Conflicting Conceptions of the Purposes of Schooling in a Democracy

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Introduction

Living and working in Florida, I was surprised by dialogue concerning the imperative to bring democracy to other countries juxtaposed with rhetoric proclaiming the need to increase accountability in the form of standardization in order to improve schools. What I was not privy to were questions regarding connotations, contradictions, and coherences inherent in the discourse within K-20 institutions. Without serious attention to the meanings of democracy, the purposes of education, or education according to whom and for whom, massive reforms aimed at graduating literate, numerate, productive citizens have been implemented, not only in this state but throughout the Western world. There is pressure on educational institutions to prepare "students for two functions; firstly, as workers for global market economies and, secondly, as citizens for life in democratic societies" (McMahon, 2012, p. 32). As an example, the Florida Department of Education articulates divergent goals. One goal focuses on efficiency and the preparation of a skilled workforce with an emphasis on developing "the proficiency of all students within one seamless, efficient system" (Florida Department of Education, 2009b). Another goal is "for all Florida students to receive a high quality education that will prepare them to be active citizens, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners" (Florida Department of Education, 2009a).

This phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007; Leedy & Ormond, 2005) is an attempt to understand the participants' perceptions of the

connections between democracy and purposes of education in a context where democracy is believed to be desirable and yet remains largely unexamined in schools. Consistent with this approach, data were collected from interviews with administrators in K-12 schools. The major research question guiding this research was: How do the participants understand the purposes of education and/or schooling in a democratic society? The participants were asked about the goals articulated by the Department of Education; how they complement or contradict each other; how these impact on their roles as school leaders; and the factors that facilitate and/or hinder the enactment of democratic practices in schools.

Review of Literature

Meanings of democracy are contested, socially constructed, contextual, and evolving, and some serve to mask the roots of existing inequities (Macedo, 2003; Price, 2007). Tensions exist between notions of democracy as a system of government and democracy as a daily struggle toward equity and social justice. Equated with civics, the first sense of democracy is concerned with the rights and responsibilities of citizens, as well as with which citizens have what rights, and may actually serve to reinforce inequities within hegemonic structures. The second conception is consistent with what Price (2007) describes as democracy that is "about hope and commitment, power, possibility and promise" (p. 15). It envisions democracy as a constantly evolving process rather than as an end product.

Influenced by Dewey's (1916) notion of democracy and education, schools are often configured as agents of change that provide a means of social and economic mobility for poor and minoritized populations. This belief in schools' ability to transform individuals and societies is communicated in state and school district commitments to leave no child behind and close achievement gaps. These serve as articulations of equitable and socially just practices for all children. However, even though there is overall agreement that "education is the foundation of democracy, the presence and importance of other outcomes of education that promote the public good are hotly contested matters" (Fusarelli & Young, 2011, p. 93). Conceptions of democracy and the theories and practices of education in a democracy are often expressed and enacted in complimentary and contradictory ways. Helfenbein and Shudak (2009) report that the relationship "between education and democracy, not set in any stone beyond individuals' tenuous historical memory, finds itself under attack" (p. 9). Additionally, Wotherspoon and Schissel (2001) contend that historically, "factors like conformity, competition,

knowledge transmission, and responsiveness to economic mandates coexist with commitments to democratic principles of diversity, inclusiveness, innovation, and personal development" (p. 322). These conflicting democratic ideologies in education can be understood within broad themes of conservative or techno-rational, liberal or student-centered, and critical democratic conceptions of democracy and schooling (Horn, 2009; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Portelli & Solomon, 2001).

The Florida educational goal focusing on efficiency can be seen as representative of conservative and/or liberal principles in that, far from serving as forums for participatory democracy where students' identities as democratic participants are facilitated, "the social and academic practices of public schools mostly develop forms of identity that undercut the kind of self-understanding required for critical democratic citizenship" (Glass, 2005, p. 84). Conservative conceptions of democracy in education envision the purpose of schooling as primarily for cultural capital and are based on a market economy that has been categorized as "minimalist, protectionist, and marginalist" (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 17). Although still not participatory, liberal conceptions of democracy and schooling are more student-centered, and individual growth is juxtaposed with cultural capital as a primary goal of education (Horn, 2009; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Portelli & Solomon, 2001). Both liberal and conservative notions of democracy in education create climates that McMahon (2012) argues are consistent with schooling *for,* as opposed to *as* or *in*, a democracy and are in keeping with Fusarelli and Young's (2011) contention that, "Discourse is moving away from public education—by the people and for the people toward an emphasis on public education—for the people" (p. 90). By depicting students as products (Murphy, 2001) and disengaging them from the process of their own education, these ideologies cohere with current reform efforts informed by narrow understandings of accountability. These initiatives emphasize efficiency and standardization and create schools "where choice is minimized and where the student is subservient to subject matter [that] is contrary to democratic living and thinking" (Breault, 2003, p. 5).

