Critical Vulnerability:
An Imperative Approach to Educational Leadership

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When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.
—Audre Lorde, (n.d.)

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.
—Audre Lorde, 1984, p.40

Proper to right thinking is a willingness to risk, to welcome the new, which simply cannot be rejected simply because it is new no more than the old can be rejected because chronologically it is no longer new.
—Paulo Freire, 1998, p. 41

[I am] not afraid to condemn the exploitation of labor and the manipulation that makes a rumor into truth and truth into a mere rumor. To condemn the fabrication of illusions, in which the unprepared become hopelessly trapped and the weak and the defenseless are destroyed. To condemn making promises when one has no intention of keeping one's word, which causes lying to become an almost necessary way of life. To condemn the calumny of character assassination simply for the joy of it and the fragmentation of the utopia of human solidarity.
—Paulo Freire, 1998, p. 23

Introduction

When the concept of vulnerability is discussed, often images of harm,

threat and potential abuse are evoked. These images are not without substantiation, as one may be able to readily provide examples of past experiences in which individuals were placed at risk of physical, psychological or spiritual injury. For example, in *Looking White People in the Eye,* Razack (1998) examines the ways in which minoritized bodies were made vulnerable through colonial practices of brutality and exploitation. Smith (1999) also discusses the vulnerability of indigenous communities at the hands of Western researchers seeking to commodify Aboriginal knowledges and life practices. In each of the former contexts, thinking of vulnerability as a negatively imposed term is aptly appropriate as it describes the ways in which individuals were placed in danger and made susceptible to imperialist forces.

While this perspective of vulnerability is most relevant and advantageous to the discourse of imperial domination, it does not speak to the discursive practices of resistance that opposed these acts of violence. More importantly, vulnerability as the consequence of subjugation fails to provide a telling account of individuals who willingly and consciously choose to place themselves at risk in order to counter, diffuse and transform these detrimental conditions. In this regard, I speak of individuals like Nelson Mandela and Steven Biko who willingly endured imprisonment and torture in order to expose the genocide of apartheid. I also speak of the legacy of Kwami Nkrumah who despite substantial legal fines, unremittingly published *The Accra Evening News* in an effort to subvert the imperial myth of African inferiority and motivate Ghanaians to continue their pursuit towards liberation.

In naming, I would be remiss to forget individuals like Edward and Irvin Carvery who in conjunction with members of the Africville[1] Genealogical Society, publicly protested the demolition of the Africville community, the forced relocation of its citizens and the municipal expropriation of land by the former city of Halifax. The Carvery brothers' decision to speak out against the Africville atrocity placed them continually at risk of reprisals and often in violation of civic ordinances and statutes. Quite similarly, it is integral to recall the gentle efforts of Viola Desmond,[2] Hazel Roett,[3] and Calvin Woodrow Ruck[4] who courageously assumed vulnerable positions in order to contest domination and further the materialization of critical democracy[5] within their own communities. I sincerely question whether a passive connotation of vulnerability describes their passionate commitment and dedication to social change as this passive assertion fails to reflect the purposeful and strategic engagement that was demonstrated by each of these individuals.

If the former definition of vulnerability is problematic, then it is important to ask what construction of vulnerability describes the efforts

of individuals who deliberately enact liberatory practices irrespective of risk, harm or injury. Further, it is expedient to consider what might a reconstructed understanding of vulnerability, namely critical vulnerability, offer the field of educational leadership and how might critical vulnerability prepare leaders to transform educational and civic spaces into geographically inclusive and just settings. I contend, that finding answers to the former questions is imperative to the study and practice of educational leadership as it has the potential to revolutionize our thinking about leaders, their work and current climate, that defines the nature of their existence.

In this paper, I have chosen to respond to the former questions by first revealing my sociocultural positionality and the connective influences that inspired this conception of leadership. Following this disclosure, a reconstructed understanding of vulnerability is described that speaks in concert with a socially just project. Establishing a rationale for adopting critical vulnerability as a leadership approach is important and as such, the author subsequently presents the justification for assuming a critically vulnerable leadership stance. This rationale will specifically examine the critiques of scholars on issues pertaining to educational reform, student engagement and spiritual injury and their proposals for arresting the hegemony that exists within our current systems of education.

