Educational Leadership Frameworks:

Looking to Archetypal Images for Twenty-first Century Wisdom

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Abstract
As twenty-first century leadership becomes more complicated and more illusive, school administrators search for solid frameworks upon which to build meaningful work. This paper offers for consideration three metaphorical frameworks derived from ancient archetypes. An analytical study highlights leadership characteristics derived from recorded narrative presentations of the mentor, hero, and prophet and evaluates the capacity of each for addressing the complexities of present-day school leadership.

School principals often discuss frustration with the work. Extended conversations many times end in expressed concerns about the lack of meaning in the job and about the continuing difficulty supporting family commitments in light of growing work demands. These conversations turn to second guessing decisions to enter school leadership careers and to the price of an on-going internal conflict involving choices between successful private and public lives. These conversations closely resemble concerns expressed by citizens interviewed by Bellah et al. (1985/1996) for Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life and resemble most especially discourse of meaning, success, the good life, and personal choice. Principals, in addition to
discussions about conflicting loyalties, talk about the need for meaningful work, an issue that doubly compounds their concerns about sacrifices of time and energy. They report preponderant school conversations about standards, high-stakes testing, and related issues and, in addition, find little, if any, time or support for significant dialogue involving the larger society, a context most directly affecting and defining the tenor of their lives and those of teachers, students, and parents. In essence, school leaders express a basic disconnection, an alienation of sorts, from the larger, more comprehensive and meaningful dialogue about the context of school in society. This disconnection between the imposed reality of work and what they perceive to be important about educating children in a greater social context contributes to feelings of marginalization, powerlessness and angst.

The Microcosm-Macrocosm Perspective

The desire for important discourse in the context of satisfying job functionality reflects the need for meaningful work. James B. Macdonald (1975/2000) wrote: “It is clear to me now that when we speak of education we speak in the context of a microscopic paradigm of the macroscopic human condition, a paradigm that holds all of the complexities in microcosm of the larger condition” (p. 4). Certainly, our school leaders need to engage in and lead conversations about the realities of the human condition so that education is meaningful. There are those who believe that our survival may depend upon
viable connections through meaningful discourse, connections that promote hope rather than despair, connections that promote possibility and encourage imagination, most especially in the context of school (Eisner, 2001/2004; Greene, 1979; Martin, 1992; Noddings, 2003; Purpel, 1989; Purpel, 1999).

Reframing the Conversation through New Metaphorical Frameworks

Bellah et al. (1985/1995) imply that if we do not talk openly about issues of importance to us, then, we will lose the language to do so. The danger of not talking openly is, of course, that our lives will become shaped and controlled only by those concepts and ideas about which we can communicate. If we lack public language about significant concepts and concerns, then our lives become shaped and controlled by ideas imposed from the outside rather than those originating from our own hearts and revealed in community.

Metaphorical Discourse

Since language is highly metaphorical, it is essential to search for metaphors that, rather than limiting discourse, expand understandings both of school-based education and, as well, meaningful connections with the larger society. Metaphors can limit or expand our understanding. In a system where the imposed conversation of schooling is relegated to defining education in terms of the outcomes of high-stakes testing and meeting imposed standards, where teaching is defined in terms of test scores and meeting growth standards, where methodologies are measured in terms of maximizing student success on the test,
where children are defined and categorized by nine-week’s and end of grade test scores, where teachers are viewed as good or bad solely by their class’s standing on the end of grade tests, where leaders are defined by how well their schools score on the annual tests, and where communities are judged as good ones or bad ones by how well the community school was ranked using test scores, it is understandable that the larger society judges schools and education by scores. In essence this marginalization reaches every facet of a school and its community.

Several metaphorical frameworks have been ascribed to or suggested for the principalship. Beck and Murphy (1993) describe themes from literature reflecting the climate of the country and schools of the related historic periods: i.e., the 1920’s values broker, the 1970’s humanistic facilitator and 1980’s instructional leader. While instructional leadership continues to be a theme in the literature, other metaphors are also suggested: moral steward, servant leadership, community builder (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Hodgkinson, C., 1991; Huebner, 1984; Murphy, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1999). Despite these many conceptual choices, currently-proposed metaphors appear not to be robust enough to provide the capacity for leadership that is warranted by current complexities. Where does one look for a comprehensive, authentic, and imaginative metaphor for school leadership? Where can one find a metaphor for school leadership that moves beyond the current discourse? Where can we look for a metaphor that allows us to imagine a better education and a better world? Where can we find a
metaphor that is able to connect viable educational discourse with the macrocosmic condition? Where does one find a metaphor powerful enough to effect paradigmatic change, to aid in critique and envisioning possibilities, to rid education of the ever-widening disconnection with the realities of the human condition caused by a lack of discourse around issues of importance?

