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Transformative Preparation and Professional Development: Authentic Reflective Practice for School Leadership

Joseph A Polizzi, Ph.D, *Marywood University*
William Frick, Ph.D, *University of Oklahoma*

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Joseph A. Polizzi
Marywood University
Scranton, PA

William C. Frick
University of Oklahoma
Norman, OK

In this conceptual paper, Western scholarship from both within and beyond the field is reviewed, and theory is provided to support practical authentic pedagogical applications useful in the development of school leaders. A transformative professional learning experience fosters reflective practice and processes that elaborate and clarify core professional ideas, experiences, and questions within the personal and professional contexts of school leadership. This article offers conceptualizations of reflective practice alternatives that can further inform school administrators and enable them to meet the demands of increasingly challenging work within the public schools.

Keywords: authenticity, holistic leadership, reflective practice, professional development, transformational learning

It is evident that school leaders must have the skills and competencies to improve and develop people either in work-related technical ways or in respect to attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions, set direction for their organization, influence all stakeholders to move in the same direction, and be ready and able to redesign their schools as necessary so that a more effective organization can foster powerful teaching and learning for all students (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). The processes, patterns, and theories utilized in both the professional development of incumbent leaders and preparation of novice leaders will effect, to a large extent, a leader's ability to apply the skills necessary to do exactly the aforementioned tasks.

Preservice training and professional development for school leadership has long emphasized the improvement of technical and managerial aspects of the work. We would not readily discount this kind of learning, for there is obviously room both for "technical content" and "deeper changes" in professional learning (Woods, Woods, & Cowie, 2009). With that said, we propose that some of the most powerful preservice education and professional development be viewed not only as a change in some technical variable in a school leader's repertoire of skills or outlook, but rather a more general, holistic (humanistic), and deeper qualitatively organic shift—a transformation in a core aspect of one's identity and professional mindset (Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005). This kind of formal preparatory education and professional development, we postulate, frames, encourages, supports, and directs administrators in a self-reflective, core humanistic dimension of leading that is currently undermined by a narrowly defined technocratic approach to school leadership and most of mass schooling governance and processes, *per se* (Rose, 2009).

The professional commitment of a formal school leader's role has increased in manifold ways, and in many regards the traditional methods of preparing administrators or "in-servicing" them are no longer adequate to meet the leadership challenges posed by public schools (Darling-Hammond, 2005). In fact, we would suggest that an inherent requirement of good leadership development that has not been adequately addressed to date, even within the strong drive for the development of "instructional leadership," is systematic and planned exposure to, and development of, core reflective processes. For indeed a true professional is a *humanistic* reflective practitioner in the fullest sense (Polanyi, 1966; Schön, 1983).

This article offers conceptualizations of reflective practice alternatives that can further inform school administrators and enable them to meet the demands of increasingly challenging work within the public schools. We review and discuss aspects of authentically holistic (humanistic), reflective, and transformative practices for the preparation and professional development of school leaders, considering frameworks that further support leadership in these turbulent times (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). Additionally, we offer several reflective practical approaches that answer the questions:

1. How can school leaders be prepared and professionally developed to be reflectively authentic in their role?
2. How and in what ways can leaders be developed to be critically reflective about their connectedness and embedded context within a given community, in constructive ways that enable entire school communities to learn and thrive?

Our aim is to contribute to the idea of an "ethical architecture" of preparation and professional development that is good, humane, purposeful, and sensitive to client needs (Bredeson, 2005).

The Challenges of Contemporary School Leadership

School leaders, by necessity of administrative office, perform multi-faceted roles and work diligently to meet the needs and requirements of their students, staff, broader school context, and wider community. Yet, there are different notions as to the processes of *how* school leaders can be prepared and professionally developed in order to be diligently responsive and learning driven while at the same time achieving a level of critically reflective humanistic effectiveness that includes being compassionate and forgiving, adhering to professional ethics, demonstrating academic integrity, engendering cultural sensitivity and understanding, and operating from a bona fide space that ultimately breeds a more empathic, moral, and intelligent student body and wider school community. As Korthagen (2005) notes:

> It is vital that [school leaders] learn *how* to steer their own development, so they can learn from each new experience, and become ever more proficient at independently integrating new insights into their day to day activities. This idea is crucial to the idea of the learning organization. But this concept, fruitful though it is, is not itself sufficient. What is important is *how* [school leaders] in organizations learn from their work experiences, and how they learn to direct their own development even in the midst of complex change processes. (p. 371)

