

CHAPTER 7

ACTIONS OF AN ENGAGED LEADER

There are people in America who overemphasize our unity yet fail to appreciate the importance of our diversity, just as there are those who emphasize our diversity yet fail to appreciate the importance of our unity. It is to appreciate the importance of our unity. It is imperative that we honor both. It is our unity and our diversity that matters, and their relationship to each other reflects a philosophical and political truth outside of which we cannot thrive.

Williamson, 1997, pg. 72

INTRODUCTION

I became the Special Assistant to the Chancellor for Diversity and Community at Texas Christian University in, I believe January, 2000. Before this change I served as an Associate Professor and Department Chair for Educational Foundations and Administration in the then School of Education. One of the first actions taken in this office focused on bringing clarity to the work ahead. These actions led to the development of a pamphlet describing our work. John Butler, then University Minister, (my partner in crime), and I wrote this document. I share parts of this document below. I will attempt to connect these thoughts with the work of engaged leaders later in this chapter.

DIVERSITY – INCLUSION – ENGAGED LEADERSHIP

Today, the word ‘diversity’ often appears in the variety of places we experience community (work settings, schools, churches, etc.). Immediately, there are images that come to mind, some comfortable, some threatening, some helpful to self and others. The word carries with it many complex reactions and many complex dimensions. Approaching that complexity will require a rich variety of experiences, steps and stages, policies and procedures that involve every place we are organized for life together and involve all the people who share those places.

People everywhere are living with every aspect of their lives connected to a global society. Almost every culture can be found almost everywhere. Wherever we are busy with life we will find the world in people with whom we will be engaged. Our environment, health, clothing, transportation, technology, medicines, education, and most everything that shapes the quality of life occurs on a global scale. In many ways we are at a critical point of change in the history of the world. Those persons who are comfortable, respectful, informed about, and engaged with life in that global society

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will be successful (socially, emotionally, even economically); those who are not able to achieve this level of comfort and capacity will find themselves in increasing trouble in the coming years. A global society is not some fad or a political notion that will go away. Already, the change that has occurred would require the demise of our culture to re-establish some notion of “what is was like in the good old days.” These factors have led people across the society to draw upon one another to make the most of the changing realities to achieve the best living-working situation for all people involved.

Often there are reactions to the word diversity and they include avoidance at one end and a sense of completion on the other. Avoidance frequently carries with it feelings of anger, claims of some established and somehow reliable solidarity, some degree of defensiveness, and a denial that there is anything to explore. It is perceived that “*there are not problems and if there are, that is the way it is supposed to be.*” Others will have the perception that diversity is not something to be avoided, that it is real and important, “*I just happen to have already completed the work that is needed.*” This feeling carries with it a level of comfort in certain assumptions, a clarity that others have work to do, that prejudices and injustices reside everywhere. “*I don’t have any prejudices, I treat everyone the same. I know what we need to talk about, and if there are problems, others will need to explore their problem. I don’t have a problem with anyone.*” Given the history of our country and how diversity work has begun in recent times, both reactions are natural and to be expected. It is appropriate to accept both reactions as part of the landscape of relationships. If those who have either response will journey even for a short time into the work of diversity and inclusiveness they will discover that their reaction is only that, a reaction. Both will turn out to be unsupported by rational understanding and not helpful to self or the community as we work toward a better future for all of us.

Diversity work is not an experience, or scheduled event, or a workshop or a set of skills, rather, it is a process of becoming that begins wherever we are individually and collectively with our comforts and capacities, leading into the future. Diversity work is like working with a fabric or a mosaic working toward completion, using who we are in an active interaction and active commitment to end insensitivity, intolerance, and prejudices that weaken the society we are becoming. And while work on the connections certainly occurs in a workshop or in a personal encounter, new people will come into the environment, new insights will occur, and new dynamics from beyond us will each require us to change. The combination of personal commitments, policies, and laws guide the process, but do not guarantee or adequately respond to the process of change that is occurring in the world. Diversity work is thus a never-ending process. For the foreseeable future, as the world makes its change and we are part of that change, all of us will be engaged in diversity work, (positive and/or negative) in a rich variety of settings.