**Metaphorical Capacity**

McFague (1982), in writing about metaphor, quotes John Middleton Murry: “Metaphor is as ultimate as speech itself, and speech as ultimate as thought” (p. 32). McFague determines metaphor to be the primary source of our language and knowledge because it calls forth truth and still retains the tension, the “it is and the it is not” (p. 13) that metaphors in their indirection create. Basically, we depend upon metaphor to use a better-known or more familiar object or idea to point out a quality in common with a lesser-known object or idea. The familiar is used to talk about the less-familiar or unknown. McFague defines metaphor as a comparison by which one sees one thing as another, “pretending ‘this’ is ‘that’ because we do not know how to think about ‘this,’ so we use ‘that’ as a way of saying something about it” (p. 15). Or, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) write in *Metaphors We Live By*: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p.17). Language, thoughts, and speech are metaphorical.
There are good metaphors, poor metaphors, and bad metaphors. McFague writes: “Good metaphors shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension, and they are implicitly revolutionary. Metaphorical thinking [is]…prophetic…[and] projects, tentatively, a possible transformed order and unity yet to be realized” (p. 17). Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) further highlight the importance of choosing metaphors carefully since metaphors can expand or limit the possibilities and realities of our lives. A clear example of limitation is seen in their discussion of political and economic metaphors. They point out that

like all other metaphors, political and economic metaphors can hide aspects of reality. But in the areas of politics and economics, metaphors matter more because they can *constrain* our lives. A metaphor in a political or economic system, by virtue of what it hides, can lead to human degradation. (p. 236)

An example of such a metaphor is “labor is a resource,” where the hidden aspect is the nature of labor itself in that “no distinction is made between meaningful labor and dehumanizing labor” (p. 236). Given that there are no statistics on meaningful labor and assuming that cheap labor is good, exploitation of human beings is in effect a given in cultures that boast of “a virtually inexhaustible supply of cheap labor” (p. 237). While this particular metaphor might be a rather neutral sounding economic statement/metaphor, it hides the reality of human
degradation. This phenomenon is not unlike that of education when schools, students, leaders and teachers are seen as “the test.”

For this dialogue, the idea is to find a metaphor that is strong enough, yet simple and clear enough, to carry the weight of meaningful educational discourse and, as well, contribute to analytical and critical discourse about education in a larger social and cultural construct. The search is for a metaphor that can bring the microcosmic and macrocosmic human condition together with comparative language in such a way that the meaning derived from the comparison can lead to paradigmatic change that is more powerful than the predominant conversations of either schooling or the larger society.

Metaphorical Possibilities from Ancient Stories—

The Mentor, the Hero, the Prophet

This discussion focuses on three symbolic images of leadership found in ancient narrative literature and concentrates on the capacity for leadership found in the lives, traits, and potential for knowledgeable use of language of the mentor, the hero, and the prophet.

*The Mentor*

Ancient literature characterizes the person Mentor, etymologically rooted in the word meaning *mind*, to be a wise and trusted teacher and counselor. Specifically, in Greek mythology Odysseus’ trusted counselor was named Mentor, and Athena in disguise became the guardian and teacher of Telemachus.
Recognizing these great teachers and their important positions in the lives of ancient Greeks, the term *mentor* has been adopted to represent the relationship between the novice and experienced teacher, administrator or other leader. This literature presents mentors as those who have professional knowledge and pedagogical skills worthy of imitation. Mentors then, in current educational practice, are those who have the skills necessary to teach new teachers the currently accepted “best practices” of the profession.

Discussions involving mentors are also prevalent in educational administration literature. A review of the last five years of *Educational Administration Quarterly* alone reveals more than fifty articles involving mentoring relationships, nearly all focusing on normative practice (See, for example, Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Jackson & Kelley, 2002). Clearly, this concept is accepted as important by the educational community and provides a possibility for this study.

