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THE ETHICS OF PRACTICE: NAVIGATING THE ROAD OF AUTHENTICITY: JOURNEY INTERRUPTED

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Writing this paper about the challenges associated with developing and implementing educational programs during September 2005 in Louisiana was a real challenge. At times I found it difficult to focus. At other times I was drawn so deeply into the vortex of deliberation about values and ethics that I would almost lose sight of myself. This was not atypical for me, having found this to be the case whenever considering ethics and values in educational leadership, particularly the theories and research presented over the years at the annual Values and Educational Conference. The conference has been my touchstone, reminding me of the importance of reflection and deliberation in the process of becoming authentic, true to oneself, in the sense that Starratt (2004a) asserts, is "the most weighty of life's moral activities" (p. 5).

Journey interrupted

The challenge of writing about such matters is at least in part due to the fact that I attempt to explore both public and private landscapes. So I am sharing not just my thoughts and experiences about successes, achievements, challenges, and frustrations from an organizational, professional perspective, but from an inner, personal one as well. This was a challenge for me because it required that I take an extended journey inward to a place that required my full attention and sometimes brutal honesty. That type of focus and attention on my own thinking is difficult at the best of times, but the challenge was intensified when, during the writing process, Hurricane Katrina thrust itself upon the Gulf Coast, including many communities in southeast

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Louisiana. In the wake of the storm, reports emerged of the devastation, loss of life and destruction to property. Writing about my personal experiences with developing and implementing educational programs in one university in North Louisiana somehow seemed unimportant in the shadow of this catastrophe, with over a million people evacuated from their homes and communities. It made the issues that I had been writing about seem diminutive, perhaps even trite. Reflecting on the process of my own inner journey began to morph into a self-indulgent one. Better I move away from my computer and go do something of immediate and tangible use. Take action: donate money, donate food, donate blood, and volunteer my services as needed. These are things that really make a difference in times of crisis, aren't they?

Well, yes, they are. And multitudes of people did take action to help; heroic, courageous, self-sacrificing actions. However, alongside the noble acts were also the ineffectual, sometimes ignoble ones. And there was also inaction. In the ensuing days after the hurricane, we know that much criticism, blame, and finger pointing took place as the nation and the world began to realize and question the fact that thousands of people were left behind, some by choice, but most as victims of circumstance, to face unimaginable human suffering and anguish in the face of deteriorating conditions. Charges of ineptitude, incompetence, and unpreparedness were leveled against local, state, and federal governments and officials. Along with these indictments, were the more insidious ones of racism, classism, and ageism. What other explanation could there be for why greater resources had not been pre-deployed before the hurricane struck? Would there have been more of a ground swell of concern for the people lined up outside of the Superdome if they had been mostly white? Mostly affluent? Mostly strong? Mostly self-sufficient? Would a greater number of people, the bewildered onlookers from the comfort of their living rooms, have been more outraged, more compelled to action, had the demographics of the population standing in line been different? Was there blindness to or denial of the macrocultural values embedded in this picture? Hard questions. And while I do not claim to have definitive answers to these questions, I do believe that they need asking and considering—at least in my own journey toward authenticity. Moreover, attending to them is not trivial. On the contrary, it is highly relevant to my deliberation about values, ethics, and authenticity. As I continued to

write, in the context of this unfolding human tragedy, I realized more fully the importance of not only action, but of reflective action in our endeavors. I asked questions of myself: How can I be sure that my actions are helping to create a better, more just, more caring, more equitable society? How can I, in my role as a professor in an institution of higher learning in Louisiana, acting in the capacity of teacher, researcher, and a servant to the community better understand and address the social injustices experienced by the marginalized and the disadvantaged, such as those who could not evacuate during the hurricane? So, while my deliberations were interrupted by Hurricane Katrina and my attention had taken a turn toward the more immediate and urgent matters of doing what I could to help, I eventually returned to my writing with increased fervor in the knowledge, or rather the confirmation that such matters are not trite, nor self-indulgent. Rather they are of great value. The necessity of responding to an urgent situation through our immediate actions does not preclude the need to continue to be philosophical and to consider and reconsider our values, our valuation processes, and the influence of our values on our actions in the pursuit of a morally authentic life. In fact, the two are indeed related, as I hope to amplify as I continue.

