Leadership Guided by Courage:
A Challenge to Instantaneous Perfection

STELLA C. BATAGIANNIS
Indiana University–Purdue University, Fort Wayne

ABSTRACT: The search for magic bullets and quick fixes, that is, *instantaneous perfection*, reflects the insatiable thirst for immediate solutions. These demands in education, generally, and in educational leadership, specifically, result in limited, technocratic, rather than adaptive leadership. The *No Child Left Behind* Act (passed into law in 2002 in the United States) is a clear example of instantaneous perfection. This manuscript's methodology links theory and practice through personal observation as a school superintendent and as a college professor in deconstructing instantaneous perfection and leadership. Using the concept and analysis of courage, defined as wisdom, passion, and hope, suggestions are provided as to how to resist instantaneous perfection's dominant practices among educational leaders.

RÉSUMÉ: La recherche pour des recettes magiques et des réparations rapides, ce que j'ai appelé *instantaneous perfection*, est le reflet d'une insatiable soif d'obtenir des résultats immédiats. Ces exigences, en général, dans l'enseignement et dans l'orientation scolaire, restreignent l'orientation au lieu de l'adapter. *No Child Left Behind* illustre parfaitement la perfection instantanée. La méthodologie de ce manuscrit fait le lien entre la théorie et la pratique à partir d'observations personnelles en tant que directeur d'école et en tant que professeur de collège de la perfection instantanée et de l'orientation. En utilisant le concept et l'analyse du mot *courage* défini comme la sagesse, la passion et l'espoir, des suggestions sont apportées pour savoir contrecarrer les pratiques dominantes de la perfection instantanée chez les dirigeants de l'enseignement.

Most don't consider courage. We tend to think of leadership in a more technical way, but to be a leader you need courage to give you the "guts" and strength to be effective and implement ideas/change.[1]

Introduction

Magic bullets; quick fixes; carbon-copy schools; and cloned, disposable administrators – all reflect a certain mentality and tendency in our personal and professional lives today – that of *instantaneous perfection*.[2] I have ignited the usage of the term, having discovered in it not the superficial, but rather deep implications. It clearly reflects our society's philosophy, the resulting demands of policy makers, and the challenges it causes for educational leaders. The term reflects my recent personal observations, as a K-12 administrator, including as a superintendent supervising administrators, of the demands on schools and the resulting frustrations experienced by administrators and staff at all levels of the organization. One could blame technology or the evolution of the knowledge society for the propagation of instantaneous perfection. One could even blame our instantaneous perfection syndrome on the world of "Type A" personalities or on a world with an insatiable hunger for speed. Whatever the cause for our thirst for instantaneous perfection or a quick fix, we live in a world that demands perfect solutions and demands them not only quickly, but immediately, irrespective of outcomes. Instantaneous perfection is, I believe, in part, an ineffectual search for an escape from a world that inspires insecurity and fear at every turn. Yet in this unsuccessful quest, we remain oblivious to the dire consequences of these demands.

In the United States the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB)[3] in 2002 was a clear example of instantaneous perfection, which has bombarded schools with a narrow, singular focus on measuring achievement through testing alone. Educators often characterize NCLB as "drill and kill," a concept that was criticized by John Dewey in *Democracy and Education* (1916) as failing to engage students and failing to link learning to students' personal experiences or higher order thinking. "Not less serious is the exaggerated emphasis upon drill exercises designed to produce skill in action, independent of any engagement of thought – exercises having no purpose but the production of automatic skill. Nature abhors a mental vacuum" (p. 209).

If it were what it purports to be, NCLB would have some merit. Instead, lack of reflection prior to implementation and the reluctance to modify the critical errors in the legislation have caused and are continuing to cause serious harm to public education. For example, NCLB assumes that all children start from an equal socio-economic footing and then renders itself oblivious to the implications of test construction around issues of race, class, and gender.

We hear consistently that today's world cannot survive with competition, but only with collaboration. Yet competition is what we are instilling in our students through our definition of achievement as the measurable result of rigid, standardized testing alone, while at the same time, educators are beaten down by a society that is demanding instantaneous perfection from all. The NCLB legislation is perhaps the best example thus far in history of the emphasis on excessive competition in our schools resulting in universal fear among educators, parents, and students.

Many teachers plan their syllabi hoping only to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a mandate of NCLB. Schools that do not make AYP, as defined by each of the states, face punitive measures. Subgroups, for example, special education, English as a second language, minority groups, and so forth, that have a minimum number of students, again as established by each state will affect AYP. It is not unusual for a school to fail to make AYP although significant improvement may have been made and achievement may be at high levels if the school fails to show improvement in the achievement of a subgroup. The teachers often feel compelled to neglect other curricular issues, such as relating curriculum to creativity, to critical thinking, and to gaining any sense of student voice. Deep study and thought, followed by communication of the ideas generated by these activities, do not fit today's mold of instantaneous perfection at any level. Thoughtfulness has been lost, be it in our society, in general, or in the classroom, specifically. As a result, Purpel (1989) appropriately speaks of the resulting "trivialization of American education" (p. 19).

