THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS'
SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP PRAXIS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation study to my amazingly supportive spouse, Dr. Pamela Louise Ross McClain. Thank you for your continuous encouragement and direction which fueled my professional growth and desire to excel as an educator. Thank you for being the anchor for our family so that our sons' (Ross' and Jaiden's) immediate needs were met. I appreciate the sacrifices that you made professionally and personally so that I could pursue my career ambitions.

I also dedicate this work to my parents, siblings, and extended family members who have all nurtured my intellect allowing me opportunities to cultivate my skills as an educational leader.

I dedicate this research to the children of Saginaw, Michigan who always deserved more than I was ever able to provide them as a teacher, administrator, superintendent, or community advocate. Keep striving for your dreams and know that you are wired for success.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the Daniels Heights project housing complex and First Ward Community Center. Thank you for always believing that I could go from the projects to the principalship and beyond.

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Abstract

This dissertation is a phenomenological study conducted in a Midwest urban school district that explores the social justice leadership experience of secondary school administrators (6th - 12th grades) under the supervision of a self-identified social justice advocate superintendent. This study uses principal and superintendent interview data to describe the phenomenon of social justice leadership. The study captures the unique experiences of school administrators of varied gender, cultural, socioeconomic and communal backgrounds who are charged with systematizing equitable academic and ancillary support for students from diverse and economically underprivileged backgrounds.

The dissertation introduces the topic of social justice leadership in secondary schools, includes a review of the literature that contains definitions, characteristics, and the theoretical underpinnings of social justice leadership. This dissertation also presents a rationale for a hermeneutic and egological qualitative phenomenological design, maintaining that this approach is best suited to capture the multiple perspectives on social justice leadership that exist in one complex, diverse, and interconnected school district. Findings contribute to understanding the essence of social justice leadership in secondary urban schools.

Keywords: *social justice leadership, secondary principals, equity, cultural competence, culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, school climate, transformational leadership*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) officially adopted Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) as a means for ensuring that all students have access to knowledgeable leaders capable of creating equitable learning outcomes and environments. The PSEL standards are primarily for building-level leadership focusing on the work of principals and their assistants. They are research-based principles that if applied with fidelity in practice demonstrate improved student outcomes. The standards include expectations for professional behavior and responsibilities of Michigan educators that one can argue have implications for social justice leadership in schools. For example, Standard 1 - Mission, Vision, and Core Values (NPBEA, 2015), states that effective leaders:

> Articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity; inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement (p. 9).

Furthermore, Standard 2 – Ethics and Professional Norms (NPBEA, 2015), goes on to state that effective leaders "Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity" (p. 10). Likewise, Standard 3 – Equity and Cultural Responsiveness (NPBEA, 2015) asserts, effective leaders "Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of) leadership" (p. 11). One can argue that based on the Professional Standards for

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Educational Leaders and depending on how they are interpreted by educators who vow to uphold them, all educators functioning within the scope of this leadership criteria might be classified (to some degree) as social justice leaders.

Modern-day public Pre-K-12 school systems and educators in the United States have been idealistically charged with the mission of providing the promise of equality of educational opportunity for all students. Nonetheless, public school systems have simultaneously existed as microcosms of larger American society; therefore, public schools have mirrored and, some might argue, reproduced social inequities that persist, even today, in the United States.

Much of the literature regarding social justice leadership (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Theoharis, 2004) in education examines how principals, informed by social justice theory, develop a leadership philosophy to (1) factor in the unique needs of learners to transform curriculum and best instructional practices, (2) reculture the entire learning community, and (3) establish a collaborative relationship with all members of the school community and its stakeholders. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) argue that principals should encourage staff "to get to know their students and their students' families and community on a personal level…to learn to dignify the culture of their students" (p. 609). Social justice leaders must commit to understanding the communities where they are called to serve in order to eliminate achievement gaps between high achieving students and their underperforming counterparts.

Achieving social justice and equity in schools is a complex and subjective undertaking. Lyman and Villani (2002) assert that school leaders must have a working knowledge of the effects of poverty on students' families and the local community to truly understand how to proactively approach learning. Leading for social justice in education calls for strategic and intentional proactive measures in schools (Theoharis, 2007). A preeminent scholar on social justice leadership, Theoharis (2007), states, "Social justice in schools does not happen by chance. It takes more than what traditionally has been understood as good leadership to achieve greater equity" (p. 253). I have worked alongside principals who remain committed to promoting social justice in spite of the personal and professional challenges they encountered. Whether serving as a classroom teacher, building principal, or Superintendent of Schools, I have always tried to achieve and model professional standards for being a social justice leader. My experience as a career educator has intensified my commitment to educational leadership that promotes social justice and equity, but I am fully aware of the isolation, resistance, risk, and retaliation involved in this work.

Scanlan (2012) notes a key deficit area in social justice scholarship is "its failure to articulate coherent theories of action through which school leaders actually apply social justice praxis" (p. 350). Likewise, Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009) classify the integration of social justice leadership in educational programs and degrees as being "soft" and marginalized when compared to more traditional topics in education such as accountability, finance, and theory. The idealism of social justice leadership is abundantly represented in the academic literature. Theoharis (2010) describes a

qualitative study using a positioned subject approach of six principals who were primarily concerned with issues of justice and equity within their school cultures. Theoharis recalls the reflection of one principal's work ethic as "permeating everything I did, every decision I made, every conversation I had, and every part of my leadership (p. 363). However, scholars like Marshall (2004) affirm a notable lack of research that illuminates the shortage of educational leadership training necessary to address inequalities, internal dissonance, subversive strategizing, and rough justice that often is a byproduct of taking on the work of dismantling institutionalized barriers to learning for marginalized students.

This phenomenological study explores how six secondary public school principals, under my direct supervision, in a mid-sized urban school district in the Midwest characterize the evolution of their social justice leadership roles and practice. This type of inquiry into school leadership for social justice is pertinent in the current national climate because existing trends in the shifting demographics within urban centers make it more critical for scholars to research social justice leadership practices of school leaders who are engaged in the work of responding to the diverse needs of students from multicultural backgrounds.

Background

The principal is seen as the most integral component in the school's transformation process in helping to facilitate practices that address academic inequalities that result when students are denied access to a high-quality education. Theoharis (2007) states, "A recurring theme from these schools and from the literature

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on school change is that exemplary leadership helps point to the necessity for change and helps make the realities of change happen" (p. 223). Not surprisingly, scholars such as Dantas (2007), Keiser (2009), and Villegas and Lucas (2002) forecast that administrators must be able to respond to the ever-changing expectations for school leadership based on: changing national demographics specifically within urban centers, achievement disparities, equity concerns, and ethical issues associated with leading continuous school improvement efforts. Educational leaders must also seek to develop cultural proficiency to understand the diverse populations of students whom they serve. Villegas and Lucas (2002) express the need for educators to develop a sense of sociocultural consciousness which is "the awareness that a person's worldwide view is not universal, but is profoundly influenced by life experiences" (p. 31). Keiser (2009) also suggests that "educators who see themselves as monocultural Americans are more likely to perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes" (p. 60).

A growing body of literature (Blackmore, 2002; Ryan, 2010) exists that explores how the micropolitical actions of principals can influence differences between what educators typically conceive to be good educational leadership and what is called for in social justice leadership. Ryan (2010) insists that effective social justice principals must have a keen understanding of politics that drive their districts and school community. Their ability to navigate the politics of their organizations is thought to be directly tied to their capability to influence social justice and equity issues. Scanlan (2012) observes, "while describing how to conduct equity audits or to integrate support services, the literature leaves under-examined the mechanisms by which educators themselves learn

to enact these changes" (p. 251). This would suggest that more research needs to be conducted on how social justice principals perceive themselves as evolving leaders who have the ability to influence teachers' actions and improve student achievement when teachers are given the appropriate support and resources.

Statement of the Problem

Current trends in the shifting demographics of students within urban centers make it more critical that educators explore inclusive leadership practices that can address the multiple needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Many urban school systems within the United States are saturated with an overwhelming majority of Caucasian teachers instructing minority students. Milner (2010) confirms that although urban school systems became more diverse, data indicated that from 1999 to 2000, "public school teachers were predominantly White, non-Hispanic (84%). Of the remaining proportion, 7.8% were African-American, 5.7% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian American, and .8% Native American" (p. 120). According to the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting (2013), the racial composition of the U.S. teachers' workforce has failed to keep pace with shifting student demographics.

Principals who espouse social justice practices attempt to provide more equality of educational opportunity to students who have been historically marginalized in the dominant culture (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Furman, 2012; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). School administrators in urban districts who rely on a social justice leadership philosophy to transform climate and culture must contemplate a number of

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considerations before enacting this leadership approach. Theoharis (2007) observes, "Marginalized students do not receive the education they deserve unless purposeful steps are taken to change schools on their behalf with both equity and justice consciously in mind" (p. 250). For instance, many school leaders recognize that all students have unique needs that must be met to move students towards self-actualization. Social justice leaders take a more comprehensive stance towards understanding how to be responsive to students' special circumstances by analyzing the influence of social constructions such as race, class, religion, and special needs classifications on students' overall quality of life.

The CAEP Commission on Standards and Performance Reporting (2013) indicated that minority students comprised about 40% of public school enrollment while teachers of color represented approximately 17% of the teaching field. Hernandez and Kose (2012), in their study of developing a model for intercultural awareness, forecasted the shifting demographics of minority students. These authors cited U.S. Census Bureau data projecting, "By 2023, children of color under 18 will be the U.S majority" (p. 513). Maxwell (2014) and Yoshinaga (2016) later reported that the majority of minority students was estimated to be 50.3% by the fall of 2014–2015 school year. Educators who are not accustomed to working with minority students often have to undergo a process of self-examination to assist them in identifying with specific student populations and challenges these students face (Gay, 2010; Sleeter, 2017). Sleeter (2017) shares that although more White teachers have demonstrated a willingness to familiarize themselves with the culture and realities of students of color,

the literature (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Flynn, 2015) often cites resistance and fatigue as common byproducts of White teachers' interactions with minority students.

Social justice leaders must act as cultural agents who assist students and teachers with developing curriculum that is culturally responsive to all stakeholders (Cooper, 2009; Evans, 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Smith, 2005). Principals have to anticipate staffs' and students' needs resulting from increased cultural diversity in schools and advocate for resources that support valuing multicultural education. This includes building familial partnerships to assist with ensuring that students' socioemotional and academic needs are being appropriately addressed (Sanders, Sheldon, & Epstein, 2005). These competencies are essential for any social justice principal attempting to enact sustainable, comprehensive school reform initiatives that enhance climate and culture while fostering community partnerships that are supportive of restructuring measures. Social justice principals' perceptions of their efficacy in cultivating the necessary leadership skills associated with social justice work is vital to increasing student achievement and creating a collaborative, collegial working environment for all staff.

Social justice principals must possess the capacity to influence a teacher's actions and beliefs to establish a culture of shared accountability. Brown (2004); Marks and Printy (2003), and McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez, Cambron-McCabe, Scheurich (2008) suggest that school leaders must develop a critical consciousness around social justice issues that influences their ability to identify with marginalized groups. Administrators have to become knowledgeable

about how social justice leadership can be used to develop and implement a culturally responsive curriculum encouraging teachers to adopt pedagogy and practices that reflect and respect students' diverse backgrounds. Hernandez and McKenzie (2012) accurately state there must be significant buy-in from administration and staff to promote a social justice platform. These scholars assert school leaders must ask themselves, "Is there a high level of commitment from faculty and support from administration to begin a program focused on social justice?" (p. 67). Social justice principals have a professional obligation to assist teachers and students with understanding changing attitudes towards embracing fundamental principles and benefits of social justice theory and multicultural education. Wooleyhand (2013) emphasizes this position suggesting, "Principals must steadfastly connect actions to their beliefs. Their ongoing message to students, staff, and parents must include genuine concern for the progress of all students" (p. 11). A closer examination is needed for pinpointing the success of principals' roles in employing tenets of social justice theory as a practice for leveling the playing field for disadvantaged students.

Purpose of the Study

Principals who espouse social justice leadership practices seek to provide equitable opportunities to students who have been historically marginalized in the dominant culture. The study is designed to investigate the lived experiences of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district as related to their leadership roles in advocating for social justice in their respective schools. School administrators in urban districts, which are challenged by multiple

social problems, often factor in a number of variables before enacting a social justice leadership approach. A review of the scholarly literature (DeMatthews & Mawhinney 2014; Scanlan, 2013; Theoharis, 2007) on the work of social justice leadership principals illustrates a clear relationship between student achievement and a social justice principal's ability to manage (1) the impact of educator actions and beliefs on the learning culture, (2) culturally responsive curriculum, pedagogy, and practices, and (3) the maintenance of a positive school culture and climate based on supportive communal partnerships. A closer examination of the successes and challenges of principals when employing tenets of social justice theory as a practice for improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged students is warranted.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study is guided by the following primary research question: What is the social justice leadership experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent? Relevant ancillary research questions germane to this study included:

- What experiential knowledge has shaped the actions, beliefs, and ethical decision-making of 6th-12th grade principals in regard to educational leadership for social justice?

- What, if any, professional growth/development training experiences in social justice theory and/or practice do secondary principals draw upon to support their advocacy for social justice?

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- What experiences do secondary school principals have in assessing the impact of social justice practices on school climate and culture?

- What experiences do secondary school principals have with planning and implementing professional development for faculty, staff, students, and parents that is relevant to social justice in education?

- What resistance at the building/communal level, if any, do secondary school principals experience while attempting to implement social justice practices to improve school climate and culture?

- What supports, if any, do secondary school principals acknowledge are provided by central office administration in order to implement social justice practices with fidelity at the building level?

- What experiences do secondary school principals report are sources of resilience in their work as social justice leaders in public schools?

Significance of the Study

The scholarly literature (Brown, 2004; Santamaria, 2013; Shields, 2012) acknowledges the importance of social justice theory in addressing educational equity issues of students who have been historically locked-out of opportunities afforded to members of dominant culture. Brown (2004) argues for a more accurate depiction of the realities of marginalized minority students in the literature and within programs used to educate social justice leaders. Santamaria (2013) shares, "Including multiple perspectives in leadership practice sounds innovative today; however, in the recent past, multiple perspectives of women and people of color were not considered with

regard to scholarly contributions in educational leadership" (p. 348). In order to keep pace with the growing demands of an increasingly diverse nation and world, educational leadership will have to become progressively more inclusive. Leadership for social justice must resist constraining and prescriptive constructs in favor of remaining malleable and responsive to the contextual circumstances of diverse and multicultural student populations.

As a Superintendent of Schools who espouses the tenets of social justice leadership theory, I hoped to gain deeper insights into how a commitment to social justice and equity affects the leadership of secondary principals. The complex interplay between a principal's professional and personal identity and this outward and inward viewpoint affects how he/she makes leadership decisions in the interest of promoting social justice in their schools is worthy of more research because no formulaically precise social justice leadership praxis exists (Bogotch, 2002; McKenzie et al., 2008). Theoharis (2007) acknowledges that the meaning attached to social justice work is consistently changing due to the complex and unique nature of the issues that schools experience. There is no foolproof social justice leadership praxis. Knowing this, it becomes increasingly apparent why more research needs to be conducted highlighting the successes and challenges of social justice leaders. I surmised that findings from this study would yield a richer understanding of the social justice leadership capacity and characteristics of secondary administrators in urban settings.

This research study promises to add to the body of literature (Brown, 2004; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Jean-Marie et al., 2009) that examines the work of

school leaders who act as social justice and equity change agents in urban public school districts. The study is significant because it presents emerging themes and concepts about social justice leadership praxis by drawing out the voices of secondary school administrators who lead in historically underserved urban school cultures.

Assumptions of the Study

This research was conducted with four assumptions at play for the duration of the study. The first assumption was that secondary school principals who agreed to participate in the study would feel at liberty to be forthright about the extent to which they identified as social justice leaders. The second assumption was all principal participants would be truthful in the recounting of their perceptions and experiences. The third assumption was that each principal's experiential knowledge would reflect his/her particular distinctive school culture and climate. The fourth assumption was that learning about the challenges, trepidations, and successes experienced by these principals held educative potential for other school administrators who are engaged in the work of being social justice educational leaders.

Overview of Research Procedures

This study captures the lived leadership experiences of six 6th-12th grade principals along with myself (their superintendent) in a Midwest midsized urban school district regarding our work as secondary school administrators who uphold social justice and equity in schools. This research is a phenomenological study bounded by one common urban school district that contextualizes the leadership experiences of secondary administrators who represent diverse personal characteristics such as race,

ethnicity, age, gender, administrative experience, and embody unique knowledge, beliefs, and culturally responsive decision-making that inform their leadership for social justice.

I conducted a hybrid of hermeneutic and egological phenomenology to investigate secondary school administrators' experiences with social justice educational leadership praxis. I was a researcher and participant in the study. Each participant represented is a unit of analysis within this phenomenological study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews by a second-party interviewer. I purposefully distanced myself form the data collection procedure to avoid compromising research findings. All participants were interviewed individually to learn about their singular self-reported social justice leadership practices. I analyzed data looking for common themes relevant to the phenomenon of social justice leadership while keeping a reflexive analytical journal to record potential bias that might influence data analysis. I also enlisted the support of collegial coders to confirm the descriptive coding process, and guard against bias due to my role as participant and researcher. During horizontalization, the interview data from the study participants was sorted for emergent themes which allowed me to identify and juxtapose all structural themes used to write the textual description of the essence of social justice leadership experiences within a single urban school district under my leadership.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1, the introduction, includes a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, conceptual framework, significance of the study, assumptions of the study,

limitations of the study, an overview of research procedures, and the organization of the dissertation. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature that relates to social justice leadership praxis for principals. The following categories will be used to frame discussion within the literature review: defining social justice leadership, educational leadership preparation programs, teacher education preparation programs, embracing discussions on race and colorblindness, principals' impact on teachers' practices and beliefs, resistance abatement, evolving role of the principalship, and social justice principals as instructional leaders. The literature review also explores culturally responsive curriculum development as well as school culture and climate, and principals' sources of resilience. Chapter 3 describes the proposed research design for the study and subsequent analyses. Chapter 4 presents findings extracted from transcribed data of principals' semi-structured interviews. Chapter 5 provides an extended discussion on findings along with conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for additional research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Social Justice Leadership

A prominent theme in the research examining how principals employ social

justice practices is the notion that there is no "definitive" definition of social justice

leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Bruccoleri, 2008; Kose, 2005). Some scholars believe that the

term "social justice" is commonly used as a catchphrase containing very little substance

as to what its political, cultural, and economic significance is in relation to educational

outcomes. Bogotch (2002) asserts, "social justice has no fixed or predictable meaning"

(p. 153). He contends that since society is ever-changing, variables such as the current

social structure, economy, and political landscape all work to influence perceptions of

social justice. North (2006) suggests, "The individuals and groups implicated in the

policies and practices designed and executed under the banner of 'social justice' would

benefit from an explicit discussion of both the theories underlying this label and the

desired consequences of its use" (p. 507). DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) note,

"Theoretical and prescriptive writings describe theories of action for school leaders, but

empirical research focused on how principals enact social justice leadership is relatively

new and still emerging" (p. 847). Considering that social justice leadership in education

is still an evolving field of study, many scholars caution educators against establishing a

rigid conceptualization of this practice.

A more practical application of social justice leadership is evidenced in the work

of Theoharis (2007). His scholarly work defines social justice leadership to mean

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"principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision" (p. 223). For the purpose of this research, I have adopted Theoharis' working definition of social justice leadership. However, I recognize that developing a common understanding of how social justice leadership is defined in education is problematic because of the unlimited range of issues that can potentially fall into this leadership design. This reality has caused scholars such as McKenzie et al. (2008) to define and contextualize social justice in a manner that is inclusive of multiple scenarios applicable to K-12 school districts.

McKenzie et al. (2008) state, "we argue for a definition of social justice that is non-essentialized (that there is not one meaning that can be universally applied in every situation, with every marginalized individual, in the same way)" (p. 114). Although scholars appear reluctant to rigidly define social justice leadership, there is more agreement about the promising practices of principals who lead schools that serve historically marginalized groups of students such as: special needs learners, students of color, transgender pupils, and impoverished youth, etc.

Defining school leadership through a social justice lens factors in the struggles that underserved groups encounter within an inner-city, K-12 educational setting. Exploring this phenomenon through a social justice perspective allows for the examination of influential factors such as students' race, gender, class, and special needs, etc. as they relate to a principal's ability to create a school culture that is responsive to the needs of students from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds.

DeMatthews (2014) observes that social justice principals respond to inequality by challenging policies and procedures that reinforce disparities and seek out resources, provide teacher training, and focus on improving school culture and climate issues. Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian (2006) suggest that social justice theory rests on the premise that equality is an idea that can be attained when systems of oppression that promote inequities are acknowledged and dismantled.

There are scholars (Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000; Grant and Sleeter, 2011; McKenzie, et al., 2008) who insist that social justice leadership has a definite framework that school leaders must focus on to establish efficient and effective school transformation. According to the work of McKenzie, et al. (2008), social justice leaders must improve academic achievement, prepare students to think critically about the context in which their educated within, and have exposure to an inclusive, comprehensive curriculum that values diversity. Furthermore, these academics assert that student achievement, inclusive practices, and cultural awareness must be at the forefront of a social justice leader's school reform agenda to promote social justice activism. Grant and Sleeter (2011) share, "This curriculum is also organized around diverse viewpoints and experiences but through a lens of social justice and action" (p. 186).

Scholars stress that minority students should have access to opportunities that members of the dominant culture are accustomed to operating with and benefitting from (Armstrong & McMahon, 2006; Capper, Frattura, & Keyes, 2000). They pose the following question: "How will they be able to participate meaningfully in the game

without adapting in ways that do not necessarily suit them, and for which they do not always have the resources, tools or skills to participate" (p. 24). These authors contend that inclusion involves allowing students to add value to decision-making that alters the status quo for the betterment of all participants. Educators can best support this practice by encouraging students to infuse aspects of their culture into classroom activities such as communicating using their vernacular or respecting and challenging exclusive practices that do not promote appreciation for culturally appropriate activities.

The difficulty that scholars have encountered in defining social justice leadership in education has contributed to a rise in conceptual frameworks designed to qualify social justice leadership competencies that are characteristic of social justice practice (Blackmore, 2002; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Riester, et al., 2002). Blackmore (2002) believes that socially just leadership promotes "learning networks and partnerships premised upon trust and reciprocity between schools, communities, and among individuals" (p. 219). School improvement planning, innovations, and interventions that result from school leadership guided by social justice theory will be determined by the principal's ability to provide appropriate student-centered remedies. Dantley and Tillman (2006) note, "Leadership for social justice investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities" (p. 17). Riester et al. (2002) share that a significant segment of the social justice leadership literature (Shor, 2012; Valencia, 1997) focuses on avoiding the trap of the "deficit thinking model" which essentially is a way of blaming students for their lack of achievement while protecting systems that

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benefit more privileged students. Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernández (2013) as well as Shor (2012) were able to establish a link between failed school processes and deficit thinking directed at underserved students and families from impoverished backgrounds. It's necessary to investigate the type of training that social justice leaders must invest in to overcome damaging preconceptions of poor youth while meeting the multiple needs of students, staff, and community partners.

Educational Leadership Preparation Programs

Much of the scholarly literature focuses on preparing administrators for the complexities involved in restructuring school cultures on fundamental social justice theory principles. As Capper et al. (2006) state, "To prepare leaders for social justice, educational programs must attend to critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice with their students" (p. 212). The scholarly literature (Beachum & Dentith, 2004; Miller & Martin, 2015; Santamaria, 2013; Young & Mountford, 2006) places a significant emphasis on enhancing educational leadership preparation programs for social justice principals to address the needs of shifting student populations within urban school districts. Miller and Martin (2015) share, "as the school setting changes, both in student population demographics and with accountabilities issues, the socialization of the principal is essential" (p. 131). Santamaria (2013) adds the experiences of educators of color must be infused in leadership programs to acknowledge how these educators' view of challenges within urban schools may differ from the status quo. Also, Lyman and Villani (2002) suggest

that principal leadership programs must be able to integrate the dynamics of poverty's influence on struggling learners.

The literature (Scanlan, 2012; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004) maintains that principals' leadership programs promoting equity audits enable school leaders to efficiently respond to shifting student demographics to create equity of learning in accessing quality education. Schneider (2012) best describes equity of learning by stating, "Educational equity is a federally mandated right of all students to have equal access to classes, facilities, and educational programs no matter what their national origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, first language, or other distinguishing characteristic" (para. 1). Schneider believes the persistent pursuit of equity ensures equality of educational opportunity for students. Skrla et al. (2004) define an equity audit as a tool used to rate schools based on effectiveness of curriculum, attention to civil rights concerns, and accountability and reform efforts. If social justice ideology is used to guide the work of principals dedicated to auditing critical components of their school's instructional infrastructure, then, leadership programs may want to develop auditing practices that accurately capture the experiences of learners from diverse backgrounds.

The scholarly literature (Allen, 2006; Brown, 2004; Keiser, 2009; Marshall & Olivia, 2006; Shoho, 2005) on school reform efforts establishes the need for a new social order inspired by social justice theory within educational leadership programs to train administrators to effectively practice social justice teachings. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) suggest that educational leadership "programs must prepare new

leaders to critically inquire into the taken-for-granted structures and norms that often pose insurmountable barriers for many students' academic success" (p. 204).   The establishment of this new order may be convoluted by the fact that as Shoho (2005) states, "there is still no broad-based agreement on a conceptual definition of social justice with respect to educational administration" (p. 47). Likewise, Brown (2004) insists that social justice leaders must embrace learning that stretches their thinking about dissimilar communities. Brown (2004) states that if educational leaders seek to engage communities in crucial and respectful conversations about racism and other societal ills, then, they must shift from a "community of sameness" to a "community of difference" (p. 80).

Likewise, Allen (2006) insists that educational leadership programs have an obligation to assist with deconstructing oppressive systems serving as impediments to students' learning. Developing mindful leaders who are capable of reexamining issues of equity through a social justice lens is considered to be a step toward creating a new social order in educational leadership. Marshall and Olivia (2006) focus on conceptualizing social justice leadership as a means for improving pedagogical innovation and student and teacher participation in projects leading to practical applications of social justice. This creates new opportunities for educational leaders to promote and push teacher learning across the continuum, from pre-service education to in-service professional development.

Teacher Education Preparation Programs

Not only does the literature acknowledge a need to develop better educational leadership programs for principals to augment social justice practices, there is cause for enlisting their assistance with rethinking teacher education programs at the university level to be more inclusive of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices, changing worldviews, and value systems (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Lopez, 2016; Oyler, 2011). Oyler (2011) remarks, "it is important that matters of social justice, multicultural curriculum, and equity pedagogy are integrated into foundation courses, methods courses, and field-based courses" (p. 152). This exposure will assist teachers with creating classroom environments that are sensitive to the experiences of students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Scholars forward the idea that when considering change in educational programming, it's critical to examine the context of how the national culture shapes the educational experiences of teachers to influence learning (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Luyten, Visscher, & Witziers, 2005). Principals as social justice leaders must model the type of inclusive dialogue with staff that they want to see replicated in classrooms through teachers' interactions with students. Thomspon, Templeton, and Ballenger (2013) declare, "The educational leader has the responsibility to model the relevance of learning pursuits to participants in the learning environment. The perspective from which the educational leader performs will excel or impede student's readiness for the future" (p. 3). This communication enables principals to build meaningful relationships with teachers which in turn encourage teachers to develop more culturally responsive instructional strategies for students.

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Lopez (2016) observes that communities can no longer exist as homogenous entities who seek to insulate themselves from the realities of neighboring school districts. The objective should be to coexist with communities that may have dissimilar cultural backgrounds in order to acknowledge the diversity of experiences that can be shared within and outside of schools. In an effort to increase diversity amongst teaching staff in grade K-12 systems, inner-city school districts have worked with local universities to encourage minority candidates to apply to pre-service teacher education programs. However, the reality is that there are simply not enough degreed minority candidates opting to pursue careers in education to have a respectable percentage of teachers of color. Green (2005) asserts, "From the 1987-88 school year to 2012, students of color have increased by almost 17 percentage points, while the percentage of non-white teachers had only crept up by 4.9 percent" (p. 1). This trend data suggests that teacher education programs must do a better job of selecting prospective candidates who can go into culturally diverse classroom settings prepared to differentiate instruction while simultaneously having a healthy respect for the racial/ethnic characteristics associated with the demographic that they are serving. The reality is that due to high teacher turnover rates in urban sectors, employment opportunities will be available in schools that have high academic and social challenges. This will increase the need for social justice principals to identify and hire educators who have the skillset to teach in culturally diverse settings.

Furthermore, it becomes the responsibility of social justice principals and central office personnel (e.g., superintendents; director of curriculum) to provide teachers with

the prerequisite knowledge to meet the needs of diverse groups of students if teacher education programs are slow in their development of culturally responsive curriculum. For the purpose of this discussion, culturally responsive curriculum as defined by Gay (2002) is content that incorporates inclusion of cultural experiences, viewpoints, and perceptions of a diverse group of learners to educate them more equitably. Gay notes, "Cultural characteristics provide the criteria for determining how instructional strategies should be modified for ethnically diverse students" (p. 112). This curriculum respects the historical contributions of racial/ethnic minorities to improve student engagement and academic achievement.

Similarly, an increasing number of culturally diverse students entering into schools that are predominantly White/Caucasian will likely cause school leaders in predominately White/Caucasian settings to reevaluate their level of responsiveness to the needs of students of color. Teacher education programs are being highly scrutinized for their inability to prepare pre-service teachers to acclimate to environments culturally different from the schools that they attended or communities that they were reared in. Goodwin (2004) shares, "This means that most teacher educators are quite distant from their own P-12 classroom experience and teacher preparation (if they had these experiences to begin with) and are not likely to have first-hand knowledge of teaching children of color, especially in urban and central city schools" (p. 8). This creates an interesting dilemma in that most teacher education programs are comprised of White students who may inevitably find employment in schools that are becoming increasingly more multicultural.

Moreover, social justice principals should be more selective in their teacher

recruitment and retention efforts to sustain school transformation efforts. Sleeter (2001)

suggests, "Another strategy to alter the mix of who becomes teachers is to recruit and

select only those who bring experiences, knowledge, and dispositions that will enable

them to teach well in culturally diverse urban schools" (p. 96). This position is

comparable to the approach that McKenzie et al. (2008) advocate in relation to the

selection of teachers in educational leadership programs that focus on social justice

leadership. McKenzie et al. (2008) state, "We are recommending then, in support of the

growing literature on teacher leaders, that we only choose students who are already

showing signs of leadership in their current teacher positions" (p. 119). It would also be

advantageous for teacher education programs to offer more relevant multicultural

education courses that have fieldwork experiences that permit pre-service teachers an

opportunity to work directly with students in multicultural settings. This experience

may cause prospective educators to confront harmful stereotypes that often result when

disadvantaged student populations are unfairly labeled and stigmatized. This practice

could potentially assist pre-service teachers in identifying populations of students

whom they feel comfortable working with and give social justice principals and their

school districts an opportunity to develop relationships with teacher education

programs at universities that can better identify quality candidates.

