# Teachers: Being the Light in the Tunnel

Lucian A. Szlizewski[1]
*Western Carolina University*

## Abstract

This philosophical essay, experiential narrative and meta-analysis of classroom observation narratives, speaks to changing schoolhouses and classrooms into micro democratic societies through the creation of a positive and student-centered learning environment rather than the more common traditional system more based on myopic vested interests and questionable empirical data decisions. This essay also forwards the ideal of a more democratic classroom that helps each student learn to learn at all levels of Bloom's taxonomy through active use of knowledge and engagement. Finally, this essay encourages each educator to enhance the learning that goes on in each classroom by becoming more focused on how each student learns best, through daily and on-going assessment, rather than what each student learned through the use of grades, quizzes and tests.

**Keywords:** *constructivism, cognitive level, didacticism, democratic classroom, quality teaching*

[1] Assistant Professor Lucian A. Szlizewski is affiliated with College of Education and Allied Profession's Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations in Western Carolina University, USA. Email:szlizewski@email.wcu.edu

**Introduction**

*I believe that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform. All reforms which rest simply upon the law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile....* John Dewey, My Pedagogic Creed, 1897

Like Dewey, (1902, 1916, 1920 & 1934) I believe that teachers must develop their ability to meet students where they are and help them go as far as they are able to go. This is a unique trip for each student and none of them are easy. Becoming a teacher states to the world that that is your goal with each child put into your care.

**Starting with the didacticism**

*You can't make a tomato bigger by weighing it and you won't make kids smarter by constantly measuring a few of the things they may have learned* (Szlizewski, 2007).

In general terms, most classrooms, at all levels and categories, have a singular focus resulting in one set of lesson plans for each class or lesson where the didacticism of the transfer of knowledge or content is the dominant paradigm and also the dominant challenge. It would also appear that more classrooms use this epistemic because it is the easiest epistemic. The general trend, for decades, has been to offer higher cognitive level content in the traditional higher-level courses rather than lower-level courses (Raudenbush, Rowan & Cheong, 1993). The general trend, for decades, if not centuries, has been to offer more rote and lower cognitive level content to students of average to low social and/or academic status. A best guess, which is what any data set basically is, would be that up to 80% of public school students appear to receive most of their instruction in a didactic paradigm (Goodlad, 1984). Generally, more high-level courses appear to also have better studenting (teacher is to teaching as student is to studenting) capabilities and allowances than do the rest of the student population.

Informed educators know this is the least acceptable methodology, but because focused policy, allotted time and overwhelming numbers have taken their toll on creative planning and quality teaching efforts, the necessary motivation to move out of this paradigmatically stilting process is minimalized. The focus of ill-informed and ill-advised policy is also on learning content at the lower levels of Bloom's hierarchy (Bloom & Broder, 1950 &Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956) with a strong focus on learning content and testing knowledge of that content. The end result of this, now pernicious and persistent malady is an overly strong focus on content rather than Democracy, respect and higher order anything.

*… the Learner-Centered Model (LCM) and its ALCP* [Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices] *survey tools can bring the promise of providing the tools and capacity for expanding and transforming notions*

*of learning and schooling in ways that produce healthy and productive lifelong learners.* (Crick and McCombs, 2006, p. 441)

Unlike LCM, the excessive focus on the didacticism continues to be the primary methodology that has been dominating single group classrooms for decades if not centuries. The didacticism also continues to be the greatest detriment of other, higher quality, learning experiences and growing a solid moral judgment capacity (Piaget, 1948). Many critical pedagogues, including John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Stanly Aronowitz, and Henry Giroux, can only offer many well-versed explanations for these findings and discuss intended and unintended implications. Implications that should have convinced educational policy makers, decades ago, that a continuation of the didactic paradigm is largely responsible for depriving conscripted students of their rightful social equity and justice. The real key to challenging and changing the prevailing didacticism will be in the exposure, by quality teachers, by being the light in the dark tunnels of stifling enactments and promulgation of ill-conceived policy by, supposedly, informed policy makers who are the real sponsors of a body of 'canonized' content.