Depending on its interpretation, the second Florida Department of Education report referenced above could be informed by either liberal or transformative notions of democracy. Fusarelli and Young (2011) contend that "a healthy democracy cannot be sustained by an ailing public education system that fails to educate those most at-risk—a population that constitutes an increasingly large segment of American society" (p. 88). Consistent with a social justice perspective, education for critical democratic transformation "associated with equity, community, creativity, and taking difference seriously" (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 17) is in

stark contrast to both conservative and liberal ideologies. This perspective is consistent with life in a pluralistic participatory or public democracy (Dewey, 1916). Critical inquiry is integral to this conception of democratic schooling "whereby students and educators develop knowledge, skills, values, dispositions and actions that are called for by a reconstructive conception of democracy" (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 70).

Methodology

For this study I conducted semi-structured, digitally recorded interviews with 12 principals (P) and assistant principals (AP) that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each. The research was carried out with Institutional Review Board approval. Participants were initially referred by doctoral students in an educational leadership program and were people the students believed to be receptive to being interviewed about their understandings of democracy and the purposes of education. Potential interviewees were contacted by email or telephone in order to confirm their interest in being involved in this research and to schedule the time and location for interviews. The participants also recommended other potential interviewees. The following chart (see Table 1) shows the number of African American male (AAM), African American female (AAF), White male (WM), and White female (WF) participants; school report card grades and panels for their current administrative positions; and the number of years of employment in formal education settings.

In keeping with my research questions, using qualitative research methods of data collection allowed me to focus on the meanings these administrators attach to democracy and the purposes of education (Prus, 1996). The semi-structured interview format was consistent with this purpose and provided me with the freedom, as Berg (1998) described it, "to digress… to probe far beyond the answers to prepared and standard-

Table 1

Race and Gender	Role		School Grade		School Panel			Experience in Formal Education Positions			
	P	AP	A School	F School	K-6	7-9	9-12	0-10 years	11- 20 years	21-30 years	31+ years
AAF	4			4	1	2	1			1	3
AAM		2		2	1		1	1	1		
WF	2	1	3		3			1			2
WM	3		1	2			3		1	1	1

ized questions" (p. 61). Responding to the interviewee's narratives also gave me the flexibility to adapt my interview protocol before and during each individual interview (Carspecken, 1996). In addition to being asked to define democracy and the purposes of education in a democracy, the administrators were questioned about the goals articulated on the Department of Education website; how these complement or contradict each other; the impacts of these goals on their roles as school leaders; the ways in which student, parent, and educator leadership in schools aligns with notions of democracy; and factors that facilitate and/or hinder the enactment of democratic practices in schools.

Findings and Discussion

Data were professionally transcribed, and participants were given the opportunity to review and edit the transcripts to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were read multiple times individually and in groups to identify emerging themes related to meanings of democracy and aspects of schooling in a democratic context. Themes that emerged from the data included different understandings of democracy as a way of life and as a form of government, and conflicting perceptions about the nature of Florida's articulated goals of education between administrators working in schools designated as A and F. There were no significant differences in responses between males and females or between principals and assistant principals in this study. Aside from dealing the implementation of different policy initiatives, answers were also similar from administrators working in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The impact of race on responses was more complex. Although there were differences as a result of the race of the respondents, this may or may not be related to district placement practices. In a state where schools receive grades from A through F based primarily on standardized test performance, all of the African-American respondents had been assigned to low-performing, F-graded schools, having been given the task of turning around failing schools. Three of the White respondents had been in their A-graded successful schools for several years, and the two who had been promoted within the last two years were assigned to schools that were already classified as A schools. One of two White administrators placed in a failing school was hired from outside of the state and resigned after the interview, less than a year into the appointment. His responses were consistent with those of the African-American administrators. The other White male principal assigned to a failing school had been employed in that district for over 30 years and appeared fatalistic about his schools' report card grade. With that exception, the data indicate that personnel

procedures associated with the assignment of administrators to different types of schools influenced the participants' understandings of democracy and the purposes of schooling.

