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Social Justice and the Superintendency: A Study of Eight Los Angeles County Superintendents

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by

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DEDICATION

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Social Justice and the Superintendency:

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by

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Although there is a significant body of literature on superintendents and another on social justice, there is not a comprehensive body of research on superintendents who focus on social justice issues. It is important to study what actions superintendents with a social justice focus take to address inequities in their school districts. The primary research question for this study is: how do superintendents within Los Angeles County define social justice, and how have they implemented social justice tenets within their school districts? To answer this question, eight semistructured interviews were conducted with current superintendents within Los Angeles County. The results of the interviews were then analyzed and the patterns were compared to existing social justice frameworks. The findings identified an opportunity to continue to clarify the definition of social justice and to expand upon current frameworks utilized for principals. In addition, recommendations for superintendent preparation programs and advice for existing superintendents were identified.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Since the 1800s, the role of the superintendent has evolved from a schoolmaster, to a manager of schools, to the educational expert in the community (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). As the superintendent of the Burbank Unified School District, I was interested in learning more about how superintendents implement social justice tenets within their school districts. I was also interested in how to better prepare and support superintendents who want to lead their districts with a focus on social justice. Although there is a significant body of literature on superintendents and another on social justice, there is not a comprehensive body of research on superintendents who focus on social justice issues (Maxwell, Locke, & Scheurich, 2013). It is important to study what actions superintendents with a social justice focus take to address inequities in their school districts.

The results of this study add to the understanding of researchers and practitioners by providing an analysis of the impact of the role of the superintendent on overall student success, the challenges of the superintendency, how the role of the superintendent has evolved over time, the emergence of research focused on transformative leadership and social justice leadership, an analysis of how the bodies of research on the superintendency and social justice leadership intersect, and how superintendent preparation programs do or do not develop social justice-minded superintendents.

Oakes, Rogers, and Lipton (2006) provided some concrete examples of how to apply social justice practices within school districts. In this study, I determined that there are opportunities for future critical research to become more structured in better understanding the

core tenets superintendents leverage to implement social justice strategies. Shields (2010) took an initial step toward creating a more structured way of analyzing transformative leaders. Her conclusion that transformative leaders must focus on both critique and promise provides an opportunity to expand upon existing school leadership frameworks that can be applied to guide social justice–minded superintendents as they look to implement changes within their districts.

It is encouraging to witness the evolution of the role of the superintendent. However, without deliberate and critical reflection, we will not be able to identify opportunities to help guide superintendents in their roles. Clear definitions, a refined social justice framework for superintendents, and findings from semistructured interviews with superintendents can provide graduate program curricula and practitioners with better tools and support systems. Using Los Angeles (LA) County as a model, I conducted interviews for this study, which provide actionable examples of how superintendents reflect on their leadership style, define social justice, and implement social justice practices within their community. The interview results identified key lessons learned and best practices that can be used to support a critical mass of social justice–minded superintendents through actionable and practical research.

The Problem

For this study, I began by evaluating the role of the superintendent and how it has evolved over time. The historical role of the superintendent started as a schoolmaster who had limited authority. Since the 1800s, the majority of school district decisions were made by school boards (Glass et al., 2000). The role of the superintendent then evolved to become more of a managerial role or, at times, an authoritarian leader. Most recently, the role of the superintendent has become more focused on being an instructional leader or being the expert in the community

for all educational issues (Glass et al., 2000). There is also a small emerging body of literature that highlights the role of the superintendent as a change agent or a social justice leader (Furman, 2012).

A historical review of the superintendency also highlighted the difficulties and challenges superintendents face. Wimpelberg (1997) discussed the role of the superintendent as a broker constantly managing scarce resources. Wimpelberg argued that a superintendent must be able to focus on the financial, operational, and instructional issues of a district. He discussed how the magnitude and multitude of issues surrounding a superintendent can be overwhelming. He also talked about how superintendents must have a clear focus to successfully navigate all of these issues. In addition, the superintendent is surrounded by many influencers, including teachers, unions, parents, school board members, nonprofit leaders, principals, students, mayors, elected officials, and so forth. Superintendents must engage all stakeholders, but also must not allow one group to exert undue influence.