When we say the word diversity, many of us think, “Oh, I know what that is about, we are going to talk about those others.” There is, of course, much to learn and thoroughly incorporate about others around us. The world is large and complex when it comes to cultural identities. The experiences of those around the country

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already doing diversity work, the overwhelming time and energy will be spent learning about self as we each become individually part of the new reality around us. There is much to learn about self in diversity work and the result not only will help us in the changes, but will help others in their changes. Self and others are two sides of the same essential experience of learning in this work. There are several other combinations that will guide and enrich the work ahead.

The rich diversity within each of us (how do I understand love, achievement, honesty, compassion, and many other elements in identity) impacts the quality and extent of our diversity work. They are each a complex and unfolding mix of realities within us; each contributing to the other in significant ways. This is the diversity within us. And yet there is that reality out beyond us, which behaves in more complex, but similar ways; the Internal and External sides of diversity. We each grew up with an understanding of whether or not we are part of the majority or the minority (for example, racially, politically, religiously speaking). And yet, based upon the setting and changing circumstances we will find ourselves moving from one to the other and back again. All of us understand there are differences between us and we want to respect and affirm those differences. And yet if all we worked on in diversity work and in social settings were the differences, very soon there would be significant pressure to affirm a particular, what would be seen as pure form of a given difference. And that purity would be sought to be the absolute expression of a difference, destroying society in the declaration of it. We have seen those declarations in history and contemporarily. Another side is needed. The work for the common good becomes essential. We appreciate the differences, but see that we have common hopes and needs, and that common connection is good for all. And yet, if all that was sought was the common good, very soon there would be efforts to have common language, common dress, and common values. The result may make some people feel better, but the result destroys personhood. Both work for differences and the common good are essential. And that is the case for all of the two-sided coins of diversity. And there were more than were mentioned here; Here and Everywhere; Now and a Very Long Time; One Culture and All Cultures. Each of these are coins for investing time, energy, hopes, comforts, and capacities for the sake of the future. We will be back and forth between each side of each coin as circumstances demand. Leaders and those successful in the changes occurring in the world will move smoothly and easily between both sides. Those fisted on one side of a particular coin will be a problem for themselves and the community. All of these coins and others will be required to make the investment in diversity work for the future that is unfolding.

A PROCESS OF BECOMING

When considering our thoughts expressed here regarding diversity, what kinds of teaching and learning environments will effectively serve the students at your university or school? What role does the teaching/learning process play in this learning environment? What are the roles of the individuals who are members of this community

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of learners? To answer these questions we must first have a vision depicting the type of individuals we want our students to become and the society in which they will live. We would suggest that we want to help develop individuals oriented towards a life of active, self-directed learning, critical inquiry, reflective thinking and prepared to serve by searching for what we can become instead of just being satisfied with the way things currently are. If this premise has any merit we must then choose the types of learning environments and experiences that will help us achieve these goals. Should we also, as part of our responsibility in this teaching and learning process, facilitate the continuous process of learning education leaders must experience in order to remain effective?

What responses most accurately answer these thoughts? Do we listen to popular constructivist discussions about preferred learning environments and believe we are moving towards doing the right thing? Will looking at campus/school environments, our evolving global community and current student beliefs and actions bring validity to these discussions or reinforce the need to continue without much change? In other words, how do we view the global community and our role in preparing students for this new world?

How we think and what we believe help to form the foundation from which we live our lives and interact with others. These two factors can either enhance or hinder how we provide growth opportunities for individuals. Similar to building bridges, if foundational components are not internalized then attempts to build on such foundations have little chance of successfully sustaining challenges that are sure to occur during one's life. The building process is doomed from the very beginning. Our approach consists of three stages.