One of the most interesting comments came not from an interview but from one school district's research department as they refused to allow me to interview their administrators, even off-site and outside of their work hours, about democracy and the purposes of schooling. The response to my request was, "Why would you want to interview principals about democracy? Democracy has nothing to do with schools. They do what we tell them to do." Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of the participants who came from nearby districts understood democracy in terms of civics, and their beliefs about the purposes of education in a democracy were for the most part closely aligned with conservative and liberal notions of democracy and schooling. Competency based administrator preparation programs combined with state and district level professional development sessions focused on benchmarks swamp all administrators with compliance directives and allow neither the time nor the space to question their ideological underpinnings.

Democracy

In spite of knowing that the interviews were focused on issues of democracy, purposes of schooling, and educational leadership, the interviewees overall had difficulty defining democracy. A White female assistant principal struggled before stating, "United States, I don't know. Democracy, that's a tough question." A White female principal, who had asked for the questions in advance, although unable to deconstruct what it meant, was enthusiastic in responding, "I just love America!" This lack of ability to clearly articulate the meaning of such a common yet important term supports Breault's (2003) claim that "American democracy has reached a level of sophistication that precludes a need for intensive cultural self-examination" (p. 3). Some of the other participants spoke in terms of a system of government where citizens have rights and freedoms and, according to an African American female principal, "all of the stakeholders give input in order to make a decision that's going to be good for the total group as opposed to just a few." In contrast with the statements equating democracy with the United States, one White male principal ruminated,

> I think that democracy probably has been lost in the country. My view of democracy is that we all are in this together, that we all have a say in the direction of our country, that the policies and the efforts made in total here are at least a representation of what the masses wish, I guess, and that there's equal opportunities and equal access for all individuals.

The extent to which it is presently operating in the United States not-withstanding, interviewees' understandings of democracy as a system of government as opposed to a way of life were apparent throughout their responses. As examples, a White male principal defined democracy as "a system by which everybody has a say in the things that govern them," and an African-American female principal reflected, "Ideally, some phrases that come to mind are freedom to choose, government led by the people, in theory." These notions informed their depictions of the purposes of education in a democracy, and all of the administrators spoke of the need to prepare students for life, although what that meant was often ambiguous.

Purposes of Education

Kyle and Jenkins (2002) maintain that "the fundamental purpose of education should be the preparation of informed, engaged, democratic citizens" (p. 150). While some of the interviewees agreed with this claim, for others the connection was somewhat tenuous. One White female principal declared, "We are in a democracy. We're supposed to be voting on what we want to happen in our country, and I think that that the major purpose of schools is to have an educated, well-informed elector-ate." Ironically, this occurred well into President Obama's second year in office in a school where the foyer was festooned with photographs of former president George W. Bush and none of the sitting president. For a White female assistant principal, the purpose of school appeared fairly clear-cut, as she said, "the purpose of education is to teach students, for students to learn." For other administrators, this question was much more complex and they struggled with what it meant, as one White male principal said, "to give students the tools to basically regenerate what we've got going on in the world [because] they have to assume the adult roles of the future, so we've got to basically get them prepared to take that role so that society continues." He was able to add that those roles included being an employee, a family member, and a voter.

Complementary and Contradictory Goals of Education

In preparing students for the future, the need for schools to provide equity of access and support for students was evident throughout the responses. For example, an African-American female principal declared that schools need to "give equal access to every individual to be educated or to pursue further interests or abilities regardless if it's a higher edu-cation, or a degree, or a trade, to give them that opportunity to pursue whatever their interests." Although a few of the administrators spoke of the purposes of school as consistent with notions of democratic trans-

formation, in general they talked in terms of equality of access and did not articulate ideology reflective of equality of outcome. For some of the administrators this is likely more semantics than ideologies as they worked to offer and create success by offering in failing schools advanced placement and other academically challenging courses that are readily available to students in other schools.

