

2012

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Recommended Citation

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Preparing For the Crossfire: Equipping Evangelical Leaders for Service in Public Schools

Gary Sehorn

Abstract

This article addresses the preparation and support needed by evangelicals who serve as administrators and teacher leaders in public school settings. Educational leadership is lonely, demanding, and draining. This article explores the unique challenges evangelical leaders face because of the ongoing conflict between conservative Christians and public schools. Work-related conflicts that evangelicals experience in the workplace due to faith and the cultural dynamics that fuel this conflict are described. Strategies are proposed for Christian colleges and universities to prepare school leaders for the cultural crossfire.

Introduction

Michael Metarko was a successful principal at Hanover Elementary School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. As a Christian who had shifted careers from the business world to public education, he was making a difference, being “salt and light” in a school recognized for excellence. In 2010 he abruptly left. In his resignation letter he wrote, “I am now aware that not only have I not been working for God, I have been working in complete opposition to Him. I mistakenly thought I was on neutral ground: there is no neutral territory” (Metarko, 2010a). Metarko is now an advocate of Christian homeschooling who views public education as a “Trojan horse” in American culture. He warns parents, “if you send your child to public school, you WILL most likely lose your child to the secular humanistic worldview” (Metarko, 2010b). Metarko’s shift from public school leader to public school antagonist may seem extreme, yet his story highlights the cultural conflicts between conservative Christians and public education.

The public school has been and continues to be a place of conflict in American culture. It is one of the few places where citizens meet face-to-face to sort out difficult questions of unity and diversity (Tyack, 2003). In recent decades, politically, socially, and theologically conservative Christians have been prominent in that conflict, with national organizations maintaining a high profile campaign targeting many school-related issues while emphasizing the active role of individual citizens at the local level (Detwiler, 2006). The terms “Religious Right,” “Christian Right,” “conservative Christian,” “evangelical,” and “fundamentalist” are best understood as overlapping populations distributed along a spectrum of political and religious belief and practice, but are often used interchangeably in both popular media and research

to refer to the population assumed to be represented by this political force (Woodberry & Smith, 1998). For the purposes of this article, the school leaders considered here are those who self-identify as evangelical Christians. Because of the failure to differentiate the terminology, these leaders are vulnerable to being inaccurately and negatively categorized in ways that are likely to misrepresent their own beliefs and practices. On the other hand, other leaders who share many of the beliefs of evangelical Christians but do not identify with the category may benefit from an understanding of these issues although they will not be included here.

Conflict is an expected feature of public education in a pluralist society because schools are a vehicle for enculturation. When competing visions of the “good life” clash, schools often become the focal point. Principals and teacher leaders who are evangelicals are likely to find themselves in the crossfire with divided loyalties. Whether at work or at church, these leaders operate in the landmine-infested political battlefield between public education and conservative Christianity. How might Christian universities prepare and support those in school leadership roles who serve in the midst of this conflict? This article argues that with deeper self-understanding and with insight into the cultural forces in play, evangelical leaders in public schools are better equipped to take positive steps toward professional sustainability.

Evangelicals, Culture Wars, and Public Schooling

James Davidson Hunter (1991) frames the culture war context in which public schools operate as a conflict between cultural conservatives and progressives. He observes, “Actors on both sides of the cultural divide have placed the battle over public education at the center of the larger conflict” (p. 201). The Christian Right (the Christian element within the Religious Right) has advocated for the cultural conservative worldview. Many school issues are central to this struggle, including multiculturalism, science curriculum, sex education, and assessment (Dill & Hunter, 2010). In spite of these conflicts, the orientation towards cultural engagement rather than withdrawal that distinguished Christian evangelicals from fundamentalists through the 20th century kept most evangelical families in the public schools (Sikkink, 1999; Smith, 2000). However, as part of the political ascendancy of the Religious Right in the last decades of the 20th Century, national organizations such as Focus on the Family and the Eagle Forum have kept conservative Christians informed concerning educational initiatives and reforms viewed as threats to core Christian values.

During this period of political ascendancy, Christian advocacy organizations supported local action (Gaddy, Hall, & Marzano, 1996) and their efforts to gain victories in public education were the object of grave concern by groups such as teachers’ unions (Jones, 1993). However, attempts to take control of local schools through the strategy of getting Christians elected to school boards failed to sustain energy or produce much of the desired effect (Deckman, 2004). Further, calls by national leaders for Christians to abandon public schools have not led to a mass exodus and the overwhelming majority of evangelical children continue to attend neighborhood public schools, though their parents are best described as wary (Smith, 2000).