The above discussion is either directly or indirectly related to educational leadership. While educational leadership has been defined by many, its meaning is not easily captured. Foster summarizes this difficulty in defining it: "yet such a common term [leadership] seems to defy definition ... although many have tried to encapsulate it" (1986, p. 170). Although *leadership* is a complex and elusive concept, we can at least all agree on its critical role in our schools today. A necessary and primary component of leadership is courage. Being courageous permits the leader to be guided by his passion for education, not limited by fear.[4] Courage also permits the lens of the school's vision to remain unclouded and clear.

Courageous leadership will result, not only in effective leadership, but in the sustainability of that leadership, which Fullan (2005) describes as, "continuous improvement, adaptation, and collective

problem solving in the face of complex challenges that keep arising" (p. 22). Lambert (1998) discusses the negative impact when sustainability in leadership is absent, "in many schools, momentum, energy, and growing commitment begin to form around some key improvement ideas; then a change in key personnel or mandated directions derails the effort" (p. 2). She goes on to point out the disappointment and cynicism which result from the lack of sustainability (p. 2).

With these issues in mind, in this manuscript I will first highlight the deeper meanings of instantaneous perfection through my personal experience as a school superintendent. In this section I will discuss the negative effects and the deeper complexities of these examples. The second section will build a theory of courage that has the potential to challenge instantaneous perfection by speaking to the dialectic that exists between courageous leadership and instantaneous perfection. The two are inherently and diametrically opposed. The former delves into the deeper issues of leadership, while the latter remains at the superficial management level. In adding the element of courage, which I see as critical and integral to leadership, I expand on what Heifetz (2003, 2006) and Fullan (2005) call adaptive and sustainable leadership. This courageous leadership focuses on transformational and sustainable change, including the perspective not of the technocrat, but of the adaptive agent. In my conclusion I relate this form of courage as a direct challenge to instantaneous perfection, as a means of negating fear, and as seen through the daily work of schools. Thus, the dialectic between courage and instantaneous perfection when acknowledged and understood might clarify the thinking of educational leaders both at the policy level and in practice.

Instantaneous Perfection: Its Source and Its Impact

In delving into instantaneous perfection, one finds, after the first, perfunctory glance, that there is more involved in instantaneous perfection than mere, innocent impatience. There is a deleterious issue, that of an insatiable hunger for immediate gratification, one that has grasped educational leaders by the throat, so to speak. Walsh (1995) warns of the woes of self gratification, which he sees as linked to a social imbalance, and which I see as linked to instantaneous perfection: "For our society to survive, we must be able to balance conflicting needs. Everyone cannot always have exactly what they want. This system involves compromise and cooperation, and without self-discipline, those two things are impossible to sustain" (p. 83).

Additionally, Walsh addresses directly the problem of quick fixes, "we also like things to be resolved or 'fixed' quickly, and want our efforts rewarded without delay. In other words, we have become a society obsessed with instant gratification" (1995, p. 85). Citing an example of a marketing advertisement in which a quick phone call can extend a vacation in paradise, Walsh sees a deeper meaning in the advertisement and laments the fact that the advertisement and our focus on immediate gratification reflect a deterioration of values in our society. The deeper meaning of the advertisement as an example of our thinking is:

> The opposite of the kind of work ethic that built this country. It
> flies in the face of the philosophy of working hard to achieve a goal,
> of being patient, and of the need to save up to earn something
> worthwhile. (p. 86)

Walsh (1995) points out the negative message given to students about their learning process since, "after all, in our society, competence is equated with lightning-fast problem-solving" (p. 88). As a former superintendent and now a college professor, I have observed that impatience in board members and in graduate students. For instance, when I suggested to a student that she take a few days to reflect on her topic, she responded, "I don't do that. If I don't get it the first time, then I'm done."

Change agents, such as Heifetz (2003, 2006) and Fullan (2005), relate the essence of this expectation of instantaneous perfection to educational leadership. They both define two kinds of leadership, technical and adaptive. While not rejecting the value of the technical, Fullan (2005) does point out that the focus on technical issues alone misses the need to address the more complex, adaptive issues. He comments that,

> The new work of school leaders is a mixture of technical and
> adaptive work. ... Not that technical problems are easy to solve, but
> we do know how to approach them. An adaptive challenge is one in
> which we do not have the answers. (p. 53)

Fullan (2005) gives an example of a *technical* issue as teaching children to read, while an example of an *adaptive* challenge is engaging unmotivated students (p. 53). He deems both as necessary, while identifying the latter as clearly the most complex, with the more far-reaching implications and impact. There is no simplistic checklist or even general guidelines for addressing adaptive challenges. Heifetz (2006) emphasizes the complexity of adaptive challenges, linking them to leadership, "but there are no readily available solutions for adaptive

challenges – those that require people to clarify their priorities and learn new ways of thinking and behaving. Adaptive leadership requires changing hearts and minds" (p. 512). Heifetz also reminds leaders that, "adaptive challenges always involve conflict – between the current situation and a vision of the future, and among different groups of stakeholders, including those who are personally threatened by proposed changes" (p. 512).