Administrators of high performing schools identified more coherence between the expressed goals of education, and found state and district policies and practices less problematic, than did the administrators in low-performing schools. Some of this may be attributed to the fact that although all of the participants would have experienced personal academic success and undertaken similar administrator preparation training and licensure requirements, leaders in the low performing schools were engaged on a daily basis with the embodiment of school goals, policies and practices that negatively impacted already marginalized students. One African-American assistant principal saw his childhood experiences replicated in the lives of some of his students. He reflected:

> I try to make sure they know that education is important, and I'm still in school, and I'm working toward another degree. But at the same time, I've been without a home, I've been without power, I've been without water, and I have two college degrees underneath my belt, and if I can do it, you definitely can do it. So I try to make sure I keep that before myself as well as them.

At the same time he was clear that his was not a "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" approach and that there were reasons outside of his control that his life has turned out very differently than it has for some of his siblings. This includes a number of positive relationships with teachers, administrators, and professors who demonstrated high expectations for him throughout his experiences in formal educational institutions.

Extending beyond their personal interactions to the impacts of policies and practices on student success, divergent responses to the espoused goals of education may also have been influenced by the differences in realities between their working hours. Although there is no question that the administrators in A level schools worked long hours, administrators in F graded schools spent school hours with students, educators, and parents and completed the myriad of paperwork required by the district and the state after school and on weekends. Consistent with Ruck Simmons' (2007) concept of educational leadership as critical vulnerability involving a "commitment to move beyond consumption and engage in strategic risk-taking, creative imagining, soulwork, and community building" (p. 88), they spoke of the importance of sacrifice and of

educational leadership as a moral undertaking. One African-American principal described her role as "truly to be the Statue of Liberty…Give me your poor, your hungry, your tired… [our mandate is] to work with what we have and to form relationships and to show the kids a different way and to give them a way back when they've made a bad choice." As an example of the work involved in maintaining a sustained commitment to students in failing schools, participants spoke of the need to be intentional with the use of their time. In the words of one African-American female principal, "Administrators have to take a stand on…being in the classrooms and seeing what's going on, knowing my students, knowing my teachers, knowing the families, knowing the community and being engaged…if this is the profession you choose, there are certain things you give up in order to make it." Another African-American female principal developed this theme:

> It seems like we have more and more paperwork to do every year. Well, obviously it takes my time so that I can't work with the students and the teachers or many, many days I just have to kind of be intentional with the use of my time while the students and the teachers are on campus and then that obviously I have to make up for the paperwork that has to be done after hours.

Administers in A level schools saw the two Florida goals of education—efficiency and critical thinking, and active citizenship—as compatible. For example, one White male principal stated, "those are wonderful goals… educating all individuals, providing them with the best possible opportunity—I think their intent is to get there [by providing] opportunities for every student." Conversely administrators in F schools perceived them as contradictory and felt constrained by the need to avoid sanctions for not meeting school improvement targets and compelled to operate within standardized and efficiency paradigms. The divide was evident. A White female principal proclaimed, "I've been in education for a long time, so I know how to balance, even when we set new objectives and new goals…even though my school has been an A for nine years—that feels good when people go, 'You're an A school.'" From the perspective of working in a failing school, an equally experienced and knowledgeable African-American female principal reflected that accountability is a form of:

> . . . punishment and a singling out of where the problems are instead of building the type of support system to help and to assist and say, yes, this is an area of weakness, let's work on how we get you out of that, as opposed to, you fail, you fail, and holding you up to everyone to view your failures.

This sentiment is echoed by another African-American female principal's comment: "I think sometimes the obstacle is that we have laws and the accountability piece that are supposedly put in place to help and sometimes I think they distract from what the real job is." An African-American male assistant principal's experience of ambiguities in the department of education was not limited to these specific goals of education. He ruminated:

> I definitely see a contradiction, and I think that's something, unfortunately, that runs throughout the department of education where they have different agencies and units who are focused on whatever their objective or mission is without considering how it impacts or hinders or should coincide with other missions within the same department or the same agency. And we get that a lot, particularly with education, when we have policies or things that are going to be implemented that contradict something else that came from the same body or the same agency.

As further evidence of the paradox between articulated policies, he pointed to conflicts between course requirements for access to scholarships and requirements for standardized test remediation, both of which are purported to assist the same marginalized students.

