

LEADING FOR EQUITY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

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A Regenerative Process

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to all the educational leaders who are striving to lead for equity in uncertain times. It is heartfully dedicated to the leaders who shared their hearts and minds with me for the research of this book and whose souls I hope get renewed in the coming years by their teachers, students, and communities they love so much. Lastly and most importantly, my greatest gratitude is to my husband, Jim, for always supporting my work, listening, and responding to multiple iterations, and helping me to create the time and space to read, to think, and to write.

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PREFACE

This book is a process book, but it is also a book of the stories of the real experiences of educational leaders who put their personal lives aside to lead, care, and serve others during three of the most tumultuous years in recent history. The Regenerative Process was born from my work as an Associate Clinical Professor in educational leadership and policy studies. I teach people how to lead in educational organizations. I also consult with leaders, school communities, school districts, and related school entities on how to respond to their educational challenges.

In the fall of 2021, I was asked to present a professional development seminar to an educational community of leaders on how to reconnect their community. Their community had become divided and polarized due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and differing political ideologies. In my preparation and research on healthy communities, what do thriving communities do, and how to heal communities after crisis, I came across regenerative practices. Particularly, regenerative agriculture which honors nature's systems of renewal practiced by indigenous cultures around the world. In regenerative agriculture, one of the main principles is soil regeneration where soil essentially is brought back to life, to its highest self (Tindall et al., 2017).

I thought, if soil can regenerate, why shouldn't we be able to regenerate our human relationships? Why can't we regenerate our ways of being with one another? Why can't we regenerate education? Simultaneously while researching and preparing for this presentation, I was teaching my graduate students who were preparing to become school leaders how to lead through disruption and crises. I was hearing about their experiences in schools as teachers, deans, and assistant principals and the unrelenting demands being placed upon them. My students were sharing experiences of confusion and miscommunication from upper level organizational (district) leadership. I heard about how their students were presenting extreme mental health needs and behaviors they had not seen before.

Schools, leaders, teachers, students, and parents were all struggling to make sense of the turbulence happening around them. I began to frame a process to help this small community and my students make sense of their experiences.

What began as a protocol has evolved into a theoretical process. The Regenerative Process you will learn about in this book is grounded in social theories but grown from the lived experiences of educators and community members. The social theories of recognition, social connection (reconnection), reconciliation, reciprocity, reconstruction, and revolution are the basis for this process.

This book is designed to demonstrate how to use the Regenerative Process while at the same time sharing the experiences of high performing educational leaders during this difficult time. My experiences of using the Regenerative Process with educators have shown its promise for helping people process crisis, disruption, or significant change. I have seen disconnected groups of people reconnect over their common experiences, a desire for social cohesion, and a more hopeful future. I have seen departments, teams, and schools use the learning from the process as a catalyst for future planning fueled by what they learned and want to do better.

My hope is educational leaders at all levels can learn from this process and the leaders' experiences to anticipate the needs of the people in their organizations after crisis, disruption, and significant change. It is clear to me we need a new way forward in education. What we are doing at scale in education is not working for most of our leaders, teachers, and students. We need a new education model that is regenerative, open to the future as it is emerging, inclusive of the people it is designed for, and a leadership model that centers equity, equity mindedness, and is responsive to the times we are in today.