The learning process and activities for principal preparation and professional development curricula should be built around *prior learning experiences* of school leaders and continue throughout the stages of their career (Darling-Hammond, 2005). A preparation and professional development curriculum that acknowledges and utilizes prior learning experiences fosters a change that needs to occur on a *personal level* (i.e., attitudes, beliefs, dispositions, tacit assumptions, ways of thinking) which will influence the school leaders' professional performance. The necessity of changing behavior, re-conceptualizing a frame of reference, and the need for raising consciousness based on personal/ educational experiences *at a core level*, is often unacknowledged in the traditional process of preparation

and professional development of school leaders (Frick & Riley, 2010). The barriers of an individual's ability to lead are often embedded in the personal educational experiences that have not been re-conceptualized or reframed within a leader's professional cognitive realm of practice. The mind of an educational leader is not blank waiting inscription. New meanings can only be appropriated through a confrontation with existing understandings and by way of a transformation of the existing structure of personal meanings (van Huizen, van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005). Where Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) argue that school leaders' knowledge and expertise may best be explored at the group or collective level rather than at the individual leader level, especially as these collective efforts yield stronger manifestations of social capital within school systems (Resnick, 2010), we argue for the importance of individual (and in many respects private) development of administrators in their pursuit of a collective good in the context of the school and districts in which they lead. It is here where a self-reflective, holistic approach to school leadership preparation and professional development is useful.

   Leaders are increasingly called upon to function in ways that demand creative inter- and intra-personal intelligence as much as book smarts and street smarts (Cowan, 2007; Pink, 2006). An educative approach acknowledging this fact encourages processes in the school leader that develop their inner resources. These inner resources allow for sustainable self-reliance, increased professional competence by deepening ones understanding of their motivations, nurtures practice through dialogue and discourse about the relevance of reflection in the leadership context, and aims to accomplish a stable, motivating self-worth which is grounded in an organization of the self. This autonomous leader simultaneously displays a strong sense of personal and professional integrity while remaining focused outward toward a pursuit of a collective good. As argued by Heuser (2005), it is an ethic of social cohesion that is sought through this developmental process—a developmental process that is defined largely by the autonomy of the individual to do good across group dynamics and organizational boundaries. To the extent that an autonomous and reflective individual acts for the collective good, we could say that they have been cohered (Heuser, 2005). This is not simply "doing good"—it is a matter of realizing that school leaders often operate in a case hardened, multi-faceted environment that demands preparation and development of a different ilk.

A Holistic and Transformative Approach

   From a teacher studying to become a principal for the first time, to a novice principal in their first year of a principalship, to a seasoned school leader facing new challenges, a change in a frame of reference is necessary in all leaders in order for transformative learning to occur. The essence of transformational learning is:

> A process of exploring, assessing, and working to change limiting frames of reference and habits of mind. It has both individual and social dimensions and implications and it demands that we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and that we be as aware as we can about the values that lead us to our perspectives. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8)

It is a self-actualizing process within the context of professional development. Fostering transformative learning in the context of school leadership is not just about making sense of experience through dialogue; it involves the participation in processes that help facilitate professional understanding among the individual participants involved (Taylor, 1998). A balance and change is sought on the personal level within the institutional context of the leader's own professional realm. The starting point is a personal transformation which leads to a deeper understanding of the values and passionate conviction about one's capability to make a difference in the lives of all who are connected with them (Notman, 2008, 2010). Holistic leadership encompasses a vision of school change as movement towards a leader's inner *and* external harmony with the environment rather than merely an exertion of control over it along with a sensate attribution to the ethical and moral dimension of the leader and the learning environment.

