

Abstract

School leadership requires the capacity to value diversity in ways that treat everyone with dignity and respect. Leadership development involves close examination of personal biases, understanding of the larger picture of poverty and diversity, and the development and commitment to a plan to make a difference in the lives of those in poverty or come from diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the study was to further understanding of the nature of change agency through a comparison of developing change agent graduate students against practicing school leaders with proven records as change agents in high poverty schools. The study analyzed social change agent plans of graduate students in four programs (educational administration, human service administration, school and agency counseling) with the work of four practicing school principals identified as social change agents working in high poverty schools. The study used a framework developed from a previous study of graduate student their social change agent plans. The framework included moral purpose, application social and professional toolkit theory to practice (which encompassed professional competencies, definition of necessary changes in profession influencing others to action, listening, tolerance for ambiguity and risk), and empathy for others.

Conclusions drawn from the study confirm the original framework of moral purpose, social and professional toolkits, and empathy for others. The empathy expressed by practicing principals was not as explicit as with graduate students writing about future intentions to make a difference in the lives of others. As might be expected, the professional toolkits of these principals was more fully developed particularly in regards to collaboration with teachers and others to achieve their mission to raise student achievement. The application of professional knowledge, skills, and understandings to raise student achievement involves complex behaviors that cannot be taught. The importance of providing graduate students models of effective change agents is deemed essential.

Purpose

This study is based upon the findings of a previous study that analyzed the personal/professional change agent plans developed by graduate students in four programs,

school administrators, agency and school counselors, and human service administrators (Tripses, J. & Hatfield, K, 2004). In that study, students were identified as having developed the capacities for change agency (understanding of the issues of poverty and difference, reflection, and the development of complex leadership skills for change) into three distinct categories: Purposeful Change Agents, Emerging Change Agents, and Compliance Change Agents (See Table 1).

The purpose of this study was to further understanding of the nature of change agency through a comparison of developing change agent graduate students against practicing school leaders with proven records as change agents in high poverty schools. This study compared the level of change agency as reflected in the culminating papers of 23 graduate students with the views of four practicing principals (recognized statewide for the level of student achievement in high poverty schools) on what it takes to be an effective change agent. The intention of the researchers was to apply findings of the study to strengthen the preparation of graduate students as future school leaders.

Theoretical Framework/Context

A summary of the findings of the previous study revealed that all graduate students were engaged in the process of becoming social change agents. Their papers and participation in the course indicated strong commitments to making a difference in the lives of their students and clients. Based upon the extent to which students were identified as having developed the capacities for change agency (understanding of the issues of poverty and difference, reflection, and the development of complex leadership skills for change), students fell into three distinct categories (See Table 1). The most fully developed group of students was labeled as Capable Change Agents. This group of students was regarded to be well on the way to synthesizing their professional knowledge and skills to effect change in their environments. Their work reflected the most developed understanding and synthesis of the essential elements of change agency (moral purpose, social tool kit theory, and empathy). The next stage of development was called Emergent Change Agents. This group understood the issues of poverty and difference, but had not yet synthesized those understandings to their professional practice. Their writings reflected an understanding of what was required of them in their professional capacity, but did not reflect the degree of internalization reflected in the first group. The third group was labeled as Early

Change Agents. This group was in the beginning stages of confronting their personal beliefs about poverty and difference and did not to any great extent apply their understandings to professional practice. This group did not articulate to any degree moral purpose, professional toolkit or empathy in their personal or professional lives. While they could list these components, the conceptual transformation required to apply this in a manner consistent with those who were placed in the first two categories simply was not evident in their culminating papers.

Table 1 Extent to Which Graduate Students are Becoming Social Change Agents

	Descriptors
Purposeful Change Agents	<p>Moral purpose of work reflects necessary changes in profession that are clearly defined including influencing others to action. Tolerance for ambiguity and risk is clear.</p> <p>Social toolkit theory has clear application to professional practice</p> <p>Empathy for others guides behavior, assistance is informed and skillful.</p>
Emerging Change Agents	<p>Moral purpose of work is emerging. Necessary changes required for social justice explained in general terms that are not clearly related to profession. Tolerance for ambiguity and risk is emerging - coming to terms with idealized and actualized self.</p> <p>Social toolkit theory explained in general terms.</p> <p>Empathy for others is emerging, learning to suspend judgment.</p>
Compliance Change Agents	<p>Moral purpose of work is not a consideration. Work is motivated by following the rules of the profession. Changes required for social justice seen as problematic because of predicted behaviors of others. Capacity for ambiguity and risk is not evident.</p> <p>Social toolkit theory is either not addressed or focused on self.</p> <p>Empathy for others is not evident.</p>

Adapted from Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership, (2002, p. 9); Fullan, (2003), Furman, 2003; Henze, et. al (2002); Senge et al. (2000); Senge (1990); Sergiovanni, (1999); Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J.,1998).

