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Guest Editor's Introduction: Leadership for Social Justice

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Comments

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I wanted to edit a special issue of the *Journal of School Leadership* on social justice for two main reasons. First, I was curious to know what my colleagues had in mind when they thought of social justice. What concrete or abstract ideas might be collected under the heading of social justice? Would there be a variety of positions taken and ideologies represented? Would the manuscripts be theoretical or based on empirical research or both? Could social justice be presented in nontraditional forms of writing even in an academic journal? Questions of content and style piqued my interest.

My second reason stemmed from a desire to be engaged in an activity that allowed me to do more than think about social justices issues in the abstract. Editing a special issue would force me to spend time on producing something that I hoped would spark further conversation on these topics. I wanted to help provide a context in which the authors (and I) could "communicate . . . or express [our] feelings and perspectives on social life . . . where others can listen" (Young, 2000, p. 32). Gathering the accepted articles under the umbrella of social justice would help to label particular concerns as ones worthy of our attention in the educational community.

At the outset, then, I understood that I was offering a service to my colleagues and the journal in proposing the special issue. But it was not until I had read the 19 submissions, the reviews, and the revised manuscripts that I had a sense of a larger purpose. To be able to provide this opportunity illustrated for me one of the two ideals of social justice put forward by Iris Marion Young, namely, self-development. She argues that social institutions that are just, "provide conditions for all persons to learn

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and use satisfying and expansive skills in socially recognized settings" (2000, p. 31). In encouraging this special issue (which has expanded to become two special issues), the *Journal of School Leadership* has given us the opportunity for our own self-development. By not restricting our modes of expression or views of life, and by providing an outlet for the ideas contained within, the journal has demonstrated that it values social justice in the broadest sense of the term. Thus, the process that leads me from curiosity to focused activity has extended my thinking.

I now see this collection of 10 articles (five in this issue, and five in the next issue) as examples of communicative interaction. Each is valued for its own substantive discussion of one aspect of social justice. Through well-crafted studies and critical analyses of data, through thoughtful, probing essays, the authors have raised our awareness of current concerns and given us valuable ideas to consider. For instance, in this issue, Carolyn Shields, Linda LaRoque, and Steven Oberg converse with one another about the difficulties of understanding race and ethnicity across different school settings and among educators with different perspectives (and yes, the format is a departure from traditional academic prose). Jill Blackmore argues that "a socially just education requires educational leaders to practice moral outrage at the persistence, if not worsening, of homelessness, hunger, and poverty." Ira Bogotch cautions that there is no fixed definition or meaning of social justice prior to engaging in it, and that "all social justice/reform efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued." Katia Goldfarb and Jaime Grinberg describe the leadership conditions that encouraged authentic participation of community members in a Venezuelan community center to advance social justice there, and Patrick Solomon writes of Canadian school principals' efforts to introduce anti-racist initiatives into their buildings.

In the issue to follow, Dana Rapp argues the importance of rebellious, oppositional imaginations for educational leaders to take a more activist stance against the social injustices they encounter. Antoinette Riester, Victoria Pursch, and Linda Skrla report on a study of elementary school principals working to ensure academic success for children from low-income homes. Suzanne Rice and Howard Ebmeier criticize the practice of differentially weighting high school grades as socially unjust. Linda Lyman and Christine Villani discuss a study of educational leadership programs that reveals very little attention is being paid to understanding the complexity of poverty in students' coursework. Finally, Genniver Bell, Enid Jones, and Joseph Johnson show that reformers in the United States rarely acknowledge the serious inequities and inequalities characterizing most reform efforts, which have produced few sustainable results for disadvantaged students.

Individually, each author makes an important contribution to our conception of social justice issues in education. In addition, the two issues provide a medium of communicative interaction—a means of influencing thought and possible future action. The articles are more powerful in the collection than they would be on their own. I see the issues as an outgrowth of what Iris Marion Young (2000) calls an associative activity. She defines an associative activity as one that "spring[s] from the everyday lives and activities of communities of interest" (p. 158). In this case the "community of interest" is the community of educators who care about social justice and who responded to a call for manuscripts on issues of race, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing conditions. The authors thus voluntarily "associated" for the purpose of calling attention to their concerns. Under the sphere of civil society, associative activities operate through communicative interaction rather than through the medium of authorized power or the medium of money—the two media through which the state and the economy operate. Moreover, this kind of associative activity can be described as political activity as Young defines it. "Political activity is any activity whose aim is to politicize social or economic life, to raise questions about how society should be organized, and what actions should be taken to address problems or do justice" (p. 163).

Thus, we have achieved more in producing a compilation of articles than we could have in publishing them separately. But we must not be deluded into thinking that by simply putting the articles out there we have made the changes advocated in each article! Although an associative activity can have more influence than a single voice, it does not have the power to effect change. "[P]ursuit of justice as self-development cannot rely on the communicative and organizational activities of civil society alone, but requires positive state intervention to regulate and direct economic activity" (Young, 2000, p. 184). And, I would add, state intervention is required to provide the necessary policy levers to seek especially solutions to problems of poverty, segregation, and economic domination. In the educational arena these underlying problems serve to prevent many students from receiving an equitable education. "[D]emocratic citizens should look to law and public policy to address these, and related problems, and should consider state institutions and their actions as major sites of democratic struggle . . . for taking action to foster social changes to promote greater justice" (p. 187).

Our work has just begun in a sense. I am encouraged by the notion that we can associate with one another as colleagues in higher education, pk–12 settings, professional organizations, and foundations committed to eliminating injustice. We can insist that issues of social justice permeate

our conferences and annual meetings. We must invite knowledgeable speakers to keep us informed and to rock our complacency. We need to continue to study and write as the authors in these issues have done, and we must disseminate our work in different forums, but to echo Dana Rapp, we must also take a more activist stance. We must act collectively to have our debates heard by politicians, legislators, and other policymakers who have the power of children's futures in their hands. The forces of civil society combined with the advocacy for state action is a powerful combination. For though we do not speak in one voice about social justice, the conflicts we illuminate and the diversity of perspectives we provide need to be on the table so that we can interrupt the continued maintenance of the status quo.

REFERENCE

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