In discussing sustainable leadership, Fullan (2005) again stresses the need for the opposite of an instantaneous fix, "need I say that ... the focus on the short run ... [is] fatal for sustainability?" (p. 23) Furthermore, he stresses deep learning, again, focused on adaptive issues, not on superficial, technical learning. What begins as instantaneous perfection and a demand for immediate gratification progresses to the deeper implications of today's emphasis on technocratic management alone and at the expense of true, courageous, and sustainable leadership.

During my tenure as a school superintendent, I received calls from parents, angry with a principal for not instantly firing a teacher because of a problem that occurred in the sixth period that very day. Calls also came from board members who expected principals "fixed" by the superintendent – and instantly. If not, the expectation was to dispose of them as one disposes of a broken piece of electronic equipment and then to get a better model. Donaldson (2005) summarizes the problem in "The Lose-Lose Leadership Hunt," – "School boards hand down requirements and policies the way a 12-year-old hands down clothes – expecting principals to 'implement' them immediately" (p. 42). In our world, frustration is expressed by some, not because programs are not in place, but because *perfect* programs or policies have not been created and implemented. And never mind the deep issues involved; the easy surface ones will suffice. Perfection is all we need, and perfection implemented yesterday.

The day-to-day logistics of the school organization, as well as the leadership roles in schools, are affected by instantaneous perfection. The voice on the other end of the phone asks expectantly that we fax, or better yet, e-mail communications. This becomes a by-product of instantaneous perfection. Without time for the briefest of reflection, communications must be perfect. Of course, a quick and superficial glance at this instantaneous perfection syndrome is also indirectly related to the use of technology as a quick fix. While technology may

have speeded up our lives, its rampant growth has made us far less reflective.

Instantaneous perfection always made me uneasy as an administrator, and I often mused that perhaps I was a bit more reluctant in my thinking than the rest of the world. After some personal reflection, I now far better understand and appreciate that uneasiness. I was uncomfortable with the lack of reflection expected in leadership roles, as related to harried meetings and quick decisions.

It should be no surprise then that instantaneous perfection has invaded our professional lives since it also pervades our personal lives. A local news program proudly proclaims, "get the news, and get it fast in just seven minutes" – as if seven minutes has a special significance and as if speed is of paramount importance. Pizza is to be delivered in 30 minutes from the moment you place the order; again, speed is of primary importance. We cannot enjoy any holiday without simultaneously being bombarded with the anticipation of holidays or events months away. In July, we have back-to-school sales and preparation for winter. In October, the advertisements for Halloween are accompanied by reminders of Thanksgiving, while Christmas carols play in the background. Watching one television program is insufficient; we now have the option of picture-within-a-picture sets. The list of the day-to-day examples of instantaneous perfection, unfortunately, is virtually endless.

What is frightening in leadership is that few are stopping to reflect on the harm that is being done by the insistence on instantaneous perfection. We lose sight of visionary, courageous leadership and focus instead on technocratic leadership, addressing minuscule, technical goals. The proverbial forest is missed, as we focus on narrow issues, such as a new student discipline code, as opposed to how to create an inclusive culture for all students; additional contractual language, rather than sharing leadership and responsibility between teachers and administrators; retention policies, rather than visionary models providing additional academic support for students to assist them in attaining the academic goals without punishing them. We have all heard the story of the three blind men trying to examine and to identify the elephant, each drawing a different conclusion. That story is sadly reminiscent of many seeking quick solutions today, rather than reflective ones. The three blind men are not the only ones who suffer from blindness.

To regain our vision, first we must slow down to allow reflection. Next, courage and reason must prevail. We must end our mad quest for the non-existent quick fixes and cease addressing complex issues simplistically and, therefore, unsuccessfully. We will not continue to make poor, or even catastrophic decisions, if we recognize the limitations of the speed that we have been raised by technology to expect. The focus on speed locks leaders in the superficial mode, which, in turn, forces them to operate as technocrats. For example, if the problem of bullying arises, the administrator who seeks a quick fix will look no further than a punitive solution for dealing with the bully. Such a solution has been proven time and time again in recent years to have the potential for a catastrophic impact in the form of tragic school violence. Instead, the courageous leader, while remaining equally focused as in the first scenario on protecting the welfare of his students and staff, will opt for a less, knee-jerk process, seeking to explore the deeper issues involved. Following this path then is likely to enlighten the staff on the real causes of the bullying, thus permitting them to develop more effective solutions. Another example is that of how student discipline should be addressed. Years ago, in my first year as an assistant principal, I recall a conversation with a teacher, who felt that students should not be counseled in the assistant principal's office. He felt they should be given only the appropriate discipline, as stated in the handbook, and moved out of the office quickly and efficiently. That, of course, was not at all my view. I felt students should be given the appropriate discipline, of course, but that they should at the same time be counseled in order to resolve problems, provide support, and avoid future misbehavior.

