

LEADING A SCHOOL COMMUNITY THROUGH A PANDEMIC

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Wednesdays @ 2 pm MDT (Saskatchewan)
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Episode 11: Confronting Systemic Racial Injustices in the Education System - June 10, 2020

James Baldwin, the great black American essayist, begins his 1963 essay “A Talk to Teachers” by writing:

“Let’s begin by saying that we are living through a very dangerous time. Everyone in this room is in one way or another aware of that. We are in a revolutionary situation, no matter how unpopular that word has become in this country. The society in which we live is desperately menaced, not by Khrushchev, but from within. To any citizen of this country who figures himself as responsible – and particularly those of you who deal with the minds and hearts of young people – must be prepared to “go for broke.” Or to put it another way, you must understand that in the attempt to correct so many generations of bad faith and cruelty, when it is operating not only in the classroom but in society, you will meet the most fantastic, the most brutal, and the most determined resistance. There is no point in pretending that this won’t happen.”

He later writes that, “The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated”.

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- Part of the work I do is guided in part by John Rawls, the author of *A Theory of Justice*.
 - Justice, as Rawls talks about, is a sense of fairness
 - Our fundamental belief is that there is such a thing as a social contract that exists between human beings. That contract allows people to establish laws, codes, and rules about how they will live their lives
 - Rawls says that among our understanding of the social contract is the fundamental assumption that we are all equal. Class, position, social status, gender, and race are not to be considered, but rather if you are a free person then you may enter into the social contract

- Rawls presents that this notion of a social contract is fundamentally flawed. Its assumption that we are all equal, that we know about each other, our histories, and the society to which we all belong, is in fact false
 - Much of what we have seen in the Black Lives Matter movement and in the solidarity for indigenous peoples is the recognition that the dominant sector of society have blindly assumed the social contract upholds a sense of fairness and not a sense of privilege, especially white privilege
- Rawls's position is that if we step aside from this false assumption, that the social contract exists to benefit all people equally, then we need to take a look at what justice really means

What does this mean for the education system?

- Education is not immune or uninvolved in the socialization process of youth, but also of educators themselves
- As we look at the tragic systems that are created to destroy people's lives, we all need to take a look at the level of our complicity
- Educators especially need to take time to understand their implicit biases that impact them and their ability to fairly teach
 - If we don't confront these beliefs and biases then we are destined to replicate an unjust and unfair system that will continue to marginalize people in our societies
- These biases not only impact our relationships with students but with our colleagues and who are colleagues are
- Educational leaders in particular need to be aware of these biases and how they shape hiring processes
- Before the hiring process, there is work to be done on the level of educating future teachers
 - There needs to be a more diverse group of students within our education programs
 - Even before that, we need to be mindful about who we we speak to be about becoming teachers
- The question is what are teachers going to do to raise opportunities for those who don't have the same privilege that you have?
 - The declarations and statements are a good start, but action is needed