



ISSN NO. 2320-5407

*Journal homepage:* <http://www.journalijar.com>  
*Journal DOI:* [10.21474/IJAR01](https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01)

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF ADVANCED RESEARCH**

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Leadership and At-risk.

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#### *Manuscript Info*

##### *Manuscript History:*

Received: 19 May 2016  
 Final Accepted: 26 June 2016  
 Published Online: July 2016

##### *Key words:*

Gender, instructional leadership,  
and at-risk students

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#### *Abstract*

While educational leaders may believe they are gender neutral when dealing with at-risk students, research suggests otherwise. In their traditional roles, men are socialized to become competitive, strong, and to be in control. The top-down leadership practices have been reported to cause troubling experiences for at-risk students to the differential in the social capital represented by bureaucrats and that the students at risk of academic failure bring into the school system. Similarly, women have also reported to have been alienated by some of the masculine leadership traits in societal institutions. Society expects women to be mothers, teachers and nurses. In those roles, women are socialized to be interactive, long suffering, cooperative, conscientious, empathetic, and providers of supportive leadership to others, especially those that are vulnerable. Yet, the quality of classroom instruction for at-risk students has been reported to have deteriorated over the years in the public school system where the majority of educators were women. In their practice, irrespective of their gender, leaders often begin with what comes “naturally” to them. However, habits inculcated by socialization, erode over time due to the idiosyncrasies and the vicissitudes of careers. This article attempts to probe extant literature using a critical theory approach in order to identify distinctive capabilities entailed in the re-conceptualization of instructional leadership and at-risk students beyond the knowledge gleaned from gender roles.

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#### **Introduction:-**

While educational leaders may believe they are gender neutral when dealing with at-risk students, research suggests otherwise. In their traditional roles, the socialization of men requires them to be competitive, tough, strong, and to be in control (Blackmore, 1996). The top-down leadership practices have been reported to cause troubling experiences for at-risk students (Anyon, 1994; Kozol, 2005; Noguera, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2015). As a sociological concept, social capital is an outcome of social relations, and consists of the expectative benefits derived from the preferential treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups. As they lack the aforementioned resources, the at-risk students constitute a large group of young people who live marginal lives outside the socially accepted norm (Kohl, 1994), and are predominantly found in the lower track classrooms (Cook, 2015).

Similarly, research reports women to have been alienated by the masculine portrayal of organizational leadership rooted in individualism, command and control (Blackmore, 1996). While female leaders may apply--in their practice--some of the traditional rules of leadership, some of them have developed a view that in the face of adversity and vulnerability, potential leaders do not inevitably arise from a single mold. Rosener (1990) observed that women were making their way into organizational leadership not so much by assuming the traditions of men, but by also drawing from attitudes and skills developed from shared experiences and their socialization as women.

The Pew Research Center (2015) survey on women and leadership, found that most Americans believed that women are indistinguishable from men on “key leadership traits such as intelligence and capacity for innovation, with many saying they’re stronger than men in terms of being compassionate and organized leaders” (p. 1). In the area of

education, gender characterization of leadership appears to suggest critical implications for what educators, irrespective of their gender, can learn about instructional leadership and students at risk of academic failure. As its methodology, the article utilizes a critical review of extant literature in order to identify, synthesize, and articulate critical conceptual aspects of instructional leadership that educators can learn, develop, and apply in enhancing the wellbeing of K-12 students at risk.

### **Statement of the research problem:-**

One of the questions that arises from the educational literature, is whether it is only by chance, in the randomness of human behavior that certain female educators have asked profound questions regarding the wellbeing of at-risk students in the face of the persistent disparity in ethnic learning outcomes in K-12 education (Conant, 1959; Capper, 1993; Plucker & Burroughs, 2010; Cook, 2015). Troen and Boles (2003) ask why “the quality of classroom teaching seems to get worse year after year” for at-risk students (p. 14). At about the same time, Meier (2002) laments whether any of these issues matter, and “who cares?” (p. 50). She also asks, “Why were the self-confident voices I knew so well at home and on the playground muted in the schools?” (p. 3). Olszewski-Kubilius and Clarenbach (2014) wonder why an underwhelming response has been given to “a cry of alarm about the need for a new generation of thinkers, innovators... and creative problem solvers” to meet the social and economic demands of the nation in the 21st century world (p. 103). But, whatever the case may be, a failure to educate a considerable number of young people “constitutes a crisis,” that society needs to address with a sense of urgency (Goodlad & Keating, 1990 p. 1). Duncan-Andrade (2015) in his twenty-two years of teaching in East Oakland, has witnessed firsthand how employment, food and housing insecurity visits a punishing impact on how children learn causing them to be at risk of academic failure. The at-risk students experience academic failure, social stigma, and broken lives with unfulfilled expectations (Cook, 2015). By not realizing their human, social and economic potential, these young people represent a phenomenal waste to themselves, their families and the nation.

