



THE CONVERGENCE OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE 2012 LONDON OLYMPICS: WHAT SCHOOL LEADERS SHOULD KNOW

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Abstract

The 2012 Olympic games were held in London. This event showcased talented athletes from all over the world. These athletes represented different socio-economic, religious, educational, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. They had divergent personalities and unpredictable personal idiosyncrasies. Yet, their coming together as athletes beautified the world and demonstrated multiculturalism as a global phenomenon. In this article, we argue that school leaders can learn from these athletes in regards to building multicultural education in their respective school communities. We further assert that these leaders can create a more multicultural school environment by using a framework called Culturally Relevant Leadership.

Keywords:- Multicultural Education, Diversity, Leadership, Schools.

The Big City

Life is an inspiration,
You can take it or leave it,
No matter what you do or where you go,
You still have a life to live,
a heart to love
and family to belong in.
In The Big City,
Some people have it,
Some people don't,
In life, people try to be fake and lie;
But, lying can't take you anywhere,
neither can being fake.
Everyone is like a flower,
We can grow or we can die.
In The Big City,
There are places to go,
things to do,
and fun to have.

(Alicia Amaog Obiakor, August 20, 2012)

After spending lots of time watching the 2012 Summer Olympics, Alicia, a 4th grader at Lake Bluff School, Shorewood, Wisconsin, wrote the above poem to express her fascination with the Games of the XXX Olympiad. She enjoyed seeing thousands of people from different races, cultures, and classes demonstrate their athleticism and represent their native countries. Alicia wanted the United States to win the majority of the medals - and they did! However, in her mind's eye, it became apparent that she saw more than some people saw—Alicia saw a world united for the common good in the big city of London.

Looking back at the London Olympics, all of the athletes were respected and celebrated despite the differences they brought to the competitions. In fact, the competitions were very intense. Each event was teemed with varying cultures and wrought with religious, socio-economic, political, and educational underpinnings. For instance, athletes from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Middle East, North America, South America, and West Indies competed zealously; and those from different religious faiths and political persuasions competed against each other in wrestling, basketball, track and field, judo, boxing, swimming, and soccer, to mention a few.

Consider a few other Olympic highlights! In soccer, the Italian team had an impressive striker who was Black. Mexico, the Olympic soccer champion, was led by a soccer star with a Brazilian root that helped his team to beat Brazil. Senegal and United Arab Emirates demonstrated some soccer finesse that shocked even the worst skeptics. The United States, Great Britain, Spain, and France had soccer stars and athletes who had their roots from all over the world. In track, there were remarkable stars from The Dominican Republic, Grenada, South Africa, Kenya, Jamaica, The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, Russia, Cuba, Australia, and so on. Amazingly, a White South African track star with physical disabilities (i.e., he does not have two legs, but used assistive technology to run) ran in the track preliminary heats. It was an impressive track event to see the British crowd heroically cheer their long distance runner, a Muslim who emigrated from Somalia. In all sports, people of different races, cultures, languages, values, and religions were featured. The whole Olympic scenario was glaringly multicultural and global—put another way, the focus was on

building a unity of purpose or an esprit de corps that transcended national or tribal boundaries. In fact, the whole world saw itself as a village that exemplified quality and equity at the very highest level.

There is no denying that in the 2012 London Olympics there was some arrogant humility or humble arrogance amongst participants from member nations. Yes, some athletes were expected to dominate (e.g., the Jamaican men track team in the 100 and 200 meters races); however, some were not expected to win like they did (e.g., the United States women gymnastics team won gold). The pomp was unbelievable and it showed how technology has become the life wire of our modern society, especially when one looks at the opening and closing ceremonies on television. No doubt, we were reminded of how small the world has become! Many athletes were taking pictures with their own cell phones and cameras to record their experiences of these world-wide events which had nothing to do with how White, Black, yellow, or brown one's skin color was! The events had nothing to do with one's language, accent, or linguistic sophistication! Additionally, while some bodies were well-built for certain events, the events themselves had nothing to do with how tall, short, fat, or skinny one was. Finally, they had nothing to do with how rich or poor one was, his/her parents were, and his/her country was. What were visible were human talent, endurance, capability, resilience, skill, and commitment. After all, Gabrielle "Gabby" Douglas, an African American girl from a single parent home won the overall gold in gymnastics. Mexico defeated Brazil to win the overall gold in soccer. Jamaica swept the gold, silver, and bronze medals in the 200 meters race. American women won the overall gold in soccer, gymnastics, and the 4x100 and 4x400 relays. In fact, one could see similar feats in the overall game where people of different countries, races, colors, cultures, languages, and religions excelled. It became very evident that friendships were built at different levels. Is it any wonder why these friendly relationships do not translate into positive political and socio-economic relationships at school, community, national and global levels?