## The light may be as simple as altering the dominance of presentation methodology

Is it the content that drives didactic presentation methodology that has a long tradition of 'covering' content and has been endowed with cultural weight (Lauter, 1991)? This would seem to be a simple enough question, but therein lays the problem; simple solutions are generally incorrect solutions. This context compels many to lean into this content driving direction, even if this foists a low level epistemic paradigm on the majority of students. If this is indeed the case then the exposure of economic and political suppression by an elitist mindset is showing itself to be too ill advised to know that where the light is brightest is where more solutions and possibilities will be seen. At the risk of being wrong, it would seem that a simple solution (actually quite complex to implement) would be to evolve student differentiated engagement into a higher Bloomian ideal and actually take all students from where they are to as far as they are capable of going. Under this policy teachers could be a bright light that would indeed fill the tunnel we call school.

## The abandoned student – Failure seems to be an option

Giroux's (2003) "The Abandoned Generation" should be generations and offers one possible answer to the question: How can we teach all students of all ages to see the macro and micro ways political power relationships unfold and are maintained that make them difficult to be challenged? To be able to successfully challenge anything one has to be prepared and retain / obtain a degree of agency (Lipman, 1989). The didactic generations are not prepared as is evidenced by the perpetuation of didacticism and the loss of agency by most students. "The Abandoned Generation" is an attempt to awaken educators and specifically educational administrators, to what they essentially need to see as their appropriate roles of education in our society.

This critical analysis is a continuation of this dialogue and is an attempt to impress on teachers and educational administrators that they should be a driving force for individual freedom and student agency enhancement. They should resist, more ardently the old and well-established role of being the keepers of the mechanisms of disenfranchisement, disaffection, and dissatisfaction. To be the light in the tunnel of education teachers must try to put a stop to the perpetuation of poor policy and the suppression of active participation by teachers and students in the continuing presentation driven educational enterprise. This dialog speaks directly to all educators to encourage them to be the activists in the forefront of replacing poor policy with student-centered policy, regaining their rightful autonomy, academic freedom; and creating democratic classrooms where studenting is not a requirement or exclusive device.

We, as educators, must place ourselves in a position that is capable of recognizing the hidden agendas and hidden power behind policy making groups and continuously call for social justice, empowerment, and action to be center stage in all of our classrooms. Giroux (2003, 87) clearly shows how "standardized tests serve multiple gods, enforce racism, consumption, and class segregation in the name of high performance. It would appear that students today are trained to learn specific ideas, but they are not educated in how to be active participants in a representative-democratic society. A representative-democratic society that requires not only the ability to look at any given reality more critically, but to be able to offer imaginative alternatives to that reality that will benefit more instead of fewer (Scapp, 2004 & Dewey, 1916 & 1920).

Kohn (2003) also feels this trend reflects a deliberate strategy, part of an educational philosophy based on students memorizing basic facts and skills. Standardized tests generally go hand-in-hand with didactic forms of teaching and with a system of coercive control, which mandates that kind of teaching. Possibly, more often than not, and even more disturbing, such tests fail to reflect any particular endorsement of a style of instruction or testing or have much value. When all of the 'manipulations' are taken as aggregated effort, the results are anything anyone wants them to be.

> They only espouse "a vague desire to hold schools accountable
> coupled with a total ignorance of other ways of achieving that
> goal. (Kohn, 2003: 204-5)

Consequently it is all too easy to understand why many educators frequently behave overwhelmingly conservatively, more motivated by personal interest and self-preservation than as advocates for the youth and society they serve. Unfortunately, many of these pedantic teachers are unable or unwilling to behave differently all the while and almost simultaneously many are able to recite a full range of education tools that educators need in order to implement and manage change that will maintain and enhance flawed educational policy (Senge, 1994).