Journey continued

So, as difficult as it was to take this journey, particularly the more personal and private aspects of it, I continued. Parker Palmer (1998) underscores the importance of knowing our inner selves, stating that "the more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted ...our living becomes" (p. 5). Palmer, who writes about teachers and teaching, but whose words can apply more broadly to educators in all settings, suggests that our inner and outer reality should "flow seamlessly into each other" (p. 5). In other words, we need to be firmly rooted in a true sense of self — the inner journey — in order to do meaningful work — the outer journey. Although he does not state it directly, Palmer is talking about the journey of authenticity. He couches the journey toward authenticity in terms of the quest for identity and integrity. Identity, he suggests, is a "moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am" (p. 13).

Examining one's identity as part of the quest for authenticity requires one to take an inner journey, but not in an individualistic sense. The journey is at once personal and public, and requires thinking about

oneself, one's values and beliefs in relation to one's interactions with others. In that respect, it is a communal process, perhaps in the vein of Furman's (2003) ideas expressed in her deliberations about the ethic of community. Furman writes:

In its simplest terms, an ethic of community means that administrators, teachers, school staffs, students, parents, and other community members interested in schools commit to the processes of community; in other words, they feel that they are morally responsible to engage in communal processes as they pursue the moral purposes of schooling and address the ongoing challenges of daily life and work in schools. Thus, an ethic of community centers the community over the individual as moral agent—it shifts the locus of moral agency to the community as a whole. (p. 4)

Furman (2002) emphasizes communal processes over community. The sense of community, she writes, “is based in relationships, which depend in turn on the processes of communication, of dialogue, and collaboration, and not on a set of indicators such as “shared values” and “shared decision making” (p. 285). So too, understanding one's identity is not an individualistic process. If we think of identity as transformational and not “fixed essences....that [do] not change over time” (Butler, 2005, p. 188), but that inform and are informed by the interactions we have with the people we live and work, it is indeed a communal process. It is a journey that cannot be undertaken in an individualistic sense. In other words, identity is inherently social because it is our interactions with other people that help us form a concept of ourselves. Moreover, identity is not static. It is “an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of the self” (Palmer, 1998, p. 13). Identity is formed and transformed through our interactions, our relationships, with others.

Implicit in notions of the social nature of identity formation and transformation is “the view of oneself as a moral person, with character, who acts with integrity” (Johnson & Johnson, 2002, p. 36). Integrity, Palmer (1998) asserts, is whatever wholeness one is able to find in that intersection of inner and outer forces as “its vectors form and re-form the pattern of my life....By choosing integrity, I become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more real by acknowledging the

whole of who I am” (p. 13). Conceptualizing integrity as the pathway to wholeness suggests that a person's character remains intact (Cox, La Caze, Levine, 2005) “and that there is congruence in standards, words, and behavior” (Branden, 1994). It also suggests that integrity is a “master virtue, a condition of having others” (Cox et. al, 2005). If one has integrity, then there will be congruence in a person's claim to be honest and in that person's actions. Consequently, having integrity in this sense may not always mean that one's actions are ethical in a conventional sense of the word.

Identity and integrity can never be fully defined or known and the pursuit of authenticity as a moral endeavor is a “complex, demanding, lifelong process of self-discovery” (Palmer, 1998, p. 13). Begley's (2004) position is similar. In his work on valuational process and educational leadership, he suggests that

“the study of ethics should be as much about the life-long personal struggle to be ethical, about failures to be ethical, the inconsistencies of ethical postures, the masquerading of self-interest and personal preference as ethical action, and the dilemmas which occur in everyday and professional life when one ethic trumps another”(p. 5).