School leadership is both communicative and instrumental, involving both normative and technical rationalities (Sergiovanni, 2009); it is about understanding ourselves, others, and the norms and structures of the organization, community and society in which we live and work (Cranton & King, 2003). It is also about having the ability to lead and inspire others to work and contribute to a greater good and facilitate a deeper clarification and personal readjustment of one's self, behaviors, and cognitive understanding of prior learning in the context of one's leadership position. A holistic, humanistic approach considers the human condition as one of perpetual movement, progression and change that leads to wisdom and understanding, eventually bringing clarity to the interpretation of life, both as an individual and collectively. It holds at its core an integral understanding of the human condition and the interrelatedness of all living things, and, importantly, the connectedness of re-learning the past in the context of the present learning environment (Western, 2008). Opportunity for transformative readjustment requires what we call a core space, a clearing from whence authentic teaching and leadership roots itself. It is an existential space. The transformation, change, and learning that occurs within one's core space is an inward light; it is akin to the joy of one's own intelligence knowing itself. This existential space contains an intrinsic purity that is mysterious yet simple, maintaining a loyalty and a basic presence of one's identity (Polizzi, 2007). Discovering and acknowledging the boundlessness of this space aims at greatly increasing an individual's capacity and frame of reference for leadership. In turn it enables one to move more freely in harmony with their lived experiences in order to become better leaders (Branson, 2009, p. 163). Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify six core moral virtues that emerge across cultures and throughout time lending themselves to better aid in defining this boundless human space. The core moral virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence include such character strengths as creativity, generosity, love of learning, kindness, forgiveness, gratitude, humility, modesty, and self-regulation. Branson (2009) calls this leadership for an age of wisdom, or the synergistic insight leaders gain when they honestly, equitably, and explicitly consider both objective and subjective information within their decision-making process (p. 159).

This approach requires school leaders to consider purposes beyond those that are solely managerial, rational, and efficiency oriented as chief reasons for the institution of schooling. Many scholars (Begley, 2003; Freire, 1998; Gardner, 1999; Giroux, 2001; Hodgkinson, 1991; Noddings, 1992, 2003; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 1994) discuss the ethical, moral and values-based quality of schooling, leading, and teaching. The process of preparing and developing school leaders in this light appears to us to reach for the originating existential space and the moral virtues and character strengths discussed above that exist before our known realms of cultural, societal, institutional, and professional codes and traditions take root (Nussbaum, 1988). This "core space" is where an authentic school leadership orientation can emanate. This development of consciousness through preparation and professional development would aim to provide, in a practical way, a transcending inner journey to the deepest recesses of one's being beyond narrow egocentric concerns to a compassionate, empathic, humanistic understanding of life where a leader becomes in touch with their core essential qualities and values. As Palmer (1998) notes, effective leadership comes from the identity and integrity of the leader. Effective leadership is informed by core reflective practices focusing on the exploration and development of qualities such as courage, determination, empathy, frankness, fortitude, and a certain integral understanding of being interconnected with a larger whole (Branson, 2007). In some cases, it is the finding and forming of "plateau experiences" that, as a result, bring a heightened experience of life. These types of non-orgiastic experiences include a quiet sense of miracle, quiet sacralizing, meaningfulness, simplicity, gentle wonder, gratitude, awe, incredulity, and fascination in addition to peak experiences that are more cognitive than emotional (Maslow, 1971). These experiences can occur in the simplest of gestures or moments by listening closely to a co-worker's concerns, insuring the well-being of a child, writing a letter of support, working towards an aim that is beyond oneself, seeking better living conditions for those less fortunate, comforting the ill and downtrodden, and other instances of selfless devotion.

        Some argue that in order for educational leaders to create conditions under which elemental experiences and understanding such as those discussed here may occur, they must engage in spiritual work. This work would necessarily involve helping themselves and their fellow educators understand what it means to be who they are and how to be fully present to others (Dantley, Shields, Capper, Murtadha, & Starratt, 2006). Yet, rather than conceptualizing the process of school leadership preparation and development as being necessarily spiritually or ethically bound on the one hand, or contextually and technically bound on the other, we recognize there are interrelationships between the two—that within the school leader there is an interior life where potential for profound insights into the interconnectedness of *valuing, learning*, *personal development,* and *specific work context* can be achieved (see Darling-Hammond, 2005). The problem facing educators is not having had sufficient experience, but rather, as Pierre Bourdieu states in the motion picture *La Sociologie est un sport de combat* (Frégosi, Gonzalez, & Carles, 2001), how to reinterpret and utilize their own personal and professional life experiences in the most useful and authentic ways. Therefore, the most powerfully profound education will oblige current and future leaders to examine their own experiences within the professional realm and be exposed to direct cognitive demands that bring them to a deep reflective experiential base of their core essential qualities. As Woods (2007) argues, authenticity in educational leadership is not about *fulfilling* identity in context, it is about *developing* identity in context.