Autonomous educators posses control over powerful forces of knowledge and persuasion that can be either enabling or disabling of the status quo and, all too often, work against changing a culture of apathy by their tacit acceptance of poor policy on the national, state and local levels.  One only needs to read Colinvaux's (1980) "The Fates of Nations" and other fascinating sociological treatises to be informed of the repetition of history that continues to go on and an interesting theoretical frame work that may be close to the truth.

**Flawed policy is persistent – A  place to start**

> *Numerous policy makers and pundits are now pushing for standardized curriculum, intensified testing of students at all grade levels, and strong accountability measures with the unabashed goal of ensuring that the United States maintains certain levels of economic productivity and world power — or what, taken together, are commonly construed as "national security" since the publication of* **A Nation at Risk** *in 1983.* (Granger, 2003)

Because much policy and the empiric's data that supports it is both flawed and pervasive, the excuse is that, it is difficult to know what is an appropriate action.  The first challenge is to see what is going on in each schoolhouse and each classroom. Educators are well equipped to recognize both the detrimental and the facilitational, because they see the direct impact of broad policy on individuals based on daily experience, knowledge and classroom level empirical evidence necessary to refute poor policy and advocate learner centric policy.  The question remains: why isn't this happening more?

As educators, our prime educational goal is to continue to raise important questions and ideas, but leave educational pedagogy open to the possibilities for remediation of many of the causalities of unfulfilled hope and uncritical public discourse.  A great deal of knowledge seems to be assumed on the part of administrators and policy makers. However, because of an inability or unwillingness to consider the large ideas addressed in facilitating and advocating for a democracy enhancing forum many educators have abandoned their professional rights of academic freedom and autonomy (Scapp, 2004 & Dewey, 1916 & 1920).

Students' advocates go back more than 2,000 years.  In that time writings by Freire, Giroux, Kohn, Palmer, Dewey, Socrates, Cicero, Pestalozzi, Froebel and countless others, fought for and continue to fight for continued fuel for the light of learning to illuminate the educational tunnel.  In short, educators simply need to have the courage to advocate for each of their students.  The more success more people have the more everyone ends up with – the poor gain wealth and the wealthy get wealthier.  This simple concept seems to be anathema to current and past policy makers as they continue to erode the possibilities for higher quality and reward from an overly bureaucratically shackled educational system.

**Getting around to giving some answers – educators have more than they know if they learn to look and see.**

> *To act in front of students as if the truth belongs only to the teacher is not only preposterous but also false. (Freire, 1986: p. 39)*

When teachers make a career move from teaching into administration it is thought by many that it requires a different lens for reading and understanding educational theory. However, a shift from a focus on theory to a decidedly more testing, test prep practice perspective may, in fact, be a debilitating factor. Education has always been and will always be in the process of restructuring approaches to learning moral (Piaget, 1948) and social pedagogies while continuing to develop theory and practicality that will also continue to foster positive change in our democratic enterprise. These theorist, many of them practicing or former teachers and administrators, provide many of the resources that can be used to enhance the professional learning of the teachers and administrators with whom students work. These theorists are present to guide conversations, to thinking reflectively, and guide our practice towards a more learner-centered model of using content as the raw material for building our knowledge rather than what is learned (Lampert, 1985).

When a philosophical shift is made to practical much of the potential influence and advocacy for positive change is lost. All too often practical equates status quo and managerial routine with administrative management. Because the transition from theoretical to practice can be difficult to make, many choose to not try. To overcome some of the stagnation we must continue to evolve a Constructivist and Deweyian teaching paradigm that helps educators build their professional practice capabilities as well as the capabilities of their learners. Deweyian teaching can represent a wide array of classroom contexts that can positively influence the perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators by designing their classroom cultures to be learner centric. The important reflection on the power of Constructivism or Deweyian Progressivism is that they are teaching and learning theories that have an abundance of practicality. We all have to begin where we are and move forward from there.

