Running Head: THEORY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

Toward a Theory of Social Justice Educational Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

The literature on leadership for social justice identifies schools that have demonstrated tremendous success not only with white middle-class and affluent students, but students from varied racial, socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Capper & Young, in press; Maynes and Sarbit, 2000; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan and Lipton, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002; Scheurich, 1998; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001). A re-occurring theme from these schools and from the literature on school change is that exemplary leadership helps point to the necessity for change and helps make the realities of change happen (Bell, Jones, & Johnson 2002; Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Grogan, 2002a, 2002b; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Riester et al., 2002; Solomon, 2002). This paper seeks to enhance administrative practice and the field’s understanding of leadership by building a theory of social justice leadership.

Three aspects of this paper make it distinct from the growing body of literature on leadership for social justice. First, this empirical study started with the principal as the unit of analysis. In other literature on leadership for social justice, the researchers started with schools that made substantial progress in terms of enacting justice and backed into the principal from that position. This study focused on identifying principals who came to the field with a calling to do social justice work and from there expanded to exploring their accomplishments and struggles. Second, there is minimal if any discussion of special education and inclusive practices in the body of literature on social justice leadership. This paper makes the necessary connection between social justice and inclusion of students with disabilities in that social justice cannot be a reality in schools where students with disabilities are segregated, pulled out from the regular classroom, or receive separate curriculum and instruction. This is not to say that every student
requires that same curriculum and instruction. However, through developing collaborative staffing and differentiated instruction, student needs, regardless of ability/disability, are met together in the general classroom. Third, this paper develops a theory of social justice leadership, which has been missing throughout the literature on social justice leaders within education. While there is theoretical work in the area of social justice and leadership (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Dantley, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; MacKinnon, 2000; Rapp, 2002; Shields, 2004) a gap exists in developing a theory of school-based leaders for social justice.

DEFINING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Working toward this theory requires defining social justice. Numerous scholars provide definitions of social justice (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Gerwirtz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002), and Karagiannis, Stainback, and Stainback (1996) took an initial step linking inclusive schooling and social justice, all of which have influenced this definition that is grounded in the daily realities of school leadership. For this paper, I define social justice leadership to mean that these principals advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States. Because of its emphasis on addressing and eliminating marginalization, inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities, English language learners, and other students traditionally segregated in schools are also necessitated by this definition.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addressed three research questions. 1) In what ways are principals advancing social justice in public schools? 2) What countervailing pressures do justice driven principals
encounter in their justice work? 3) What strategies do principals use to advance social justice in light of the countervailing pressures in public schools?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The work of Alinsky (1971), McLaren (1985), and Palmer (2000) provide a foundation for my understanding of resistance. I developed a three-pronged framework of resistance that served as a conceptual framework for my study. I frame resistance in three ways: (a) the resistance principals enact against historic marginalization of particular students, (b) the resistance the principals face as a result of their social justice agenda, and (c) the resistance or resilience these principals develop as a result of facing constraints to their work. In many ways, the first research question examines leadership focused on enacting resistance, the second question addresses the resistances social justice leaders face as principals, an the third question explores their experiences that relate to their development of resilience and determination in pursuing socially just aims and practices within their schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research focused on studying principals who sought their positions in educational administration in order to enact social justice and equity in the schools they led. I grounded this research in qualitative methods using a positioned subject approach (Conrad, Haworth & Millar, 1993). In a positioned subject approach, the researcher assumes that the principals under investigation actively create meaning from and interpret their work. According to Conrad et al. subjects are considered people who have “particular needs, perceptions and capabilities for action” (p. 284). Position in this context refers to the setting in which they are located (Conrad et al., 1993).
The positioned subject approach of this inquiry was selected because it allowed me to take in the varied perspectives of a particular group of educational leaders and interpret their experiences through the lens of their own particular setting, situation, and the social justice goals there leaders maintained for their schools. Within the context of this study, the subjects of interest were the school principals who are committed to social justice work. These principals were positioned in their particular schools alongside their staff and school community.

While feminist and postmodern theories have significantly influenced this research endeavor, I grounded this study primarily in critical theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Carspecken, 1996; Roman & Apple, 1990). All three of these traditions influenced this work since I believe that the world is complex, influenced by power relations and not necessarily empirically knowable. I find common ground with these traditions in their understanding that a researcher’s culture, background, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and experience inform her/his work and that a researcher brings ideas, assumptions and theoretical understandings to each endeavor in the field (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Carspecken (1996) provides a general understanding about the purpose of critical qualitative research and the beliefs of those who subscribe to this methodology that resonates with my own work. He states:

Those of us who openly call ourselves “criticalists” definitely share a value orientation. We are all concerned about social inequities, and we direct our work toward positive social change. We also share a concern with social theory and some of the basic issues it has struggled with since the nineteenth century. These include the nature of social structure, power culture and human agency. We use our research, in fact, to refine social theory rather than merely to describe social life.” (p. 3)
This study and my experience as a white-male, leader for social justice were driven by the belief held widely by critical theorists that my work should “benefit those who are marginalized in the society” and that “the current way society is organized is unjust” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.21). While all of the principals in this study may not identify themselves as critical theorists, their work to transform their schools to benefit the most marginalized students and families, to address issues of race and class, and to focus their vision on developing a just school certainly aligned with this view and theoretical orientation.

The critical orientation of my work and my own desire for social change align with the tradition and description of activist research (Fine, 1994). Fine provides a general definition of activist research:

Some researchers fix themselves self-consciously as participatory activists. Their work seeks to unearth, disrupt, and transform existing ideological and/or institutional arrangements. Here, the researcher’s stance frames the texts produced and carves out the space in with intellectual surprises surface. These writers position themselves as political and interrogating, fully explicit about their original position and where their research took them. (p. 17)

Fine (1994) further explains that activist research captures at least one of four different strategies. These four strategies are “breaking the silence,” “denaturalizing what appears so natural,” “attaching what is to what could be” and “engaging in participatory activist research.” This study used a combination of the four strategies Fine described but primarily he first two. Naming the activist purpose of this study was essential to my critical theory epistemology because the ultimate goal of this theory of social justice leadership is to name and describe an alternate conception of leadership centered on the possibility of more socially just schools.
In designing this study, I borrowed from the tradition of autoethnography (Cole & Knowles, 2001) and included myself, a principal driven to enact social justice, as one of the subjects. Including myself enabled me to make this work more personal and reflective. While I included myself in this study, I wrote the findings and discussion in the third person, even when I am speaking of my own experiences. I do this because I am only one subject of a group of activist principals, and changing to the first person exerts a particular power that unnecessarily shifts the focus to my experiences over the experiences of the group of principals.

Using purposeful and snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 1998), eighteen principals were referred to participate in this study. The principals were selected for the study based on the following four criteria. The principals 1) led a public school, 2) possessed a belief that promoting social justice is a driving force behind what brought them to their leadership position, 3) advocated, led and, kept at the center of their practice/vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and/or other historically and currently marginalizing conditions, and 4) have evidence to show that their work has produced a more just school. Eight principals met these criteria, but only seven agreed to participate in this study.