MOVING THROUGH STAGES

Everyone approaches the work of diversity, whether on campus or in corporations in the larger society, through stages. No one experiences inclusiveness in a single conversion experience, or educational encounter, or a workshop of days or a week. It happens in stages and in fact, one might more accurately say, we, as individuals and as organizations, rotate through stages, beginning, completing, and beginning again. Life circumstances and our own capacities both move us through the stages and force us to make the journey again. It might easily be said to those who say, "*well, I know all there is to know of diversity. I have done all that,*" it is good you have done what you have, but most of us have hardly even begun. The immediate community and the global community are rapidly changing in demographics and in issues that give our community its reality. No one is ever finished in this continuously unfolding and expanding process. It is a journey toward an inclusiveness that has no precise end because people and issues and new understandings of the two sided coins are reappearing new, unexpected, and transforming ways.

Different authors propose a variety of stages ranging from four to six identifiable, testable, and reliable stages. While these are important to know and appreciated, we are proposing that they can be reduced to a simple set of three stages.

IDENTITY

The first stage is a set of experiences, encounters, integrations, and self-understandings that lead to identity formation and a declaration for all to know. This is who I am and how I am able to declare; here I stand. Coming to this certainly includes a personal sense of well-being, health, cultural histories, traditions, symbols, personal experiences, and all that defines a person and how that person is part of a larger culture. Identify is of course more than our own expression of who we are. There are so many cultures and so many people within each. Some people have not thought of their identity within the interplay of others, while some have well begun the process. Caucuses and other group experiences that help present the identity and the rich variety of ways of gathering people within an identity are all part of this stage. Thinking, engaging, withdrawing, reflecting, coming back to engage again, asserting, reshaping, and integrating are each pieces of this important stage. More to the point of being in the work of diversity, this stage includes finding the space to do this work not only for one's own cultural identity, but to allow and encourage others to be about the same process. This stage is almost continuously reoccurring as new people become part of the community, bringing new ways and new opportunities for being a particular identity. This stage is not merely the first stage; it is the foundational encounter with self and with others in which all dimensions and elements in the diversity work impact the self, with self-impacting others. To say that this stage is exciting and creative is an understatement. The power it brings to individuals, groups of individuals, and to the community that knows it emerges out of the capacities of everyone to declare a strong, vibrant, and contributing identity.

PRESENCE

Once a person and/or groups understand who it is (rather who it is becoming), there is the need both for that group and for the larger community to experiences the presence of that group. What is it that the group or culture has to say to all of us? What is it that they have to say to particular individuals within the larger organization or community? How will they say it? How will they impact the on-going life of the community? These questions and others point to a process of recognition, respect and appreciation, honoring, and enabling the presence (physically, organizationally, and interpersonally) in all dimensions of the organization or community. This stage is both the standing to declare a difference made because of the particular identity, but it is also the act of making room for, giving credence and appreciation for the presence of the identities that form the community. This will be a dynamic, potentially loud, and always changing stage for everyone in the organization. To truly encounter the presence of a population is to address many of the coins described earlier that are the investment in the success of self and the success of the particular community. This stage will be a most rewarding and highly visible stage, but the one stage among the three where tension emerges, issues are defined in new ways and the content of

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the future comes into clearer and clearer focus. Because of you and you and you and me, we will be different.

INTENTIONALITY

What we do with who we are together becomes the essential test of both of the earlier stages. Whether we can make our community stronger, more successful, more effective in who we really are for ourselves is as vital an issue for the organization as it is for a single individual. This is the moral, character defining, value laden, social-economic, political moment of making a difference in the larger global community. It has to make a difference that we have come to a full awareness of who we are and what we have to do as a result of that as an outcome. Will there be fairness and justice in our relationships and in the world? What difference does it make that we exist together? Will we be able to create a new community that better understands who we are and that is better prepared to receive the on-coming realities of the world yet to be? This is the process of accountability with one another and with the future generation. This is the stage in which we apply the other two stages for an outcome that is marked by the best in who we are and the hope in the best in who we must yet be for the future. This is the stage where alliances and commitments to be a community take shape. This stage is marked by moral and political choices, by discoveries of our similarities in purpose, by our commitment to inclusiveness for everyone, including those who have not yet appeared or emerged. It is a raucous and yet rewarding stage that turns the immediate community into just that, a community, and establishes the hope for the global community that is still taking form.