Moreover, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) contend that, as principals who self-

identify as social justice leaders work with teacher education programs to reexamine

their approach to training pre-service teachers how to value multicultural education as

a mechanism for improving student achievement and instructional engagement, school district personnel must do a better job selecting content and classroom resources that support culturally responsive teaching practices. Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching "as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, of performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (p. 31). However, even before teachers attempt to make cultural connections in the classroom, they must have an accurate working knowledge of the students whom they are instructing. Villegas and Lucas (2002) stress, "If teaching involves assisting students to build bridges between their preexisting knowledge and experiences and the new material they are expected to learn, then teachers must know not only the subject matter they teach but also their students" (p. 26). With that said, it stands to reason that you can't teach what you don't know and more fundamentally, you can't teach who you don't know.

This is the same approach that social justice principals must apply in their relationships with teachers to improve pedagogy and practices that value multiculturalism. This reality entails taking on an affirming attitude towards both teachers and children from dissimilar backgrounds and developing an awareness of a sociocultural consciousness that enables teachers to acknowledge how social constructions such as race, class status, and religion influence students' perceptions of themselves as learners grounded in the context of their current life circumstances. Lewis and Moore (2008) observe, "Too often, students of inner-city communities have to contend with public schools plagued by unimagined curricula, overcrowded

classrooms, inadequate plant and facilities, and only a small proportion of teachers who have confidence in their students and expect them to learn" (p. 124). Effective teachers acknowledge the difficult circumstances under which they are attempting to educate disadvantaged student populations while building confidence in students' abilities to overcome hardships or constraints that typically lead to poor academic performance and limited life options. Dynamic leaders of social justice-oriented school communities find ways of getting the human and material resources necessary to eliminate equity disparities within their schools.

Embracing Discussions on Race and Colorblindness

As opposed to avoiding tough conversations surrounding race-based issues, social justice principals of minority student populations seek to address problems. These educators demonstrate that they care about how minority students' culturally-rooted experiences sway what they learn in the classroom. They do not shy away from conversations on race matters because they understand that race is still a major determinant of the life chances of students of color. As noted by Gooden and Dantley (2012), "Although discrepancies, inequalities, and discriminatory practices may be historical, they may also be a product of how we structure school systems and educate children in the country differently based on race" (p. 239). Therefore, it's essential that educational leaders within our K-12 system feel free to dialogue about and challenge systemic discriminatory policies and practices that have historical significance and still influence the daily operations of our schools (Hodson, 2001).

Ladson-Billings (2000) states, "Anti-racist education emerges from an understanding that racism exists in society and, therefore, the school, as an institution of society, is influenced by racism" (p. 211). Culturally responsive educators realize that they cannot simply omit content that has racial undertones because they are not comfortable or knowledgeable about how race influences the self-concept and learning identities of students of color. Brown (2007) acknowledges, "When teachers are given the responsibility of teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, their attitudes must reflect an appreciation of the cultural, linguistic, and social characteristics of each of their students" (p. 58). Thus, educators who recognize the need to multiculturalize their classrooms feel comfortable with entertaining dialogue about how race/ethnicity influences learning.

Similarly, Bakari (2003) advances research detailing successful experiences that White teachers had while teaching in predominantly African-American settings. Bakari notes, "Success in the classroom came only after a shift in their attitudes about teaching, learning, and culture. Shifts in attitudes of these teachers involve viewing culture as a tool in teaching rather than ignoring it" (p. 641). The seemingly benign notion of colorblindness can negatively affect the teaching of students of color. Educators who fail to acknowledge the realities of race and racism's effect on minority student populations often experience difficulty with students seeing the relevance of teachers' instruction. Evans (2007) discusses how "school leaders must eschew color blindness, 'see' race, acknowledge the various sociopolitical manifestations of racism, and recognize their own (or group's) dominance or marginalization of others" (p. 184).

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Likewise, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) conducted a cross-case study of six Caucasian urban school principals to determine how they perceived and acted on their role as being multicultural leaders. The authors found that the principals had little conception of how to develop or integrate culturally proficient content into their curriculum. "Some principals in the study commented, 'I don't see color. I teach children'" (p. 578). Again, although these educators may be well-intentioned in their desire to view all students equally, they failed to acknowledge the value that students' cultural identity and background can have towards educating students about respecting and appreciating diversity. Gooden and Dantley (2012) share, there is a need for social justice educators to have culturally appropriate and authentic conversations about race with teachers and students who are curious about how cultural differences influence standards of learning that they are expected to observe and achieve.

Principal's Impact on Teachers' Practices and Beliefs

Social justice principals are in a unique position to help all educators under their leadership reevaluate their beliefs about what students are capable of accomplishing. The scholarly literature addresses the responsibility of social justice principals to cultivate and validate appropriate faculty and staff motives for serving high-poverty students from diverse backgrounds. Two of the major complaints that social justice principals have regarding staffing in inner-city school districts is that there are very few teachers of color and even fewer Caucasian instructors who can empathize with the plight of most low-income minority students. Subsequently, cultural conflicts are often the byproduct of Caucasian teachers' inability to effectively communicate with students

of color. Consequently, minority students' actions may be misinterpreted, or their behavior labeled as insubordinate if poor cross-cultural communication exists with White/Caucasian instructors. Milner (2010) states, "Researchers have found that conflicts, incongruence, inconsistencies, and mismatches can exist between mostly White teachers and students of color, which can limit students' learning opportunities" (p. 122). These circumstances also contribute to White teachers viewing minority students through a deficit model that portrays these students as lacking foundational skills as compared to their white counterparts (Reed & Swaminathan, 2014). Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of social justice principals to help staff examine their attitudes and beliefs towards the community of learners under their supervision.

The leadership role of social justice principals in urban schools is becoming increasingly more multicultural as communities continue to diversify (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Nieto, 2009). Nieto exclaims that if multicultural education is to be recognized as more than just celebrating cultural difference, then "it must be aligned with the concept of social justice" (p. 10). The day when inner-city teachers will look out at their classrooms and see a sea of faces that look like their own is long gone. Those persons who once used to constitute minority micro-cultures have become the new collective majority. McDonald and Zeichner (2009) offer the perspective that in light of the growing trend of cultural mismatch between teachers and students in urban public school settings, social justice principals will have to assist teachers with adapting and tailoring their instructional practices to promote higher levels of student engagement and mastery of content. The authors suggest, "social justice teacher

education shifts the focus from issues of cultural diversity to issues of social justice, making social change and activism central to the vision of teaching and learning promoted" (p. 597). Adopting a culturally responsive leadership focus allows social justice principals opportunities to gain valuable skills in creating a culture that values diversity while directly supporting the work of their instructors.

Before principals can embark upon the work of multicultural school leadership based on social justice theory, it should come as no surprise that scholars (Furman, 2010; Sensoy & Diangelo, 2009) place great emphasis on the need to identify educational leadership qualities that are compatible with social justice work. Furman (2012) observes, "to date, the literature offers few specifics about the actual practice of social justice leadership in K-12 schools and the capacities needed by school leaders to engage in this practice" (p. 192). According to Sensoy and Diangelo (2009), leading scholars in social-justice-oriented practices, a social justice framework is one that "actively addresses the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, [and recognizes] that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability [among others]" (p. 350). Principals who proclaim to be social justice leaders are responsible for assisting staff and students navigate the complexities of inequity that institutions perpetuate by failing to challenge the status quo. These administrators educate their school community on how to think critically about unjust systems that disadvantage youth and empower stakeholders to speak out against injustice. The literature (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Theoharis, 2007)

points to a description of a social justice leader as being a person who consciously acknowledges and considers conditions of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or other historically marginalizing factors into their decision-making practices of creating equitable learning opportunities for youth.

Resistance Abatement

Much of the literature considers the resistance that social justice leaders face as they attempt to transform schools within communities that are not accustomed to change. Aleman (2009) reviews how conflict can be a positive force in redirecting school culture into more inclusive practices. He asserts, "A school's culture is in large part determined by the overarching values exhibited by the school's leadership and faculty, and the educational practice that they implement" (p. 12). As social justice leaders begin implementing programs that alter the academic, athletic, and social norms within a school culture, they must address concerns from multiple stakeholders. For example, researchers (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Lewis & Ebbeck, 2014) explore the ways principals strategically enact social justice in their schools may assist proponents of this philosophy with identifying personal characteristics or efficiency practices that make these leaders more successful than others at building effective school cultures. Examining ways in which people respond to social justice principals' efforts can give educational leaders an opportunity to anticipate and prepare for potential conflict if they choose to adopt transformation models that employ social justice measures. Plus, literature that clarifies how the principal facilitates the development of a system of

accountability to sustain social justice may be extremely beneficial for educational leaders who are considering adopting a social justice framework.

Equally important, the manner in which social justice principals, teachers, support staff, and community stakeholders respond to a social justice leadership agenda will ultimately determine the school culture's level of productivity. Vogel (2011) insists, "Multicultural education and social justice are two concepts found in social science and education research that address the engagement of minority students in the learning process, leading to increased academic achievement" (p. 69). Most educators are openly committed to supporting the success of all students. However, there is not universal consensus amongst educators that social justice theory is relevant. Social justice theory often precipitates an environment of discomfort that can spawn resistance. Social justice principals must be able to reasonably anticipate how to address resistance that may result from adopting a social justice leadership philosophy. Resistance to culturally responsive education may also occur if teachers aren't provided with the appropriate professional development and strategies (Kose, 2007) for integrating new and perhaps unfamiliar content into their curriculum. Madhlangobe (2009) notes, "Multicultural education needs to be more broadly defined and understood so that teachers from a wide range of disciplines can respond to it in appropriate ways and resistance can be minimized" (p. 55). Educators are more likely to resist that which is unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Investigating how principals establish a system of accountability in the face of resistance to promote social justice

work will be beneficial for school leaders who are contemplating implementing a social justice leadership model.

One empirical study within the literature conducted by Theoharis (2007) examines the pursuit of seven school administrators to establish a social justice leadership philosophy within their respective school cultures. The discussion describes the resistance these administrators face as they attempt to transform their school's curriculum, climate, and instructional practices to benefit groups of students that had been historically marginalized within the public school system. Theoharis (2007) introduces the reader to seven principals who consider themselves avid practitioners of social justice leadership as a measure for addressing equity issues regarding students' access to a quality education. The author conducts a positioned-subject approach grounded in critical theory utilizing qualitative methods relying on interview data obtained through in-depth conversations with all principals. The data analysis involves a thorough review of daily field logs and extracting quotes from transcripts that reflect recurrent themes used to build a profile for social justice leadership characteristics that each principal should display. Theoharis (2007) comments, "I used the constant comparative method of data analysis using both inductive and deductive components" (p. 226). The author's findings illustrate that each principal evolved in their pursuit of social justice leadership by developing a philosophy of social justice that they could reasonably and successfully enact through anticipating and overcoming resistance using both proactive strategies and coping tactics to manage adversity. Furthermore, the data suggests that all principals were able to effectively improve student

achievement, build staff's professional capacity, fortify the school's culture and surrounding community, and enhance operating systems within the school to promote efficiency.

Resistance to adopting a social justice leadership philosophy comes in many forms. Principals within the scholarly literature (Cann & Hernandez, 2012; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Theoharis, 2003) note that their educational leadership programs were unaspiring and afforded them very little practical application for community building in their current assignments. Moreover, principals believe that this scarcity of experience, limited access to resources, and convoluted regulations from the state and federal government hindered their ability to acquire services that students and staff needed to counteract resistance to their social justice work. This observation is supported by the work of Cann and Hernandez (2012) who believe leaders "must be fluent in and support fidelity to state standards while also insisting on the use of culturally relevant curricula to buttress the learning of students historically marginalized by standards that often privilege the cultural capital of the dominant racial group" (p. 49). Most principals cite unsupportive central office administrators as being the main impediment to enacting a social justice leadership model. Likewise, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) report that principals experienced unproductive interactions with teachers, support staff, and parents who had difficulty abandoning the status-quo which enabled their past practices to dominate decision-making processes in favor of a more democratic leadership model. They also reference a number of teachers

who used a deficit model approach when explaining students' poor performance on environmental factors and poverty.

The scholarly literature (Brill, 2008; Karpinski, 2008) also explores interpersonal issues between novice social justice leaders and teachers within school cultures that challenge school leaders' ability to leverage resources and build effective relationships to improve student achievement. This, in turn, generates discussion around teacher performance issues associated with transforming schools through social justice theory. Karpinski (2008) provides a case study of a novice middle school assistant principal's attempt to lead in a school culture where the principal lacked vision for school improvement, the veteran staff was insistent on maintaining the status quo, and novice teachers had limited access to opportunities for professional growth. The author questions how novice administrators can effectively lead under such adverse circumstances. Brill's (2008) scholarship also speaks to frustrations that beginning administrators experience as they transition from the classroom, where most experienced successful interactions with students and staff, into a role where they were expected to be the enforcer of policies and procedures. Brill (2008) states these school leaders "are quickly nudged out of the nest and expected to fly gracefully into a world of discipline and accountability, with very little training or preparation" (p. 27). Administrators who are cast into the role of being the "enforcer" find it difficult to promote principles of social justice leadership that are more restorative as opposed to punitive. Nonetheless, novice social justice leaders can take advantage of these

opportunities to have authentic dialogue with students, staff, and families to determine

how to best support each other through adverse circumstances.

One research study conducted by Cann and Hernandez (2012) documents

seventy-five oral testimonies provided by inexperienced school leaders who were

enrolled in a preparation program designed to teach participants how to design more

equitable school cultures. The authors employ a Critical Race Theory lens to research

and analyze their findings in alignment with the values of social justice programming.

They cite work of Furman (2012) to describe social justice leadership in relation to

transforming school culture. Furman notes, "Leadership for social justice is action

oriented and transformative, committed and persistent, inclusive and democratic,

relational and caring, reflective, and oriented toward a socially just pedagogy" (p. 195).

School leaders tended to be more interested in procedural systems that would enable

them to document teachers' performance as opposed to looking for avenues to build

professional relationships with instructors. Cann and Hernandez (2012) assert, "the

interaction between the leaders and struggling teachers was centered on documenting

teachers' actions (or inactions)" (p. 56). School leaders who often criticized teachers for

their inability to build meaningful relationships with students to improve student

achievement also demonstrated a reluctance to establish caring collegial interactions

with teachers.

Evolving Role of the Principalship

Another consistent theme throughout the literature (Bell, 2002; Bogotch, 2005;

Theoharis, 2007) examines rethinking the role of principalship that favors views of

social justice theory as a mechanism for leveling the playing field for students. This

literature explores organizational structures that principals must be able to effectively

establish that empower youth by creating school cultures dedicated to serving

marginalized groups of low-performing students from impoverished backgrounds

(Ginwright & James, 2002). This literature investigates how leaders must assist students

with reflecting on how they perceive themselves as learners and how to improve their

overall academic performance when given the appropriate rigor and support network.

As Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates (2016), Bell (2002), and Leithwood (2003)

observe, children from low-income homes oftentimes are not encouraged to have high

expectations set for academic achievement. They continue to be underserved with less

access to advanced coursework and enrichment programs by an educational system

insistent on defining historically marginalized students as being deficient in skills rather

than devoid of resources. Bell (2002) asserts that our school systems are "to this day

beset with achievement gaps, alienations, push-outs, stereotypes, fundamental

disregard for legitimate cultural and human differences, as well as many other

marginalizing conditions" (p. 318). As school systems become increasingly more

culturally diverse, there is a need to have more social justice programming to assist with

closing the achievement gaps that persist.

Principals must be very strategic and intentional with promoting a social justice

platform within schools. Bogotch (2000) insists that educators should recognize that

social justice leadership practices can be integrated into the traditional framework of

school leadership. He insists that this integration can help "bring social justice to these

traditional approaches as a necessary purpose of schooling which requires a broader

knowledge base and different skill-sets for future school leaders" (p. 8). In order to

understand the motivation driving social justice principals, it may be worth inspecting

both the professional and personal toll that enacting social justice theory and practice

has on the physical and mental wellbeing of the principal. Theoharis (2007) shares that,

"Creating a space to wrestle with developing resistance can provide future

administrators the opportunity to be a step ahead of the resistance they will face and

address proactively issues of burnout that can impact social justice leaders" (p. 251).

This is also a call for universities to revisit the importance of social justice topics in

teacher certification and educational leadership programs to address equity issues that

school personnel experience as classrooms become more culturally diverse.

The supporting literature (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Dantley &

Tillman, 2006) also focuses on social justice principals as being transformational

intellectuals who have an informed perspective on the historical oppressions that

marginalized groups have experienced within U.S. public schools. This point of

reference is considered to be an essential component in dismantling unjust systems that

reinforce discriminatory practices. The principal's instructional leadership role is

influenced by the need to acknowledge the core beliefs and cultural characteristics of

oppressed groups as a condition for providing all students with a quality educational

program. Principals as social justice agents have to acknowledge the history of inequity

of treatment of marginalized students as compared to students who represent and

benefit from educational systems designed to advantage mainstream culture.

In addition, much of the literature addresses expectations that administrators produce sustainable academic results and build viable relationships within the local community. For example, Jean-Marie et al. (2009) observe, "Schools today face shifting demands such as growing pressures for accountability, achieving higher levels of learning for all children, and an increase in public scrutiny" (p. 8). The literature (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004) specifies opportunities that administrators can pursue to create sustainable academic cultures and build viable communal partnerships. Reed and Swaminathan (2014) remark, "Social justice leaders tend not to focus on the student as the problem but focus on the structures and services as the means to better address the needs of the students" (p. 7). Social justice principals' ability to cultivate collegial trust amongst staff was cited as being a major factor in their ability to transform schools (Hoy & Tarter, 2004) using social justice practices. Building organizational culture through transparent dialogue, collaborative conversations, and optimal working conditions is essential for schools attempting broad-based, comprehensive school reform. Cosner (2009) states, "research on school reform and organizational change underscores the importance of collegial trust as a social resource and dimension of school capacity?" (p. 257). A social justice principal must be versatile and innovative in providing staff with the relevant direction and motivation to complete projects that require a high degree of interdependence.

Social Justice Principals as Instructional Leaders

Researchers argue that principals, as instructional leaders, have the ability to model and monitor teacher practices, beliefs, and professional commitments that reflect

cultural competence and responsiveness (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Kottkamp, 2002). Examining principals' professional growth in inclusive teaching practices and knowledge of multicultural curriculum over their career is essential to determining how responsive they are towards diverse groups of students. Social justice leadership, integrated with multicultural teaching, has the potential to transform educators who are willing to grow both professionally and personally as a result of their immersion in diverse settings. Social justice principals consistently model and share their leadership philosophies that qualify them as culturally responsive leaders within their school community. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) insist that "Modeling becomes particularly important in the context of the tremendous struggle school leaders confront in reforming their practice" (p. 216). They are cognizant of how instrumental teacher certification programs are in the development of culturally responsive instructors who are capable of developing culturally sensitive lessons. Also, social justice principals' observations are critical to understanding what attitudes and practices need to be present to develop and implement a culturally responsive curriculum to facilitate school-wide change in culture and climate.

Oftentimes, teachers and principals are not conscious of the effects of culturally influenced practices on students' learning (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). However, many educators are intent on maintaining the status quo without fully examining the benefits that culturally relevant pedagogy and practices can have on a school community. The principals in my study have pointed to the disconnect that is often present with teachers when they

appear to be unwilling to change existing practices or reluctant to reflect on their own conceptions of cultural competence and its importance to learning within a multicultural setting. On the other hand, as Beachum and Dentith (2004) observe, "it appears that teachers who take leadership roles in their schools are successful agents and conduits in promoting cultural change" (p. 283). A key to creating more inclusive and collaborative school cultures that value social justice is cultivating principal leadership that supports teachers' interests in multicultural initiatives.

The supporting literature (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009) conveys how social justice principals as instructional leaders can strategically provide professional development opportunities to influence teachers' pedagogy and cultural competence of marginalized groups of students. However, as Bustamante et al. (2009) suggest, although principals may have a theoretical understanding of the importance of embracing cultural competence within diverse learning communities, they must also have an awareness of how to assess cultural competence within their school setting if staff is expected to value and promote this practice. A study conducted by research teams led by Bustamante applied school culture audits utilizing an inventory instrument called the Schoolwide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist to assess how well educational leaders support diverse groups within their school setting. Bustamante et al. (2009) observed that "school leader participants reported that they did not know how to go about assessing cultural competence in actual school settings" (p. 801). If principals advocate for a social justice leadership platform, it's logical to assume

that teacher training that results within a school culture will be heavily influenced by social justice theory put into practice.

Improving teaching and learning can be effectively modeled by principals who understand pedagogy and can communicate how a culturally responsive curriculum, practices, and instruction all intersect to meet the needs of students from multiple backgrounds. Kose (2009) explains, "An increasing body of research and scholarship suggests that school principals substantially influence the quality of teacher professional development" (p. 628). The advantage of having a visionary building principal who is also perceived as being a social justice advocate and the school's instructional leader can positively direct the work of teachers. Teachers in turn help students develop their own sense of cultural competence and identities as learners who can navigate the complexities of participating in a global society. The literature (DeMatthews, 2014; Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Santamaria, 2014) proposes that educators who experience success in urban settings are receptive to professional development opportunities that cause them to reevaluate their own perceptions and beliefs about what students are capable of achieving and which instructional strategies and leadership practices are most effective in assisting students with experiencing success.

Espousing culturally responsive instruction in and of itself is not sufficient practice for social justice principals to transform school cultures in significantly eventful ways. Culturally responsive instruction must be infused with a leadership philosophy that can resonate throughout a school culture to create the necessary buy-in to produce

meaningful, sustainable change. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) suggest, "Educators of social justice would be wise to seek the constructivist approach to training, preparing, and developing the new 21st century school leaders as the necessary first step of "praxis" configured as an ongoing, reflective approach to taking action" (p. 13). As with any constructivist approach, social justice leaders must start where they are at, build from what they have, and make adjustments along the way. The art of constructivism is the ability to adapt practice while remaining malleable to the learning process.

Principal's Impact on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices

Other than engaging staff in culturally sensitive professional development activities, how can social justice principals encourage teachers to be more culturally responsive to students who are of dissimilar racial/ethnic origin? Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) note that preparing both veteran and pre-service teachers to be culturally sensitive to minority students to improve academic achievement. These scholars also note that the levels of student engagement are often difficult if teachers are ill-equipped to differentiate curriculum that genuinely and accurately speaks to the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. Expert teachers occasionally struggle with forming professional and personal relationships with students from dissimilar racial and socioeconomic classifications. Likewise, Reed and Swaminathan (2014) share that when probationary teachers are employed in urban settings, "they wanted their students to be more like suburban students with middle-class, White dispositions" (p. 3). Many instructors, regardless of years of teaching experience, simply lack an understanding of cultural characteristics and a point of reference

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regarding the historical contributions of racial and ethnic groups within the United States.

Howard's (2016) work entitled, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know,* encourages White educators to undertake a personal and professional transformation allowing them to be more culturally sensitive to the realities of students of color. Gay (2002) discloses that many educators are simply unaware of how to integrate multicultural pedagogical strategies in a classroom setting. It is critical to analyze literature that reflects the use of culturally responsive pedagogy on the following: student engagement and academic achievement examining teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards racial/ethnic students, determining the effectiveness of training culturally responsive teachers, confronting bootstrap and colorblind philosophies, and developing a sociocultural consciousness.

Gooden and Dantley (2012) argue that American school systems perpetually and systematically educate students based on oppressive factors associated with race. Bustamante et al. (2009) focus on social justice principals' challenges to develop culturally inclusive practices that aim to improve teachers' perceptions of students of color by exposing organizational values that impede minority student' progress. Oftentimes, it is the communication gap that is present between minority students and White educators that inhibits students' ability to master content (Brown, 2003; Madom, Jussim, & Eccles, 1997). Brown (2003) contends, "Urban educators must be aware of specific verbal and nonverbal communication styles that affect students' ability and motivation to engage in learning activities" (p. 280). Social justice principals can assist

teachers with acknowledging and appreciating differences in communication patterns

between dissimilar racial/ethnic groups and support teachers in delivering content,

especially when learners recognize that the instructor is attempting to understand their

communication styles. Students are more apt to receive direction from principals and

instruction from teachers who value multicultural models of communication. Reyes-

Blanes and Daunic (1996) also observe, "The more educators can help create and

optimal match among critical interacting factors (e.g., student backgrounds, teacher

predisposition, and classroom setting), the better the probability of maximizing

students' cognitive and social development" (p. 106). Advancing culturally responsive

pedagogy is a means for teachers to exhibit the appropriate professional practices and

beliefs that reflect cultural competence to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Furthermore, the literature finds that effective social justice leaders practicing in

predominantly minority school settings must contend with the myth of meritocracy that

often leads teachers to superimpose a "bootstrap mentality" onto their students' living

circumstances (Flennaugh, Cooper Stein, & Carter Andrews, 2018; Darder, 1991).

Darder notes, "most teachers still retain notions of culture that reflect colorblind or

melting-pot assumptions and a bootstrap mentality. The idea that everyone is born

with the same life-chances and the belief that success is a natural result of hard work

doesn't resonate as truth with many students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Students know all too well about the institutionalized impediments and systemic racist

practices that impede individual progress. Ogbu (1992) states, "Voluntary minorities

have cultural models that lead them to accept uncritically mainstream folk theory and

strategies of getting ahead in the United States and to interpret their economic

hardships as temporary problems that they can and will overcome through education

and hard work" (p. 291). On the contrary, involuntary minorities (e.g., African-

American, Hispanics, Native Americans) often perceive their life circumstances as being

detrimentally influenced by institutionalized racism which is still viewed as the most

pervasive factor in determining their quality of life. Hernandez and Kose (2012)

suggest that principals must demonstrate a degree of self-awareness and self-reflection

around diversity matters to lead students of color who are more inclined to exhibit trust

issues. Dantley and Tillman (2006) affirm that students of color demonstrate a

willingness to receive supervision from leadership and instruction from teachers who

are sensitive to the life circumstances that students' families are enduring. Literature

detailing the implications of culturally responsive pedagogy and practices on school

climate provides a point of reference for how social justice principals build relationships

that will ultimately be responsible for transforming school climate and culture

(Auerbach, 2008, 2009; Brown, 2004; Santamaria, 2014).

It is vital that educators learn how to lead effectively across inter-cultural

boundaries due to greater expectations of student proficiency on academic targets and

increased standards for teacher accountability linked to student achievement and

performance evaluations. Much of the literature (Cohen, 2006; Dantley, 2005;

Hernandez & Kose, 2012) pertaining to social justice principals' ability to boost student

achievement by improving school climate and culture references culturally responsive

curriculum, pedagogy, and practices as being beneficial for teachers who want to build

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meaningful connections with urban students from diverse backgrounds. Gay (2002) notes, "In addition to acquiring a knowledge base about ethnic and cultural diversity, teachers need to learn how to convert it into culturally responsive curriculum designs and instructional strategies" (p. 108). Simply having an appreciation for the historical contributions of minority groups is not enough. Social justice educators must train themselves to differentiate learning and engage in content that is inclusive of the experiences of all students within a learning community. The literature (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Santamaria, 2014) speaks to the need to erect organizational structures that integrate the larger communal assets to create a more inclusive and supportive school climate.

Overall, the principal as a social justice instructional leader generally has the authority to shape school climate/culture by building communal partnerships through a collaborative process (Gooden, 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Johnson, 2006) meant to involve all stakeholders in the transformational reculturing of an entire school. Differences are to be respected and not used as a mechanism to marginalize and debase certain factions within a community or classroom environment. Social justice principals convey to teachers the importance of intensely listening for emergent themes that are characteristic of culturally responsive educators. Principals' willingness to have authentic discussion about uncomfortable topics like racism, classism, gender discrimination, and stereotypes commonly accepted in mainstream culture will assist with their adoption and implementation of culturally responsive instructional practices.

Emergent Questions for Consideration

There is an overwhelming sense that our current public school systems are not equipped academically or financially (DeGrow & Hoang, 2016; Higgins, 2018; Odden & Picus, 2018) to adequately address the complexities that come with leveling the playing field caused by disparities evidenced within class, race, gender, and other factors that have historically ostracized many marginalized groups. There is value in examining the degree to which educational leadership programs have influenced social justice theory as a leading philosophy towards preparing school administrators to implement comprehensive school reform measures. Furthermore, debate continues as to what extent educational leadership programs have focused on equity issues in assisting marginalized student groups. What alignment of effort needs to occur amongst university personnel, state education department officials, and local educational agencies to encourage all parties to investigate the value of social justice reform initiatives within schools? These are questions that are worth further examination within complex multicultural school contexts. Furthermore, if White educators continue to represent a disproportionate number of instructors and administrators within urban public school settings, what type of cultural competency training should school districts employ to ensure that these educators gain access to social justice principles to make them more responsive to the needs of minority students? It would be valuable to research ways that social justice principals can support Caucasian teachers in immersing themselves within a minority culture's student demographic. The challenges that these instructors face throughout their acclimation process could be

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used to help inform practice within teacher education and educational leadership programs.

In the United States' current shifting demographic climate, further investigation of how social justice principals support teachers in becoming effective educators of their culturally different students is essential. Research suggests that effective teachers in multicultural settings are likely to employ the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy even if the teacher does not consciously practice or articulate the terminology associated with this school of thought. We know that excellent teachers find ways to acknowledge and overcome cultural barriers to provide students with relevant learning experiences. However, principals and teachers must operate in unison. Social justice leadership is cemented at the building level based on how principals envision the crux of their school's success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is thought of as both a philosophy and a method. The philosophical roots of phenomenology can be traced to origins that are largely attributed to the seminal work of Edmund Husserl that emerged early in the twentieth century (Butler, 2016; Husserl, 1982; Jacobs, 2013). Husserl is credited with asserting phenomenological principles that stretched philosophic phenomenology into a scientific investigation methodology that generates knowledge from rich description allowing for increased understanding of the essence of experience (Mortari, 2008; Reeder, 2010). The role of the phenomenological researcher is to engage in a reflective process to understand his or her function as a researcher and scholar to avoid drawing assumptions about the participants in a study. Chan and Wai-tong (2013) note that phenomenological researchers should avoid creating scenarios that sway "the participants understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 1). Husserl's philosophical method includes four interrelated steps: 1) the epoche (also known as bracketing), 2) phenomenological reduction, 3) imaginative variation, and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Step one, epoche, is a process of unearthing, recording, and containing or bracketing biases, preconceived notions, and knowledge stores, before beginning the research process. The qualitative researcher Patton (1990) explains:

In bracketing, the researcher holds the phenomena up for serious inspection. It is

taken out of the world where it occurs. It is taken apart and dissected. Its

elements and essential structures are uncovered, defined, and analyzed. It is

treated as a text for a document, that is, as an instance of the phenomenon that is

being studied. It is not interpreted in terms of the standard meanings given to it

by the existing literature. Those preconceptions, which were isolated in the

deconstruction phase, are suspended and put aside during bracketing. In

bracketing the subject matter is confronted as much as possible, on its own (p.

408).

Of the four steps put forth by Husserl, epoche has arguably drawn the most

deliberation (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010; Taminiaux, 2004). The belief that we can

holistically bracket our consciousness to suspend judgment has been fervently

questioned. Researchers (Findlay, 2012; Perniola, 2011) debate whether or not it is truly

possible to divorce oneself from innate biases, preconceived notions, or knowledge

stores.