Thereafter, attention is directed towards discussing critical vulnerability as a leadership paradigm and exploring its potentialities for the practice of educational leadership. In particular, the author will describe the formative aspects of critical vulnerability namely strategic risk-taking, soulwork, creativity and community building, while expanding upon the associated linkages to the practice of educational leadership.

In the last section of this article, I direct my efforts towards considering the implications of adopting critical vulnerability as a leadership approach. More specifically, I explore how a commitment to leadership has the potential to trouble and inform the study and practice of educational leadership. In conjunction with the former analysis, focus will be placed on exploring the personal, professional and educational considerations that accompany a critically vulnerable approach to leadership.

Situating Vulnerability: Within the Personal and Professional

> [G]et to know a bit about the people who wrote them—when they lived, how they lived, where they worked, and, most important of all, how they thought. We have to know these things because we will always be

> trying to figure out why they said what they said, why they did not say something else, and often why they changed their minds.
>
> —Alexander, 1987, p.1

Alexander's declaration maintains that theories are birthed within social contexts and are drafted within the experienced identities of the authors. As I believe the former to be crucial, it is important to advance what Alexander suggests is necessary and expedient in the process of theoretical comprehension. I thereby acknowledge the elements of my location and their connection to the project of critical vulnerability. As an entry point, I choose to identify myself as a spiritual, West Indian Canadian woman of African descent. Centering my positionality within these frameworks is essential, as they are the primary markers that characterize my identity and explain how I have come to understand and move within this world. These frameworks are not exclusive or neutral, but rather, they entwine in socially constructed, complimentary and adversarial relationships that create tensions and thereby influence what I reflect upon, question and ultimately take up within the discourse of leadership.

My journey within this constructed identity has been marked by intimate experiences with discrimination and daily occurrences of knowing myself as the "other." These experiences are too numerous to count; yet they occur too frequently to forget, as they are typically operationalized through practices of isolation, denial and domination. Attaining psychological, spiritual and physical wholeness has therefore often meant that I deliberately confront risk-engendered assertions and engage in counter-sense-making in order to survive and flourish within debilitating and precarious environments.

Understandings of vulnerability as a necessary and proactive engagement have also been heavily influenced by indigenous and community activists, who have been willing to speak, write and work towards the materialization of a just society. Their relentless efforts towards instituting social change attests to the spirit of a critical vulnerability project and reiterates the importance of remaining steadfast in the midst of adversity, turmoil and social degradation.

Encounters within the field of education have also influenced my conception of vulnerability. As a student and educator, I have experienced schooling as an oppressive site of marginalization and resistance, an environment in which students struggle to retain their sense of dignity and self worth, amidst alienating curricula and practices. This characterization is not meant to suggest that all persons connected to education have consciously engaged in hegemonic practices, or to tarnish the libertory efforts of educators, who intentionally undertake the practice of education from a transformative stance. Rather, I wish only to affirm

Freire's (1998) and hooks' (2003) assertion that systems of education are deeply rooted within long-standing strongholds of power and domination and have traditionally functioned as incubators of social injustice.

In regards to the field of education, I have witnessed the powerful impact of educationalists, who unreservedly contest the imposition of disparaging policies and practices that frame marginalized communities within "inner city," "disadvantaged," and "high-needs" characterizations. While their decisions and subsequent actions resulted in harrowing professional reprisals, these individuals calculatingly chose to reconfigure educational initiatives. To this end, such that students, staff members and families were positioned to put forward more accurate and respectful identifiers in response.

The professional works of critical theorists also serve to inspire my conception of critical vulnerability. Most notably, this understanding of vulnerability is informed by scholars like Dei, James, Karumanchery, Wilson, and Zine (2000), Freire (1998), hooks (2003), Portelli (2001), Razack (2002), Ryan (2003), and Vibert and Portelli (2000, 2002). Notable works by these scholars, affirm a critical praxis as a means of fostering the materialization of inclusive educational practices. Cumulatively, these authors confirm the importance of strategically entertaining risks, challenging cemented practices, and the imperative of regarding leadership from a critically vulnerable position.