Developing the capacity to leverage change for social justice is complex work for graduate students just coming into their leadership potential. Creation of visions outside the social mainstream requires clarity about the moral purpose of work, the professional skills and knowledge to make a difference, and finally a clear understanding of the importance of networks that connect with others willing and capable of making a difference. Simultaneously, students are examining their most personal beliefs and biases about differences in others and putting them up against factual information presented about poverty in contemporary society. This internal work requires complex understandings of the moral purpose of one's own work balanced with leadership knowledge and skills.

The research has several contexts related to social justice issues. Understanding issues of social justice requires the deconstruction of popular myths about poverty and the oppressed as well as consideration of methods designed to break the cycle of oppression and poverty (Darling-Hammond et al. 2002; Duncan, 1999; Henze et. al. 2002). The graduate project provides the foundation of understanding upon which students begin the process of developing necessary skills and knowledge to effectively lead schools and agencies with diverse populations. Consideration of practicing principals identified as successful social change agents provide models to leaders who regard the policies and rules of organizations to exist to serve the needs of students and families. Their efforts are motivated by values and ethics that go beyond the rules and regulations of the school

Moral purpose

The first context of the research is based upon the concept of moral purpose for leadership (Fullan, 2003, Furman, 2003, Sergiovanni, 2000, 1992). Moral purpose in school leadership is concerned with right and wrong (Furman, 2003), serving the common good (Fullan, 2003), developing a common sense of purpose (Fullan, 2003; Furman, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994) and developing leadership potential in others (Fullan, 2003; Lambert, 1998). School leaders frequently face ethical dilemmas for which there is no obvious right or wrong solution. Moral leadership may be expressed not only in response to the more obvious daily ethical dilemmas such as justice for one group at the expense of another, but also in attention to the mundane policies and structures of schools that may have hidden ethical implications. Wise leaders know that every social arrangement benefits some people at the expense of others (Lashway, 1999). Assuming that schools automatically embody desirable standards is “ethically naïve, if not culpable” (Starratt, 1991, p.187).

Moral purpose requires leaders who are willing and capable of action beyond traditional boundaries of schools or other agencies (Fullan, 2003, Sergiovanni, 1999). Such leaders “believe that injustice in our schools and communities is neither natural nor inevitable” (Larson and Murtadha, 2002). Leadership in this sense begins with purpose which is to serve all children well, including the marginalized and poorly served, and then maps backward to figure out how to get there (Furman, 2003). The creation of schools and other social agencies where gaps are

closed between those who are served well by the system and those who are not well served, requires leadership that is clearly focused on addressing injustice and finding ways to make a positive difference for the oppressed.

Fullan (2004) describes four aspects of leadership derived from moral purpose as (1) making a difference in the lives of students (2) committing to reducing the gap between high and low performers within a school or district (3) contributing to reducing the gap in the larger environment and (4) transforming the working (or learning conditions) of others so that growing commitment, engagement and the constant spawning of leadership in others is being fostered. The leadership required to achieve such ends taps the emotions, appeals to values, and responds to connections with others in the school (Sergiovanni, 2000).

Toolkit Metaphor

The second context involves the development of practical knowledge to implement the kind of change envisioned. The term social toolkit theory is used in this study to describe two related but separate sets of conceptions. The first is introduced to graduate students in one of the required readings World's Apart by Duncan. In a comparison of the social landscape of three rural communities, Duncan (1999) describes the conditions by which school leaders and other professionals can intervene to make a difference in the lives of the poor. The social toolkit theory (Swidler, 1997) holds that climbing out of poverty requires an individual to acquire skills, habits, symbols, experiences that are not part of their family experience. Mentors, teachers, counselors, ministers, and others can compensate for lack of family resources available to poor children to overcome disadvantages and envision a positive future for themselves (Swidler, 1997, Payne, DeVol, Smith, 2001). As used in the graduate course in this study, the social toolkit theory compares relatively pessimistic stereotypes about the poor with more optimistic perspectives that moves beyond judgment and blaming to couple high expectations with informed support by the professional.

