

# URBAN SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND THEIR ROLE AS MULTICULTURAL LEADERS

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*This study focuses on the role of urban school principals as multicultural leaders. Using cross-case analysis, the authors describe what 6 practicing principals do in regard to multicultural leadership. The findings suggest that although multicultural preparation was lacking for these principals, some did engage in work that promoted diversity in their daily activities. All principals dealt with multicultural issues, usually focusing on individual students or specific programs to accommodate immigrants or refugees. Although some principals held high expectations for all, others were less aware of the connection between affirming diversity and student achievement. Recommendations are made to support principals in their work.*

**Keywords:** *multicultural leadership; principal preparation; diversity*

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American school students have always been culturally diverse. Regardless of whether they are schooled in the midwestern United States or the southwestern border states, or whether they are from a predominant racial-ethnic group or a variety of cultural

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groupings, students are diverse in age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, physical and mental ability, language, and ethnicity. Although some schools might have greater challenges with diversity than other schools, all must recognize an increasing diversity within their respective communities, districts, and states and the nation as a whole. According to Marx (2002), by the year 2050, the United States will become a "nation of minorities," with less than half of the population being non-Hispanic White. At present, more than half of the students attending urban schools are members of minority groups (Orfield, 2001).

Standards and educational leadership practices are often focused on managerial, instructional, and participatory leadership. Within these areas of competence, administrators and their staff need to be knowledgeable about diversity to provide education that is culturally sensitive to difference, is free from discrimination and prejudice, and promotes educational equity. School principals have a critical role. For example, they can ensure that inclusive teaching and learning are encouraged or that culturally relevant teaching practices are explored (Riehl, 2000). Principals can maintain high expectations for all while advocating for appropriate pedagogical approaches for each student (Lomotey, 1993). School principals are also challenged by their specific school needs and issues related to serving diverse student groups that might be at odds with local communities.

In this study, we examined the real-world experiences of practicing principals as they dealt with the multicultural issues facing their schools. We defined multicultural leadership broadly in terms of that which enables principals to address diversity within a school setting through affirming cultural pluralism and educational equity (Bennett, 2001). Our aim in this study was to critically examine the role of urban principals as multicultural leaders.

Our data sources in this study consisted of case studies of 6 school principals in one urban school district (four elementary schools and two secondary schools). For analysis, we used traditional methods of qualitative analysis with a to-and-fro process between the field data, the researchers' experiences, and

key theoretical points from the research literature. Riehl's (2000) framework, which she developed from a literature review, was useful to compare against themes arising from our own field data. It is described in the next section of this article. We also examined the principals' background, education, experiences, and challenges in their respective schools by writing case studies on each school principal. Finally, we considered each principal's views of his or her leadership preparation. In conclusion, we offer recommendations for supporting educational administrators in the multicultural dimensions of their leadership.

### **A MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK**

Scholars have written much about multicultural education and leadership for social justice (see Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Banks & Banks, 2001; Capper, 1993; Cochran-Smith, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2001; Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, & Walker, 2002; Hollins, 1996a, 1996b; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Marshall, 1993; Nieto, 2000; Nuri-Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2002; Robins, Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1987; Wallace, 2000). According to Bennett (2001), multicultural education rests on four broad principles, namely,

- (a) cultural pluralism; (b) ideals of social justice and the end of racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination; (c) affirmations of culture in the teaching and learning process; and (d) visions of educational equity and excellence leading to high levels of academic learning for all children and youth (p. 173).

Theorizing about the practice of educational administration, Riehl (2000) identifies three key tasks in determining whether administrators would be adequately prepared to respond to diversity and demonstrate multicultural leadership. The first task is fostering new meanings about diversity. For example, do principals maintain high expectations for all while providing support for diverse groups of students? To what extent do they attempt to institute and sustain school reform? How do they support dialogue and

discussion among groups that might be culturally different? The second task involves promoting inclusive instructional practices within schools by supporting, facilitating, or being a catalyst for change. To what extent do principals demonstrate instructional leadership that promotes inclusion, awareness of pedagogical practices, or concern for appropriate assessments? The third task relates to building connections between schools and communities. Are principals engaged with parents and families to encourage success for their children? Do they encourage community involvement and partnering with social service agencies? To what extent do they endeavor to bridge cultural clashes between diverse groups within their school-communities? These tasks are grounded in the values of multicultural education, advocating for cultural pluralism and honoring difference while ensuring social justice and equity among all students. As such, they offer a useful means to frame what is meant by multicultural leadership and how to consider its enactment.