In brief, critical vulnerability as a leadership approach arises from an interplay of personal and professional experiences. These variables thereby speak of an eclectic understanding of educational leadership and a powerful legacy of intentional engagement, as a corrective force for individuals wishing to practice with and for justice.

Reconstructing Vulnerability: Through Literary Imaginings

The process of reconstruction often involves a re-evaluation and in-depth analysis of the contextual elements framing a desired project. Likewise, in endeavoring to put forward a reconstructed understanding of vulnerability, it is advantageous to explore literary contexts that denote a liberatory conception of vulnerability. To begin, Lorde's (1984) poetic acclamations as found in the introductory section of this article provide a powerful benchmark from which to begin reconstruction. These self-affirmations boldly speak to the presence of risk, and the ensuing reality that social change will only emerge when we are willing to assume a vulnerable stance of resistance.

These ideas are potent declarations that symbolize an emancipa-

tory interpretation of vulnerability. Taken together, Lorde's statements embody an unwavering resolve that characterizes vulnerability as a dedicated allegiance to disrupting practices that are dogmatically and unquestionably exclusionary.

Lorde's (1984) sentiments of counter-hegemonic resistance are also echoed by Freire (1998) in *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*, a text devoted to the enactment of critically democratic practices in schools. Freire's work emerges within the Brazilian context following the presence of Portuguese imperialism. In this context, Freire's words may be understood to represent an emancipatory project aimed at arresting the "predatory" legacy of colonial domination, neglect and cruelty (Freire, 2000). Against this historical backdrop, Freire's words speak to the necessity of assuming a risk-engendered disposition as a subversive response to the lure of the status quo. Individuals are urged to contest dominant portrayals of history to uncover alternate readings that have yet to be heard. Quite similarly, to Lorde (1984), Freire recognizes that risks are involved in any attempt to educate for social transformation. Nevertheless, Freire also asserts that while threats to meaningful democratic change are inherent, individuals committed to the establishment of a liberatory education must be prepared to confront these forces. Presumably, even to the extent that they implicate established practices and deeply held assumptions.

Freire's (1998) notion of "unfinishedness" also contributes to a liberatory connotation of vulnerability. By compelling individuals to regard their understanding as partial, rather than absolute, Freire sanctions the legitimacy of learning and the value of being in this world with others as "subjects" rather than "masters" (Freire, 2000).

Cumulatively, Lorde (1984) and Freire (1998, 2000) suggest a reconstructed understanding of vulnerability, that I herein will refer to as *critical vulnerability*. Rather than arousing images of imposition as most definitions[6] of vulnerability would suggest, statements made by the former authors depict critical vulnerability as an act of resistance and a deliberate attempt to confront risks and "deal with real life, controversial and substantive issues" (Portelli, 2004). Critical vulnerability is also seen to entail a worldly attentiveness, an awareness that hierarchical and dominating relations of power construct and are constructed by individual bodies. To be critically vulnerable, therefore, implies a conscious recognition and willingness to transform society, and its institutions, into places where equity is experienced rather than considered.

The reconstruction of vulnerability as a critical project of engagement has much to offer the field of education.

The Justification for Critical Vulnerability

Critique of Neoliberalist Reform Initiatives

The present educational climate currently bears witness to an onslaught of neoliberalist reform initiatives. While these educational agendas are often touted as the redemptive cure for educational failings, scholars continue to warn of the inexcusable repercussions of wedding educational change to marketable discourses of standards, efficiency and accountability (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning 2001; Portelli & Vibert 1997; Ryan, 2002).

Critiques of these neoliberalist agendas reject notions that school success, student engagement and educational leadership are dependant upon formulaic and technocratic constructions of schooling. Rather, these scholars advise that raging interests in implementing market-informed initiatives further entrench disparities by ignoring the relevance of equity within a reformative project. Consequently, advocates describe what I view to be a current educational crisis, a situation in which cries for a transformative practice of education are steadily becoming inaudible and muted by popular conceptions of success, progress and achievement (Armstrong & McMahon, 2002; Ball, 1993; Blackmore, 2002; Dei & Karumanchery, 2001; Ryan 2002).