While the well-defined term *mentor* is used frequently in educational literature and settings, it lacks a transformational component in both ancient and present-day treatments. Its well-defined usage could inhibit the capacity for dialogic language necessary for promotion of a strong social and cultural critique. In essence, the term, partially because of its frequent and current usage, may not have the power to be provocative enough to engage the imagination in envisioning fresh possibilities. Using the word, at this point, in more creative and
critical ways would involve unlearning and reteaching this educationally and culturally useful concept.

*The Hero*

While there are times when we refer to persons as heroes who have been great mentors, the word *hero* generally refers to those who demonstrate great courage or engage in risks for noble purposes. The hero monomyth immortalized by Joseph Campbell (1949/1968) offers strong language and narrative possibilities for this study. Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* contributes greatly to the popular and cross-disciplinary understandings of the hero. The monomythic journey of the hero from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* includes these phases: the hero receives a call to adventure, is forced to leave the homeland, encounters a helper, and crosses the threshold of adventure by encountering a significant challenge on the journey, is tested and with helpers changes himself, is transformed, flees, returns to the homeland a changed person with notoriety and great gift for leadership sometimes related to the ability to regenerate the society as a whole (p. 38). The hero journey is sometimes called a spiritual journey in the sense that the hero encounters almost insurmountable challenges and emerges triumphant. Certainly the language, story, and traits of the hero have possibilities for the study of leadership in schools.

Literature of educational administration includes some discussion of leaders as heroes. Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) discuss the wounded
leader in terms of the hero journey; Brown and Moffett (1999) address school transformation and improved learning in terms of the hero’s journey; Marks and Printer (2003) speak of principal heroes who attempt the job without sharing leadership; and Keyes, Manley-Maxwell and Capper (1999) write about the hero as a skilled analyst. There are many others.

In ancient stories the hero returns as one who is known and followed primarily due to leadership confidence, a type of knowledge resulting from successful conquests. In general, the hero returns to lead within the context of regenerating or healing a known social structure. While there is evidence of leadership for social change, this is not always the goal of the hero journey. Emphasis is more generally on the hero character than on the society to which the hero returns. Campbell does, however, write that the hero “and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolic deficiency” (p. 37) that is overcome through the story trials. Writing about the monomythic hero, Campbell further explains that the hero can represent a “microcosmic triumph” or in the case of the “world-historical” hero, a “macrocosmic triumph” where the hero “brings back from his adventure the means for the regeneration of his society as a whole” (p. 38).

In addition to the above general and leadership scholarly references to the hero, stories of heroes certainly have strong credibility and notoriety in our current culture where sports figures and performers are referred to as heroes.
These common usages of the hero metaphor actually hurt the possibilities of this metaphor to create new leadership frameworks. It would be difficult in schools to move beyond the current reified and more linear, culturally conceived usage of hero to one involving characteristics for multifaceted institutional change. In addition, Mayrowetz and Weinstein (1999) make a viable observation when they write that the “myth of a solitary educational reform hero is alluring but unwise” (p. 449). We know that real, sustainable institutional change comes from shared visions and hard work on the part of all members of a community of practice. Educational change is a complex endeavor dependent upon leaders who see themselves as community builders rather than persons who want or need to be idolized. Relying upon one, revered leader can be risky. When there is a shift in leadership, evidence of real institutional change can be minimal because members of the community of practice have not done the work for sustainable change.

*The Prophet*

Both Walter Brueggemann (1978/2001) in *Prophetic Imagination* and Abraham Heschel (1962) in *The Prophets* present critical descriptions of prophets as viable leaders. Stories about prophets as change agents who call people into action through their words certainly give impetus to furthering this study. Heschel, who writes about prophetic consciousness, outlines the qualities of a prophet as one who displays an almost hypersensitivity to evil and who displays an ability to see evil in people, events, or everyday situations that are normally
considered to be trivialities even by those persons who are good. Heschel (1962) writes: “[Prophets] make much ado about paltry things,…[calling attention to] trifling subjects. What if somewhere in ancient Palestine poor people have not been treated properly by the rich?” (p. 3). To the prophet this is fodder for discourse and action. Always there is attention to the plight of humankind.