Palmer suggests that “stories are the best way to portray elusive realities of this sort” (p. 14). Consequently, I have opted to share a story, a story from my professional world, a story of my interactions and collaborations with others, and what I have learned from these interactions in my endeavor to strive for authenticity. I will share this story in the context of my deliberations about authenticity and my evolving identity as an educator in Louisiana, particularly in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The landscape

At the dawn of a new millennium, Louisiana educators were awash in a sea of anticipation, promise, and not a little trepidation, as a result of national- and state-mandated educational reform and accountability efforts. The following excerpt from a 1999 Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) report captures the expectations of the time:

Education is Louisiana's top priority today! There is excitement, energy, and hope about education in Louisiana, a state traditionally ranked near the bottom of the 50 states on

educational quality and effectiveness. This state is also near the bottom on measures of the wealth and health of its citizens, but a turnaround is underway. Historically, one common perception of Louisiana has been that of a state defined by opposites which often fall along racial and socioeconomic lines: those who send their children to private schools and those who cannot; those who are powerful and those who are not; those who have professional careers and those who have jobs in agriculture, the service sector, or the oil industry. Today, however, people from these diverse groups are working together to improve education by facing the challenges, barriers, and inertia head-on. (SEDL, 1999, p. 5)

The report also announced and applauded Louisiana's new school and district accountability system, which was to have been phased in over the "next several years" (p. 17). These were not hollow promises. The accountability system has been alive and well in Louisiana schools since the year 2000. And while there are many detractors of the accountability system and the approach that Louisiana has taken, the fact that the state education system has made a concerted and extensive effort to improve its status as one of the nations lowest in student achievement cannot go unrecognized. Indeed, it has recently been receiving considerable national acclaim for actually doing so (Education Week, 2005). Moreover, the PK-12 education system was not the sole benefactor of this 'new-found excitement, energy, and hope'. In the year 2000, all universities in Louisiana were required by the Board of Regents and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to redesign their teacher preparation programs. Following that, in 2003, the universities were mandated to redesign their post-baccalaureate programs to

"expand knowledge gained in redesigned teacher preparation programs, address new requirements for the No Child Left Behind Act and other federal legislation (e.g., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), focus upon school improvement and student achievement, and address the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission" (Louisiana Teacher Quality Initiative, 2003, p. 2).

In effect, what this means as it relates to my story is my colleagues and I at Louisiana Tech, along with other stakeholders, have been redesigning various

programs of study for the past five years. As already stated, the intent in sharing this story is not so much to discuss a specific program, but to share insights pertaining to authenticity and ethical leadership theory. In January 2003, the MEL team, as we later began to call ourselves, began the task of designing a new educational leadership program. The MEL team was the university redesign team for the new leadership program and we worked with three advisory teams to develop the program. Following are a few highlights from that experience that have resonated with me in light of my deliberations about authenticity and moral leadership.

Accountability and authenticity

There is considerable debate about the perceived benefits, consequences, challenges, and goals of current accountable efforts in American education. And while this is worthwhile discourse in which scholars, policy makers, educational practitioners, parents and the general public may engage, those directly involved in the efforts must find a way to digest and implement accountability policies and their directives in a manner that will allow them to meet the demands of these diverse external forces in a way that will bring "wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death" (Palmer, 1998). In other words, teachers, principals and university faculty must find a way to maneuver this landscape in such a way that their personal and professional standards remain congruent with their words and actions so that they maintain their integrity — if that is their quest. We can imagine those who deliberate about such matters as embarking on an inner and outer journey toward authenticity — a journey which requires each of us to weave "the major strands of [our] identity into [our] work" (Palmer, 1998). In working with the MEL team, I believe many of us were on such a journey. And while I cannot speak on behalf of each team member, I can share some of my experiences in the process. For example, I can share with you the tremendous challenge we faced in our endeavor to develop the curricula — leadership courses, the internship experience, the assessment system — as well as the candidate recruitment, selection and screening process all within, not only the redesign guidelines, but national and state standards, as well as our own conflicting views of what a leadership preparation program should look like, and more importantly, what it should achieve in real-world applications. What was quite interesting, upon reflection, is that as a committee I would say we took our responsibility very seriously, but the nature of that

interpretation of responsibility often differed. To explain this phenomenon I use Starratt's (2004) work on ethical leadership and the ethics of responsibility.