All seven of principals worked in urban schools in the Midwest. Of the seven participants, four were secondary principals (two high school and two middle school) and three were elementary principals. One was Asian and six were white. One identified as gay and out in the community and six identified themselves as heterosexual. Three of the principals were women and four were men. Their administrative experience ranged from three to fifteen years. The principals’ ages ranged from the early thirties to the early fifties. While this group is diverse in a number of ways, clearly it is not a racially diverse group. Five principals of color were referred to me through the snowball sampling process, but only one met the criteria for selection.
While I see this as a limitation of the study and an area for future research, it also demonstrates that social justice and equity work is not and should not be limited to leaders of color. Table 1 details the school demographics of the principal participants.

Table 1.
School Demographic Information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Students in Special Ed. (%)</th>
<th>Students in Poverty (%)</th>
<th>Students of Color (%)</th>
<th>Staff of Color (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Mid.</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Mid.</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Elem.</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Elem.</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Elem.</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Students in Special Ed = students in the school with Individual Education Plans, meeting IDEA disability criteria. This does not include students whose IEP is only for speech and language. Students in Poverty = students who are qualify to receive free and reduced lunch.

It is both arrogant and shortsighted to assume that any research endeavor does not have ethical considerations. According to Goodson and Skies (2001), “Research per se is an inherently political activity in that it has a bearing on how human beings make sense of their world” (p. 89). How we conduct research, how we interact with the participants and how we relay our data and analysis all have ethical considerations. While there were a number of ethical considerations for this study, the primary concern was to “do no harm” to the principal participants.
Lee and Renzetti (1993) as cited in Goodson and Sikes (2001) suggest using certain care for research subjects when the research examines deeply personal experiences and when the work impinges on people in power. Since these principals are so closely connected to their work, they challenge the norms of their communities, and do not fit the traditional meta-narrative of the principal, I felt an ethical obligation to “do no harm” due to the sensitive nature of their interviews. To help deal with the potential sensitivity of this work and to do no harm to the principals involved, I used pseudonyms for each principal and for the most sensitive of stories, I do not identify the principals by pseudonym but only as “one principal.” To further protect their confidentiality, I do not identify principals by school in Table 1. While I might mention Principal Tracy in the findings of this study, I do not identify which school was Principal Tracy’s. Additionally, concealing specific school context does not allow for future or current educators to claim that the social justice gains are context specific, thus positioning social justice as possible in every school for every child, and not only in certain places.

The method of data collection relied on a series of in-depth interviews, a review of documents/materials, a detailed field log, and a group meeting of the principal participants. I used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) using both inductive and deductive components (Erickson, 1986; Graue & Walsh, 1997). In working toward a theory of social justice leaders, with both I coded and analyzed the data using the three-pronged conceptual framework of resistance as a starting place.

Trustworthiness is an important component to any study and as Glesne (1999) states “is an issue that should be thought about during research design as well as in the midst of data collection” (p. 32). I used triangulation (Crowson, 1993), member checks/ debriefing (Glesne,
I kept a field log and utilized a tape recorder to ensure the reliability of the information. The interviews were transcribed and coded. Seven principals were studied to provide me with multiple sources of information supporting the validity of the data. Data from each principal were reviewed with each subject during the second interview to provide deeper understanding of their work and their interpretations of the strategies they develop (Crowson, 1993). I developed themes only when I could triangulate them across the experiences of at least three principals. These procedures fit Crowson’s description of triangulation of data as “the use of multiple sources of data.”

Clarifying and revisiting ideas with the principals was an attempt for me to gain a deeper understanding of who they are and what they do. Providing my understanding to them of what they said, sharing my analytical thoughts, and even transcripts from our interviews made opportunity for ongoing discussion, checking, re-checking and listening. Glesne (1999) defines this as member checks. I brought the principals together for a group meeting at the conclusion of the study to review and discuss my work. This provided my analysis with their important insight about this group of leaders and the research process. These essential pieces of my methodology maintain the importance of the individual participants, their insights and views in the ongoing work of the study.

Giving attention to the principals’ backgrounds and beliefs as well as my own assumption and convictions was essential to this study and to maintaining trustworthiness - reflectivity/humility - Eisenhart and Howe (1992) characterize this as an “alertness to and coherence of
prior knowledge” (p. 62). This reflective component about the participants’ perceptions, beliefs, and worldviews was essential to the critical theory underpinnings of this study.

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) describe the intersection of reflectivity and humility as:

Humility in this context should not be self-deprecating, nor should it involve the silencing of the researcher’s voice; research humility implies a sense of unpredictability of the sociopolitical microcosms and the capriciousness of the consequences of inquiry. The critical humility is an inescapable feature of a postmodern condition marked by a loss of faith in an unreconceptualized narrative emancipation and the possibility of a privileged frame of reference. (p. 151)

Being a member of the group studied, a group that shares significant qualities and values, also enhanced the reflective and humility aspects of trustworthiness. Tierney (1998) problematizes studying the “Other” who are “in many respects powerless or exotic to the author on a grand level” (p. 58). He asserts that studying a group to which you do not belong can be reinforcing of existing power inequities and additionally can be condescending. In studying a group to which I belong, I sought to move away from these specific problems/issues Tierney raises.

While there are problems with studying oneself and problems with studying a group to which you belong, this does move away, at least slightly, from an unequal distribution of power between the participants and the researcher. In this study I sought to “in effect make ourselves, rather than the Other, vulnerable; we reveal ourselves in the text as a narrative character, not as an act of hubris but as a necessary methodological device to move us toward a newer understanding of reality, ourselves and truths” (Tierney, 1998, p. 56).
This study holds a number of limitations. First, the sample is small, not racially diverse, and limited to urban Midwestern principals/schools. Second, it relies only on the words/experiences of only the principals, and third it does not contain detailed accounts of the daily life of social justice leadership. While it is important to recognize these limitations here, future research can examine the social justice principal in ways that address and move beyond each of these limitations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

But That’s Just Good Leadership

Inspired by Ladson-Billings’ (1995) article entitled *But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*, I make a case the leadership described in this paper is more than good leadership. In her article Ladson-Billings described that in sharing her work on culturally relevant pedagogy, the usual response she received was “But that’s just good teaching” (p. 159). She asserts that while she is describing good teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy “is much more than that [good teaching]” (p. 159). Ladson-Billings proposed that the historic norm of what is considered good teaching must be reexamined to understand that teaching that does not serve African-American students and other students of color well, cannot be described or understood as good teaching. She asserted that culturally relevant pedagogy is what good teaching should be and must be made available to all children.

In a similar experience to what Ladson-Billings (1995) described, while presenting the preliminary findings to a number of graduate classes and at six lectures at universities across the country, I without fail received the comment, “what you are describing is good leadership,” or “these principals typify what the literature on leadership describes as good leaders.” I listened and did not agree, but at that point I was not sure how to articulate what I saw as the difference.
Wrestling with these comments, I refined my conceptual framework to additionally include the core aspects of the social justice leader, which was initially missing. The revised conceptual framework detailing the three types of resistance and the core essence of the leader describe a complex leader focused on equity and justice and distinct from “good leadership.” This social justice leader goes beyond “good leadership.”