The second use of the toolkit metaphor describes the professional knowledge, skills, and understandings that graduate students will need to make a difference in the lives of others. Knowledge, skills and understanding include understanding of poverty in America, networking, looking beyond bureaucratic rules and structures, mentoring, and effective communication.

Students are asked to identify strengths and areas for growth in relation to a professional toolkit. The basis of the social change agent plan is to understand the social toolkit theory, apply it to the profession for which the graduate student is preparing in a professional toolkit, and develop an explicit plan to impact poverty.

Profiles of successful principals in high poverty schools reflect important leadership characteristics. Social change agents are purposeful about the types of change that they promote and support (Fullan, 2003, 1993). Change agents have a strong participative and collaborative style and they actively listen to gather information about needs, conflicting ideas, and possible solutions to mold innovations and create coalitions (Fullan, 2003, 1993). Related to moral purpose of their work, tolerance for ambiguity and risk are important for change agents (Kanter, 1983). Descriptions of change agents can provide the impression of heroic “command and control” leaders based upon popular cultural myths of leadership. Sergiovanni (2000) cautions that such models of leadership have their place, but using this type of leadership as a dominant or even predominant strategy, may lead to teacher dependency.

Behaviors of successful change agent principals in high poverty schools include a strong focus on student achievement (coupling high expectations and continuous use of data to inform decisions) through careful attention to school culture, strong partnerships with the wider environment including parents, community, and the school district, wise provision of resources including time, money, and professional development for teachers, and clear understanding of the change process (Billman, 2004, Fry, Bottoms, & O’Neill, 2005).

The role of the principal as change agent is critical to this study. The introduction to the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership acknowledges that “theory and practice of leadership and management is in transition... educational leaders must possess the capacity to manage change and to create collaborative action on behalf of student results (Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership, 2002, p. 2).

Characterizations of the behaviors associated with leadership in change include “troubling the bureaucracy” (Blackmore, J. 1999), “tempered radicals” (Meyerson, 2003), and “change masters” (Kanter, 1983). Two very important characteristics emerge from the descriptions of these leaders. First of all, they have the capacity to see beyond the prescriptions

of constraints in the environment which can stem from bureaucratic policies, scarce resources, oppression, societal issues that show up in students, etc to return to their clearly defined moral purpose. These and other hindrances do not constrain change agents from their mission. Secondly, these change agents (bureaucracy troublers, tempered radicals, change masters) know how to work with others to get the job done. Meyerson, in particular, provides clear delineation of strategies used to work within the system to accomplish goals that the system may not currently support. "Possibly the most fundamental thing to remember about successful tempered radicals is that they know *who they are and what is important* to their sense of self. They realize they have multiple selves, some aspects more enduring and "core" than others, and they are clear about the ways these core values or identities are at odds with the dominant culture" (p. 171-72). These change agents favor action, they see the choices in everyday actions, and they recognize and act upon opportunities to make a difference based upon their core beliefs (moral purpose). While their moral purpose drives action, change agents are frequently meticulous in their attention to the details of their work (Lyman, Ashby, and Tripses, 2005). For school principals, this translates into attention given to student achievement (coupling high expectations and continuous use of data to inform decisions) through careful attention to school culture, strong partnerships with the wider environment including parents, community, and the school district, wise provision of resources including time, money, and professional development for teachers, and clear understanding of the change process (Billman, 2004, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005). In other words, they know how to accomplish their visions. "They know themselves, favor action, recognize that they have choices (including the choice not to act), pay attention to details, look for opportunities, create learning by framing local events in terms of their broader significance, and forge connections with other people" (Meyerson, p. 173).

Empathy

The third context of the study involves the development of empathy. In the context of this study and the graduate course upon which it is based, empathy is defined as a learned ability to grasp the world from someone else's point of view. Empathy requires respect for people different from oneself (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). The quality defined as empathy is not based

solely upon compassion for the situations of others, but goes further to provide informed assistance where appropriate and in ways that are appropriate. Empathy is a thread that runs through both moral purpose and the development of the toolkit.