Moral responsibility

Starratt (2004b) suggests that educational leaders must be morally responsible, not only in a preventative sense but in a proactive one as well. Responsibility in the latter sense is three-dimensional in that the leader is: i.) responsible as, ii.) responsible to, and, iii.) responsible for. As stated, upon reflection, the MEL university team members as a unit seemed to have been responsible in all three of these ways, with each member being responsible in different ways on different issues. One example that comes to mind was the issue of meeting the redesign guidelines, particularly the request for identifying the empirical basis for educational practices and teaching methods covered in the newly developed courses for the program. There was considerable deliberation about which research studies to include with some of MEL team members placing considerable importance on integrating studies from journals and organizations that were reportedly considered to be embraced by the Board of Regents and the state Board of Education, suggesting they felt a primary responsibility:

- as state employees
- to state governing agencies
- for developing an educational program based on strict adherence to state guidelines.

On the other hand, other committee members expressed dismay at such an approach, and advocated that there was enough expertise on the committee to locate, examine, and utilize empirical studies that were deemed most appropriate for meeting course and program goals and objectives. This stance appears to suggest they felt a primary responsibility:

- as program developers
- to prospective program candidates
- for developing an educational leadership program informed, but not constrained, by state guidelines.

Another issue that arose and for which MEL team members appeared to have felt responsibility as, to, and for in different ways was related to the nature of the internship experience. Some committee members seemed to place greater value on managerial type experiences manifesting a primary responsibility:

- as former and current principals in high-needs schools in Louisiana
- to the Principal Advisory Committee
- for cultivating prospective principals who can successfully administer in a high-needs school

and who understand the socio-cultural and political nature of the community and school in Louisiana

Alternatively, other committee members placed greater value on experiences that would emphasize professional development and involve program candidates in vision building, professional growth, and instructional leadership. To that end, it would appear that these team members felt a responsibility:

- as professors of educational leadership
- to the profession
- for cultivating prospective principals who could lead schools in a public school setting

As might be expected, there were other issues for which the MEL committee members held different positions throughout the year-and-a-half collaborative endeavor. Since much of my research and writing has been in the area of professional collaboration (e.g., Leonard, 2002; Leonard & Leonard, 2005; Leonard & Smith, 2004), not from an ethical standpoint, but from the perspective of benefits and challenges in developing professional learning communities, I will elaborate on that issue. In my work as a committee member on the MEL team, I was able to experience first-hand the challenges of working collaboratively to develop the new leadership program. As addressed previously, there were differences in how we conceptualized our responsibilities as, to, and for when developing the program. Consequently, important questions to consider are: How did we work out our differences? Did we collaborate and in what manner? How did this process affect the outcome — the educational leadership program? Was this a collaborative and democratic process? Was it a communal process?

Begley (2005) purports that "the essential, and often absent, component that would make adherence to a value genuinely democratic is dialogue" (p. 1). I believe that in resolving most of our differences, but certainly not all, the "dialogic deliberation" (p. 2) did occur and toward the end of the process, we began to compromise, and in some cases approached collaboration in the fashion advocated by Friend and Cook (2000). This may have occurred because as a group we began what Starratt (2004a) describes as the process of authentically knowing or

"putting aside one's own sense of superiority or importance, leaving one's own self-centered agenda aside, submitting oneself to the message of the subject, letting the subject re-position the self in a new or clearer set of relationships (natural, social, cultural), allowing the self to be

humbled by the integrity of the known" (p. 18).