It would also be beneficial for teacher education and administrative preparation programs to offer summarizations of the traditions and research that have formed around constructivism. Although there are many forms that constructivism can take (Phillips, 2000). A unique aspect of some Deweyian theorist is that they are reflections of Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs and Gregorc's (1985) personality style indicator.[2] The intention here is to provide some highlights and background that are illustrative of key features to be found in Deweyian theory. This theoretical lens can serve as a guide as personal interests motivate.

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[2] Gregorc proposed 4 main types of styles, based on all possible combinations of two dimensions: concrete versus abstract and sequential versus random.

**A practical theoretical and philosophical lens – creating a micro-democracy.**

> *If all students are to learn well, teachers must be able to meet them on their own terms, at their own starting points, and with a wide range of strategies to support their success.* (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2005, p. 11)

This theoretical lens can guide the discussion with a beam of light that will help illuminate the educational tunnel with questions that should be clearly intended to fit the higher cognitive levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956 & Bloom & Broder, 1950). This perspective will serve to help readers transfer their intended learning to their own practice. Also prevalent in any learner is a need for teachers to be teaching for understanding - broadly characterized as a process approach. This process approach is reflected in Bloom's Taxonomy and in Perkins' (1995) performance perspective. This is not only important for elementary, middle and high school students, but for students of any teaching and learning (Firestone & Herriott, 1982). This process is beneficial to educators because it positions mastering items of declarative knowledge and engages the 'student' in interpretative, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluator stances that are critical for a quality democratic classroom, and at the same time, also builds leadership and future success potential.

**Case studies – The path less taken**

The use of case studies, for students of any age, can be most beneficial because there is little direct focus on the path of conceptual content and more of a focus on carrying out the various processes thought to constitute the doing of what is being learned. Case studies are critical epistemic tools for developing links between theory and practice and essential for quality teaching or learning. This epistemic tool is an important consideration, because the doing is often the missing link that will, more likely, engage students' receptiveness to theory and to re-think theoretical frameworks not clearly established in their thinking so that solid grounding for their practice of teaching and learning is present. To gain rich understandings of any type of theory, case studies build a solid bridge between theory and practice. In the hands of a skilled teacher, this is an extremely powerful tool. The whole Deweyian process not only engages learners in their own learning, but also will minimalize other behavioral issues that poor quality instruction engenders.

This beginning acceptance of theoretical frameworks as practical applications will reinforce educators' notion of the student as an active learner and the teacher as a guide or facilitator in the learning process (Cohen, 1993; Conley, 1993; Newmann, 1996; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Sizer, 1992; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993). This continues to reinforce the theory of constructivism and is based on the idea that any aged student learns better when they are actively constructing knowledge and are provided opportunities to synthesize and internalize new information with currently held knowledge. The feeling of success and empowerment this provides both the teachers and the students can be head lightning. This discussion continues to bolster the theory

that rests on several assumptions: (1) what constitutes knowledge is usually culturally constructed, rather than truth or fact; (2) knowledge is distributed among group members and the knowledge of the group is greater than the sum of the knowledge of individuals; and (3) learning is an active, rather than passive, process of knowledge construction (Conley, 1993).

**Moving further into professional development – We are all students**

> *Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning.  (Freire, 1998: pp. 30-1)*

High cognitive level based learning for adult and adolescent students is encouraged to pose hypotheses and explore ways to test them.  This is particularly powerful for any teacher – the classroom teacher or the administrator as teacher of teachers.  In numerous surveys compiled over the past 30 years, teachers consistently speak of wishing they could take this or that method, thought, example or trial into their classroom, try it and bring the results back to the group.  This forms an ideal professional development environment that benefits education theory, educational process, and education practice at all levels (Katz, Lesgold, Hughes, Peters, Eggan, Gordon & Greenberg, 1998).  Why is it that some of the worst teaching in education happens during many professional development settings?  The answer is easy, professional development is not taken seriously enough or valued enough to put competent people in charge of it.  When competent people are put in charge of professional development, rich experiences are received by the participants.  Survey any faculty and they will tell administrators exactly what this is and how to do it.