Where good leadership works with “sub-publics” because it is important to have connections to all parts of the community, the social justice leader places significant value on diversity and extends cultural respect and understanding of that diversity. Where the good leader speaks of success for all children, the social justice leader ends segregated programs that prohibit both emotional and academic success for marginalized children. Where the good leader leads the school in professional development in best practice, the social justice leader embeds that professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, and disability. Where the good leader collectively builds a vision of a great school, the social justice leader knows that any school cannot be great until the most fragile, the most vulnerable, the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich opportunities both academically and socially as their more privileged peers. Where the good leader empowers staff and works collaboratively, the social justice leader demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success. Where the good leader networks and build coalitions, the social justice leader seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her/him in this work. Where a good leader uses data to understand the realities of the school, the social justice leader sees all data through a lens of equity. Where a good leader understands that children need their individual needs met, the social justice leader knows that building community and differentiation are tools to ensuring that all
students achieve success together. Where a good leader works long and hard to make a great school, the school becomes intertwined with the social justice leader’s essence.

Social justice in schools has not happened by chance. It takes more than what traditionally has been understood as “good leadership” to achieve greater equity. To be clear, the leadership described in this paper goes beyond what has been seen as “good leadership” and raises the challenge to recast good leadership as leadership for social justice. At this moment in history, leadership that is not focused on and successful at creating more just and equitable schools for marginalized students is indeed not “good leadership.” The social justice leadership described in the following sections gives vivid examples of what is possible, what is necessary, and what is “good – meaning socially just -- leadership.”

Theory of Social Justice Educational Leadership

In my analyses, I found my initial conceptual framework (i.e. resistance enacted, resistance faced, and resistance developed) useful as a starting place for understanding social justice leadership. However, this framework did not completely account what I found through my analysis of the principals in this study. To build a theory of social justice leadership that the principals in this study lived, I needed to add an examination of the personal essence or core aspects of their leadership to the initial three-pronged framework of resistance. My revised conceptual framework of social justice leadership, represented in figure 1, incorporates the three types of resistance as well as the core aspects of the social justice leader. I will only briefly discuss the core aspects of these leaders in this paper. Future papers are needed to provide the comprehensive and detailed description necessary to fully explain the core components to these principals and their leadership.
This revised conceptual framework provided a way to understand the resistance the principals enacted, the resistance the principals faced, the resistance the principals developed, how the three types of resistances interrelated, and the core aspects of these principals’ leadership.

*The Resistance They Enacted*

I found a great deal of hope in the findings in response to the first research question about how these principals impacted their schools, their students, their staffs, and their communities. These principals not only possessed a remarkable commitment to equity and justice, but under their leadership the schools they led became better educational environments. These leaders
advanced social justice and enacted their own resistance in four ways: raising student achievement, improving school structures, re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture/community.

I start this discussion with raising student achievement because this is the core of the needed improvements for marginalized students. I position the next three advancements of these principals’ enacted resistance - improving school structures, re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture/community - in two ways. First, all three of these advancements toward justice were strategies these principals utilized to improve student achievement. Second, while improving school structures, re-centering staff capacity, and strengthening school culture aided in raising achievement, the principals additionally insisted that these steps/strategies were necessary because they were the moral or right course of action. For example, principals described that they eliminated pullout models of special education or ESL because they felt it was discriminatory to segregate students in that manner and because they knew the positive impact on achievement inclusive practices would have on all students and, in particular, previously separated students.

After my discussion of raising student achievement, I discuss school structures next because the principals felt that although most of their efforts to raise achievement required changing structures, key structural changes were necessary changes even if they were not accompanied by an increase in achievement. Next, I will discuss the findings about re-centering and enhancing staff capacity because the principals felt that there were necessary changes and skills that staff needed in order to both raise student achievement and work effectively within the new structures. Finally, I will discuss findings related to strengthening school culture/community. This is last not because it is less important but because the discussion of my
findings broadens outward from students to the structures under which they learn, to the staff that teach them, to the school community that surrounds them.

*Raising Student Achievement*

First, by enacting their own resistance against the traditional marginalization of particular students, these principals raised student achievement. Six of the seven principals demonstrated significant improvements in student achievement during their tenure. The seventh principal was in his first year as head principal and adequate time had not passed to document changes in achievement. One example of increased student achievement came from Principal Tracy.

Principal Tracy provided compelling data in terms of student achievement growth. During his three years as principal, the students experienced dramatic improvement on the statewide reading test. Principal Tracy shared that when he arrived only 70% of the students were tested for accountability purposes, but three years later 98% percent participated in all assessments. When he started, roughly 50% of the students achieved proficient or advanced levels, during his tenure this rose to 86% percent. Moreover, he provided data on dramatic improvements for various marginalized sub-groups of students. These improvements are summarized in Table 2. Principal Tracy noted that these gains in literacy scores on the state test were confirmed by local assessments as well.
Table 2

Statewide Reading Test Student Achievement Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students Tested (%)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All students – Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American students – Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian students – Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic students – Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education students - Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL students - Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in poverty - Proficient or advanced (%)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Tracy arrived in 2000 the school was put on the state’s preliminary No Child Left Behind list by of “Schools in Need of Improvement,” but with the achievement gains in every content area on both local and state assessments, Principal Tracy’s school moved off the state list of failing schools – evidenced by the dramatic improvement in achievement over three years.

This form of resistance challenged the status quo of public schools, a status quo that creates and accepts as normal or natural (e.g. Fine, 1994) disparate achievement among racial groups, between English language learners and their English speaking peers, between students with disabilities and their regular education peers, and between students living in poverty and their middle class and affluent peers. While the full and subtle ranges of disparities found in the lives of marginalized students cannot be resolved alone by public schools, the principals and schools in this study as well as in other empirical studies (Capper & Young, in press; Riester et
al., 2002; Scheurich, 1998) have created places where those achievement gaps among marginalized and privileged groups of students are closing.

Improving School Structures

The second strategy these principals used to enact resistance involved changing the structures of their schools in five ways. They:

1. Eliminated pullout and segregated programs,
2. Increased rigor and access to educational opportunities,
3. Increased student learning time,
4. Increased accountability to the achievement of all students,
5. Incorporated social responsibility into the school curriculum.

These changes to school structure are both strategies the principals used to raise achievement (previous section), and stand alone accomplishments of the principals’ enacted resistance to educational – in this case, structural – inequalities (e.g. Bogdan & Biklen, on critical theory). While most of the principals changed their school structures in all five of these ways, given the space constraints of this paper, an example of only one of these five elements will be provided.

Principal Dale provided a compelling example of improving school structures as he explained some of the changes at his school. He spoke of “two major initiatives to eliminate pullout and segregated programs.” The first initiative centered on the “detracking the math program.” In eliminating an ability-tracked math program, Principal Dale noted that the previous lower track and remedial level classes for math were “populated by poor and minority students.” He said, “We’re trying to provide equity by shifting to heterogeneously [in terms of ability and background characteristics] grouped math instruction.”
The second initiative involved the “movement to pretty much fully include special education students into the curriculum. We have about twenty to twenty-five percent of our kids from special ed. They spend virtually all of their time in a regular education classroom now.” Principal Dale explained that this change “replaced the former service delivery system where the instruction for the students with special education labels took place only in groups of students with special education labels, outside the regular education classrooms, in resource rooms or in special education classrooms.”