Developing the Leader's Identity

        Starratt (1994, 2004) maintains that the foundational qualities in the identity of a school leader should include autonomy, connectedness, authenticity, and transcendence, and that authenticity plays a foundational position within the realm of teaching and leading schooling. Autonomy is derived from the Greek *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rule), hence, "self-rule," which is the condition of living according to laws one gives oneself or, negatively, not being under the control of another (Haworth, 1986, p. 11). Life consists in learning to live on one's own. As a fully developing school leader, one must recognize what is one's own—being familiar and at home with oneself; this means, in the most basic terms, to learn who one is, what one has to offer to the contemporary world, and how to make that offering valid (Merton, 1979). The foundation of autonomy is competence. Being autonomous in the practice of educational leadership means being proficient, self-organizing, maintaining responsibility for one's action, and being able to independently act on what one believes to be *right* without fear of sanction (Heyneman, 2002). This stance is, in many respects, antithetical to notions of "influencing action" of so-called effective leadership strategies designed for school improvement and "turnaround." The Japanese phrase "Seimi soku shimei" is helpful in clarifying what is implied here; it is roughly translated as "to learn how to use one's life"—which is an autonomously integral practice. As such, a self-directed leader cannot authentically express his or her autonomy except in relationships with others as part of a school community characterized by cohesiveness (Starratt, 1994).

        Authenticity is another "virtue" that has gained considerable traction within the field of educational administration (Begley, 2003; Cooper*,* Scandura, & Schriesheim*,* 2005; Eagly, 2005; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Hoy, Gage, & Tarter, 2006; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). On the business side, scholars conducting work on authentic leadership believe that the recent upswing in corporate scandals and management malfeasance indicate that a new perspective on leadership is necessary (Cooper et al.*,* 2005). From the school leadership standpoint, the link between morality and ethical frameworks of school leadership preparation now address the notion of authentic leadership (Begley, 2007; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Starratt, 1994, 2007). Authentic school leadership practice is ultimately about the leader knowing him- or herself, and being transparent in linking inner desires, expectations, and values to the way the leader behaves every day, in each and every interaction (May, Hodges, Chan, & Avolio*,* 2003). This is a humanistic, holistic practice. As Woods (2007) argues, authenticity in the identity of the school leader involves not only being true to the self, but also to transcendent ideals and the social obligations we take on. He clarifies by furthering the idea that

authenticity is clearly more than a subjective feeling, and that it is inherently open to tensions between competing demands. In seeking to further understand the process of *how* to authentically prepare and professionally develop school leaders so they can address the needs of their school community, we find that authentic school leadership emanates from a place of mutual understanding, cognition, empathy, and intuition that exists beyond the narrow confines of the ego. It is essentially a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration (Begley, 2007). Here we create the discourse and dialogues that tell us *what* authenticity is in school settings, and begin the consideration of a practical application of concepts that can be useful in providing professional preparation and development that encompasses the ingenuity to successfully do the work necessary to promote authenticity and improve school leadership. As preparers of leaders we construct "the little bridges and the narrow but necessary stairways" that will offer both the aspirant or incumbent leader the required tools to make internal psychological connections and cross successfully the unforeseen personal and professional obstacles lying between him or her and the destination of school improvement.

Experience, Transcendence and Reflective Learning

Dewey (1997) articulated a belief that "wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experiences. Hence, the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kinds of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (p. 27). Within the context of preparing and supporting the transformation sought in school leader preparation there must be a clarification of prior experiences that are considered to be "critical incidents" (Mezirow, 2000), which in turn are interpreted as influential in the educator's cognitive, practical, and professional development. A personal transformation is a fundamental change in an individual's understanding; it involves and combines a resolution to a personal/professional dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in a more fully realized personality integration (Boyd, 1991). Transformative learning involves core reflection and dialogue (inquiry or rational discourse), which enables individuals to make self-discoveries within the context of their personal life and professional practice. As individuals make self-discoveries within a school leadership context, their feelings, images and thoughts are supposedly unified with their actions (Wade, 1997). What is gained through this process is an aspirant or incumbent leader brought closer to their sensed "phronesis" or experiential knowledge, which is embedded within character, and used by individuals to determine and follow courses of intentional action (Halverson, 2004). Phronesis, as Halverson (2004) found, is an essentially moral form of knowledge that is guided by the habits of virtue that come to form and strengthen one's character. What is being sought through an authentic preparation and professional development practice is a new kind of discipline, one that aims to develop our inner experience so that it is lifted to a higher level (Dürckheim, 2007).