> Looking at curriculum for Bright Futures, and policies regarding how students are scheduled for courses. Bright Futures was revamped recently to include certain course requirements in order for students to be eligible for those scholarship funds. At the same time, at the middle school level, it's become so stringent in terms of if a student scores this particular score on FCAT, they're required to take X, Y, and Z. So if I'm taking X, Y, and Z as a requirement, in order for me to qualify for Bright Futures, I have to take W, C, and A, and because I'm having to take these state mandated classes, I can't take the courses required for Bright Futures to qualify for those scholarships.

Piem and Flint's (2009) contention that "assessment has intensified and consolidated its hold on the institutions, discourses, practices and identities that fall within the ambit of education… has become the key factor in the overriding logic of improvement that motivates contemporary educational activity" (p. 343) highlights another contradiction between the goals of education. Activities in schools assigned an F grade and which have been designated for intervention are rigidly controlled. One White male principal observed that, "we're held accountable to the state right now because we're an Intervening School [deemed to be chronically failing with a combination of 65% non-proficiency in reading and/or math and/or increases in non-proficiency]…an A is able to do a lot more creative things with the students, more project-based learning type things."

In spite of the situational nature of how these goals are enacted in A and F level schools, which result in apparent contradictions between them, there was support from the administrators for each of the articulated goals of education. It is not surprising that there is a belief in the need to prepare literate citizens for democratic participation; however, there was not agreement about its importance and how their attainment was hindered or facilitated.

Factors that Facilitate and/or Hinder Democratic Goals of Education

Consistent with other research (McMahon & Armstrong, 2010; Ryan, 2012; Solomon, 2002), this study found that democracy in education existed in isolated acts by individual educators. Several of the interviewees spoke of themselves as role models for their teaching faculty. For example an African-American male assistant principal reflected,

> I'm not just telling you what to do, I'm a part of it as well. And it takes me to actually show and demonstrate what's expected, and how you can get across to the students.

Two of the principals were able to recruit and hire teaching faculty who were strong educators and visible role models for the students. One African-American female principal stated,

> Before I came, the primary ethnicity was probably around 98 percent white. In this one year, we're close to 20 percent minority, and that's something I continue to work on. I've also brought more male figures on too.

Unfortunately, institutional policies and practices that hindered democratic processes far outweighed individual initiatives that facilitated them.

The administrators in schools assigned an A grade experienced the goals of education as complementary. Consequently, they did not identify them as factors that hindered the implementation of democracy in schools. However, as previously mentioned, data from participants assigned to failing schools support Kimber and Ehrich's (2011) concerns regarding "the erosion of democratic principles in public education by managerial and market forces" (p. 181). In addition to narrow conceptions of curriculum and assessment, time devoted to accountability measures was cited as a major obstacle to democracy in education. Struggling to reconcile her role as an agent of the state and the school district focused on test results with her desire to emphasize active democratic citizenship, one African-American female principal observed that time and energy in the school is spent working to "meet their [district and state] guidelines and statutes and so on and so forth and for the most part that may not be bad because maybe that's what

keeps us safe and functional, but it does place limitations on what we're able to accomplish."

Another African-American female principal spoke of the disjunction between state and/or school level experiences of accountability.

> I think sometimes the obstacle is that we have laws and the accountability piece that are supposedly put in place to help and sometime I think they distract from what the real job is. I think we make laws sometimes and we put policies in place and we don't think about the ramifications at the school level and how it truly impacts that classroom. We look at the big picture, which we should be, but we also need to look at what that impact is on that school level.

On a related note, an African-American assistant principal observed that policy makers "don't take a democratic look at how can we involve teachers, superintendents, school boards in creating policies that impact our students... people who actually work in those school systems."

