Headline: Inclusive Leadership
Subhead: A Strategy to Diversify Schools
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Evaluation Criteria: Creating a Culture, Engaging the Community, Closing the Gap
Section: Guest Authors & Featured Content
Word Count: 1865

Edited By: (to mark so done, right click on the box and change it to a check)
- ✓ David
- ✓ Caroline
- ✓ Jocelyn

Status for Scott:
- ❏ Draft
- ✓ Final

Lack of diverse teaching faculty in U.S. schools has been an issue for decades. Even though our communities became diverse in the last three decades, schools could not attract people of color to teaching. White teachers continue to dominate the teaching profession when compared to Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asians.

According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education, the comparison between the 1987-88 school year and 2011-12 shows the percentage of white teachers decreased from 87 to 82 percent, Black teachers from 8 to 7 percent, Hispanic teachers grew from 3 to 8 percent, Asian teacher from 1 to 2 percent, and American Indian or Alaska Native teachers dropped from 1 percent to half percent (2016, p.6).

Studies show schools are taking steps to equip classrooms with diverse teachers. Unfortunately, there is not much progress yet. The needle isn't moving very far. One of the reasons is *insufficient leadership capacity to invite, hire, and retain teachers of color into the classrooms*. To address the problem, leaders at all levels must embrace a leadership style called *Inclusive Leadership*.

Inclusive Leadership
I define inclusive leadership as a form of leadership in which leaders believe in inclusion, are aware of biases, value perspective of diverse members of a group, and make unbiased decisions with a goal of

serving their constituents better. Inclusive leaders follow five steps: they are aware of biases, lead with vision, plan strategically, have courageous conversations, and thoughtfully reflect.

Figure 1: Inclusive Leadership
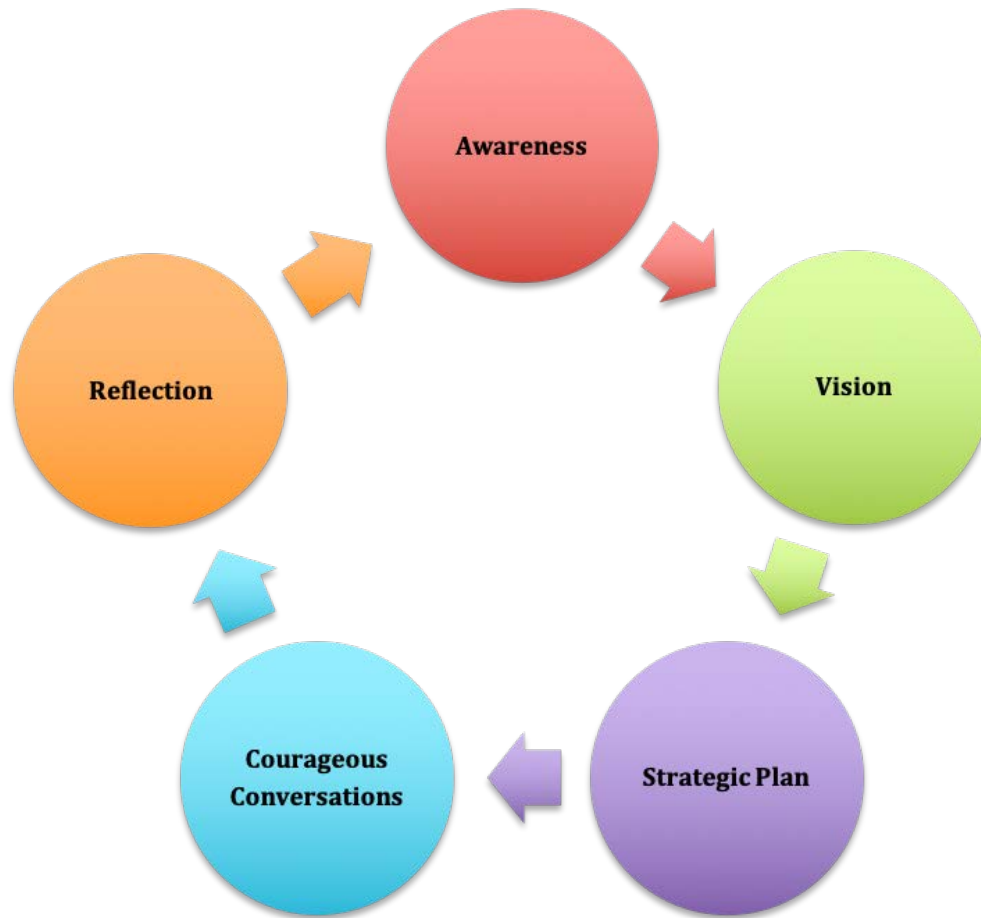
1. Awareness of Biases.

