be used to replace tenured classroom teachers.)

The superintendent then requested that a lawyer be hired who would help create an experimental program, using a law which states that school districts have the right to create experimental pilot programs. This move ultimately allowed the partnership to be created, but it initially antagonized some of the union members with whom we had to partner. As we examined this against-the-grain decision, it seemed like we were using a negative political frame to impose a structural frame, so that the human resource frame (for students) could be positively affected.

We also went against our grain when we felt we had to perform within what we came to call the “tyranny of civility” (the cultural context) in our workplace, rather than just being directly honest. This became tiring and depleting because we found ourselves softening the message, making it less direct, and experiencing feelings of more dishonest approaches – while always smiling.

One example of this tyranny of civility was found within the local university itself. The university’s school of education had asked, for six years, for the arts and sciences college to make a change in a math course for education students, all to no avail. When the school of education finally invoked a university policy that allowed it to bring the course under its wing due to lack of responsiveness by the math department, the school of education was called “nefarious.” It was told, “That’s not how we do things around here.”

(7) We went against our grain as we wondered if many of these types of decisions were difficult because they went against a gendered acceptance of norm.

In fact, we continue to watch and wonder about this. But within the scope of this study, we saw that males often seemed to approach our own against-our-grain type of decisions as more personally normal and less abrasive. While we are keenly aware of the literature on gendered decision-making, this emergent finding has become a topic for future study or consideration.

4. Discussion

As the researchers and framers of this study, we found that when we felt forced to make “against our grain” decisions, it was usually because we were caught up in the framework of busyness or doing (i.e., to “do” is to be “productive”). Such decisions and/or actions proved to be depleting, at best. Doing and being busy makes us good producers, but it doesn’t tend to help us provide or move toward real agencies of knowledge.

Apple (1999) calls this “intensification” and says of it:

Intensification is one of the most tangible ways in which the working conditions of teachers have eroded. It has led people to cut corners so that what is essential to the task immediately at hand is accomplished. It forces people to rely on “experts” to tell them what to do and to begin to mistrust the expertise they may have developed over the years. In the process, quality is sacrificed for quantity. Getting work done is substituted for work well done. And as time itself becomes a scarce commodity, isolation grows, thereby reducing the

possibility of interaction and discussion among teachers to jointly share, critique, and rebuild their practices (p. 101).

We felt these moments were a movement away from the more purposeful meanings of education – that we were being separated from deeper knowledge and understanding that could provide concise insights into self and societal reforms and advancements. And as we grew more frustrated with trying to change a historically embedded system of social injustice, our decisions grew more terse and impatient.

The same held true for decisions that went against our grain in relation to policy. We found ourselves constantly having to work with imposed external accountability policies that made us literally wince – policies that not only continue to impose a deficit model, but perpetuate it. These included:

- a. The new definition of the poverty index that includes wealthier retired people, rather than a pure description of the K-12 population, so the school district is ineligible for some federal grant monies.
- b. A high-poverty, urban, failing school district staying on the take-over list for 5 years with no state response. Given this lack of response, was the district expected to fail so that it could just be consolidated?
- c. The reduction of desperately needed funds for ongoing improvements when a failing school district re-emerges from its failing status. How can we fight against the teacher deskilling movement? Or, in the words of Apple (1999), why do we continue to allow “schools to assist in the re-creation of an unequally responsive economy by helping to create the conditions necessary for capital accumulation” (p. 57)?

Noam Chomsky (1995) firmly believes that education is ignorance. He states that intellectual confinement is not accidental:

There are huge efforts that do go into making people, to borrow Adam Smith’s phrase, “as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human being to be.” A lot of the educational system is designed for that...it’s designed for obedience and passivity. From childhood, a lot of it is designed to prevent people from being independent and creative. If you’re independent-minded in school, you’re probably going to get into trouble very early on. That’s not the trait that’s being preferred or cultivated.

For empirical reinforcement of this issue, see Anyon’s studies (1980), as well as Bowles and Gintis (1976), Apple (1979, 1999), and Bernstein (1977).

No matter the decision we needed to make, when it went against our grain – when it seemed to go against freedom and creativity – we were embedded in forces that we instinctively rebelled against: social class delineations, racial blindness, and poverty to name a few. And, yes, when we became highly frustrated, when we felt a teacher couldn’t see the larger picture no matter our attempts at discourse, we sometimes reverted to “just do it” command and control.

On some days, the more we immersed ourselves in our study and in contemplating the reasons for our decisions and subsequent actions, the more depressed we became about our work in the partnership. How could we continue to do “good work” when it seemed to make little or no difference? The more we looked, the more deficit-creating policies we found. The more we examined theories around issues of change, social class, leadership, and politics, the further removed they seemed from our frameworks of peace education. And the more we shared our findings and theories, the more others simply nodded in apparent agreement at the hopelessness of it all.

But we also had support. Everyone, including our provosts, kept reminding us that a single change can make a difference and that while we may not succeed, it would be a definite moment of failure if we gave up on the partnership. While perhaps simplistic, Dewey’s words had great meaning for us when he said that “the ultimate aim of production is not production of goods, but the production of free human beings associated with one another on terms of equality” (in Chomsky, 1994). So on those days when the sheer weight of reality made us feel we could no longer seek to help children become free and creative thinkers, we went on. We learned to give each other strength to meet challenges of monumental proportion, to harness energies that allowed us to promote change, and to find the inner strength to prevent our students from becoming mere dulled producers and users in a consumerist society. From there, we began to construct our strategies against having to compromise our positions.

From this partnership and research study group, many relationships have been built which have resulted in positive, real, sustained change. To date, there are more than 65 separate teaching and learning initiatives occurring with the school district, a profound demonstration of collaboration and collegiality. And we are constantly reminded about the cutting edge nature of the partnership. It was, and continues to be:

- a. A unique, rare opportunity for two universities to work toward change with a challenged urban school district,
- b. An opportunity to jointly re-examine our educational values and knowledge bases of teaching and learning,
- c. An opportunity for the universities and school district to learn from each other in sometimes unexpected ways,
- d. An opportunity for the district teachers and university faculty to speak together about teaching and learning possibilities for students,
- e. A true partnership of equals meeting together to help each other *become*.

5. Conclusion

The issue of peaceful, embracing leadership became imperative when the team focused on the particular needs of the adopted school district and the university resources necessary to support change. In spite of issues related to race, ongoing collective bargaining, school violence, the low socioeconomic urban environment, shockingly low graduation and high drop-out rates, and five years of failure under NCLB, exciting possibilities for real change continued to maintain our motivation. Some of the lessons we learned along the way include the following:

- a. A peer network of like-minded leaders was critical to success (and like a sigh of relief when those individuals were found).
- b. Recognizing when we made “against our grain” decisions helped us to avoid them in future decision-making. It also helped us to increase our patience and understanding of where others might be in their thinking. Thus, the exercise of the study itself became a useful strategy that allowed us to learn when we made decisions of which we weren’t always proud.
- c. Using the Bolman and Deal perspective of the four organizational frames allowed us to become more aware of what we might be including and excluding in our own frameworks.
- d. The study and the partnership helped us to live our beliefs more often – finding ways to hear each other so collaboration and listening became a habit.

The ongoing nature of peaceful leadership and learning ultimately became the koan in our work. By challenging ourselves and supporting each other in the hard ongoing work of peaceful leadership, a new model of leadership and learning has evolved that is grounded in deepening our connections to others. We believe that today’s students will see this and, when they are grown, carry on that connection in their own lives.

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