When analyzing what effects the tenure of superintendents, one must remain user centered. Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu's (2015) research highlighted the importance of remaining focused on the key user of your research rather than on all of the constituents involved; therefore, the specific role of the superintendent is the focus of this study.

Several researchers (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014; Glass et al., 2000; Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Petersen, Fusarelli, & Kowalski, 2008; Wimpelberg, 1997) have addressed the factors that impact the tenure of superintendents. A review of the literature identified five key challenges of the superintendency: (a) stressful working conditions, (b) expectations that superintendents be experts on everything, (c) funding issues and staff turnover

within a school district, (d) federal and state policy focused on quick results, and (e) the constant turnover of school board members. These challenges will be reviewed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

In addition to understanding the complex role of the superintendent, I reviewed the definitions of *social justice* and *transformative leadership*. Based on the research, it has been argued that a consistent definition is needed. These two terms are often used interchangeably in research articles, which leads to confusion. For example, Shields (2010) highlighted the challenge of other researchers using different definitions of transformative and social justice leadership. Furman (2012) argued that a clear definition of social justice is necessary to assist researchers and practitioners as they develop improved preparation programs and support systems for social justice–minded leaders.

One of the primary roles of transformative leaders is being an advocate for equity and challenger of the status quo without necessarily having a strong focus on engaging the community (Shields, 2010). Such leaders are often seen as pushing ahead and leading the charge for change. The literature on social justice also advocates for equity, but tends to focus more on themes of love, humanization, dialogue, and empowerment of the oppressed (Freire, 1998). I explored these concepts of social justice in greater detail and analyzed the results of interviews to determine if these elements should be included in a social justice framework that superintendents can use. Based on a review of current research on social justice and the superintendency, a social justice leader is defined as one who often creates the conditions for the oppressed to advocate and enact change, in contrast to the "transformative leader," who stands alone out in front of an issue (Freire, 1998). In this study, I leveraged the theoretical frameworks of transformative

leadership and social justice to see how they apply to the role of the superintendent. (See Figure 1.)

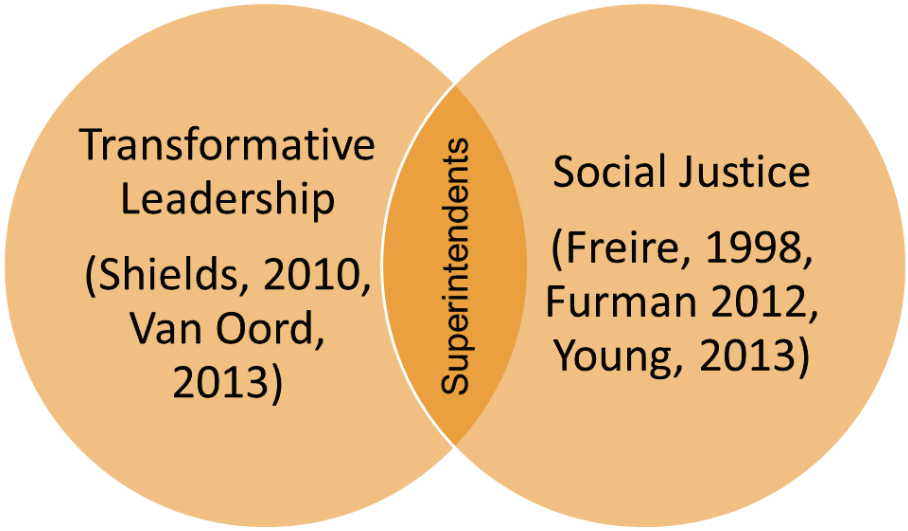

Figure 1. Intersection of social justice and the superintendency.