Principal Dale and the other principals maintained that enacting this form of resistance to all tracking or segregation models was not only a pedagogical/learning shift but it was also a moral act. They felt it was the right thing to do, not only to pursue raising student achievement but because they believed that systems that provided separate programs maintained unequal levels of instruction, maintained the marginalization of particular students, and created a situation where those particular students received an inferior education. These principals’ beliefs directly countered the ideas of deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) in that the changes in structure as a result of their beliefs (e.g. creating heterogeneous and inclusive programs) positioned traditionally marginalized students past failure not as their own deficiencies or “fault” but as an inherent result of an unjust system. The powerful combination of eliminating pullout programs, increasing rigor and access to educational opportunities, increased student learning time, increasing accountability for the achievement of all students, and incorporating social responsibility into the school curriculum enacted a strong resistance against the status quo of schooling that transformed their schools to the benefit of all students but in particular marginalized children.
Re-centering and Enhancing Staff Capacity

The third strategy that these principals leading for social justice used to improve achievement and create more just schools involved strengthening their schools’ staff. In other words, the principals resisted the assumptions that typical teacher education or staff development programs were adequate preparation in substantiating a social justice orientation and practices for educators. They sought to increase staff capacity in five ways by:

1. Addressing issues of race,
2. Providing on-going staff development focused on building equity,
3. Developing staff investment in social justice,
4. Hiring and supervising for justice, and
5. Empowering staff.

Again, while the principals accomplished all five ways of re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, only one example will be shared here due to space limitations. Principal Meg provided an example of building staff capacity. She shared “We have open and candid discussions about race. We have spent considerable time learning and investigating whiteness . . . through book groups, professional development about white privilege, sharing our personal racial autobiographies . . . since most of my staff is white.”

She organized and facilitated learning for her staff in the area of English Language Learners, ELL. As a part of a major restructuring effort, her staff needed to gain knowledge, skills, and licensure in working with students learning English. Principal Meg arranged for a university professor who taught in the area of English as a second language to teach credit-bearing courses after school in the school library. These classes were offered for a number of years. Principal Meg reported,
Many of the staff took these classes . . . one custodian, the school clerk, a PE teacher, our art teacher, our music teacher, special education teachers, I think every classroom teacher, a number of assistants, and me, the principal. Through this training eight teachers received certification as ELL teachers.

Principal Meg and the other social justice principals enacted resistance to prevailing assumptions about learning and learning environments through instituting programs of staff development, hiring, and supervision. They built staffs that possessed not only a commitment to equity but also the pedagogical skills to reach every student. Staff were given professional freedom, valued as people, and had a greater say in the running of the school, but they were also made to examine issues of race, existing injustice, and historical inequity as related to schools and learning. The principals shared they supported both symbolically and with the resources at their disposal staff growth and learning that focused on equity.

**Strengthening School Culture/Community**

The final way these principals enacted their own resistance involved strengthening the school culture/community. This took two forms:

1. Creating a warm and welcoming school climate,
2. Reaching out to the community and to marginalized families.

While all of the principals in this study accomplished both, one example of the first achievement above is discussed here. Principal Eli shared an illustration of how he enacted this resistance by building relationships with students. He stated sadly, “When I came here, it was a depressing, out-of-control, ‘ghetto’ high school, fights, tardiness, absence from school, to a certain degree a stereotypical bad ghetto high school.” He continued,
It’s night and day different . . . where you have teams of teachers that know all the kids, or a lot of kids, and knowing them allows you to have a relationship with them . . . you develop relationship so they buy into better behavior. So if there’s a kid, we have some rough kids, you know exposed to bad stuff out there, you want to keep it out of the school . . . gang stuff, horrible stuff, or somebody beats somebody up, but you have a relationship with that kid. You know nine out of ten times you’d be able to stop that behavior, I mean with relationships you can.

Principal Eli described that the school now experiences fewer fights and fewer false fire alarms. Students tell staff they feel safer, and new students shared that they felt safer there than at their previous schools. He made the point that to create a warmer and safer climate the key was to “make people feel good about themselves, to build relationships with staff and students, and to be visible.”

By resisting the historic disconnect between marginalized families and schools, the social justice-oriented principals in this study worked to create warm and welcoming school climates and also reached out to the community and in particular to disenfranchised families. Not only did the improved school climate and closer connections to the community affect student achievement, but also this form of resistance served to challenge and begin to transform the white middle class assumptions regarding students, families, and communities that permeate public schools across the country. For example, these principals reported not only that greater numbers of marginalized families participated in their schools, but the school staff began to understand, construct, seek, and value participation from families in ways other than the traditional parent teacher organizations, conferences, field trips, open house, and fundraisers. The schools led by the social justice oriented principals created diverse entry points including
ethic parent meetings, multi-language forums and family communication, and culturally relevant school events.

In summary, the “resistance they enact” component of the conceptual framework helped make sense of what these principals introduced and accomplished in their schools that sought to displace (e.g. Fine, 1994) the traditional norms informing public school leadership. These norms have maintained power and privilege for certain groups of people and marginalized students based on race, class, disability, sexual orientation, language, gender, family structure, and neighborhood. In understanding the “resistance they enact,” it is clear that these principals made significant accomplishments in challenging these norms and assumptions and advancing justice.

The Resistance They Faced

“I have yet to experience a day without enormous barriers to this work,” commented one principal when asked about the pressures he faced in trying to enact his social justice agenda. The principals working to enact social justice met formidable resistance to their efforts. Consistent with the social justice leadership model introduced earlier, these barriers constitute the resistance they faced. They faced three kinds of resistance: 1) the norms of the principalship, 2) the staff and community, and 3) the district and beyond. This resistance resulted in significant consequences to these principals.

The Principalship

While advancing justice, the job itself was the first type of the resistance they faced. The principalship created resistance in two ways:

1. The size and scope of the principal position, and
2. Their own personal expectations of themselves as principals.
While both forms of resistance caused struggles for these principals, because of space constraints one example of the first form will be discussed. The daily requirements of what is described as a “nearly impossible” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003) job combined with a personal belief that they can and must quickly create just schools produced serious resistance for these leaders to face. Principal Scott provided a clear example of the job of principal itself constituting resistance to enacting social justice.

Well, if you have a job that the expectation is that it takes eleven hours a day and you still can’t do it all, you don’t have the luxury of sitting down and having this conversation [about the ethnocentric social studies curriculum] even if you know that the conversation is necessary. I mean to sit down and have that conversation would require me to neglect my family, neglect my health, fall behind on necessary paperwork, not do any evaluations of any other teachers, ignore a bunch of student discipline, probably skip some truancy conferences, be late mailing things. All kinds of things fall apart every time you want to dig in on a problem…. This example that I’m giving is something I should be doing, I should make time for. How much time can I make when I already have less time than I need to do all the things that have nothing to do with equity but just have to do with just getting the basic things done to run the school.

He continued about how the demands of the job consumed him and he constantly needed to do more,

I think the minimum number of hours [I work a week], anywhere between 65 or 70 and then the amount of work that I do outside of that, I might do a couple more hours outside of that, say 5 more hours outside of that. But really the job consumes you, your thinking, your working; your mind is continually at school. So, I’ll be working at 3 in the morning
because I woke up in a cold sweat because I can’t stop thinking about all the things I have to do.

In addition to these self-imposed pressures and expectations, external constituencies were also powerful forces of resistance.