Ryan's (2002) examination provides a benchmark from which to understand the current educational dilemma. In particular, Ryan contends that although current accountability frameworks appear "sound," these structures inevitably pose greater difficulty for diverse school communities wishing to develop more inclusive and equitable schools. As a corrective action Ryan contends that:

> Those interested in promoting inclusive forms of education that benefit diverse communities need to find ways to implement more localized kinds of accountability practices. This is not to say that accountability should be an exclusively local practice, but that there ought to be efforts to acknowledge the traditions, knowledge and values of the diverse communities, which many contemporary schools serve. (p. 982)

We are further reminded by Ryan (2002) that a different understanding of leadership is necessary to counter the current trends and ensure that justice becomes foundational to reform endeavors. Ryan's (2002) call for a renewed conception and practice of leadership suggests a deeper commitment to going beyond a mere acceptance of the status quo. This charge not only requires leaders to be cognizant of the precarious educational climate, but also admonishes individuals to assume the risk of enacting practices that lead with diversity rather than against it.

Blackmore (2002) provides a complimentary critique and situates the current educational crisis within a climate of corporatization. She describes how opposing forces of regulation and marketization relegate social justice and equity-based issues to peripheral and antithetical locations. Additionally, Blackmore contends that the present educational environment fosters a disjointed performativity that coerces educational leaders to act in ways that contradict their values and sensibilities. Consequently, Blackmore casts the current leadership crisis as a field of practice that more accurately reflects risk management rather than risk taking.

Blackmore urges leaders to reject the attraction to lead passively. Further, she compels leaders to assume what I read as a deliberative and vulnerable stance of engaged opposition, in order to counteract and imagine, more equitable leadership practices. Blackmore's assertion speaks in concert with Ryan's (2002) earlier analysis by exposing the commodification of education and the manner in which normative characterizations co-opt schooling into a marketable entity. This hostile reality in the opinion of the author, and as alluded to by Blackmore, calls for a paradigmatic shift in leadership and movements that embraces risk-taking as necessary and expedient responses.

Similar concerns are echoed by Dei, James, Karumanchery, Wilson, and Zine (2000) who write that, "concerns for money management, and the bottom line are taking precedence over the basic needs, desires and opportunities for *all* students" (p. 2). Together these researchers recommend inclusive approaches to schooling that acknowledge and disrupt the tendency to cost education. Further, their efforts commend an alert engagement with the "tensions" and "pressures" of schooling in an effort to ensure the materialization of equity within schools.

Discourses on Student Engagement

While the agendas of current reform initiatives provide a foundation upon which to submit a call for critical vulnerability, literature pertaining to student dis/engagement also offers compelling support for a new leadership paradigm (Armstrong & McMahon, 2002; Cross, 1998; Dei et al. (2000); Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine 1997; McFadden & Munns 2002; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Vibert & Portelli, 2000; Vibert, Portelli, Shields, & Laroque, 2002; Waite 2002).

In the opening chapter of *Removing the Margins: The Challenges and Possibilities of Inclusive Schooling*, Dei et al. (2000) connect the significance of educational reform initiatives to the issues pertaining to student disengagement. The work of the former authors speaks to the impact of a market driven educational system, offering what I believe is

a rationale for the justification of critically vulnerable leadership. The authors write:

> Arguably, the new millennium will witness mounting tensions in schools, and these pressures will be fueled by the conflicting interests of multiple stakeholders….the result will be [a] fractured and stretched educational system where only a few may thrive, while those unfortunate others are lost in the shuffle….We fear that at this moment, concerns for money management, and the bottom line are taking precedence over the basic needs, desires and opportunities of all students. (p.2)

While it may be rightly argued that student disengagement was a problematic reality prior to the adoption of marketized reform, Dei et al. (2000) as do Armstrong and McMahon (2002), argue that the current attention to "bottom-line" figures and the quest for homogeneity have pushed minoritized students further away from experiencing a connected and informed education.