### **RESEARCH METHODS, DATA SOURCES, AND ANALYSIS**

Our aim in this study was to critically examine multicultural leadership through in-depth qualitative case studies of practicing administrators in six urban schools (four elementary, two secondary) through the course of a school year. Pseudonyms were used for the administrators and schools in this study to provide for confidentiality. The school district housed 53 public schools in grades PreK-12, with a total of approximately 27,000 students. The majority of the students were Caucasian with a small percentage of minority youngsters, some of whom were relocated refugees (Afghans, Bosnians, Slovaks, Somali Bantu, Rwandan Tutsi, Hutu). The district's English Language Learner (ELL) program accommodated 56 different languages. Although there were a number of Hispanic and other ethnic minority students, there was little diversity in the teaching or administrative staff, who were predominantly Caucasian.

Criteria for selecting the principals were the following: (a) that the principal was an administrator in an urban school undergoing demographic changes with an increasingly diverse student population in terms of ethnic and cultural background and/or socioeconomic status (SES); and (b) that the principal had been an administrator for at least 3 years with some leadership experience. We compiled a list of potential participants and purposively selected individuals who were in schools where they were likely to be dealing with multicultural issues because the student population was becoming increasingly diverse. Thus, the increasing diversity of the school student population, rather than the principal's own background, guided principal selection. In one case, we purposefully selected the assistant principal because he had a reputation at the district level as a "hands-on" administrator with students and families and was likely to be information rich in knowing about multicultural issues. He was recommended by one of the district-level personnel, and during the course of the study, he became the principal.

All 6 administrators in this study were Caucasian. There were 3 women and 3 men, ranging in age from 42 to 51 years of age. All the participants were married, with adult or high school-aged children. One of the 6 participants held a doctoral degree in education; the other participants held master's degrees with principal certification. Their years as principal varied from as few as 1 to as many as 15, with years at the school being as many as 7 years. See Table 1 for information on the principals.

Initial fieldwork, observation, and collection of documents were aimed at learning the social, political, historical, and cultural context of each school and community (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The goal was to understand how school leaders were conceptualizing and engaging in their roles as multicultural leaders to serve the diverse populations in their schools and communities. Learning the context was followed by in-depth interviews with each school principal. Interviews were conducted on-site in the principals' offices. Supplemental interviews were held with 3 district-level administrators to better understand the support that principals were receiving. These interviews were conducted in a conference room at the district office complex. Interviews focused on learning what

TABLE 1  
Information on Principals

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Principal	Kroll	Sanders	Caruthers	Brown	Garrison	Andrews
Years as principal	15	5	15	6	4 <sup>a</sup>	7
Years at school	3	1	1	5	2 <sup>a</sup>	7
Race or ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male
Age	51	48	50	42	41	51
Education	BA, special education	BA, special education	BS, education	BA, elementary education	BA	BA, sociology and history
	MA, special education	MEd	MS, education	MEd	MEd	MA, anthropology
	Principal credential	PhD	Principal credential	Principal credential	Principal credential	Principal credential

a. Started as an assistant principal and became the principal during the study.

principals were doing with regard to multicultural leadership and included their views of multicultural education and leadership, particular issues they had faced in school, and their preparation for the work. The interview guide for principals is included in the appendix. A similar guide was used for the district administrators, with the questions focused on their work as district administrators in supporting principals. All the interviews were transcribed and the field notes were written. School-based documents were also collected, which composed an extensive research record.

*The researchers.* Qualitative research relies on the researcher's engaging in self-awareness and reflexivity throughout the research process. As individuals, the authors both have an interest in well-qualified school administrators leading diverse schools. Mary has two sons—one African American and one Caucasian. She lives with the joys and the heartache of a biracial family in a predominantly White school district. Ernestine is a third-generation Japanese American who has studied schools and school systems struggling with issues of diversity. Our commitment to this topic meant that we needed to be constantly aware of our points of view in relation to the research and writing and to be clear where we are stating our own positions. Collaboration aided the research process by enhancing accountability. Simply stated, the point of view that we both share and that we brought to this study is that principals who are multicultural leaders will value diversity; hire teachers and staff of color when possible; and find ways to integrate curriculum that reflects multicultural ideas and music, literature, and activities that will lead to improved student outcomes. Above all, we see great principals as those who believe in students, relate to them and their families, and are able to support teachers to educate students to be caring, lifelong learners who live meaningful and connected lives.