### **The purpose of the study:-**

First, using the extant literature, the article discusses the view of how gender may impact an understanding of leadership of teachers in dealing with at-risk students in K-12 education. Second, the study will critically explore the extant literature in order to identify and articulate distinctive capabilities, salient features, processes and social structures that can inform instructional leadership beyond the socialization of gender roles concerning advancement of the social and academic wellbeing of K-12 at-risk students. Goodland (1990) asserts that the population that cannot take advantage of “the yellow brick road” to acquiring a good education, as well as attaining an acceptable standard of living in United States of America is of particular demographics among the White, the African American and the Brown people (p. 4). According to Pedro Noguera (2015) the at-risk students are those students who attend persistently failing schools in the communities in the inner cities with concentrated poverty due to structural barriers including lack of jobs and calmness and safety.

### **The research question:-**

What distinctive leadership capabilities can educators learn beyond traditional gender roles about advancing the academic success of at-risk students and improving their wellbeing in K-12 schools?

### **The Sub-questions:-**

Who are the students at-risk of academic failure?

What are the invisible forces that lurk in the teaching and learning affecting at-risk students?

Is gender of teachers a factor in the practice of instructional leadership with at-risk students?

### **Methodological Approach:-**

#### **Critical inquiry and the role of instructional leadership:-**

Some researchers suggest that educational research ought to focus on examining school variables such as instructional leadership as opposed to only student body variables in order to improve K-12 education (Edmonds, 1979; Weber, 1971). Considerable attention in research has been focused on the latter variables, supporting the status quo, with the results which tend to conclude that the students are to blame for the lack of instructional progress in K-12 education (Mayeske, Okada, Beaton, Cohen and Wisler, 1972). According to those studies, schools do have a minor influence on students' achievement. Nonetheless, for the purpose of instructional improvement, critical inquiry has challenged all certainties regarding the status quo of proliferating events and arrangements in

today's school system by providing a startling awareness about alternative narratives regarding educational contexts and institutions (Kim, 1994; Lucas, 2007).

Critical scholars accentuate the role of human agency in investigating possible ways in which members behave in their organizations (Marcuse, 1964; Bourdieu, 1977; Foster, 1986; Bernstein, 1990; Capper, 1993; Maxcy, 1991; Noguera 2015; Duncan-Andrade & Morell, 2010; Watson, 2016). In education, a critical approach to inquiry, employing the human agency, offers the possibility of understanding educational administration practice that helps the school community realize that in spite of how elaborate and efficiently devised organizational plans may be, the same plans and arrangements can also create sites of manipulation, and marginalization of organizational beneficiaries and stakeholders (Watkins, 1986). Human beings create organizations to meet their human needs. Conversely, too often those establishments detach themselves or become cold to some of their beneficiaries and not others. That is why Apple (1982) and Bernstein (1977) contend that the main consideration of instructional leadership comprises resolving how power penetrates educational settings, and how this energy shapes the social structures that allocate and evaluate knowledge to the advantage of some but at the cost of others. The question of leadership is at the heart of all these paradoxes.

### **Gender and the research on leadership:-**

It is not unexpected in a world that has long been dominated by men that research on leadership has tended to focus on men, in the years past. And yet, women have also led in their families and organizations since the ancient times. As the twentieth century came to a close, scholars and female leaders launched an unparalleled effort to inquire and record data on the activities of women in organizational leadership, including educational leadership. Rosener's (1990) inquiry, *Ways Women Lead* is a distinctive example of how women lead in the contemporary society, whereas Fennel's 2002 inquiry, *Letting Go While Holding On: Women Principals' Lived Experiences with Power*, personifies women's leadership in the field of education. Reviewing the literature from Rosener (1990) to Fennel's (2002) study, offers an ecological view of gender and leadership in organizations.