Human beings are biased by default. Intentionally or unintentionally, we show bias with our words, actions, and choices. Cultural, social, economic, gender, professional, political, religious, intellectual, emotional, and racial are just a few biases we commonly exhibit. People develop these biases due to the environment in which they were brought up, and exposure to cultures, traditions, misconceptions, and lack of knowledge. Take a moment here and reflect on your biases towards people and political, social, religious, and other issues. I would be surprised if you can't identify a single bias.

Organizations are becoming more diverse and represented by people of different ethnicities, languages, cultures, and practices. Leaders make decisions every day—decisions that impact individuals directly and indirectly. Many factors influence these decisions. In this regard, Scott (2013, p. 26) stated that "Biases include beliefs or extraneous factors that influence decision-making, often without the evaluator's awareness." To be impartial and fair, leaders must be aware of all the factors that might influence their decisions, both positively and negatively. In this effort, leaders need to be sensitive to individuals' perspectives, practices, beliefs, traditions, values, etc. while making decisions.

The *#MeToo movement* is a recent example of how people in power were insensitive to women, and their insensitivity impacted women's lives significantly. The issues people of color face on daily basis as they work along with dominant cultures are similar to the issues women face while working with leaders who are not aware of biases and do not acknowledge them. Being unaware of biases and/or not acknowledging them is the biggest barrier to becoming an inclusive leader.

2. Vision.
Any leader who is intentional about addressing challenges with diversity in our schools must make inclusiveness a part of their vision. As mentioned earlier, the statistics indicate very little progress has been made to improve the diversity in teaching faculty in the last 25 years, even though our communities are more diverse. Demographics continue to shift rapidly every year, yet the majority of students are taught by only a white teacher most or all of their K-12 education. Everything else in education—from teaching methodologies, student growth, standardized testing, and more—have transformed, but the diversity of our educators has not. It becomes a huge issue!

Teacher diversity, and subsequently principal diversity, is not proportionate to the student population in the majority of our urban schools. Perhaps many leaders have been intentional about improving the diversity among teaching faculty; they may not have made it a part of their vision, and if they did, may not have approached the problem with a carefully planned strategy. On the other hand, some leaders might have had some partial success. Even where schools have had some success, it is unlikely these schools have broken the barrier of the disproportionate teacher and student ratio.

When school districts want to make a significant difference in an area, they include it in their vision. Integrating technology in classrooms, social-emotional curriculum, PBIS, and interactive learning are

some aspects that are/were part of many school districts' vision. Similarly, school districts must include inclusiveness as a part of their vision to balance the ethnic disproportion of teacher and student ratio.

3. Strategic Plan.

All school districts have strategic plans. However, very few school districts have an equity team or department to create equitable opportunities for all, or are focused on employing people of color in different capacities. Even if they have a team or department, we are not sure how effectively they are functioning to address the problem of diverse teaching faculty in their classrooms.

Inclusivity is a sensitive subject, complex, and still a new arena for many leaders. Inclusivity should be part of the school district's strategic plan. It should be a common thread connecting all the district's and school's goals, and it should be part of every decision made by the leaders at all levels. Inclusivity should become a *mantra* for all. In this effort, all employees should be committed to the concept of inclusivity by developing knowledge about the importance of inclusiveness, learning how to practice it through professional development, and intentionally practicing inclusivity all the time. These steps will encourage leaders to overcome implicit and explicit biases, make decisions with inclusive lenses on, and provide employment opportunities to diversify the population.