*Data collection and analysis.* The qualitative methods used in this study relied on a cross-case analysis (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2002) that involved four stages and ongoing discussions and reflection throughout the process. Case studies were written on each principal and district-level administrator in the first stage. Data were primarily obtained from in-depth interviews conducted at the

schools in the principals' offices and observations of the principals at work. In addition, school Web sites, school self-reports, catalogs, brochures, and school publications were obtained. Information was gathered on school mission, context, organization and aims, student enrollment, staffing, curriculum, pedagogy, and parent-school relationships. See Table 2 for information on the characteristics of the schools. The second stage involved the process of seeking answers to questions regarding the principal's conceptualization of his or her role as multicultural leader and the dilemmas and challenges he or she faced in the school. As a third stage, we used the three tasks from the multicultural education framework outlined above and examined the data from the separate case studies. In addition, we considered the preparation of each administrator and the extent to which his or her background and experience informed praxis. After categorizing the data according to skills and preparation, the fourth stage was to write about the analysis in narrative form, drawing out the similarities and differences in the principals' leadership.

## FINDINGS

The principals in this urban school district reported that they had little preparation in the multicultural dimensions of leadership. Principal Caruthers did complete one semester of urban internship as part of her undergraduate teacher preparation. Principal Andrews argued that his master's degree in cultural anthropology prepared him "very well." Three of the principals had educational backgrounds in special education, which might have better prepared them for inclusive educational practices. However, not one administrator recalled focusing on multicultural issues during his or her principal credentialing. Their programs were oriented toward traditional business management (e.g., planning, finance, management, human factors, and public relations). Currently, most administrator preparations programs require at least a course in multicultural diversity or social justice leadership, but the principals in this study were prepared years ago when such a requirement did not exist.

All 6 principals dealt with problems as they occurred, focusing on individual students or handling specific concerns with the ELL

**TABLE 2**  
**Data on School Characteristics from School Performance Report 2002-2003**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Name	Republic	Colton	Wakefield	Lowen	Valley View	Boyd
Grades	K-6	K-6	K-6	K-6	7-9	10-12
Enrollment	441	225	326	338	680	1,154
English-language learners	13.6%	3.1%	40.6%	11.4%	12.8%	1.5%
Gifted and talented program (elementary) or advanced placement (secondary) participants	2.0%	3.0%	1.0%	10.0%	—	84.8%
Free or reduced lunch participants	72.0%	40.6%	94.5%	53.7%	41.3%	15.6%
Special education participants	13.6%	9.8%	18.0%	13.2%	12.8%	9.3%
Average daily attendance	94.4%	97.6%	97.0%	96.2%	95.1%	91.4%
Average class size	20.6	19.7	21.7	23.9	20.2	22.2

program. Some administrators tried to provide basic needs for students who were refugees and seemed to be busy with regular education youngsters. In general, diversity issues were not the focus. As an example, Principal Sanders, although a caring principal, noted that multicultural leadership was not one of her priorities: "At this school, diversity is pretty limited. The teachers have just had limited exposure. Would they be willing to learn? Sure. But I don't think the need has been there." She stated that only one of her teachers "did some activities on Martin Luther King Day."

At the other end of the spectrum, Principals Caruthers, Brown, and Kroll were committed to becoming multiculturally proficient. For example, Principal Caruthers, who led a school populated by low-income students and refugees stated it this way: "It's what we do here on a daily basis. How can you teach the students if you don't know them, where they are coming from, who they are,

what they value?" She viewed herself as an instructional leader and a learner, constantly learning from her students and their families and guiding her teachers to apply relevant multicultural curriculum and instruction. Between these two extremes, other principals could be described as transitional or emergent multicultural leaders.

In the next section, we describe in detail what practicing principals did related to demonstrating multicultural leadership based on Riehl's (2000) three key tasks.