A similar critique is raised by Cross (1998) who sees "nonengagement" as the resultant condition of an exploitative and oppressive educational curriculum that ignores the lived realities of students in favor of what is technical and prescribed. Cross' work compels those working and leading within educational settings to "struggle against" passivity and to become actively entwined and committed to practices of freedom which engage and affirms the lives of students.

McMahon and Portelli's (2003) philosophical inquiry into the varying conceptualizations of student engagement leaves educationalists with a clear sense of purpose and direction. In essence, they contend that conservative and liberal notions of education must be contested with courageous pedagogical approaches. These approaches, they maintain, must have the power to disrupt the hegemonic foundations which underpin student disengagement. Consistent with Blackmore (2002) and Dei et al. (2000) and Armstrong and McMahon (2002), McMahon and Portelli (2004) affirm that a risk-engendered stance is not only warranted but also expedient.

Spiritual Injury

Justification for a critically vulnerable leadership approach may also be found in literature pertaining to spiritual injury. More specifically, I refer to Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2004) anecdotal accounts in *The Wounded Leader and Emotional Learning in the Schoolhouse,* which describe the landscape of educational leadership as an emotionally injurious and curative domain. What is also of interest to the project at hand is Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's understanding of vulnerability

as a potential point of strength. These researchers contend that while leadership may be fraught with disabling experiences of fear, isolation and disempowerment, they contend that a vulnerable stance may in effect, facilitate leaders' critical reflection and hence, foster growth, learning, and a renewed commitment to one's self and others.

Similarly, Waite (2002) also recognizes that traditional understandings of education erect hazardous boundaries between leaders and their work. Consequently, Waite calls for an immediate infusion of a spirit-based, ethnographic and democratic leadership disposition that is capable of reconnecting educational leaders to purposive and socially just missions. Waite's critique and subsequent resolve is best understood by the following, as it exclaims the urgency for adopting new and critical approaches to educational leadership:

> If we are to realize the potential inherent in the unfolding area of educational leadership, further work…needs to be undertaken, and soon, lest we allow the opportunity to make profound, meaningful contributions to the lives of the children and adults with whom we work to slip from our grasp forever. (p. 40)

Cumulatively, literature pertaining to educational reform, student disengagement and spiritual injury provide a rationale for mounting a risk-engendered conception leadership. The following discussion will provide an overview of how this challenge has been taken up and considered by the author.

Leadership as Critical Vulnerability

Leadership as critical vulnerability is ultimately concerned with the democratic transformation of society. Although not restricted to the field of education, for the purpose of this present paper it will be used to describe an educational leadership paradigm that aims to ensure that individuals within schools take up and interrogate authentic and problematic issues. As such, leadership as critical vulnerability goes beyond the physical boundaries of schools to address the interconnections that exist between education, society and the global environment. When one juxtaposes this mandate alongside traditional notions of educational administration, it is evident that critically vulnerable leadership is ultimately a discourse of resistance. Further, critical vulnerability represents a commitment to move beyond consumption and engage in strategic risk-taking, creative imagining, soulwork, and community building. What follows next is an examination of these aspects in terms of their relationship to a critically vulnerable leadership project. This review is not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive, but rather descriptive of educational pursuits which

strive to make "participatory," "public" and "critical democracy" a lived and experienced reality (Portelli, 2001).

Strategic Risk-Taking

A central feature of critical vulnerability is the decisive willingness to move beyond consumption, that is, the passive acceptance of, or indifference to the status quo. Instead, individuals choosing to engage this leadership approach must commit themselves to looking beyond the initial trappings of uniformity and engage in strategic risk taking with the forces of exclusion and marginalization. Ultimately, it is what Ahmad (2000) describes as a substantiated commitment to enact changes in spaces where change seems unnecessary.