The specific issues that concern Christian parents have shifted in recent years, but the battles endure, with flames fanned by national advocacy groups. Current issues that can ignite at the local level include religious expression (Green, 2009), sex education (Luker, 2006), Bible curriculum (Chancey, 2009), evolution and intelligent design (Slack, 2007), and gay rights (Macgillvray, 2008). However, as Myers (2010) discovered, lack of consensus on educational issues among state level leaders of evangelical organizations indicates that evangelicals today are unlikely to present a unified front on most political issues related to schooling. One such issue where consensus is lacking is public policy concerning school choice, especially as it involves public funds being redirected to private schools.

The other side in the culture war, identified as progressives by Hunter (1991), is far from a unified force but shares a common worry concerning the goals of conservative Christians in all public spheres, especially education (Apple, 2006). As the Religious Right emerged, some progressives were hopeful that a working consensus was possible between conservative Christians and public schools (Gaddy, Hall & Marzano, 1996). Many others have asserted otherwise (Lugg & Robinson, 2009; Berliner, 1997). Berliner, for example, is adamant that there is no common ground and contends that the extreme voices on the Christian Right hold views of human behavior and goals for education that are incompatible with public schooling. He warns, “we need to keep in mind that ... [the Christian Right’s] goals are subjugation of our schools to theological purity, or their outright destruction” (p. 413). Kahn (2006) suggests the conscious and unconscious ways conservative Christian teachers who have religiously-based objections to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students may have a negative effect on the school experience of these students. Worry about teachers proselytizing students is not unusual, but it has unique importance in the field of teaching English as a second language, since English language instruction and missionary work have been historical partners (Varghese & Johnston, 2007).

Evangelical Leaders in the Cultural Crossfire

The current political environment has been described as “hyperpolarized democracy” by Pildes (2011), who observes, “Politics is partisan warfare” (p. 277). Though there is evidence that culture war dynamics involve small groups of highly engaged extremists with a large, unengaged center (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2011), the extremists are the voices heard whenever conflict erupts both in the local community and at the national level. Hyperpolarized politics and hyperpartisanship leave little middle ground for school leaders to operate, though that is the space where public education is anchored when it serves communities best (Tyack, 2003). When these leaders encounter these culture war issues, they do so at their own peril.

In this hyperpolarized context, leaders who seek compromise can expect opposition. Extremists view such action as capitulation. Those who consider public schools a place of indoctrination into an anti-Christian worldview—such as former principal Michael Metarko—judge compromise as tantamount to dealing with the devil. In her study of curriculum conflict in California, Adler (1996) describes this dynamic in action, detailing how Christian leaders get caught in the crossfire:

Some teachers and principals have tried to defuse these situations by assuring parents that they also are 'good Christians.' In many cases this is the least productive approach because it can be interpreted in two ways. Either you were so inefficient that you did not know what 'evil forces' were at work in your school, but now you will take charge by summarily removing the offending material (which would violate most school board policies). Or, you knew about the material and support its use, in which case you are acting as a tool of evil forces even though you say you are a Christian. (p. 343)

Though the media are quick to report on cultural conflict when high visibility issues erupt, there is clear evidence that most of this cultural conflict in schools is sorted out in mundane, day-to-day interactions similar to the experiences of the leaders Adler (1996) studied. For example, book censorship efforts are often religiously motivated and the vast majority of such situations are handled informally (Doyle, 2011). McGuire (2009) details widespread non-compliance with Supreme Court rulings regarding school prayer, especially in the South. The culture war experience of school leaders is best understood as a series of small, informal encounters that are likely to be quite personal.

Evangelical leaders attempting to negotiate these explosive issues in public schools should expect to encounter many of the same obstacles faced in other fields where similar dynamics have been studied. Lindsay's (2007) massive study of 360 prominent evangelical leaders in places of public and private cultural power does not include public school leaders, but offers several applicable insights. Many of his subjects "spoke about negotiating the demands of their multiple identities as people of faith, successful professionals, and devoted family members," and he observed them "struggling over the right way to invoke faith in a religiously diverse society" (p. 212).

Evangelicals who are not in top leadership positions experience fear and trepidation concerning faith at work that is not evident among those in the halls of power. For example, Bruce (2000) surveyed administrators in governmental agencies concerning religion and spirituality, and observes, "people who work for government are often frightened of anything that might smack of religion in the public-sector workplace" (p. 464). This contrasts with the private sector efforts to bring spirituality to the fore in positive ways (Hicks, 2003; Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010).