#### **MULTICULTURAL TASK 1: FOSTERING NEW MEANINGS ABOUT DIVERSITY**

*High expectations for all.* Principals who demonstrated multicultural leadership were able to embrace a position where they and their teachers and staff were learners who challenged stereotypes and conventional wisdom. For instance, despite having "impoverished" ELL or low-income students as well as "talented" high-SES students, Principal Kroll at Republic Elementary School set about raising expectations for all learners (also see Okagaki & Moore, 2000). Reframing perceptions and valuing difference were accomplished by celebrating ELL and low-income learners and, where appropriate, placing them in enrichment and advanced programs. Principal Caruthers's mantra was that all students can succeed, regardless of home background, given that they have well-educated teachers who hold high expectations: "Your life at home may be in the pits. It may be terrible. But you're at school now. What can we do to make you more successful?" Principal Caruthers noted, "We have gifted and talented students in this school, and that wasn't always the expectation. Why wouldn't students from low-income homes be gifted and talented? Some people are surprised by that."

*Changing the cultural deficiency perspective.* Principals Caruthers and Kroll saw the need for cultural change in their schools. They felt that too many teachers held a deficit perspective toward students from low-SES backgrounds and that teachers needed to be guided toward a new view of believing in the capabilities of all students. Principal Kroll put it this way:

The school had a huge impact from transience, homelessness, and a population, unfortunately, in our old way of thinking, that had too many challenges to be academically successful. . . . You can't feel sorry for yourself and the kids. You just need to get on with the business of putting all your energy into student success. . . . When you're a new parent, the baby is your first priority. For schools, the baby is student success.

Principal Kroll engaged in a school improvement plan that fundamentally altered the way her staff viewed the students—a shift to high expectations. The new school culture was accomplished in conjunction with a district initiative based on teacher collaboration, instructional focus, frequent observations, administrative observations, and team time. Team time involved student grouping following frequent assessments according to instructional need. Some students were retaught in new ways until they were proficient, and others were given enrichment activities. More important than the districtwide program, however, was the principal's instructional leadership in insisting that all teachers cast off old doubts and begin to believe that all students can learn. The old class-based model of focusing on the high-SES students and neglecting low-income students was no longer tolerated.

In contrast, other principals seemed to be focusing on basic needs. An example is the way 1 principal spoke of refugee camps in which students had lived prior to coming to the United States:

We have some students out of Africa right now that have basically been raised in a tent camp and don't know how to flush a toilet, how to go through a cafeteria line. Our goal is to socialize (the students) to our educational system, as well as teach them some English skills.

The camps seemed to define the students as lacking rather than this being a challenging experience that these amazing students had overcome, thus demonstrating their potential. Another example is 1 principal's negative view of a low-income neighborhood: "The highest crime rate, highest number of released felons, they reside there . . . in the quadrant that goes to this particular school."

With so few teachers of color in the schools and so few culturally proficient administrators, the burden of multicultural leadership

sometimes fell on the few Hispanic ELL teachers. Principal Sanders described a situation when she was principal at Wakefield Elementary School:

The ELL teacher was Hispanic—natively. So she was able to bring that firsthand to the teachers and she had to explain—I can remember a situation with, I’ll call it abuse, we were very concerned the discipline that was being used at home and we had some pretty heart-to-heart talks. In the Hispanic culture, the father is the head of the house and he does spank and he may be the disciplinarian, and we had to kind of know where to draw the line on that between abuse and just this is their way and it is none of our business. That was very difficult for a lot of us; she was masterful at helping us understand that being very soft-spoken and knowing that when the parents came in that we addressed the dad and that sort of thing. So that was a learning experience.

Some principals also referred to the disruptive home lives of Hispanic students in their schools. Many of these families were legal or illegal immigrants who labor in the state’s agricultural industry. During the winter months when work is scarce or not available, families take their children along when they seek work in southern states, such as Texas, or when they return home to Mexico. Some principals criticized these families for interrupting their children’s education and saw this action as burdensome to the school. Principal Brown spoke of the tendency “in the past” of some other school principals to classify students by the SES of their parents and then neglect those students. Principal Brown stated,

What I’ve heard is that you would take a school with, say, a predominant Hispanic culture, and there would be a whole bunch of them in a school that had been there for a lot of years. And people just kind of ignored them. You’re a migrant worker. You can’t learn anything.