### **Men's and women's descriptions of leadership:-**

From an ecological view of gender and leadership in organizations, Rosener (1990) concluded that male and female leaders described their leadership behavior in dissimilar terms. Male leaders tended to be more conventional leaders, while female leaders regarded themselves to be more interactive and warm leaders. These leadership views suggest important implications for teacher leadership and involvement with students at risk especially in rapidly shifting environments. For male leaders, demonstrating competitiveness, toughness, and the tradition of rising through the hierarchy, and being part of an establishment is more significant than responding to the call of those without influence and a voice in the organization (Chirume, 2009). In schools where the norm of hierarchy is prioritized, the dilemma for teachers is that they walk in the principal's shadow, disconnected from their students at risk. Murphy (1988) contends that in a state of disempowerment, teachers cannot take responsibility for the failure of the school to educate. Yet instructional leadership, as an act of taking responsibility for successful student learning, cannot be limited to the activities of the principals in the school, who, by the very nature of their working space is located outside the classroom, are not in the immediate proximity of the students. Students spend their time, minute by minute, with their teachers and peers in the classroom. In light of their proximity to at-risk students, teachers are better positioned than others are, to make a difference in the lives of at-risk students. Leadership deals with inter-subjective forces that affect students positively or negatively, beyond the explicit factors and arrangements in school organizations (Foster, 1986; Maxcy, 1991). It is here in the up-close interactive spaces where students' lives are touched by direct or hidden curriculum that leadership in the school organization is found or lost.

Unlike men, women leaders have reported the description of their leadership more as interactive leadership (Rosener, 1990). Interactive leadership appears to nest the potential for openness to novel solutions, creating flexible structures, and devising new ways of leading in tumultuous environments. Change and turmoil in organizations may not be desirable, but these forces have become important factors in creating opportunities for people to prove their leadership capabilities. Many women have gained credibility and legitimacy by achieving results in difficult organizational circumstances (Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2014; Winerip, 2011). In Rosener's study, women leaders have frequently referred to their efforts to encourage participation and the sharing of power and information. This helps in creating an open, inclusive organizational climate in which candor has generated useful information about work-related issues to the advantage of organizational stakeholders.

The value of openness and a climate in which people feel energized and empowered is one where people do not need be commanded to accomplish tasks. They each have a mind of their own, in pursuit of a common mission. When disagreements occur, an open environment helps individuals to work closely, thus increasing the support for decisions ultimately reached at every level of the organization. Thus, the risk that unexpected opposition will undermine plans and decisions in an organization is reduced.

Rosener (1990) acknowledges that women's self-descriptions of participative leadership went beyond the usual definition. They described their interests as enhancing other peoples' sense of self-worth and they made a real effort to create a sense of group identity by encouraging each person to provide input on every aspect of the work at hand. They believe that people perform best when they feel good about themselves and their work and that each member is part of the bigger organizational picture. Observations and experiences earlier in their careers helped them to realize the ineffectiveness, limitations, and isolation of top-down leadership models (Kreisburg, 1992).

### **Leadership and gender socialization:-**

Rosener (1990) noted that the first female executives adhered to the majority of the rules of conduct that seemed to have worked for men. However, since the 1990s, women have made their way into leadership positions smashing the glass ceiling both in traditional organizations, such as schools and newer organizations, not by assuming the habits and styles of men, but by drawing from attitudes and skills they developed from shared experience and their socialization as women. Although, for the most part, socialization and career paths are changing and diversifying, certain societal habits seem to persist. Women have been expected to be mothers, community volunteers, teachers and nurses, and wives as well. In those roles, they learn to be cooperative, understanding, and, above all, provide service to others. In this way they learn to re-create their self-esteem by helping and being supportive of others and family members, especially those that are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

### **Gender and a confounding state of affairs of leading at-risk students:-**

The discussion about gender and students at-risk, raises a number of subtle but legitimate questions: Is it confounding, that student retention of African American, Hispanic students, and other marginalized populations deteriorates in schools where females are significantly the majority of educators in schools? Isn't the majority of these teachers predisposed, from their upbringing and socialization, to have a better handle on the disadvantaged members of society? According to Bates (2006) the rich always enjoy the best representation in state and societal institutions, including schools, in the professions and even in government while the poor, according to the World Bank Poverty Net (2001/2002), often lack representation and remain most vulnerable in human affairs. In the course of business and human interactions, the poor report that, they often are implicitly treated badly and are excluded from the voice and power of societal institutions. For example, students quoted in the study conducted by Keegan and Crescenta (2006), asked why the perception was that "teachers and principals treat the rich kids better...and schools [want] to work with them more than with the rest of us." Yet the "poor kids though, are exactly the ones who need extra investment" (p. 34).