Professional careers typically require a college education and most of those degrees are earned at secular institutions. Antipathy of college faculty towards evangelicals is well documented (Tobin & Weinberg, 2007; Rosik & Smith, 2009; French, 2010; Yancey, 2011), accounts of the experiences of evangelical college undergraduates who encounter this hostility abound (e.g. Bramadat, 2000), and evangelicals who teach in secular institutions have been found to sacrifice "identity capital" when integrating their faith with their professional practice (Craft, Foubert, & Lane, 2011). Graduate school experiences appear to follow a similar pattern. A study of graduate students preparing for careers in college student services (Rogers & Love, 2008) found that evangelical students "felt they would be 'outliers' if they shared this aspect of themselves, despite the program's stated values of openness" (p. 54). Concerns about conflicting worldviews in graduate programs in social work were explored by Hodge (2006). Even in an area of the

country where the highest faculty representation of evangelical Christians would be expected (Southeast), just 3.2% of full time social work faculty in 25 schools located in 12 states self-identified as evangelical Protestant. Given this lack of representation and the negative cultural attitudes about evangelicals, Hodge concludes, “it would be surprising if evangelical Christians did not report elevated levels of discrimination” (p. 261). Other researchers looking at graduate programs in social work echo these concerns (Thyer & Myers, 2009; Thaller, 2011). Given the hostility between public education and conservative Christianity detailed above, it is unlikely that graduate faculty in education programs are significantly different in this regard. The graduate school experience of evangelical leaders in all fields can be expected to provide practice in guarding against overt expressions of faith and encourage practices of compartmentalization.

Evangelicals in Public Schools

Few studies have looked specifically at Christians in public education. The evidence that does exist suggests that faith is a crucial aspect of the work of these educators, both as motivation for service and as a guide for daily practice. However, an array of challenges faces evangelicals in connecting their faith and their work. For example, a study of three elementary teachers by Lederhouse (1997) shows deep and complex connections between her subjects’ faith and professional practice, which included respect for appropriate boundaries involving personal beliefs in the classroom. Faith communities are shown to provide both subjects with personal support but also add to the conflict experienced by the teachers. As a result of a local curriculum conflict, subjects report “a general lack of support from national evangelical leaders who harshly criticize public education on moral and academic grounds” (p. 200). Nelson (2010) conducted case studies of two K-8 teachers who worshipped at the same evangelical church and taught at the same school. This study provides rich descriptions of the complexity each individual brings to the task, how important religious identity is to professional practice, and how important it is to resist making assumptions about teachers based upon church affiliation. White (2010) conducted case studies of six teachers, three Christian and three Jewish, to explore the intersection of personal faith and teaching practice. One of the teachers was an evangelical Christian. The study establishes that for these teachers, religion provides purpose, guides relational structures in the classroom, and influences instructional strategies. The overarching finding is “that the individual religious orientations of teachers...can impact how they enact their professional roles in the classroom” (p. 45).

School administrators share much of the experience of teachers, but there are important differences in roles and responsibilities. There is growing evidence of the importance of spirituality in effective leadership in schools (Fite, Reardon, & Boone, 2011), but there have been few studies of evangelical school leaders, and the few that exist typically focus on issues of race and gender in the context of educational leadership (e.g. Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010; Stiernbert, 2003). Recognizing the vital importance of these challenges for all public school leaders, there is a need to prepare evangelicals who aspire to leadership in

public schools for the cultural conflict that lies ahead. Christian colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to meet this need.

Preparing Leaders: Five Approaches to Consider

Evangelicals serving in public schools should expect Christian colleges and universities to be uniquely aware of the cultural conflict this article addresses. Indeed, it is incumbent upon such institutions to prepare all leaders to be effective when these predictable cultural conflicts surface at the school level. Five programmatic approaches to differentiate in order to achieve these goals are suggested:

1. Teach the conflict
2. Model the vision
3. Analyze evangelicals
4. Confront compartmentalization
5. Target personal and professional sustainability

Each approach is considered in turn and the article concludes with suggestions for providing ongoing support for evangelical public school leaders as they serve in the field.

A key assumption undergirding these suggestions is that the evangelical subculture has a unique history in American education and has a continuing and powerful influence on policy and practice. Given that political reality, it is proposed that evangelicals serve as the common subject of study in the exploration of cultural conflict. By offering this unique subculture as a common subject of study, all students will gain essential insights into this culturally significant population and the associated dynamics in the area of public education. Additionally, this can provide a jumping off point for each student to consider her or his own faith commitments along with the faith commitments of others.