When administrators and teachers work together in site supported and district sponsored methodological investigations that have the opportunity for trial and failure and are able to be brought back to the group to be digested and discussed, then professional development will become the rich experience that it predominately has failed to achieve (Stevenson, Schiller & Schneider, 1994).  When these same methodologies are further implemented into the classrooms by knowing educators, supported by knowing administrators and seen by policy makers as the best we can offer, then knowledge gained will become part of other teachers' thoughts, administrator thoughts and classroom practice.  There are many ways to learn.  The more ways that can be fostered and nurtured the more learning will occur.

When any learner is encouraged to weigh information from these learning opportunities with their previous experience, then understanding of the topic, theory, idea forms a construct that fosters an understanding of subject matter, delivery methodology, grouping strategies, socialization skill building, and a plethora of learner centric opportunities (Montessori, 1912).  All students will develop analytical skills that can and will be applied to other problems and situations.  Rather than accept their limited practice or educational expedient explanations – "We've always done it this way" learners must demand better opportunities.  Teachers and administrators are in a position to do this for themselves, but who will advocate for the conscripted learners

formally know as K-12 students.  It is hoped that teachers and administrators will.  They will do this by changing the status quo, developing quality instruction and learning opportunities and focusing on the best way to help each student go from where they are to as far as they can go.

**One of many possible answers:  The role of learner ability and teacher attitude**

> *Being learner-centered is a reflection in practice of the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles—in the programs, practices, policies, and people that support learning for all.*  (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, p. 9*)*

There is a growing body of empirical evidence that suggests that quality instruction is practiced in limited settings—but in which settings?  Who influences the structure of these settings the most?  What decisions concerning method and content of instruction are directly influenced by the characteristics of students or groups within the classroom? (Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 1993; Newmanm Marks, & Gamoran, 1996: Dreeben & Barr, 1988; Herr, 1992; and Oakes, 1985, 1990 to name but a few).

 Because strongly held traditional' views of instruction encourage didactic teaching, traditional views of students' intellectual ability will generally dictate the types of students to whom the highest quality teaching is directed.  By contrast, some teachers of upper-level courses provide opportunities for higher-cognitive thinking tasks, put more effort into preparation and provide more interesting materials (Oakes, 1985, 1990). This is where building administrators must step in.  They absolutely must know what is going on in the classroom, what is working, what is not working, and what to do about it. When principals are asked why they do not like to do classroom observations, the predominant answer is a discomfort or feeling of inadequacy or knowledge of the content.  This is wrong headed.  Eighty percent of what is important in the classroom is the delivery of the content, the interaction of the teacher with the students, the interaction of students with students, and especially important are the opportunities to help the student further their understanding of any segment or topic.

More students are set up for failure because these opportunities are lacking or missing all together.  Educators must be able to recognize how well or poorly any of the above attributes are being engaged in any classroom.  Content is secondary in the observation of teaching.  Content is the easy part.  Unfortunately, content may be the only thing a low quality teacher is good at.  Educators must spend time in many classrooms, be provided high quality professional development opportunities, and encourage collegial dialog, which is always necessary (Senge, 1994).

To get away from, abandon and bury very deep what many teachers believe--that didactic instruction, including drill and practice, (drill, kill, and fill) may be more effective for students with lower intellectual abilities (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993) only serves the end result – students with lower intellectual abilities get to stay where they are.  This fostering of mindless work only serves to foster mindless students (Gardner, 1983, 1991, 1993,1994, 1999).  Unfortunately, this reality suggests that

teachers are less likely to use innovative instructional techniques if they believe their students need training in basic skills. This mindset is pervasive in spite of volumes of evidence to the contrary. The question is why is this happening? There is also some evidence that traditional instructional methodologies are, in turn, more prevalent in lower track classes (Oakes, 1985, 1990; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993). The least effective methodology is foisted upon the students that need the best teaching. By this continually happening in lower-level classes, methodologies characterized by rote memorization, drill, kill, and fill learners are stagnated and leave school with a diminished capacity to learn, to feel well about them selves and a lower level of confidence.