Indeed, leaders may begin with what comes "naturally" to how they lead; but those habits inculcated by socialization erode over time in the face of the idiosyncrasies and the vicissitudes of careers (Rosener, 1990). What has persisted and what can change in the classrooms is not only due to instinctive behavior of individual teachers. The situation also stems from factors "beyond their immediate influence" (Cuban, 1984, p. 6), of tradition and gender socialization. Changes in professional leadership behavior and practice can be expected to occur from the factors associated with research, deep learning, and professional development, support and training.

### **What educators can learn beyond the traditions of gender roles about a re-conceptualization of instructional leadership and at-risk students?**

In a study by Chirume (2009), which included 88 male and 131 female educators, a multivariate analysis of variance revealed that Wilks' Lambda = .995,  $F(4,210) = .288$ ,  $p = .886$ . At alpha .05, the null hypotheses that male and female scores differ in their attitude toward how teachers behave regarding the students' educational well-being was rejected. This finding seemed to strongly suggest that gender did not have a dominant effect on how educators viewed instructional leadership and at-risk students. This finding seems to suggest that in the randomness of human behavior, it could have been by chance that certain female educators have asked profound questions regarding the wellbeing of at-risk students. Re-conceptualizing instructional leadership as "...a simultaneous act of diminishing the impact of negative forces and magnifying positive forces of change on the lives of students..." was the most

agreed views a human behavior that could be learned (Chirume, 2009, p. 18). But, the most disagreed view in the study was whether colleges and universities did a good job of preparing preservice teachers to practice instructional leadership in dealing with students at risk of academic failure in K-12 schools.

### **The context of teacher preparation, and dynamics of teaching and learning regarding at-risk Students:-**

Quoting teacher educators evaluating teacher education and K-12 education at the inception of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth (2004) disclose that: “most of our undergraduate students are, like ourselves, limited to English proficiency (LTEP), women from middle – or upper – income families” (p. 215). Nieto (2000) declares “Nor are we preparing teachers to teach Hispanic students or children living in poverty, or other politically and economically disenfranchised groups” (pp. 214-215). Ladson-Billings (2000) charges that teacher preparation is culpable in the failure of teachers to teach minority students effectively. “Love of little children” seems to apply mostly to clean, White, well-dressed children, and only in the most patronizing way to, “those poor little Black/Mexican/ trailer- park kids” (Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004 p. 214). In small and unconscious ways, schools “silence these persistent playground intellectuals” (Meyer, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, the question is not whether there are at-risk students in the American classrooms; the question is what the teachers “are doing to help these at-risk students...” (Kim, 1994 p. 14) who are impacted negatively by invisible forces in the teaching and learning environments.

### **Invisible forces adversely affecting the teaching and learning environments:-**

Goodlad (1990) explains that there are “certain institutionalized features of America’s educational system that function as barriers to knowledge, especially for poor and minority students” (p. 1). Chirume (2009) called those institutionalized forces are called “invisible forces” (p. 6). The term *invisible forces* refer to veritable and critical forces that are not, for one reason or another, part of our “reflective awareness” Goodland (p.1). Expanding on the malignancy of invisible forces, Ashton-Warner explains that for the marginalized, the school destroys the organic unity of feeling, speaking, reading, and learning, and increases the student’s vulnerability. Ashton-Warner (1963) explains that reaching out for a book to read needs to become an organic action. Words alone will not suffice. “They must be words organically tied up, organically born from the dynamic life itself” (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 33).