*Understanding through communication.* Noticing gang problems in his junior high school, Principal Garrison acted as a learner rather than the all-knowing professional. “We had a real concern with local gang issues, so we spent a lot of time with the community resources, families, and students, working on gang-related

issues.” To begin to address these issues, he attended the National Latino Conference and served on a district committee examining Latino dropout rates. He then conducted staff development meetings with his teachers to talk about validating student identity, raising expectations, and communicating those expectations to students and families. He explained, “We met with individual students as issues arose and laid out our expectations. Once we began to communicate what our needs were, the students responded and our discipline issues really declined—really dropped.” Education, learning about and from Latinos, connecting with families, and then working with school resource officers and several police department gang units helped this principal work with his staff to assess the situation. They considered whether the students were being unfairly identified as gang members simply because they looked and dressed differently. The principal noted that teachers previously could not distinguish between friendship groups and gang formation. Communication was enhanced when the principal adopted a learner stance in relation to the school community, and he encouraged his teachers to do the same.

*Socializing new immigrants into U.S. schools.* Many of the principals in the study were involved in socializing new immigrant students to an American way of life and to U.S. school practices. Some of these principals knew little about the history, culture, or languages of Bosnia, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq until they were presented with new immigrant and refugee students. Interpreters in Farsi and Dharsi were brought in to assist in one elementary school. Principals sought to learn about the unfamiliar religions, cultures, and ethnicities of their new students. However, the priority was socializing and teaching these students the English language, not learning their languages and cultures.

Principal Garrison at Valley View Junior High School noted that one multicultural issue he was dealing with involved “interactions between our male students that come from diverse cultures and our female students, and teaching them the proper ways that the dating game is played in America.” In this particular case, the “male students from diverse cultures” were refugee students from

Africa, Afghanistan, and so forth, and “our female students” were Caucasian. It was not apparent the extent to which Principal Garrison was aware of his actions in socializing students given their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Nor was it apparent that he and other principals viewed new immigrants as a rich resource. New knowledge, languages, cultures, and/or ethnicities were present in all six schools and could have been brought into the center of the learning in the classrooms and schools.

#### **MULTICULTURAL TASK 2: PROMOTING INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES WITHIN SCHOOLS**

*Hiring practices.* Principals in this study bemoaned the fact that they “had to let teachers go [teachers who were Hispanic, ethnically diverse, or bilingual] due to budget cuts.” From 1 principal we heard the argument, “I am a firm believer that one should hire the best person for the job, regardless of race, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. I do not believe that a person should be hired to increase the diversity of the population.” At Valley View Junior High School, diversity in staffing occurred in the kitchen staff, some of whom were of minority background or were immigrants. Kitchen staff would, on their own initiative, occasionally hold multicultural days, featuring menus from their own ethnic cuisine to honor students’ special holidays and backgrounds.

*Multicultural display.* At Republic, Wakefield, and Lowen Elementary Schools, there was evidence of multiculturalism in the posters and student work displayed in hallways and classrooms. Different languages, skin colors, and cultural norms were visible in these displays, although multiculturalism did not appear to be a central focus that was celebrated. Principals argued that multiculturalism and pluralism were addressed some time ago in textbooks and that any texts adopted by the school district would be representative of diversity. Yet one of the district administrators noted that the curriculum was only “somewhat multicultural,” and in our view, attention to multiculturalism in classrooms was less than optimal. Boyd High had numerous Native American artifacts displayed,

celebrating the Braves mascot of the school, but multicultural representations were not readily apparent. (For a discussion of the American Psychological Association position on Native American mascots, see American Psychological Association, n.d.)

*Peer tutoring and inclusive educational practices.* A useful practice, the strategy of peer tutoring was established for students who were ELLs at Lowen, Republic, and Wakefield Elementary Schools. Students for whom English is a first language were paired for short lessons with students for whom English is their second language. Student outcomes were positively affected by the focus on learning and the inclusive school culture created.