Step two, phenomenological reduction, is looking in on the phenomenon with a

consciousness that has been purged of human propensity to permit past experience to

project meaning (Ganeson, 2006). The researcher seeks unobstructed openness to

perceiving the phenomenon almost as if it emerged from an unconscious vacuum. The

notion of creating a vacuum that constrains consciousness, unconsciousness, and pre-

consciousness is not unfounded. Martin, Carminati, F., and Carminati G.G. (2013)

explain:

In 2007, Carminati and Martin (2008; Martin and Galli Carminati, 2009) studied

the individual unconscious and consciousness as quantum systems, i.e., as

vectors of a Hilbert space. In such a frame they studied the phenomenon of

consciousness and especially the awareness of unconscious components. Writing

down the state of the unconscious as (U) and the state of consciousness as (C),

they introduced another state of the unconscious, (I) which is the insight or pre-

consciousness. By building a model of quantum entanglement between those

three states they apply it to the awareness of unconscious components (p. 19).

Presuming that a state of pre-consciousness can be attained, next, the researcher enters

into horizontalization by searching for clusters of data that give the phenomenon its

character. Padilla-Diaz (2015) defines horizontalization as a process by which

researchers provide textual descriptions from relevant quotes and topics provided by

participants of a study. Multiple trials of horizontalization lead to emergent themes

that are used to formulate a textual description of the phenomenon. The textual

description masterfully knits a pattern by beholding and recounting. Subsequently,

themes and layers, bubble to the surface that had not been seen before.

Step three, imaginative variation, involves meaning-making through the

construction of structural themes and descriptions from the textual meaning that goes

beyond surface meaning to tap into the essence of the phenomenological experience

(Lin, 2013). A phenomenological approach is not predictive of future occurrences of the

phenomenon under investigation, rather, the researcher seeks increased knowledge

about the essence of the phenomenon by capturing a snapshot of a particular context and time.

Step four, synthesis, is the process of creating and sharing new knowledge about the phenomenon by presenting the essence of the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The essence of the phenomenon is a synthesis of the consensus shared findings of the interview informants.

As one might imagine, phenomenologists have expounded on the foundation laid by Husserl to offer other derivatives of phenomenology. If Husserl is regarded as the father of phenomenology, Heideggar may well be considered the first-born heir who adopted some of his forefather's beliefs but added his own bend to phenomenology. Giorgi (2007) juxtaposes Husserl and Heideggar:

Both thinkers claimed the phenomenological method. Husserl consistently, and Heidegger initially in terms of nomenclature, but what evolved for him as a method seemed radically different from what Husserl described. Because Husserl was a logician and an epistemologist, he was interested in grounding secure knowledge and because of his invention and use of the phenomenological reduction, he gave priority to careful description. Interpretation was, for Husserl and articulation of the given object that was relevant to the experience but not limited to the strictly given. For Heideggar, the question of being dominated his thinking, and since he traced the question of being back to *Dasein*, the being who raises the question of being, and discovered that *Dasein* has to interpret the meaning of being. Heidegger gives priority to interpretation…So, for Heidegger,

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at least with respect to research into the Being, priority is given to interpretation, and description is a type of interpretation (p. 63).

I recognize the advantages of the phenomenological approach that are shared by both scholars, but I am not a proponent of Husserlian-based phenomenology due to my growing awareness of researchers' inability to be fully disentangled from biases, past experiences, and knowledge stores which can potentially taint the research process. I argue that it should become increasingly more common to accept the credibility of research conducted by researchers in their own lived contexts. Creswell's (2013) explanation of the hermeneutic phenomenological research is outlined using Figure 1 (see Appendix B). Padilla-Diaz (2015) paraphrases six steps in the hermeneutic phenomenological research process as theorized by Creswell (2013) as follows:

1. The researcher describes his or her own experiences with the object of the study in order to identify personal judgments and prejudices so that they don't affect the process of analysis.

2. The researcher proceeds with the 'horizontalization' of data. This refers to the process wherein the researchers list relevant quotes of the studied topic and gives them equal value with regard to the expressions of the group. This is where the textual description begins: What are the participants saying? What are the relevant topics expressed by the research participants?

3. The researcher groups the relevant topics into units of meaning.

4. The researcher writes the textual description and includes 'ad verbatim' quotations.

5. The researcher writes the structural description.

6. Finally, according to the textual and structural analysis, the researcher proceeds to identify the essence of the phenomenon. The researcher then examines the common elements repeated in each of the research participants (p. 19).

This type of phenomenological research, as described by Creswell, can help to mitigate the production of research that reflects a tendency of researchers who are unfamiliar with foreign research contexts to unknowingly "make the strange even stranger" by failing to capture the essence of the phenomenon from the informant's perspectives.

Hybrid Phenomenological Theoretical Framework

Leading experts on designing and evaluating educational research Fraenkel and Wallen (2004) describe phenomenological studies as research which "investigates various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon" (p. 437). My phenomenological inquiry used semi-structured, in-depth interviews with secondary school principals as the primary method to collect qualitative data that described the phenomenon of social justice educational leadership in a midsized urban school district. This phenomenological approach allowed me to explore the shared experiences of school leaders juxtaposed to my own experience as their Superintendent of Schools in order that I might discover the universal elements in the collective experiences of educational leaders and the essence of social justice leadership in practice.

Based on Padilla-Diaz's (2015) work, I derived my study's theoretical frame and genre of qualitative research as a hybrid of hermeneutic and egological phenomenology which Padilla-Diaz, defines simply as:

Descriptive or hermeneutical phenomenology – It refers to the study of personal experience and requires a description or interpretation of the meanings of phenomena experienced by participants in an investigation.

…'Egological', genetic or constitutional phenomenology – It refers to the analysis of self as a conscious entity. This type of phenomenology appeals to universal consciousness (p. 103).

Figure 2 (see Appendix B) provides a visual representation of Step 2 and Step 3 of the hermeneutic research process and illustrates how the raw interview data for both the principals and myself, the researcher and Superintendent of Schools, was transcribed and sorted through a process of horizontalization.

The imagery of the funnel is appropriate for phenomenology because in phenomenological research, the researcher is required to conduct multiple trials of sorting through the data during horizontalization as if mining (or filtering) for precious gems that are equated to themes that give the phenomenon its character. During horizontalization, substantive verbatim quotes from each respondent emerged as themes in the data. Significant quotes were banded into themed clusters or units of meaning. These themed clusters were subsequently funneled during horizontalization and categorized in order to write the textual and structural description to reveal the essence of the phenomenon.

Figure 2 (see Appendix B) exemplified an expectation that there were some similarities and differences in the interviewees' perceptions of the phenomenon as evidenced by their interview responses. While Figure 2 did not illustrate the possibility that there were no consistent themes across the participant sample, it should be noted that this was probable as well.

This hybrid phenomenological approach was appropriately aligned with my dissertation research because the purpose of my study was to investigate social justice educational leadership as experienced by 6th-12th-grade principals in a Midwest midsized urban school district under my central office administration leadership. The phenomenological methodological approach was selected because I was interested in capturing the lived social justice leadership work experiences of principals from their perspectives. Social justice educational leadership is a phenomenon that manifests as an outgrowth of multi-faceted social contexts, situational realities, and complex standpoints derived from varied life histories. Hermeneutic phenomenology coupled with egological phenomenology were appropriate philosophic methodologies to explore the phenomenon of social justice educational leadership in my own educational setting. I was able to take on the role of participant researcher and disclose my innate biases, preconceived notions, and knowledge stores without the burden of quarantining them. Husserl introduced the term "egology" during the 20th century in his *Cartesian Meditations* (1931) in connection with phenomenology. Ziolkowski (2014) explains how egology became known as "the study of the individual consciousness and its modes of experiences: seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, etc." (para. 3).

There is no denying that this phenomenological dissertation study could have just as easily been framed as practitioner research. Fellow qualitative researchers may argue the case that being a participant in the research setting diminished my ability to remain objective and unbiased as I collected data and analyzed it in the context where I led. To avoid this scrutiny, I could have just as easily framed my dissertation study as practitioner research. I chose to pursue a hybrid phenomenological inquiry while openly acknowledging and offering a plan to abate my subjectivity, though I remained intricately involved in the research setting throughout the duration of the study.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study was guided by the following primary research question: What is the social justice leadership experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent? Ancillary research questions germane to this study included:

- What experiential knowledge has shaped the actions, beliefs, and ethical decision-making of 6th-12th-grade principals in regard to educational leadership for social justice?

- What, if any, professional growth/development training experiences in social justice theory and/or practice do secondary principals draw upon to support their advocacy for social justice?

- What experiences do secondary school principals have in assessing the impact of social justice practices on school climate and culture?

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- What experiences do secondary school principals have with planning and implementing professional development for faculty, staff, students and parents that is relevant to social justice in education?

- What resistance at the building/communal level, if any, do secondary school principal experience while attempting to implement social justice practices to improve school climate and culture?

- What supports, if any, do secondary principals acknowledge are provided by central office administration in order to implement social justice practices with fidelity at the building level?

- What experiences do secondary school principals report are sources of resilience in their work as social justice leaders in public schools?

These ancillary questions may or may not have been administered in the interview protocol (see Appendix B) as the phenomenological approach was semi-structured to remain opened-ended and organically guided by the interview informants' responses to the primary research question prompt.

Researcher as Participant

Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) acknowledge that:

…Practitioners do research for many reasons. Some do dissertations at their own sites. Some study their own settings to improve their practice. Some see themselves as producers of knowledge that other practitioners, as well as academics, might find useful. Some see themselves as part of a grassroots movement to challenge older paradigms of educational practice. Some critique

the schooling practices that help reproduce social inequalities in the wider

society… We are biased towards viewing practitioner researchers as critical

change agents within their schools (p. xvii).

I saw glimpses of myself in all of the examples that Anderson et al. (1994) gave to

characterize the work of practitioner researchers. Nonetheless, I organized my

dissertation research as a hybrid phenomenological study (including hermeneutic and

egological approaches) because the skill of exercising objectivity was essential to my

career as an educational leader practitioner/researcher. In this age of increased

accountability based on data-driven decision-making, it was critical that I continued

honing my ability to be a data-informed and unbiased educational leader. This

phenomenological dissertation process provided an optimal opportunity for me to

assist principals with gaining more experience to that end.

Since I was the Superintendent of Schools in the district where the research was

conducted, in the spirit of researcher transparency, I acknowledged that I operated as

an administrator/researcher and was highly involved within the research setting where

I was employed for the past twenty-two years of my professional career. I had a

longstanding working relationship with the principal interviewees. I also received my

elementary and secondary education in the school district. In order to safeguard

against conducting a study that was biased by my preconceived notions, and

experiential and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, I

disclosed my own experiences with the phenomenon and informants in order to

identify my personal judgments and preunderstandings so that they were less likely to affect the process of analysis.

This hermeneutical phenomenological approach did not call for bracketing. I contended that even with the use of bracketing, "no research is neutral" (Andersen et al., 1994, p. 4). Despite the threat of some bias, I maintained that my role as a participant in the research setting held more advantages than disadvantages. One advantage was that I openly acknowledged that I had tacit knowledge of the setting that I revealed before embarking on the research process. I also authored a reflexive data analysis journal in which I classified and recorded instances in the data analysis process that triggered my pre-dispositions or pre-understandings.

I was acutely aware that even with the full disclosure of my prejudices regarding the phenomenon of social justice leadership, I may still be challenged with distancing myself from the research because of my personal knowledge of the research setting. As an added safeguard, I proactively enlisted a second-party researcher to conduct my interviews. The second-party researcher earned her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Oakland University and had previously taught qualitative research within graduate-level programs. She was PEERS certified and had multiple publications relating to curriculum and instruction. She also served as a collegial coder and participated in cross-checking during the data analysis for emergent themes so as not to allow my intimate knowledge of the setting and participants to cloud the data analysis and interpretation process. According to Padilla-Diaz (2015):

Some of the most commonly used strategies during the process of validation

under phenomenology include corroboration by participants and agreement by

coders (Creswell, 2013). Corroboration with participants consists of presenting

and discussing the data analysis between the researchers and the research

participants to verify that the essences and meanings are in fact those expressed

directly or indirectly by participants. Agreement between coders is a more

complex process. Various people or external researchers participate willingly in

the process of encoding data. These people concern themselves mainly with

seeking correspondence between the relevant themes (and subthemes) and the

categories that emerge from the data analysis. At the end, all coders compare

their respective analysis and, if necessary, according to mutual agreement, the

categories can be reorganized to validate the information obtained (p. 107).

As stated before, I employed the process that Padilla-Diaz (2015) referred to above as

process of encoding data as an added precaution to avoid bias. I did not however,

corroborate with interviewees during the data analysis phase because I did not want

interviewees to edit their initial interview responses, after-the-fact, because they may

have felt compelled to adapt their oral responses when they reviewed the transcript text

that is presented without the accompaniment of voice inflection, facial expression, and

other interpersonal communication cues that can elicit meaning that may not be

conveyed by mere text transcriptions.

I had a vested interest in the context where the research was investigated,

therefore, I was committed to taking every precaution to implement this

phenomenological inquiry with ethical fidelity. I included egological phenomenology as part of my research methodology so that I could incorporate my own experiences in the research rather than attempt to extract myself from a context where I had deep roots and insider knowledge.

The primary disadvantage of my role as participant in the research setting was that the principal informants may have felt obligated to participate in the study. One could also argue that the truthfulness of principal interviewees was diminished because of my supervisorial role in relation to them. I addressed these concerns by stating clearly in the participation solicitation protocol that involvement in this study was strictly voluntary and there was no penalty for non-participation or for the discontinuation of participation once the study was underway. Again, I used a second-party researcher to conduct the interviews to reassure interviewees that they could be truthful. In addition, the purposeful sample size was large enough to ensure an acceptable level of anonymity for the interviewees.

Being able to make credible contributions to the field of research on social justice leadership served my own practitioner needs. Finally, as a self-proclaimed and publicly acknowledged social justice leader myself, I had strong views about social justice leadership theory that I withheld in order to analyze the data objectively and avoid compromising the confirmation of my research. I also believed my research added to the professional body of knowledge on social justice leadership praxis.

Data Collection Techniques

In order to assure confirmation of my research study, it was necessary to clearly articulate a plan to acquire permission to conduct the research and outline my data collection procedures. My data collection procedures included a data gathering plan for collecting data through semi-structured interviews, establishing protocols for collecting, recording, and managing interview data, providing a description of the research setting and participants, as well as explaining the process for gaining access to the research site.

Approval to conduct this phenomenological study was requested and granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Michigan-Flint. Consent forms were obtained from principals identified who are willing to participate in the study and proper permission from the school district to conduct the study was granted.

Phenomenological Interview Procedure

Opting to have a second-party researcher facilitate the interview process was imperative to create a neutral climate for principals to openly share their views. I purposefully excluded myself from direct participation in the interview protocol to encourage unencumbered and authentic responses from principals. The second-party researcher took written notes as a backup to audio recordings. Audio recordings were word processed by professional transcriptionists who produced narrative script of the interviews. I enlisted a second-party researcher to conduct-90-minute tape-recorded interviews with six principals and myself to gather the data for this hermeneutic/egological phenomenological study. Interviews were semi-structured to

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elicit the lived experiences of public school administrators that reflected specific social justice leadership practices. According to Brinkman and Kvale (2015):

> A semi-structured life world interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subjects' own perspectives. This kind of interview seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to the interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena…The interview is usually transcribed and the written text and sound recording together constitute the materials for the subsequent analysis of meaning (p. 32).

A second-party researcher could objectively conduct the interviews. Due to the sensitive content associated with discussion around social justice issues regarding race, class, gender, and politics, confidential interviews were a less intimidating means for documenting details from participants. Principals were provided with a sense of assurance that they could speak freely throughout the interview process.

Superintendent Interview

In addition to interviewing the principals, I participated in a superintendent interview conducted by a second-party researcher that allowed me to share and critically analyze my own conception of social justice leadership. This interview format assisted me in understanding my own conceptions of social justice leadership in relation to the context in which social justice principals under my leadership reflect on their own leadership practices. My responses allowed me to examine my conception of social justice leadership and how it intersected with the experiences of fellow administrators who self-identified as advocates for social justice leadership.

Reflexive Data Analysis Journal

A reflexive data analysis journal was kept, allowing me to log a metacognitive record of my bias, preconceptions about social justice leadership, tacit contextual knowledge, existing knowledge stores, and personal knowledge of the principal interviewees during my analysis of the interview transcripts. Berger (2015) contends, "One goal of reflexivity in qualitative research is to monitor such effects and thus enhance the accuracy of the research and 'the credibility of the findings by accounting for researcher values, beliefs, knowledge, and biases', that is, to gain plausibility by securing researcher's trustworthiness" (p. 221). Please see Appendix C for an example of the reflexive instrument.

Research Setting

The communal backdrop for the school district where this study was conducted was a Midwest midsized urban city that has historically relied on the automobile industry for its economic viability. The city's tax base eroded due to many automotive manufacturing jobs leaving the region. Consequently, over the past four decades, this community lost approximately 40,341 residents. According to the 2016 U.S. Census Report, the city currently has a population of approximately 51,507 residents. The same report estimated the city's racial makeup was 43.5% African American, 37.3% White, 0.3% Native American, 0.6% Asian, and 5.8% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 15.1% of the population. The median household income from 2012 – 2016 was approximately $28,871 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). As of December of 2018, the city's unemployment rate was 6.6% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Jan. 2018).

Historically, the city has been identified as one of the most dangerous cities per capita based on violent crimes (870 per 100,000) such as homicide and crimes against women (76 rapes per 100,000) in particular (Casserly, 2012). A 2012 Forbes Magazine publication identified the city as being the most dangerous city for women in the United States. However, over the past two years, there has been a significant decline in violent crimes. Kransz (2018) reported that the city had sixteen homicides in 2017, eleven murders in 2016, and eight killings in 2015. In 2016, the United States Department of Treasury awarded the city $2.2 million dollars to combat blight (Tower, 2016). Within the last decade, there has been a substantial pattern of residents leaving the city. U.S. Census Bureau (2016) data from December of 2017 indicates a 2,521 person decline (approximately 4.9%) occurred in the city's population from 2010 to 2016.

The school district's overall student body was comprised of approximately 62.92% African-American students, 20.95% White students, 11.75% Hispanics students, 2.42% Asian, .93% two or more races, and .83% native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Eighty-three percent of the teaching staff was Caucasian, 13% were African-American, and 4% were Hispanic (MI School data, 2018). The student enrollment at the time of the research was 5,755 students. From 2010 to 2017, the district lost approximately 2602 students. Students classified as special needs learners represented 14.7 percent of the district student population. English Language Learners made-up .05% of the district's student body. According to the 2016 Michigan Census Bureau, approximately 35.8% of students between the ages of 5 and 17 lived in poverty (Michigan Census Bureau).

Despite ongoing struggles with proficiency scores on state standardized tests, the school district increased its graduation rate from 66.9% in 2012 to 77.26% in 2017 (MI School Data, 2018). Increases were attributed to the use of targeted academic interventions throughout the instructional day and expanded credit recovery options after school, on weekends, and during Summer School. Two of the comprehensive high schools and one traditional middle school were operating under a transformation plan due to their identification as Priority Schools.

There was a Pre-K through 5th grade Blue Ribbon award winning IB Program along with a 6th—12th grade Center for the Arts and Sciences. Both programs were Reward Schools within the 98th percentile based on the state's index value system for school accountability. The district also operated its own career and technical education center with concentrations that received numerous state and national awards in programming. The district has ten elementary schools and one Early Childhood Center with Pre-K programming and a Birth – 5 Program. Due to the district's high poverty index for its student demographics, all children within the district received free lunch through the Community Eligibility Option. From 2011 through 2015, the district was running an $18 million-dollar deficit and closed over 8 schools within the past decade. The district currently has more offline school buildings than operational schools.

To eliminate deficit spending, faculty and staff endured a 9% rollback in pay. Over the past four years, significant concessions from bargaining units, a reorganization of district facilities through school consolidation and closing facilities, downsizing of staff through layoffs and job absorption, and better oversight of budgetary matters

through deficit elimination planning resulted in the district establishing a $13 million-dollar surplus. Fortunately, recent savings enabled the district to reinstate the 9% pay cut. Prior to the 2017 – 2018 school year, staff had not received a step increase since the 2009 – 2010 academic year. No cost of living increase was provided during this time. Additional reorganization efforts are necessary to right-size the district to ensure optimal use of human and material resources to prevent future deficit spending.

Interview Participants

A purposeful sampling design was used to identify six secondary lead principal participants within the district who self-identify as social justice leaders. Their work with students from urban communities on issues of social justice was a major consideration for including them in this study. A narrative description of the interviewees was included. The identity of all participants has been kept anonymous with the use of pseudonyms.

The first principal interviewee, Diane Ramirez, had been an educator at the secondary level for over 38 years. She initially taught English and sociology at the middle school level in a neighboring urban district with comparable demographics to her current district. She engaged in work requiring schools to adopt reform models because they were labeled as persistently low-achieving. Mrs. Ramirez prided herself on her ability to identify relevant professional development and classroom resources that teachers needed to instruct effectively. She worked closely with the district's Instructional Division to provide staff with job-embedded coaching to expand teachers' professional growth. Because her school was not Title I, she worked with staff to secure

resources and grants that provided students with comparable materials and technology used to support instruction. Diane was the oldest of three children of immigrant parents who came to the United States from Mexico to provide their family with a better quality of life and access to a free and public education. She was raised in a community that is fifteen miles northeast of the school district. She was the only member of her family to complete college.

Matt Foster was the principal of a high school that had recently been released from priority status. He had been a secondary educator within the district for twenty years. He began his career teaching social studies at a high school within the district before becoming an assistant principal at one of the district's middle school. Prior to serving at the high school, he successfully led an IB PYP Program at a middle school that was also released from Priority status as a persistently low achieving school. Matt experienced success with leading both a middle school and high school staff through redesign plans resulting in students achieving higher proficiency in core academic content. His focus was on aligning curriculum with relevant assessments that accurately measure state standards that students are assessed on. Matt routinely asked staff and students to take a proactive approach to learning by adopting a growth mindset as opposed to accepting fixed parameters for learning. He was the oldest of three siblings raised by a single parent mother. Matt's siblings earned advanced degrees in educational leadership and engineering respectively.

Jacqueline Demery had twenty-two years of experience working with at-risk students in urban settings. She was in her third year as principal in the district's most

academically challenged school culture. She started her career in education as a social

studies teacher and assistant principal at the high school level. She had experience with

reculturing a school and bringing it out of Priority status. She was a firm advocate of

Promoting Positive School Climate (PPSC) as a means for improving staff and student

relationships and insisting on high levels of family and community engagement. She

frequently incentivized student performance to create a sense of urgency around high-

stakes assessments and improving students' dispositions toward their school work. She

insisted that students must be able to reflect critically on how they perceive themselves

as learners in order to assist them in becoming better students and responsible citizens.

Jacqueline was the youngest daughter of her parent's five children. She was the fourth

child in her immediate family to graduate from college.

Rebecca Rivers had been an educator at the middle school level for sixteen years.

She began her career as an English teacher within the district's gifted and talented

secondary school. She was extremely competent about matters relating to curriculum

design and assessment. Rebecca used her Title I funds for parent engagement activities

designed to provide families with specific strategies that they can use to support their

children at home and school. She had an intricate knowledge of how to implement a

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) that provides appropriate and targeted

interventions to her most needy students. She used professional learning communities

to assist teachers with unpacking standards, developing instructional units, and

providing the appropriate formative assessments to ensure that students are mastering

the content. Rebecca established after-school tutorials, weekend enrichment, and

remedial programming to keep students engaged in learning. Rebecca was the older of

two children who grew up in a two-parent household within a rural community 100

miles north of the school district. She was the first to graduate from college in her

family.

John Langston had eighteen years of experience at the secondary level within the

district. He began his career as a middle school science teacher, district science

instructional coach, and eventually became a lead principal at the district's Career and

Technical Education (CTE) Center. John developed curriculum for Positive Behavior

Instructional Support (PBIS) programs which he used within an alternative education

program housed on the campus of the CTE Center. He attended college at a local

university and established himself as an educator committed to culturally responsive

pedagogy due to his experiences with diverse students. John was the younger of two

children of a family who has rural roots 52 miles northwest of the district. He believed

that students who lack interest in traditional classroom instruction benefited from

skilled trades initiatives. He noted that when students enroll in half-day CTE

concentrations, their level of engagement increased in traditional core classes at their

home schools. He spent a significant part of his recruitment efforts directed at student

populations that were historically underserved due to their classification as special

needs, English Language Learners, and behaviorally challenged.

Tara Morris had twenty-eight years of experience as an elementary/secondary

educator within the district. She began her career as a high school teacher, elementary

teacher, Title I instructor, and later secured principalships at the elementary and middle

school levels. She believed that a school culture should have an overarching leadership philosophy that provides students with the prerequisite skills to think critically, problem solve, and care for the larger community that they are connected to. Her students and staff all had a common leadership model with accompanying language that they operated within. She acknowledged her students and staff on a monthly basis for their academic growth, citizenship, attendance, and volunteer efforts within their community. Tara was the younger of two siblings who grew up in a two-parent household within a rural community twenty miles east of the school district. She was the first to graduate from college in her family.

The ethnic make-up of the principals consisted of the following: a Black male and female, a Hispanic female, a White male, and two White females. Each one of the participants had over fifteen years of experience in the district as either a teacher or administrator with the exception of the Black female. She had over twenty years of experience working with a comparable student demographic in another mid-sized, Midwestern urban school district. All participants were between the ages of 45 and 60. None of the administrators resided in the city where their school or district was located. Please refer to Table 1 (see Appendix A) for a snapshot of the interviewees' profiles.

The superintendent attended K-12 schools within the district throughout his entire primary, middle, and secondary school experience. He graduated from one of the district's high schools and attributes his post-secondary preparation for success to the strong academic and socio-emotional foundation that was instilled in him by nurturing educators. Upon graduating from high school, he attended the University of

Michigan in Ann Arbor and graduated with class honors. He earned a MA and Ed.S.

degree from a local university in Educational Leadership. He is currently a doctoral

candidate at the University of Michigan-Flint in Educational Leadership. He continued

his lifelong learning journey in education because in his words he considers it to be his

"professional obligation and never-ending duty to seek advanced leadership

development that will build the intellectual muscle and internal stamina needed to meet

the demands placed on 21st century educational leaders." He is the middle child of three

children. He was the only member of his family to graduate from college.

Please refer to Table 1 (see Appendix A) for a synopsis of all principal participants and

the superintendent.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis Plan**</div>

The data analysis plan for the semi-structured, in-depth interviews employed a

hermeneutic phenomenological method staged in five phases. Phase one focused on

horizontalization, which is a process used to extract critical statements from transcribed

documents that explain how social justice leadership is experienced by participants. A

descriptive coding system was used to analyze emergent themes present in the data.

Saldana (2013) notes, "Descriptive Coding summarizes in a word or short phrase - most

often as a noun - the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 88). This content is

then analyzed and categorized into significant themes. Blair (2015) suggests, "Content

analysis is dependent on creating labels (codes) that can be applied to data in order to

develop data into meaningful categories to be analyzed and interpreted" (p. 16). The

descriptive coding procedure entailed (1) reviewing participants' statements several

times, (2) developing labels from clustered information into meaningful macro (central) themes used to subcategorize micro-themes, and (3) establishing properties that are derived from participants' transcribed statements (Gallicano, 2013).

Phase two involved categorizing the statements from the transcripts into clustered themes. Groenewald (2004) notes, "By interrogating the meaning of the various clusters, central themes are determined, "which express the essence of these clusters" (p. 50). During phase three, participants' experiences were presented through writing a textual description of social justice leadership practices that emerged from the themed clusters gathered in phase two. Phase four explained how the context or setting of social justice leadership was experienced by the participants through a written structural description. Hycner (1985) shares, "After the general and unique themes have been noted, it is often helpful to place these themes back within the overall contexts or horizons from which these themes emerged" (p. 293). During phase five, the essence of social justice leadership practices were presented by the researcher (?) in a descriptive narrative as experienced by the participants. This composite report enabled the researcher to link details in the interview with the research findings.

Procedure: Reflexive Data Analysis Journal

A descriptive coding method was used to review journal entries and identify content that may have influenced researcher bias. This journal was vital in tracking biases, presumptions, knowledge stores, tacit contextual knowledge, and personal information that I held about the principal interviewees and/or social justice leadership. This activity assisted me with labeling my triggered responses during data

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analysis of the principals' self-reported social justice leadership experiences. Again, the use of a reflexive data analysis journal provided a measure allowing me the opportunity to be mindful of biases that emerged during the data collection process. The presence of internal dissonance that arose when reviewing the principals' transcribed statements was recorded for consideration during the data analysis process.

Summarization

This chapter described the qualitative method that I used to answer my research question: What is the social justice leadership experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent? Data collection techniques included semi-structured, in-depth interviews, a superintendent interview, and maintaining a reflexive data analysis journal. Furthermore, a descriptive coding activity was used to collect data in the form of emergent themes and patterns consistent with social justice leadership practices of principal participants and myself. The essence of social justice leadership will be captured in a composite report detailing the lived experiences of all participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

A hermeneutic and egological phenomenological approach was used to capture the essence of the lived experiences of principals' social justice leadership in their schools. In simple terms, Kafle (2011), defines phenomenology as "a way of researching the essence or essential meaning of phenomena" (p. 189). Hermeneutic phenomenology in qualitative research was used to examine text by isolating themes used to generate the essence of the phenomenon being studied (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Transcribed principal interviews interlaced with my own, their superintendent's interview, provided the textual description necessary to unpack the lived social justice experiences of the secondary educational leaders studied.

This phenomenological study was guided by the primary research question: *What is the social justice leadership experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent?* Ancillary research questions informed the phenomenological interview process but were administered in response to the interviewees' commentary to allowing the participants to guide the semi-structured interviews. These ancillary questions focused on professional growth/development training experiences in social justice theory and/or practice, assessment of the outcome of social justice practices on school climate and culture, professional development for faculty, staff, students, and parents that is relevant to social justice in education, resistance at the

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building/communal level the implementation of social justice practices to improve school climate and culture, central office support for social justice initiatives, and sources of resilience in the work of advocating for social justice. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived roles, barriers, and practices of secondary principals (6th-12th grades) who lead schools in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent.

This chapter presents emergent themes that resulted from qualitative data analysis of semi-structured interview transcripts from six principal participants and me, as their superintendent. Three macro-themes emerged from a careful examination of responses given by the participants. These macro-themes or umbrella categories were determined based on the frequency of their reporting in each of the participants' transcribed and coded interviews. Macro-themes included: 1) Enacting Visionary Transformational Leadership; 2) Eliminating Barriers for Equity of Learning; and 3) Promoting Positive School Climate. The findings also revealed 21 significant micro-themes that were less pervasive in the respondent interviews. These micro-themes were sorted under macro-theme categorizations as part of the horizontalization procedure. This procedure required multiple trials of sorting through the data in order to categorize the macro-and micro-themes and then writing the textual and structural description that revealed the essence of the social justice leadership phenomenon (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

Please refer to Figure 3 (see Appendix B) for a chart illustrating the sorted macro- and micro-theme categorization schemata. The macro and micro-themes provided the textual and structural description of principals' lived experiences with social justice within their learning communities to reveal the essence of the phenomenon of social justice leadership in schools.

