

Dare public school administrators build a new social order? Social justice and the possibly perilous politics of educational leadership

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Abstract

Purpose

This paper aims to discuss how public school administrators with a social justice perspective have an obligation to permeate society beyond their schools and how they might address the perilous politics associated with advocating social change. Using George Counts' landmark 1932 speech, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* as the conceptual lenses, it examines the relevancy of Counts' words for contemporary school leaders and professors of educational administration.

Design/methodology/approach

While this article is historical in tone, the paper proposes pursuing a critical hermeneutic rather than a strictly historical approach.

Findings

The paper finds that there are similarities between the present-day call for social justice and the earlier Social Reconstructionist movement that Counts' manifesto sparked. Both movements have invited educators, and particularly the professoriate, to think more expansively when it comes to US public education, society at large, and the influence of educators in shaping a more democratic and just country. But Counts goes much further than most adherents of the current-day social justice movement. He stressed that educators must see themselves as political actors, who can shape their political environments through their teaching, as well as by participating in other venues.

Practical implications

For contemporary educational leaders, they may be working in far less hospitable settings than their twentieth-century predecessors. Administrators are under fierce accountability and fiscal pressures, while coping with a larger political environment that is polarized and fearful. And the internal environment of school administration favors a "managerial" approach. Consequently, embracing a social justice ethic invites a degree of risk-taking.

Originality/value

This paper examines the relevancy of Counts' words for contemporary school leaders and professors of educational administration and highlights implications for school leaders.

Keywords

Social justice Social change Leadership Politics

Citation

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Seattle Public Schools is proposing a controversial ethnic studies framework for math instruction. Despite its detractors, this policy might be the answer math instruction needs. Seattle Public Schools' Plan for Math And Social Justice Actually Adds Up. Colin Seale Contributor. Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own. Diversity & Inclusion. I'm the author of "Thinking Like a Lawyer: A Framework for Teaching Critical Thinking to All Students," and I write about preparing diverse, future-ready learners to lead. Share to Facebook. Share to Twitter. *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Dare the School Build a New Social Order? (Arcturus Paperbacks, No. AB 143). First, however, Counts starts by indicting many progressive educators, progressive schools and the families who send their kids to such schools for being too complacent, for trying to be "neutral" and remove the messiness of politics from education. Such parents and educators, he charges, tend themselves to be from the comfortable classes who benefit from the status quo, so they have created a form of education that replicates it. He discusses how wary schools, especially progressive schools, have become about "influencing" children. First, they are concerned about susceptibility to charges of