The Staff and Community

These principals leading for social justice faced resistance from both staff and from community members, especially parents. This resistance took three forms:

1. Momentum of the status quo,
2. Obstructive staff attitudes and beliefs, and
3. Insular/privileged parental expectations.

In the name of continuing the “way things are done here,” some staff, and particular families were fiercely committed to maintaining unjust and inequitable programs, structures, and opportunities. This resistance weighed heavily upon the social justice leaders. Again, while all three were significant forces, one illustration is provided here. For example, one principal conveyed the pervasive sentiment by her staff who took comfort in keeping the status quo.

When I arrived at the school, the prevailing sentiment was, “It’s worked this way for 32 years and you’re coming in here and changing us? You want us to have academic rigor, you want us to make decisions, you want us to take responsibility for kids not learning, we’ve never had to do that before.”

Another principal explained the pressure and resistance he experienced from staff.

There’s a fair amount of pressure from the staff, looking at things in a certain way. They didn’t necessarily want an inclusive program, didn’t want to think about creating a different math program. This feeling that they should talk to parents in the way that they
[the teachers] felt comfortable and that might turn parents off and they didn’t care about that - not that they didn’t care, but they didn’t know what they did. There was this nostalgic feeling that “if we only had those good students again” mentality, and what that meant was “if we only had all white middle class students again, the way it used to be.” A lot of resistance to doing things differently, looking at themselves, to even talking about being reflective, to planning together… So there was a fair amount of resistance I felt from that. Not everyone, but certain people on the staff were really resistant in that way.

Continuing “outward” from the individual principals, a final source of resistance encompassed school district personnel and myriad expectations and assumptions regarding their appropriate roles as education leaders.

_The District and Beyond_

The principals faced resistance from within and beyond their school districts. They faced six kinds of resistance from outside their immediate schools:

1. Unsupportive central office administrators,
2. A formidable bureaucracy,
3. Prosaic colleagues,
4. A lack of resources,
5. Harmful state and federal regulations, and

Meeting resistance from these sources left the principals feeling isolated, without models of how to do their social justice work, in a system not designed to support them, and working with and for people who do not share or value their social justice commitment. While these
principals for social justice faced all six types of resistance, only two examples follow dealing with colleagues and graduate preparation.

One principal shared her perceptions of other principals’ commitment and drive.

Some colleagues just don’t have any drive in this [equity and justice]. That’s not why they’re a principal. Take [Kenneth], that’s, that’s not why he’s doing this job. He’s not in it for equity or social justice or educating all kids. I’m not really sure why he does this…. that could be a countervailing pressure too, that you sit around in a principals meeting and 30 of us are there and maybe only 2 people are having the emotional struggle of trying to promote a social justice agenda … and then you see so many people who, who don’t care whose agenda items suck up weight, suck up your time.

Another principal discussed his administration preparation program.

In terms of equity or justice, I haven’t learned much at all. I remember sitting in my administrative preparation classes, at one of the best administrative preparation programs in the country, and looking around because they’re not interested, they don’t get it. The program needs to make them understand that this [leading for equity and justice] is part of their job…but I never got that feeling in my program. Dealing with race, disability, ELL, etc. were not a priority. If leading for social justice wasn’t a part of you when you entered, you weren’t going to learn it in the ed. admin. program.

All of the principals agreed with the sentiment that their preparation program did not prepare or aid in their social justice work. One common suggestion was to include a “rigorous” internship during principal preparation that would help give future principals a more solid understanding of the daily roles and managerial tasks that are required better preparing them for the position of principals and allowing them to then devote more energy to social justice issues.
The “resistance they faced” from their positions, their staff, the community, the school district, and beyond, posed serious consequences for the leaders in this study. They described two consequences of facing this resistance: a great personal toll and a persistent sense of discouragement. One principal described this toll.

I was so frustrated by the fact I couldn’t change things fast enough . . . that really ate me up . . . and pressures, when all these pressures came together, and it [the school] wasn’t better, it just drove me crazy . . . There were periods of months when I threw-up every morning. There were periods of time when everyday I couldn’t help but cry alone in my office or at home . . . There was a huge toll on who I was. I had trouble sleeping. I wasn’t as funny. Outside of school, I wasn’t myself.

Another principal discussed the sense of persistent discouragement.

This stuff [creating a more just school] is easier said than done, I mean I have to tell you how hard it is. We try, but we’re so far away from where I think we need to be. That’s why I get discouraged . . . it gets to be too much, and I get discouraged . . . I think, man I’m an F-up, I’m no good at anything . . . Why do I get discouraged? Because you care, you care and you try and you do and then you run up against the bureaucrats who tell you, you can’t do things, or you run up against a society that sometimes it’s so unjust that whatever you do, you’re not going to change it. You feel like what you’re doing is futile.

In order not to be completely overwhelmed and worn down by this resistance, these social justice principals developed their own resistance.

The Resistance They Developed

Little has been written about the strategies principals use to sustain themselves. For the principals in this study, developing this type of resistance proved essential to advancing social
justice in the face of on-going resistance. These social justice principals created and used two kinds of strategies as a means of developing their own resistance: proactive and coping.

**Proactive Strategies**

I defined proactive strategies as strategies the principals used professionally to enable them to continue their work toward social justice. These strategies involved doing the daily work of the principalship differently and examining the position to keep the overwhelming scope as well as barriers manageable. The principals developed and used seven different proactive strategies. The strategies included:

1. Communicating purposefully and authentically,
2. Developing a supportive administrative network,
3. Working together for change,
4. Keeping their eyes on the prize,
5. Prioritizing their work,
6. Engaging in professional learning, and
7. Building relationships.

These principals used these strategies to continue their work to advance social justice in the face of resistance. While they used all seven strategies, space limitations permit the sharing of only one example. For Principal Tracy, keeping their eyes on the prize meant keeping equity and justice at the heart of conversation and celebrating success. Principal Tracy shared,

Whether it was during the literacy conferences I held with every teacher, or discussions about school-wide discipline or evaluation meetings with individual staff . . . I tried to always bring race, poverty, gender and disability into our conversations. Even if there wasn’t a decision to be made, I felt like I was making progress, I felt ok with myself, I
felt I could keep up this nearly impossible work, if at least the important issues were being talked about, if we were at least acknowledging equity.

These proactive strategies created time, emotional space, and necessary support to continue their equity and justice work. In a sense they reinvented key parts of their jobs to emphasize their social justice focus. The principals did not believe that these strategies made their work easy. They also did not believe that these proactive strategies were enough to sustain themselves in their quest for social justice as educational leaders. Additionally, they were purposeful about using coping strategies for their lives outside of school.

**Coping Strategies**

The principals identified coping strategies in addition to proactive strategies that helped them continue to advance social justice in the face of countervailing pressures. I defined coping strategies as strategies that allowed the principals to generally get through the day, week, or school year. These strategies did not necessarily help them with their daily principal work, but included ways the principals sustained and nourished themselves. They identified six coping strategies:

1. Prioritizing their life outside of school,
2. Utilizing mindful diversions,
3. Accepting outside validation,
4. Engaging in regular physical activity,
5. Providing for others, and

These principals found all six strategies useful at keeping the resistance they faced at bay. One illustration will be provided in this paper. These leaders worked incredibly long hours, but
they learned to purposefully set aside time not to work or scheduled time with family and friends. Principal Natalie shared,

[I] try to separate my personal life and professional life; it’s a huge strategy. That means that after sixty or seventy hours of work, I don’t want to talk about work any more…[for example] I will put, like once a month I’ll put on my calendar “university” in the afternoon. What that means is if I get through that week and nothing huge has happened and I’ve got everything I need done, I’m going home that afternoon. I feel guilty about it, but not guilty enough not to do it [laughs].