It is difficult to talk of transcendence without the mention of spirituality, although the transcendent mind is not limited solely to spiritual experiences. As Maslow (1971) argues, the spiritual life is part of human essence—it is a defining characteristic of human nature, without which human nature is not fully human nature. It is part of the real self, of one's identity, of one's inner core of one's species-hood, of full humanness (p. 325). Transcendence is difficult to ascertain in a leadership environment, but a transcendent experience is one that forever transforms the individual and permeates all other experiences. When "called up" or evoked through core reflective processes, the transcendent experience makes constant connections to future lived experiences (Foshay, 1991). It is the goal, in a subtle and intuitive fashion, for school leaders to acknowledge the ability to realize ideals, and to acknowledge that those ideals transcend them. In fact, being inspired and/or supported by acknowledged transcendent power in one's leadership capacity is indicative of the practical relevance of this kind of experience. As proposed here, school leadership, authentically practiced, is a distinct calling that includes a deep self-knowledge as well as the ambient cognizance of being transcendent of oneself to the service of others and one's calling. A transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It

determines its existence in each instance, without being able to conceive anything before it (Sartre, 1957, pp. 98-99).

It is vitally important to understand, as noted by Schein (1992) and Densten and Gray (2001), that reflection plays a structural and foundational part in this process of learning from life experiences, and critical self-reflection is a central component to transformative learning. Reflection is a process of reconsidering prior experience through reason, and reinterpreting and generalizing the experience to form mental structures (Mezirow, 2003). Critical self-reflection is the type of thinking that serves to challenge our notions of prior learning (van Halen-Faber, 1997) and can possibly lead one beyond a strictly cognitive experience to that of emotional and transcendent awareness (Dantley, 2005; Woods & Woods, 2010).

Core Reflective Processes for School Leadership Development

The processes of Branson (2006), Korthagen (2005), and Polizzi (2007), which are presented and discussed below aim to add to the discussion *of how* to create authentic reflective and transformative practices for the preparation and professional development of school leaders. All three require a school leader to utilize structured core reflection and critical incidents in their processes. Branson (2005, 2006, 2007), building on empirical research from a qualitative study of elementary school principals in Australia, has developed an applied practical psychoanalytic and reflective process for the professional development of school leaders in which the main facets rely upon the idea that authentic leaders act primarily in accordance with their personal values and convictions from which they construct essential credibility, respect, and trust. Branson's process utilizes the ideas of school leaders using a deeply structured reflective process that looks at defining moments, critical choices, and pivotal people in a leader's life in order to elucidate their prior learning and change a frame of reference that influences and affects their professional realm. In completing the reflections and necessary related work, school leaders' self-knowledge increases as well as a deeper understanding of how values influence their actions and leadership. According to Branson (2006), a fully authentic person is one who is able to recognize the "fictional" parts of their self-concept and has adopted simple ways to redress these false understandings.

Branson's (2007) authentic leadership development process aims to highlight what is true and authentic within the self-concept of the school leader and works sequentially through self-esteem, motivation, values, beliefs, and behaviors within the context of educative life experience and their professional realm as a school leader. Through the structured reflection process, school leaders learn to suppress the influence of those values that can cause undesirable behavior and therefore enhance the positive effect of their leadership. This kind of authentic preparation and professional development of school leaders enables learners to encounter the meanings embedded in the curriculum about the natural, social, and cultural worlds they inhabit, and, at the same time, find and redefine themselves in these worlds: This type of learning is intrinsically ethical (Starratt, 2007).

Korthagen (2005) discusses the concepts of reflection and intuition as complementary processes when leaders aim for organizational balance. His process acknowledges elements of transpersonal psychology and flow and focuses on developing "quality from within" in practicing school professionals. The process focuses on the importance of reflection and intuition in the process of learning how to manage one's own development as a teacher/leader as well as being able to coach others within the context of the process. Reflection is not only an individual matter; it also functions in the context of coaching. Participants learn to supervise others through cycles of reflection, which gives them the advantage of learning to reflect autonomously and coach others in reflection (Korthagen, 2005, p. 380). These ideas are similar to the most profound and advanced notions of school leadership practice as manifested in the collective process of reciprocal interdependency put forward by Linda Lambert (2002) and her associates.

