

## Moral and Values-Based Leadership

Moral and Values-Based Leadership And School Improvement by Michelle Fattig-Smith, Ed.S. “Public school leaders today are somewhat like an heir receiving a handsome legacy from a distant relative, who neglected to include in the will instructions for maintaining the bequest,” (Tyack & Hansot, 1981, p. 14). Criticism of public education today may be due, in part, to technological advances outpacing the ability of schools to compete and the ensuing ‘erosion of traditional authority;’ past successes leading to more educated, critical, and vocal complainants; a pervasive doubt that true change and improvement can be made; and a certain level of ignorance regarding the true state of performance compared to past performance of our educational system (Schlechy, 2001, p. 21). Research shows that many school-level factors have been proposed to be the true basis for effectiveness in education (Marzano, 2003, p. 15); however, considering school factors alone do not provide an understanding of the overall climate of our culture and how outside factors affect teachers and students (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004, p. 33). There is more to school reform and school improvement than just getting the job done. School reform and school improvement must add value to the process by managing limited resources and maximizing outcomes through collaboration and capacity building (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. x). Criticism of Public Education There has always been a divide between educational policy and actual practice; therefore, meaningful and lasting school reform efforts have struggled. Policymakers continue to propose educational reforms that fail to consider real schools, educators, parents, and students (Plaut & Sharkey, 2003). Unfortunately, the public does not always trust the reformers. While there appears to be agreement between the public and the reformers in a broad view regarding the goals of education, there remains a deep chasm in the perspectives on how best to meet these goals. Although more children are graduating than ever before, and more enrolling in college, dissatisfaction with public education, in urban areas in particular, stands at an all time high (Schorr, 1997, p. 245). School Factors in the Larger Context Poverty dramatically affects growing numbers of children in our country today. “As a group, children are America’s poorest citizens,” (Canestrari & Marlowe, 2004, p. 85). The proportion of American children living in poverty has risen dramatically over the last decade and continues to rise at an alarming rate, and the greatest concentration of poverty tends to be found among single-headed households, particularly those headed by women (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, Smith, & Leal, 2002, p. 10). Poverty, unemployment, bad housing, blighted and unkempt physical environments, single-parents, and married couples struggling to raise children, earn a living and make ends meet became yet another facet of the malady of our distressed society (Taylor, 2002). Poverty impacts the ability to obtain adequate medical care, food, and shelter. The size of the school, quality of curriculum, resources, teachers’ expectations, and potential for tracking has been an issue, and low income and minority students are more likely to be in low ability classes or non-college-bound curriculum opportunities. Even students, who are successful in the low-status curriculum and able to move on to more college-bound tracks, are prevented from doing so due to missing out on the learning experiences considered prerequisites to the higher curriculum (Oakes & Guiton, 1995). Under funded schools, poorly regulated childcare, and federal mandates are other factors affecting public education today (Glickman, et al., 2004, 33). These and other outside factors can lead to classrooms of “disengaged, unmotivated, and/or disruptive learners, who may find school irrelevant, or even hostile to their values,” (Canestrari & Marlowe, 2004, p. 79). Moral and Value-Added Leadership for School Improvement Although few school reform advocates threaten to upend the entire system and start with a fresh slate (Sergiovanni, 2005, x), these radical school reformers often include special interest groups hiding their true intentions “behind the cloak of reform and of school improvement,” (Canestrari & Marlowe, 2004, p. 121). The overall prevailing strategy by reformers tends towards relying upon “a school’s existing strengths and to build capacity by developing a collaborative culture of continuous improvement,” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. x). Lists of school-factors in school effectiveness may include a guaranteed and viable curriculum; challenging goals and effective feedback; parent and community involvement; safe and orderly environment; and collegiality and professionalism (Marzano, 2003, p. 15). However, school-factors alone cannot account for the change necessary in education if we are not to “drive out the best educators and undermine the natural drive to do one’s best that lies at the heart of good parenting and good schooling,” (Schorr, 1997, p. 103). Parents, academics, school reformers, educators, and politicians agree that drastic change is needed. Schools need to be able to provide students with the skills and abilities to create a world where people will have the best that humanity and technology have to offer, and the ability and desire to engage in lifelong learning in this complex, competitive world. “Extraordinary times need extraordinary solutions, and the times aren’t just tough, they are changing. Institutions face resource shortfalls and changes in public expectations that will not disappear when economic conditions improve. Focusing on value can provide just the catalyst needed for rethinking and reconfiguring the core elements of the educational model.” (Caraveli & Norris, 2006, p. 1) References Caraveli, A. & Norris, D.M. (2006). New leadership goals in an era of accountability. Retrieved January 13, 2007 from <http://www2.universitybusiness.com/viewarticle.aspx?articleid=40> Glickman, C.D., Gordon, S.P., & Ross-Gordon, J.M. (2004). SuperVision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach, 6th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc. Marzano, R.J. (2003). What works in schools: Translating research into action. Alexandria, VA: Association for Research and Curriculum Development. Oakes, J. & Guiton, G. (1995) Matchmaking: The dynamics of high school tracking decisions. American Educational Research Journal, 32 (1), 3-33. Plaut, S. & Sharkey, N. S. (2003). Education policy and practice, bridging the divide. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education. Schlechty, P.C. (2001). 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