Furthermore, in the process of preparing students for a better future, they should be equipped with the knowledge of inclusiveness. Wherever possible, adults in all capacities should promote the concept of inclusiveness among students. This is part of building the capacity among the future leaders. Enabling students to be inclusive-minded individuals is essential for creating inclusive *culture* in our institutions at all levels.

4. **Conversations**.

Conversations are crucial to develop deeper understanding of issues we face. Conversations help to understand the challenges we faced in technology, medicine, various fields of science, world cultures, religions, arts, music, etc. Conversations help improve the way we perceive, practice, live, and think. Great inventions and advancements in various fields of study are the result of powerful conversations. Conversations help people move out of their comfort zone.

Generally, people are hesitant to ask questions related to faith, dress, or culture and food for fear they might offend someone. However, people are rarely offended by genuine questions. Asking questions is a good beginning to meaningful conversations. Questioning leads to gaining knowledge, which in turn helps to find solutions to problems. It takes courage, honesty, openness, tolerance, and patience to begin meaningful conversations. If a question is asked appropriately with curiosity rather than being critical, people do not get offended.

Leaders have a great responsibility to create an environment for courageous conversations about people, practices, traditions, problems, misconceptions, and all other issues that hinder progress. Courageous conversations have been instrumental to the success of organizations like as NASA, BMW, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Starbucks. These organizations, and others, work closely with people around the world with different working styles, values, perspectives, attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. Educational institutions have adopted leadership practices, management styles, organizational development strategies, and many other things from corporate sectors. Since these organizations found a way to make progress, why shouldn't schools adopt their approach to address the problem of diversity across school districts, and especially in classrooms?

One way schools and districts can make progress is to share with students that our society not only needs scientists, doctors, engineers, politicians, lawyers, but also *inclusive leaders.* We recognize students in science, technology, math, reading, writing, drama, and music on daily basis. In the same way, we need to recognize students who have the potential to be great teachers, especially students of color, and let them know they would be great teachers and inclusive leaders. This practice helps to build the capacity among students to become teachers and inclusive leaders.

5. Reflection.
Successful organizations reflect on their work constantly, make necessary changes as needed, and progress continuously. Inclusiveness is a huge task, and many organizations are still in the learning stage. As people, we have so much to learn from each other's culture, practices, and beliefs. It takes an intentional effort to understand other cultures. To make organizations inclusive places, leaders must create a culture of reflection on their work, evaluate their actions, and build on the progress already made to move to the next level.

Continuous reflection with an intention of making progress helps us to get better at learning about each other. In the 21st century, organizations must be bold to bring inclusiveness to the front burner as one of the top priorities. Only bold actions can make our workplaces equitable for all. To make a better workplace for all, organizations must honor and provide equitable opportunities for all, without implicit and explicit biases. Inclusiveness with intentionality is a powerful means to bridge the gap between the disproportionality that exists in communities and the employment in organizations.

We know students can be what they can see, which is why it's important for students to see successful people who look like they look and share their same culture. Inclusiveness becomes more meaningful and powerful when it is spread from lowest level to the top most level of employment in organizations. Not only do we need to diversify the teaching force, but school leadership must shift to reflect our communities as well. Until it is accomplished, Dr. King's dream, and the dreams of people who believe in equality, will continue to be just that...a dream.

Conclusion

Inclusiveness is an essential aspect to creating better work and living environments for everyone on this planet. Communities and organizations who value inclusiveness benefit from it significantly. With inclusiveness, highly talented individuals with different learning styles, attitudes, approaches, strategies, and perspectives will join organizations in different capacities and create significant impacts. As our communities become more diverse, smart leaders will have to become inclusive leaders. Just like other leadership styles from the past, inclusive leadership is another leadership style leaders must embrace to better serve their communities.

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