A prime example of a deep issue concerning instantaneous perfection is the ever-growing, deteriorating philosophy of education in our local, state, and national communities that defines education and accountability only in limited, quantifiable terms, thus limiting leadership to the technocratic area. This statement should not be misunderstood. Quantifiable data are part of accountability in education and, therefore, important. As educators, we have had a historical responsibility to be accountable. Data is one tool in determining student achievement. However, the mistake of those who focus on quantitative measures alone is in concluding that it is the only part of education that should be addressed. Today's demands allow for little else, as school administrators juggle the NCLB mandates, particularly AYP, and individual state accountability legislation. Given this, McLaren (1994) aptly defines today's escape from leadership and learning,

> The file keepers, accountability-mongers, and "knowledge
> specialists" at both state and local levels have instructed teachers
> to segment behavior, measure fluid social activity in terms of
> "inputs" and "outputs," and reduce human beings to computer
> printouts. (p. 219)

McLaren and others would agree that administrators and teachers in
the organization are caught up in the intellectually debilitating speed of
instantaneous perfection and, as vestiges of autonomy are removed from
teachers and administrators, they begin to behave like technical robots.
Kanpol (1992) has discussed examples of outside control and did so a
decade before the implementation of No Child Left Behind, "nothing
could better exemplify state control than the incessant bombardment of
reports, such as the now much publicized "Nation at Risk," Carnegie
Report, and so on" (p. 13). He reminds us that, "schools have installed ...
a standardized curriculum with its prepackaged teacher-proof materials"
(p. 26). This pushes McLaren to critique what I term the instantaneous
perfection mind-set in which teachers adopt a technocratic
consciousness, "teachers often give technocratic theories the benefit of
the doubt and exhibit at times an incredulous penchant for following
instructions and deferring to the 'experts.' Some of the new curriculum
technologies have even been 'teacher-proofed' " (p. 219).

Kozol (1991, 2005) has time and again concurred with the Kanpol
and McLaren concept of teacher-proofed curriculum by further arguing
that, "in the lowest-performing schools ... [are implemented] the rote
approach, the scripted literacy programs, officially claimed to be teacher-
proofed" (1991, p. 34), and then arguing that inner city schools are hit
hardest. Kozol (2005) criticizes teacher-proofing severely, "few teachers,
of whatever age, can take it as an evidence of even minimal respect for
their intelligence to be provided with a 'teacher-proof' curriculum" (p.
268).

Today this external control of the classroom has grown to
gargantuan proportions and without the financial resources to fix even
the limited, quantifiable academic needs of students. Instead of receiving
support, educators are confronted by the demand for instantaneous
perfection. All this relates to a focus on lockstep, technical instruction,
which Kanpol (1992) defined as the "deskilling"of teachers, and which
has become today's norm,

> The concept of *deskilling* has to do with teachers executing someone
> else's goals and plans. ... Teachers are taught the skills to teach.
> They are skilled to execute tasks, assignments, the curriculum, and

so on. Ironically this works in ways to deskill teachers, as they are not the conceivers of plans over their work, that is, they do not determine curricular goals or establish content. They are deskilled from conception. (p. 14)

McLaren (1994) concurs, arguing that, "[Teacher proofing of the curriculum] contributes further to the devaluing and deskilling of teachers by removing them from the decision-making process" (p. 219).

The same deskilling concept is actually also true of administrators today, as teachers and administrators are bombarded and deskilled by requirements disguised as standards. Sadly, a perhaps unanticipated response to deskilling is occurring. Some teachers and some administrators are responding to deskilling by throwing up their hands in defeat, rejecting the path of courageous leadership, and asking for more prescriptive direction. For example, administrators frequently ask that central office provide them with more administrative regulations, complaining that such documents are not sufficiently extensive and detailed. What they are seeking is what I call *push-button administration*: identify the problem, push the button (or turn to the appropriate page in the administrative regulations), and presto! There is the solution. Thus, teachers and administrators alike are giving in to fear. They are beginning to see deskilling as a means of escape from some of the pressures they face if someone will provide an easy, technocratic solution, that is, a quick fix – "Just tell me what to do."