Theoretical Framework

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in research focused on social justice for educational leaders (Shields, 2010). Some authors clearly differentiate their definition of transformative leadership by defining it as an advocacy role (Shields, 2010). Social justice proponents, like Freire (1998), often do not focus on the leader as advocate but rather as one who focuses on creating the conditions for addressing inequities via humanization and dialogue. Oakes et al. (2006) discussed the importance of working with the community and developing leaders within the community to improve the community conditions. Young (2013) also discussed the importance of shared action, asserting, "It means that [we have] an obligation to

join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust" (p. 96).

Furman (2012) began to address the gap in the literature of how social justice principles can be applied in practice for school leaders. In her study, she highlighted a social justice framework for school leaders that leader preparation programs can use. I used Furman's framework, which identifies five dimensions for social justice leadership: (a) personal, (b) interpersonal, (c) communal, (d) systemic, and (e) ecological. Furman then stressed the importance of reflection and action in each dimension. This framework will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Research Question

The results of this study add to the understanding of researchers and practitioners by providing a brief analysis of the impact of superintendents on student outcomes; how the role of the superintendent has evolved over time; the emergence of research focused on social justice; and the analysis of how the bodies of research on the superintendency and social justice are starting to intersect. The primary research question for this study is, "How do superintendents within LA County define social justice and how have they implemented social justice tenets within their school districts?"

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how superintendents within LA County define social justice and how they implement social justice tenets within their districts. In addition, the results of this study provide aspiring and current superintendents with a social justice framework they can use to lead their school districts.

Significance

Even though the research on the superintendency shows an increased focus on social justice over the last decade, there is still a persistent and increasing income gap between affluent and low-income families. If this disturbing trend is going to be reversed, there must be a more deliberate focus on how education can be a driver to lift students and families out of poverty. If this country is truly dedicated to social change, leadership actions must be reviewed at the highest level within school systems—the superintendent. Although there are several studies on the role of principals and transformative leadership, and on principals that focus on social justice (Brown, 2004, 2006; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007), comparatively little is known about superintendents who exhibit transformative leadership and/or focus on social justice (Maxwell et al., 2013). The results of this study support expanding the current social justice framework used for school leaders and apply it to the superintendency. Graduate schools and superintendent preparation programs can leverage this framework to develop better tools and support systems to more effectively prepare future superintendents who will focus on resolving inequities within their communities.

Methodology

Given the complexities associated with school districts and the role of the superintendent, I conducted semistructured interviews (Flick, 2014) instead of open-ended interviews. Shields (2010) also conducted semistructured interviews with her participants. She then backward mapped, via interviews, the transformative leadership practices that the self-identified social justice principals in her study demonstrated. This approach resulted in specific and actionable findings that school leaders could apply to their schools. I used this approach and conducted

semistructured interviews and then analyzed the results of the interviews to existing social justice frameworks.

After conducting the interviews, I identified patterns and themes that can provide new insights into the actions superintendents take to enact change within their school districts and communities. I then compared the findings to Furman's (2012) framework identifying five dimensions for social justice leadership: (a) personal, (b) interpersonal, (c) communal, (d) systemic, and (e) ecological. I also compared the findings to Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich's (2009) framework for equity-oriented change agents (EOCA). Skrla et al.'s EOCA framework includes the following elements: (a) having an equity attitude, (b) avoiding demonization, (c) initiating courageous conversations, (d) demonstrating persistence, (e) remaining committed but patient, (f) maintaining an asset attitude, and (g) maintaining a coherent focus. The goal of this study was to better understand how superintendents in LA County viewed their role, their leadership style, and their approach to implementing social justice tenets within their districts.

Participants

Eight out of the 80 superintendents from LA County were selected to participate in this study. A diverse group of participants was selected based on race, age, gender, and district characteristics. The goal was to study similarities and differences among participants.

As Flick (2014) discussed, it is important to be cognizant when conducting elite or expert interviews. I believe that superintendents fall into both of these categories. Any statement that they make is very likely to end up on the local news or the local newspaper. In addition, many individuals look to superintendents for feedback or guidance as they are setting policy or procedures for school systems and individuals schools. Therefore, most superintendents are

reluctant to identify themselves during the interview process. Since the superintendents were comfortable being identified, I needed to ensure that they were open to sharing their true thoughts on sensitive subjects.