Administrators in the failing schools also reported that teachers' low expectations for students in these schools hindered the attainment of either of the articulated goals, but especially of instituting democratic goals and practices. These comments are consistent with research on the negative impacts of deficit approaches on students' abilities to succeed (Valencia, 1997; McMahon, 2011). One African-American female principal reported, "I'm dealing with classic low expectations with the returning faculty... they can't, they can't, and so it's been a year of proving yes, they can, yes, they can...Because the faculty felt that way, the public had that perception." This phenomenon was echoed by another African-American female principal who indicated that a problem she inherited was that teachers simply allow "students to just sit quietly and fail" as long as they are not disruptive. She described a destructive "I got my tenure and I'm on drop and I got three more years, you just try it lady" attitude which was largely perpetuated by faculty who resisted principals' efforts to change the deficit thinking endemic to the cultures of some schools. This mentality is not only reserved for experienced educators, as some novice teachers, unprepared to understand the complexities inherent in teaching/learning processes, have clearly entrenched views about wanting to teach in a 'good' as opposed to a 'bad' school. They "are coming into the profession with a constrained view of teaching their subject matter, and even what their own sense of identity as teachers might be" (Helfenbein & Shudak, 2009, p. 7). This is partially because the ideology of schools as businesses and students as clients informs the practices of all educational institutions, from kindergarten to graduate studies. As one African-American principal reflected, "I think we're moving from people oriented... toward a philosophy of running

schools like businesses. You're never going to be able to accomplish that because we're not turning out products. We are turning out humans." The disconnect that these administrators feel between their professional accountability to educate, as opposed to school, students "run[s] counter to the emphasis on a narrow understanding of contractual accountability in the current managerial context" (Kimber & Ehrich, 2011, p. 185). These findings have significance that extends beyond the state of Florida and are consistent with research that examines tensions educational administrators experience when their personal values and ethics conflict with those of their institutions (Armstrong, 2004; Begley & Johansson, 2008; Marshall, 1992).

Conclusions

This research sought to understand how K-12 administrators conceptualize democracy and the articulated purposes of schooling in a democracy. There were disparities between administrators' work in high and low performing schools that extend beyond time devoted to specific tasks to include how they experienced the goals and purposes of education and schooling and the ideologies that inform how these were articulated. Administrators in schools deemed to be high performing were, in general, repeating patterns of social reproduction. Having experienced personal academic success they have spent years leading schools that continue to reinforce their unexamined beliefs about democracy and the purposes of schooling. In addition to personal experiences, research (Armstrong, 2012; Matthews & Crow, 2003) indicates that the socialization processes and practices that administrators experience influence their adaptation to, and compliance with, state and district defined administrative roles. Conversely, administrators in low performing schools were struggling to challenge and change entrenched hegemonic structures. As agents of the school district and the state, they were expected rely on conceptions of schooling that are not designed for equitable outcomes.

Simmons et al. (2007) report that research has documented that the current high-stakes accountability environment "can impede good principal practices" (p. 542-543). The disjunction that participants in F schools experience between working within, while attempting to change, inequitable institutions was compounded by the micro-management inherent in accountability measures that limit possibilities for democratic participation is schools. In spite of these barriers, the administrators working in the low performing schools struggled with the same issues that Langlois (2004) found in her research with superintendents; namely that the policies and practices of their school

districts were antithetical to the attainment of equity and educational success for their students

> . . . to rely solely on political, administrative or legal logic to solve a complex problem seems even to constitute, for some decision-makers, a form of torture that sometimes leaves a bitterness in their working environment. In order to overcome such, it seems that the exercise of moral judgment is rooted in an axiological reflection which materializes in their ethical practice. (Langlois, 2004, p. 89)

The data were also consistent with Armstrong's (2004) research with novice vice-principals who reconciled the overwhelming weight of "institutional barriers and role constraints that restrict professional autonomy… [by realizing] that while they do not have to provide immediate solutions to all of the problems, they have a moral and ethical obligation to alleviate some of them" (p. 5). Additionally, the administrators in the failing schools also reinforced Jean-Marie's (2008) findings that in spite of challenges, social justice leaders "led with purpose, knowledge, courage, and commitment in the midst of increased accountability and high-stakes testing" (p. 353). The moral purpose of educational leadership was clearly articulated by the African-American administrators assigned to failing schools. This is not to suggest that the White administrators employed in academically successful schools did not have a sense of the moral nature of their work. Perhaps teacher and administrator socialization forces combined with the successful designation of their schools did not bring these issues to the fore. For the educators who struggle against policies and practices that do not serve to improve educational experiences and, consequently, life opportunities for their students, there is a conscious realization that each of their decisions and actions seriously impacts the lives of young people. Further research that examines administrators' perceptions of the moral and ethical nature of education in academically high and low achieving schools would contribute to the theoretical knowledge base about educational administration and could inform school district placement and training practices as well as administrator preparation programs.

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