Young teachers in my graduate classes relate stories of teachers leaving teaching and confess their own contemplation of doing the same since the fear of NCLB and AYP no longer allows them to *teach*. Kozol (2005) in an interview by the National Education Association (NEA) notes similar conversations, concluding,

The really scintillating young teachers, who are incandescent in their ability to steer a child's fascination, they call me up at night and cry. ... These teachers are the ones we are going to lose. They're not going to stay in these schools. (p. 34)

John Dewey, while acknowledging that both technical and deeper learning have value, supports Aristotle, who criticized technical learning: "Aristotle was permanently right in assuming the inferiority and subordination of mere skill in performance and mere accumulation of external products to understanding, sympathy of appreciation, and the free play of ideas" (1916, p. 299).

The demand for instantaneous perfection and the focus on simplistic, technical solutions also reflect the scientific management theory and

Taylorism of the early 1900s. Reminiscent of today's accountability demands, particularly No Child Left Behind, Ellwood Cubberley (1922) stated,

> In time it will be possible for any school system to maintain a continuous survey of all the different phases of its work, through tests made by its corps of efficiency experts, and to detect weak points in its work almost as soon as they appear. (p. 338)

The words, "almost as soon as they appear," could easily have been written today, almost a century later. The next step is then to resolve these "weak points" as quickly. Thus, there is no doubt that such things have been sought after throughout history, but never to the level that instantaneous perfection is craved, expected, and insisted upon today. Fullan (2005) argues against thinking such as that expressed by Cubberley and the concept of instantaneous perfection as he focuses on attaining deeper levels of achievement and of leadership,

> The set of strategies that brought initial success are not the ones – not powerful enough – to take us to higher levels. In these cases, we would expect the best learning organizations to investigate, learn, experiment, and develop better solutions. *This takes time.* (p. 27)

Noddings too, critiques the all-too-common, narrow definition of education, citing the thinking of Soder, Goodlad and McMannon (2001),

> From the current policy debates about public education, one would think that U.S. society simply needs competent workers who will keep the nation competitive in the world market. But both history and common sense tell us that a democratic society expects much more: It wants graduates who exhibit sound character, have a social conscience, think critically, are willing to make commitments, and are aware of global problems. (Noddings, 2005, p. 11)

In educating future administrators, universities have recognized the critical value of reflection in preparing educational leaders. This reflection is found in the individual university standards, in state standards, and in national standards, such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), *Standards for School Leaders.*[5] Yet across the country, there is one example after another that suggests that with the right *plan*, teachers and administrators can be replicated, and like empty vessels be filled easily with *canned* programs. It is such quick fixes that are absent of wisdom; that fail to be informed by theory, history, or even common sense; and that ignore a central element of leadership that will be discussed next – courage.

Challenge to Instantaneous Perfection:
Courage in Leadership

Lost in the myopic quagmire of instantaneous perfection and mired in the lack-luster definition of leadership as technical management alone, absent courage, who will carry the beacon of learning? Management is a necessary component of educational leadership. True, if an administrator does not manage the school or district, confusion will reign, and there will be no opportunity for instructional leadership. Technical issues in education must be addressed. However, while management and addressing the technical issues necessarily coexist with courageous leadership focused on adaptive issues, the former can never supplant the latter in leadership.

The frightened leaps of today's educators from one surface solution to another in the hope of staying the relentless criticisms are the norm for educators today. W. Edwards Deming included in his 14 Points, "drive out fear. ... It is necessary for better quality and productivity that people feel secure" (cited in Walton, p. 35). Fullan, too, in his adaptive paradigm, discussed earlier in this paper, advocates efforts to reduce fear if we wish to promote leadership sustainability. Yet educators today face fear at every turn and around every corner.

How then do we define courage for educational leaders? A concept that moves us beyond the notion of adaptive change discussed by Heifetz (2003, 2006) and Fullan (2005) is that of courage. Courage has been defined in many ways. Yet, I am convinced that there can be no true educational leaders if they lack this virtue. Socrates defined courage as one of the primary virtues. It seems to be the most basic and lofty ideal. Particularly today, without courage and with the barrage of attacks on public education inspiring fear, a person in a position of leadership will not be able to rise above the level of a technocratic manager alone, bantered about by the political winds of the day, succumbing to the whims of the latest power monger, as he focuses not on a vision of educational leadership, but on personal survival. Educational leaders are entrusted with teaching our youth about the *good* and the *right*, about democracy and citizenship, and about the sheer joy of learning. Such leadership requires courage.

Robert Louis Stevenson (cited in Heischman, 2002) points out this centrality of courage, calling it the "footstool of the virtues, upon which (all of the others) stand" (para. 6, n.p.). Heischman concurs as to its importance, "courage, it seems, lies at the root of accomplishing a lot of

other good things. Without it, we cannot function as leaders" (para. 8). He goes on to identify courage, "in the form of tough decisions that we must make, the no-win situations where the outcome, essential as it may be, will lead to further problems. Courage in the form of lonely, thoroughly unglamorous, and seemingly unheroic decisions" (para. 16).