Bringing the aforementioned dynamics to educational, political, and socio-economic discussions seems like a big task. But, it is not! We need concerted efforts for such discourse to come to fruition. We need visionary leaders who can step outside their comfort zones to move the world forward! In addition, we need selfless school and community leaders who have demonstrable integrity to push for new ideas just as John F. Kennedy pushed forward the Peace Corps of America to reach the remotest areas of the world. Surely, some school leaders have been able to translate global discourse into meaningful school programs to advance humanity. For example, the United Nations (UN) have been helpful in resolving conflicts all over the world; the World Health Organization (WHO) have promoted health and well-being in the world; the World Bank (WB) has helped to stabilize the world economy; the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) has buttressed education programming at global levels; and the United Nations Children's Educational Funds (UNICEF) has advanced educational programs for young children all over the world. Still, our cups seem to be globally half-full or half-empty, depending on who is looking at it; and we seem to always rationalize why we have not been able to solve critical school problems that have global implications. As young Alicia warned us in the introductory poem, "In life, people try to be fake and lie; but, lying can't take you anywhere, neither can being fake. Everyone is like a flower. We can grow or we can die." In this article, we use the events of the 2012 London Olympics to challenge school leaders to comprehend the impact of their actions or inactions in building school communities that have far reaching implications.

Struggles for Multicultural Education and Leadership in United States Schools

Again, looking back at the 2012 London Olympics, we can learn a lot about multicultural education and leadership in the United States. Can school leaders put into practice multicultural lessons of the London Olympics in United States' schools? Even though there are visible demographic shifts in our student populations, our educational policies are still Euro-centrally based and efforts to equalize education and narrow achievement gaps continue to meet with stiff resistance and opposition. There continues to be problems associated with the general and special education of all students in our schools and many of our students continue to be misidentified, misassessed, miscategorized, misplaced, and misinstructed because they look, learn, talk, and act differently (Obiakor, 2001). In many cases, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) learners in our urban schools continue to be disproportionately placed in special education. While they are rarely placed in programs for students with gifts and talents, they are predominantly placed in programs for students with behavior disabilities/disorders and further suspended and expelled from school because of their different behavioral patterns and learning styles (Obiakor, 2007).

It is common knowledge that many students who are linguistically different are viewed as linguistically deficient. As a result, they are inappropriately placed in remedial or special education (Garcia & Dray, 2007). This premise was not operational during the 2012 London Olympics. More often than not, the lack of language valuing is extended to students' parents and communities. To a large measure, teachers and school leaders who work with CLD learners are ill-prepared and unprepared and are frequently unwilling to shift their foundational presumptions or traditional paradigms. Coupled with these problems, the colleges and schools of Education that prepare these professionals lack the diversity needed for educating pre-service students and leaders for a changing world (Brooks, 2012; Obiakor, Grant, & Obi, 2010). Apparently, at all educational levels in the United States (i.e., from pre-kindergarten to university levels), the playing fields are not level for CLD populations, especially in the establishment of equitable educational programming.

Legal and Legislative Pursuits of Excellence and Equity

While public education is preserved by national governments worldwide, in the United States, education is neither considered a fundamental right under the federal constitution (*San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, 1973) nor under direct control of Congress (U.S. Const. amend. X). Despite this fact, the federal government has had input into states' educational policies by invoking the authority to do so primarily under the General Welfare Clause of the U.S. Constitution (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8). This clause is generally referred to as the Spending Clause. Its purposefully vague wording has been construed to afford the federal government the power to collect taxes and distribute public money for the general welfare of all citizens (see *Helvering v. Davis*, 1937). State governments rely on the U. S. Supreme