Enacting Visionary Transformational Leadership

One outstanding quality that emerges in the scholarly literature Kose (2009), Theoharis (2008), and Shields (2012) regarding social justice principals is their ability to lead through a transformational visionary lens in order to establish buy-in from stakeholders who lend support to enhancing school culture. This form of visionary leadership encourages teachers and support staff to value students' diversity, implement more multicultural education into lessons, and consider their own racial identity while interacting with students of color. Kose (2009) asserts, "through collaborative planning and communication of this vision, principals provided purpose and direction behind professional learning efforts" (p. 638). Shields (2012) contends, "such leadership is about vision, ideology, and beliefs as well as about actions and social change" (p. 53). He further describes this form of leadership as being rooted in critical analysis and self-reflection to ensure that individuals have equitable access to resources to succeed within an organizational structure.

Transformational visionary leaders seek to involve all stakeholders associated with a learning community. Principal participants divulged a desire to work collaboratively with me, their superintendent, the school board, and community

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stakeholders to co-construct a vision for the district that people within the organizational structure can identify with and execute. Principal Foster explained how critical building-level input is when enacting visionary transformational leadership to be responsive to social justice concerns:

> We need central office to actually listen to what the vision is. At the end of the day we expect the superintendent to provide a compelling vision, strong vision for how we can move schools forward. As opposed to regurgitation of the same old vision from other superintendents or other leaders.

He further stated, "I think as a social justice leader you have to have a vision, you have to have a compelling vision and you have to be able to sell that vision." The notion that visionary leaders have to have a systemic awareness of processes that occur within their building and district is embedded in nearly all principals' commentaries. Principal Ramirez shared:

> I think social justice once again, evaluates the big picture. You look at the big picture and you look at what your vision is for the organization and how you assess those individuals that are receiving your services and showing that they have all the resources, all the access, all the equality that they should be receiving.

Principal Demery echoed similar sentiments adding, "You have to keep visualizing the end game in mind for kids, not just your money every two weeks, for kids. Where are they gonna get when they walk out the door."

There is an expectation amongst most principals that a reasonable timeline should be established in order to effectively evaluate the fidelity and systemic value of operationalized changes. Understanding the urgency to see needed institutional changes, I explained:

> One of the most challenging aspects of social justice leadership within the district is getting people to understand that systemic district transformation takes time and resources. In a culture of accountability where threats of school closure are real, the community has to understand that districts don't just get into or out of financial crisis and academic duress overnight. There is a strategic way that you have to approach school reform and district restructuring is much tougher than building-level turnaround. Unfortunately, the short shelf-life of superintendents in urban districts does not always permit the time necessary to enact meaningful change. Consequently, you see a bunch of academic experimentation with our most needy students occurring in inner-cities throughout the state.

Principal Demery furthered my notion that reform can be difficult in the midst of chronic circumstances and added, "It just is… and it's something that we can't just 'fix', these are things that are engrained, systemic things in our society." Principal Morris noted the importance of continuous reflection and adaptation to establish forward progression in spite of current communal and societal influences and stated, "I think it's important that my leadership team and I stop and reflect, and we get input from the staff of the previous year about what changes we have to make for the next year." Principal Morris further shared, "You have those who when you don't have the follow-

through, there's breaks in the system and no matter how strong that system is set up, how it's spelled out, or whatever much of a break in that system, it affects everybody else. And that includes the kids too." Principal Morris envisioned her school as being a place that was perpetually reacting to larger societal challenges but nonetheless could be positioned to make a positive difference for students when all stakeholders were onboard with promoting positive change in spite of how daunting this goal may appear. Similarly, Principal Rivers commented:

> You have to be able to say, 'Okay, this didn't work today. How am I going to change tomorrow?' So just really having a positive attitude. But you can get burnt out very quickly in an urban setting, especially when you're trying to make change.

One can argue that before you can physically see changes in school systems, you must first envision what might be possible before the concrete evidence of promising potentiality appears.

Transformational visionary leadership comprises numerous qualities that principals possess who are committed to engaging staff and community stakeholders in a social justice platform. Thompson, Templeton, and Ballenger (2013) point to characteristics such as a leader's ability to focus on concepts such as empowerment, vision casting, and team-building to improve student outcomes and staff cohesion. Principal participants in this study generated seven under-girding micro-themes that provided structural significance to the enactment of visionary transformational leadership: (1) personal experience with social justice/injustice, (2) knowledge of social

justice theory and practice, (3) isolationism within social justice leadership, (4) shared accountability, (5) resilience, (6) self-compassion, and (7) ambiguity of social justice. Each of these micro-themes for the enactment of visionary transformational leadership will be explained now, in depth.

Personal Experiences with Social Justice/Injustice

Principal participants cited personal experiences with social justice as being motivating factors that helped shape their work in education. Theoharis (2008) characterizes leaders who infuse deeply interwoven personal attachment to their work as having "passionate visionary leadership" (p. 16). Principals' ability to identify with the lived experiences of their students and families is also critical to their leadership development in promoting socially just schools. McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) advise that principals must show investment within understanding "their students and their students' families and communities on a personal level" and to dignify the culture of their students" (p. 609). Four of the seven principal participants credited their childhood experiences with social justice as being the major reason for increasing their awareness of social justice issues in education. Two principals noted their desire to create more efficient and equitable learning settings for students and staff through improving their leadership skills.

Principal Ramirez credited her experience as an English Language Learner growing up in a Hispanic household where English was a second language. She described hardships and shame that she encountered while attempting to learn English:

I participated in a bilingual program. I didn't speak English when I went to

school. I only spoke Spanish. And whenever a teacher told my Mom, they'd

have to speak English. So, we learned English and we started speaking English.

It was very difficult at first. But my parents weren't high school graduates and –

they were very adamant. They were very big advocates about the kids. They

were insistent on their children getting a good education and valued what that

could do for you. I remember being a kid in Burt City. Children from a lot of

families who spoke only Spanish were placed in Special Ed. So, we had families

with 16, 17, 18 kids and all of them were in Special Ed. because they were ESL

students. And I remember my parents very early on fighting the Board of

Education, trying to build their case and protesting, requesting and demanding

that there be Spanish teachers and bi-lingual teachers that would know how to

work with students that were of a different language background instead of just

automatically saying that they were special ed. students. And that was a fix-all

for the district at the time.

Principal Foster also disclosed personal experiences that aided in the development of

his social justice platform. He attributed his upbringing in an urban environment as

being the catalyst for his social justice work:

I think, my overall background growing up as a poor African-American student,

raised by a single mother with limited opportunities. I think that overall has

kinda shaped my leadership style and I want to provide that type of support for

students. I think, I'm just real passionate about providing for those who are

marginalized and under-represented in urban schools. One example was growing up in school settings where we didn't necessarily have exposure to Advanced Placement courses. Where students were maybe bored, disconnected from school and easily marginalized. We came through basic instead of classes that challenged them.

Principal Demery also referenced childhood experience with a set of grandparents who had survived poverty-stricken circumstances and another set who pursued education to ensure that their lineage sustained itself. She provided a vivid account of these circumstances:

I'm a granddaughter of sharecroppers, my grandfather couldn't read and write, on one side. On the other side, my grandfather was college educated. So, along the way I feel like it's my responsibility to bring my students along, particularly in urban education where there's high poverty. That doesn't have to be your lot in life. Education can move you to different phases.

Likewise, Principal Rivers expressed a strong desire that she had to work in an inner-city school where she believed she could be of more assistance to at-risk students. Although she was from a more affluent environment, she felt a genuine compassion to work with urban youth and recollected:

I actually went out to Seattle, Washington and worked in Seattle Public Schools, which was definitely a challenging urban setting. And so from there, came back to the area and just really loved to work with urban kids and felt that they needed more people to push them to that next level. So that's what started my

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experience, did a lot of research, my master's in urban learning techniques, and

so that's sort of what got me here.

Principal Langston's motivation to work within his current district was

grounded more in his research agenda within behavior modification through Positive

Behavior Instructional Support (PBIS). He envisioned his leadership as being a natural

outgrowth of his desire to assist colleagues with improving classroom climate and

student achievement. He reflected on his career pathway as an administrator:

> I got directly involved with the school improvement team and school leadership
>
> team, and I just really enjoyed the processes of what makes a school work and
>
> what makes a school operate, and the equity of learning, and the professional
>
> development with the teachers, and how that whole process worked.

I added that my own personal experiences growing up poor and biracial in a project

housing community profoundly shaped my perspective on social justice. Plus, my

experience with Affirmative Action programs in college and witnessing efforts my

university made to attract and retain minority students significantly influenced my

stance on social justice. I recounted the following:

> Attending schools that were majority minority, low socioeconomic class status,
>
> and eventually matriculating to the University of Michigan had a profound
>
> impression on my view of issues regarding equal access to education. I entered
>
> the University of Michigan through a Bridge Program that was specifically
>
> designed to recruit and retain minority students by providing them with
>
> academic supports and counseling. This program was a product of the

Affirmative Action movement that was occurring at the time which attempted to

level the playing field for minority students entering U of M in relation to their

White counterparts.

All participants in this study shared lived experiences with social justice that

profoundly changed their conception of how leadership prioritizes to promote equity in

schools with scarce resources. It appeared that these principals drew upon both

knowledge gained from personal lived experiences and professional practices acquired.

Knowledge of Social Justice Theory and Practice

Principals cited more personal experiences with social justice issues and the

resulting injustice than social justice theoretical knowledge. Nonetheless, their practice

was influenced by their growing theoretical knowledge and commitment to lead

socially just schools. Principal Rivers stated, "Personally, I just think social justice needs

to be a larger focus in the educational field both at the specialist level for teachers as

well as administrators, and pre-service teachers." Principal Foster's discussed efforts

that the school administration employed to expose more staff to social justice concerns:

We do a lot of workshops and we have discussions around growth mindsets,

different strategies and different ways teachers can talk to kids. Really build

that, so really trying to provide – just trying to provide teachers with a high level

of support and training so that they can realize they have the power to change

circumstances, like through social justice that they can go out and they can be

difference makers. They can change the lives of these kids and have an impact,

not only in the lives of the kids but really impact the community for generations.

Principal Demery's professional experience with social justice training occurred outside the district. She shared, "Prior to coming to the district, I had contracted with some people to come in and provide cultural conflict and social justice training with teachers."

My own knowledge or awareness of social justice concerns within my community heightened when I was a high school ELA teacher. I would often use critical pedagogy to engage students in controversial human rights issues that developed their critical thinking skills and enticed themes to hone their writing and analytical skills through dialogic journal writing. The professional conviction to empower my students to be autonomous thinkers and proactive change agents is captured in my interview where I revealed my position on why it's critical to have and an awareness of social justice best practices:

> I believe that people are capable of treating each other in a respectful manner if they are taught to value the historical contributions of diverse groups. There are too many examples in U.S. history and human civilization of what happens when people are dehumanized or devalued because their beliefs, practices, or appearance are not consistent with mainstream culture. It is important that social justice leaders have an intimate knowledge of social justice theory and best practices.

Although my findings revealed that school leaders often drew upon experiential knowledge more commonly than theoretical knowledge when faced with the urgency of real-world leadership challenges, it must be noted that experiential and theoretical

understanding need not be at odds with one another. In fact, given a chance, experiential and theoretical knowledge stores can be complimentary and reinforcing and thereby more easily transferable for future learning and professional growth.

Isolationism Encountered Within Social Justice Leadership

Due to the sometimes painful yet transformative nature of leading for social justice, many principals reported feeling isolated from their colleagues and members of the school community who were unsupportive of needed changes. Theoharis (2003) describes a pilot study with principals who considered themselves to be social justice leaders. He asserts, "A key idea that came from the pilot study was that principals leading for social justice feel isolated. Principals in the pilot study described how essential having a network of support was to their ability to lead and do justice work." This same dynamic was present in principals' commentary within this research. When asked about what level of support she needed from central office, Principal Morris stated simply, "I can't do it by myself." Principal Ramirez similarly shared her frustrations with feeling like an outsider and disclosed:

> I try to be available, but this entire year has been especially challenging with anyone in my building questioning my competence. My assistant and counselor have been there, 18 to 20 years. They believe that they have more invested in the success of the school.

 Principal Ramirez was new to the school and had difficulty getting buy-in from the Leadership Team because she wanted to make substantial changes to curriculum that some staff members simply felt were unnecessary. The school was in the 95th percentile

ranking for academic performance. Therefore, staff couldn't find any merit in her proposed changes. She stated, "There was no team. I was like, 'Oh, my God.' My first two years, I'm just struggling with trying to figure out how do I get this work done by myself. And I felt completely by myself."

As Superintendent of Schools, I believed that my school principals would see me as an ally in their pursuits to establish more inclusive, socially just schools. Ironically, I too often struggled with a sense of isolationism when asking principals to reflect on existing practices and reconsider how to make systems more sensitive to students based of their conceptions of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and religion, etc. I reflected on my feeling of abandonment from many of my colleagues who had been my peer administrators prior to my appointment as superintendent and noted, "To be honest, I've always operated as a team player, but, sometimes the superintendency can be a lonely position to navigate through. Nonetheless, I embrace the struggle." Bogotch (2000) alludes to this feeling of seclusion by pointing out that "In educational leadership, an individually-minded principal is often called a maverick: an individually minded teacher-leader is called a troublemaker. Neither is included under the banner of loyalty to the system or as a team player" (p. 148).

School leaders like Principal Foster have developed strategies for countering a sense of marginalization by finding comfort in being isolated if it allows him to lead with his convictions uncompromised. Principal Foster proudly reported taking a Robin-hood inspired approach to problem-solving. He noted, "To me, I don't know,

sometimes leadership is about taking risk and about sometimes thinking outside the box."

Principal Foster's "outside of the box" risk-taking leadership prompted me to write in my reflexive data analysis journal:

> Principal Foster often has blinders on when it comes to larger systemic issues that his 'outside the box' problem-solving can potentially impact. For example, in a school system that receives federal funding to support economically challenged as well as special needs students, formulaic precision must be adhered to in order to remain in compliance with legal statutes and district policies. While it can be commendable to takes risks, these risks taken at the building level, should not be driven by self-interest and must factor into the functional synergism of the entire school district with all students in mind.

One of the interesting findings that came up in this study is that principals often indicated wanting to instill a sense of shared accountably within the school culture under their supervision but were less inclined to embrace the shared accountability expected from them by central office administration. I noted in my reflexive data analysis journal:

> Having experienced every rank in my current school district from first grader to high school graduate, teacher, assistant principal, principal, executive principal, supporting central office administrator, top-ranked central office administrator, community member, and parent, I am convinced that if we can ever dissipate the hierarchical barriers that we institutionalize and elect to operate within a climate

of transparency and shared accountability, we will be in a stronger position to build a school system where we are empowered by our collective strengths rather than disempowered by our individual shortcomings.

Shared Accountability

Principals' observations indicated that shared accountability amongst all stakeholders is essential for true transformation of a school culture to occur. Hallinger (2003) notes, "transformational leadership is often considered a type of shared or distributed leadership" (p. 338). He further suggests that transformational leadership creates change from a bottoms-up stance as opposed to traditional top-down leadership styles. This focus allows for more participation from organizations that can assist with accelerating change as compared to individualistic efforts from educators. Principal Morris noted:

> I think my level as a leader and my staff supporting each other had a 'yes you're going to be held accountable' because our mission is [to] accept responsibility for your accidents and your actions, and if we keep making excuses, then we allow our kids to get away with... they're not going to understand... they're not going to internalize what they've done wrong.

Principal Langston spoke about civil rights accountability standards within Career and Technical Education associated and with core performance indicators within concentrations at the Career Center and explained:

> Working with the Office of Career and Technical Education is a lot different than working with the Michigan Department of Education. They have some specific

monitoring and evaluation tools, which really hold us accountable in the area of

civil rights and the area of non-traditional students being placed in areas that

really promote diversity and acceptance. And so I state the way I assess this is I

look at that non-traditional data, look at – am I providing an opportunity for

education success for students where – that the classroom area is free of bias, so

we constantly – we report on that every year. We do an assessment of the

classroom. And then – and that is – could be gender, race, sexuality – Are we

setting up the class where you walk in and it's inviting?

Principal Ramirez provided an account of her staff's reluctance to follow district

reporting protocols and data analysis regarding professional learning communities and

the adoption of a Positive Behavior Instructional Support initiative, which were

expectations from the Instructional Division. She stated:

And so, they're now willing to go – they went to a PLC conference. They're

willing to – because we are emerging from a time when they haven't had to be

accountable for stuff, you know, PBIS stuff. This isn't going away. This is

something that all schools in the state of Michigan have to do. So, instead of

resisting change, we're gonna have to do it.

Similarly, I gave an account of a support network for administrators that central

office personnel developed to hold principals accountable while providing them with

assistance with devising more effective and efficient practices to boost student

achievement:

I expect these central office personnel to provide direct assistance to building administrators to relieve some pressures caused by inefficient systems. They must assist with the alignment of human and material resources to substantially support principals in their role as instructional leaders. Closely monitoring the progress of school improvement plans is essential to accurately determine whether goals are being met through the Guided School Improvement Process. There is a common saying in education, "You must inspect, what you expect." In my leadership, I attempted to do this in a manner that did not feel punitive but rather was perceived as supportive. While I felt that it was important to hold principals to high standards of accountability, I also understood firsthand the challenges they faced so I also sought to be flexible.

Shared accountability in educational settings often references principals' and teachers' interactions around instruction designed to improve academic outcomes. Marks and Printy (2003) note, there are shared accountability models that involve principals and teachers being equally responsible for staff development, curriculum alignment, school improvement, and culture and climate building. Principal Foster illustrated this dynamic of shared accountability and explained:

Teachers, well, I have to work with them collaboratively. But I really have to, one of the things I think I do best is being able to get teachers to understand the reason why we do what we do. The reason why we have to provide equal access to all students. And then, what you typically do, is when you provide teachers with like a road map of how to get to where we're going. They'll typically buy-

in if it doesn't come across that you're making the decision on your own and not

including them. And then, putting more work on their plate. So, kind of

providing a road map but really being able to sell a vision to them.

Like Principal Foster, Marks and Printy (2003) espouse the merits of shared decision-

making authority and state, "Transformational leadership, put briefly, provides

intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while

empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making" (p. 371).

Resilience

Principals' who consciously engage in social justice leadership often report that

this work can be all-encompassing and draining (Miller & Martin, 2015). At the same

time, they report various sources of revitalization that fuel their resilience.   Their

resilience also comes in the form of coping strategies that they employ to keep them

focused on the work. In a qualitative study of seven principals who considered

themselves to be advocates for social justice, Theoharis (2007) notes, "the seven

principals developed and used both coping and proactive strategies to advance social

justice in the face of countervailing pressures" (p. 248) Similarly, Principal Foster

responded to inquiries about resilience that,

> …just being persistent and never giving up…that's the kind of attitude that I
>
> take to my work with students and it's worked out well so far. And even the
>
> response from the staff is always really quite unpredictable. So, I'm confident in
>
> my work. I think that's contributed to my resilience.

Principal Rivers provided vivid imagery for her source of resilience:

I will say that four and a half years, it's been tough. I can see administrator

burnout quick in districts and schools like this. I think just the biggest thing that

keeps me going is the kids' faces in the mornings, because when they come in

smiling and they come in telling you that's how it gets me through. But you

have to be resilient. You have to have tough skin.

This position is supported by Federici and Skaalvik (2012) who state, "Researchers find

that self-efficacy influences the effort of principals and their work persistence as well as

resilience in the face of setbacks" (p. 296).

There are principals that noted extrinsic factors that were a source of their

resilience. Principal Demery maintained, "There's a population of kids who need me

and I try to be there for them. I do it for the kids." Principal Langston cites his

appreciation for the student diversity resulting from student enrollment comprised of

fifteen participating high schools from thirteen neighboring districts within the county

as being inspiration for his social justice work:

You have 15 different cap and gowns all together. We allow them to do their

home school cap and gowns. I think you just – you see it and you want it. So I

think it's easier to keep up the fight because you want it.

I also shared my continuous commitment to having a positive influence on

students' lives: "My resilience comes from understanding that every day presents an

opportunity for me to have an immediate impact on helping students improve their

overall quality of life through education." Principal Ramirez, though eligible for

retirement, shared the impetus for her desire to keep working while remaining resilient,

"I think just being critical of myself, about "Have you done enough? Have you done all

you can do? Is there more you can do?" So, I think that's what keeps me going."

Without resilience, the turnover amongst social justice leaders would be

catastrophic. As noted by Hargreaves and Fink (2003), sustainable leadership is

important to the viability of schools because it "provides time and opportunity for

leaders to network, learn from and support each other, as well as coach and mentor

their successors" (p. 8). The resilience that principals exhibit while integrating social

justice principles into their school cultures and local community speaks to their genuine

objective to provide resources and sustain programming needed to create more

equitable schools for students and staff.

Self-Compassion

Oftentimes, principals' own self-compassion can be used to revitalize their

efforts. Lewis and Ebbeck (2014) note that individuals who have an increased sense of

self-compassion in the execution of their jobs, typically navigate problems better and

exhibit more resilience than leaders who don't display this quality. Principal Foster

suggested:

> At the end of the day, for me, I believe that when you make decisions and you
>
> make them in the best interests of kids, you can never go wrong. I never second
>
> guess the decisions that I make as long as I know that they are in the best interest
>
> of those kids.

> Principal Demery affirmed, "I always say you have to have heart to do this all

the time. You have to remain confident. I'm not allowed to be depressed." Principal

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Rivers relied on her work ethic to internalize a sense of self-compassion that enabled

her to persevere in social justice work:

> I work very hard like most administrators, often 12, 13, 14-hour days, but when I
>
> leave, I leave it there and I come back the next day, even if it's four or five hours
>
> later. I try to leave it at work so that I can just function.

> Principal Ramirez declared, "Nobody wants to get out of their comfort zone,

including me." She further explained that she has learned to recognize her own internal

resistance while simultaneously being kind to herself when her work stretches her

outside of her comfort zone. She acknowledged growing pains as a necessary part of

change and leadership development. Similarly, my remarks supported using self-

compassion as a coping mechanism:

> I have a clear sense of who I am as a leader and I do not let people, fans or foes,
>
> or circumstances, good or bad, define me. I am mindful to offer the same
>
> compassion to myself that I strive to extend to others.

Ambiguity of Social Justice

In spite of an expanding body of research on social justice educational leadership

(McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Riester et al, 2002; Theoharis, 2004), it can be argued that

what it means to be a social justice leader is, at best, still ambiguous. There are

innumerable mitigating geographical, generational, communal, personal, and legalistic

variables that play a role in determining what might be considered "justice" in any

given educational context. According to Scanlan (2013), "Social justice is a messy

concept, complex and contested, stretching across a wide array of issues including

resource distribution, cultural domination, respect, and power relations…Moving from theory to practice—is complicated" (p. 349). The convoluted nature of social justice praxis in school leadership surfaced in my study and was coded as the seventh micro-theme, embedded in the macro-theme, Enacting Visionary Transformational Leadership. My interview revealed that I had to learn to become comfortable with uncertainty. My interview exposed my personal belief:

> I always perceive social justice as being this moving target that you constantly have to recalibrate for in order to refocus your aim to truly address the severity of the issues that unjust circumstances cause. I'm not sure that there is an iron-clad way of approaching any social justice issues because the circumstances surrounding these topics are very personal and deeply rooted in ethical practice. I believe that social justice leadership has to be the vehicle through which we change how people perceive their treatment of others.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the principals under my leadership but not all principals saw the ambiguity of social justice as being a sign of the times and our ever evolving and increasingly complex society. Some saw it as a matter of "archaic" leadership on my part.

Principal Foster provided a concrete example of what he felt was mixed-messages from central office leadership that emerged from policies that he equated to unjust laws that were outdated and overly punitive to urban learners. He stated emphatically:

Let me see if I can give you an example – they have certain policies in our policy

and procedure book. For example, that are not in alignment with Restorative

Practices. So, our cell phone policy, prime example. Is, kids, all of you can't text

or call. The policy is they're not supposed to have one inside school from like

7:30 am to 3:30 pm or whatever. It's really an unenforceable policy. So, if we

enforce the policy as a habit we'd be suspending kids all of the time, but yet you

want us to implement a more restorative approach but yet, when my building

actually came up with a restorative way to handle phones. For example, our

staff decided that they would have, instead of fighting with kids and sending

them out of class because they have a cellphone, that they implemented a

practice where they designed signs where there was a silent mode using a red

light, a yellow light and a green light and there was a little sticky. And so, they

would put a cell phone next to, if its direct instruction and they didn't wanna see

a cell phone they would put this up, a cell phone by red. If they didn't mind the

kids bringing their cell phones and using them after direct instruction, they put it

on yellow. And green they might put it on if they wanted to bring them in

because maybe they're using it for some kind of formative assessment. But then

the superintendent told us, we're not allowed to do that because the policy is

they can't have these phones. But this is outdated and what we did is we looked

at what other schools were doing. What other suburban schools were doing for

example, other than kicking kids out of Grand Blanc High School or Midland.

Are they suspending kids for having a cell phone and the answer is, no. These

are the same practices they have in place, but when we get to urban schools, we

go with this very primitive old school approach for everything. So, you want us

to implement Restorative Practices, but then, you want us to follow these archaic

practices.

Principal Foster further stated his concern that being a social justice leader at the

building-level is even more difficult when central office administration is not similarly

committed to social justice. He affirmed, "You have to have strong leadership at the top

who also understand social justice and how to provide an example when we talk about

social justice."

Principal Foster's characterization of my leadership practices led me to write in

my reflexive journal. Rather than dismiss what could very well be unfounded

criticisms, I journaled about how sometimes when you are at the building-level, you do

not have the bird's eye view of all of the policy and legal implications of social justice

issues and how that played out in the day-to-day operations of a school system. Each

school is a part of a larger system and while principals are afforded a significant

amount of autonomy to assert their decision-making authority, they are nonetheless still

accountable to a governance structure that binds them with all other administrators

within their school district. While individualistic leadership practices are often allowed,

they cannot come at the expense of the collective well-being.

In spite of the fact that all principals interviewed for this phenomenological

study led schools in the same school district, under the leadership of the same

superintendency, and expressed that they envisioned themselves as advocates for social

justice in their assigned schools, participants expressed notable concerns that they experienced a lack of clarity at times on how to grasp what constitutes social justice. Principal Langston expressed his concern that times change so fast that he had a hard time keeping up. He asked himself, "What's coming next?" He noted:

> … Your mind is open because you're thrown into this social inequity or whatever it may be, where someone doesn't feel welcome because of what they – whatever it is…just – be prepared. Like, that changes, it seems like, in five-year cycles regularly. And it's hard to keep up.
>
> …It feels like every few years, it cycles into a new culture of students that I have – that you have to be prepared for. And I think that's the biggest challenge…You know, 50 years ago it was just race and gender. And now it's race, gender, and sexuality. And now – it feels like it just keeps growing, to be honest.

Principal Langston's concerns are shared by other principals who question whether they can keep pace with societal changes. Principal Ramirez expressed that she has accepted her inability to perfect her praxis as a social justice leader. She confided:

> I keep pushing myself because to me that's the only way you're going to meet the kids' needs – they need the best and we need to keep pushing them because you never arrive. You're constantly moving towards the mark, but you never arrive.

Similarly, Principal Morris pushed herself to envision a world of unlimited possibilities for her students but she questioned:

How do I get that vision out there for the kids? How do I intrinsically get the

kids to see this is why I need to be in school to get myself to where I want to be?

I don't have those answers for them.

Ambiguity for her meant not having all the answers and being at peace with this lack of

knowledge.

The principals in this study are not alone in their assertions that social justice

leadership comes with an unavoidable degree of ambiguity. Scanlan's (2013) research

reveals, "We are adept at identifying educational inequities and describing structural

changes to ameliorate these inequities, but less clear about the processes of learning to

bring about these changes" (p. 386). It appears that some degree of ambiguity can be

expected in social justice leadership as school leaders learn and grow in practice.

Eliminating Barriers for Equity of Learning

Barrier elimination was a dominant macro-theme in my research findings. This

macro-theme was emergent in all school leaders' interviews, including my own. Social

justice principals often cited the elimination of barriers as a necessary condition to

integrate more equitable practices within a school community. Furman (2012),

Theoharis (2007), and Shields (2012) provide numerous accounts of obstacles that

principals navigated around to enact a social justice agenda. Less dominant themes,

that surfaced and are relevant to the macro-theme, Eliminating Barriers, included seven

micro-themes: Access to Resources, Talent Management, Cultural Competence of

Teachers, Principal's Expectations of Teachers, Perceptions of Learners, Expectations, of

Learners, and Parental Disengagement in Academics.

Before barriers can be eliminated, they have to be acknowledged and deemed as obstacles in need of removal. In my interview I shared: "Social justice leadership breaks down barriers that prevent individuals or groups from advancing due to pre-existing discriminatory practices or institutionalized belief systems that negatively impact people due to race, class, gender, religion, political affiliation, etc." Similarly, Principal Foster expounded:

> My definition of social justice would be a leader who works to ensure that there is equity and equal access for all students. What that looks like, all students irregardless of disability, race, gender, they all have access to high quality instructions, high quality teachers, high quality curriculum, and electives. They have support; they are treated fairly by all stakeholders, by administrators, teachers, para-pros. Social justice is also protecting the right for those who are marginalized, I believe social justice is advocating for all individuals.

Yet another school leader, Principal Demery identified the challenges faced when trying to address inequities that are deeply engrained in society at-large. She noted:

> Working in education and as a social justice leader, I feel like my role is to bring people along in our society to put them on a better playing field, a more level playing field than perhaps when they started, than perhaps what their parents had.

Clearly, she believed that she had the agency to eliminate barriers to equitable learning that could potentially enable equitable changes for realization of the American dream and disrupt patterns of generational social reproduction.

Principal Langston confided his urgency to help students, attending the Career Center, meet performance standards so that there would be no justifiable rationalizations for under-performance. He shared: "We were solely performance-based and try to eliminate the barriers to help students succeed, and that way we can just say – we don't have to talk about the excuses of not achieving academically." While Principal Langston was reluctant to become an enabler of his students by fostering a sense of learned helplessness, he acknowledged that there were real barriers that students faced that the school could address. He recalled his assurance to students: "We can get you a ride here, we can provide whatever it is to eliminate the barriers, but just perform."

Other principals reported additional, concrete examples of barriers that they were able to abate or eliminate in the schools. Principal Foster recognized what he perceived to be over classification of Black males for special education services as a barrier to equitable learning. He confided that the district had "a history of over-identifying Black males for special education. If they can't sit still in a seat, they are typically placed in special education and it becomes a life sentence for those students." In an effort to eliminate what he perceived as a barrier for students who were misclassified based on behavior concerns rather than aptitude, Principal Foster revamped his schools' special education services' model to be more inclusive of meeting the needs of special needs students in the general education setting. He described his barrier removal process for his special education students and stated, "Those students were not exposed to the general curriculum, which I thought was almost cruel."