In practice, educational leaders choosing to connect with critical vulnerability will contemplatively read and rethink issues from a social justice perspective. As such, educational reforms will be deemed problematic when they conflict with the materialization of equity for students, school staff and communities. Strategic risk-taking will therefore lead educational leaders to become intricately knowledgeable of the political frameworks that withhold success for marginalized communities. For example, Hargreaves et al. (2001) report that educationalists are growing weary of imposing and standardizing initiatives. Although the influx of standardization may be a point of contention at school sites due to their tendency to increase one's workload, or constrain the practice of education, individuals engaged in strategic risk-taking will also contest the ways in which these standardization initiatives impinge upon students' rights to a fair and accessible education. Subsequently, critically vulnerable leaders will chose to seek out avenues whereby they may inform the wider school community and engage proactively influencing a more equitable manifestion of organizational policies.

A stance of critical vulnerability will further move educationalists beyond a critique of current and past initiatives to an unrelenting insistence on attaining responses that address the demands and concerns of interested parties. Such actions will likely require educational leaders to lobby governmental departments, advocacy-based allies and endure professional assaults in an effort to challenge the system constraints of conformity.

Soulwork

As an aspect of critical vulnerability, soulwork requires leaders to know themselves and to reflect upon how their constructed identities may facilitate the enactment of "democracy in education" (Karumanchery &

Portelli, 2005).[7] Critical vulnerability as soulwork therefore entails the reflective act of self-interrogation. It symbolizes a readiness to examine how one's positionalities contribute to, maintain and disrupt oppressive systems within educational contexts. Soulwork challenges educational leaders to acknowledge that by virtue of their humanness, they are implicated along with those social forces that desire to marginalize, incapacitate and undermine the establishment of more equitable and just schooling experiences.

Critical vulnerable leadership is an informed process of commitment whereby individuals strategically tackle complex issues with the expectation that repercussions will ensue. Soulwork within this context consequently requires educational leaders to move beyond the mere acknowledgment of risk to calculatingly discerning what risks are most expedient and how movements may best facilitate a transformative outcome.

Creativity

Creativity as a component of critical vulnerability speaks to the imaginative process of working within and towards substantive democracy. It entails an active process of reconstruction whereby individuals are encouraged to imagine and design new possibilities for leading and working within schools and society. This process of creative sense-making speaks in concert with Greene (2001) who states that an individual:

> Must be aware of conventions currently used to organize reality, [o]ne must be conscious that the "fictions" used in sense making (in the schools as well as outside the schools) are mental constructs, human-made schemata deserving only 'conditional assent' rather than loyal allegiance. (p. 97)

Central to the project of creativity is recognition that leadership is a deconstructive process; that is, a means whereby dominant discourses that minimize the significance of oppression and prevent the emergence of imagined possibilities may be subverted. The creative aspect of critical vulnerability encourages leaders to disrupt common sense notions that shield privilege and reinforce subjugation. Quite similarly, educational leaders operating from this orientation affirm what Beane & Apple (1995) assert to be important, that is, a conscious effort to "seek not simply to lessen the harshness of social inequities… but to change the conditions that create them…and tie [our] understanding of undemocratic practices inside the school to larger conditions on the outside" (p.4).

The creative aspect of critical vulnerability also necessitates that individuals from dominant social locations remove themselves from the

podium of privilege in order to create a circle of exchange and possibility. It requires those in leadership positions to contribute rather than dominate and to come to view themselves as knowing something rather than knowing everything. A creative stance reiterates that leadership for democratic transformation is about becoming comfortable in not knowing and realizing that it is not incumbent upon leaders to know everything, despite what regulatory bodies suggest and mandate.

Further, the creative aspects of critical vulnerability provide opportunities for students, parents and community leaders to teach and thereby allows for learning to be experienced through a creative and consensually representational process. Creativity embodies the understanding that while there is more to tell the world, those accounts must be told by those who have been denied voice and prominence. Critically vulnerable leadership, as creativity, therefore concerns the establishment of an inclusive forum whereby school-community members have opportunity to meaningfully shape and reshape the direction of social change. This process is only possible when leadership is broadly defined as an occasion to share rather than an office from which to govern.