Introspection about self, in relation to one another and to society at large, creates the initial foundation for all the other necessary work on social justice (Carter and Goodwin, 1994; Darling-Hammond, et al, 2002). Graduate students in this study reflected upon their own beliefs relative to poverty, diversity and democracy in order to develop a personal appreciation for the ways in which they might have been advantaged or oppressed. Acknowledgment of diverse experiences was regarded as necessary to create the associations for students, both personally and socially, to develop into agents of social change (Darling-Hammond et al., p. 3).

Moral leadership emerges from the values and ethics of leaders themselves (Furman, 2003). Considering the values and ethics of leaders, including an ethic of care in their relationships with others, provides insight into effective leadership. An ethic of care opens up possibilities for leaders to “deal with individuals with whom we have relationships, not as representatives of social group. Leaders who adopt an ethic of care are more likely to see themselves in relationship with others” (Grogan, 2003, p. 25). “Caring is a way of being in relationship, not a set of specific behaviors,” Noddings wrote (1992, p. 17). Leaders develop communities of learning with others when they build relationships, and develop shared values of caring, knowledge of and attention to teaching and learning, and inclusiveness (Lambert, 1998; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1999; Wheatley, 1999).

Methodology

The research employed the framework from Table I to examine the development and practice of practicing and preparing social change agents. Four practicing principals, selected by purposive reputational method, were interviewed. These four principals of Illinois Spotlight Schools, are recognized by Northern Illinois University as high-poverty, high-performing schools that are beating the “achievement gap.” Criteria for this award include: (1) Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by No Child Left Behind, (2) a minimum of 50% low income students in current and previous two years, (3) a minimum of 60% of students met or exceeded state standards in the current year, and (4) a minimum of 50% of students met or exceeded state standards in the previous two years. Transcripts of interviews as well as artifacts that supported the work as change agents were analyzed using qualitative content methods (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 1994; Sowell, 2001). Interview questions included the following scripted questions specifically designed to elicit comments related to the concepts of moral purpose, social tool kit theory, and empathy:

1. Talk about the challenges faced by your school in meeting the needs of students who come from high poverty backgrounds.
2. Describe how your school meets the needs of these identified students.
3. Talk about your role in meeting the needs of these identified students. Include any challenges you personally face.
4. Talk about how you have worked with various groups in the school to get everyone focused on meeting the learning needs of students from high poverty backgrounds.
5. What direction do you believe you must now take your school as you go forward into the future?
6. As you think back upon your leadership in this school, what is most important to you?
7. Can you identify one, two or three of your personal beliefs or assumptions about children that have been central to the success of your efforts in leading your school?

The graduate students were enrolled in one of two sections of a required course, entitled, Legal and Social Change from four programs (educational administration, human service

administration, school and agency counseling). Student change agent plans were analyzed using inductive qualitative content analysis using grounded theory techniques of open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Creswell, 1994; Sowell, 2001

Findings

Of the twenty three graduate student papers analyzed, ten students fell into the Category of Purposeful Change Agents, seven students were classified as Emerging Change Agents, and seven students were classified as Compliance Change Agents. The seventeen students classified as either Purposeful or Emerging all reflected in their papers beliefs that were consistent with findings supported from the data gleaned from the interviews with the Spotlight Principals. See Table 2.

Table 2 Identification of Graduate Students as Social Change Agents

	Students (23 total)	Descriptors
Purposeful Change Agents	10	Moral purpose of work reflects necessary changes in profession that are clearly defined including influencing others to action. Tolerance for ambiguity and risk is clear. Social toolkit theory has clear application to professional practice Empathy for others guides behavior, assistance is informed and skillful.
Emerging Change Agents	7	Moral purpose of work is emerging. Necessary changes required for social justice explained in general terms that are not clearly related to profession. Tolerance for ambiguity and risk is emerging - coming to terms with idealized and actualized self. Social toolkit theory explained in general terms. Empathy for others is emerging, learning to suspend judgment.
Compliance Change Agents	7	Moral purpose of work is not a consideration. Work is motivated by following the rules of the profession. Changes required for social justice seen as problematic because of predicted behaviors of others. Capacity for ambiguity and risk is not evident. Social toolkit theory is either not addressed or focused on self. Empathy for others is not evident.