Principal Foster continued, "…one of the things we did was we created a resource model, the resource model pushed all of those Special Ed. kids out into the general curriculum and this was 80 percent of the time or more." Principal Foster further asserted that the action that he took in is school to remove a barrier for special needs students served as a model to the entire district. He proudly reminisced, "Not only did we see an increase in student achievement, I'm most proud of that ultimately the Board adopted this type of resource model and eliminated the self-contained classrooms district-wide."

Although Principal Foster asserted the merits of his changes in his approach to serving the needs of special education students, his efforts were met with some criticism. As a result of his efforts to remove a barrier, he experienced what he described as union push-back because:

> The union was kind of upset because it required eliminating some positions. We didn't need as many Special Ed. teachers because these kids were pushed into general education classes and it was the right thing to do for kids, to expose them to the general curriculum.

He further justified his actions and maintained, "We saw that those students' achievements ultimately outperformed those who didn't have an IEP." As a fellow administrator who was privy to the building level data Principal Foster referenced here, I was compelled to write in my reflexive data analysis journal, "While on some level, I understand Principal Foster's need to *spin* his take on the special education sub-group performance data in his building, his assertion is an overgeneralization of the

performance of all students who previously had an IEP when one examines their raw proficiency data in comparison to the aggregate performance of all students that did not have an IEP. Nonetheless, I empathize with his desire to justify his actions and recognize notable gains for students who previous to his restructuring of special needs services, showed persistent trends of underperformance on standardized tests."

Principal Foster also reported wanting to remove the barrier of lower expectations for all students under his leadership and offered another example of how he made changes and shared:

One of the things I wanted to do was expose kids, that all kids have the access to rigorous curriculum. We adopted an International Baccalaureate Program. And that would provide equal access to all kids, every single kid had to be exposed to technology and foreign language. Obviously, there were career education, but there were seven different areas where they all had to have exposure to it.

Similarly, Principal Ramirez recalled the need to step back a rethink her gifted-and-talented school's policy that privileged students that were advanced and/or gifted in the academic subjects but were not comprehensively advanced and/or gifted in the performing arts to incur no penalty. Conversely, students who were advanced and/or gifted in the performing arts were expected to also be comprehensively advanced and/or gifted in the academic subjects or be subject to the threat of dismissal. Principal Ramirez scrutinized this pattern and stated:

It's not fair to say that if a students' area and expertise was in the arts, then, we expected them to perform like the math/science kids and do geometry in the

eighth grade. So, it's not fair and it's abusing the kids. And especially for our

district's kids because my school is about 50 percent out of district. They come

from Kirkland, Swan Creek, Pinhurst, and Burt City. All over. They come from

all over. And I think – I just have a thing about – having worked at West Middle

and at Stewart High, and Arbor High, I know we have a lot of talented kids and

bright kids as well. And I just don't think it was fair to exclude them because of

their academic challenges and maybe for other core areas.

Principal Ramirez eliminated what she perceived to be a barrier and explained, I started

looking at the big picture and how we run something – programs retaining students

and, too, how do we offer them the support they need. She described her efforts to

remove the barriers and reminisced, "I've created grade-level courses in math and

science for seventh and eighth grade for kids who are not math-science concentration

kids and they were able to pass." She did not lower standards; she made them more

equitable across the board.

Principal Ramirez and others had to dismantle past practices that proved to be

counter-productive to social justice. Some might argue that eliminating barriers to

social justice is harder than building fresh from ground-zero because it required

dislodging entrenched organizational practices. Each educational leader represented in

this research inherited inequities that they were charged to identity as barriers and

dismantle with the tools that they had at their disposal. This is painstaking yet

necessary work in the work-life of social justice leaders. In my interview I recalled:

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My role is not only to educate the public on these issues, it's to problem-solve

and secure resources to supplement students' deficit areas so that our children

can perform despite obvious obstacles to learning. As a superintendent, you're

both a child and community advocate. My role is to point out the reality of the

circumstances that our children are being educated within. However, my job is

not to rationalize failure or create a deficit lens through which our students are

viewed. Our families count on us to find solutions to real issues that negatively

influence student achievement.

I know that I cannot singularly find solutions or remove barriers without the support of

the principals under my leadership. This is why it became glaringly apparent that I

needed to offer them the supports that they needed from central office to be successful

in removing impediments to student achievement. I've modeled this commitment as

evidenced by the fact that "I've assigned members of the Executive Staff and

departmental directors to assist building administration with alleviating obstacles that

limit principals' ability to be efficient and effective leaders." I would hope to think that

these supports empowered my principals to be more effective in their work efforts.

Each principal envisioned their duty to eliminate barrier slightly differently.

Principal Foster affirmed, "What we try and do, is we try and break down barriers.

And we try and eliminate all obstacles so our kids can reach their greatest potential."

Principal Rivers recalled her epiphany early in her career as an educator working with

urban kids by declaring, "These students deserve the same chances as any other

student." Although principals are often inspired by the idealism that they can eliminate

most barriers, some brace themselves for the realty that this is not always possible.

Principal Demery commented on how the monumental expectations for what she

should achieve are often misunderstood or under-appreciated. She noted:

> People who don't understand the commitment to students or the educational
>
> process will often say something like: Why do you keep doing that, oh, my God
>
> that is awful? Oh, my God, those parents, oh, my God that job. They don't
>
> understand at all, they don't have that heart.

Even when principals have the heart for social justice leadership that Principal Demery

acknowledged as being essential to the work, the magnitude of work is unrelenting.

Principal Morris envisioned her idyllic role as an administrator leading a school

wherein:

> Everybody's getting the same thing. That we're providing for their needs
>
> whether they be the academic, the emotional, the social, the behavioral. All
>
> pieces of their life and we're meeting those needs, enriching them, and
>
> supporting them even if they don't have the background support from their
>
> parents.

 Principal Morris' comments led me to write in my reflexive data analysis journal that

"everybody might not get the same thing, but we will strive for equity. I think people

struggle with the semantic difference between equity and equality. This becomes

glaringly clear when principals compare what they perceive to be inequitable resource

distribution across the district."

Clearly, Principal Morris wanted to be positioned to meet the holistic needs of her students. She aired her frustration in not being able to keep up with all of the needs expressed by her students who she described:

> …then their behaviors come out. You're in a classroom that you're not being fulfilled by, I have no idea what you're talking about, so I don't want anybody else to know I'm not getting it so, I'm gonna act up or just giving up. We have those types of kids too. And that's my biggest challenge right now. How to tackle that.

Ironically, we often see barriers as external forces that are obstructions to students' future success. Principal Morris's observation revealed that sometimes students can be their own barrier when there resistance to schooling contributes to their own social reproduction. The charge of the social justice leader is to do everything possible to break negative self-fulfilling prophecies whether they are held by the prophet or the objects of the prophets' prophecy.

Access to Resources

Social justice principals recognize the education is largely a resource game. There have been substantial funding adequacy studies (Augenblick, Palaich, & Associates, 2016; DeGrow & Hoang, 2016; Odden & Picus, 2018) in the state of Michigan that articulate how access to or lack of resources influence student achievement. This reality can determine what programming principals and teachers can realistically employ to improve student achievement. State school funding formulas that allocate per pupil expenditures based on students' residence have historically underfunded

education for students from impoverished backgrounds. Adequacy studies in the State of Michigan calling for a more balanced approach to funding schools have pointed out disparities in how school districts are funded throughout the state.

Nearly every principal interviewed in this study mentioned the need to provide access to resources. They overwhelmingly reported that their biggest challenge was making sure that their students had access to resources that they needed to be competitive. I shared their sentiment and remembered the many years that I spent as a building principal advocating for adequate resources to meet the needs of students. I am adamant that "Social Justice is a mechanism of support by which society ensures that individuals will have equal access to resources that promote their overall growth and development." Under my leadership in central office, I reasoned, "Central Office personnel have to make sure that the necessary resources are implemented in the appropriate manner to bring about the desired result." I learned that when one has to get results across an entire district rather than just in the school under your direct leadership, the distribution of resources is significantly more multifaceted.

While material resources are essential, people resources are most essential. Principal Rivers' observation of herself as a coach for educators under her charge illuminates this important point: "I really think of myself as a coach, someone who's in side-by-side with those teachers, working alongside of them, bringing in resources as needed, and just really supporting the kids any way we can." She also noted that she needs assistance outside the direct support that she can provide. She felt convicted, "continuing to just have districts rally and ISDs rally around how we can support these

students, it needs to be a large focus." Lack of resources may seem like an obvious barrier to social justice but assuring both resources and access to the resources can be complex. School leaders noted that they had to leverage people resources, material resources, and communal resources to provide wrap-around services and social justice.

When resources are limited, it is more difficult to break the cycle of academic under-performance. Principal Demery maintained that poverty often breeds more poverty and all the challenges that come with it. She professed:

> Impoverished schools are probably going to receive lower SAT scores and fewer students. But if you pull the cream of the crop out of struggling schools because now they feel like this school can't do the job, enrollment suffers, when in fact, the school was doing the job. And so, schools that are stuck in generational poverty are part of our problem due to inconsistent teaching and less proficiency on the SAT. What do we expect the outcome to be?

This issue of declining enrollment raised by Principal Demery and resources that are tied to enrollments often poses a challenge for principals. She was clear about one obstacle to her work as a social justice leader "… lack of resources, human and otherwise, there isn't enough money; we don't have enough money to buy books."

Principals often feet that central office is not responding appropriately to the urgent need for resources that were facing them. Principal Foster described his funding woes:

> The challenges that we have, typically, are around just training and funding. For example, we had a lot of teachers who really bought into providing social justice.

We had a lot of teachers that really supported the vision but each year because of

funding we lose a good portion of our teachers.

Principal Foster further expressed with candor:

Just funding is an issue, stability within staffing is an issue. Sometimes even

support from central office. While we talk about social justice, sometimes they

don't quite get it, in order to provide us with the staffing that we need to make

things happen sometimes. You know, additional support for our students and

we're teaching not being able to offer certain courses. Just from a curriculum

standpoint and programming like Restorative is expensive with all the teachers

we have to constantly train and support those teachers through process.

Principal Morris who also serves in a high needs school, but with less pervasive

poverty, expressed her frustration that she felt that resources were unevenly

distributed. She raised the concern:

My kids don't get the same resources that Thorton Middle School students get.

My 7th and 8th grade teachers don't get the same resources that their teachers

get. I don't have three or four behavior interventionists. I didn't have a security

officer before this year. I didn't have a BI (Behavior Interventionist). I don't

have Title teachers. I feel that lack of these resources has contributed to poor

student achievement.

One reason that contributes to the feelings conveyed by Principal Morris is access to

supplemental federal funding. This district cannot offer the same resources when some

schools are eligible for funding when other schools are not.

This problem of inequitable resource distribution was illustrated by Principal Ramirez who recalled receiving the windfall of a School Improvement Grant while serving as my assistant principal. She recalled:

There's always been a deep feeling like when I was at Arbor High under SIG (School Improvement Grant) we had four million dollars to spend. And when we're excited about, "Oh. We got all this money, how are we gonna spend it?" That's when it really clicked and I was like, "I wanna be very – a good steward with that money. I don't wanna just buy stuff for the sake of buying stuff." So, we did a lot. In fact, the work we started at Arbor High is what prompted them to do a district-wide PLC for schools – the PD sessions within the district originated out of so many things that we did at Arbor High. I mean, so many things that we did there is what the district adopted as practice.

Principal Ramirez went on to give concrete examples of creative ways that she experienced being able to remove barriers when resources were plentiful:

We're the ones that created behavior interventionists and academic interventionists. We created those roles because there was a need for the service. We created – like, okay, how do you have a math coach, because we need one. So, we created those positions and then the district bought into them and filled them in other schools, replicated them in other schools. I t's always just enough time to stay attune to what the needs are within the district. Staff have committed themselves to learning programs geared at improving student achievement. Oftentimes, they're not compensated for the time and energy

devoted to implementing change. They count on us to lead them in the right

direction.

Principal Ramirez was able to transfer what she learned as an Assistant Principal in a

low-performing school that received a school improvement grant to a high-performing

magnet school that from her perspective was under-resourced as well. She explained:

Currently, I'm in a magnet school for accelerated students in math, science, and

the performing arts. Once again, coming from an outside perspective, having

worked in schools where students struggled academically, there were some

major adjustments that I had to make in challenging staff and students to excel. I

committed myself to providing access to students who could make it in a gifted

program if they received the appropriate supports. Students could enroll in a

half-day concentration and still participate in coursework and athletics at their

home school. I understood all of the pieces that they wanted to have a well-

rounded experience.

Principal Ramirez used her leadership to breakdown intra-district barriers to her gifted

and talented programs. She also worked to assure that students in her school who

traditionally faced less economic challenges were not being short-changed when it came

to the distribution of district resources. She recalled:

My first year, I was able to cut funding from the instructional line item itself. I

had experience from Arbor High and Stewart High working with Title I and 31A

funding sources. So, I was able to secure more financial aid for a building in

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which that had never been done before because 40 percent of students were labeled at-risk.

She was diligent in her efforts to secure additional funding for economically disadvantaged students who typically did not receive supplemental services because their school was not eligible for federal funds. She explained:

Some of us write grants. So, they are mini-grants. Most of them are just one-page fill in the blank kind of things. All I do is ask and nine times out of ten, you'll get the money. So, we've started doing that. And looking at ways to support students through grant writing. And then, I have some parents who are professors that work with us to write grants. Like for the science fair. Because of financial constraints, some of the kids can't get to the science fair or the regional science fair. If they got placed at the next level, they couldn't participate. I'm like so why don't we get a bus? So, I funded $2,000.00 from activity accounts for transportation and hopefully next year, we can write that into a grant. So, that way you can have money saved up or money to take some. I said, "Because it's not fair that because a kid's parents work two or three jobs, they don't have time or don't they have gas money, the kid can't participate in the next level of competition." And so, they're like, "Oh. Okay." And so, that's what we do. And this allows both kids to participate in the regional competition with all the projects so that all kids can have access.

Even with the addition of modest grants, Principal Ramirez recalls her need to rethink how existing funds were being allocated. She recalled questioning inherited budget practices and noted:

> One other thing that they were doing was spending a lot of money on virtual high school courses. And so, I looked at what they were offering and I was like, "Well, I should – we're spending a lot of money on that work, I could use that money somewhere else." And so, we ended up – I ended up working with counselors creating elective courses to replace those virtual – and I think we went from like $38,000.00 on virtual high school to $12,000.00 last year. And so, they were not happy with that. This is what we've always done. Virtual high school is our program. After that, I prefer a teacher in front of kids than virtual high school, you know? And so, that helped us.

Principal Ramirez was able to give her students more access to broader curricular offering while saving money to make other adjustments. She explained her rethinking of budget priorities:

> I pulled it out of virtual high school and put it in the master schedule with teachers' certifications created a robotics class for non-math/science kids to have that STEM experience. There were three middle school First Robotics teams as opposed to a high school team.

She also made use of community college partners to allow for better curricular offerings in her school. She noted:

I had a Calculus AB class and a Calculus BC class and the teacher was teaching

both classes together, which I thought was doing a disservice to all of the kids.

So, what I did was I worked with Davis College and I said, "You know what?

We'll bring these students to you for the remainder of the school year to increase

our dual enrollment numbers." They can get college credit leaving high school.

So, you know, that was huge – we've probably had about a 15 to 20 percent

increase in dual enrollment since that started.

Principal Ramirez made other budget cuts to make better use of funds:

I mean, I just created a publications class so that we could do our – school's

magazine because they retired last year and I didn't want it to go away under my

watch. It had been here for 30 some years, which is the Columbia Scholastic

Award winner. And so, creating that class so that we could continue – and then

you know working with the yearbook company because they always were

keeping us in debt from year to year. We found a new yearbook company. So,

you know, just constantly trying to do things that are good for kids because

ultimately they are good for us. There are also PR things because they motivate

people to think favorably about our offerings. Also, our parent group is really

generous in assisting with funding to create computer labs. This is something

functional for kids to use but that was the PTA's idea of getting something.

Principal Ramirez was determined not to lose enrollments due to her inability to

provide equal access to resources. She acknowledged her resource constraint:

We lose kids from middle school to high school because they return to their high

school, where they can have more athletic options. So, we've done co-ops.

We've had a girls' team, a boys'. We've done baseball, softball, in co-ops. And

people are pleased with that, but like I said, there's no reason that we can't – I'm

not saying that we are gonna be district champions, but there's no reason that we

can't have a competitive athletic program because that's gonna be a draw for us.

About a month ago, I spoke with our interim superintendent about this concern.

He said, 'No. Academics, SESE's not known for athletics. That's what's

important. They like that?' I said, 'Does this mean it has to stay like that?' These

are some of the best athletes, basketball players, off the field, are full time Arts

and Science Academy students. When they hit high school they go to play

basketball at Arbor High. You know, how are you gonna sit here and tell me. I

mean, the player of the year was one of my kids. She will have to make that

choice. And exactly – and that would be a draw for us. We would be pulling

more kids if we had a viable athletic program incorporated within our offerings.

Principal Ramirez's challenges are unique in that she revealed that a social justice

posture is applicable even in contexts where students are considered gifted and talent

and are not overwhelmingly economically deprived. She still had to advocate for access

to resources that could support her students in maximizing their fullest potential in

academics, athletics, and extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

School leaders have to ensure that both human and material resources are strategically aligned to avoid waste and provide students with quality learning experiences. Higgins (2018) reports,

> A new statewide poll commissioned by the School Finance Research Collaborative shows most Michigan voters agree it's time for a new approach to funding our schools. The poll found that: "70 percent believe Michigan's schools are underfunded; 67 percent support a new school funding system that meets all students' needs: and, 63 percent believe Michigan's current school funding system is unfair (para. 9).

Funding schools appropriately provides district and school leaders with the necessary resources to ensure that students are exposed to highly qualified/certified teachers, a rigorous curriculum, and the necessary interventions to promote academic proficiency. The call for Michigan to devise a more equitable funding formula for school districts is well documented. The results of the Michigan Education Finance Study (Augenblick, Palaich, & Associates, 2016) commissioned by the Michigan Department of Education reveal, "there was significantly more variation in per pupil revenues and expenditures across districts than is desirable for an equitable school finance system" (p. 152). Therefore, some parity needs to be reached to ensure that all students can benefit from a more balanced school funding model.

Although there appears to be a weak correlation between Michigan students' performance on standardized tests and school funding (DeGrow & Hoang, 2016), there does appear to be a relationship between a district's ability to provide students with

high quality instruction, innovative programs, and supplemental academic services, when considering school funding (Odden & Picus, 2018). School leaders are being asked to restructure existing resources so that students may receive the optimal academic benefit from full utilization of district funding.

Talent Management

Principals often relate concerns about having inconsistent staffing due to high teacher turnover or staff who are not prepared to adequately instruct and support children. Preparing 21st century school principals who are capable of leading within multicultural school settings involves developing a talent pool that reflects the culture that they are serving. McKinney and Capper (2010) observe how one university responded to this need, "One of the department's first initiatives in incorporating diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice in their program involved faculty hiring practices" (p. 83). Young and Mountford (2006) share that school districts and universities will have to work collaboratively to develop leadership programs that "emphasize issues of diversity, ethics, and equity, and use transformational learning to train leaders who will be better able to advance social justice in their schools and districts as well as in their communities and society at large" (p. 265). The hope is that more of these leaders will be better equipped to address the unique needs of their service population and less inclined to pursue employment elsewhere due to frustrating work experiences.

One of the most notable resource hindrances that principals described was teacher turnover. Principal Foster explained:

We have a bunch of subs and we have to do a lot of re-training and there's not

enough funding for training. We also lose a lot of courses that I believe provide

our kids with certain access. For example, we went from 13 Advanced

Placement courses to around 4 because of funding. Losing teachers to other

districts.

Of all the resources that they reported as being a decisive force to fight for social justice

and equity, the people resources were counted amongst the most significant. Not only

do social justice leaders need "highly qualified" teachers, they need teachers who have

the passion and temperament to work with high need communities. Principal Ramirez

warned, "You can't just take any teacher and place them in an assignment. I know how

to support teachers. But, I mean, I'm not that good. I'm not a miracle worker. And it

takes time and a whole team." Principal Ramirez also acknowledged that fiscal

challenges exacerbated the program of teacher and staff attrition. She explained that

she understood that you can expect people to work in the toughest assignments for less

pay:

Shared vision and support. Like getting the people you need in the places that

you need them. That's one thing I've always talked about. Like even from hiring

people who are highly qualified and certified. ...I mean it starts with leadership.

Getting commitment from the entire staff, getting, you know, pay for these

teachers. They wouldn't pay them for their experience so they didn't retain the

teachers and then, this year, they're gone. We need to focus on helping teachers

earn the achievement that we are expecting from students.

Principal Morris echoed this sentiment, "The leadership piece has become more challenging because how do I support my students and my staff when you have a diverse staff and not a consistent staff. Staff that have come and gone." She felt strongly about what she needed most, and stated, "I guess the support would be the first thing, a full staff. A competent staff. This is my first year I've had an assault on a security officer. I'm trying to... I can't... I began managing versus leading." She offered examples of her lack of qualified teachers and understaffing, "In my middle school, the last two years I've had subs for the whole two years. One class, my science class from December till the end of the year, and then our math class I haven't had a teacher for a year and half." She offered another example of having staff that was not capable of doing the job:

> Case in point, I tried to... I had a brand-new teacher last year who was
> ineffective, and I wanted to mark down non-renewal and I was told we had 22
> vacancies or... let me correct myself. It was this year. And this teacher was
> ineffective. That teacher's not going to be in my building this year. So, what
> impact is this person going to have on another building in the district?

Principals have come to expect that staff retention will continue to be a challenge in light of decreasing enrollment trends and a persistent pattern of teacher attrition. Principal Ramirez confided:

> I'm always thinking about the next thing. Like when I was at Arbor High and I
> had massive losses of staff because they would take higher paying jobs in other
> districts. We've gotta pay them what they are worth. I t was a hard decision for

them to leave. I understood that they make professional decisions for financial

security, but knowing that I'm always grooming other people to fill-in.

Principal Ramirez magnified a problem that is not isolated to our district. Teacher

shortages in high needs urban communities are growing in epic proportions. Without

ways to incentivize teachers financially and intrinsically, it is hard to compete with

more affluent districts.   Allen (2006) observes that district leadership can assist teacher

educators with reexamining their perception of practice in relation to social justice and

equity. Assistance with navigating differences and complexities associated with a

school's culture, may increase the likelihood of staff's satisfaction with work.

Cultural Competence of Teachers

Capper (1993) and Bustamante et al. (2009) insist that relationship building

through cultural competency may be a good strategy to help offset inequitable learning

conditions resulting from the absence or lack of resources. Bustamante et al. (2009)

state, "by conducting culture audits, school leaders, who are positioned to enhance

schoolwide cultural competence, might begin to uncover and confront underlying

assumptions that obstruct the academic success of many students and impede the

development of global competencies of all students" (p. 820.) These practices are not

cost inhibitive and lead to greater appreciation for cultural perspectives within a

classroom or school setting.

One can argue that principals in this research unknowingly conducted cultural

audits. Many assessed their staff as being underprepared for the realities of culturally

diverse urban school settings. Principal Morris shared, "Seeing my staff come in with

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all different avenues who have never worked with children of diverse populations or worked with children with needs struggle the most. They don't know how to, from my perspective, communicate and such." She offered the example of one teacher in particular and explained, "This teacher came from an all-white population… no experience working with our kids. That was his excuse. "I don't know how to work with this population."

Principal Foster described a similar experience with teachers who have lived culturally encapsulated lives prior to interacting with racial and ethnic minority students:

> We end up with a lot of teachers who have no experience working with urban school kids, they're just not equipped to do it all, the challenges they ain't used to teaching in this kind of setting. So, the challenges are a constant rotating door, is structures that kind of come and go and providing that constant level of support for them. As opposed to a more seasoned base of instructors who have been trained and who understand our students and our community. Once I took a group of teachers on a bus ride throughout the community and then I get another group of teachers that are brand new, it's just kind of hard to keep replacing that turnover.

In order to address the teacher attrition described by principals in this study, researchers have expressed a need for more support in educator preparation. Dimmock and Walker (2005) also confirm the need to instruct school officials on the importance of multicultural education in solidifying a sustainable talent pool. Their scholarship

focuses on assisting school leaders with appreciating the cultural context of their school and neighboring community while simultaneously respecting the differences of leadership within dissimilar regions. Principals and teachers may take advantage of professional development opportunities that enable them to view challenges of school culture through a multicultural lens. School districts must work with university faculty to assist them with identifying how to support education within their unique learning settings.

Principal Demery explained that she understood that she had to fill in the learning gaps for teachers under her leadership. She called for:

> …training, additional training. Something around the lines of cultural awareness because I think there's a gap there specifically in a number of vacancies we have and for people we are hiring. Maybe they haven't worked in an urban setting before but there needs to be some, and we're actually doing a book study with my staff this summer regarding Rich Teachers, Poor Students.

Principal Demery is not unlike other social justice leaders who are compelled to serve as cultural informants for teaching staffs that are culturally mismatched with the students they teach. Principals have acknowledged that valuing diversity and having an appreciation for cultural competence helps them lead more effectively (Brooks et al., 2007; Dantley, 2003)) by establishing better learning experiences with students and staff. If social justice principals can assist teachers with being responsive to the cultural context in which students learn, children will identify better with content taught by someone who is invested in valuing their experiences.

Principal's Expectations of Teachers

Principals are responsible for helping to shape expectations for teachers through clarifying the context under which realistic expectations can be achieved, engaging staff in collaborative activities, and developing professional learning communities that support teachers. Leithwood (2003) argues, "Effective expressions of high expectations help people see what is being expected is in fact possible" (p. 4). Teachers as well as principals committed to social justice are expected to challenge practices that do not promote equity within learning for all students.

Principal Demery expressed her struggles to hold her staff accountable while at the same time being mindful of the pressure that they worked under as a result of being designated as a persistently low achieving school by the Michigan Department of Education. Principal Demery explained what it was like to execute the implementation of a school improvement plan, also known as a Partnership Agreement, with fidelity:

> Some staff members share that same vision, some people do make that connection, others do not… Dealing with what is outlined in our Partnership Agreement and I say all the time, we are doing what we say we're gonna do in the agreement. If you can say, yes, I'm doing this, then we should be good. But expectations for the teachers to do what they say that they're going to do… the end game is teaching what is expected to remove us from priority status and grievances and all that.

Principal Demery's interview showed that desperate times sometimes call for extreme measures and heightened accountability. In this climate of academic accountability,

teachers are often called upon to go above and beyond. In many instances, teacher expectations exceed the scope of traditional contractual obligations. Villegas (2007) insists, "To be responsive to a diverse population, teachers also need to understand how children and youth learn and develop in different cultural contexts (p. 372). Principal Ramirez noted this and shared:

> I really want teachers, as you said, to learn about the whole child, about the impact of their words and their attitudes and even their body language has towards kids. And so, when I first came three years ago, it – I couldn't even have that conversation.

Principal Ramirez admitted that she had to pace her leadership for social justice so as not to put teachers on the defensive. Similarly, Principal Demery noted that she often had to privately educate teachers. "She shared, "And it's all in the conversation that needs to take place behind a closed door so that they understand their role."

Principal Ramirez recalled a poignant example of a time when she was able to motivate a teacher to see themselves in another role other than that of the teacher. She recounted an incident where a parent and teacher were having difficulty finding a resolution to supporting a student that was experiencing academic and social challenges:

> I had a teacher and a parent share with me that a seventh grader was struggling and she had dyslexia. I asked the teacher, 'Are there some suggestions that you could give me or some strategies that you could give me to help the child at home to do better in your class?' And the teacher responded, 'I only teach gifted

students.' The parent did not want me to share this with the teacher, but I have to. I said, 'I can't. This young lady was an African-American student.' But I found it very interesting that this same teacher came to complain later on because the math teacher on her team – gave two students an exam at the same time and his daughter was in tears because she didn't have enough time to finish the exam. And I'm like, 'So, in my opinion, when you put on your parent hat, you look at it through a different lens than when you have on that teacher hat on. So, what I want you to remember is how you thought as a parent. And then, think of what your response is from your teacher stance to that parent and we'll confirm it.'

Principal Ramirez expects her teachers to think about other people's children in the same way that they would want someone to think about their children. She reiterated, "I want them – once again, I always go back to "If that were your child, if that were your biological child, how would you feel? What would you do?"

Principal participants shared similar concerns about teachers' willingness to engage students through understanding students' needs and valuing differences in learners. Both teachers and principals struggle with developing a more positive lens to view their students' experiences through to establish higher student expectations. Principal Demery noted:

So, a lot of times, it's about teachers having higher expectations for their kids and not letting them provide and use an excuse to fall back on. 'The reasons why I

don't, the reasons why I can't,' and I say all the time, that's where we have to have great expectations.

Teacher expectations are often influenced by preconceptions and misinformation about the cultural context of the communities that students reside in. Madom, Jussim, and Eccles (1997) share that oftentimes, "Teachers do indeed develop erroneous expectations for their students, and these expectations predict student motivation and achievement even after statistically controlling for students' previous motivation and achievement" (p. 792). Thus, principals can motivate teachers by developing reasonable learning expectations of their students and continuing to project positive images of youth.

Perceptions of Learners

Perceiving learners through a deficit-thinking model limits both the teachers' ability to develop high expectations for students (Villegas, 2007) and results in fewer opportunities for youth to engage in potential leadership activities. Riester et al. (2002) note, "In simple terms, the deficit-thinking model is a theory that blames the victims of school failure for their own lack of success in a system that was designed to serve the interests of the wealthy and powerful" (p. 282). Principals involved in this qualitative research appear to provide comments that both rebut deficit-thinking and support facets of this model as being rampant in their schools.

Principal Ramirez accounted the negative views of students to changing times and shared, "We have to have the big picture in mind. You know, things change. It's sometimes hard to help them understand when they're in demographic shifts causing

change." Principal Demery added that this age of funding transparency, high stakes student/teacher accountability, and constant comparative rankings of schools and districts has heightened public concern that schools are underserving learners. She asserted, "My other challenge is that we spend a lot of time comparing student performance with other districts. Other districts that have a different population of students, not even necessarily race, it's socioeconomics." Yet another principal, Principal Langston maintains that it is hard for him to pinpoint the source of the problem in meeting achievement targets because society is evolving so rapidly. He proclaimed:

> It's tough because I feel that our students are constantly bringing up new issues that aren't relative to my generation. And I'm 40; I'm a young generation. But I feel like there are issues with this group of students that I never had to deal with. And so how do I get past my own biases to allow them to express themselves? And I have my own beliefs on certain things.

While Principal Langston hinted at his need to interrogate his own biases regarding his perception of students from time to time, more often than not principals reported examples of their teachers' pathological perception of students.

Principal Morris shared an example of one of her teachers who struggled to make sense of his students' deficient basic skill levels. She recalled:

> He's from here... he grew up here in this area and he says... 'I don't know what it is but the population of kids today... the lack of knowledge, the lack of empathy, the lack of skillsets. I had no high functioning... I had one little girl. I had one

female and one male that kind of outshined... kind of... not totally, but kind of

outshined the kids. You go to every other school and you have your honors kids,

you have your kids who can handle your AP classes.'