The justification for all of the above is generally formulated around their perceived lack of ability and knowledge. Not the lack of ability and knowledge of the learner, but of the policy makers. The bureaucratic shackles that keep education in traditional mode is that most of these policy makers were probably good students and learned in spite of traditional teaching or they were the lucky ones who benefited from a Deweyian based education. If the latter is the case, they are failing to use their Deweyian based education for the benefit of current and future learners. In the end all adults must firm up their ability and willingness to speak for the learners for whom they are responsible.

Human nature being what it is, learning being the complex and paradoxically enriched enterprise that it is yields inconsistent research results. One simple example, in a Raudenbush, Rowan, and Cheong (1993) study that investigated teachers' instructional goals for each of their mathematics or science classes, found that teachers differentiated their objectives based on the academic track of their classes; the same teachers who held higher-cognitive level objectives for their college-bound students de-emphasized these goals for their nonacademic classes. It can be easily argued that this differentiation of almost any instruction is highly institutionalized. Regardless of the age, ability, race, or gender of these students, the instruction should be challenging and rich with students engaged in whatever content they are working with (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

**Education is a group process**

Because education is always a group process, that is, a process in which several individuals are involved in some level of social interaction, the simplest of which is a group process in which one party, the educators, strive to serve the needs of the learners. If this simplest level can be attained, then school would indeed be a better place for learners. The High School has been an instrument of mass instruction for some time. Schools have been at it long enough to begin to get it right. Schools have been at it long enough to know what doesn't work. Because educators are in the best position to inform policy, have the background and empirical evidence in their buildings, and have the history of successes and failures in their buildings, they must begin to use all of this to better inform policy. More meta-analyses will not resolve this philosophical dispute.

Research continues to be inconclusive with proponents of many positions finding empirical evidence to support their position. The bottom line is, we have a problem that

needs to be fixed.  Engaging students in their learning in meaningful ways has been shown, for 100's and even 1,000's of years as an effective methodology (Aries, 1962). Forming schools within schools, building smaller schools, or whatever it takes, the opportunity has to be built that will allow teachers to know their students well enough to be able to plan, with the students' help, the best routes they can take to get to where they need to go.

**How do we get there – One step at a time – The steeper the climb the smaller the steps**

Clearly, the small groups within a classroom represents one type of group interaction. Interaction in a group may develop in several directions and practical implications and theoretical implications indicate - the more possible directions the better.  On the surface, it would seem that the role of the teacher or instructional leader in the classroom is not informed or educated by the students, but this is faulty reasoning.  The teacher very much needs to be informed and educated by the students or how else will the teacher know what the students need or already know.  The what of the education may be different, but the end result is the same.  For the student it is to acquire knowledge that will help them grow as learners.  For the teacher it is to acquire knowledge that will help them help students grow as learners.

School is ideally suited for structuring socialization learning and is a critical participant, beneficiary, and progenitor of future success of institutionalized education and the recipients.  A group is a unit of social interaction.  A school building is a group.  A classroom is a group and the groups in the classrooms act as a group.  Much of this interaction, irrespective of the goals of the group, must be positive and cooperative or the members will leave the group.  Socialization as an important element in the learning process must parallel the content delivery so that the benefits of social interaction are always a learning experience where the learners are experienced in social interactions. This at first may seem almost paradoxical, but in reality, if socialization fails to socialize then group processes, regardless of their intentionality, will fail to achieve the outcomes desired.  The ability to negotiate is a life long skill that is used many times every day.  When learners are able to negotiate their learning and their life then there will be cooperative and successful ventures on all levels.