Instrumentation

For this qualitative study, an interview protocol was used to guide, but not restrict, the interview process. I took Goodall's (1993) advice to "willingly surrender to mystery" (p. 5). The flexibility of the interview process resulted in richer insights by allowing the conversation to flow in and out of the interview protocol.

Each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes. Each superintendent was asked the following initial interview protocol (see Appendix A):

1. Please share with me your journey that led you to the role of superintendent.
2. How do you define your leadership style?
3. What is your definition of social justice?
4. How have you implemented social justice principles in your district?
5. How were you prepared for the role of the superintendent and what was the focus on social justice?

Depending on the participant's answers, I asked probing questions to capture their thoughts and experiences.

Procedure

To accommodate the challenging schedules of the superintendents, the interviews were conducted at a time and place that was convenient for them. The goal was to create a comfortable environment for the participants to reflect on their beliefs and practices. To foster a more relaxed

interview and to be mindful of the pressure on the interviewer to collect data from an objective point of view, I focused a lot on preparation, as highlighted by Briggs (1986):

> The interviewer in thus subjected to conflicting pressures. She or he expects to be able to keep the interaction within the confines of the interview. The very success of that interview depends, however, on the researcher's capacity for allowing native communicative routines to work their way into the interview situation. (p. 28)

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Because participants were given the option of having their recorded responses confidential, my assumption is that they answered the interview questions candidly and truthfully. I also assumed that the interviewees felt comfortable speaking with another superintendent about their experiences.

Limitations

One major limitation of this study was the number of study participants. Rather than conducting a large-scale survey, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews with eight superintendents. I decided that spending more time with a few superintendents would provide richer insights into how they view their roles and how they apply social justice tenets. I felt that it was better to focus on depth instead of breadth, because I wanted to provide readers with specific and detailed insights from the interviewees.

Delimitations

One major delimitation of this study was its focus on superintendents within LA County. Given this geographical limitation, participants may report similar experiences based on the student demographics and district characteristics within LA County.

Another delimitation was the use of elite interviews, as defined by Flick (2014). Since I interviewed superintendents, I was mindful that it would be difficult for them to give me the time

to conduct multiple interviews. I conducted the majority of my interviews during the summer months, which tend to be slower times for superintendents. However, I was cognizant that many superintendents take vacation during the summer. Therefore, I was flexible with my schedule to accommodate their schedules.

Definitions of Key Terms

Social justice. Björk et al. (2014) defined social justice as "an ethical framework in which equity and achieving a primary social objective is given a priority. In its simplest form, equity is linked to redressing problems by giving more to those who have less" (p. 407).

Transformative leadership. Given the number of definitions for transformative leadership, it was important to clearly define what the term means so the findings can be clearly understood during the interview. Weiner (2003) defined transformative leadership as "an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility" (p. 89).

Organization of Dissertation

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the background of the study, the problem, the theoretical framework, the research questions, the purpose and significance of the study, and an overview of the methods used. Chapter 2 discusses the historical overview and context of the superintendency and social justice through a review of the established literature. Chapter 3 details the qualitative methods used during the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and analysis of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings on the role of superintendency.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The results of this study add to the understanding of researchers and practitioners by providing an analysis of how the role of the superintendency intersects with social justice. The primary research question for this study is: How do superintendents within LA County define social justice and to what extent have they implemented social justice tenets within their districts?

This literature review began with an analysis of the limited research on the impact of the superintendency on student outcomes. This review then explored the history of the superintendency and how it has relied on different leadership principles and characteristics to manage the internal and external challenges of leading a school district. Next, the review clarifies the different definitions of transformative leadership and social justice leadership. Shields's (2010) analysis of transformative leadership highlighted that many researchers have used different definitions of transformative leadership. I then analyzed the limited studies that explore the roles and characteristics of social justice–minded superintendents. Although there is a significant body of literature on superintendents and another on social justice, there is no comprehensive body on superintendents who focus on social justice issues (Maxwell et al., 2013). Finally, this review discusses the research on superintendent preparation programs. Furman (2012) argued that a clear definition of social justice can assist researchers and practitioners as they develop improved preparation programs and support systems for social justice–minded leaders.