–Strategy 1: Teach the Conflict

School leaders are best prepared to serve if they have an understanding of the dynamics at work behind the scenes. Conflict should be expected, and understanding will guide wise leadership action. Readings, personal stories, and case studies are effective approaches for presenting the culture war as a societal framework that will support an analytical study of issues related to schools. Leaders need to consider how conflicted Americans are concerning matters of faith and religion in the public square and need to have a grasp of the long history this entails. Public schools are complex spaces where these conflicts are played out daily.

Though religion is a powerful aspect of multiculturalism, it is often given short shrift in efforts to address diversity in the workplace (King, Bell, & Lawrence, 2009). As schools and districts attempt to tackle issues of race and gender that have been and continue to be powerful barriers to student success, issues of

religious diversity cannot be slighted. Law frames much of this topic and leaders must be fluent in the issues. Students should also explore resources that add depth to challenges linked to their own faith. For evangelicals, easily accessed organizations such as the Rutherford Institute (<https://www.rutherford.org/>) and the Christian Legal Society (<http://www.clsnet.org/>) offer useful legal information and perspective, and similar resources for adherents to other beliefs, ranging from atheists to orthodox Muslims, can be explored. Though there are times when an assertion of legal rights is necessary, in most situations faced by school administrators a more nuanced response is in order. Leading in the midst of cultural conflict must be seen as the norm (Gerzon, 2006) and it is complex and messy. Nevertheless, conflict should be presented as an opportunity to serve the common good as a vital function of the public schools in a community, which is what Michael Fullan (2005) refers to as “productive conflict” (pp. 71-72).

–Strategy 2: Model the Vision

Leaders in training should personally experience the kind of learning and working environment they should aspire to create as school leaders. The experience of productive conflict and gaining personal experience with tools and ideas that put those concepts into action are essential for the individual reflection and growth needed. Professors will be at a disadvantage if they have not experienced the kind of school culture envisioned, but by joining with students in the learning, a lively professional learning community can be created.

There are several models to draw from in crafting this learning experience. Lindsay (2009) suggests appropriating two guiding concepts from contemporary authors committed to productive pluralism in our nation. The first concept is “Cosmopolitanism,” as described by Anthony Appiah (2006), and the second is *convivencia*, as presented by Douglas Hicks (2009). Lindsay lauds cosmopolitanism’s emphasis on retaining and valuing difference and finding in that difference a richness that benefits the public square. Similarly, Lindsay sees in Hicks’ vision for *convivencia* an approach that leverages various faith traditions in the service of the community without asking individuals to be less than who they are in their faith.

A common strategy used by evangelicals working in the public sphere is to identify language that aligns with both the individual’s work and their religious tradition (Schmalzbauer, 1999; Lindsay, 2009), an approach endorsed by Robert Wuthnow (1996). Leadership programs can model this by focusing on three terms that offer strong foundations for leadership: the common good, servant leadership, and social justice. Because these concepts are commonly woven into leadership programs, it is a rare student who cannot link these terms to their own core faith commitments. The notion of the common good is often attached to public education, but it is a term that for some has come to mean little more than the aggregation of each person’s pursuit of individual “goods” (Cuban & Shipps, 2000). Such a definition of the “common good” fits well with a market-driven vision of schooling, but it does not align with any traditional understanding of that term. Servant leadership is sometimes associated with Christianity, but as it has been promoted in the recent past (Greenleaf, 1977; Spears & Leider, 2006), it is a broad concept.

Though there have been different attempts to list the key features of servant leadership, Spears' list of core features of servant leadership (2006) is helpful in that it shows how those of varied faith commitments can find connections to the elements he delineates: Listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Both the common good and servant leadership are well-aligned to the national standards for both administrative leadership (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2008) and teacher leadership (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011), and social justice is specifically addressed in both. The use of common good, servant leadership, and social justice as foundational leadership concepts provides a context for the practice of cosmopolitanism and convivencia in the learning experience that honors and engages all faith traditions in contributing to the collaborative mission.