Court to protect the states' right to choose not to receive federal monies in exchange for adhering to federal legislation that may trespass on state policy domains "if the conditions are educationally, financially, or legally offensive" (*Wheeler v. Barrera*, 1974, cited in Alexander & Alexander, 2009, p. 77). And, while binding, undue federal constraints on state decision-making solely based on states accepting federal monies may be restricted (*South Dakota v. Dole*, 1987). As it stands, the federal government has indirect yet considerable influence over education policies when states accept attached federal dollars. Hence, federal education policies and ensuing practices are often cemented through litigation. To better understand how the federal government has impacted public education, a brief look into the antecedents of the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) is helpful.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

With ample research clearly indicating that poverty is often coupled with poor student achievement (Bennet et al., 2004), the federal government, in 1965, formulated what was then the largest and most ambitious piece of federal education legislation ever proposed, the ESEA. Under Title I of the ESEA, the newly enacted legislation "operated narrowly to support the states in paying the extra costs of educating 'educationally disadvantaged' students" (Liguori, 2006, p. 6). The act was structured to aid local school districts in their efforts to improve student performance in schools with sizeable populations of children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. As it appears, the ESEA endorsed theories proposed by standards-based education reform initiatives. These theories were based on the belief that high expectations and expressed goals result in academic success for all students. It promoted an increased focus on reading and mathematics by identifying how well students were learning and when they might need extra assistance. Under ESEA, each state used data from annual assessments to determine how a student was performing on a year-to-year basis and to help schools diagnose and meet the needs of each student. Nearly 30 years later, this legislation was amended with the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. This revised decree served to hold students who participated in Title I funded programs accountable to the same academic standards as other students, regardless of their economic and educational conditions (Liguori, 2006). To date, the ESEA has been amended eight times.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

The NCLB Act, the most recent reauthorization of ESEA, promulgated a number of federal programs aimed at improving the performance of primary and secondary schools by increasing the standards of accountability for states, school districts, and individual schools. The NCLB Act increased districts' flexibility to use Title I resources where they were needed most. Additionally, the NCLB Act provided parents with the ability to choose which schools their child would attend once the state determined that their home school was in need of improvement. The law also required each state to supply parents with information about the quality of their child's school, about the qualifications of their child's teachers, and about their child's progress in key content areas. Under the NCLB Act, each state has the responsibility to decide what its students should learn at each grade level. Based on identified competencies, individual states must then develop rigorous academic standards to drive the curriculum and subsequent instruction. The results of these assessments should direct resources for instructional activities such as after-school tutoring and summer school for those students who are falling behind. To ward off potential state concerns that the federal government was attempting to diminish the state's authority over public education through the NCLB Act, Congress left it to the states to devise appropriate curricula, standardized tests, pass rates, and methods for calculating graduation rates. However, this nod to state control over education has generated inconsistency and variety in developing state standardized tests, in setting passing rates, and in determining graduation rates (Watson, 2010). Such diversity among the 50 states makes it difficult to ascertain what and who is successful and to compare those results across states.

Educational and Socio-Historical Connections

Eradicating the achievement gap and improving the academic and life outcomes of CLD learners calls for an honest and systemic look at the nature and purpose of school systems. The question remains: Are school systems merely the beginnings of a caste system or viable pathways to a better life? For example, African American males are disproportionately represented in special education classes (Gardner & Miranda, 2001) and leave schools with worthless diplomas (Watson, 2010). Earlier, Lomotey (1988) observed that many public school systems in America have become mere pipelines to prison. Ofer (2011) confirmed this point when he reported that school discipline policies overwhelming chasten CLD students, propelling them into the criminal justice system at an early age. Despite these bleak realities, many CLD students and their families still deem education as their only viable choice for a better tomorrow. Thus, it behooves educational leaders to help CLD learners to actualize their dreams by critically shifting paradigms in schools and colleges of Education.

It is important to know that socio-historical developments have shaped and molded America's contemporary educational situation. This realization will help us to rethink traditional policies, decisions, and approaches that have worked to create separate and inequitable educational systems. Additionally, it is critical to look at the impact of suburbanization in the United States. For example, Villegas and Lucas (2002b) stated that "the suburbanization of the United States has created two racially segregated and economically unequal systems of education – one urban, mostly for children who are poor and of color, the other suburban, largely white, middle-class children" (p. 48). Logically, these students in these areas have totally different educational experiences. Students in urban areas frequently attend schools that are antiquated, dilapidated, and even crumbling (Kozol, 1991, 2005). This can send a clear message to students that their school is inferior or no one cares, which is in stark contrast to their suburban counterparts who frequently attend schools that are updated, in good condition, and in some cases new. Sadly, urban schools do not always have access to certified and/or qualified teachers. "In addition to the unsafe and demoralizing facilities they offer their teachers, poorer inner-city districts generally pay teachers less than wealthy suburban school districts" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b, p. 47). Uncompetitive salaries increase the problem of locating and keeping the best teachers. Unfortunately, many urban