Issues and Limitations of the Literature Search

Studies discussed in the literature provided valuable insights into how to recruit, develop, and support social justice–minded superintendents. Searches included combinations of the following keywords: superintendent, transformation, transformative, leadership, and social justice. Articles were accessed using the databases Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholar. Because of the limited number of results produced from the search on superintendents who focus on social justice, the review was expanded to include articles that focused on school leaders. Only articles that focused on social justice or transformative school leaders that were relevant to the superintendency were included in this literature review. The final limitation of this investigation was that articles specifically focused on the intersection of the superintendency and social justice exclusively spoke to on rural superintendents.

Impact of the Superintendent

The first section of this literature review looks at the impact of the role of superintendents on their district and community. There is a limited set of studies on the superintendent's impact on student outcomes. For example, Alsbury (2008) found that the stability of the superintendent position had a positive impact on a student's test scores. In addition, Waters and Marzano (2006) found a positive correlation between length of superintendent tenure in a district and student achievement. However, Grissom and Anderson (2012) found no correlation between short-term district test score growth and superintendent tenure. Wimpelberg (1997) discussed the challenge of judging a superintendent's effectiveness due to the variety of variables impacting student outcomes. Wimpelberg highlighted the importance and the challenge of judging superintendents on how well they help students grow in their learning.

Given the limited research on the impact of the superintendency, Grissom and Andersen (2012) stressed the importance of studying superintendent turnover to determine if superintendent turnover can hinder district reform and improvement. However, Grissom and Andersen noted that the research on superintendent turnover is very limited. Grissom and Anderson studied 215 superintendents starting in 2006 and found that 45% left their districts within 3 years. Grissom and Anderson noted the possible negative effects that constant leadership turnover can have on a school district in regard to instability and a lack of focus on student achievement.

Impact of Superintendent Turnover

Because of the limited number of studies focused on the impact of superintendent turnover, Grissom and Anderson (2015) reviewed the literature on city manager turnover to try to better understand some of the reasons why superintendents leave their districts. They developed a labor market framework that examined the employment decisions by school boards and superintendents. Grissom and Anderson determined that there was a mixture of factors that impact superintendent turnover. These factors included board disharmony, policy impacts, superintendent career advancement, and accountability pressures. These challenges are discussed in more detail in a future section of this literature review.

Alsbury (2008) highlighted that constant superintendent turnover can lead to lower staff morale due to uncertainty in leadership, which in turn can lead to principal and teacher turnover. Glass et al. (2000) argued that given the short tenure of less than 6 years for most superintendents and less than 3 years for urban superintendents, it is important to review the literature to determine the impact of superintendent turnover on a school district and, more

importantly, student outcomes. Further, Fullan's (2000) research states that it takes 5 years or more to implement systemic change; therefore, constant superintendent turnover could have negative impacts on the success of a school district due to staff uncertainty.

In order to better understand superintendent turnover, the next section reviews the role of the superintendent over the course of history to better understand the impact of the role on school communities and the types of leadership styles superintendents have exhibited over time.

Historical Review of the Superintendency

The superintendent leads the school district and ultimately hires, evaluates, and supports all employees. Researchers, including Callahan (1966), Carter and Cunningham (1997), Norton (1995), Kowalski (2005), and Björk et al. (2014), have studied and documented the evolution of the role of the superintendent over time. Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, and Ellerson (2011) discussed the complexity of the role of the superintendent and how it has changed over time:

> In order to appreciate the complexity of the superintendency and persons occupying the position, one must know the past and present. This pivotal position of school superintendent has evolved over more than 100 years, and contemporary practice is affected by a range of issues, which take on varying levels of importance from state-to-state and district-to-district. (p. 9)