Courage is necessary in standing staunchly by what we believe is right. Philosopher Alain de Botton (2000) points out that we sometimes allow, "being jeered at … [to] seem an unequivocal sign that we have gone astray" (p. 29). Heischman concurs, concluding, "as much as we might think to the contrary, in this era of polls and surveys and constant feedback, unpopularity is not a sign that we have gone astray" (2002, para. 20, n.p.). Socrates asks of Crito, "why do we care so much about the opinions of others?" Heishchman points out that educators have to work hard to overcome that concern for the opinions of others, "all of us know that leadership entails being unpopular, bravely or reluctantly taking a course of action that few people will like. Intellectually, we are all aware of that dimension of our work" (para. 18).

What then is courageous leadership? Courage is not a virtue which stands alone. Others (Bolman & Deal, 1995) have identified passion, wisdom, and courage as some of the virtues key to leadership, but without deconstructing these terms. Sergiovanni (2005) has identified hope as another such virtue. I concur with the critical nature of all of these virtues. However, I see wisdom, passion, and hope as actually the characteristics which comprise courageous leadership.

First, courage must include wisdom. The courageous leader has the wisdom to understand the risks he takes. The courageous leader is not foolish. He first seeks the necessary knowledge to understand the issue. Courage does not allow us to proceed blindly, nor does it allow us to hide from action. The courageous leader must have a deep understanding of the issues and of the risks in which courageous leadership will result. Heishchman (2002) points out the need for knowledge and wisdom as components of courage, "there is a gutsiness to courage, but there also must be knowledge, even wisdom. We must know what we are doing, what risks we are taking" (para. 8, n.p.).

Knowing what one is doing does not preclude action, but it certainly will affect timing, process, and planning. For example, the courageous leader will address a curricular deficiency, such as the need for more significant student writing experiences at the high school level. Because it is important for students, he will do so even when faced by a staff of mature teachers who object to any change in the curriculum. However,

wisdom will allow reflection and may cause the courageous leader, for example, to train a few interested teachers first and to allow time for the remaining teachers who do not support the program to become familiar with it, as opposed to insisting upon implementation by all staff in the first year. Another example is that of the courageous leader seeking to address the adaptive challenge of more effective transitioning of students from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school, rather than the typical, technocratic, though superfluous, student orientation that most commonly exists. Wisdom, again, will provide the courageous leader with the knowledge and understanding of the issues if the administrators under his supervision are not embracing the concept of transitioning. For example, it may be that the implementation of several other initiatives is absorbing all of the staff's time. It may be that they have not fully understood the definition of the problem or that they are more comfortable in the role of technocratic managers. The courageous leader will involve administrators in a discussion of the number of students who struggle as they move from one level to the other and initiate reflection on the reasons for that struggle. He may decide to make this the topic of an administrative retreat or to initiate a book study on related topics. He may also choose to substitute this responsibility for one of the others currently consuming administrative staff time. Thus, again, the courageous leader, once an issue has been identified as a legitimate concern, will seek a deep understanding of all the issues involved and will then act. His leadership will thus be informed by wisdom.

Second, courage includes passion. It is passion that provides the fervor of commitment and fuels action. Courageous leaders, administrators and teachers, have a passion for meeting the needs of their students. It is actually this ingredient of courage, this passion, that is not lost even to the youngest child in the classroom as students identify *teachers who care* as a characteristic of outstanding educators. Educators who care, who have a passion for their work, refine programs consistently; explore new programs, for example, alternative schools, gifted-and-talented programs, Saturday schools, schools-within-a-school, and so forth; and devote an endless number of hours in their quest to reach every child. Other examples of the work of passionate educational leaders are: the initiation of teacher leaders in the school culture and the creation of professional learning communities. It is passion both to educate and to meet all the needs of every child that motivates the courageous leader. The latter causes them to focus on addressing the

social, the counseling, the medical, and the nutritional, as well as the educational needs of children. Courageous leaders have been willing to accept these additional responsibilities, knowing that they deplete the financial and human resources of the school. Passion does not allow them to say *no* to any request that supports and, sometimes, even *saves* the children in their care. Passion also serves as the source of courage to take risks. Trying a new program, committing time, risking resources and inviting possible criticism are guided by passion. Passion balanced with wisdom then tempers excessive caution with the willingness to risk. This passion is the very ingredient that is lacking in the for-profit schools and their managers that are sprouting up across the country. It is passion that makes educators selfless and courageous.