schools hire teachers who may not have certification in the subject in which they are teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Jerald, 2002). While it would seem like students who are in the most need, would get the most resources/assistance, many times, this is not the case for students in urban areas (Beachum & McCray, 2012; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; McCray & Beachum, 2014).

There are many teachers and school leaders who engage in deficit-thinking when it comes to urban students. This line of thinking is based in a belief that certain students have intellectual or cultural deficits that need to be corrected. Moreover, it promotes short-sighted thinking that is primarily shaped by White, middle-class values. "When we use universal standards to judge student competence, without acknowledging disparities in either economic resources or opportunity, we consistently privilege the privileged" (Larson & Ovando, 2001, p. 133). To a large measure, this spawns a viewpoint that narrowly "blames the victim" and privileges the White, middle class dominant culture. Villegas and Lucas (2002b) agreed that:

Teachers looking through the deficit lens believe that the dominant culture is inherently superior to the cultures of marginalized groups in society. Within this framework, such perceived superiority makes the cultural norms of the dominant group the legitimate standard for the United States and its institutions. Cultures that differ from the dominant norm are believed to be inferior. Cultural differences, therefore, are viewed as problems...Such perspectives inevitably lead teachers to emphasize what students who are poor and of color cannot do rather than what they already do well. (pp. 36-37)

In addition, these perceptions support a position that these deficits can be genetic and these students are intellectually inferior to other suburban students or even incapable of learning (Milner, 2006; 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b).

Going Beyond the "Excellence" Rhetoric to Reach CLD Learners

Beachum, McCray, and Huang (2010) indicated that "educational excellence is now defined by high stakes testing, greater accountability, school choice, and achieving an adequate yearly progress" (p. 53). These are not totally negative goals, in fact, they can be beneficial. The problem manifests itself when educational excellence tries to obscure, confuse, or replace the push for educational equity. "In its most noble sense, excellence is an ideal that should permeate American educational ideology, but its usage has veered from more principled conceptions and has been used to compete and conflict with equity" (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005, p. 7). Educational equity promotes the idea that all students have what they need to be successful. In short, it encourages a level playing field in terms of quality teaching and leadership, access to a high-quality curriculum, culturally relevant teaching approaches, and high expectations for all learners (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Brooks, 2012; McCray, Beachum, & Yawn, 2012). In the end, it impacts resource allocation and student motivation.

Challenges faced by CLD learners due to preconceived mental models (Larson & Ovando, 1991) and far-reaching generalizations are not new to CLD populations whether in or outside of K - 20 settings. Dubois (1989) raised the issue of the color line at the start of the 20th century and as we embark on the next millennium Black, brown, and yellow people continue to be encumbered by their inherent differences. Instead of being celebrated for their rich cultural histories as witnessed in the London Olympic villages, CLD learners are subjugated by Euro-centered pedagogies and marginalized by educational policies in America's classrooms. These findings are supported by the increasing achievement gap (Holzman, 2012) and serve to undermine the historic *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision that struck down segregation in the nation's classrooms. Unfortunately, America's most recent educational practices and policies have been found to result in many "(un)intended" consequences (Tillman, 2004) and to have created a new system of segregation (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). Educator and activist, Jonathan Kozol (1991, 2005) detailed these realities in his texts, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* and *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling*. Based on a six-year study of successful teachers of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) called for culturally relevant teaching to be used as a tool to improve the life chances of CLD students. Culturally relevant pedagogy encompasses three core principles for student success: "(a) Students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (C) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160).