A historical review of the research on the superintendency identified six distinct eras that defined the evolution of the role. From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, the community viewed the role of the superintendent as the schoolmaster or a teacher-scholar (Callahan, 1966). Then, in the early 1900s to the 1930s, the community viewed the role as a business manager (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Following the 1930s to the 1950s, the role evolved into that of a political leader or a statesperson (Norton, 1995). Next, the role of the superintendent started to focus on a

broader set of issues in the community, and many superintendents focused on the principles of an applied social scientist (Kowalski, 2005). More recently, the role of the superintendent expanded to value communication skills (Björk et al., 2014). Finally, starting in the early 2000s, the role turned into a community leader (Björk et al., 2014). During each of these phases, key historical events impacted the role of the superintendent. The following review analyzes each of these phases and how they shaped the significance and importance of the role of the superintendent. Table 1 highlights some of the key shifts in the role of the superintendent over the past two centuries.

Table 1

Historical Summary of the Role of the Superintendent

Era	Summary	Description	Researcher
Mid-1800s	Establishment of the role of the superintendent - School Master	The original role of a schoolmaster, with an appointed or elected lay board of education making almost all decisions of any importance.	Callahan, 1966
Early 1900s	Superintendent as a professional	Superintendents in most states became responsible for all operations in the district	Callahan, 1966; Carter & Cunningham, 1997
1930s to 1950s	Superintendents as statespeople	The role evolved into the role of a political leader	Norton, 1995
1950s to 1980s	Superintendent as applied social scientist	Superintendents started to focus on a broader set of issues and many superintendents focused on the principles of an applied social scientist	Kowalski, 2005
1980s to 2000s	Superintendent as a communicator	Superintendents engaged the community to respond to reforms	Björk et al., 2014
Early 2000s	Superintendents as experts (community leader)	Superintendents viewed as chief expert on schools in the community	Blumberg, 1985

Note. Adapted from *The study of the American school superintendency 2000. A look at the superintendent of education in the new millennium* by Glass et al., 2000, pp. 1–6.

Mid 1800s: Establishment of the Role of the Superintendent

According to Callahan (1966), the city of Buffalo, NY, appointed one of the first superintendents of schools in the nation, R. W. Haskins, in 1837. But Haskins resigned before the end of the year because he felt he lacked the power to make the changes that were expected of him. Oliver Steele replaced Haskins at the end of the year. That same year, the Massachusetts legislature appointed Horace Mann as the Commissioner of Education. Mann was known for being critical of the status quo. Mann visited Europe in 1845 to learn about the Prussian model of education to determine if it could be applied in the United States (Callahan, 1966). The Prussian model of education relied on structure, rules, and discipline. Mann was concerned with the unruly nature of the U.S. educational system and was interested in developing more hierarchy and organization within schools. After studying the Prussian model, Mann favored a role similar to that of a superintendent. After his return from Prussia, Mann formed a commission; the findings of the commission argued for the creation of a new role of superintendent for Boston schools (Callahan, 1966). Boston, however, did not establish the role of the superintendent until 1851 when it hired Nathan Bishop (Callahan, 1966).

The original role of the superintendent had characteristics similar to those of a schoolmaster. The superintendent was appointed or elected by a lay board of education. The board of education made almost all of the decisions of any importance. The superintendent primarily focused on ensuring quality of instruction and implementing curriculum (Spring, 1994). The superintendent had limited authority in the early years because school boards struggled with the idea of granting too much power to the superintendent. Although school boards began to see the importance of having one person—at that time, a man—responsible for

the educational outcomes of a community, local school boards of education did not want to relinquish the power that they had fought so hard to secure (Callahan, 1966).

It took over 30 years for the growth of superintendents to reach a critical mass. For example, the National Association of School Superintendents did not form until 1866 (Callahan, 1966). In his research, Callahan noted that the role of the superintendent did not gain true authority and power until 1890. Callahan gave examples of the more prominent superintendents during the early years: William Torrey Harris, superintendent of St. Louis schools; John Philbrook, superintendent of Boston schools; and William Maxwell, superintendent of Brooklyn schools. The community viewed these superintendents as scholars who focused on arts and philosophy. Even though the community respected the role of the superintendent, superintendents had limited power.