In contrast to the inclusion at the elementary level, ELL instruction at the secondary academy was separated from the general education students. Principal Garrison at Valley View Junior High School recognized that the school had a problem in its separation of both teachers and students divided along ELL and SES lines because many of the ELL students were also low-income students. The school housed the district's ELL secondary program, with students enrolled from ages 12 to 21 years. However, there was little interchange or collaboration between ELL teachers and general education teachers and students. Principal Garrison explained,

The other thing that we really have to pay attention to is the inclusion of our ELL population. We have high school students here, and so it's different than a junior high mentality and trying to mix them so they can become friends and meet at school. . . . We try to run intramural activities so that the ELL and general populations are intermingling with one another. . . . When they begin to segregate if there is an issue, it becomes peer group against peer group . . . and some of those lines are drawn the ELL versus the general population.

The principal was able to identify the problem. He was searching for ways to close the gaps of misunderstanding between the students in the ELL program and the general student body but did not feel he had the knowledge or skills to institute necessary policy and practices to address the problem.

*Multiculturally proficient instruction.* When asked whether the school or curriculum was multicultural, principals commented that they left that up to the teachers. Several principals asked the researcher to explain what she meant by culturally proficient instruction. When asked why there was no student work in the halls pertaining to Martin Luther King Jr. Day, the Colton Elementary School principal said, "I had a teacher once who did all kinds of neat things. But she had adopted some Black children and was attuned to it [multiculturalism]." When it was suggested that teachers could be assessed for their multicultural skills, Principal Garrison at Valley View Junior High reflected, "I don't know [if] I've ever evaluated my teachers on whether they are culturally proficient. . . . It is kind of an expectation, since we have the [ELL] academy here." Principals had little knowledge of culturally proficient instruction beyond basic learning-styles information. They had gained some knowledge through practice. For instance, Principal Kroll explained how the Bosnian students in her school are physically active and how close interpersonal proximity is the norm. Most of the principals expressed an interest in learning more.

### **MULTICULTURAL TASK # 3: BUILDING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES**

*Early educational opportunities and intervention.* Principals who demonstrated multicultural leadership in this task were able to work with parents to achieve necessary changes in schools despite initial opposition. For instance, noting the large proportion of low-income youngsters in the area because of changing demographics, 1 principal worked with district administrators to offer quality preschool programs and all-day kindergarten programs for low-income students. This all-day kindergarten is offered at an affordable tuition rate. One of the elementary schools with a declining enrollment became an inclusive preschool, which is free, based on academic need or income guidelines, and currently funded through federal grants. The benefits provided to families strengthened the relationship between school and community. By partnering with Head Start, the district plans to eventually extend preschool and all-day kindergarten programs to other schools.

*Parent involvement.* Those principals who saw their role as multicultural leaders were able to foster parent pride and involvement in nontraditional ways. Principal Caruthers's school, Wakefield Elementary, is a low-income school with a 94.5% free or reduced lunch participation, which contrasts with the district's average of 41.3%. The school has the reputation in the city as a tough school with failing students. Recently, a local resident was quoted in the newspaper as saying that it was an "alarming" prospect that his daughter might be transferred to this school because of the proposed closing of a neighborhood school. Principal Caruthers was visibly concerned the morning that the article ran in the newspaper. Her parents were also upset and mobilized to counter the negative perception. Encouraged by their efforts, Caruthers said, "I love that the parents care that this [is] happening. I've got a mom that has e-mailed me already her letter to the editor."

*Community involvement.* Many of the principals sought out and encouraged community groups to use school facilities and to view the school as their own. For instance, at Lowen Elementary, prayers during Ramadan were held in the gym. A Jewish Passover Seder was held at the high school. Gospel singing from the Black Baptist Church could be heard from the neighborhood school.

*Partnerships with social service agencies.* Principals, in caring for the needs of the children in their schools, partnered with numerous community and social service agencies. In Republic Elementary School, for example, Principal Kroll worked with Operation School Bell to fund school supplies, clothing, and books for youngsters in need. A neighborhood church sponsored a whole grade level of youngsters. The local television broadcast network ran an essay contest. Schools were supported by community resource workers, police officers, YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, and relief agencies that provided services to students, especially the refugees. Speaking of the challenges with 55 ELL youngsters in his school, Principal Brown of Lowen acknowledged the help received from the Agency for Americans and World Relief. "I am so grateful for them and would like to see them do more. However I know they are stretched thin. . . . Are their services adequate?"