Earlier, Paulo Freire (1998) aligned transformational learning with critical self-reflection in his groundbreaking text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In the first stage of Freire's activist learning paradigm, the oppressed, through critical self-reflection, realized they are indeed oppressed. This knowledge serves to liberate them and inspires them to free others. In the second stage of the pedagogy, the oppressed are no longer oppressed, and the oppressor no longer oppresses. Ironically, it is (only) the formerly oppressed who can free both themselves and their oppressors. To date, the question begs: How can educational leaders ameliorate the conditions that hinder academic and life outcomes of CLD learners? Apple (2013) called for school leaders to become "critical researchers" in their respective settings in the face of glaring realities predicated by unjust educational policies and practices. This directive is in stark contrast to the teacher-centered banking model of education prescribed by traditional teachers and teacher leaders (Freire, 1973). Based on this model, students are characterized as empty vessels and taught rote skills, which are usually non-transferable to their everyday lives and assessed by standardized tests. Clearly, educational leaders, particularly those in urban settings, must utilize their students' realities as a context and impetus for their learning. As such, in order for education to be affective and improve academic and life outcomes of CLD learners, the curricula must be meaningful, tactile, and "committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).

Promoting Culturally Relevant Leadership

Today's educational leaders must have the attitude and spirit of the Olympic athletes, which is characterized by determination, hard work, mission-orientation, and the ability to compete and collaborate. Culturally Relevant

Leadership framework by Beachum and McCray (2012) and McCray and Beachum, (2011) is a way to buttress these qualities in the school building. In addition, it is a process whereby school leaders start with the 'self' in freeing their minds and escaping the snares of the status quo. As McCray and Beachum (2011) pointed out, "Leaders must then confront negative images and stereotypes resulting in a change in attitude. Finally, as reflective practitioners, they must change the way they operate on a daily basis" (p. 497). Culturally relevant Leadership is supported by the foundational ideas of liberatory consciousness, pluralistic insight, and reflexive practice. The following sub-sections discuss these ideas.

Liberatory Consciousness

The Culturally Relevant Leadership framework "is akin to critical consciousness and seeks to raise awareness levels and increase knowledge with regard to diversity and social justice" (McCray & Beachum, 2011, p. 92). The reason for liberatory consciousness is because a state of unconsciousness or what some may call dyconsciousness exists (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a). Thus, leaders must be aware that systemic inequities do exist that can be beyond the solution of taking personal responsibility. As Villegas and Lucas (2002b) remarked,

Awareness of the pervasiveness and longevity of the inequities in schools and of the structures and practices that perpetuate them can be disheartening for prospective teachers [and administrators]. But it is essential that they recognize these realities. If they see schools through the rose-colored glasses of the meritocratic myth, they will unwittingly perpetuate inequities. (p. 58)

There is a well-established precedent with regard to raising one's consciousness (Beachum & McCray, 2011; Bogotch, Beachum, Blount, Brooks, & English, 2008; Brooks, 2012; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Freire, 1973; Kailin, 2002; Ryan, 2006). Liberatory consciousness is very important because it is an internal process where the leader takes personal and purposeful steps toward self-improvement. This may include reading social justice research/literature, going to diversity-related conferences and meetings, starting a book club on the achievement gap, inviting diversity experts into the school to train faculty and administration, and/or holding focus groups or small group discussions with students to truly understand their experiences in the school. Milner (2006) captured the essence of liberation when he wrote, "Completeness for the oppressed begins with liberation. Until liberation is achieved, individuals are fragmented in search of clarity, understanding, and emancipation. This liberation is not outside of us or created or accomplished through some external force. Rather, it begins with a change in thinking" (p.85).

Pluralistic Insight

Pluralistic insight deals with a school leader's disposition toward students. "It leans toward an affirming and positive notion of students (especially students of color) that acknowledges the uniqueness of their experiences and their rich diversity" (McCray & Beachum, 2011, p. 92). It is apparent that educator's attitudes and perceptions impact how they interact with CLD students (Kunjufu, 2002; Obiakor, 2001; Prier, 2012). In the words of Tatum (2007),

Regardless of our own racial or ethnic backgrounds, we have all been exposed to racial stereotypes and flawed educational psychology, and unless we are consciously working to counter their influence on our behavior, it is likely that they will shape (subtly perhaps) our interactions with those who have been so stereotyped (p. 52)

Pluralistic insight mirrors Culturally Relevant Pedagogy by insisting that leadership styles be congruent with the student population and context. In addition, it promotes an authentic belief in the abilities, experiences, and knowledge of students and their communities. This approach begins to reject the negative stereotypes, misinformation, and outright biases that unfairly stigmatize CLD learners. This is not only the task of leadership, but also staff. "Culturally relevant leaders should assist people in the organization to understand themselves and their students. This requires not only the appropriate knowledge base, but also the proper attitude especially when working with students of color and/or of different cultures/backgrounds" (Beachum, 2011, p. 32). While it is true that we all have our opinions and perceptions of students, schools, and communities, we also have the responsibility to teach and lead past rumors, naysayers, negative people, and community-based stigmas. Pluralistic insight is a way for this to occur.