Ashton-Warner cautions that the collapse of organic teaching and learning is not a mere negative invisible phenomenon. The situation is taken for granted by many educators. There is something concealed within the experiences of the hidden curriculum. In most books, the identity of poor students is that of underclass citizens. Indeed, they are shunned where others are welcome, needy when others are comfortable, and denigrated where others are praised. Indeed, in an educational context, invisible forces lurk in the interlocking set of structural conditions found in formal or the hidden school setting.

These forces may be curricular and instructional practices, or both, or other social and physiological conditions that block some students’ access to knowledge and skills (Goodlad & Keating, 1990), or keep some students from making academic progress. According to Cook (2015) a mix of race, poverty, behavioral problems, grade retention, obesity, risky sexual behavior, greater risk of illness, greater risk of interpersonal or self-directed violence, broken family structures, are associated with lower wealth, lower health, lower parental education levels, more dealings with the justice system all circumstances which create a perfect storm that leaves minorities in K-12 without the same educational opportunities as the mainstream students.

### **Challenge the status quo and dealing with the bad news of conduct in the profession of teaching and learning:-**

As they come into the profession preservice teachers may be naive, but they do have the potential to be empowered and in turn empower their students. Rather than blaming pre-service teachers for their class privilege, race, and sometimes socially conservative views “their proud monolingualism; their sorority priorities and their love of little children that seems to apply mostly to well-dressed clean White children” (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004, p. 214), good teacher educators who see their alumni struggling in economically, linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms must ask themselves what they are doing or not doing that contributes to the teachers’ failure. Nieto (2000) nudges teacher educators to be willing to share the blame, **challenge the process**, and keep placing diversity, and multicultural education “front and center” in the pre-service pedagogy. Irrespective of the varying outcomes regarding the impact of multicultural education of preservice teachers, teacher educators are advised to be wary about coercing unity over discord. According to Moll (2000), the approach to teaching multicultural education is based on the view that cultural life “consists of multiple voices, of unity as well as discord” (p. 257).



Educators must ask themselves deep and critical questions as a way of helping pre-service teachers see culture, their own, as well as their students' (Nieto, 2000, p. 180), as an essential prerequisite for practicing culturally responsive teaching. This pedagogy entails recognizing and creating a space for the social capital that these students bring from their diverse backgrounds (Allen & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2004, p. 214). This means allowing classrooms to be terrains for celebrating different cultures as parallel, but equally complex systems of attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms of living and understanding the world. If teacher training colleges or universities fail to empower teachers with the social capital of the "dispossessed," then the void in the social capital and teacher expectations will prevent teachers from responding to students' at risk of academic failure. Therefore, the problem of the achievement gap would persist, thus, limiting opportunities for the expansion of social justice and education among the people in America.

Researchers such as Bourdieu (1977) and Bernstein (1990) have long presented evidence that students from poor neighborhoods are neither intellectually inferior nor inadequate. Rather, they possess a different form of social capital than that of middle, and upper-class students. According to these researchers, evidence indicates that a lack of instructional leadership and the practice of selective pedagogy have forced poor students to divorce themselves from their cultural heritage and concomitant knowledge and skills when they enter the classroom door. Edmonds (1979) explains that we become spiteful in our reaction to cultural and linguistic difference from our norms. Allen and Hermann-Wilmarth point out that because the majority of the teacher educators and teachers in the schools is essentially limited to English proficiency; they possess elaborated code and mainstream social capital, but lack the social capital and pedagogy of the marginalized. Indeed, the latter constitutes essential components of understanding and engaging students at risk of academic failure.

The discrepancy in the educators' social capital turns out to be an invisible force causing many disadvantaged students to experience dilemmas, which, sometimes may lead to their academic under performance, with no recourse to those in powerful positions in institutions. Sometimes those in positions of power can reduce leadership to concealed forms of deception, segregation and exploitation. For example, the traditional school principal could structure the school environment such that language, discourse, and practice are disconnected from the fears, pain, and welfare of certain students the school should be serving. Inversely, disadvantaged students have reported that when opportunities occur for them to experience genuine instructional leadership they indeed made scholastic headway. According to Watkins (1986), much research has revealed that the uncritical facile employment of the term "instructional leadership" and institutional rules and policies have tended to obscure the seduction and subversion carried out in the name of school administration.

