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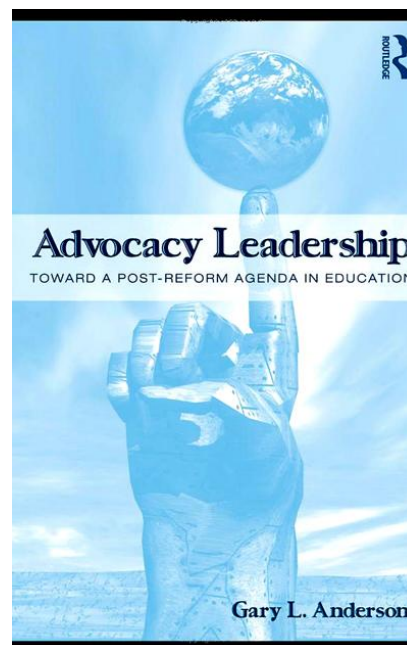
Anderson, Gary L. (2009) *Advocacy Leadership: Toward a Post-reform Agenda in Education*. NY: Routledge.

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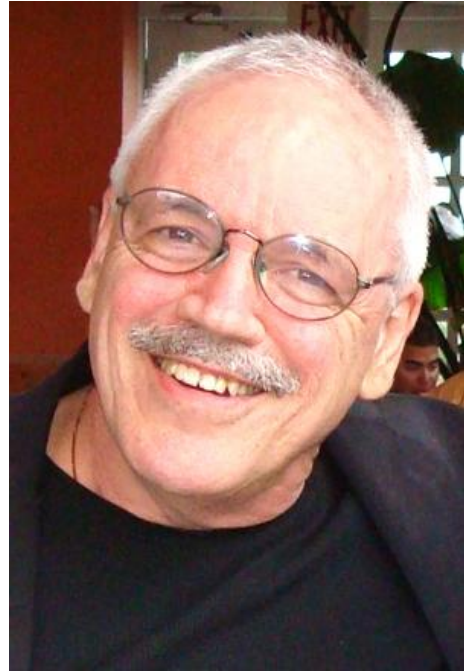
Public school principals who work with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a nation-wide community organizing group, often say that “an angry parent is an opportunity.” Rather than trying to mollify parents or re-direct their anger away from school matters, these IAF principals attempt to utilize parents’ anger to organize the community to do something about the causes of their concern: if one parent is upset, others probably are as well, and their anger can motivate them to come together to solve the problem. Principal, parents, (sometimes teachers) and local community organizations collaborate. Typically, the goals of such collective activity are to increase opportunities at the school site, remove inequities, and (ultimately) to build community power sufficient to hold district and state education officials accountable. Gary Anderson, in his important book about principals who respond to parent anger in this



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way, calls them ‘advocacy leaders’ (2009). In urban areas, particularly, activist school leaders identify inequities in the school, in the community, and in the larger social system, and attempt to engage colleagues and parents in fighting the injustices.

Typically, such advocacy on the part of administrators involves working with groups in the city that are already organizing parents and other community members to improve schools, enact living wage laws, create jobs and build decent housing (for example). Research in the last decade has demonstrated convincingly that in poor areas around the country, community organizing for educational reform has made important contributions to educational equity and reform. In Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Boston, and Oakland, CA; and in towns and cities in Texas and other parts of the Southwest, community organizing has increased scholastic achievement in poor schools, has transformed punitive school cultures into nurturing ones, has increased students’ college going aspirations, and—crucially—has emboldened and tutored parents who lack formal education to work for change in their communities and states (see Anyon, 2005, 2011; Fabricant, 2009; Gold, 2002; Hong, 2011; Mediratta, et al., 2009; Warren and Mapp, 2011).



Gary L. Anderson is Professor of Educational Administration in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development at NYU. His work attempts to refocus the field of educational leadership through the use of critical and poststructural theories, particularly Marx, Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault.

Fortunately, some of these books (especially Hong, 2011 and Anyon, 2005) provide substantial information and models of activity that K-12 teachers can use to engage students in neighborhood campaigns for justice. But there has been scarce guidance for principals and other administrators who would like to encourage participation in social justice activity. Anderson’s *Advocacy Leadership* thankfully fills this void.

The book is a response to market based measures that have overtaken education reform language and practice (including the dominance of high stakes testing and privatization of school services) and have turned many principals from educational leaders into ‘entrepreneurs’ of the market. Principals’ relationships mimic those of the

larger society, where, as Anderson notes, we have moved toward “transactions,” which are inauthentic ways of relating in a market economy, instead of “relationships,” which are based on personal relating. What Anderson argues is needed in the current neoliberal conjuncture is two-fold: “advocacy for children at multiple levels of the system, and greater authenticity within the classroom, school, and society.” (p. 26)

Anderson is not talking about the traditional notion of ‘authenticity’ in leadership, although his ideas incorporate and transcend aspects of these – building ‘caring communities’ in schools and developing ‘trust.’ He is talking about something more: *trying to change the conditions that work against both trust and care in schools—poverty, inequity, and hierarchy*. He proposes dynamic leadership that challenges the status quo and unjust relationships and raises consciousness about these in participants and families of the institution. Authentic relationships among educators and parents must be built on equality: as community organizers often say, “no trust without equal power.”

Authentic participation for low-income parents in a school, for example, would move beyond their use as volunteers to building their participation as partners in governing and decision-making; engaging with them as equals in organizing for equity and quality; and preparing them to become educational and social change agents.

Anderson sees clearly that advocacy leadership is a politicized notion of managerial status, and that it acknowledges schools as “sites of struggle over material and cultural resources and ideological commitments.” (p. 38) This, he contrasts with traditional leadership theory and practice, which aims to “re-engineer,” “make more productive,” and establish “entrepreneurial” goals in administrators. Rather, advocacy leadership involves “policy appropriation.” (p. 256)

A principal can pick top-down policies s/he will implement vigorously, and those s/he will implement symbolically. Anderson describes advocacy leaders in the following way:

An advocacy leader believes in the basic principles of a high quality and equitable public education for all children, and is willing to take risks to make it happen. Advocacy leaders tend to be skilled at getting beneath high-sounding rhetoric to the devil in the details. They are skeptical by nature. They know the difference between the trappings of democracy and the real thing. They refuse to collude in so-called collaborative teams or distributed leadership endeavors that are inauthentic. For instance, they know when a site-based leadership team is rigged against low-income parents. They know when parents of children with disabilities are being railroaded in IEP meetings by school professionals. They know the hard ball politics of influential parents and the ways they work the system to get privileges for their children at the expense of others. They are not seduced by business models yet they don't close off any avenue of new ideas. They are skeptical of the idea that we can avoid the difficult give-and-take of politics by replacing politics with market based choice policies. (p. 22)

He argues that educators—perhaps the majority of whom would agree with his critique of the diminishment of education and leadership via market based reforms—cannot not merely critique and resist neoliberal reforms, although such activity is crucial. They must develop counter proposals. And his proposal is that they advocate loudly and clearly for equity and opportunity for students, families, and communities.

In an age when waves of neoliberal reforms crash around us and leave private profits, high stakes tests, and spurious notions of accountability in their wake, we need to hear Anderson's call for authenticity and advocacy and act on what he recommends.

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