Reflexive Practice

Reflexive practice is "a form of educational praxis that is oriented toward change agency" (Beachum, 2011, p. 32). This third component addresses the leader's practices, skills, and actual work in the school. Furthermore, "the work of the educator is not viewed as strictly objective, but rather educators' work is connected to the surrounding community of the school and the external society at large" (Beachum, 2011, p. 33). Earlier, Singleton and Linton (2006) stated that a good administration should lead "the effort to reach out to all parents and members of the community" (p. 227). They added that a culturally competent school is the kind of place where

Parents and other community members do not feel disfranchised nor do they feel intimidated due to their own personal educational attainment, English language skills, racial description, economic status, dress, or perceptions of school derived from their own personal experiences. Families know that their voice matters in school affairs" (p. 227).

This becomes evidenced in the way the school reaches out to the community and also brings the community into the school. This approach has the potential to unlock new possibilities and creativity. School leaders who engage in reflexive practice begin to encourage endeavors like having an in-school community liaison, establishing a "community corner" (where community events, artifacts, and information can be on display), promoting strong university-school partnerships, and making the school a hub for social interaction, educational debate, and community connection. As Swaminathan (2005) pointed out, "Schools can never divorce themselves from the communities where they exist" (p. 195).

Conclusion

The tenets of Culturally Relevant Leadership framework create avenues for the overall improvement of leadership

quality and school effectiveness. As it appears, the 2012 London Olympics operationalized multiculturalism and the Culturally Relevant Leadership framework. Clearly, the athletes knew who they were and the countries that they represented, however, based on their actions and activities, they inspired the world in more ways than one. They showed liberatory consciousness as leaders. They directly sought enhancement, information, development, and/or instruction that are tied to diversity and equity. They had pluralistic insight to build on liberatory consciousness by promoting affirming perspectives of themselves and their countries, and they took the additional step of modeling and encouraging themselves and others. They built history and sustained culture in all their activities. Just like school leaders, they were deliberate and reflective in their efforts. In school systems, Culturally Relevant Leadership should help school leaders to address actual changes. They could include more diverse course offerings, an investigation into the gender and achievement gap, or even a neighborhood walk by teachers and school leaders to engage the surrounding community. To a large extent, these leaders could advocate community engagement and a two-way street of communication and collaboration between the school and community.

Just as in the 2012 London Olympics, we need school leaders who know who they are, but who can also inspire people to value cultural, linguistic, learning, behavioral, and socio-economic differences. We need leaders who can enhance collaboration, consultation and cooperation, not just at school levels, but also at community levels. In fact, a child who comes from any part of the world can be educated. To a narrow thinker, the 2012 London Olympics events were just about sports competitions or meritocracy at a global level. The reality is that 2012 London Olympics became a multicultural celebration that actually boosted world peace and brought people together. The athletes became culturally relevant leaders who used their athletic prowess to solve problems and light candles at the darkest part of the world's tunnel. The 2012 Olympic events have come and gone; yet their impacts live on! Yes, people expected the best performances from the athletes; but, as humans, some did not meet expectations while some exceeded expectations. They came from different countries and spoke different languages; and we saw their perfections and imperfections. They bridged gaps regarding our assumptions; and they led us to value differences in people. We want school leaders who can lead us like the 2012 Olympic athletes. It is imperative that we have educators and leaders who can assist us in maximizing our fullest potential at all educational levels. The reasons are simple! The world is getting smaller and smaller based on technological advancements; the paradigm has already shifted; the train has left the station; and there is no going back! Efforts must be proactively doubled to educate new cadres of school leaders who have the vision and integrity to make a difference in the lives of others. We also need educators and leaders who are knowledgeable, culturally sensitive, globally abreast of the times, up to multiple challenges, and caring. Finally, as leaders, we believe it is time we began to light the candles in others instead of cursing the darkness in them because as young Alicia concluded, "There are places to go, things to do, and fun to have."

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