As we repeatedly move through each stage, due to changes in self and others, we become more capable of establishing the inclusiveness that comes only through all voices. Inclusiveness is a measurable, desirable, changeable and renewable outcome. The community will in the long run have reached its most effective goal because of who formed it and how they are able to work together. There are other approaches to organizational and community life: dictatorships, effectiveness training, quality assurance, and others. But none will have voices of all participants and move to include the full connections to the global community as the process of inclusiveness.

We must create opportunities for individuals to become more understanding, thoughtful, and expressive about issues that impact their lives. All must have opportunities to “Voice” their opinions in the community. With these thoughts and stages as our foundation, we suggest *Inclusiveness* as a possible approach to achieve desired goals.

INCLUSIVENESS

The concept of inclusiveness has often been used to force homogenization or to create the image that we are a “melting pot” of identities, creating a single notion of culture and community. We believe, however, in the concept of inclusiveness

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that leads to a synthesis of thoroughly understood and strongly declared identities which lead to actions that shape the good of a realistically diverse community. Inclusiveness, we believe, builds a stronger campus community, city, nation and world in three powerful and interrelated ways. First, by emphasizing our uniqueness in promoting the reality that each voice makes when valued, respected and expected to provide positive contributions to the community. Emphasizing our uniqueness will bring support as all members of a community work toward making the traditional hierarchical structures of identity flatten into a continuum of descriptions and beliefs that bring value, energy, and synergy to an organization. In other words, we begin to understand that difference does not automatically mean *less than*, but rather different. These declarations of “*Identity*” provide an invaluable gift to persons and to the process toward inclusiveness. Second that a commitment to the worth and dignity of people expressed in their uniqueness brings synergy to a community. Our willingness to both declare “*Presence*” and an openness to receive presence across a variety of identities provides an atmosphere where collaboration empowers the complexity of our life with others. Broadening our perspectives and capacity to relate to people and ideas will help us better understand the societal dynamics, which need improving. Third, understanding the dynamics in our society which need improving from this perspective will help people recognize that we are all part of the synergy and systems where heritage is a resource and not a barrier, where hopes are shaped by our interdependence and not upon imposed separation. Broadening our perspectives about issues and experiences can create “*Intentionality*” – new pathways of understanding, more productive and real relationships, and empower others to become active contributors towards the betterment of the community. Much of this work is addressed as we seek answers to the following questions:

- What expressions of identity are forming in the community?
- What causes and events and organizations are allowing for identity here?
- How can we create an atmosphere where presence is anticipated and desired?
- Is there a particular presence burgeoning that we need to hear and incorporate?
- What are the organizational opportunities to form an intentionality that will change our community toward inclusiveness?
- What connections are happening between persons and cultures that can change our community?
- Can we recognize where people are in their journey toward inclusiveness?
- Can we recognize where our community is in its journey toward inclusiveness?

Answers to these and similar questions bring focus to the issue at hand, what can we do to create a more inclusive community of learners on our college/school campuses?

STEPPING TOWARDS INCLUSIVENESS

We developed a questionnaire entitled “What Is Your Philosophy of Diversity?” that has proven to open the doors of conversation about the issues that impact

