Short Essay

The Critical Role of Global and Culturally Responsive Leadership for Higher Education in the 21st-Century

D. Eric Archer
Yuqian Zhang
Western Michigan University, USA

ABSTRACT

This short essay discusses the critical role of global and culturally responsive leadership for higher education in the 21st-Century. Using the concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), global and culturally responsive leadership should be emergent and interactive to respond in an agile way to the fast-paced, volatile context of the knowledge era.

Keywords: culturally responsive leadership, global leadership, higher education

"**W**e are on the precipice of an epoch," in which 21st-Century organizations are facing a complex, competitive landscape driven largely by globalization and the technological revolution (Hitt, 1998, p. 218). As such, Bikson et al. (2003) urged universities to develop a global leadership curriculum, based on their prediction of a future shortage of global leaders, whether in the public, for-profit, or nonprofit sectors. Yet, most universities have been slow to develop such a curriculum (Osland et al., 2018), with the focus of international education efforts being primarily confined to student mobility (Fischer, 2019). The eager embrace of global education among colleges in the US often lacks attention to basic tenets, such as international knowledge, intercultural competence, and global citizenship. In the contemporary

context of nationalism and populism, the views of the well-educated, within and beyond the academy, are not shared by all.

Globalization has resulted in the emergence of complex global socio-ecological systems that do not operate in predictable ways and give rise to nonlinear change and conditions of uncertainty (Young, 2017). Systems thinking offers a lens to assist global leaders in responding to these growing organizational complexities by shifting leadership from a traditional bureaucratic model to a more adaptive model (Morgan, 2006; Senge, 1990). Using the concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), global and culturally responsive leadership should be emergent and interactive in order to respond in an agile way to the fast-paced, volatile context of the Knowledge Era (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007).

A critical stance on globalization juxtaposes multiple ways of knowing and contradictory realities within a single discourse, with the intent to make citizens' preexisting frames and metaphors open to discussion and amenable to change (Folkman, 2006). Culturally responsive frames push leaders from a mindset of simply "thinking about leadership" for social justice toward the habits of "thinking about leadership practice" and thinking about qualities that result in social justice and equity (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016, p. 6). Rather than having diversity reveal limitations in our leadership, university graduates need to practice culturally responsive leadership, which can inspire transformation, improvement, and achievement for all learners (Santamaría, 2014).

As more graduates have moved around the globe, the increase in intercultural interactions has resulted in concerns about cultural, social and religious conflicts (Spring, 2008). Contemporary views on global culture are often characterized not by diversity but by individualism, Western values, and homogenization in general, triggering numerous cultural reactions against this process (Finger, 2005). Globalization requires the infusion of non-Western and indigenous perspectives into our thinking about learning (Saudelli et al., 2012). Bush et al. (1998) stressed that "all theories and interpretations of practice must be 'grounded' in the specific context … before they can be regarded as useful" (p. 137). Further, Walker and Dimmock (2002) warned against "decontextualized paradigms" in researching leadership, which "has developed along ethnocentric lines, being heavily dominated by Anglo-American paradigms and theories" (pp. 1-2). They argued that the field of leadership education is lagging conceptually and epistemologically behind the globalization of policy and practice, leading to the need for a comparative branch of study that is rigorous and reflects a cross-cultural dimension.

Finally, to successfully navigate the postmodern world, college and university graduates must be able to engage in dialectical thinking; the acceptance of inherent contradictions and alternative truths (Merriam & Caffarella, 2007). Kegan (1994) argued that the pressure to engage in dialectical thinking comes from our need as adults to respond to culture's curriculum, defined as the mental demands the postmodern world places upon us. The key idea is that the parties in conflict should move beyond trying to "win" for a specific position. Rather, what is needed is the recognition that "the other side will not go away, [and] probably should not" (Kegan, 1994, p. 319).

Our culture determines what we know about others, and vice versa, others' cultures influence what they know about us (Schein, 2010); this truth has important implications for foreign policy, intelligence, media, business, and education. Meaningful cross-cultural relationships require rejecting surface-level, national stereotypes and caricatures portrayed in the popular press and rather, prioritizing learning to communicate at a deeper level through a shared understanding of values (Graen, 2008). For the global leader, "It takes a leap of the imagination to understand all culture as multiple and relational, to understand one's own society as just another culture, albeit one's own, and to see life as others see it" (Marginson, 2016, pp. 115-116).

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Bios

D. ERIC ARCHER, Ph.D., is an associate professor of educational leadership in higher education in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology at Western Michigan University. His research interests include issues of diversity and inclusion in postsecondary education with an emphasis on the internationalization of higher education. Email: eric.archer@wmich.edu

YUQIAN ZHANG, M.S., is a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at Western Michigan University. Her research interests include global leadership and the internationalization of higher education.
Email: yuqian.zhang@wmich.edu