Absolutely not. Is it their fault? I don't think so." Social service organizations provided a start, and energetic principals took advantage of these services. More assistance to students and their families in urban schools seems to be needed.

## DISCUSSION

In this study, the role of the principals as multicultural leaders was evolving as principals learned on the job. Generally, principals learn in actual situations and glean information from other principals. This finding is consistent with research on professional socialization. (For literature on principal socialization, see Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Hart, 1993; Heck, 1995; Leithwood, Steinbach, & Begley, 1992; Parkay, Currie, & Rhodes, 1992; Saks & Ashforth, 1997.) However, university preparation programs could also provide support, and participants noted that professional development on the multicultural dimensions of leadership was needed. As principals credentialed many years ago, these men and women had achieved principal certification in programs with no attention to issues of diversity, social justice, or multicultural education.

All 6 principals had roles as multicultural leaders in dealing with diversity issues in their respective schools. All principals were generally empathetic with new immigrants, attempting to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and appreciating the cultural diversity brought to the school by students from as near as Mexico and as far away as Afghanistan. But although some administrators held high expectations for all youngsters, others maintained deficit views about certain groups of students. For the junior high school principal, socializing the refugees was a challenge. Likewise, Principal Sanders, who did not see herself as a multicultural leader, stated early on in the study, "I feel that the mission of schools is learning. I will leave the issue of pursuing social justice to others as I work with my students, parents, and community." She did value and try to include her parents and community in her school. But she appeared to be unaware of the negative impact that a monocultural assimilation environment can have on

student learning, and she initially was not prepared to be a learner in multicultural education herself. During the course of this study, her views changed. She later stated, "Diversity is a worthy cause."

Of the three multicultural leadership tasks, the second one, promoting inclusive instructional practices, seemed to be the least evident. Principals were not sure what was meant by "culturally proficient instruction" and tended to rely on their teachers. With the challenges of second-language learners and recent immigrants, Principal Brown suggested that good teaching was simply good teaching:

If a child doesn't understand because of a language barrier, that's not necessarily different than a child who doesn't understand because they have a learning disability. You've got to look at other ways to get the information across.

But we would counter the notion that all students should be acculturated to a single way of knowing and behaving. In research on effective schooling, Rosenholtz (1991) proposes that principals need to support teachers in learning ways to better instruct, guide, and mentor youngsters from diverse ethnic, linguistic, social, and economic backgrounds. As well, superintendents can support principals by providing learning opportunities "to refine and expand their pedagogical repertoires, opportunities for critical inquiry, rigorous discourse and analysis" (p. 188).

As noted earlier, some principals in this study commented, "I don't see color. I teach children." We appreciate that they are trying to be impartial in this statement. However, in not seeing diversity, they are denying their students the beauty and richness of the backgrounds, heritage, and cultural treasures that the students bring to the classroom (see Gardiner, 2005, for a personal account). Ferguson (2000) showed that educators who are ethnocentric and view their students as "culturally disadvantaged" simply because of their ethnicity have a devastating effect on students' willingness to learn. In contrast, other studies indicate positive effects of teachers holding high expectations for students and appreciation for their ethnic diversity. Test scores are likely to rise when the focus is not on the tests but instead on a lively and engaging educational

environment that validates and encourages all students. (For more on the fallacy of color blindness, see Bell, 2002; Frankenberg, 1993; Marx, 2004; Thompson, 1998; Williams, 1997.)

Principals who are multicultural leaders help raise test scores by ensuring that teachers are including multicultural knowledge in the curriculum and in their pedagogy. Evaluation of teachers (and principals) could include multicultural proficiency as a dimension of evaluation. In predominantly White schools, there is a need for school administrators to be attentive to issues of racism, intolerance, and prejudice. It may be even more important in seemingly nondiverse settings to have administrators who value diversity. All students, including Caucasians, are better educated when they are able to communicate cross-culturally and are prepared for the pluralistic societal and work environments that characterize our nation and world.