These principals committed to social justice developed and used a variety of coping strategies in order to keep advancing this work. These strategies allowed them to help maintain their personal sanity and helped clear their minds from the struggles at school. These principals combined these personal coping strategies that helped make them “feel whole” and helped “maintain some semblance of sanity” with the previously discussed proactive strategies.

In sum, the seven principals developed and used both coping and proactive strategies to advance social justice in the face of countervailing pressures. They attributed their success in making their schools more equitable at least in part to the strategies they developed.

Social Justice Leadership Theory:

Interrelations Among the Three Types of Resistance

Understanding the relationship among the three aspects of resistance proved essential in developing a theory of social justice leadership. The resistance these principals enacted came into direct conflict with the resistance they faced. Facing tough, multi-dimensional, on-going resistance from their position, staff, other administrators, and certain families, the principals in this study made significant accomplishments in advancing social justice (the resistance the
enacted). While the resistance they faced provided incredible obstacles and barriers, they managed to create more just schools.

However, even in the wake of their accomplishments they felt a persistent sense of discouragement and paid a personal price. As a result of the resistance they enacted, the principals discussed that the resistance they faced took a serious toll on their bodies, emotions, and lives. They made significant progress, yet even with those accomplishments these principals paid dearly for advancing justice.

At the intersection of the resistance the principals enact and the resistance they face, I propose that effective social justice leaders are forced to develop resistance in the forms of resilience and sustenance in order to advance their social justice agenda. To keep the resistance these principals faced from overwhelming and obliterating the resistance they sought to enact, they needed to develop a protective ring, shield, or buffer to enable them to continue to seek and advance justice. In this study, developing this resistance proved essential to maintain the principals’ sanity and their ability to lead for social justice.

The three aspects of resistance and how they interrelate help make sense of the daily work of social justice principals, but it is only the first part of building a theory of social justice leadership. Building this theory requires examining and understanding the very essence or core aspects of who they are, how they work, what makes this accomplishment possible, and how this entails tremendous pain. Future reports from this study will detail the personal core aspects of these leaders: a tenacious commitment to social justice, a mix of arrogance and humility, an intense passion in their leadership, and a knowledge base that enables them to be effective principals for social justice. Although there are numerous implications for practice from this study, most of which can be inferred from the data and findings presented above, I have chosen
to focus specifically on implications for administrator preparation programs. Decisions regarding admissions, curriculum, staffing, and desired educational outcomes from the graduate experience can potentially have a significant impact on the development and cultivation of social justice leaders in education.

Implications for Preparation

In light of both the literature attesting to the lack of focus on equity issues within administrator preparation programs (Brown, 2004; Bell et al., 2002; Dantley, 2002; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Mackinnon, 2000; Marshall, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Rusch, 2004; Solomon, 2002) and the data from this study reaffirming that gap, implications for administrator preparation become critical to this work. In wrestling with the data from this study I have come to a number of salient conclusions about administrator preparation.

First, I do not believe that anyone and in particular everyone admitted to principal preparation programs can do, or wants to do, social justice work in schools, but I suspect that more than only these seven leaders are capable of and committed to social justice leadership. In saying that, I hesitate to call for limiting admissions to only those with a drive to enact social justice because at this moment in history there is a limited number of applicants for administrations positions and there is a growing need for more administrators. Candidates for administrative positions can be placed in relation to social justice leadership using a four-quadrant figure, see figure 2. Both quadrants A and C contain the future of social justice leadership and the greatest promise for public schools.
Second, in examining administrator training through the conceptual framework of social justice leadership developed in this study, I argue that preparation programs need to prepare social justice leaders to both enact and develop resistance in the face of significant barriers. In combining the resistance framework and the potential for social justice leadership matrix, I propose changes to both admissions and content of preparation programs that wish to produce and cultivate social justice leaders in schools.

Admissions processes must attract potential educational leaders, like the principals in this study, who bring with them a commitment to create more socially just schools. It is necessary to both search for and recruit educators to administrator preparation programs who possess this drive to enact social justice. This process will help bring people described by quadrant A into educational administration. This recruiting must rely on current administrators and community members to identify educators with a passion for equity and justice. Faculty and staff in preparation programs then need to work aggressively to enroll these students. This is one avenue that may bring potential administrator candidates with a desire to enact their own
resistance in the interest of marginalized students. While this is a vital step, that alone is insufficient. Recruitment will not bring in enough candidates to fill the growing need for school leadership, and as noted in this study, administrator preparation a not considered to be supportive of or congruent with social justice leadership. Therefore, a reexamination of the content of administrator preparation programs is also necessary. To prepare candidates in quadrants A and C to be leaders for social justice, educational administrator training programs need to focus their content on enacting and developing resistance in these prospective educational leaders.

*Developing the Capacity to Enact Resistance*

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. Similarly, developing the capacity to enact resistance is paramount in educational leadership preparation programs. In the face of overwhelming evidence of persistent educational disparities, the central purpose of educational administration preparation must be to position the field to examine and change our schools to benefit marginalized students. Administrators must be at the front of the line transforming schools into more equitable and just places. At the core of educational administration preparation must lie an inherent belief that all of the course work, all of the readings, all of the content, and all of the discussion should be framed from the position that leaders can improve schools for those who historically school leaders have failed. The core of educational administration preparation should not be rhetoric about high expectations, discussing sub-publics, state politics, or total quality management techniques. With this social justice purpose clearly in mind, enacting resistance requires that future administrators develop a reflective consciousness centered on social justice and a broader knowledge base.
Reflective Consciousness

Developing reflective consciousness contains four components that can be marshaled to enact resistance and lead toward social justice: “learning to believe the dream is possible,” models of equity and justice in practice, deepening administrators knowledge of self, and “rebellious, oppositional imaginations.” Reflective consciousness begins with “learning to believe the dream is possible” (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 9). Scheurich and Skrla propose the key is answering the following question, “Do I – deep inside where my most firmly held beliefs reside – truly believe it is possible in the immediate future to create and sustain schools in which literally all children will be highly successful? (p.10)” Getting to the point where future administrators answer “yes” to this question, not that they want to believe that, but that they firmly know “deep inside” that real equity and justice is possible and possible now (Scheurich & Skrla), is the foundation of reflective consciousness and the beginning of the capacity to enact resistance. Preparation programs curricula must start and continually return to this guiding question.