**The difference between leadership and management is the 'difference'**

Research underscores the importance of connected community involvement as a pre-requisite for effective schooling (Merz & Furman, 1997).  For example, some would suggest that schools must reach out into the community in an attempt to strengthen the social capital available to children.  Many contend that school-family-community collaborations are one way to provide a caring component to today's often large, assembly line schools (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997).  Heath and McLaughlin (1987) argued that community involvement in schools is important because, "the problems of educational achievement and academic success demand resources beyond the scope of the school and of most families" (p. 579)."  Epstein's

(1995) theory of overlapping spheres of influence identifies the community as one of the primary contexts in which children learn. She contends that school, family, and peer communities must work collaboratively to ensure the academic success and socio-emotional well being for all students.

However, a connected community, satisfaction of needs and leadership are unique and very situational. Power is inherent in any of these positions and has the ability to satisfy needs, acceptance, and the willingness to be a proponent or adversary. Obviously in our social relations we tend to associate with individuals perceived by us as strong and able to satisfy our needs; friendly and willing to do so or adversarial and preventing satisfaction of needs. In spite of these enhancements or limitations, we especially need leaders who are able to initiate, stimulate, guide, and control our activities. It has been shown beyond count that if we are afraid and without leadership we will not be able to satisfy our needs or the needs or our children and students to the degree needed.

## Conclusion

This brings us back on point, back to the educator as learners and working with learners — a dominant and infinitely important key to success in any school. An early and easily attained first step in reinventing the faculty meeting and mentoring good ideas that will prove that risk and thought will be rewarded, do a pre-meeting survey of a few perceived issues. Find out the real problems and seek effective solutions. Work on as many or as few as can be comfortably maintained. Start a list of needs. Start a list of strategies. Share these with the faculty. As a group of intelligent and dedicated individuals, group involvement and participation is a key element for any possibility of solution.

Demonstrating growth of adroitness in managing issues, delegating, learning and trying are all key models the educator must demonstrate (Crow & Matthews, 1998). These are the experiences and examples that will serve encouragement when we strive to shift our personal paradigms in our classrooms. A simple "Like / Don't Like / How I would Fix it" survey will generate the topics which are gleaned from issues teachers are dealing with and the focus of the meeting will then be to discussion and problem solving of these issues (Bempechat, 2000). Educators are expected to be present, to participate and not sit in the back of the room being unprofessional. It is up to the educational leaders to be the clock-watchers, the taskmasters, the disciplinarians, and the supportive role models in these meetings. If the meetings can be recorded and the results disseminated to the full faculty, the benefits will be, easily, doubled. Sharing leadership in this way creates a sense of shared responsibility among all educators for the operation of the school as a whole. The same concept of sharing leadership must also be present in each classroom and for all of the same reasons.

Problems of the group are we problems and the solutions of the group are we solutions. We did it is what the group must leave each meeting with. We can do it is what the group must begin each meeting with. We are all teachers, but we are not all the same.

A teacher as a true leader can easily do this. A teacher as a learning leader can learn this. A teacher as a content manager will never do this.

A critical element that we must always confer with on a regular basis, requires more time and attention than it will get in this essay, is the idea that educators should not settle for rules and regulations as the sole basis for their relationship with students. When the instructional leader establish a conversational interaction with their students, genuinely listening to what they are saying, getting to know them as individuals, and talking with them about their concerns and issues they will learn many things that cannot be taught. Students' relationships with the adults in a school form some of the more powerful and influential relationships learners acquire. When the instructional leaders keep the learners at the center of their school's purpose, use their presence, actions, intentions, aspirations and plans to further their students' learning and success then the quality of education will only be enhanced.

When teachers as educational leaders are committed to creating an appropriately relevant and supportive learning environment for each of their students they will provide the light in each student's schooling tunnel so that each student succeeds at the things they can do. This will be known by the appropriate and quality instruction that can be seen taking place on a daily basis in each classroom and that each learner is exposed to the best that the school and social surround are able to provide. To be certain that this is continuous, teachers must have the instructional materials, necessary autonomy, and administrative supports they need in order to be focused and capable of being the light in their students' tunnels.