–Strategy 3: Analyze Evangelicals

The study of evangelicals as significant combatants in the culture wars will assure that leaders not only practice the skills needed to analyze the conflicts from a particular perspective, but will also prepare them to apply those tools to other cultural groups. The goals of this strategy are to assure that students have a working knowledge of the complexity masked by the term “evangelical” and understand the reasons for the wariness with which conservative Christians view public schools. A common reading (e.g. Badley, 2002) can provide helpful context, but media resources from the evangelical subculture may be the most effective way to immerse students in the actual cultural battle. For example, the documentary *Indoctrination* (Eash, Gunn, & Fernandez, 2011) purports to be an even-handed investigation of public education involving a filmed tour across America in a school bus as the host interviews various individuals (including many well known names in the evangelical subculture such as R.C. Sproul, Ken Ham, and Howard Phillips.)

As the study of evangelicals is conducted, students must be given the opportunity to explore other perspectives and grapple with difficult realities such as the negative attitudes towards other faith communities, including Muslims, Mormons, and atheists (Penning, 2009).

–Strategy 4: Confront Compartmentalization

The goal of this strategy is to address directly the issue of personal integrity, helping students discover ways to bring “all of who they are” to their work as a school leader and to guide others in doing the same. The two guiding questions for this strategy are: “What is the relationship of your community of faith to the culture?” and, “How does public education fit into that relationship?”

Effective school leaders understand the need to help those they lead link their faith commitments to their work in appropriate ways. Doing this well will yield benefits for both employees and the students served, but administrators cannot lead in this area until they come to terms with their own struggles. School

leaders need to understand how their own faith commitments integrate with their work and then address the spiritual needs of those they serve in the organization.

This strategy begins with a clear articulation by each student of his or her own faith commitment. Flintham (2010) uses the term “secular spirituality” and defines it as “a system of beliefs and code of moral values that provide a personal paradigm for living, a moral prism through which the world is experienced and an implicit underpinning philosophy of ensuing practice” (p. 32). Flintham asserts that “all school leaders can readily articulate a moral purpose: their core moral and ethical value system or ‘spirituality,’ the ‘lived faith’ which underpins their leadership actions, particularly when the going gets tough” (p. 2). This may be closely connected to a specific religious tradition, reflect a variety of religious influences, or have no connection to a formal system of belief.

The common study of evangelicals continues to provide a starting point, and the variety of views likely to be articulated by those who self-identify as evangelicals will come as a surprise to many students and will add depth to the complexity of this religious label. As evangelicals are examined, the broader context of the sacred/secular divide that shadows the evangelical subculture can be explored. Central to this divide is the enduring question of the appropriate relationship of Christians to culture. All students will investigate their own faith traditions to locate resources that may introduce them to previously unknown aspects of their own faith. By sharing these insights, perspectives, and resources, those of different traditions will enrich one another. Meanwhile, the entire class will understand that evangelicals are not of one mind concerning intentions when engaging culture. The way each individual sorts out his or her basic approach to culture creates an orientation towards service in public education.

With a firm sense of faith identity, the next step in this strategy is to determine how to live an integrated life that appropriately incorporates personal faith in the workplace. Miller (2007) proposes a framework for the integration of faith (“faith” being broadly defined) at work that offers a useful tool to assist leaders in both understanding themselves and in accommodating those who work under their leadership. The “4 E’s” matrix contains four quadrants: Ethics, Experience, Evangelism (Expressive), and Enrichment This model may present some faith-work options that students would not have considered previously.

Schwartz (1997) described three orientations common to Christian teachers: “Agent for Enculturation,” “Undercover Agents,” and “Christian Advocate/Evangelist.” As part of the study of evangelicals, it could be helpful to understand the motivations behind each of these orientations and thereby gain more insight into the subculture’s internal conflicts since most conservative Christians would be expected to see Expression/Evangelism as the preferred approach to workplace faith, yet Miller suggests all profiles are potentially “faithful.”

–Strategy 5: Target Personal and Professional Sustainability

Living lives of integrity as leaders in public schools requires special attention to personal and professional sustainability because conflict is inevitable and conflict exacts a price from the leader. Questions for individual reflection that are central to this strategy are: What are your expectations about the cost of

leadership? Do you tend to “go it alone” or are you part of a community of support and accountability? Who knows and understands your leadership wounds? How do you replenish your reserves?