According to Heschel a second major characteristic of the prophet is the use of emotional and imaginative language. Here I refer to this phenomenon as the *prophetic voice*. The prophet’s voice is used to call attention to evils, to challenge the status quo and to promote the highest good as kindness, justice, and righteousness. Heschel (1962) writes:

> The words of the prophet…suggest a disquietude sometimes amounting to agony….The prophet’s use of emotional and imaginative language, concrete in diction, rhythmical in movement, artistic in form, marks his style as poetic. Yet it is not the sort of poetry that takes its origin, to use Wordsworth’s phrase, ‘from emotion recollected in tranquility.’ Far from reflecting a state of inner harmony or poise, its style is charged with agitation, anguish, and a spirit of non-acceptance. The prophet’s concern is not with nature but with history and history is devoid of poise. (p. 7)

Heschel describes the prophet’s words as ones that are “designed to shock” (p. 8). They are meant to “burn where conscience ends” (p. 12).
Heschel continues in his description of a prophet as one who is “not regarded as an ambassador who must be dispassionate in order to be effective” (p. 31), unlike the leadership style of some school leaders who have been taught to perform their jobs with dispassionate aloofness. Heschel portrays the prophet as giving the message of censure and castigation out of a foundation of love and compassion, which sets the tone for redemption—the involvement of everyone in a new, more just world where all are responsible (pp. 3-31). The new world promoted by the Heschel’s image of the prophet is one of promise, concern, care, compassion and justice (p. 619) where relationship is important.

Walter Brueggemann (1978/2001) in *Prophetic Imagination* enhances Heschel’s description and presents the prophet (1) as one who presents “what is” to us in such a way that we see the unjust nature of the current situation, (2) as one who uses “the voice,” i.e. discourse, to bring people into an awareness of the present situation as unjust, (3) as one who describes a new world of justice and compassion as “what is not but what can be.” Brueggemann’s contribution lies primarily with the description of the prophet as one who sees an alternative reality and who uses the language of grief and mourning to call people into this new reality through the use of their imagination.

Heavily influenced by Paul Ricour’s works on imagination, Brueggemann recognizes the imagination as “a legitimate way of knowing” (p. x). He writes:
One consequence of this new awareness is that … prophetic texts could be seen as poetic scenarios of an alternative social reality that might lead to direct confrontation with ‘presumed, taken-for-granted worlds…When one considers the issues of liberation and exploitation on the ground, then the intimate contact between the …texts of a prophetic sort and matters of social justice, social interest, and social criticism seem to …be incontrovertible. (pp. x-xi)

Acknowledging that prophets exist in subcommunity, i.e., on the margins of society, Brueggemann emphasizes the prophet’s “active practice of hope.” The “community knows about promises yet to be kept, promises that stand in judgment on the present” (p. xvi). Brueggemann points out that while prophets are concerned with “matters political and social,” the major purpose is “much more radical than social change” (p. 21). The prophet counters the “what is” by asking

not whether it is realistic or practical or viable but whether it is imaginable. We need to ask if our consciousness and imagination have been so assaulted and co-opted by the royal consciousness that we have been robbed of the courage or power to think an alternative thought. (p.39)
By *royal* here, Brueggemann is referring to the bureaucratic power of government.

Further defining the vocation of the prophet by identifying the prophetic voice with the possibility of the new vision, Brueggemann writes:

The prophet does not ask if the vision can be implemented, for questions of implementation are of no consequence until the vision can be imagined. The *imagination* must come before the *implementation*. Our culture is competent to implement almost anything and to imagine almost nothing. The same royal consciousness that makes it possible to implement anything and everything is the one that shrinks imagination because imagination is a danger. Thus every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist. It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing futures alternative to the single one the king wants to urge as the only thinkable one (p. 40).