Again, this is not to suggest that the entire process was communal. In some instances it was not. Personal egos and agendas emerged as we discussed various aspects of the program, manifesting themselves in a variety of styles of interaction — competitive, avoiding, compromising, withdrawing. However, through some of these discussions new and better ideas for shaping the program and the internship began to emerge. The process emerged as collaborative and the leadership distributed and, in the manner that Furman (2003) describes, was grounded in our "interpersonal and group skills... [and]... ongoing dialogue... that allow[ed] all voices to be heard" (p. 4). And while, the ethic of community may be an ideal difficult to explain and challenging to create given the many constraints under which collaborative educational endeavors usually take place, I believe that when people come together to work and share ideas in pursuit of mutual goals, and each is sincere in the process, then we are at least approaching community in the sense that Furman describes.

In the case of the MEL team and its work with the three advisory committees, there were undoubtedly differences in not only views about what constitutes an effective educational leadership program, but in more deep-rooted value orientations. Some of the differences, I believe, may have been due to what Begley describes as cultural isomorphs, which are "social conditions or value postures appearing to share the same shape or meaning from country to country, but actually structured of quite different elements" (Begley, 2005, p. 1). This may be an explanation for the differing views expressed about the nature of the principalship and what should serve as rigorous field and internship experiences, given the varying cultural orientations of group members, particularly since some of the MEL team were not native to Louisiana and, therefore, had differing conceptions of effective leadership. The experience and reflection upon the experience has helped me realize the important of knowing who we are, of clarifying our identity, and of understanding who we responsible as, to, and for. The quest for authenticity demands that we participate in this process.

Striving for authenticity in the aftermath of Katrina

The inner and the outer struggle for authenticity is one which involves making sense of the world in which we live and work in ways that acknowledges, nourishes, but also challenges our inner realities. It

requires that we take stock of who we are and what we stand for and that we understand the cultural, social, political, geographic, and additional influences on our identity. It means putting into context all of what we do — the pursuit of aligning our inner and outer realities so that they might "flow seamlessly into each other". Being authentic is not easy. What it means for me is that I must find ways to align my professional responsibilities with my personal and professional values as a teacher, as a researcher and scholar, and as a servant to the community. I must also be sensitive to the context in which I live and work. Sometimes this process requires that I reconsider my personal and professional values — not to sacrifice my integrity, but to examine these values from the vantage points of others.

For example, the ideals of my role as a professor in higher education were put to the test when I moved to Louisiana and began working with teachers confronting the challenges of meeting state accountability measures while working with insufficient resources and support and often with students who come to school disadvantaged in one way or another. While I have over 15 years experience teaching in public schools, I have not had the experience of teaching in an atmosphere infused by the kind of hysteria that accompanies comprehensive accountability plans, high-stakes testing, school report cards, measures of adequate yearly progress, all of which have potentially grave consequences for teachers and students, particularly those in diverse, high-poverty settings. Talking about the ideals and values of collaboration just does not "cut it" with these teachers in this type of environment. And while I concur wholeheartedly with Palmer's (1998) assertion that "the most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us we do it" (p. 5), I have found it difficult to help teachers in the PK-12 setting to see this perspective. I suspect that, in the wake of Katrina, and subsequently Hurricane Rita, this will continue to be a challenge for me. Hurricane Katrina, in particular, has struck a severe blow to the nation in general, and to numerous communities in the south in particular. The effects of this blow are widespread, with the education system in Louisiana being one of the areas that has been deeply affected. Education in Louisiana has experienced severe turbulence "with structural damage...to normal operations" (Gross, 1998).

Katrina destroyed or damaged schools in at least six Louisiana parishes, displacing more than 135,000 students, most of whom were poor and black, in the PK-12 system as well as many students in post-secondary institutions. Thousands of teachers were also displaced. At our institution, the university president stated that the university was utilizing every possible resource to provide stability and a first-class education to all students and comfort and assistance to those affected by this disaster.