Essential to Korthagen's (2005) process is the notion that, within reflective components, the participant becomes aware of the tensions between an ideal situation and corresponding limitations or

inhibitions. Once achieved, the participant must take a step back so as to "dis-identify"—to no longer identify with a former manner of handling any given situation (Assagioli, 1976). Although deeply feeling and experiencing the situation is essential, the stepping back process is a re-centering act that allows the participant to recognize and become in touch with the core qualities that can be more easily expressed, such as care, empathy, courage, determination, and forthrightness.

> Individuals calling on such core qualities can feel very inspired, because they have established a relation with the inspiration they bring to their work, and or an awareness of the inter-connectedness of things. [One] gain[s] a greater realization that [her/his] concern . . . [can] be more than a personal need. (Korthagen, 2005, p. 382)

Core reflection can be a self-reinforcing process. By engaging in the learning situation, and once a deeper contact has been made with various core qualities, a continuation of core reflection may proceed more easily in successive sessions.

Another approach to core reflection offered by Polizzi (2007) utilizes Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning, Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis's (1999) experiential learning theory, and Starratt's (1994) discourse on the foundational components of an ethical person. Mezirow's theory of transformative learning further elaborates on the experiential models of learning: its focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others in order to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear thinking decision makers (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). The Transformational Professional Learning Experience (TPLE) is what begins to occur the moment someone immerses themselves into a newfound leadership role. This new role may begin when a former teacher or other school person begins their school leadership training/internship or, lacking formal training, simply when one enters a new leadership role. By becoming immersed in a preservice learning experience or their new leadership role, participants reflect on their own biographical and school related experiences—experiences that have latently informed their professional practice and frame of reference over time. Participants become actively engaged in an inquiring process of learning to lead. A component part contributing to the transformation to the leadership role that occurs throughout the mentoring process is encouragement of critical rational discourse about the school context. Preparation for leadership and professional development requires the understanding of the organizational goals and beliefs in which the leader leads. Practice in this light is never a closed or final act. On the contrary, it is an ongoing process of acting and responding in context and reflecting on the unfolding of the transformational process. The TPLE process is, on the one hand, encountering and engaging with central organizational ideas and beliefs of the particular school organization. As well, it is also individuals answering their compelling *Core Professional Ideas, Experiences* and *Questions* (CPIEQ's) that exist at the heart of their practice. The process of eliciting and being aware emanates from a deeply reflective examination of one's educative biographical critical incidents that latently guide, practice, and offer insight and clarification into understanding "why the leader does what they do as a leader."

> Questions that can begin to elucidate a school leaders' CPIEQ's are:
>
> 1. What experiences are at the heart of your desire to lead?
> 2. What questions are at the heart of your work as a school leader?
> 3. What theoretical ideas most inform your practice as a school leader?
> 4. What specific incidents or experiences can you identify as being influential in your desire to become a school leader?
> 5. What are one or two experiences over the course of the past year as a leader that you can identify as being "critical incidents" or "outstanding incidents" in your development as a school leader?