Principal Morris seemed to share the position expressed by her teacher and she shared

her concerns that she may not have the ability to offset what she too perceived to be

student deficits. She confessed:

How to tackle the lack of the skills kids are coming to us with. There's not

enough time in the day to meet the needs of all the kids with everything else

we're supposed to do. I feel like we're rushing through the content just to get the

content, rather than truly teaching the kids at the level where they need to be

taught in order to get them to the next level. It's a huge challenge…

And how you catch them up when they get to this point where they are already

so far behind?

Principal Morris continued to explain the adversity that she faced by comparing her

role as a K-8 principal to neighboring districts where the grade span grouping were

configured differently. She explained,

When you have a growing student population with academic deficits from ages 4

to 15, I cannot become good at any one thing when I feel like I'm hitting

everything a little bit on our target... from curriculum to all these big growth

areas, because in the township you have buildings that are 3, 4, 5 and K, 1, 2.

That would be ideal when you only have a small group of curriculum in the lab

but no one from Pre-K to 8th grade, all the needs there curriculum-wise... all the

needs behavioral-wise. How do you support your teachers for all different

levels?

Principal Morris painted a bleak portrait of what she felt she was up against as a school

leader. She reminisced that early in her career as a beginning administrator, she was

colorblind. She recalled, "I didn't see skin color. I did see assistance was needed and I

saw more of the adults." Now, many years into her career, she admitted feeling

somewhat defeated at times. She conveyed:

> I just know the youth that I'm working with now are completely different than
>
> the youth I worked with three years ago, five years ago, eight years ago. It just
>
> seems to be the lack of respect, the lack of care, the lack of empathy for
>
> themselves. They can't see the future. They cannot see... they don't have the
>
> skills and they cannot see what the world is really about… I'm seeing kids come
>
> through with a lack of skills compared to where we used to be.

Furthermore, Principal Morris shared that the problems that she notices are larger

communal and societal issues. She observed, "The crime, the culture, we notice that the

kids are coming in from other schools bringing a lot of... have brought a lot of baggage."

Principal Langston worked in a career and technical school where he was

focused on getting his students ready for the work force. He shared that in spite of

external forces beyond the school's control, he sought to ensure that all students at the

Career Center were primed for success. He conveyed, "I think that that's the big piece

for the leadership is to kinda making sure that everyone is viewing all students equally

and accepting them." Principal Langston did not sugar coat the hardships he faced with hiring teachers that are industry professionals. He explained:

> You hire experts from industry to come in. And so your engineers have a
> preconceived notion of what a person should learn and how they should learn
> and what they should look like. And your welding instructors have a
> preconceived notion of what a welder should look like and how should they
> work. And so that is a challenge. And it's funny, I say it's a challenge, but it's
> also a benefit too, in a couple different ways. So it's a challenge because they
> think they know what they're looking for. But it's also a benefit because I think
> they can overcome differences quicker, because they're used to a performance-
> based work environment.

While Principal Langston often tried to keep the focus on performance, he did not neglect to acknowledge that his students sometimes faced perception barriers. He noticed that his teachers from industry felt that work quality spoke for itself but even they had to overcome the initial apprehension about believing that non-traditional workers could meet industry standards. Principal Langston divulged:

> Like a whole – their whole world previously was - "You know, I don't care who
> you are, what you look like – Get the work done. And if it's done with quality
> and fidelity, then I will take you." And so I think that first there's an initial shock
> and maybe not as welcoming and things like that, but so if I can get past that
> barrier, then I think they're quicker to come around than maybe some other
> traditional teaching staff.

Clearly, Principal Langston saw that his staff, not unlike himself, might struggle with various cultural clashes that emerge when diverse groups come together. That being said, he still maintained the optimism that common ground could be established upon which students could build a foundation for promising careers.

Principal Foster took a much more direct approach to preparing teachers to confront their biases and overcome culture shock. He prided himself on initiatives like taking his teachers on a bus tour of students' communities and being somewhat of a cultural informant tour guide for his teachers. He was quite candid about what he observed as teachers' prevailing perception on urban learners:

> Black, single parent, germ infested households. No, they look to see what they can do to help kids be successful instead of making excuses, so they use different strategies. Like pair kids up, they do one-on-one, just being resilient themselves in not giving up. We're liking that they have the power to actually make a difference that through their effort they can actually help kids be successful, as opposed to these kids will never get geometry for a whole bunch of reasons. They're female so they're not gonna be good at science. No, when you have a growth mindset, you believe that all these kids can be successful, irregardless of where they come from.

Clearly, Principal Foster did not attempt to downplay the realities that his teachers encountered in a highly demanding urban school context. Nonetheless, his also felt that teachers could not allow themselves to become immobilized by the habit of making excuses and taking on the posture of learned helplessness.

Principal Ramirez summed up the importance of teachers having a positive

perception of their students regardless of their circumstances and communicated:

> When kids feel good about themselves, they can learn. That's the bigger thing
>
> that I try to instill in staff, it's you're making assumptions that kids learn this
>
> stuff. You're making assumptions that kids are coming to us with certain skills
>
> or certain attributes, and they're not.

The principals in this research offered evidence of indisputable deficits but the deficits

do not morph students into irreparable deviants. The manner in which both principals

and teachers view students has a significant influence on how committed they are to

integrating a social justice agenda within schools. Educators who persist in typecasting

youth in an apathetic and dysfunctional mode are failing to recognize opportunities for

teachable moments within leadership training for learners. However, principals and

teachers, who routinely engage students and become familiar with their leadership

aptitude, can develop democratic learning communities primarily driven by student

initiative. Ginwright and James (2002) suggest, "In organizations around the country,

young leaders are not being taught about leadership; they are taking leadership and

learning by doing—thus making organizations, schools, and communities more

accountable, effective, and democratic" (p. 44).

Expectations for Learners

The "Equity of Learning'" dilemma presents real problems for social justice

principals who want to set high expectations for youth and teachers as well. Principal

Langston shared, "When I go talk to a classroom, is the level of expectation the same for

one class as it is for another?" He believed strongly that all students needed to be consistently held to high performance expectations. He noted that at his school, "It's so performance-based, which is great. So my role is just to constantly talk about the performance of our students, and keep that the focus. And when I do that, I seem to have more success with the social justice piece." One can argue that learner expectations are aligned to how effectively teachers can engage and motivate struggling students. Social justice practices within schools seek to increase students' access to high quality instruction and rigor, which help to improve overall student achievement.

Principal Rivers explained understanding her role as a social justice leader and how she had to position herself to raise expectations for students:

So, my understanding of social justice leadership is basically a leader who, let's see how can I say this, a leader who is in a tough situation, typically with tough students, and is someone who leads knowing that students can excel even despite their circumstances. So, it doesn't matter their socioeconomic background, whether they come from a single-family household, but they can excel, they can learn right along with their counterparts.

Principal Rivers continued by explaining that often her students have incongruent home and school behavioral expectations: She observed:

Students that are urban and struggling, they don't necessarily get some of those skills that they need at home to teach them when it's okay to talk, when it's not okay to talk, when it's okay to use profanity and not use profanity, when it's okay to talk loudly because in my house there's six kids, and so I'm going to talk

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above them versus a normal inside voice. So all of those things. We have to talk about expectations.

Principal Morris felt that she and her staff could mirror positive expectations for students to excel. She stated, "I think it's very important that my role, and starting with my staff, that they see that we are the number one models of what society expects from the student, I guess."

Students are expected to be active participants in the tenants of social justice that their school adheres to. Students have to be invested in making certain that they challenge themselves academically, respect the social and emotional well-being of others, and work within a communal or global context to help imbue change. Principal Morris felt strongly that this meant providing students with structure. She realized:

Every child at every single level, whether it's academic or behavioral, needs that structure. Needs that guidance. Needs that caring and support. Even though they felt that they were referred in some different classes, they felt that these were the best classes because they were learning the most and they would tolerate them. They couldn't goof around.

Principal Morris felt that students actually appreciated adults being tough on them because on some level they understood that adults had students' best interests in mind.

Principal Foster talked about his branding motto GRIT which he explained was a way to change teachers' expectation of students as well as students' expectations of themselves. He recalled his GRIT campaign:

We have student support. For example, one of the things we really push is our

college and career for which we have a college and community access

coordinator in the building and we have what's called a GRIT Initiative. And

our GRIT Initiative becomes a part of our PBIS and the term GRIT was just

coined by Angela Duckworth and her research on patience and perseverance in

the long term. We use that to kind of anchor our school initiatives, so all of our

teachers, all of our students, the public, everybody helps.

Principal Foster felt that it took school and community buy-in to help set appropriate

and attainable expectations for students.

Ginwright and James (2002) discuss the benefits of good decision-making as it

relates to contributions that learners make to establish healthy accountability systems

within their schools. They indicate, "Youth are put in a context where they are

supported in making decisions and seeing the impact of their decisions on themselves

and their communities" (p. 41). School leaders expect learners to be reflective change

agents who take a social and political interest in the inner-working of their school

communities.

Parental Disengagement in Academics

In order to engage more parents in collaborative efforts to improve student

achievement, districts are utilizing social justice practices to connect with parents.

Sanders, Sheldon, and Epstein (2005) and Auerbach (2008) outline multiple struggles

that urban school district encounter with identifying strategies to improve parental

engagement in an effort to enhance communication between the home and school.

School transformation models often require districts identified for improvement to develop improvement plans with family and community outreach goals. Sanders et al. note, "The current wave of educational reform includes an emphasis on family and community involvement as a strategy for school improvement" (p. 24). Principals and teachers often communicate concerns regarding what they perceive as a lack of positive reinforcement of foundational concepts that are taught at school and later ignored within the home.

Principals within this phenomenological study were both critical and sentimental to the unique familial circumstances influencing parental participation in students' academics. Principal Morris explained:

> You have the parents who don't understand the concepts that are being brought out… I don't know where or how to make the change unless things in the system change. You know... what the state's expecting us to do and bring down to our kids. How do you change the strength in the schools without strengthening in and bringing that knowledge to the parents? You know, the population changes so much and it's so transient.

Principal Langston expressed his concern that his staff did not know how to engage what he called "apathetic parents." Principal Demery noted that often when parents showed interest they seemed to have the wrong priorities. She noticed:

> There are a number of parents who are not focused on, let me tell you, I'm saying it wrong, this is my issue. The athletics and prom were the biggest deal to them

and the number of parent teachers' conferences is an eighth of what I see at any

of our basketball games or the prom.

Like or not, principals have to accept that in order to educate students, they must also

bring along the parents. The notion that parents within impoverished communities are

purposely distant from their child's learning experience is also a facet of the

aforementioned deficit-thinking model. As advocates for the parental empowerment of

students from disadvantaged families, Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernández

(2013) indicate, "The empowerment-based approaches discussed here counteract deficit

perspectives by leveraging a powerful critique of educational institutions and

articulating the "power of parents" to become active agents, critics, and transformers of

education and schools" (p. 168).

Promoting Positive School Climate

Safety is always a priority regardless of the school setting. Principals pursuing a

social justice platform for their schools frequently describe efforts to create a safe,

positive school culture and climate. Cohen (2006) explains, "Systemic intervention to

create a safe, caring, and responsive school climate is the unifying goal for evidenced-

based work in this area, as it provides the platform upon which we teach and learn" (p.

212). Administrators must be knowledgeable of strategies they can enact to promote

positive school climate.

Providing a positive school climate is an unfunded mandate. The public expects

that schools will be safe, welcoming and nurturing for all students in spite of looming

societal problems that plague communities. Much of the work of creating a positive

school climate can be funded by the benevolence of pleasantly dispositioned educators who emote positive vibes into their school culture by interacting with their students, colleagues, and community members in a manner that reflects authentic care and mutual respect.

As Superintendent of Schools, I attempted to model the expectation that servant leadership was a district value. Nonetheless, I was also grateful to be able to incentivize this expectation as a result of receiving grant funds to support this priority. My interview revealed:

> We have been fortunate that STPD was awarded a Safe Schools Healthy Students grant that enabled us to train staff in Positive Behavior Instructional Support programs like Restorative Justice Practices or Promoting Positive School Climate, parent engagement activities, mental health services through school-based healthcare centers, and the development of a Parent Resource Center to assist families within the district with finding academic support and health services for their children. We also involve district staff and community service agencies such as DHS, law enforcement, and the Can Council etc., in community forums that give families an opportunity to network with representatives from these agencies to support children.

These supplemental resources cleared the way to empower principals to proactively address school culture and climate issues. Each principal in this study made mention of how they assessed and addressed school culture. Principal Demery concluded that before she could create a positive school culture for students and the larger community,

she had to create safe spaces for her staff to feel supported. She developed an open

door policy for staff and discovered:

> And now some who never come down to the office, after I have visited their
>
> classroom, are having positive conversations, about building school culture.
>
> And I've had some teachers say, remember when we first came here, we thought
>
> you were gonna be all strict, and I thought you were terrible when you yelled at
>
> me. I was compassionate with you, I didn't yell at you and there's the difference.

Principal Langston took a slightly different approach in establishing culture-building

expectations for staff at the Career Center. He applied what he believed to be the

universal industry standard of "professionalism." He led teachers that were

professionals in their diverse field and he recognized that if they were going to be able

to forge a collective school identity and positive school culture, his leadership would

need to be the common denominator. He reflected on his attempts to create a

productive school culture and climate and divulged:

> I think as far as treating the whole staff consistent – it's different because, like I
>
> said, it's not one size fits all. Everybody has a unique set of skills for their
>
> particular program. So I think they start responding – the way they respond and
>
> create that culture of professionalism is our big piece that we've done so far.

Principal Rivers also recognized her staff as being professional, but she realized that

even professionals sometimes need assistance in tackling challenging tasks. They

required scaffolded support when asked to attend to new job performance expectations

in a more deliberate and intentional manner. She admitted:

We had huge climate and culture issues that had a lot to do with the social

justice piece. Teachers weren't understanding where kids were coming from.

We had to teach students things that they would have normally gotten at home.

And so, we had an opportunity to bring behavior interventionists in to support

teachers, provide PD embedded training, coaching in the classroom.

Principal Rivers took a strategic approach to addressing school climate issues because

she was able to leverage her resources to fund additional support staff for teachers.

Principal Ramirez described her experiences as a lead principal at a gifted and

talent magnet school that had fewer supplemental resources, after having been the

principal at a high school where she could create supplemental positions to focus on

school climate. She recognized that she could not leave school climate issues

unattended. She made re-culturing her school a part of her strategic priorities. She

recalled:

My plan when I went in – my first year, I worked at solidifying processes,

procedures, and then making it a safer place across the board… Then my second

year was dedicated to restructuring the curriculum. And then, this year, I've

been focused on trying to increase access to athletics, assisting booster clubs,

things like that. So, my second year – we made sure that all kids were taking

coursework based on their ability levels. Students outside of the math/science

concentration have to start pre-algebra and then the math-science kids take

algebra and geography seventh and eighth grade. But they were making

seventh-grade visual arts, performing arts – students take algebra in middle

school, but those kids just aren't ready for it yet because ideally, algebra is an eighth grade class… PBIS training for Promoting Positive School Climate along with Restorative Justice Training are critical initiatives this year.

Principal Ramirez's approach to creating a positive school climate was not limited to safety in the traditional sense of physical safety, she also highlighted the need to make sure that students had ability appropriate curricula, as well as equal access to extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. She indicated that these were all needed to make an academically high performing school even better.

Principals conveyed evidential examples of how their schools changed to create a more positive culture and climate. Principal Morris shared, "I do pride myself with having a warm welcoming environment when you're walking in. It's colorful, homey, plants, couch, pillows, those things are on display." She also mentioned, "You walk down the Pre-K corridor and you see a lot of kids' art work and pride in the kids' work." Similarly, Principal Morris reported, Principal Ramirez, shared that she wanted to re-brand her school by making it more pride-filled and physically inviting. She explained how she, her parents, and staff attended to the building aesthetics:

> We bought carpets with our logo to create the brand of our school and make it more marketable. And so – because, to me, if you're a gifted school, you should look like a gifted school. Previously, we had these branded posters that were held together with tape. We've gotten a lot of cosmetic things for the building just to make it look brighter and cleaner and more inviting.

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Clearly welcoming and inviting facilities communicate a message to the public about how they are valued but even when resources are lean, the people resources can make a world of difference by how they treat the people they serve.

Several principals spoke of the intangible and unmeasurable school climate variables that they noticed shifting in the right direction. Principal Rivers reminisced:

> So the piece that we struggle with and I talk with my leadership team about a lot is the feel of the building. They'll think it's not hard data, so for example, seeing kids walk down the hall and smiles on their faces, kids who are coming up and doing proactive things: 'Hey, hey, Mrs. Rivers, I think you need to meet with so-and-so and so-and-so, because they had an argument, and this might turn into something else.' Children are coming in to us on Mondays now and saying, 'Hey, this is what happened in our neighborhood over the weekend and I think you need to be aware.' And those things are really hard to measure.

Principal Morris shared similar observations, "Honoring them, and calling their names out on the PA, and seeing pride in them, and giving them high-fives or hugs in the morning. That helps with the culture of the kids." Principals consistently expressed that they had to keep school culture and climate issues at the forefront of their work commitments. Principal Foster confessed:

> So, while we still have some work to do, really getting teachers to operate the real social justice lens by creating practices that keep kids in school and provide them with a level of support when they mess up, so that they can learn more from their experiences and grow. As opposed to these punitive methods which

kind of link to just a whole pipeline to prison. These kids are out of school and left roaming the streets. And I think we've been able to really make a tremendous impact on that end.

Schools often operate as a microcosm of larger society. With that in mind, social justice principals embrace the daunting task of creating positive school climates and cultures which are often an oasis for students who live in seemingly hostile environments.

It is not always possible to offset all the unmet needs that surface in schools. As one who takes great pride in advocating for social justice and equity in schools, I am fully aware that school climate issues cannot be minimalized. As I reflected on my leadership priorities, I recollected numerous measure that we put in place to monitor school culture and climate:

Outside of collecting perception data from student, staff, and parent surveys regarding climate and culture, we look at simple indicators like student and staff absences which could tell you a lot about health and safety concerns with culture and climate. We see more instructional staff engaging students in interactive lessons designed to build meaningful relationships. There is more interest from outside agencies wanting to connect with staff to support student achievement through mentoring, tutorial services, career exploration, STEM activities, and students' involvement in community service projects. Plus, it's always a good sign when you see teachers writing mini-grants to help support experiential learning activities dedicated to exposing students to diversity in settings outside the city. I see more problem-solving as opposed to complaining about

circumstances that staff feel helpless to change. I believe that our recently

adopted district-wide communications' protocol also assisted with staff feeling

as if their feedback on curriculum and discipline issues is valued. All of this has

an impact on our ability to gauge climate and culture.

In spite of my best efforts to equip my principals with the resources that they needed to

create positive school cultures, I am fully aware that there are certain aspects of

promoting positive school culture and climate, which are just like the weather, outside

of my control.

Resistance to Change

In a study of six social justice principals committed to transforming their school

cultures, George Theoharis (2010) cites two primary sources of resistance that these

leaders faced as coming from "within the school community and from the district and

beyond" (p. 339). Breaking from the status quo to follow practices that are completely

new is not only difficult for staff who rely on past practice to problem-solve, change can

be difficult or damaging for the principal proposing it. Theoharis adds, "These leaders

enacted their own resistance by (a) raising student achievement, (b) improving school

structures, (c) recentering and enhancing staff capacity, and (d) strengthening school

culture and community" (p. 231). These four initiatives were thought to be necessary to

engineer a positive school culture that promoted social justice principles.

Principal Rivers discussed her most significant challenge to embedding social

justice practices within school culture as being internal resistance coming from teachers

within the union. She shares:

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The biggest challenge I have is the union. Our teachers' union is very strong, and the other piece is that there's still a lot of old regime, old mentality of the idea of punitive measures. Every kid goes out, they should be suspended, and at the end of the day, we're missing instructional minutes. And so, that's probably about the biggest struggle is to just get people to understand that we're all changing and it's not about the kid getting off, it's not about the kid winning, but it's about we have to teach them what are the proper responses to things.

Principal Ramirez cited staff's propensity to retreat back to prior practice as being a major form of resistance. She responded: "It's just looking at the bigger picture – people fall into that "This is how we've always done it" and they really figure that's it." My remarks supported Principal Ramirez's observation. I reported, "Due to the pace that you have to move to demonstrate progress, staff burnout is also a reality. Not retreating back to the status quo once adversity hits is also a major challenge. People feel comfortable with the familiar even if those practices have not yielded any significant progress."

As mentioned earlier, resistance also manifested itself in the form of a sense of isolation that principals felt compelled to work through resulting from their attempts to change detrimental aspects of the existing school culture and climate. Resistance from the community established itself in the form of oppositional parental backlash with parents feeling a sense of entitlement regarding their ability to influence a school's practices. Principal Demery asserts, "I'm looking for parents to be open to change, to support a spirit of cooperation no matter what social justice must occur, a parent and

myself providing a program that we can still stand as a united front for to push the student to the next level to achieve. Disagreements with parents often give students an excuse for not doing work. So, how can we work together to improve accountability?"

Resistance also emerged from stakeholders' propensity to maintain the status quo and sustain practices that the public had come to perceive as adding value of the school's general services, academics, and athletic programming. Outside resistance can often surface in the form of bureaucratic procedures at the state department level that don't support funds being used in a manner that can develop a competent, consistent talent pool (Capper et al., 2000; McKenzie et al., 2007; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). Resistance from within the district can be evidenced by lack of direction or inadequate support in the form of scarce human and material resources from central office or grievances filed by teacher union representatives who believed that principals were operating outside the parameters of teachers' contractual agreements.

Principal Foster references central office leaders' inability to generate innovative ideas to create a more realistic vision for staff to follow. He suggested, "As opposed to regurgitation of the same old vision from other superintendents or other leaders. It hasn't changed in years and the practices have not changed at all to really truly meet the needs." His observations undoubtedly reflected his belief that central office administrators are somewhat out of touch with the realities that he experiences as the building-level.

In order to keep pace with the growing demands of an increasingly diverse nation and world, educational leadership will have to become increasingly more

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inclusive. Developing consistent leadership while enforcing culturally sensitive policies and practices is a positive way to build school community. Leadership for social justice must resist constraining and prescriptive constructs in favor of remaining malleable, reflective, and responsive to the contextual circumstances of diverse and multicultural student populations (Bustamante et. al., 2009, Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Skrla et al., 2006). Principals can further their social justice agenda by ensuring that the public is properly educated on social justice concepts that the school is adopting

Valuing Diversity

Educational leaders are encouraged to value diversity by reflecting on multicultural practices and incorporating important aspects of all stakeholders' cultures into schools (Brown, 2004; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In order to responsibly educate students from diverse backgrounds, principals have to assess how their personnel and resources are currently being used to make learning more culturally inclusive. My interview revealed, "I believe that social justice leadership promotes and values aspects of diversity that cause people to gain a better of understanding of how to co-exist in a multicultural context." Principal Ramirez's thoughts mirrored this belief and she simply stated, "Our kids need diversity because we have students of color." When she spoke of the diversity they needed, she was speaking of diversity relative to experiences, curriculum, and educators.

Learning to value diversity can be taught but lived experiences are another way of acquiring an appreciation for diversity. Principal Langston shared what he learned in practice and stated, "When you do all your research in understanding multicultural

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education, and you talk about the equity of learning for all students, and you know you have your plan, you can see every student as an equal in the classroom." Principal Ramirez also advocated for professional development to support valuing diversity and insisted, "It's professional development because we're constantly burning things into their psyches." School leaders who genuinely value diversity as opposed to making it a part of school mandated reform initiatives rely heavily on staff development that builds investment in multicultural experiences (Smith, 2005) for students and staff.

Principal Langston summed up the need for educators who value diversity and stated, "We really have to value each other's backgrounds, experiences, in order to succeed. Because it's all about working together and collaboration to create that unity for success." Ultimately, principals can significant effect the progress that school cultures make with integrating social justice practices within a multicultural framework. Kose (2007) shares, "principals should foster a supportive, learning school culture that welcomes, affirms, and learns from student and community diversity" (p. 279). Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) also suggest that principals who advocate for multicultural practices are in a better position to support staff with diversity challenges by debunking harmful preconceptions and discriminatory building practices that have been systemically embedded within a school culture over time.

Building Relationships

Many scholars reporting on the influence of social justice on school effectiveness argue that non-academic factors are critical to the implementation of a viable social justice platform (Luyten, Visscher, & Witziers, 2005; Stringfield, 2002; Teddlie &

Reynolds, 2001). Building meaningful relationships is essential to establishing the trust

necessary to create and sustain a culture committed to advancing a social justice

philosophy. School contexts help to establish the nature of the relationships that

internal and external stakeholders form for purposes of school improvement. Luyten et

al. (2005) argue:

> In addition to explaining the relationship between features of school processes
>
> and school performance, studies should place more emphasis on the influence of
>
> non-educational factors in the school context (e.g., neighborhood, family, peer
>
> group) on schooling processes and on student achievement (p. 259)

Establishing guidelines on how interaction is to occur amongst stakeholders is central to

fostering the trust and respect that encourages social justice practice. How school

personnel interact with individuals or groups at the local, state, and national level has a

direct impression on the nature of relationships formed within a school community.

Therefore, any combination of interactions can influence school climate and define the

overall context in which relationships are formed within schools. Cohen, McCabe,

Michelli, and Pickeral, (2009) describe the primary relationships that help to embed

social justice philosophy within a school culture/climate as being: "Positive adult-adult

relationships between and among teachers, administrators, and staff; positive adult-

student relationships; positive student-student relationships; shared decision-making;

common academic planning opportunities; diversity valued; student participation in

learning and discipline" (p. 201).

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Principal Langston describes how he interfaces with staff in an effort to foster relationship-building: "I feel that leadership plays an essential role in constantly bringing the issues that we have up to the staff. I don't ever see a time to hide any of the information. If there's an issue, we talk about it openly, and if there's a problem… for example, if I feel like there's a perception issue with a certain class, a certain type of student, or something, we talk about it." This same notion of trust-building through open communication is witnessed in Principal Ramirez's comments: "You know, trust is such a big issue. You trust people when they see your struggles and keep confidence you know, it's not everybody's business." Principal Demery also adds: "How do I get the buy-in from teachers? It's something I'm still working on. And it's most often trusting as you're building relationships with teachers. And some of the teachers already know this, so we can finish each other's sentences." Principal Morris underscores the importance of establishing relationships by declaring: "And my end in mind, my belief in life is that we have to push to make our kids feel like they're welcome and they're there. Relations are key."

Learning communities encouraging trust are invested in ensuring that students are learnng in a nurturing environment that takes into consideration their academic, emotional, and physical needs. These schools promote relationships with people and agencies that stimulate prosocial student and staff development. School leaders have to be extremely selective in deciding how to identify key personnel and agencies who can add value to relationship-building dynamics within their school cultures. Making sure that the social justice principles and work of groups or individuals are in alignment

with a school's mission and stance on equity and equality will assist school leaders with determining if certain partnerships are worth pursuing.

Principal Rivers describes her rationale for training staff within Restorative Practices to build community: "We had an opportunity to take all of my staff, to train them with the support of the district. We trained the service staff in Restorative Practices. We used circles. We started the first ten days of school just building community circles and learning about kids and just really doing that foundation of relationship building." I rounded out this discussion on establishing meaningful relationships with the general observation: "I believe that if people spent less time judging and more time authentically communicating, then, forthcoming generations would be less inclined to promote insensitive thought and practice."

Modeling and Mentoring Affective Behavior

Effective school leaders make personal and professional investments in understandings students' cultural context to assist them with modeling principles of social justice leadership throughout the school and local community. Enlisting the support of colleagues will be critical to successfully integrate and replicate these concepts into practice. Bustamante et al. (2009) observe, "Without a leadership team that values and models personal and organizational cultural competence, staff members and students might resort to myriad excuses for not promoting cultural competence" (p. 819). Educational leadership programs are being asked to assist principals and staff with transitioning their practices by modeling effective strategies that support social justice principles. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) suggest, "Modeling becomes

particularly important in the context of the tremendous struggle school leaders confront in reforming their practice" (p. 216). Principals and their staff can use cultural competence to model and embed affective behavior practices that support socioemotional learning within a school culture. Jones and Bouffard (2012) advise, "we propose that schools integrate the teaching and reinforcement of SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) skills into their missions and daily interactions with students" (p. 3). Although public schools educators already face serious time constraints with covering academic content for state assessments, finding a mechanism that supports students' understanding of prosocial interactions with classmates and staff will help facilitate learning.

Principal Morris articulates just how important modeling of affective behavior has been for her school culture: "So, getting my staff to realize and focus on the academic, and the social, and the emotional pieces, being that Leader in Me piece with The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Kids and Teens, really having that mindset of what are we in charge of? What can we control? What we cannot control? And you know modeling that with the kids and modeling that with my staff. What is our end in mind?" Similarly, Principal Rivers noted: "Having a kind of culture coach would be an asset. We have instructional coaches, but you know, if you can't get your kind of culture right, instruction's not gonna get there." I also disclosed, "As superintendent, my objective is to serve as a resource person for administrators who model the type of change that I want to see throughout the district." Ultimately, there is extreme value in

principals consistently demonstrating behavioral changes with students and staff within a school culture that they wish to see replicated over time.

Schools systems are beginning to rely more heavily on partnerships with community agencies that can assist with modeling affective behavior when developing appropriate social skills. Ryan (2006) speaks to the benefits of distributive forms of leadership that encourage a team or multi-agency approach. Ryan (2006) asserts, "Members of the school community can also engage in a number of activities designed to help critical reflection. These include testing out platforms, modeling, cognitive apprenticeships, administrative portfolios, journals, case records and studies, two-column analyses, various scenario analyses and simulations, and value audits" (p. 11). If students witness school leaders having positive interactions with their classmates, staff, and community stakeholders, they will have a point of reference for how to handle social interactions. As school communities network with more outside agencies for supplemental support or enrichment, it will be necessary for staff and students to develop healthy routines for interacting with the public. Ultimately, school leaders should be excited about the possibilities of expanding students' social skill development resulting from shared educational responsibilities with colleagues and local organizations that can add value to a school's social justice practices. As Leithwood (2003) notes, "By modeling desired dispositions and actions, leaders enhance others' beliefs about their own capacities and their enthusiasm for change" (p. 4).

Principal Langston further affirms:

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Social justice is tough. Outside of me being a principal – I'm considered an

expert in classroom management. I do some consulting and training for other

school districts and agencies. And that doesn't have a direct correlation with

social justice, but the big piece that I work with teachers on is modeling

appropriate behavior. Just response to students in general.

Incorporating Restorative Practices

Most principals associated with this research cited using Restorative Justice

Practices as a way to develop an accountable school culture that does not focus on

punitive measures to resolve conflict. Overall, the principal as a social justice

instructional leader has the capacity to influence school climate/culture and build

communal partnerships through a collaborative process meant to engage all

stakeholders in the transformational re-culturing of an entire school community. To

transform a school culture effectively, requires that school leaders must have a personal

and professional commitment and investment in social justice philosophy for it to take

root within the school and local community. Theoharis (2008) notes that social justice

principals "play active roles and maintain highly visible profiles with the students, staff,

and families" (p. 17). He demonstrates this prerequisite condition by establishing that

social justice leaders accept their assignments with the intention of enacting practices

that address equity issues relating to historically marginalized groups. Restorative

Justice Practices "build a particular sense of community in which every member-

students, teachers, parents, volunteers, aides feel that they are seen heard and

respected" (Teaching Restorative Justice Practices with Classroom Circles, p. 4).