Adapted from Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership, (2002, p. 9); Fullan, (2003), Furman, 2003; Henze, et. al (2002); Senge et al. (2000); Senge (1990); Sergiovanni, (1999); Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J.,1998).

Moral purpose

Fullan describes moral purpose as principled behavior connected to something greater than ourselves that relates to human or social development (Fullan, 2004). Graduate students' explanations of their professional purpose revealed very personal and at the same time collective voice of identity.

Several themes emerged from the graduate student papers. Not surprisingly given the content of the course and the topic of the assignment, many students recognized a new identity as social change agents (15 of 23). One student wrote , "I am a social change agent. For me that is quite a revelation. A social change agent sees something wrong and works to make it better." This student represents many of her classmates in forging a new identity as she defines exactly what that means to her professionally. The connection between students' most deeply held beliefs and their sense of efficacy was another prevailing theme in their writing. Another student wrote, "I have, however, recognized that I have a passion to advocate for those who are most vulnerable. I want to be the voice of those that others would rather ignore. I have found that I find my own voice when I am advocating for others."

A second theme related to moral purpose from graduate student papers involved a strong connection between their mission and working with families in poverty. Students in the programs in the study are required to write a personal mission statement. Educational leadership students revisit their mission formally three times in the program. Ten of the twenty-three students connected their mission statement to their roles as social change agents. Personal characteristics

that students regarded as important included integrity, honesty, respect for human dignity, seeing the goodness in others, empowering others, and being there for others. Expressing her sense of identity as a social change agent, one student wrote, "I do my work because of who I am. I am driven by my vision to help children. In my personal mission statement I state my belief in the principles of integrity, honesty, human dignity and service. These principles and my spirituality are my moral purpose." Another student, identified as a Purposeful Change Agent noted that "To become an effective change agent, my actions need to demonstrate knowledge and awareness of cultural diversity, poverty, and family social issues...I must understand the person's world and social tool kit to guide and educate the individual about social skill development to improve relationships in life."

Four students mentioned personal experiences as a young child or teen. Three students also revealed clear attention to the leaders in their current workplace. One student wrote that she appreciated the attention given to her by her supervisor. She recognized that this person saw a potential in her that she herself did not recognize. She went on to say that she can envision herself mentoring others in the future.

The Spotlight principals were emphatic that the impoverished students in their buildings were fully capable of high achievement. One Spotlight principal emphasized the importance that educators recognize that the schoolhouse may very well be "the best place our students live in all day." Similarly, another principal revealed that minority students and students from a lower socio-economic background are entitled to "a quality education, as these students want to be successful and it must be accepted that they can learn, and learn more."

Another aspect of the moral purpose of work is influencing others to action. A graduate student put it this way: “My experience and belief is that when people work collaboratively and cooperatively to combine resources and talents the feelings of well-being increase for everyone with amazing outcomes for students.” Four other graduate students made similar observations regarding the moral purpose of work. All four Spotlight principals were practiced in influencing others to take action.. One principal stated, “We need to overcome the notion that we have always done it this way.” Another suggested that “We need to be advocates for children and sometimes this advocacy is in conflict with an advocacy for staff. When this happens, it is incumbent that we work with staff to inspire them to action that is consistent with the well-being of children.” Another Spotlight principal said, “Failure is not an option at this school.”

Finally, moral purpose of work sometimes requires an ability to maintain a high tolerance for ambiguity and risk. None of the graduate student papers clearly reflected this attitude and the necessary skills. The Spotlight principals clearly resonated with the concept. One Spotlight principal who happened to be part of a minority group indicated: “As a change agent, there sometimes seems to be a disconnect between the staff and the principal.” The principal went on to say that this can be overcome by “identifying those ready for change, structuring teams properly with a mixture of those who are ready on each team, waiting patiently and encouraging others to get on board while using those who are ready to encourage those who are dragging behind.” The principals indicated that this tolerance for risk and ambiguity can sometimes result in a slower process, but such tolerance in the long run has proven to be effective.