Participants' responses begin to clarify values and purposes evident in their lives, ranging from issues such as empathy, compassion, and understanding of students to a foundational belief in the power of interconnected relationships in the school community. Figure 1 is a conceptualization of the theoretical composition of a transformational professional learning experience.
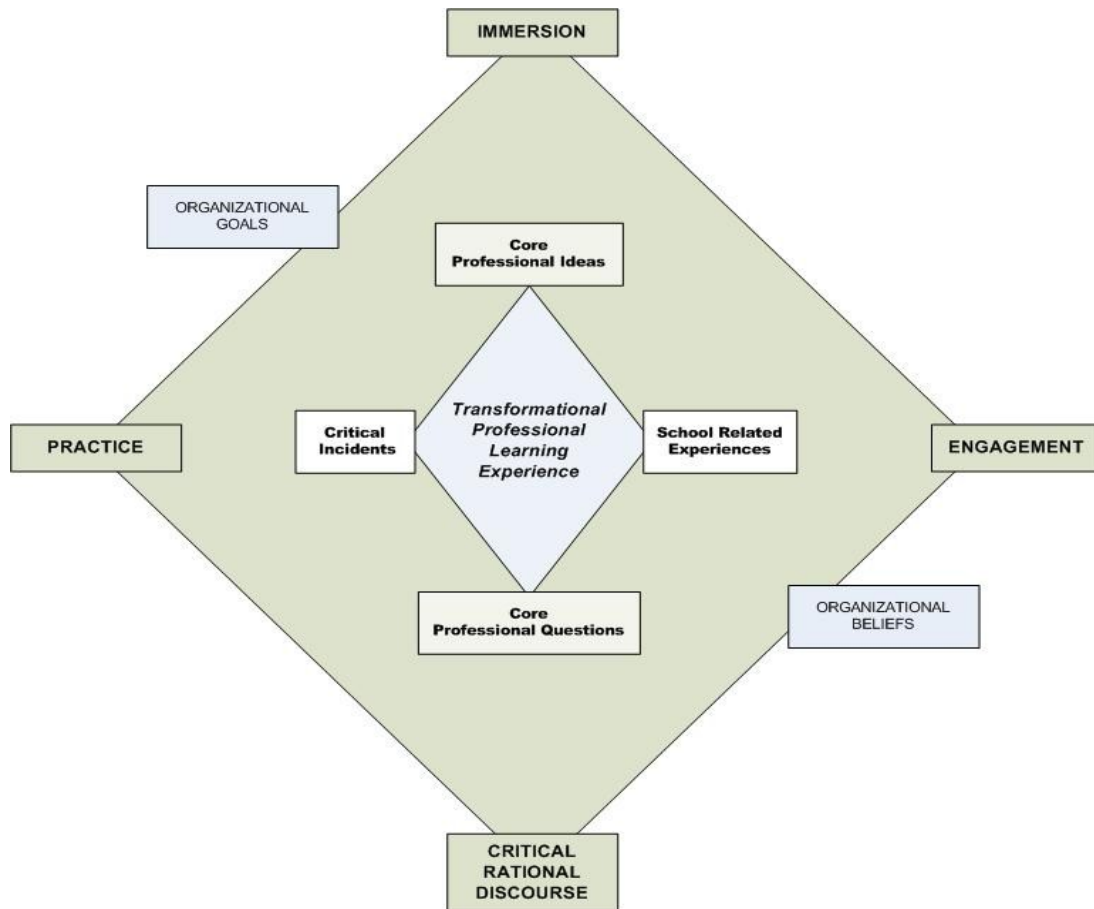

Figure 1. Theorized Components of a Transformational Professional Learning Experience model. This chart originally appeared in a slightly different form by the author. Adapted from "Transformational Learning: The Preparation of New Teachers through Experiential Professional Development," by J. A. Polizzi, 2007, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).

As Palmer (1998) notes, we teach (lead) from who we are from within, from the heart—where integrity and authenticity emanate. It is partially in the biographical experiences of school leaders that may explain their practice. Critical self-reflection and engagement with the experiences and critical incidents of one's life is essential. When ideas or concepts about school leadership are solely abstracted in the university classroom, or incumbents are unsupported and their development ignored, it can make for a limited learning experience. Even the most effective course work or technical professional development is not sufficient to prepare administrators to be reflective, and as a result effective, throughout their careers (Hallinger & Murphy, 1987). It is on this belief that we have offered this article, considering the personal and professional challenge for both teachers of leaders and leaders of learners.

In support of the concepts presented here, we discovered three additional specific processes/ activities that employ core reflection as a component part of leadership preparation and professional development. The first, a reflection process focuses on critical incidents and shares similarities with qualitative interviewing. This pedagogical technique is designed to assist aspiring and practicing leaders to investigate significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes, and issues) identified by them, and the way they were or are managed, in addition to the perceived effects of outcomes (Chell, 1998, p. 56). A critical incident is synonymous to what Mezirow (2000) calls a disorienting dilemma which is often the trigger to a transformational learning experience. Critical incident reflection and analysis enables the exploration of personal and professional experiences in relation to metamorphosis and change in the members of a school community, their learning, and development (van Aken, Berends, & van der Bij, 2007).