Principal Morris recalls and incident within her school where students set off a smoke bomb in the hallway:

> I try to have them reflect. But, what I found is that it has made it more meaningful when I'm firm. But, some of them give back in community service. Some of them had to go back to every single classroom... we had a smoke bomb go off. The kids started giving me funny notes, in fact it was the whole school. They went to every single classroom and they made a public apology to every single teacher and classroom. That meant more than sending a child home and sitting and playing video games. It never happened again.

As a result of the dynamic and synergistic nature of Restorative Justice Practice programs, it becomes important for principals to better understand how to invest in staff development, supervision of the school culture and climate, and brokering communicative and trusting relationships with all stakeholders associated with their learning community. A Restorative Practice framework is inclusive because it acknowledges the perspectives and actions of multiple stakeholders who have been charged to oversee the creation and implementation of a more proactive disciplinary model. Restorative Justice Practices are designed to be responsive to the special circumstances of high needs students who have been historically underserved and marginalized.

I expressed my support of Restorative Practices as a part of my investment in empowering principals with the right resources to evoke more justice in their schools by noting:

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We brought Restorative Practices into the district as a way of reducing suspensions and finding more constructive ways to build relationships with students, teachers, and families without focusing on the punitive approach to student discipline. We've seen a significant reductions in suspensions, expulsions, disciplinary referrals, and student encounters with local law enforcement. The training that all professional and support staff received within the RJ (Restorative Justice) framework really set the tone for how we wanted to communicate with our stake holders. It took some time for teachers to adjust their classroom management techniques to new behavior expectations that we charged students with observing. However, staff eventually saw that fewer suspensions meant more opportunities for teachers to narrow the achievement gap. It was definitely a paradigm shift in how staff was taught to respond to students' behavioral issues. Now, the State of Michigan has modified the Revised School Code to reflect more Restorative Practice regarding discipline matters.

Principal Foster commented on his initial experience with integrating Restorative Practices within his school:

One of the things we did was implemented restorative practices when I got there and it completely changed the culture, what it would be with the restorative piece, getting everyone trained and really getting teachers to understand the importance of building relationships with students.

Principals recognized that creating a school culture centered on repairing

relationships and trust makes it easier for staff to model affective behavior to students

while mentoring teachers and support staff in providing intense student support

services. Adhering to a Positive Behavior Instructional Support system that both

students and staff can identify with enables social justice principals to be consistent

with the application of administrative guidelines. Consequently, both students and

instructional staff feel supported and are in a better position to be responsive to each

other.

Principal Rivers reflects on changes within school climate and culture after her

school implemented Restorative Practices:

> Suspensions decreased after the first year by 62 percent. We had fights, literally
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> when I first came, there were fights every day – physical altercations, assaults on
>
> staff. We decreased fights by 76 percent first year. And so just teaching kids
>
> those skills that they need to communicate with each other, communicate with
>
> adults, I feel restorative practices has really supported that.

Consistency of Policy and Practices

School leaders have to reflect on and modify policies and practices that deter the

integration of social justice principles into a school's culture. Schools are the primary

socializing agencies where children from diverse backgrounds begin to form opinions

about unique cultural practices of groups. Hoy's and Tarter's (2004) research on

organization justice in schools indicates, "Authenticity and procedural justice should

guide consistency. Application of rules, regulations, and policies must be fair, visible,

and consistent, yet flexible enough to take into account individual needs and extraordinary circumstances" (p. 251). Therefore, policies and practices not only have to be consistent but also culturally sensitive to the needs of diverse groups.

Principal Langston raised several self-reflective thoughts about his social justice leadership practices:

Well, I think almost in any – I hate to call education a business, but it is. I think that in any successful business, everything flows from the top down. Not dictated from the top down, but examples from the top down. And so it's the conversations that you have in small groups; it's the conversations you have in front of everybody; it's the consistent messaging of how you respond to situations, how you promote different things, and then how you react when certain instances are happening. Are you reacting differently for a different set of circumstances, or is it consistent? And I think that social justice begins with the actions of the leader, and how they're viewed. And it's not just how you are determined as reacting, but it's how you're perceived, too. I think that perception is even larger than what you're actually doing yourself. So I think you have to know that everyone's watching you, even when you don't think they are, and then how are you responding to a situation. And what's your voice like? And what's the consistency?

Principal Langston saw inconsistency in his leadership practices to be a deterrent to enlisting support for social justice because not being consistent might be read as being discriminatory. He added how he defined "fair" education and stated point blank, "I

think for me, the definition is fair education and consistent education for all, but moreover establishing a culture of understanding." Establishing shared understanding of what's "fair" can be difficult because sometime inconsistency can be justifiable.

Principal Demery pointed out an instance where she felt that inconsistent treatment was not fair. She observed:

> There are students who have not been disciplined with consistency. Consistency means that students need to be disciplined the same for the same thing but some get to come back because they're a friend of a friend or somebody's Board member's grandchild or something like that.

This type of inconsistency in disciplinary consequences does not go unnoticed.

Social justice leaders develop skills for unearthing culturally insensitive policies and practices and extracting them from the learning environment (Banks, 2002; Robinson & Howard-Hamilton, 2000). One area of concern that is often scrutinized by building principals is disconnection between district policies, administrative guidelines, and common practices. Principal Foster pointed out:

> We have to look at and see if the district's vision is aligned to policy because of this kind of impact. The practices have to also support what we're trying to set-up that's kind of an example that central office needs to come up with practices and policies that support administrators being more social justice leaders. As opposed to sending mixed messages.

Like Principal Foster, Bustamante et al. (2009) stress, "…Once barriers are identified, leaders must then ensure that new policies and practices are created that reflect the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups" (p. 798).

When policies are fairly applied to all members of a learning community regardless of their cultural backgrounds, stakeholders are more likely to believe that the school's organizational culture is trustworthy and objective in the application of it rules (Hodson, 2001). Hoy and Tarter (2004) note, "When principals earn the trust of the faculty, they bolster a sense of human dignity in the workplace. We hasten to add that the relationship is reciprocal, that is, faculty trust enhances school justice, but justice promotes trust" (p. 255). Inconsistent enforcement of rules may cause some members of groups to feel as if they are being unfairly targeted which leads to low levels of community buy-in. When policies and practices appear ambiguous, school leaders may be sending unintended messages that suggest the organizational culture does not value diversity concerns. Thus, principals must be clear in their communication and interpretation of policies and practices that support the interaction of students and staff from diverse backgrounds. Again, the consistent enforcement of culturally inclusive policies and application of unbiased practices provides assurance that contributions from all groups will be acknowledged. This in turn provides more incentive for students and staff to share common experiences.

Educating the Public

Informing the public on the value of social justice practices within schools can be complex due to the amount of misinformation that people have regarding social justice

practices. Much of the discussion around communication and social justice initiatives

typically references stakeholders who are closest to the daily work occurring in schools.

The principal often initiates the contact with individuals or organizations that are

invested in collaborating on social justice projects. Oftentimes, principals have to reflect

critically on their own stance on social justice principles prior to communicating with

other stakeholders about their interests in promoting a school's social justice agenda.

Reed and Swaminathan (2008) note, "school leaders, like everyone else, come to us with

baggage of misinformation and prejudice from a variety of value systems that may have

reinforced oppressive behaviors. This baggage may present a serious barrier in their

ability to fully embrace inclusive social justice philosophies and practices" (p. 221).

Once principals have a clear perspective on the types of support to effectively

implement social justice projects, they can sell their vision of this work to the general

community after having thoughtfully examined their own biases after properly vetting

these practices with their staff.

Principal Demery was very clear on her charge to educate the public. She

conceded, "One of the major challenges is educating the public to value education."

Principal Langston felt that his charge was slightly different. He was determined to

create greater access to opportunity for his students in the real world of work and he

mentioned:

I think it has to be more – not just a role within the building, but a role within the

community. If I'm going into schools all over the county, if I'm in and out of

local businesses, they need to see what it is that we're viewing. Because the

career pathway is different than the educational pathway. And you get

viewpoints from industry, you get viewpoints from education, but you have to

find a way to let them – let everyone know what type of student you have,

without talking about culture and diversity or anything like that.

Principal Langston's approach led me back to my reflexive data analysis journal:

While Principal Langston has taken on the charge to educate the public on what

his students' have to offer in the workplace, he has chosen to be silent on culture

and diversity matters. He has opted to place these topics in the null curriculum

of his campaign to educate the public. This may be a wise strategy or it may be

his own inability to see how pervasive cultural discrimination and resistance to

diversity are engrained in American society.

Mr. Langston clearly was attempting advocate for his students but his students need to

have someone who is willing to go beyond making sure that they have placements.

They have to be places that are willing to go the extra mile to nurture these students as

they acclimate to their organizational culture. Larson and Murtadha (2002) call on

school leaders to take on the role of outreach specialists to facilitate the adoption of

social justice programming. They assert, "Leaders will have to recognize the wisdom of

behaving less like corporate executives and more like community organizers" (p. 150).

I used my post as Superintendent of Schools to increase public awareness about

social justice and equity matters. My interview revealed:

My responsibility as a social justice leader is to educate the Board, general public,

school administrators, families, and other partners in education on issues that

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primarily impact student achievement and opportunities for students' overall

growth. For instance, people need to understand the effect that poverty has on

academic growth and exposure to learning opportunities. The public needs to

know how school funding, based on numerous adequacy studies commissioned

in the state of Michigan, influences academic programming.

When the community has a better understanding of topics like poverty, school funding,

high-stakes testing, and conditions of facilities, etc., stakeholders may understand why

a social justice platform is necessary to adequately address how these factors' influence

on students' achievement, socioemotional well-being, and students' life chances beyond

high school. McKenzie et al. (2007) insist that educational leaders must transform into

activist leaders who have a focus on equity. School leaders can also use supplemental

resources dedicated to family and community engagement to create an awareness of

and need for public support of social justice endeavors. Also, principals can also assist

the public with overcoming its reluctance to participate in a school's social justice

practices. Community and family engagement can be instrumental in getting other

agencies that support families on board to strengthen student achievement.   Mills and

Gale (2002) observe, "Many working-class parents feel that they lack the culturally

valuable educational skills and material resources to participate effectively in the

educational process" (p. 6). Therefore, principals need to provide opportunities for

parents and community agencies to share experiences that may assist staff with

providing the appropriate support for students. This outreach will in turn empower the

public to develop more trusting relationships with school personnel.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Educators often champion "lifelong learning." This requires that schools prepare

students with the skills to learn, adapt, and grow throughout their lifespan. Similarly,

educational professionals must continuously invest in professional learning for career

growth to be responsive to societal changes that dictate new and innovative theories

and practices. The expectation that school leaders will be able to respond appropriately

to student diversity will continue to grow. Browne (2012) writes:

> Educators and families with children of school age in the 21st century are
>
> witnessing a sea shift, equivalent to a tsunami, in the challenges and changes
>
> being implemented or on the horizon that will fundamentally and permanently
>
> impact the nature of the teaching and learning process. We must make sure that
>
> none are left behind during this cataclysm. The contemporary experiences of
>
> teachers and school site administrators especially those in culturally diverse low
>
> income urban settings give new meaning to the phase 'being on the firing line'
>
> (p. 1).

As schools in the United States weather the cultural tsunami described by Browne

(2012), the lived experiences of school leaders who are expected to respond

appropriately to the expanding intersectionality of human diversity will necessarily

become a fundamental part of the discourse in empirical research. Bogotch (2002)

asserts that social justice is a social construction and "there are no fixed or predictable

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meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership

practices" (p. 153). Added to this Santamaria (2013) shares, "Including multiple

perspectives in leadership practice sounds innovative today; however, in the recent

past, multiple perspectives of women and people of color were not considered with

regard to scholarly contributions in educational leadership" (p. 348). Therefore, the

purpose of this hybrid (hermeneutic/egological) phenomenological dissertation

research study is to fill a gap in the literature that is decreasing but still prominent. This

study provides an in-depth understanding of the lived social justice leadership

experiences of six secondary (6th-12th grades) school principals under my direct

supervision along with my experiences as their Superintendent of Schools in a mid-

sized Midwest urban school district.

The methodology included phenomenological interviews. A purposeful

sampling design was used to identify six secondary principals within my district who

self-identified as social justice leaders. Five of the six principals and I had fifteen or

more combined years of administrative and teaching experience working within the

district. One principal had three years of administrative experience within the district

but had previously worked within a district with a similar demographic profile for over

twenty-two years (as a teacher and administrator).

In keeping with the hybrid (hermeneutic/egological) phenomenological research

tradition, I maintained a reflexive data analysis journal throughout horizontalization,

descriptive coding for themed cluster, crafting the textual and structural descriptions,

and the descriptive narrative writing process. I composed my data analysis journal to

record and code disconfirming evidence, tacit knowledge, biases, predispositions, or preunderstandings elicited while I analyzed the findings. The reflexive data analysis journal was kept to guard against the threat that my undisclosed biases might compromise my ability to accurately depict the principals' responses.

The principals and I participated in semi-structured interviews conducted by a second-party interviewer. Interviews were transcribed and coded using a descriptive coding method. During horizontalization three dominant themes, referred to as macro-themes, emerged from an analysis of principals' responses as well as my own. After multiple trails of clustering themes, each macro-theme encompassed seven sub-categories, referred to as micro-themes, directly related to its respective macro-theme. These themes formed the basis of the textual and structural descriptions.

This study sought to reveal the essence of the lived social justice leadership experiences of secondary school leaders in different building contexts but in a shared school district. This chapter provides a restatement of the primary and ancillary research questions, discussion of findings, the limitations of the study, implications of research which shed light on the essence of social justice leadership, as well as conclusions and recommendations for additional research.

Primary and Ancillary Research Questions

School leaders who work in diverse settings are expected to demonstrate competencies driven by professional educational leadership standards that address social justice and equity issues. The primary research question guiding the hybrid (hermeneutic/egological) phenomenology was: What is the social justice leadership

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experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent? Ancillary questions included the following:

- What experiential knowledge has shaped the actions, beliefs, and ethical stance of 6th-12th-grade principals in regard to educational leadership for social justice?

- What, if any, professional growth/development training experiences in social justice theory and/or practice do secondary principals draw upon to support their advocacy for social justice?

- What experiences do secondary school principals have in assessing the impact of social justice practices on school climate and culture?

- What experiences do secondary school principals have with planning and implementing professional development for faculty, staff, students and parents that is relevant to social justice in education?

- What resistance at the building/communal level, if any, do secondary school principal experience while attempting to implement social justice practices to improve school climate and culture?

- What supports, if any, do secondary school principals acknowledge are provided by central office administration in order to implement social justice practices with fidelity at the building level?

- What experiences do secondary school principals report are sources of resilience in their work as social justice leaders in public schools?

These ancillary questions were adapted to create the hermeneutic phenomenological interview protocol and were adapted slightly further (in consideration of my district leadership role as Superintendent of Schools) to conduct my egological phenomenological interview protocol with the second-party interviewer.

Discussion of Findings

After two rounds of descriptive coding and one round of collegial coding to verify themes, during horizontalization this hybrid (hermeneutic/egological) phenomenological study yielded three major units of meaning (overarching themes) that I designated as macro-themes with seven embedded sub-categories referred to as micro-themes. These seven micro-themes converged within each of the aforementioned macro-theme categorizations to convey findings related to the lived social justice leadership experiences of seven career educational leaders. The textual description integrated the verbatim quotes of study participants and formed the basis for structural description of social justice leadership. The structural description revealed that the essence of social justice leadership is heavily influenced by an administrative leader's ability to (1) collaboratively enact a vision for transformational leadership, (2) eliminate barriers to equitable learning opportunities, and (3) promote practices that create a positive school climate.

Together the macro-and micro-themes influenced the writing of the descriptive narrative. Both macro-and micro-themes reflect influences that principals believed were a part of their lived experiences in promoting social justice leadership within their respective schools. An overview of the three macro-themes follows:

Enacting Visionary Transformational Leadership

Principals commented that their ability to enact visionary transformational leadership was strongly influenced by their childhood experiences, personal knowledge of social justice theory and practice, and a clearly articulated vision from central office aligned to principals' work at the building-level. Some principals took the initiative to develop research-based leadership models such as Leader in Me and GRIT within their schools to create a vison and common language that students and staff share to improve school climate. These principals understood that students needed to be empowered to actively enculturate social justice practices within their schools. Ginwright and James (2002) report, "In the youth development field, there has been rising interest in framing how young people engage in social justice activities" (p. 33). As students begin to mobilize around societal issues that affect school climate, school leaders must welcome student input. Historically marginalized groups of students should be empowered with the tools to dismantle barriers to equity through social justice activism.

Principals must expose and nullify deficit thinking and insist that teachers maintain high expectations for themselves and their students.   Raising expectations for teachers means heightening their consciousness of when they are communicating a deficit mind-set regarding students' academic potential or behavioral norms. Teachers' expectations of students are often influenced by their perceptions of the impoverished environments and societal risk-factors that affect them. Brown (2004) comments, "When compared to their White middle-class counterparts, students of color and low socioeconomic status (SES) consistently experience significantly lower achievement test

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scores, teacher expectations, and allocation of resources" (p. 79). In the age educator

accountability, where performance evaluations account for as much as 40% of a

teacher's overall evaluation, it would seem logical that educators would necessarily

hold high expectations of students' potential for academic achievement. Effective social

justice teachers and principals discover ways to motivate students to meet or exceed

academic performance targets.

Many principals relied on their Positive Behavior Instructional Support

framework provide an infrastructure for operationalizing their school's vision and

mission statements.   Some principals shared that clarification of the vision for assuring

student success from central office could have provided a source of direction for how

they needed to approach faculty and staff development within their buildings. All

principals referenced their genuine desire to sustain a culture committed to providing

social justice for students and families as being a source of resilience.

Eliminating Barriers for Equity of Learning

Creating a socially just learning community entails addressing the educational

equity issues of individuals that have historically been locked out of opportunities

afforded to more privileged members of dominant culture. Vogel (2011) suggests, "To

truly understand the beliefs, practices, and policies which contribute to the systemic

inequities that constitute oppression, a theory of oppression must first be understood"

(p. 78). Oppression does not occur by happenstance.   It is sustained by deeply

embedded systems of privilege and marginalization.

As the findings indicated, eliminating barriers was evidenced in a number of distinct ways dependent on the school setting. The extent to which principals were able to identify and remove obstacles significantly influenced the work they were able to accomplish as a part of their social justice agenda. Barriers were both internal and external to the school community. Principals referenced budgetary constraints as a major source of frustration when attempting to create the optimal academic setting for at-risk students with multiple learning challenges. Most principals commented that their most significant barrier was the lack of a consistent, highly qualified, and certified teaching staff that they could work with for a sustained period of time to ensure that best practices were embedded within a school culture. Principals believed that their investment of time in the form of providing professional development, instructional coaching, and mentoring for new teachers was futile due to the high rates to teacher turnover within the district. Consequently, principals believed that their ability to raise student achievement with sustainable results within their school culture was hindered by the district's inability to retain its talent pool. Barrier elimination necessitates locating the appropriate human and material resources to effectively transform a school. Even when resources were plentiful and principals had grant supported supplements to allocate for underperforming students, gaining momentum in leveling the playing field was still difficult. Judicious care was taken to strategically apply tenants of social justice theory while making strategic and high impact investments.

The cultural consciousness of principals and teachers interfacing with students has also shown to be a significant factor in strengthening relationships. Jean-Marie,

Normore, and Brooks (2010) note that institutions focusing on diversity and culture in educational leadership dismantle barriers by seeking "to inform how practitioner-leaders come to understand their immediate contexts better, while appreciating the contextual differences with their counterparts elsewhere" (p. 9). Educators can effectively improve their own cultural competence to improve existing practices that may support relationship building.

Principals demonstrated strategies on how to integrate programming designed to improve communication and initiate relationship-building with parents. Auerbach (2009) states, "Family and community engagement are increasingly seen as powerful tools for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative" (p. 9). When administrators and teachers took an active role in the planning and implementation of family engagement activities, parents were more likely to participate in the programming. First, school personnel authentically believed that there is a legitimate rationale for parental engagement activities (Theoharis, 2007) that is aligned to the school's social justice framework. Disengaged parents were meant to feel welcome and respected in order to sustain family engagement activities that support student achievement. Theoharis (2007) recounts a statement from a principal who worked to create a climate that was culturally responsive to his parents:

> In the past many parents were greeted not as warmly. The way the school welcomes parents can make a big difference. We worked to change that and you can see and feel the difference. Parents and community members commented on

the change, but more importantly, you see more parents, and you hear in their

tone that they feel respected (p. 237).

This simple modification in the manner in which school administration developed

parental engagement activities resulted in greater participation from parents who felt

more invested in their child's academic experience.

Promoting Positive School Climate (PPSC)

Social justice principals demonstrated the ingenuity to engineer a culture of

accountability.   Many principals utilized Positive Behavior Instructional Support to

influence student behavior and teacher dispositions and beliefs. Principals primarily

focused on the Restorative Practices initiative within the district as a way to

demonstrate investment in finding ways to keep students in attendance after

disciplinary actions. Principals believed that modeling affective behavior through

Positive Behavior Instructional Support (PBIS) programs like Restorative Practices, gave

them opportunities to strengthen relationship with students, staff, and families to

enhance the overall culture and climate of their schools. Some principals referenced

Michigan's Revised School Code on Discipline to reiterate that Restorative Justice has

now become a part of the disciplinary process in Michigan when considering

suspension or expulsion as a consequence for disciplinary action.

The use of Restorative Justice to stimulate positive school climate was a model

that enabled administrators and teachers to develop consistent practices supported by a

behavior matrix that specifically outlined behavior expectations in the classroom,

lunchroom, auditorium, on the bus, and within the hallways, etc. District-wide

adoption of the Restorative Practice framework was thought be necessary in order to develop uniformity of practice to account student and staff mobility between schools. A Parent Resource Center was established within the middle school to educate the public and provide training sessions on Restorative Practices that could be used within the home to reinforce work occurring at school. Since school cultures were representative of their larger communities, principals believed that it was logical to integrate aspects of those larger communities into their school's daily operations. This ensured that groups outside of mainstream culture had a voice in how their children were educated and socialized.

Within the first year of implementing Restorative Practices, principals noticed an initial decline in the number of discipline referrals from teachers and a reduction in the number of suspensions and Board level hearings for student misconduct. This meant that students were in class receiving the benefit of instruction. Subsequently, there were slight improvements in students' attendance as well as overall citizenship. Principals shared that teachers, who were accustomed to removing students from the classroom through "snap suspension," struggled more with Restorative Practices because they were reluctant to apply tiered interventions within a behavior model. This resistance to change impeded the building-wide adoption of Restorative Practices in some schools. Nonetheless, principals believed that this model was less punitive and helped to establish a culture of personal accountability for students while enabling them to miss fewer days of instruction. Ultimately, principals hoped that this would improve student achievement for the most behaviorally at-risk students.

Principals encouraged the use and analysis of disciplinary and perception data to help inform ways to establish more responsive school cultures. Frattura and Capper (2007) advise, "data can raise the consciousness of educators about the strengths and the inequities happening in their own schools and about the myths that continue to be perpetuated about particular traditionally marginalized groups and individuals" (p. 49). Principals believed that if school leaders are consistently called upon to use data to inform instruction and provide supplemented services to students, then, it was reasonable to use data to evaluate diversity concerns to create more socially just schools. Culture audits may be an effective way for principals to assess which facets of their school's culture and climate need to be more inclusive of multicultural representations of teaching and learning.

Principals assisted with clarifying expectations for both teachers and learners so that schools could promote more inclusive classroom settings. Johnson (2006) and Gooden (2010) state that one approach to accomplishing this inclusivity within school districts is by developing leaders who promote culturally relevant curriculum and social activism for student empowerment. As school leaders educated themselves on culturally relevant topics associated with schools and local communities, their perceptions of students also influenced their practice. Those principals who had shared experiences of marginalization within the communities that they served, reported being in a better position to understand how to build relationships with and educate children within those communities. Santamaria (2013) notes, "Shared marginalized educational experiences might result in these leaders' increased multicultural understandings,

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alternative perceptions, and practices of applied leadership" (p. 3). She further states

that this cultural identification with a school's leadership may result in increased

opportunities for multicultural curriculum based on a social justice platform.

Culturally complementary relationships can be used to develop and implement a

culturally responsive curriculum that values diversity and encourages teachers to adopt

pedagogy and content that reflect and respect students from diverse backgrounds.

Principals, as social justice educators, believed that they had an ethical obligation

to assist teachers, students, and parents with understanding how they assess whether a

school climate is a healthy work and learning environment. This collaborative

assessment process built mutual trust within staff which was a necessary component for

relationship building and modeling the affective behavior that they wanted replicated

throughout the school and neighboring community. Wooleyhand (2013) emphasizes

this strategy noting, "Principals must steadfastly connect actions to their beliefs. Their

ongoing message to students, staff, and parents must include genuine concern for the

progress of all students" (p. 11).

Learning how to value diversity was one of the most critical lessons within the

framework for Promoting Positive School Climate because students and families

throughout the city were funneled into a comprehensive middle school due to a

consolidation of middle schools for budgetary reasons. Bustamante et al. observe, "The

21st century realities of global interdependence and diverse institutions require that

schools effectively and appropriately respond to diverse groups in the school and

school community and prepare all young people for positive interactions with people

who are culturally different" (p. 794). This was especially important in a city with a history of division along racial and class lines which persistently causes issues of equity of the quality of education based on students' residences and poverty index.

In addition to providing a thorough exploration of the primary research question, it's necessary to critically analyze the reported responses to data that emerged regarding the ancillary questions. The first ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What experiential knowledge has shaped the actions, beliefs, and ethical stance of 6th-12th-grade principals in regard to educational leadership for social justice?

The majority of principals responded to this question by drawing upon significant events from their childhood that served as motivation for pursuing socially just practices. Perseverance through impoverished childhood circumstances where the familial structure was "non-traditional" or language barriers that made school difficult was mentioned. Principals referenced teaching and teacher leadership development opportunities prior to becoming an administrator as factors for encouraging social justice leadership. Some principals cited working in other fields prior to entering the profession of education as being the catalyst for adopting a social justice mindset. My personal experiences growing up poor in a public project housing community and being the benefactor of Affirmative Action programming at the collegiate level surfaced in my reflections as being my impetus for striving to erect a social justice framework within my district.

It was apparent that principals personalized and drew upon their professional and lived experiences as a source of inspiration for adopting social justice practices within their respective schools. The extent to which their personal or professional indoctrination into social justice leadership intensified their commitment to the work may be worthy of further investigation.

The second ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What, if any, professional growth/development training experiences in social justice theory and/or practice do secondary principals draw upon to support their advocacy for social justice?

Principals cited being trained in ongoing district sponsored professional development in programs designed to promote cultural competence, alleviate cultural conflicts, and implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support for academic and behavioral interventions. They pointed primarily to Restorative Justice when providing context for professional development that they related to social justice leadership. Promoting Positive School Climate was also an initiative that principals referenced as a means to provide a more just culture and climate. Some principals expressed a need to have more focus in educational leadership preparation programs on becoming culturally proficient school leaders.

I reflected on family and community engagement activities that school leadership teams had received training on through our Safe Schools Healthy Students grant in collaboration with the National Network of Partnership Schools. Restorative Justice Practices, Promoting Positive School Climate, and MTSS were all initiatives

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started under my tenure as superintendent. Principals did not appear to favor any particular research-based program or service that they were trained in as being more critical to promoting social justice.

The third ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What experiences do secondary school principals have in assessing the impact of social justice practices on school climate and culture?

Most principals relied on observation from classroom walkthroughs to determine the effectiveness of social justice practices on their schools' climate and culture. Some principals referenced data on reduction of suspensions, disciplinary referrals, and increases in student achievement (e.g., special education subgroup performance) and attendance to gauge how students experienced success as a result of implementing more social justice practices. There did not appear to be any substantial trend data to support whether any gains were realized due to the integration of specific social justice programming. Most of these initiatives were fairly new to the district and would require time and training in program evaluation to determine if services resulted in academic gains or improvements in behavior. Some principals were able to quantify the number of parent contacts over a three-year period since the inception of the district's involvement in the National Network for Partnership School as well as parent participations in schools' Title I engagement activities. They also cited using surveys such as the AdvancEd perception data on climate and culture aligned to their school improvement plans. Some principals simply indicated that they could feel a positive

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shift in students and staffs' level of interaction with one another as being the basis for what they perceived as improvements within school climate.

The fourth ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What experiences do secondary school principals have with planning and implementing professional development for faculty, staff, students and parents that is relevant to social justice in education?

Principals reported that training their entire professional and support staff within Restorative Justice and leadership models like Leader in Me created a common language and practices that made problem-solving easier. Principals credited programs like Restorative Justice as being empowering for staff, students, and families once all parties bought into how integrating social justice principles benefitted the whole school culture. One principal focused on training staff how to develop a growth mindset which he believed would positively influence teachers to model affective behavior and attitudes that promote students' perseverance or GRIT. Overall, principals referenced a strong reliance on job embedded training within their Positive Behavior Instructional Support framework to provide consistency of practice that some believed was inconsistent in central office administration. The irony in this criticism was that the PBIS framework was adopted district-wide to give principals more latitude in how they addressed the unique needs specific to their schools.

One principal highlighted a guided excursion experience through the communities where students reside as being helpful to teachers. He hoped to increase teachers' exposure and heighten their sensitivity to hardships that families experience.

Again, this form of empathy development not reinforce a deficit lens in viewing impoverished communities and the students who reside in them. His effort was meant to create an awareness of the communal and familial circumstances that may account for students' levels of achievement and behavior.

All principals recognized that uninformed misrepresentations of students' cultures undermined the likelihood that students would feel valued within schools. Principals felt strongly that without informed appraisals of students' home and communal culture, teachers were ill-equipped to build meaningful relationships with students.

The fifth ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What resistance at the building/communal level, if any, do secondary school principals experience while attempting to implement social justice practices to improve school climate and culture?

Principals provided multiple examples of resistance that was internal and external to the district. Perceptions of internal resistance was described as unsupportive central office administration with an antiquated vision, outdated policies, misaligned administrative guidelines, and inadequate funding for staffing to support supplemental and enrichment activities. Principals cited the teachers' union bombardment with grievances as being an additional source of resistance.

Principals noted that as they attempted to change systems to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of practices within the school culture, they were met with parental resistance if the proposed changes inconvenienced parents who were

comfortable with past practices. Any major shifts in academic, athletic, or community-based programming were often met with resistance. However, principals did acknowledge that their ability to build quality relationships with parental partners did influence the rate at which suggested changes could be implemented. Principals who were able to include stakeholders in the decision-making process garnered more support for changes. If stakeholders were strategically acclimated to change initiatives and they recognized the direct benefit to students, then, they were more inclined to support change. Overall, stakeholders' uncertainty about proposed changes caused the greatest amount of anxiety and resistance to change.

The sixth ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What supports, if any, do secondary school principals acknowledge are provided by central office administration in order to implement social justice practices with fidelity at the building level?