Second, with the firm belief that every student -- including all marginalized students -- deserve equity and can achieve at tremendous levels, future administrators require models and examples of seeing this equity and justice in practice. This study as well as the growing body of empirical research that documents examples of more just schools provides those necessary models. Learning about successful principals and their schools grounds preparation for leading for social justice in the lived experiences of actual principals, actual teachers, and actual students. These examples provide models for understanding some of what is possible to accomplish and the leadership necessary for those changes. In combination with models of leadership and schools centered on equity and justice, anticipating the barriers of resistance
social justice leaders face needs to be an inherent component of graduate preparation. Future principals will not be adequately prepared to lead for social justice without an understanding of what resistance they will face and from whence it will likely come. Learning about barriers to social justice may well be depressing, but sugar coating the resistance may lead to principal burnout because they are unprepared to face these challenges. Worse, the leaders may fail to realize equity gains because the resistance wore them down. Both of these outcomes serve to maintain the unjust aspects of schools that already exist. Seeing what can be accomplished, understanding how it was accomplished, comprehending the barriers to these goals, and examining the leaders’ roles and struggles all advance future administrators’ reflective consciousnesses and their capacities to enact their own resistance of advancing social justice.

The third component to the on-going development of reflective consciousness involves expanding and deepening administrators’ knowledge of self. The process of advancing social justice involves an abundance of resistance and barriers documented in this study. The principals from this study conveyed that an essential aspect of maintaining a commitment to equity and justice involved understanding and being comfortable with themselves, their strengths, and their limitations. As part of the core aspects of these social justice principals that I mentioned earlier and will be discussed in future reports, social justice work requires a deep understanding about what the leader believes. Administrator preparation needs to give leaders opportunities to learn and to wrestle personally with their own beliefs, biases, and assumption about race, poverty, what all students deserve, inclusion, sexual orientation, testing and assessment, adult learning, family diversity, and adult motivation. This element of critical self-reflection echoes what Brown (2004) calls for in principal preparation. Engaging in this
examination of self builds the reflective consciousness and the capacity as well as fortitude to enact resistance.

The fourth component to developing reflective consciousness in order to enact resistance requires “rebellious, oppositional imaginations” (Rapp, 2002, p. 226). Future leaders for social justice require the ability to “resist, dissent, subvert” (Rapp, p. 226) and the vision/imagination to see a better, more just way. Preparation programs need to integrate the skills of critique, voicing dissent, and bold/creative thinking throughout administrator training. While complacency makes for easier and more convenient teaching in preparation programs, these “rebellious, oppositional imagination” skills need the fertile ground of the university for nourishment and growth. Rapp provided the image of the 1989 photo of Chinese dissident standing before tank in Tiananmen Square to capture the essence of this component of critical consciousness. These four components of reflective consciousness are necessary curricular underpinnings that preparation programs interested in fostering social justice should cultivate in future educational leaders. This consciousness, combined with a broad knowledge base prepares future leaders to enact resistance in furthering social justice.

Knowledge Base

“The knowledge base for educational administration has traditionally emphasized management and a narrow view of leadership theory” (Marshall, 2004, p. 8). To enact the resistance necessary to advance social justice for marginalized students, preparation programs need to pass on to students a broader, more relevant knowledge base. Following Marshall, the complexity of advancing social justice relies on understanding, content, language, and the integration of topics not traditionally central to administrator preparation. The principals in this study possessed knowledge and skills in the following areas that made advancing social justice
possible. These areas included special education, English language learners, curriculum, differentiation and teaming, using data, presentation skills, race, poverty, working with diverse families, and taking a global perspective. Additionally, a stronger component of hands-on training would enhance the necessary knowledge base with practical skills.

Special education. The principals in this study demonstrated an understanding of the limitations of traditional special education instructional models through their work to eliminate pullout/segregated programs. Likewise, future principals leading for social justice need to understand, critique, design, and lead inclusive special education service delivery. Along with cultivating a detailed understanding of the laws, disability categories, and the history of special education, these leaders need to foresee hurdles to overcome when planning inclusive practices and make plans to set up, support, and maintain teams, and to schedule classes and staff to support truly inclusive practices. Without this knowledge, the principals in this study would not have been able to transform their schools into inclusive schools with higher student achievement.

English language learners. As was the case with special education, the leaders in this study possessed an understanding and/or a willingness and urgency to learn about and critique instructional practices surrounding language acquisition and English language learners. The principals in this study shared the obligation they felt to understand and transform ELL programming since, for example, non-native English speaking families typically defer to the school staff’s expertise, potentially relegating themselves to a much less influential role in advocating for their children’s education. These principals used their knowledge of ELL in order to appropriately advocate on behalf of marginalized non-native English speaking children and their families. Especially in light of immigration trends, future principals will need a similar understanding about English language learners and ELL programming. This requires a basic
understanding of language acquisition; the ability to create a culturally responsive school climate; the understanding of how to communicate effectively and respectfully with families who speak diverse languages; the foresight to effectively use, schedule, and support bilingual interpreters; and the capacity to develop and plan inclusive service delivery.

Curriculum. Principals from this study used their understanding of curriculum and their social justice commitment to transform their schools’ math programs, reading programs, or science curriculum. Without that curricular knowledge, these principals would not have been capable of those essential improvements that gave marginalized children access to richer experiences. The future leader for social justice also must be a curriculum leader at school. This role necessitates on-going learning and research into the methods and content of subject areas. For example, principals need to have a basic understanding of mathematical concepts, mathematical thinking, and how children learn math. Without this knowledge a principal would not understand the need to de-track math or would not adopt math curricula that gives every student opportunities to understand and engage in complicated math.

Differentiation and teaming. As the principals in this study built inclusive structures to involve every student in the regular classroom, they relied on building their staffs’ capacities to differentiate and team-teach. These principals created, developed, and supervised teams of teachers, requiring them to understand how to facilitate differentiation and how to support teams to be effective. Future leaders who will enact social justice require the knowledge and skills to support differentiation and teaming in their schools as well. To meet this need, preparation programs should be designed to instill in the prospective administrators an understanding of scheduling to promote teaming and differentiation and an understanding of models to use for co-planning and co-teaching curriculum to students with a range of abilities, challenges, and
strengths. These require a belief that curriculum differentiation for inclusive classrooms comes not from modifying existing lessons, but looking at planning and teaching in different ways from the onset.

**Using data.** The social justice principals involved in this study described how they relied on data to inform their practice and the direction of the school. They used data to understand student learning, but also a means to keep their staff, community, and themselves focused on gaps and successes in equity and achievement. They possessed skills in understanding, tracking, and using data that allowed them to further their social justice work. Likewise, future leaders for social justice require the ability to use data effectively. These leaders will need to be able to compile, track, analyze, understand, and manipulate information about students, staff, and the school. This ability with data needs to be coupled with bringing a social justice perspective to bear on that data. Maintaining the social justice perspective creates the situation where these social justice leaders both attend to different kinds of data and attend to general school data in a different manner – a manner that centers on social justice and its pursuit. Understanding data is an essential first step, but culling that information in order to build and maintain equity requires using lenses of race, class, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing factors to scrutinize that data purposefully.

**Presentation skills.** The principals from this study regularly made presentations to both large and small groups of staff, students, families, community members, and other administrators. Given the resistance to their agendas, they needed a range of skills to effectively and persuasively present their vision, changes in the school structures or curriculum, and even the more mundane parts of their position to effectively communicate, develop a critical mass of support, engage others in the school and the equity changes, and to recognize people for their
work. Future leaders for social justice need to be able to share her/his vision and knowledge easily with staff, families, community members, and colleagues. This necessitates learning skills in organizing information, presentation theory and methods, speaking to diverse audiences, using humor, storytelling, and motivating people.