Foster (1986) reminds scholars that social structures, in any organization, are not created *de novo*; in contrast, they are malleable and have a historical reality that has resulted in the current situation. A social structure can have a positive impact on morale and human condition when it promotes work. Cunningham and Cresso (1993) contend that a collegial social structure "works best when it eliminates the capricious and inconsistent use of power over less powerful members" (p. 118). Group members communicate with the spirit of caring for each other and collaborate in fulfilling the vision of their organization. However, a social structure can have a negative impact when it serves to foster manipulation and domination of others by management. In education this impact occurs when the school's social structure simply makes it easier for those in management to control teachers and students and restrains the teacher from touching the life of a student (Cunningham & Cresso, 1993). Hence, social structures must consistently be interrogated in order to deal with any bad news of human practice (Chirume, 2009).

#### **Teacher preparation with a strong vision for at-risk students:-**

Although a teacher cannot solve every student's problem, he or she can support students cope with the burdens of pain and frustration in order to work through their problems. According to Frieman (1993) that form of support often creates circumstances for students to achieve some level of academic success. In Kim's study, students mentioned that if their teachers were aware of their personal circumstances, then they "would be able to study better in school" (p. 10). At the same time, Kim (1994, 10) found that teachers seem to have "an awareness of and receptivity" to dealing with stressful situations in students' lives. However, few teachers feel they have "the resources or training" to alleviate the situation (Kim, 1994, p. 27). Leadership is the human element of the school organization that creates a better learning environment in a serving relation with students. Children, families and school communities need servant leaders. Servant leaders literally and metaphorically serve the best interests of diverse students and families in school communities. Bolman and Deal (1997) explain that leading in a serving role implies a profound and

challenging responsibility for leadership to recognize and acknowledge the diversity of felt needs, dilemmas, paradoxes and concerns of students and families and society. For families and students at risk of academic failure, the gift of servant-leaders is love and empowering care for a community of learners.

For at-risk students, love and empowering care is largely absent in schools. Caring for at-risk students begins by acknowledgement of those who are at risk. This implies, listening, understanding and accepting each one of them. This occurrence progresses through a deepening sense of appreciation, respect, and ultimately giving love. Love is the willingness of instructional leaders to reach out to students who on the axis of pain and path to academic failure. Instructional leaders do so by opening their hearts. An open heart is vulnerable. Confronting vulnerability allows instructional leaders “to drop their masks, meet heart to heart and be present for one another” (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p347). In those voluntary moments teachers and their charges experience a sense of unity and delight in human interactions. These are the exchanges that hold the soul of community in a better school environment (Whitmyer, 1993).

Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) assert that what sets leadership apart from other relationships is that, when it works well, it enables people to collaborate in their line of service through shared values and goals of their organization's mission, and vision for the common good. In education, this helps each educator and each student to attain a sense of accomplishment from tackling challenging goals and transcending barriers in pursuance of activities of a higher purpose. A strong vision for at-risk students empowers teachers to believe in their inevitable and vital leadership roles to respond to the students' call of pain and desperation clearly inscribed in the eyes of a student at risk of academic failure. A properly prepared, and “trained” teacher would be able to identify students capable of learning, but not able to do so due to the impact of invisible forces that lurk in the teaching and learning environment. Accordingly, the teacher takes an appropriate action. Examples of such teachers have been cited in literature.

#### **Portrait of instructional leadership predicated on values of a strong vision for at risk students:-**

In the account, *I Won't Learn from You*, Kohl remarks that he would never forget the humiliation that he suffered as student of minority background and resolved never to humiliate any of his students when his turn came to be a teacher. He charges that if students are going to be spared the ignoble humiliation and denial of opportunities to learn, public schools have to learn to do one thing correctly. Teachers must learn the difference between not learning and failing to learn.

Not learning occurs when an individual has to deal with unavoidable challenges to his or her personal and ethnic loyalties, identity and integrity. This is when a student is trapped in a set of circumstances that inadvertently forces him or her to make choices where there is no apparent middle ground. To agree to learn from a teacher who does not respect his or her integrity causes a major loss of self and the only alternative is not to learn.