The third component of courage is hope, which both comprises vision and permits its existence. Hope is substantive. Sergiovanni (2005) accurately concludes that, "hope is grounded in reality, not wishful thinking" (p. 78). The leader who has courage has the moral strength to be the voice of hope even when feeling personal despair. The courageous leader certainly experiences fear and, yes, despair, but he has the resilience to overcome those feelings. All schools profess a vision, but words are not enough. The vision must be heartfelt, not just framed and posted on the wall. The courageous leader exudes hope. Hope focuses the courageous leader on his vision and does not permit a wavering from that vision. In my first few months as a school superintendent, I learned that our already financially-strapped district was now faced with the reality that the district's major taxpayer had filed bankruptcy. I decided to pursue special legislation for the district. I did so against the advice of an experienced business manager, who pointed out that it was the year of the short legislative session in which the school financial formula and related issues would not be addressed. That knowledge of reality or *wisdom* did not prevent action, although it informed it, because of the element of hope. We had to pursue the vision of adequate funding in order to prevent negative implications in the educational program and in staffing, which in turn would have hurt our students, staff, and community. Thus, hope provided the impetus for our school community's courageous action, and, by involving staff, parents, and community in the process, we were successful in convincing our legislators to pass special legislation to address the problem. Hope was not wishful thinking, but the impetus to reach a part of our vision.

The dialectic of courage and instantaneous perfection evidences the opposition between hope for true leadership and resignation to

superficial, technocratic management. It also mirrors the tension between policy and practice when policy focuses on instantaneous perfection and ignores the depth and support necessary if schools are to be effective in practice.

Courage in leadership will challenge the focus on instantaneous perfection in education because that concept does not serve children, education, or, ultimately, society well. Courage will challenge the foolhardy impatience of instantaneous perfection, whether in the guise of NCLB or other technocratic images. Instantaneous perfection steers educators away from wise, reflective acts of leadership. These educators are lulled into submission by a demanding society that has already accepted quick fixes as good and technocratic answers as right. Instead, the courageous leader must provide leadership informed by wisdom, passion, and hope.

Conclusion:
Courage Negating Fear of Instantaneous Perfection

I have discussed the proliferation of instantaneous perfection and its causes, including the desire for instant gratification and the pursuit of quick fixes facilitated by the advancement and proliferation of technology. I have also elaborated on the differentiation between technical or technocratic thinking and adaptive thinking, the role of each in sustainable leadership, and the negative impact of instantaneous perfection on education. With NCLB as a prime example of instantaneous perfection, resulting in the deskilling of educators and the permeation of fear in the educational world, I again conclude that we must focus on courageous leadership to combat the superficial, confused, technocratic disguises for leadership. Courage is indeed a necessary component of leadership.

There are multiple examples of the total failure of the technical or, at least, of its inability to stand alone, and of the need to move from the technical to the adaptive in school leadership. Certain popular programs or current educational buzz words seem initially to be adaptive in nature. In fact, labels can be deceiving, and the label alone will not determine if a program or strategy is adaptive or merely technical. For example, a school improvement plan may be adaptive or it may be frozen at the technical level. Technical components may be included in the school improvement plan, but school improvement defined only as technical work will be limited in its scope, much as NCLB forces school

improvement to be currently. School improvement will lack vision as in the narrow focus on test scores alone and will, therefore, promote educational mediocrity. Moving to the next level, adaptive school improvement will focus on holistic, broadly-defined learning for every child. Such school improvement will be visionary, promote sustainability, and be inherently courageous.

The *professional learning community*[6] is a popular term today, yet it is not necessarily adaptive in nature. It may remain at the technical level. If so, it will deteriorate into a prescriptive, narrow model with only a new name. If it becomes adaptive in nature, there will be transformational change and a collaborative focus on the school as a true community; on the creation of a committed, learning culture for students and teachers alike; on the fostering of universal leadership; and on the expectation that the learning community will make appropriate and courageous decisions.

In student discipline, *zero tolerance* is a phrase that has become familiar in cases related to weapons, drugs, alcohol, and so forth. Zero tolerance emerged from the desire to find a quick solution to the complex issue of student misbehavior and shocking student violence. Zero tolerance does not examine the complex psychological and sociological issues in the school community and in the general community which result in the inappropriate student behavior. Zero tolerance is undergirded by the principles of instantaneous perfection, so it is no surprise that it has not been successful. These issues do not respond to quick, simplistic solutions – no matter how desperately we wish they would. The complex issues of student behavior require the deep planning of the adaptive level. Cognizance of the issues that affect students and reflection do not suggest tolerating violence, but seeking more effective ways to prevent the behavior.

All of these examples re-emphasize that fast, simplistic fixes, limited to the technical level, just do not work. For sustainable leadership to occur, leaders must have courage – wisdom, passion, and hope. Instantaneous perfection can be challenged when leaders understand the reasons for today's misguided pressure from state and government officials, as well as from some school boards, parents, and members of the business community. Only by understanding that this pressure is the reflection of the desire for quick and oftentimes non-reflective educational fixes can administrators unearth the wisdom and summon the courage to oppose the demands for instantaneous perfection.