The theme of a higher moral purpose of high expectations for students is required for success for all students was reflected in all seventeen of the graduate student papers who were

classified in the first two categories and consistently referred to by the spotlight principals who were selected for interview. The Spotlight principals provided the voice of experience in terms of ways to move entire buildings to “buy into” as one principal put it, the idea that poor children coming from chaotic backgrounds can succeed in school.

The four principals identified themselves as facilitators rather than directors of change. Said one principal, “I can’t dictate, if I did that people would bristle and resist. If I’m involved in discovering why something is happening, there is more buy-in. I don’t have to be in the limelight. I let teachers go with their good ideas.”

Tool Kit Metaphor

The social toolkit theory (Swidler, 1997) holds that climbing out of poverty requires an individual to acquire skills, habits, symbols, experiences that are not part of their family experience. Mentors, teachers, counselors, ministers, and others can compensate for lack of family resources available to poor children to overcome disadvantages and envision a positive future for themselves (Swidler, 1997, Payne, DeVol, Smith, 2001). This concept was reflected in all of twenty-three of the graduate student papers. The idea of a social toolkit seemed to be grasped by all the students who were enrolled in the graduate course where this concept was taught.

The application of the toolkit theory to practice was more fully developed in the seventeen students classified as either purposeful or emerging change agents their discussion than the students classified as compliance change agents. As reflected in their papers, most of these students made a strong connection between moral purpose and the social toolkit concept. The application to their professional practice was explicit and related back to moral purpose.

Students wrote about mentoring, networking, communicating effectively with others including others in the profession as well as students or clients. One student identified a new understanding of her knowledge of the system and ways that she could use the system to help her clients. She wrote, "I have come to see how the system works for individuals dealing with substance abuse, poverty, welfare, mental health issues, and single parenthood. I have also come to learn where some of the loopholes lie. I intend to use this knowledge to help my clientele that I see in the future."

Knowledge and understanding about poverty included in the course was powerful for many students. One of the graduate students in the purposeful category said it this way: "When I was younger, I was often frustrated when sound advice was not heeded or poor choices were repeated. I did not understand why people found it difficult to change the circumstances surrounding their lives when it seemed so obvious there were alternatives to behavior or attitudes. The Lord has humbled me though, and now I understand the fragility of the human spirit. I am more tolerant and understanding, for humanity is not black or white, but shades of gray. I have discovered that to be human encompasses not only the successes but the failures of mankind as well. Being human adds different things to our tool kit, and I can influence what children add to theirs." Similarly, one of the spotlight principals put it this way: "Being able to relate to parents of children who come from a lower socio-economic background can sometimes be a challenge. Failing to do so, however, creates a disconnect between the school and home. This disconnect can then be compounded to be a failure to effectively communicate. If we don't communicate effectively, we cannot help students and their parents see the other options for improving their lives."

The students classified as compliance change agents did not recognize this disconnect, or least were unable to articulate such in their papers. These students wrote in general terms about intentions to help others with few connections to draw between the needs of individuals in poverty and professional skills to make a difference.

Speaking from the voice of experience, the Spotlight principals talked about their highly developed professional toolkits. Several themes emerged from the interviews. Each of these principals sees themselves as a facilitator of change. There was a strong theme of strong respect for their teachers who overcome the many challenges faced by children in poverty. These principals are skillful in guiding teachers to focus on a few areas with a high likelihood of success. They know how to infuse a spirit of cooperation into a group of teachers to work towards common goals. Another critical skill in their professional toolkit is a very highly developed knowledge of quality curriculum, assessment and instruction coupled with an almost intuitive sense of the connections between the three. While all of the principals were clearly focused on achievement data, they gave no indication of putting test scores before quality instruction or the people in their building.

Empathy

Interestingly, empathy (learned ability to grasp the world from someone else's point of view and provide meaningful assistance to the poor or oppressed) was seemingly the concept most internalized by the graduate students classified as either purposeful or emerging change agents. All seventeen graduate students classified in one of these two categories not only specifically mentioned the importance of this concept as reflected in their papers, but did so with considerable emphasis about its importance when it comes to working effectively with students

or clients from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The students in the Purposeful and Emerging categories synthesized personal feelings of empathy in ways that connected their moral purpose and toolkits.