There was a student called Barry, whom Kohl had taught during the 1970s in Berkeley, California. Barry had been held back in the first grade by his previous teacher for being defiant, uncooperative, and “not ready for the demands of second grade” (Kohl, 1994, p. 7). The principal moved Barry to Kohl's class, which was a multi-age grade in the hope that Kohl could help him catch up and advance with other students in his age group. Kohl found that Barry was “confident and cocky, but not rude” (p. 8). Other students respected him as the best fighter and athlete in the class and as a skilled, funny storyteller. A student told Kohl that their previous teacher had been afraid of Barry. In the Anyon (1994) study, “one male teacher characterized his school as a ‘tough’ school and said he had been nervous when they told him he would be teaching there” (p. 129). Kohl had known of a number of cases where White teachers treated very young African American boys over six feet tall as drug addicts and menaces. Barry was precisely a victim of that racist manifestation, resulting in his falling behind and not being promoted from the first grade to second grade.

The first time Kohl sat down to read with Barry, the boy threw a temper tantrum, called Kohl all sorts of names, and no progress was made. Barry's tantrums were manufactured on the spot as a strategy to avoid reading. Knowing that Barry was not incapable of reading, Kohl did not bother setting Barry up for remediation. All Kohl did was design a strategy to empower Barry by convincing the rest of the class that Barry could read and that all he had been doing in the past was putting up a resistance that he (Barry) could control. Kohl turned to Barry and convinced him that it was his decision to play his not-learning game or accept Kohl's face-saving gift and learn to read. In this way, Kohl

offered Barry the possibility of entering into a teaching and learning relationship without being forced to give up his status.

Barry accepted this win-win situation and mumbled, "This is a bug, this is a jug, this is a bug, this is a jug." Tossing the book onto the floor and turning to other students, Barry said, "See, I told you I already know how to read" (Kohl, 1994, p. 9). This episode illustrates a situation in which a teacher uses his/her discretion to situate a disempowered learner in relation to immediate and familiar learning needs of affiliation, integrity, and personal identity. Kohl is an example of a teacher leading and creating a possibility for change in the classroom. By bringing hope to a marginalized student, that student can develop and prosper in a respectful environment that recognizes diversity and individual differences. Indeed, for some students in public schools, not learning is a strategy that makes it possible for them to retain their human dignity and function on the margins of society and not fall "into madness or total despair" (Kohl, 1994, p. 10). At the same time, "not learning in particular requires a strong will and an ability to take the kinds of pressure exerted by people whose power you choose to question" (Kohl, 1994, p. 23). Reaching troubled students is the hardest but most rewarding instructional improvement responsibilities in schools (Burton, 1993). Similarly, If teacher training colleges or universities fail to empower teachers by providing them with the social capital of the "dispossessed," then the void in the social capital and teacher expectations will prevent teachers from responding to students' pain and deprivation. It is important to understand that human and spiritual dimensions play an important role in the preparation of teachers for instructional leadership with at-risk students.

**The role of human and spiritual dimensions in the teacher preparation programs with a strong vision for the success of at-risk students:-**

Human and spiritual dimensions need to play a huge part in determining the attitude and behavior of teachers (Crowther, Kaagan, Fergusson, & Hann, 2002) toward the students at risk of academic failure. The need for this kind of behavior should intentionally be seen during the teacher preparation, and the spiritual dimension must eminently become an important part of the teacher preparation program at university. Teacher educators should place emphasis on the role of values, symbols and spirit, encouraging the heart of a pre-service teacher to act. This is how these aspects of learning can give meaning and purpose in teaching and leading at-risk students in and outside classrooms of this great nation's schools. The human spirit is an inner resource that teachers draw upon to respond to "what they can obviously see in a suffering" student's eyes (Kim, 1994, p. 21). This is how teacher preparation programs plant the seed for teacher leadership and appropriate behaviors in practicing social justice, and other propensities such as capacity for human agency.

As Cuban (1984) observed and bell hooks (1994) says that there are teachers who choose not to be subservient to rules of authority, but seek to transgress the traditional norms and behave differently by reaching out to the hearts, minds, and lives of students in their classes. Such teachers, according to Anderson (2002), may or may not be in formal positions of power and yet they wield considerable influence on their students and peers. They demonstrate skill, act with confidence, and have an impact on their students, their peers, and the community members who notice their leadership traits. These teachers are substantive leaders, although their leadership may not be formally recognized.