For Brueggemann the task of prophetic imagination is “to bring to public expression those very hopes and yearnings that have been denied so long and suppressed so deeply that we no longer know they are there” (p.65). Brueggemann continues:
Hope, on the one hand, is an absurdity too embarrassing to speak about, for it flies in the face of all those claims we have been told are facts. Hope is the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion; and one does that only at great political and existential risk. On the other hand, hope is subversive, for it limits the grandiose pretension of the present, daring to announce that the present to which we have all made commitments is now called into question….The language of hope and the ethos of amazement have been partly forfeited because they are an embarrassment. The language of hope and the ethos of amazement have been partly squelched because they are a threat. (p. 65)

equally speaks of compassion as a characteristic of the prophet who identifies with the “marginal ones.” Compassion becomes “a radical form of criticism, for it announces that the hurt is to be taken seriously, that the hurt is not to be accepted as normal and natural but is an abnormal and unacceptable condition for humanness” (p. 88). Brueggemann’s prophet believes that the politics of justice and compassion can oppose the politics of oppression (p. 99).

One can draw the following conclusions from the prophetic metaphor for leadership. First, the prophetic leader must be able to bring people into an understanding of the inequities and injustices existing in the present situation—the “what is.” Second, the prophetic leader must be able to choose language—use
“the voice”—that is appropriately accessible, but shocking used to gain the attention of those who have become complacent and unaware of the inequities and injustices before them. Third, the prophetic leader must be able to bring people into an understanding that they can imagine and implement action for a better world, one without the existing injustices. In essence, the prophetic voice is able to reveal “what is” and “what could and should be” with ordinary language used in such a disparate, yet connected, way that it shocks community listeners into understanding the reality of what exists and into a vision of what could and should be. It is possible that this metaphor of prophetic leadership has the capacity to shape a new vision for personal meaning, social justice, and community through education.

Discussion: A Metaphorical Framework for Transformative Leadership in the Prophetic Tradition

A metaphor based on the prophetic tradition is far enough removed from current school literature and popular cultural understandings to provide the kind of distance that a good metaphor needs in order to do its work. In addition, most people are familiar with the prophetic tradition from narratives involving both political and religious figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and others from various religious traditions. The image of the prophet is a powerful one in that it (1) shows what is, a description of current situations, in terms of understandable language of critique, and, as well, (2) describes what is
not in terms of providing a vision of a better life where people participate in community, are treated with dignity, and realize worth.

The possibilities for the prophetic metaphor for leadership could be powerful. This metaphor could bring about new understandings of the current situations in schools and promote action for change. Applying the prophetic metaphor, then, school leaders could become persons who understand the use of this powerful metaphoric framework to call people of the community into action for change that promotes true meaning, social justice and community. In school, then, leaders who employ the prophetic framework would call upon the community to recognize that current reductive conversations in school are limiting and potentially harmful to the entire institution of education. They would call us into action to change the current status of education into a new paradigmatic manner of conceiving education beyond the currently imposed conversation on standards and high-stakes testing. Thus, the prophet’s voice is of paramount importance in that the prophetic leader would not call us into restructuring and reforming what is already there, but rather into creating new, more powerful visions for the role of education as an empowering entity for lives of meaning, social justice and community.

**Embracing New Discourse**

Freire (1994a) in *Pedagogy of Hope* writes: “Changing language is part of the process of changing the world. The relationship, language—thought—world,
is a dialectical, processual (sic), contradictory relationship. The…discourse, requires of us, or imposes upon us the necessity, that concomitantly with the new, democratic, antidiscriminatory discourse, we engage ourselves in democratic practices, as well” (pp. 67-68). When the microscopic condition of school is truly connected to the macroscopic global reality, the human condition dominates the discourse. Schools can no longer be places where people—students, teachers, parents, communities—are marginalized and oppressed. When school becomes a place where children engage in learning about the basic life connections to themselves, others, the environment, and an ultimate being, there will be real literacy about what is good, right, just, merciful, peace-making, community building and joyful.

Freire (1998) proposes: “It is true that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur” (p. 37). It is possible to envision school as a place where we engage in the discourse of the larger culture and where the discourse is about real issues confronting the human condition on all levels, and where the discourse is so strong in its critique and vision that it revolutionizes schools into meaningful communities. It is possible to envision schools where the leadership is so strong that people rise up to say that there can be a better way to educate children and that we act upon this vision. It is possible to envision a world where there is hope of true justice for all, of value in spiritual connections, of moral and political action for real community and care.
It is possible that the microcosmic and macrocosmic conversations can together focus on the human condition. This would be hope at its finest. This would be hope for the practice of meaningful school leadership and the discourse of prophetic leadership.

References