Community Building

Exclusion within the field of educational leadership is widely documented as a result of the consistent efforts of critical theorists within the field (Blackmore, 1989; Blount, 1994; Dantley, 2003 ;Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Ryan, 2003; Solomon, 2002). Critical vulnerability as a leadership practice acknowledges this history and orients followers to undertake endeavors that rebuild a more equitable educational landscape. Individuals following a critically vulnerable leadership path are encouraged to nurture the presence of diversity by building alliances within and across "communities of difference" (Shields, 2004). Through efforts that construct safe and nurturing educational atmospheres, the communal aspect of critical vulnerability allows for respectful dialogues, sharing and critical conversations to emerge.

Within the context of a critically vulnerable leadership perspective, individuals are also encouraged to understand their personal and collective identities in ways that compel them to recognize the intersecting relationships across borders of difference. Further, considerations envision difference as an asset rather than a liability. These assumptions assist educational leaders in regarding which their positionalities as opportunities to foster meaningful collaboration. As a result, community building allows for "real…controversial and substantive" issues to be discussed with hope and possibility across all boundaries (Portelli, 2004). Critical

vulnerability as community building therefore embodies a truthfulness and what Palmer (1983) refers to as an attentiveness to listen to "diverse voices and view for the claims they make on us" (p.67).

An emphasis upon building inclusive communities implies a willingness to protect all community members from onslaughts that attempt to demoralize difference. Ultimately, this approach directs educational leaders towards a concern for healing and wholeness and a commitment to counter injurious power, relations with resistance, strength and meaningful accountings.

Critical Vulnerability: Implications for Practice

As an offensive leadership approach, critical vulnerability provides an alternative understanding of leadership that counters the consumerist mandates affronting our present system of education. In the same manner, critical vulnerability allows educational leaders to embark upon creative, reflective and communal initiatives that have the potential to transform education spaces into liberation spaces of engagement. While this lens has the potential to foster transformation changes, it is worthwhile to consider the personal, professional and educational implications of assuming a critically vulnerable leadership stance.

Personal and Professional Implications

Leading from a position of critical vulnerability necessarily involves risk, and it is imperative that individuals are cognizant that their acts of resistance will provoke welcomed and unwarranted consequences. Furthermore, while critical vulnerability equips leaders with the necessary foundations from which to practice transformatively, it is not a prescriptive recipe for uncontested success. Consequently, educational leaders are encouraged to realize that the continued onslaught of neoliberalist initiatives will likely require them to reconfigure alternate understandings of critical vulnerability in an effort to respond to the varying mutations of marginalization and harm.

It is equally as important for educational leaders to remember that education is a heavily contested discipline and as such, transformative changes will likely occur in incremental stages. Given the former, it is imperative that leaders celebrate minute victories and, furthermore, maintain meaningful alliances in an effort to sustain their commitment to a critically vulnerable project.

Moreover, calculated risk will at times not be considered heroic by individuals who espouse a traditional or neoliberal perspective of leadership. Consequently, words of encouragement will often be inaudible

amidst the disapproving commentaries that denounce the relevancy of a critical vulnerability project. As such, it is imperative that leaders gird themselves with an unrepentant resolve to remain steadfast in the midst of contemptuous opposition.

Educational Linkages

With respect to the educational implications, a critically vulnerable position stands to change what is considered important and relative to study and practice of educational leadership. Critical vulnerability recognizes that transformative education does not demand the presence of an inspirational leader.[8] Rather, this approach to leadership nurtures the participation of all members of the school-community and is therefore not contingent upon formal credentialing or positional authority. As such, individuals desirous of assuming a critical vulnerability as a leadership stance may do so in the absence of such accreditation. This communal-oriented focus serves to redefine current understandings of educational leadership as it asserts that leadership resides in one's positionality rather than one's position.

At an institutional level, the shift in focus may have implications for the future role and significance of educational leadership programs. Primarily, interest from individuals practicing in the field may generate inquiries into whether post-secondary leadership programs are capable of preparing potential leaders to engage in a critically vulnerable leadership approach. Moreover, as critical vulnerability characterizes the current educational climate as one of perilous hegemony, it is further expedient to ask in what ways leadership programs purposefully acknowledge the hazardous conditions that are present and what changes may need to be reconsidered to allow faculty to work towards a critically vulnerable mandate.