Herbert Kohl, of Berkeley used his discretion, to situate disempowered learners in positions where their immediate and familiar learning needs, namely, the needs of affiliation, integrity, and personal identity, were met. Kohl and many others in schools today are examples of teachers leading to create a possibility for change and promote positive forces in the classroom, to bring hope to non-mainstream students, and to address the needs of at-risk students who will be able to develop and prosper in environments respectful of diversity and individual circumstance. For at-risk students, hope is a compelling force that in the Kohl's lexicon recognizes substantive potential for change and growth in all students. The students can contribute to life in class, in school, and bring about real changes in the world beyond the school.

Block (1993) calls for transformation of school organizational structures to enable educational personnel to experience a paradigm shift in leadership from the practice of power, control, and prediction to the leadership practice characterized by empowerment, acknowledgment, and creativity -- in response to student needs. In loosely coupled social structures, hierarchical positions are less marked and boundaries between the positions are more porous and allow a more fluid situation for teacher leadership dynamics. As noted earlier Rosener (1990) alludes to the fact that the value of an open working environment is that members of the organization feel energized and empowered. Each person has a mind of their own, in pursuit of a common mission. When disagreements ensue, an



open environment helps individuals to work closely, thus increasing the support for decisions ultimately reached at every level of the organization.

The social structures of the school organization, such as rules and regulations, must not be allowed to ossify into inflexible forces that prevent or disempower teachers from helping at-risk students. Drawing from critical theory, instructional leaders develop the substantive capability for interrogating the social structure and its relationship to popular values that underlie the formal and informal settings and implications for the wellbeing of the stakeholders. In the school system, these settings are the formal and the hidden curriculum that impact the students (Forster, 1986; Maxcy, 1991). Keegan and Crescenta (2006) contend that “many dropouts telegraph their intentions by repeatedly skipping classes” (p. 37). Early identification allows schools to intervene in the lives of at-risk students in time. This happens at best when teacher leadership simultaneously take action to diminish the impact of negative forces and magnify positive forces of change on the lives of students in an environment (in and outside the school) of continuous flux, change and reaction are provided (Bush, 2003).

On developing distinctive capabilities--The challenge for teachers to transform and improve is often confused by the need to be better at the job through professional development, which merely amounts the expansion of the repertoire of skills to deal with instructional issues. It is not just coping with the at risk students in the classroom. When this is the case, the individual teacher remains the same individual. Distinctive transformation only occurs when an individual teacher gains an awareness of and begins to see a new frontier of human capability in self, the students and others.

As noted throughout this article, seeds of instructional leadership are sown during teacher preparation. The leadership qualities grow through formal and informal learning, reflection and practice in professional communities K-12 schools. The socialization continues within cultures formed by multilayered professional communities in school districts that included competent persons that have a successful record of experiences working with minority groups and at-risk students. Professional communities with a sound mix of members from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds help members to learn from each other, reflect and cross cultural boundaries in order to diminish invisible negative forces while amplifying those forces that uplift and advance the wellbeing of all students.

### **Conclusion:-**

The article concludes that beyond gender leadership roles, educators can learn distinctive capabilities to become successful instructional leaders with students at risk of academic failure in K-12. These distinctive capabilities include personal public commitments to a strong vision for the success of at-risk student, a willingness, and an ability to challenge the status quo in order to identify the curricular and structural forces that impact student wellbeing, possession of and continuous cultivation of the capability to engender an empowered contact with at-risk students. Students are quoted in studies as saying that when their teachers were aware of their personal circumstances; they “studied better in school,” (Kim, 1994).

The seeds of change agency--successful leading, teaching and advancing the well-being of at-risk students-- can be sown in teacher preparation programs with a strong vision of teaching, and prepare teachers enough to believe in their inevitable leadership role for the students to become transcending overcomers offered at universities and colleges across the country. Subsequently this capability can be nurtured through professional development, self-reflection and reflective practice in K-12 classrooms.

Teachers who lead are those who locate themselves within the cultural struggles of the times as much as in the cultural battles of the school, and the wider society in order to advance the wellbeing of the vulnerable students. The currency of leadership is not found in a hierarchical position in the organizational structure, but instead it is located in the cultural and political struggles that meet needs of students in the school organization. Educational leadership cannot, therefore, be divorced from the struggles of the daily work and commitments of teachers to public action for the advancement of student wellbeing.

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