When the community sees the quality of caring and concern in the school they become more supportive of new and unique learning opportunities, provide volunteer help when necessary, and financial resources when needed. When students go home and are happy with their time at school, parents become happy with the school. The best PR any school can have are students going home with a degree of satisfaction for what they were able to do at school. School is both a socialization and instructional institution. Both are equally important. One informs the other. Both provide the opportunities for future success. By creating a challenging and supportive learning environment, most students will overwhelmingly respond 'yes' when asked if they like school. This does not mean that school is easy, but that students feel that school is 'fair'' and that they are being treated 'fairly'. When asked what makes a school good students will explain that what made the school good was that the adults in the school cared about them and how they are helped to understand the lessons to be learned. This goes back to helping learners go from where they are to going as far as they can go.

**When you choose to be the educational leader**

The authority that is vested in educators is to make on-going assessment decisions, minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour, and day-by-day. This on-going assessment separates them from those they lead and makes them the responsible adults. This cannot be delegated away. A successful teacher as educational leader is perceived as a person

capable of satisfying their learners' needs and willing to satisfy their learners' needs. A high quality educational leader receives acceptance of policy, proposal and procedure from their learners because they wish to be guided in their activities by someone whom they perceive as strong, caring, knowledgeable and friendly.

The bottom line has always been that the difficulties in building a quality learning environment is very dependent on the teacher-student or leader-follower relationship. The mistakes made and the lessons learned would always be useful in any new assignment, but only if there is an effort to change the things that caused the problems in the first place. Cultivating personal and social skills that will help make educational leaders into quality educators is even more critical. One only needs to read Machiavelli's "The Prince" (1978) to understand all the variations and implications. Human nature is what it is.

If we proceed with the idea of education as the continual and strong encouragement of growth from infancy through end of life then we will become the educational leaders we need to become. Perpetuation of these instrumental ideas is a critical component of the perpetuation of social, ethical, moral, and emotional maturity and the reconciliation of educational, moral, and ethical dilemmas. But, if they aren't able to be the kind of educational leaders schools and high quality education needs it may be because it isn't taught, then new and aspiring educators are certain to be ill-equipped to carry much of anything forward. Any educator who is unprepared for new freedoms and responsibilities, is uncomfortable with uncritically implemented accountability, and is unaccustomed to managerial discretion are likely to be hesitant about the implications of critical observation, paradigm shifts, delivery performance or other decentralized expectations, to name but a few areas of apprehension.

Because of the over use of the traditional presentation paradigm and other factors and according to numerous educational commentators, school districts are facing a crisis of leadership. As educators, we have to believe that our primary focus is to make a difference. If this becomes the primary, focus for the new emerging leadership then the role of educator can and will polish the appeal of the position. Given these circumstances it becomes imperative for educators and policymakers to better understand how teachers view the organizational and political dynamics associated with contemporary schooling and clearly show that it does not have to be that way. If the old guard has left the field in a state of uncertainty the new guard must see this as an opportunity to set things right.

Setting things right becomes a significant chance for the teacher as an aspiring or practicing educational leader to become a responsible leader who encourages higher cognitive levels of interaction and guides each of their learners from instrumental didactic levels to mutual acceptance and quality learning behaviors. In other words, all of us, as teachers, must start by helping any learner to grow from selfishness to maturity by being the light in their tunnel of schooling.

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**About the Author**

Dr. Szlizewski taught 5th and 6th grade in an inner city elementary school for 9 years, taught in an urban middle school for 3 years, spent 3 years as a middle school principal in rural school, worked in the county office as the pupil services director for 3 years; moved on to a 7-12 school as principal for 9 1/2 years before becoming that rural district's school superintendent for 5 ½ years. Through most of his career Dr. Szlizewski has had a strong interest and focus on constructivism methodologies, use of small groups, and differentiation. Currently Dr. Szlizewski is in his 4th year as an Assistant Professor at Western Carolina University – part of the University of North Carolina System – in the College of Education and Allied Profession's Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations. Many of the courses Dr. Szlizewski teaches are with practicing and aspiring school administrators and have a strong emphasis on quality pedagogy, educational leadership, and creating student-centered schools.