Placement of students in special programs such as ELL can be helpful, but principals noted the lack of integration between students in ELL and the mainstream student body. Questions for further research might review whether such an interchange promotes better learning and inclusion, or whether a separate ELL academy supports individualized student growth and development, especially for those who are older. Consideration might be given to offering ELL at neighborhood schools rather than centralizing services in a few selected elementary schools and one secondary ELL academy. A bilingual school with a sufficient population of both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers could be beneficial to both groups of students. We encourage continued research on the effectiveness of two-way bilingual education and other bilingual education programs (see Nieto, 2000, for analysis of several types of program) and the sheltered English language immersion that is currently used in this particular school district.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory qualitative study has illustrated how 6 urban school principals enact leadership in facing numerous multicultural challenges. Professional development, particularly when requested

by principals themselves, could be helpful. Principals, together with university faculty, might work with their staff to consider how educational law and policy have marginalized certain groups of students. Or they might look at the curriculum of their schools to determine whether there is still bias and stereotyping and offer recommendations for reform. Principals and their staff could also connect research with practice concerning instructional strategies that work successfully with particular groups of students. Practices would then need to be adapted for unique contexts and individual students.

Second, as issues of equity, excellence, and social justice are addressed in the schools, principals are more likely to be successful if they receive consistent reinforcement and support from their district-level administrators. Multiculturalism or social justice values must be clearly written in district and school mission statements and core values to serve students effectively. Mission statements articulate a vision and communicate values, standards, and evaluation expectations for all employees. It is not enough for culturally proficient instruction to be “kind of an expectation” (Principal Garrison). Multicultural leadership could be an explicit expectation tied to staff and administrators’ evaluations.

Finally, to integrate multicultural leadership principles within one’s practice, school principals can be encouraged to be self-reflective and to critique their own school sites and context. Urban school principals who are aware of themselves and the social-cultural milieu in which they live and work will be more effective in reaching their students. Adopting a mental framework of listening and learning from oneself and one’s own school and community is critical. For instance, administrators in the school district could examine their own ethnic background, traditions, and values. Then they could engage in professional development to learn about the history, cultures, and languages of the Native American tribes in the region and learn to speak Spanish if there is a significant Hispanic population. Principals cannot possibly be prepared for all the ethnic, linguistic, cultural populations they may serve. In Boyd School’s district, with more than 56 languages spoken, it is unrealistic to expect principals to know all those languages. Yet learning one new language and a willingness to listen and learn

would be appreciated. As one reviewer of this article noted, there is much to be said for a position of silence. As Principal Andrews of Boyd High noted when he explained that most of his teachers were Caucasian and monolingual in English, “We have communication problems here. It is definitely a disadvantage.” For administrators who argue that they “have always treated everyone equally,” the realization that equality does not necessarily mean identical treatment but treatment that listens to, recognizes, and affirms unique student needs and backgrounds can be powerful.

## **APPENDIX**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS**

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#### **INFORMATION ON PARTICIPANT**

Number of years served as principal \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years principal at current school \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural, racial or ethnic identity \_\_\_\_\_

Gender Female Male

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Educational degrees and credentials \_\_\_\_\_

1. Tell me about this particular school. What is it like and what makes it unique or similar to other schools?
2. Describe the student demographics of this school. Who are the various socio-economic, social, racial, ethnic, religious and ability groups that make up this school? How representative is the school of the district as a whole?
3. What multicultural dilemmas and challenges have you faced recently in your school?
4. Tell me about a specific multicultural problem or issue that you have faced as a principal. What did you do? What would you have done differently, if anything?
5. With regard to diversity, what changes have you made or plan to make in the school?
6. What instructional methodologies or pedagogical approaches are employed in this school?
7. What is the content of the curriculum? Is it multicultural? How so?

8. To what extent are your teachers “culturally proficient instructors”?
  9. How do you teach, support, and mentor your teachers to succeed in diverse school settings?
  10. What faculty development has occurred over the past few years with regard to teaching diverse learners?
  11. Please describe the social, cultural, ethnic or other communities that your school serves.
  12. As principal, how do you go about making connections between the school and its community, e.g., networking with community members to provide services for students and their families?
  13. To what extent were you prepared for the social, cultural, economic, and political challenges of serving a diverse school community? If well prepared, what enabled you? If not, what areas were lacking?
  14. How might school leaders be better prepared in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes to serve culturally diverse schools?
  15. Is there anything you can add about the process of becoming a multicultural leader? Is there anything else I should have asked? Any final comments? Thank you very much.
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