Richard Ackerman and Pat Maslin-Ostrowski (2002) have studied leaders in times of crisis and the shaping power of these critical events. They contend, “Wounding is an inevitable part of leadership; it might have to be considered part of the job” (p. 10). Their research identified the most painful wounds:

It does not hurt that much if people do not like the leader, if a decision is questioned or if a project fails; but we are told it hurts tremendously to have a motive impugned, integrity questioned, and truth denied...it hurts when some essential part of oneself is misunderstood, misrepresented, and maligned. It hurts when leaders are not known or understood for what they really are. It hurts when leaders behave in one way while in reality their feelings run the other way. (p. 17)

All public school leaders need to find ways to deal with the wounds of leadership. For those who are likely to be wounded both on the job and at church (or temple, or synagogue, etc.), the wounding concerns are that much deeper. As leaders serve others at critical moments when their most foundational beliefs and purposes are tested, they must find ways to replenish their personal reserves. The stakes are high because those who do not find ways to refill their tanks are at risk of losing their drive or leaving the profession. In his research, Flintham (2010) distinguishes between the “external reservoir of hope” provided by school leaders from which school communities draw encouragement in time of need and the “internal reservoir of hope” described as “the calm centre at the heart of the individual leaders from which their values and vision flows” (p. 41) that leaders must replenish to sustain personal well-being. He describes the strategies to replenish depleted stores of hope used by leaders who successfully persevere. These strategies are personal reflection time, networks of support, and interests outside education. Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski and Flintham both note the importance of telling stories, sharing the critical challenges that both wound and shape as an important aspect of growing and sustaining.

Besides teaching the personal sustainability strategies noted above, leaders might be introduced to leadership models that are specifically tailored to those who find themselves at odds with elements of the organizational culture, but are committed to the organizational mission. In so doing, leaders can explore an expanded array of options when they find that operating with complete integrity is not possible but they are willing to work within the organization to bring about the desired changes. There are many such models; two will be noted here: Meyerson’s “Tempered Radicalism” (Meyerson, 2001 & 2008) and Heifetz’ “Adaptive Change Leadership” (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

Meyerson describes Tempered Radicals as those who “operate on a fault line. They are organizational insiders who contribute and succeed in their jobs. At the same time, they are treated as outsiders because they represent ideals or agendas that are somehow at odds with the dominant culture” (2008, p. 5). She details a spectrum of strategies that range from quiet resistance to organized collective action that allow individuals in any role in an organization to pursue change with integrity. Meyerson also addresses guidelines for formal leaders to create contexts where Tempered Radicals can thrive. The focus on changing the organizational culture provides help for those who seek to create a workplace where

cosmopolitanism and convivencia become the prevailing ethos. Heifetz proposes that deep change (or “adaptive” change) is often misunderstood as technical change that does not address the essence of the problem. His notion of Adaptive Change Leadership begins with core beliefs that are at the center of the organizational culture. His strategies are crafted to instigate change regardless of the individual’s formal role in the organization. Both approaches highlight the need to prepare leaders to understand themselves, their context, the nature of their work, and the dynamics of their organizational culture.

“Campfires” and “Caches”

If leadership is understood as a journey, it is useful to extend the metaphor to consider two resources Christian colleges and universities can consider: “campfires” and “caches.” Campfires provide a nightly circle of safety to tell stories, find encouragement, gather information, and gain perspective. Robert Logan uses the imagery of the campfire as an essential element in his work in personal and professional coaching (Logan & Miller, 2008). Telling stories to those who understand one’s journey is an important aspect of healing and sense making (Flintham, 2010; Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002). Colleges and universities can provide such “campfire” contexts through seminars, workshops, and other events where just enough organization is in place to create the campfire without squelching the essence of the informal interactions. Institutions can also encourage the ongoing existence of “campfire” moments among leaders in various formal and informal ways. Coaching clusters are one such model, which goes beyond the typical professional coaching approaches that center on professional practice and technical concerns.

The second support for leaders in the field is the “cache.” To extend the journey metaphor, wilderness travelers can arrange for stashes of vital resources to sustain them along way. Similarly, the college or university provides a vital service when there are opportunities and resources offered that match the needs of those in the field. These may come in the form of seminars, workshops, retreats, or web-based resources, but whatever the form, they help leaders sustain themselves personally and professionally.

Conclusion

While this article summarized some of the critical elements of the cultural war, it also provided strategies designed to equip school leaders to address these clashes. These include: 1. Teach the conflict; 2. Model the vision; 3. Analyze evangelicals; 4. Confront compartmentalization; 5. Target personal and professional sustainability. These strategies, along with the support of campfires and caches, will help all school leaders understand the culture war dynamics at the local school, lead in ways that invite a positive response to diversity in faith commitments, maintain personal integrity in the process, and create a capacity for resilience both as individual leaders and as a school community when inevitable cultural conflicts surface.

Note

The author thanks Ken Badley and Susanna Steeg for their input and guidance in the preparation of this article.

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