The second, Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), is a pedagogical and development technique that aims to bring learners to the center of a community of practice as full participants by starting them at the periphery working with mentors in legitimate activities (Lave & Wenger 1991). *Legitimate* refers to the daily activities that are integral to practice. Peripheral is the notion that interns (future school leaders) or incumbents (novices or those with learning to do) will participate at the edge of the practice alongside their mentors, initially doing simple tasks, and then moving on to tasks that increase in complexity as their skills and knowledge develop. Participation suggests that mentors and interns work and talk within the practice as they negotiate meanings and improvise to solve problems that occur as a result of the changing circumstances in which they perform their tasks. (Williams, Matthews, & Baugh, 2004, p. 57)

The third practice is a documented holistic consideration focused on the realm of leading in educational contexts. The practice of writing and rewriting one's life story (Shamir & Eilam, 2005) is an exercise or practice that provides a reservoir of reflection and action in terms of authentic development. Writing one's life story requires sense-making that involves placing life experiences into a framework in order to help comprehend, understand, and explain experiences in a way that gives meaning, purpose, and direction to action (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005, p. 717). Different than life-course diagrams, what happens in the process of writing is a transformation stemming from a highly developed self-knowledge that "provides the authentic leader with self-concept clarity because it organizes life events into a gestalt structure that establishes connections between those events so that the person's life is experienced as a coherent unfolding process" (Shamir & Eilam, 2005, p. 402). This practice incorporates Polizzi's (2007) Core Professional Ideas Experiences and Questions as well as the component parts of Branson's (2007) and Korthagen's (2005) theoretical constructs discussed herein.

Discussion

We need a new kind of discipline here, one so that it aims to develop our inner experience that it is lifted to a higher level . . . the results of such discipline come not from the sort of practice that is mere carrying out of specific exercises, but from one that confirms the old saying "each moment is the best of all opportunities." (Dürkheim, 2007, pp. 31-32)

Being involved in the preparation and professional development of school leaders is multi-faceted and complex. Herein we have offered both theoretical and pedagogical approaches to enhance preservice principal training and the professional development of practicing principals. As stated previously, principals must, beyond all leadership labels, have the skills and competencies to know themselves first, develop people, set directions for the organization, influence all stakeholders to move in the same direction, and be ready and able to redesign the school as necessary. What has been proposed in this paper is the importance of school leaders learning how to engage in structured core reflective practices so as to increase their capacity to lead. Core practice inherently leads to discussion of moral practice, ethics, ideological beliefs, and deeply seated understandings of "why a leader does what it is they do." This type of learning process, when executed properly, can have profound effects on the abilities of a leader to lead—especially with respect to a leader's generative work both within him/ herself and the school as a whole (Klimek, Ritzenhein, & Sullivan, 2008).

In all, core reflective practice as a transformative learning experience provides for an integration of self by essentially remaking or reframing a sense of past experience. Transformation occurs when you bring together the personal and professional educative life experiences deemed relevant to the current professional context where a leader is immersed. Critical engagement and practice are filtered through not merely self-reflection, but coupled with the immersed engagement in relevant educational, organizational, and cognitive dimensions of schooling that enjoin professional practices leaders are confronted by in their respective school environments.

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Authors' Note

Joe Polizzi *is an assistant professor of Education and Educational Leadership in the Education Department in the Reap College of Education at Marywood University, in Scranton, PA. He holds a Ph.D. from the Pennsylvania State University in Educational Leadership. He was an English teacher in the New York City Public School System and also a Fulbright Exchange Teacher to Hungary. His areas of research include transformational learning, using film as a medium of instruction, authentic leadership and school reform. His work has appeared in the Journal of School Leadership, School-University Partnerships and other journals. He currently lives in Clarks Summit, PA with his wife Eva and daughters, Lily Julia and Sofie Joy.*

William C. Frick *is assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, University of Oklahoma. He holds a Ph.D. in educational theory and policy from the Pennsylvania State University. His prior work experience includes fourteen years in the public schools as a teacher, school counselor, principal, and director of curriculum and instruction. Bill's current research activity includes both theoretical and empirical work related to (1) ethics in educational administration, (2) reinvention of urban communities through connections between school system reform and community revitalization efforts, and (3) broader cultural studies in education addressing issues of identity and schooling. Among his publications are articles that appear in the Journal of Educational Administration, the Journal of Beliefs and Values, Educational Policy, and the American Journal of Education.*