Principals conveyed the need for central office to effectively enact visionary leadership that would galvanize the entire district and local community. Principals also communicated a desire to create safe and secure learning environments that prioritized holistically addressing students' academic and socioemotional needs. Inadequate staffing was a major concern. Most principals stated the need to have a consistent highly qualified staff. Principals focused on the need for improved talent management as a system for identifying, supporting, and sustaining competent teachers who could grow student achievement. Their urgency for stability in staffing and the allocation of supplemental building resources was exacerbated by heightened accountability to meet

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academic performance targets.   Principals mentioned needing time to collaborate within professional learning communities to plan for instruction and analyze formative assessment data. Principals sometimes conceded that many of their expressed needs carried unrealistic budgetary implications in a district wherein the fiscal climate only recently emerged from a deficit elimination plan with the State of Michigan.

Principals notably declared a need for central office to be more cognizant of the realities that they endured on a daily basis. Some principals expressed the strong sentiment that they felt supported and even mentored by central office administration. Principals maintained that better policy alignment with administrative guidelines and more consistent policing of administrative practices across the district would encourage uniform responses to district policies. Principals believed this was necessary to promote socially just building-level practices.

This ancillary question elicited my introspective analysis regarding the extent to which I effectively modeled the social justice commitment that I wanted to see throughout the district. It also allowed me to reflect on the numerous resources that I had put in place to empower my principals to be stronger advocates for social justice in their school settings. Not surprisingly, my data analysis journal documented that many principals appeared to be entrenched in the overwhelming challenges inherent in their building leadership. They often expressed a sense of inadequate resources and support to do the job they were charged to do. I took care not to over-personalize the information that I received during the data analysis phase when coding the transcribed interview data from this ancillary question since it was specifically directed at my

leadership. I recognized my principals' urgencies and sense of unmet provision of needs from central office administration because not so long ago, I worked in their roles and walked in the shoes. I would venture to say that until my principals have walked in my shoes, they may not fully grasp the complexities of district level leadership when trying to abate inherited deficits and extinguish inexhaustive needs. I have accepted that this ever elusive mission is a fundamental part of the universal plight of social justice educational leaders.

The seventh and final ancillary research question that was addressed in this phenomenology asked: What experiences do secondary school principals report are sources of resilience in their work as social justice leaders in public schools?

Most principals expressed that their source of resilience in social justice work came from the intrinsic gratification of seeing students succeed. The reward that principals received from serving students, families, and the community seemed to be the greatest source of resilience. On a more personal level, I cited not wanting to see students encounter some of the hardships that I experienced in my collegiate studies due to lack of prerequisite exposure to a rigorous academic program. Some principals cited collegial relationships as reinforcement for their resolve in espousing a social justice leadership philosophy. These principals relied on their administrative peers' empathy and shared experiences as a way to remain resilient. Other principals relied on their desire to always do more to serve all stakeholders associated with their schools as motivation for continuing social justice programming. One principal believed that his exposure to diversity within his school setting was what inspired him. Watching

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the harmonious convergence of student diversity as students from dissimilar regions within the county coexisted in a performance-based Career and Technical Educational environment fueled his resilience as he grew more culturally aware and accepting. For another principal, visualizing the students' improved dispositions, smiling faces, and expressions of need gratitude sustained her work ethic. Overall, principals' belief that they could substantially improve students' quality of life was their unanimous source of resilience.

Reflexive Data Analysis Journal

A careful analysis of my reflexive data analysis journal revealed that some principals gave responses which unknowingly demonstrated that they periodically used deficit-thinking to describe their interactions with impoverished students and families. For example, one principal noted, "I just know the youth that I'm working with now, are completely different than the youth I worked with three years ago, five years ago, eight years ago. It just seems to be the lack of respect, the lack of care, the lack of empathy for themselves. They can't see the future. They cannot see... they don't have the skills and they cannot see what the world is really about." I responded by documenting, "While this principal may have some correct views on how students have changed over time, she seems fixated on the deficits rather than their assets." Other principals referenced not seeing color in their interactions with students. One principal stated, "I didn't see skin color. Another principal indicated, "So my role is just to constantly talk about the performance of our students and keep that the focus. And when I do that, I seem to have more success with the social justice piece." I responded

by noting that, "Being colorblind may undermine valuing diversity. Seeing a child holistically means acknowledging their race and culture positively." Although I understood these principals' desire to focus on the work, colorblindness is not an appropriate response to creating a socially just learning community. This same principal added, "We were solely performance-based and tried to eliminate the barriers to help students succeed, and that way we could just say – we don't have to talk about the excuses of not achieving academically." I documented this comment because I found the assumption that silence is a solution to be troubling. If we just "focus on the work" in silence, we will likely be working alongside others who hold negative preconceived ideas about our diverse students that remain unchallenged.

There were other instances where I documented my reactions during the data analysis process. I questioned whether principals really understood the difference between equity and equality. For instance, one principal was adamant that all students needed the "same" service. She stated, "Everybody's getting the "same" thing. We're providing for their needs whether they be the academic, the emotional, the social, the behavioral." I responded by observing that, "Receiving the same thing does not equate to equitable treatment."

I have provided a few examples of how I used the reflexive data analysis journal to document my potential bias as I reviewed principals' responses. I sought to objectively review principals' comments. I must note that there were entries in the reflexive data analysis journal which revealed the pattern that some principals shifted their depiction of their leadership choices and the effect of their choices. Exaggerations,

understatements, and self-preserving omissions were evident. That being stated, the

reflexive data analysis journal provided an invaluable tool for me to contain my

reactions to the data in order to allow the sentiments expressed by the principals to

freely flow and be accurately represented without my censorship.

Limitations of Study

This study focusing on social justice leadership practices of secondary school

administrators from one mid-sized school district in the Midwest limits generalizability.

Data collected detailing principals' social justice practices within a small sample size

serving an economically disadvantaged demographic of racial/ethnic minorities limits

generalizability. The most significant limitation is the number of principal participants.

The study was confined to six secondary lead principals and me, Superintendent of

Schools; therefore, generalizations of the findings are limited. The self-reported data

collected from principals and myself increased the chance of inherent bias if

participants were prone to selective memory, attribution, or exaggeration. Due to my

role in the research setting, questions regarding my subjectivity may also be a

limitation.

In order to alleviate any potential harm resulting from these limitations, I

protected the anonymity of the participants. I assured participants that their responses

would be kept in confidence. A reflexive data analysis journal was also used to assist

me with recognizing the presence of my personal bias and preventing this bias from

disabling me to objectively analyze principals' responses. I intentionally distanced

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myself from the data collection process by enlisting a fellow researcher to conduct the interview protocol so as not to coerce unauthentic responses from the principals.

Implications of Research

As indicated earlier within this research, social justice is an idealized moving target which makes it difficult to systematically embed social justice practices within school cultures that are unique. There are countless factors that inundate school communities on a daily basis which cause principals to continuously reevaluate their approach to problem-solving with staff, students, and the local community. This complexity, coupled with the fact that social justice leadership is not clearly defined, leaves some principals perplexed when determining how to apply social justice principles in an ethical, consistent way.

Research implications derived from the findings suggest that principals' analysis of a school community's needs largely influences how social justice principles are applied within the culture. Principals' ability to enact social justice leadership practices is heavily influenced by their readiness to eliminate barriers for equity of learning, promote positive school climate, and become visionary transformational leaders. Each of these three practices is comprised of a series of qualities that assist with shaping the overall experiences of students, staff, and local stakeholders. The principal, in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, is responsible for facilitating culturally responsive and appropriate change.

The current climate of accountability places an enormous amount of responsibility on principals to cultivate a skill-set that will transform underperforming

school cultures. Most school reform models all have the same requirement in place when schools are persistently low achieving. Replacing the principal is one major action that accountability models require. Although most social justice leadership models are distributive in scope, the principal inevitably is held more accountable than other school personnel. Therefore, principals advocating a social justice leadership agenda would be prudent to develop skills and characteristics that increase their viability and productivity as school leaders.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research related to this study may investigate how school district budgetary priorities impact social justice leaders' ability to positively influence student achievement and school climate. As previously noted, funding adequacy studies in the State of Michigan could not establish a correlation between per-pupil funding and students' performance on high-stakes tests. However, the extent to which school leaders are able to provide comprehensive academic programs supported by a social justice framework does have monetary implications. Principals seek to integrate social justice practices within school cultures because these actions support better access to resources, quality instruction provided by highly certified and qualified staff, shared accountability, appreciation for diversity, and higher expectations for teachers and students, etc. While some of these concepts just require a change in mindset and procedural processes, others have budgetary considerations.

Research focused on identifying personal or experiential factors that contribute to a principal's ability to lead in familiar school communities as opposed to principals

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who may not have a personal connection to the service population may be warranted. One cannot presume that principals who are not indigenous to a school community cannot be as effective in the execution of their administrative responsibilities. Examining whether social justice principals, who have culturally congruent backgrounds with the population that they serve, are in a better position to lead those school communities is noteworthy of investigation. Principals in this study often referenced their connection to communities that resemble their student population as being a source of inspiration for practicing social justice leadership.

Further research may investigate how school leaders who resemble and are culturally aligned with the socio-cultural make-up of the student population and communities where they lead act as cultural informants for teachers and staff members who may experience culture shock. Ultimately, this research could illuminate how principals build community within their schools by demystifying cultural factors that may be in conflict. This research becomes increasingly more critical as urban communities see fewer teachers that reflect their racial or socioeconomic makeup

Another potential area of research could examine whether principals need to self-identify as "social justice leaders" in order to lead effectively in communities where equity is needed. In other words, are principals better equipped to repair a school's academic and cultural issues if they focus on a social justice philosophy as opposed to relying on more traditional data-driven, school transformational models? What value does a social justice philosophy add to a school culture that is in urgent need of improved academic achievement and attention to meeting students' socioemotional

needs? This research may reveal a variety of school reform initiatives where social justice principals are being practiced to effect change without school leaders overtly acknowledging social justice leadership theory and practice.

Conclusions

Social justice educational leaders tackle temporal specificity problems that arise as society continuously redefines what is socially acceptable or just. This means that social justice is not a one-size-fits-all societal phenomena. Consequently, the scholarly literature on social justice leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Bustamante et al., 2009; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; Riester et al., 2002; Santamaria, 2013; Theoharis, 2010) well-establishes that determining the essence of social justice leadership is elusive due to shifting societal norms, personalized belief systems, and the socio-political context that school leaders find themselves immersed within when attempting to advance a social justice agenda.

Findings emerging from my research indicate**d** that the essence of the experience of educational leaders who envision themselves to be social leaders might best be described as advocacy for school justice. The school administrators in my phenomenological study shared a broad spectrum of social justice leadership experiences that illuminated their individualistic school justice philosophies. Each participant, including myself, led within the boundaries of their assigned jurisdiction. Not surprisingly, our views on social justice were skewed by our respective administrative post and vantage point. Yet and still, because we were bound by a common school district and shared communal service population, our experience of

social justice leadership revealed a symbiotic systemic wholeness. My

phenomenological study revealed that social justice leadership for educational leaders

is more fittingly experienced as school justice leadership. My findings indicate that

school justice is a leadership stance that reflects a commitment to:

1. Draw upon personal experiences and/or knowledge of social justice theory
   and practice to enact visionary transformational leadership;

2. Clarify ambiguity associated with social justice leadership practices and
   protocols to align district policies and administrative guidelines;

3. Value diversity, remove deficit mindsets, and maintain high expectations for
   teachers, students, and all stakeholders associated with the learning
   community;

4. Develop and sustain a culturally competent talent pool;

5. Establish shared accountability by building meaningful relationships with
   colleagues, families, and community stakeholders to avoid feelings of
   isolationism;

6. Provide greater access to resources that eliminate barriers to learning;

7. Establish two-way communication systems to engage parents and educate the
   public on critical issues impacting student achievement and socioemotional
   well-being of students;

8. Model affective behavior through incorporating Restorative Practices;

9. Explore strategies to remain resilient when resistance to change emerges; and

10. Practice self-compassion at all times.

The work of dedicated educational leaders who hold these commitments resulted in the creation of more socially just schools within our district.

The coining of the term "school justice" may seem like a subtle and insignificant semantic shift but is a plausible outgrowth of research on organizational justice (Greenberg & Lind, 2000). Hoy and Tarter (2004) assert, "The topic of organizational justice is not new in the administrative literature (Beugre, 1998; Cobb et al., 1995; Cohen & Greenberg, 1982; Greenberg, 1990, 1996; Greenberg & Lind, 2000), but it is a neglected concept in educational administration" (p. 250). Hoy and Tarter (2004) further indicate that "Greenberg (1996) coined the term 'organizational justice,' which refers to individuals' perceptions of fairness in organizations" (p. 250). My study is not the first research to use the term "school justice." Hoy and Tarter's research (2004) on school principals introduces the term "school justice" (p. 255). Their research acknowledges school justice, as "the system of justice in schools that educational leaders are responsible for creating" (p. 250).

This study demonstrated that secondary school administrators valued becoming more transformational and culturally conscious leaders by embedding social justice standards into their personal and professional practices. Their lived leadership experiences reflected a staunch commitment to promoting school/social justice. I would hope that our shared aspiration to diminish school/social injustices made their work less cumbersome.

This research revealed that even when fighting in the same war for social justice, our battles for school justice often felt isolated, under-supported, and under-resourced.

Each of us faced insurmountable odds in the trenches. Sometimes the threat of annihilation by friendly-fire was even feared. Nevertheless, in each dismal foxhole instance, my principals and I drew resilience from deeply rooted internal fortitude. A common conviction amongst all of us was the desire to honor the district's tagline under my leadership, "Keeping Kids First." We had no assurance that we would win every battle, but we held fast to the unflappable belief that we would ultimately triumph in the war to provide positive academic experiences for the students, staff, families, and community partners who we were honored to serve. I am steadfast in my belief that given appropriate resources, training, direction, and resolve, we will continue to lead the charge for school/social justice.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TABLES

Table 1

Interview Participants' Profile

| Participant Pseudonym	Teaching Experience	Admin. Experience	Current Placement	Community Schooling Experience	Race/ Ethnicity & Gender	Highest Degree	Age
Diane Ramirez	24 yrs.	14 yrs.	6th – 12th 3 yrs.	Urban	Hispanic Female	Masters	61
Matt Foster	5 yrs.	15 yrs.	9th – 12th 4 yrs.	Urban	Black Male	Ed. Specialist	45
Jacqueline Demery	17 yrs.	5 yrs.	9th – 12th 3 yrs.	Urban	Black Female	Masters	56
Rebecca Rivers	12 yrs.	4 yrs.	6th – 7th 4 yrs.	Rural	White Female	Masters	39
John Langston	15 yrs.	3 yrs.	9th – 12th 3 yrs.	Rural	White Male	Masters	41
Tara Morris	20 yrs.	8 yrs.	6th – 8th 8 yrs.	Rural	White Female	Masters	50
Superintendent	6 yrs.	16 yrs.	Central Office 4 yrs.	Urban	Black Male	Ed. Specialist ABD	48

Appendix B

FIGURES
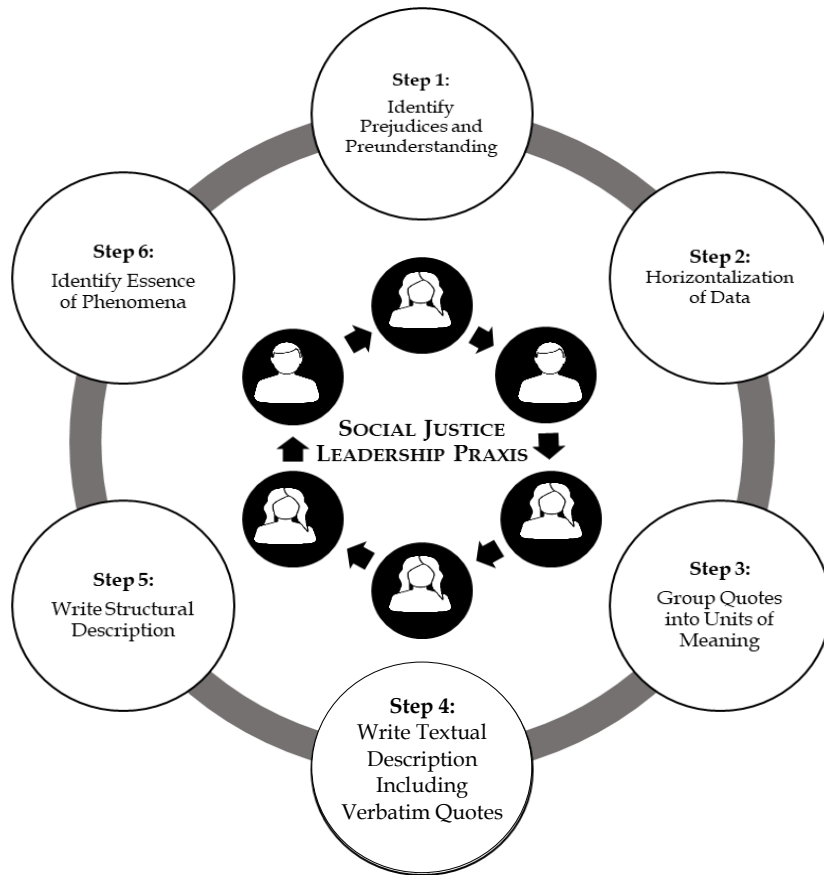
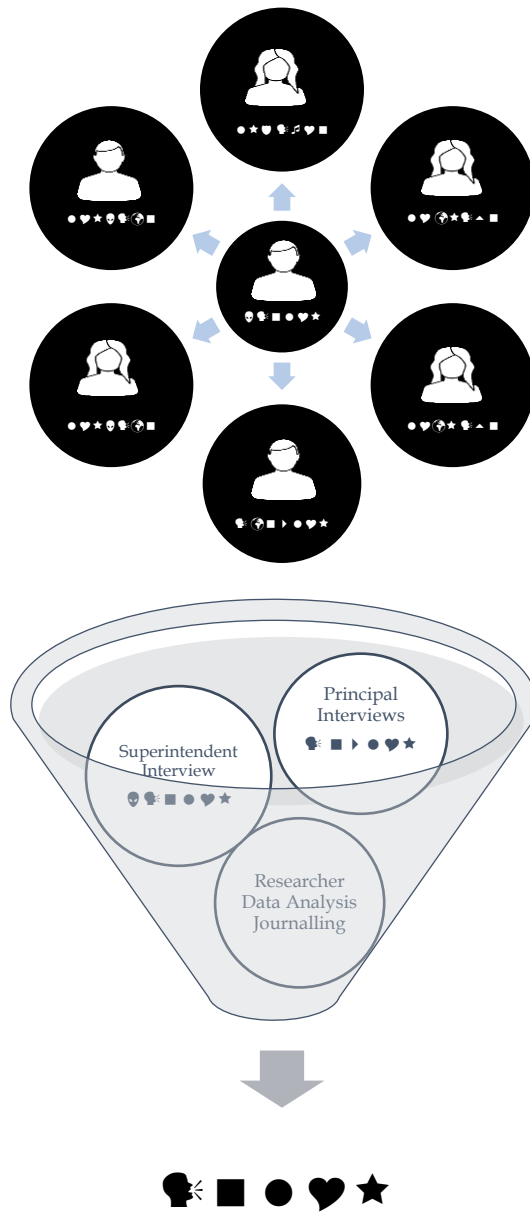*Figure 1.* Cycle for Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research

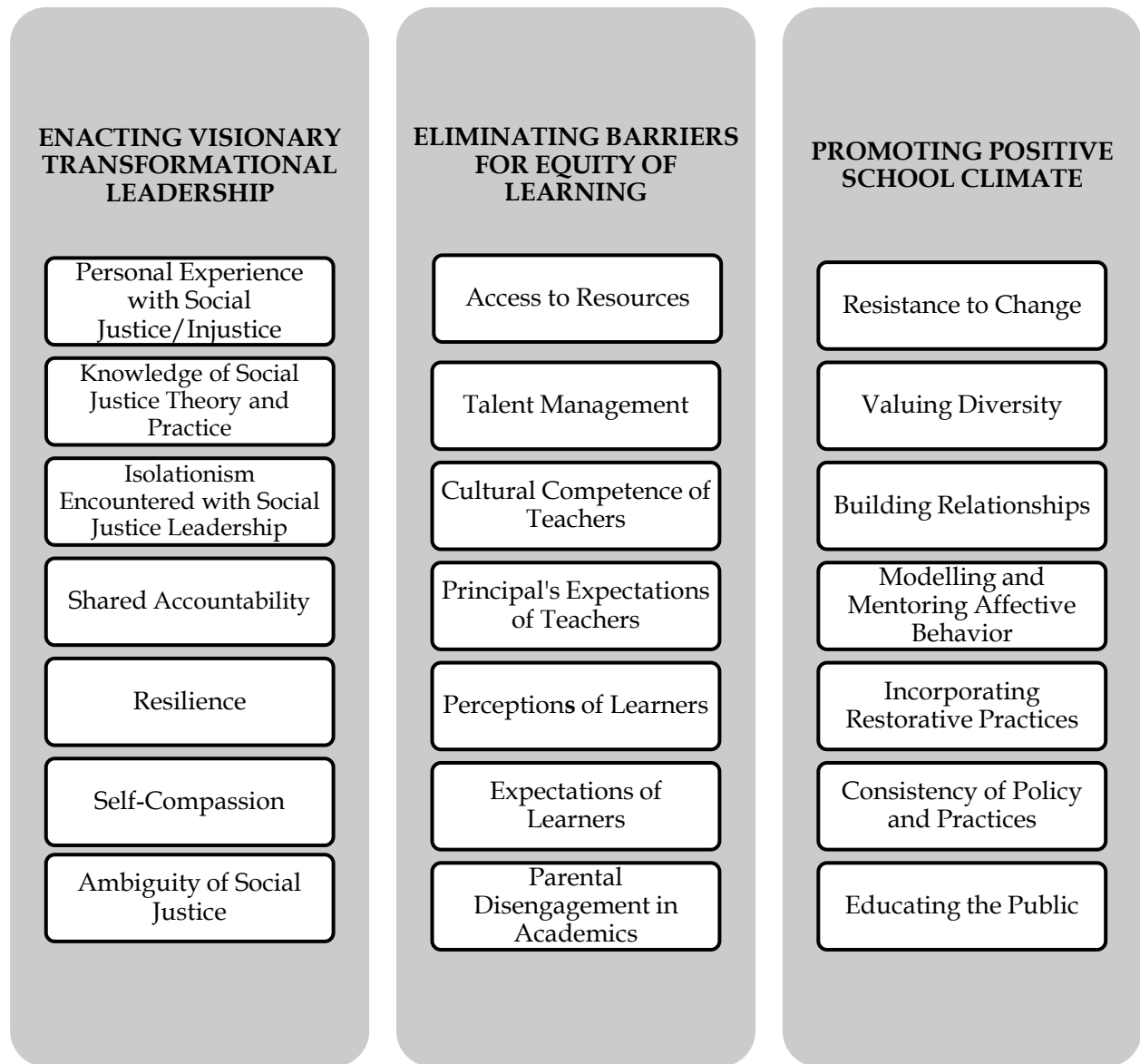*Figure 2.* Hermeneutic/Egological Phenomenological Data Funneling Horizontalization
Plan

ENACTING VISIONARY TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP	ELIMINATING BARRIERS FOR EQUITY OF LEARNING	PROMOTING POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE
Personal Experience with Social Justice/Injustice	Access to Resources	Resistance to Change
Knowledge of Social Justice Theory and Practice	Talent Management	Valuing Diversity
Isolationism Encountered with Social Justice Leadership	Cultural Competence of Teachers	Building Relationships
Shared Accountability	Principal's Expectations of Teachers	Modelling and Mentoring Affective Behavior
Resilience	Perceptions of Learners	Incorporating Restorative Practices
Self-Compassion	Expectations of Learners	Consistency of Policy and Practices
Ambiguity of Social Justice	Parental Disengagement in Academics	Educating the Public

Figure 3. Macro-themes/Micro-themes Chart

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

Appendix C:

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

Study Name:
The Experiences of Secondary School Administrators' Social Justice Educational
Leadership Praxis: A Phenomenological Study

Project Description:
This interview is a part of my doctoral studies research at the University of Michigan-Flint. I am researching the topic of principals' perceptions of their social justice
leadership practices for my dissertation project. Interviews are one source of data
collection being conducted to address the following research question: What is the
social justice leadership experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a
Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated
social justice advocate superintendent?

Procedure and Risks:
I would like to interview you, if you are willing, and use my interview notes to write a
dissertation. My notes will not include personal identifiers to ensure your anonymity.
Please feel free to say as much or as little as you feel comfortable. You may elect not to
answer any questions, or to discontinue the interview at any time. The written
interview notes will become the property of project.

If you so choose, the copy of interview notes taken will be kept anonymous, without
any reference to your identity, and your identity will be concealed in any reports
written from the interviews. There is no known risk associated with participation in the
study.

Benefits:
It is hoped that the results of this study will benefit the community through providing
greater insights into culturally responsive pedagogy from an urban school secondary
educator's perspective.

Cost Compensation:
Participation in this study will involve no costs or payments to you.

Confidentiality:
All information collected during the study period will be kept strictly confidential. If
you are willing to participate in this qualitative research study, please sign your name
on the following page. Please contact Dr. Elaine Makas via phone at extension 989-872-1121 or email at emakas54@gmail.com. if you have any questions regarding the
interview process.

Appendix C:

INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

I, _____, agree to be interviewed for the project entitled:

THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' SOCIAL
JUSTICE LEADERSHIP PRAXIS: A PHENOMENONLOGICAL STUDY

which is being conducted by Nathaniel B. McClain of the University of Michigan-Flint's
Education Leadership Doctor of Education program.

I certify that I have been told of the confidentiality of information collected for this
project and the anonymity of my participation; that I have been given satisfactory
answers to my inquiries concerning project procedures and other matters; and that I
have been advised that I am free to withdraw my consent and to discontinue
participation in the project or activity at any time by contacting Dr. Elaine Makas via
phone at extension 989-872-1121 or email at emakas54@gmail.com.

I agree to participate in one interview for this project. I understand that such interviews
and related materials will be kept completely anonymous. Also, I acknowledge that
human participation in this qualitative research study will be reviewed and approved
by the University of Michigan Flint's IRB Review Board.

I agree that any information obtained from this research may be used in any way
thought best for this study.

_____ Date _____

Signature of Interviewee

_____ Date _____

Signature of Interviewer

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Appendix D:

Interview Protocol

Introduction: Good morning/afternoon/evening. I am _____. I appreciate your consideration in being a part of this research study. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may discontinue at any point if you so choose.

Purpose: This study is designed to investigate the perceived roles, barriers, and practices of 6th-12th-grade principals in a Midwest midsized urban school district in relation to their role in advocating for social justice in their respective schools.

Study's Title: THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY ADMINISTRATORS' SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP PRAXIS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Instructions: Applying the below definitions of social justice and social justice leadership, an interview protocol has been developed to learn about your experience implementing social justice leadership practices within your school. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions.

Recording Instructions: With your consent, I would like to tape record our conversation. This will enable me to accurately transcribe your statements and capture your sentiments regarding the subject matter. Please rest assured that your responses will be kept confidential. Researchers associated with this study will be the only people who can access this recording. Tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of this research.

Consent Forms: Please review the consent forms. Read and sign them if you agree with the content. After you submit them to me, I will begin tape recording this interview session. Do you have any questions?

Key Research Question	
What is the social justice leadership experience of secondary administrators (6th - 12th grades) in a Midwest midsized urban school district under the supervision of a self-designated social justice advocate superintendent?	

Social Justice– According to Sensoy and Diangelo (2009), Marilyn Cochran-Smith, a leading scholar in education, defines a social justice framework as one that "actively addresses the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, [and recognizes] that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability [among others]. Working for social justice in education means guiding students [and often being guided by students] in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies" (p. 350).

Social Justice Leader – School leaders who consciously acknowledge and factor conditions of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, or other historically marginalizing factors into their decision-making practices of creating equitable learning opportunities for youth (Bogotch, 2002; Theoharis, 2007).

Ancillary Questions	Reflective Notes
What experiences have shaped your actions, beliefs, and ethical stance in regard to educational leadership for social justice?	
What experience do you have in assessing the impact of social justice practices on school culture and climate?	
What resistance at the building/communal level, if any, have you experienced while attempting to implement social justice practices to improve school culture and climate?	
What experience do you have with planning and implementing professional development for faculty, staff, students and parents that is relevant to social justice in education?	

What support, if any, do you need from central office administration in order to implement social justice practices with fidelity?	
What, if any, professional growth/development training experiences in social justice theory and/or practice do you draw upon to support their advocacy for social justice?	
What experiences are sources of resilience in your work as social justice leader?	

APPENDIX E:

REFLEXIVE DATA ANALYSIS JOURNAL

Appendix E:

Reflexive Data Analysis Journal – Note-taking Sheet

Personal Biases	Trigger Text:	Researcher's Response/Reasoning
	Label	
Insider Knowledge (Sense-making)	Trigger Text:	Researcher's Response/Reasoning
	Label	
Personal Knowledge (Interviewee)	Trigger Text:	Researcher's Response/Reasoning
	Label	
Tacit Knowledge of Context	Trigger Text:	Researcher's Response/Reasoning
	Label	
Theoretical Understandings (Phenomena)	Trigger Text:	Researcher's Response/Reasoning
	Label	
Miscellaneous Notes		

APPENDIX F

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL LETTER

Flint Institutional Review Board • 530 French Hall, 303 E. Kearsley St, Flint, MI 48502 • phone (810) 762-3383 • fax (313) 593-0526 • research@umflint.edu

To: Nathaniel McClain

From: Kazuko Hiramatsu

Cc: Nathaniel McClain

Elaine Makas

DeAndre Shepard

Subject: Notice of Exemption for [HUM00144757]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:

Title: THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS' SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP PRAXIS: A PHENEMONOLOGICAL STUDY

Full Study Title (if applicable): THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY ADMINISTRATORS' SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRAXIS: A PHENEMONOLOGICAL STUDY

Study eResearch ID: HUM00144757

Date of this Notification from IRB: 5/29/2018

Date of IRB Exempt Determination: 5/29/2018

UM Federalwide Assurance: FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)

OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000248

IRB EXEMPTION STATUS:

The IRB Flint has reviewed the study referenced above and determined that, as currently described, it is exempt from ongoing IRB review, per the following federal exemption category:

EXEMPTION #1 of the 45 CFR 46.101.(b):

Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

Note that the study is considered exempt as long as any changes to the use of human subjects (including their data) remain within the scope of the exemption category above. Any proposed changes that may exceed the scope of this category, or the approval conditions of any other non-IRB reviewing committees, must be submitted as an amendment through eResearch.

Although an exemption determination eliminates the need for ongoing IRB review and approval, you still have an obligation to understand and abide by generally accepted principles of responsible and ethical conduct of research. Examples of these principles can be found in the Belmont Report as well as in guidance from professional societies and scientific organizations.

SUBMITTING AMENDMENTS VIA eRESEARCH:

You can access the online forms for amendments in the eResearch workspace for this exempt study, referenced above.

ACCESSING EXEMPT STUDIES IN eRESEARCH:

Click the "Exempt and Not Regulated" tab in your eResearch home workspace to access this exempt study.

Kazuko Hiramatsu

Chair, IRB Flint

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