Unfortunately, it is far easier to join hands with those exerting this pressure and "to play the game," turning away from wisdom and passion both for doing what is right and for creating a hopeful vision for the future. Admittedly, doing so buys time and, perhaps, some temporary personal stability for the leader. The cost of doing so, however, is a loss of personal integrity as it permits one to be reduced to the role of a technocratic manager. Having courage and insisting on the wiser path, puts one at risk, but it offers ultimate gratification and success.

The dialectic of courage and instantaneous perfection is evident in the daily tug of war, which is the life of the educational leader, and which ultimately determines the type of leadership that will inform practice. A courageous leader will reflect upon and challenge instantaneous perfection, technocratic thinking, and the false search for quick fixes and magic bullets. This leader will have the *wisdom* to embrace "out of the box" thought, the *passion* to reject stagnant, status quo practice, and the *hope* to seek a vision imbued with that which is good and right for the student, for the school community, and for the larger community.

NOTES

1. After reading this manuscript, these are the words of Amy Johns, a student in Educational Leadership Program at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne.
2. There are sporadic uses of the term *instantaneous perfection*, most frequently in discussions of religion and on occasion in other disciplines, including briefly in education. However, it has not been found in scholarly work, nor deeply analyzed as a significant concept.
3. *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) was signed into law by George W. Bush in 2002, reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (*ESEA*). NCLB mandates that 100% of students will achieve proficiency in reading and math by 2014. In the meantime NCLB defines education and accountability in terms of test scores alone and relies on fear and penalties as motivators.
4. In this article, he/his will be used as the grammatically correct form for both male and female educational leaders and to avoid the awkwardness of trying to use both male and female-specific pronouns in each sentence. There is, of course, no intention to limit the definition of leaders by gender.
5. Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium *Standards for School Leaders* (ISLLC) were adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration and the Council of Chief State School Officers (fiscal agent for the project) in 1996. The ISLLC Standards are used as national model

standards for certification/licensure. Over 40 states use the ISLLC Standards in some form.

6. While Thomas Sergiovanni is renowned for the concept of schools as communities, Richard DuFour has made popular the term *professional learning community*. Both address the value of the professional learning community as an opportunity for educators in schools and districts to analyze issues in depth and to provide the leadership in school improvement through this collegial process.

REFERENCES

Bolman, L.G. & Deal, T.E. (1995). *Leading with soul*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cubberley, E. (1922). *Public school administration* (Rev.ed.). Cambridge, MA:Riverside Press.

De Botton, A. (2000). *The consolations of philosophy*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education.*. New York: Macmillan.

Donaldson, G.A., Jr. (2001, October 3). The lose-lose leadership hunt. *Education Week, 21*(5), 42, 45. Retrieved April 22, 2006, from Academic Search Premier database.

DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. (Eds.). (2005). *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Foster, W. (1986). *Paradigms and promises*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Heischman, D.R. (2002). Moral courage: In teaching and school leadership. *Independent School, 62*(1), 22. Retrieved April 22, 2006, from Academic Search Premier database.

Heifetz, R.A. (2003). Adaptive work. In T. Bentley & J. Wilsdon (Eds.), *The adaptive state* (pp. 68-78). London: Demos.

Heifetz, R.A. (2006). Educational leadership: Beyond a focus on instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan, 87*(7), 512-513.

Kanpol, B. (1992). *Towards a theory and practice of teacher cultural politics: Continuing the postmodern debate*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York: Crown.

Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation*. New York: Crown.

Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity in schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McLaren, P. (1994). *Life in schools: An introduction to critical pedagogy in the foundations of education*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

NEA Today. (2005, November). American apartheid. *NEA Today, 24*(3), 32-34.

Noddings, N. (2005) What does it mean to educate the WHOLE CHILD? *Educational Leadership, 63*(1), 8-13.

Purpel, D.E. (1989). *The moral and spiritual crisis in education: A curriculum for justice and compassion in education.* Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey.

Sergiovanni, T. (2005). *Strengthening the heartbeat.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Soder, R., Goodlad, J., & McMannon, T. (Eds.). (2001). *Developing democratic character in the young.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Walsh, D. (1995). *Selling out America's children: How America puts profits before values and what parents can do.* Minneapolis, MN: Fairview.

Walton, M. (1986). *The Deming management method.* New York: Perigee.

Stella Batagiannis is an Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne, having transitioned from superintendent in K-12 education. Her Ph.D. in Educational Administration is from Indiana State University. Research interests are in qualitative research focused on courage in leadership in the various leadership roles, its impact on multicultural education, and its effect on school reform.

Author's Address:
School of Education NEFF Hall-240D
Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne
2101 E. Coliseum Boulevard
Fort Wayne, IN 46805-1499
U.S.A.
EMAIL: batagias@pfw.edu