A first-class education is a high standard in times of extreme turbulence. I suspect that there will continue to be a "chasm between the school's learning agenda (state defined curriculum standards) and the students' learning agenda (the existential task of becoming a somebody in the drama of everyday life with all of its ambiguities and challenges" (Starratt, 2004a, p. 14) in these turbulent times. However, it's a standard worth striving to reach. To strive for professional authenticity will require that I know who I am and what I stand for and be able to articulate that in both words and actions within the professional community.

Striving for professional authenticity

Professional authenticity requires a continuous clarification and in some cases revision of who I am as a human, as a teacher, as a researcher, and as a servant and ongoing evaluation of my words and actions within my professional community. As a human I am responsible to the community for contributing to the creation of a just, caring, equitable, democratic society. Any aspects of my professional identity must be congruent with this aspect of my being. As a *teacher leader* in higher education, I have the privilege of working with pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators completing baccalaureate, advanced, or alternative teacher and leadership certification programs. To that end, I am obligated to creating authentic learning environments for program candidates so that I may "practice what I preach". As a *researcher leader*, I can select research projects that are congruent with my personal and professional values. For example, I intend to continue to investigate ways to help teachers and administrators engage in real collaboration for the creation of authentic learning environments that are informed, and not restricted by curriculum standards and accountability measures so that their students are successful in a holistic sense. As a *servant leader* in a professional learning community I can continue to reflect on my personal and professional

identities and the potential impact of my services on this community. What I have confirmed by my involvement in and deliberations about program development, particularly with the new MEL program, is that collaboration, while rarely a smooth process, is a highly important aspect in the endeavor to be authentic. Consequently, I must recognize and seize the opportunities to collaborate with my colleagues through my service on department, college, and university committees. In doing so, I recognize and embrace my responsibilities *as* a human and as a professional working in a university setting *to* faculty, staff, and students in a professional learning community for helping to create and sustain a just, caring, equitable, and democratic society. In the interest of authenticity, I must engage in "mutually affirming relationships" (Starratt, 2004b, p. 71) in my collaborations.

Concluding comments

In presenting my story and discussing aspects of it in light of particular ethical and values leadership theories, I acknowledge that the story of MEL, as well as any additional clips of my professional life that I have shared, are told from my perspective, and are therefore partial and "conditional on [my] interests and surrounding circumstances" (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p. 179). I also acknowledge that, while I may not be guilty of creating the "Hollywood plot" ... [where] everything works out well in the end" (p. 181), there has been some "narrative smoothing" (p. 181) in the interest of omitting details which might negatively reflect on persons and places described in the story. In my attempt to attain authenticity I need to acquire a "language of wakefulness" (p. 182), where I am more fully alert to the risks of oversimplification, of creating simplistic plots and interpreting the world and people's actions through my own limited lens. At the same time, however, I am mindful of what Maya Angelou's response to bell hooks' question (1998): "Do you simply write for your own inner purposes or do you have a conscious didactic purpose?" Angelou replies:

I will tell the truth. I may not tell the facts; facts can obscure the truth. You can tell so many facts you never get to the truth. So I want to tell the truth as I see it, as I've lived it. I will not tell everything I know. But what I do say is the truth.

Similarly, I believe I tell the truth, as I know it, in striving for authenticity. Becoming authentic is a

process, a journey, not an end in itself; it is an inner and outer journey and requires a continual examination of one's multiple identities within the context of the communities in which one lives, works, and interacts. It involves wakefulness to the dialogue, actions, and values of diverse others within those communities. It demands what Starratt (2004) describes as "presence", where one is "wide awake to what's in front of [us]" (p. 88), requiring us to "remove ourselves from the center of the universe" (p. 90) in ways that are affirming, critiquing, and enabling. Achieving authenticity also requires an understanding that there is much to be learned as we navigate the road of authenticity, particularly as we attempt to make sense of the interruptions we encounter along the way, from the casual to the catastrophic.

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