**Race.** All seven principals worked with their staffs to address and discuss race. They each had engaged in extensive learning, reading, discussing, and reflecting about race that allowed them to lead their schools into tackling this sensitive and often avoided topic. A future leader for social justice also requires an understanding of the multiple issues and beliefs around race. This knowledge about race is not a prescribed set of facts and skills to be absorbed; this entails time and reflection in understanding one’s own beliefs and situatedness regarding race, privilege, and institutional racism. It also requires developing language to speak, confront, and dialogue about race as it is embedded into the fabric of schools. Developing this language and the ability to speak about race moves educational leadership away from what Shields (2004) calls pathologies of silence.

**Poverty.** The principals from this study led schools enrolling children from families living in poverty. Through their work to create a warm climate and to reach out to marginalized families, these principals connected with their financially struggling population. They realized that understanding poverty and creating a climate conducive to responding to the needs of poor families was not a checklist of activities to complete. The principals found that successfully engaging low-income families in their children’s education was about demonstrating sensitivity to their situations and an authentic respect for their dignity. Likewise, future leaders for social justice need to be equipped with an understanding of poverty. This knowledge needs to include
both the myths and realities of poverty and a basic critical understanding of social, political, and cultural economic ramifications for poor families and students.

*Working with diverse families.* As was the case with engaging families living in poverty, the principals in this study successfully involved diverse families in the life of their schools: families of varying races, families of varying cultures, families who spoke diverse languages, gay/lesbian families, foster families, extended families, and families with varying parental configurations. The principals possessed abilities to reach out to diverse families and demonstrated they valued each one. Preparing leaders to enact justice necessitates learning these skills. Educational leaders should cultivate talents and skills using personal, frequent, and non-traditional methods of communication. Moreover, leaders should frame diversity not as something to tolerate but as an essential wealth of the community, learn to resist judging family situations, and learn to develop personal relationships with all of their students’ families.

*Taking a global perspective.* While the principals from this study shared their commitment to advancing equity for the schools, they also shared a larger or global sense of justice. They understood the connections between seemingly distinct educational issues (e.g. the connections between special education, high school enrollment in foreign language, and college admission) and the interrelation of larger social and political forces at work. Likewise, future leaders successful in creating more equitable and just schools will need to gain and maintain a broader global perspective. These leaders require the understanding of social construction as it relates to schools, children, teachers, and families. They need the ability not to only see and focus on the local and immediate, but to place the daily interactions, conflicts, issues, and advances into the larger social and political context in which schools and schooling ultimately operate.
In summary, these components of this expanded knowledge base as outlined above will assist future administrators in enacting resistance, responding more resiliently, and creating more socially just schools. As mentioned in the findings, the principals in this study called for a rigorous practical internship that would give future principals their own direction, insight, and understanding into the daily realities and expectations, would be embedded into a specific school context, and would involve experiential learning – an essential component of learning. This component of principal preparation is consistent with Brown’s (2004) “adult learning/theory development” (p.84). Gaining those practical skills, and testing their commitment and skills via an intensive view of the management side of school leadership would give future leaders an enhanced knowledge base and may likely reduce the overwhelmed feeling of many beginning administrators. Building up the practical knowledge of the principal position creates more space for future leaders to address equity and justice in schools.

The reflective consciousness steps, combined with an expanded knowledge base and a vital experiential component create a preparation program positioned to build the skills necessary to help educational leaders enact resistance and lead toward social justice in their schools. However, along with the ability to enact resistance, future leaders require the skills to develop their own resistance and resilience as they face barriers to social justice.

*Building a Capacity to Develop Resistance*

In preparation programs developing capacities to address resistance must accompany developing the skills above for enacting resistance. It is irresponsible to prepare leaders to take on enormous challenges and face significant resistance without understandings of how to weather the storms of those barriers and sustain themselves. However, little literature exists on the strategies that principals use to advance social justice in the face of resistance. Langer and
Boris-Schacter (2003) provide a glimpse of what could develop into future research on strategies that principals can use to deal with the increasing multiple pressures of the position. More specifically, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) engage in a brief discussion of “sustaining yourself” in their book *Leadership for Equity and Excellence*. Using the strategies from this study and Scheurich and Skrla’s discussion on self-sustenance, preparation programs can begin to create a space for the discussion, teaching, and development of strategies to continue to advance justice in the face of resistance. Although the strategies the principals in this study shared should not be used as a checklist for administrator preparation programs, they offer a starting place for focusing on leadership skills to deal with, manage, and cope with resistance. While the work of leading for social justice is never easy, the principals in this study shared that they saw more success and felt somewhat less discouragement/personal toll once they formulated and adopted strategies, both proactive and coping, to deal with the resistance they faced. Creating a space to wrestle with developing resistance will allow future administrators the opportunity to be a step ahead of the resistance they will face and address proactively issues of burn-out that can impact social justice leaders.

In sum, creating these changes in preparation programs requires both the will and steadfast commitment on the part of university faculty to center on educational leadership for social justice. The principals in this study made tremendous steps in seeking social justice through enacting and developing resistance yet noted that their graduate preparation did not appear to affirm their leadership goals or foster their development in those areas. Graduate preparation programs committed to developing social justice leaders can play a major role in helping future administrators develop their abilities to both enact and develop resistance in service of advancing social justice and educating marginalized/all students.
The study of these leaders revealed a strong sense of hope for marginalized students, yet such hope is tempered by the formidable struggle that social justice leaders face and the pain this struggle causes. Yet, in light of the struggle and in the face of daunting resistance, they demonstrate, according to one principal, “What is right is also what is possible. It’s not only what’s right in the abstract, it can happen and in fact it does happen when we really believe in it, when we understand the intricacies not only of schools but of equity and justice, when we commit ourselves.”

Implications for Research

While this initial study shed light on principals’ leadership for social justice, future research is needed to enhance and refine this theory. This research could involve an expansion of the current study to include rural, suburban and racially diverse leaders, a deeper look at social justice leaders to include various stakeholder perspectives and the gritty experiences of social justice leadership, a purposeful examination of the toll on social justice leaders, investigating the change process in social justice work in schools, comparisons between social justice leaders and other principals, and building and evaluating an equity focus of administrator preparation programs. Addressing these research topics will shed further light on social justice educational leadership.

A Final Word

Returning to the notion of “good leadership,” I caution us all to consider that decades of “good leadership” have created and sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools. Similar to Ladson-Billings’ (1995) argument for a redefining of “good teaching,” I argue that leadership that does not insure equity and does not create just schools is not good leadership. The kind of leadership that needs to be defined and discussed as good leadership is the leadership the
principals in this study have pioneered, leadership centered on enacting social justice, and leadership that creates equitable schools. Social justice leadership is indeed what good leadership should be.

Finally, I do not pretend to know what impact this study or others’ work on social justice will have on the field of educational administration, a field that neither embraces equity wholeheartedly nor deeply understands justice work. I do hope that with each additional piece of scholarship that emphasizes an orientation and commitment to justice in our schools as the core focus of administration, that the field may eventually live up to its primary purpose which Capper (1993) describes-- to prepare leaders to oppose oppression and suffering and to transform our schools into models of equity and communities of justice. While I have different questions now compared to when I began this study, I am left with vivid reminders about how incredibly difficult this leadership is, how much more graduate preparation programs can do to foster this leadership, and also great hope about what is possible.
References


London: Falmer