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our relationships with others. This questionnaire, and the discussions that follow, help participants begin to see what they really believe about certain issues, of even greater importance, why. This is how the process typically works. Participants are asked to complete the short questionnaire. They are told that we will not collect the questionnaire, so please answer each question as honestly as possible. We tell them we will ask later for volunteers to share their thoughts, and possibly their responses, regarding the questionnaire. Each participant is given a scoring chart along with our definitions for each of the four descriptors. Before asking for volunteers to share their thoughts, we review the definitions and ask participants to look at the results of their answers along a continuum of thought versus looking at them from a traditional hierarchical perspective. We say that given particular situations and our personal record of experiences that greatly influence our beliefs, we are at various stages of thought. For example, one of us might say; *“In certain situations, the concept of assimilation can be good. We all assimilate in some ways. For example, I believe we should all abide by traffic speed limits; I think that certain rules regarding my job, like wearing clothes, must be honored; I think we should not litter, etc. My point is we cannot have any degree of freedom without some rules. We must all adhere to levels of uniformity at certain points in our lives.”* Or one of us might say: *“While I support the importance of understanding cultural aspects, I must do more. I need to get to know the individual in order to develop the kind of working relationship needed to be as successful as possible in this venture. I am also excited about learning, broadening my perspectives beyond the generalization talked about. There is so much more to an individual than some set of descriptors.”*

An activity entitled “Key Words” brings more understanding to these issues (see Appendix A). We will share three key words that come to mind when thinking about the four categories (descriptors) from the questionnaire (see chapter six). We then break the participants into four small groups and ask them to share three additional words from one of the eleven categories along with why these words were chosen. People become more engaged in the process. They begin to connect our work with their personal life experiences. Participants begin to express the need for change within themselves, their families, work environments and our society.

We typically are forced to shorten discussions at this time for the sake of limited time. Our next activity is designed to help participants internalize these issues even more. We present a new set of questions to participants based on the group we are working with (see appendix B). In small groups, participants are asked to develop statements that would demonstrate a point of view for each of the four descriptors in use. For example, we might present the following question:

How should we deal with conflict centered on issues of social economic status between students?

Each group will be asked to develop a statement, similar to ones shared on the questionnaire, which would answer this question for each of the four descriptors. The expansion of issues has no limits as participants begin to develop their own

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series of additional questions. We begin to see more clearly that **how we think and what we believe help to direct our actions**. This process will also help us become more reflective before making decisions. Often we are challenged, internally, to change the way we think and what we believe – and to change our actions.

There is indeed much work to be done. This work is never complete. What I share here is a starting point worthy of serious consideration. I understand that this process is only one of many choices one can make. The importance of a process that looks more at self than the other should not be ignored. It should not be considered too *touchy-feely*. Rather, it is intense and valuable work. As previously stated, diversity work . . . “is a process of becoming that begins wherever we are individually and collectively with our comfort and capacities, leading into the future.” It is strongly suggested here that this model enhances these efforts.

CONNECTIONS

The most exciting aspect of critical thinking in the classroom is that it calls for initiative from everyone, actively inviting all students to think passionately and to share ideas in a passionate, open manner. When everyone in the classroom, teacher and students, recognizes that they are responsible for creating a learning community together, learning is at its most meaningful and useful. In such a community of learning there is no failure. Everyone is participating and sharing whatever resource is needed at a given moment in time to ensure that we leave the classroom knowing that critical thinking empowers us.

Hooks, 2010, pg. 10.

How do these thoughts about inclusion impact the actions of the engaged leader in public school settings? Of course staff development and other professional growth activities designed to enhance personal and organizational growth in this area is essential. However, to further address this question, I will briefly connect the stages of identity, presence, and intentionality to the role of engaged leadership. I will then review three questions asked earlier in this chapter:

- What kinds of teaching and learning environments will effectively serve the students in your school?
- What role does the teaching and learning process play in this learning environment?
- What are the roles of the individuals who are members of this community of leaders?