One graduate student in counseling reflected her thoughts this way: “Although expressing empathy is a counseling skill I have studied in depth, it becomes a little different when empathizing for an entire group of people. In counseling I was taught to show empathy for individual clients, but this course has taught me how to empathize with those who are struggling in poverty. This course made it clear how difficult it is to escape the life of the impoverished once a person is trapped there. Moving on to the middle class is nearly impossible for a person living in poverty because they do not know or understand the social norms associated with that class.”

Other students wrote about the origins of their sense of empathy for others. One student, identified as a Purposeful Change Agent wrote poignantly about her grandmother, “My maternal grandmother was the one taught me about having compassion for others. She was the one who taught me the difference between selfless and selfish. During the last month she was alive, I remember visiting her daily in the hospital and talking about how I was doing. She made me promise to keep helping others, never stop learning and keep my faith. I take the promise I made to her very seriously. She was a social change agent in my life.”

The need to accept personal biases about others and constantly reexamine ways such attitudes influence action was mentioned by several students. One student, identified as an Purposeful Change Agent wrote, “I find that it is necessary to continuously self-reflect. Individuals need a greater knowledge of where others have come from. Individuals, such as

myself, who have been sheltered from minorities, need to continuously gain knowledge about their history and their background. To effectively help someone, it is important for one to understand where he or she has been. If a helping professional does not know, they should use their resources to gain this information.”

Empathy as it is defined in this study and the course was on the one hand evident in every aspect of the schools and yet perhaps not as explicit in the conversations with the principals as in the graduate student papers. Empathy was more the foundation of these schools. The Spotlight principals and their teachers were providing informed assistance to those in need at a very competent level. The principals described the empathy they and their teachers provided students and one another. The values of respecting others were very evident. Said one Spotlight principal, “The changes I’ve made have been to create an environment – physical, emotional and environmental that reflect RESPECT. Related to that is listening and empathy for others. Failure is not an option at (this school).

Similarly, another Spotlight principals put it this way: “We are not complacent, we need to continue to be hungry for our kids who have the greatest needs. We cannot be satisfied with even our current local and state recognition as a Spotlight School. We need to understand where these kids are coming from and work to get them to achieve “99’s” in everything. I want them to understand that I don’t want to attend their high school graduation. I want to attend their college graduation! I can’t do this if I don’t understand what the individual life is like right now.” This theme of understanding the lives of others was consistently reflected in the papers of the purposeful and emerging change agent graduate students and all of the spotlight principals.

Empathy was a thread running through all aspects of the Spotlight Schools. Empathy, defined as informed and competent assistance motivated all actions in the school. Similarly, the graduate students identified as Purposeful or Emerging Change Agents made strong connections between moral purpose and professional toolkits through empathy.

Conclusions

Several conclusions are drawn from this study. First, 82% of the graduate students enrolled in the course Legal and Social Change seemed to have achieved the overarching goals of the course, namely, understanding of the moral purpose and empathy needed for school counselors, principals, and human service administrators to be effective change agents who can work for the impoverished they choose to serve. Second, course content and goals seem to be consistent with the impressions that practicing Spotlight principals hold as being the skills and attitudes needed to be effective with this same targeted audience. Third, Social Tool Kit Theory seems to be the one area targeted by the course of the three main components (moral purpose, empathy and social tool kit) that is most influenced by actual work experience. Only a limited number of graduate students were able to articulate in their culminating papers a similar level of understanding of this concept that approached the level of understanding as reflected by the spotlight principals who were interviewed in the study.

Conclusions drawn from the study confirm the original framework of moral purpose, social and professional toolkits, and empathy for others. The empathy expressed by practicing principals was not as explicit as with graduate students writing about future intentions to make a difference in the lives of others. As might be expected, the professional toolkits of these principals was more fully developed particularly in regards to collaboration with teachers and

others to achieve their mission to raise student achievement. The application of professional knowledge, skills, and understandings to raise student achievement involves complex behaviors that cannot be taught. The importance of providing graduate students models of effective change agents is deemed essential. The works of recognized school leaders who have focused their life's work on serving the impoverished can inspire graduate students to the level of change agent. It would appear that the transformation of their beliefs and actions can rise to a level that is required to truly become agents of change in a society that has a growing need of such agents if the sinister impacts of poverty and discrimination are to be overcome for the generations of young people still to come through the halls of the public schools of this great country.

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