In regards to pedagogical issues, a critical vulnerable leadership approach demands that course content is enjusted[9] so that the parameters of classes extend beyond the printed text to encompass the powerful life examples of critically vulnerable leaders that are impacting and critically influencing the status of education today. Regarding the issue of research, a focus on critical vulnerability would espouse initiatives that direct greater focus towards understanding, learning and documenting its shifting and multifaceted expressions. Additionally, policy analysts would be wise to rethink educational initiatives in light of a critically vulnerable agenda, namely: What policies are facilitative of such projects? How may they be enacted and what legislative acts are currently impeding progress?

Critical vulnerability may have implications for individuals involved in hiring and renewal processes at post-secondary institutions. It would seem wise that organizations interested in affirming a critically vulnerable standpoint would reconsider appointments in light of an individual's interest in establishing a professional legacy that supports and is involved in social transformation. Changing the character of educational programs will likely change the population of students most universities attract. Rather than attracting candidates seeking to "lead" and, in effect, promote marginalization, with critical vulnerability as a directive, educational leadership programs will be of interest to individuals who are currently engaged in educative acts of freedom and justice.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have chosen to put forward critical vulnerability as a new and imperative approach to educational leadership. As an offensive leadership paradigm, critical vulnerability builds upon the experiences of the author and the salient works of indigenous leaders and academic scholars to provide a counter-hegemonic response to the consumerist, disengaging and spiritually injurious climates that frame our present system of education. In the same manner, critical vulnerability offers alternate ways for educational leaders to move within schools and facilitate the emergence of transformative educational projects. Critical vulnerability as a resistant process has been shown to entail strategic risk-taking, creativity, soulwork and a concerted effort to build communities across differences. Implications raised in this paper suggest that viewing leadership through a lens of critical vulnerability has the potential to influence leaders, their work and the ways educational programs conceptualize the study and practice of educational leadership. Ultimately, I believe, that critical vulnerability offers a greater possibility for democratic transformation to be achieved than is presently provided.[10]

Notes

[1] Africville was an African Nova Scotian community that was situated along the shore of the Bedford Basin in Halifax, Canada.

[2] Mrs. Viola Desmond was a Black woman in the town of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, Canada who protested the segregated spaces for Blacks and Whites by purposely sitting in the "White" section of the town theatre. When asked to move back to the "colored" section, Mrs. Glasgow decidedly refused and was subsequently fined and jailed.

[3] Hazel Roett Ruck as a young Black Nova Scotian mother deliberately frequented shops in the downtown Sydney district that were informally known

to cater to "white" customers. Her refusal to be intimidated was an affront to shoppers and clerks who deemed these upper-class establishments to be beyond the sensibilities of African Nova Scotians.

[4] Calvin Woodrow Ruck a former Senator from Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, knowingly constructed his family home in the Westphal area despite a municipal petition opposing his right to live in a "White" neighborhood and repeated threats against the lives of his family members.

[5] By critically democratic education, I take up the philosophies of Freire (1998) and Portelli and Vibert, (1997) who together suggest that education demands an engagement with the substantive issues of schooling and society.

[6] The *Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1996) defines vulnerable as "easily wounded or harmed." The *Merriam Webster Dictionary* (1994) defines being vulnerable as "capable of being wounded; susceptible to wounds; open to attack."

[7] See Karumanchery & Portelli (2005), *Democratic Values in Bureaucratic Structures: Interrogating the Essential Tensions*.

[8] See, Ryan (2003), *Leading Diverse Schools.*

[9] I have coined "enjusted" to symbolize the deconstruction and reconstruction of course curricula such that justice becomes central feature of pedagogical undertakings.

[10] The author would like to thank John P. Portelli, Riyad Shahjahan, and Joyce Ruck-Depeza for their critical insight and editorial comments on earlier drafts. She is also deeply indebted to John P. Portelli, George Dei, Jim Ryan, and other school community leaders for their continued demonstrations of critical vulnerability.

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