IDENTITY

As previously expressed, identity relates to, “who I am and how I am able to declare here I stand.” This call for identity becomes important because it causes individuals to recognize their strengths and weakness; their place in the world; and the gifts that they individually possess to help make the world a better place for all. The engaged

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leader values this notion of identity. He/she understands the value each person's gifts to an organization. Therefore the engaged leader works to build the kind of environment that promotes identity of self, of others, and of the community. He/she utilizes the building of one to one relationships, linked with a pathway of connections. These pathways of connections are utilized by teachers to help learners connect prior knowledge with new information in ways that help to internalize meaning and to create new meaning. This pathway of connections is paved with the kinds of relationships between teachers and learners that become a conduit for a growing web of understanding of who I am; who you are; how we each learn; and how best to share new information that is internalized. Of course we all realize that the role of teacher and learner changes from time to time. In these settings, administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders are all teachers and learners at given points of the life of the school.

The engaged leader models these behaviors in their work with all teachers and learners that are a part of the organization. They strive to better understand each individual, their strengths and weaknesses; likes and dislikes; prior knowledge; best learning styles, etc. Engaged leaders then use this knowledge to bridge gaps of understanding, making links that did not exist and thus finding ways for all to voice their thoughts in ways that inform and improve the work to be done.

PRESENCE

This process of inclusion that is utilized by engaged leaders creates an atmosphere of sharing. Individuals are excited about being a part of a community of learners where recognition of self, respect and appreciation of self and the empowering of self are points of focus. The engaged leader strives to understand the needs of each individual. These actions, in turn, cause others to actively understand themselves and others. A better and more valued understanding of 'I' results in a better and more valued understanding of "we".

INTENTIONALITY

The 'we' described above enhances our efforts towards fairness; justice for all; a community striving to accomplish and exceed stated goals. The engaged leader strives to build such a community of teachers and learners. The engaged leader works hard to build a community of 'we' where accountability, dependability, and excellence thrives.

Some would argue that this atmosphere of inclusion in our public schools can only be imagined. It can never really exist. They would further argue that the need for most, if not all, of us to develop a sense of self, identify, on the backs of others will not allow for any significant community of inclusion. In other words, some would argue that human nature causes individuals to seek power. This premise is supported by the belief that those in power define themselves in ways that justify

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their position in society. They glorify themselves, while vilifying others. History, they would tell us, provides all of the needed support for their argument. I would help them to remember that this system of identity has also cloaked the dangers ahead and have led to the destruction of each of these societies. The illumination of these examples in history, one would hope, should cause all of us to take a different path. I simply provide a counter argument by asking if we are truly satisfied with the current culture within our public schools. Of greater concern, are we satisfied to travel along similar pathways that have historically had disastrous results?

Therefore, the engaged leaders establishes a teaching and learning environment built on trust. By trust I mean that teachers and learners will do all that they can to ensure that learning does occur at the highest possible levels. The atmosphere is one of inquiry, risk-taking, and self-directed learning. There exist a community that values the discussion of varying viewpoints, critical and reflective thinking; and demonstrated joy for learning.

Both teachers and learners support one another. They see learners, not as receptacles to simply pour knowledge in, but rather souls full of knowledge seeking to realize, to know even more.

Leadership then facilitates in ways that clears this pathway of interactive, engaged, and often self-directed teaching and learning of the barriers that might impede travel. They support, provide funding, and direction when needed. Engaged leaders do all that they possibly can to make sure this type of teaching and learning environment continues to evolve.

Then imagine with me the possibilities of the future of public schooling. Let us walk together as we step into this era of engaged leadership and inclusion in our public schools.

REFERENCES

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Williamson, Marianne. (1997). *The Healing of America*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

APPENDIX A

KEY WORDS

Essentialism/ Assimilation	Tolerance	Multicultural	Inclusiveness
Traditional Values	Impersonal	Group Representation	Group Representation
Control	Accommodate	Enable	Empower
Standard	Political Correctness	Respect	Voice
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
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_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

APPENDIX B

DEVELOPING NEW QUESTIONS

What foundational premise best guides our thoughts about learning?

- E.
- T.
- M.
- I.

What foundational premise best guides our thoughts about leadership?

- E.
- T.
- M.
- I.

How should the thoughts of other stakeholders be best handled?

- E.
- T.
- M.
- I.