Callahan (1966) argued that the rapid increase in the population of the United States from 1890 to 1900 increased the importance of the superintendency. As more states joined the United States of America, and more schools served the children of each state, a critical need for a leader, a superintendent, to lead each school system emerged. In the late 1890s, the superintendent shed the role of the schoolmaster or clerical leader and became the true leader of a school system. By the early 1900s, the role of superintendent had evolved into a professional who could focus on all aspects of school districts. Most superintendents embraced this role by implementing top-down mandates (Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

Early 1900s: Superintendents as Professionals or Business Managers

Carter and Cunningham (1997) discussed how, in the early 1900s, superintendents in most states became responsible for all district operations and their day-to-day decisions no

longer required close examination by the local board of education. At this time, the role of the superintendent evolved into more of a managerial role, or at times an authoritative leader (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Kowalski (1995) noted that during the 1920s most school boards consisted of businessmen who wanted to see business concepts applied to schools. Boards expected superintendents to handle the instructional and operational needs of the district (Kowalski, 1995). Superintendents turned to current-day management principles to help them address these expanded responsibilities.

The 1920s brought about a lot of change to U.S. businesses, and school districts quickly tried to catch up to the needs of the workforce. Several school boards and superintendents attempted to transform school districts through the principles of scientific management into industrial models (Norton, 1995). Norton (1995) discussed how superintendents during this time period focused on specializing roles, and analyzed time management to improve efficiencies. Norton also discussed how school districts modeled their behaviors after successful businesses. Callahan (1966) highlighted the shift in the late 1920s of the community's view of the superintendency by quoting a revolutionary superintendent Jesse Newlon. In 1925, Newlon worried, "The greatest danger that besets superintendents at the present time is that they will become merely business managers" (as cited in Callahan, 1966, p. 211). Many superintendents, Newlon said, were "more concerned about the purchase of pencils and paper, about the employment of janitors and clerks, about mere business routines than they are about the educative process that goes on in the classroom" (as cited in Callahan, 1966, p. 210).

This era and the subsequent era of the superintendency were significantly impacted by the economy. During the mid-1900s, superintendents had to adapt to how they viewed their role

because of the financial realities of the day. During the Great Depression, it was critical for superintendents to find and secure scarce resources for their school districts to survive (Kowalski, 1995).

Mid 1900s: Superintendents as Statespeople

The Great Depression had a profound impact on the role of the superintendent (Kowalski, 1995). During this time period, superintendents had to compete with other government-funded agencies for resources. To secure even limited funding, superintendents had to advocate for the funding needed to run their schools. Prior to this time period, the superintendent tended not to engage in political activities. Before this time period, the community frowned upon superintendents who engaged in politics, as it expected them to focus on the school district's management and instructional issues (Kowalski, 1995). However, when funding became scarce, the community embraced the evolution of the superintendent into a political figure.

Callahan (1966) argued that the Great Depression required superintendents to engage in a more holistic and democratic process. Superintendents needed to rely on engaging a broader group of constituents to move their educational priorities forward and rely on more limited funding. During the next era, superintendents needed to lean on their ability to adapt and engage the community to address national concerns about falling behind the Russians in scientific advancement.

1950s to 1980s: Superintendents as Applied Social Scientists

Kowalski (2005) argued that the launch of Sputnik in the 1950s defined the next shift in the role of the superintendent as an applied social scientist. With the nation focused on scientific advancement, the expectations for superintendents evolved again. Community leaders required

superintendents to leverage scientific methods to justify their decision-making. Kowalski (2005) highlighted the similarities of this role shift to that of the business manager role in the early 1900s: “In both instances, public dissatisfaction was atypically high, school administration professors were seeking to elevate their profession's status, and administration was described as being distinctively different from and more demanding than teaching” (p. 10). It is clear from this analysis that when public dissatisfaction with schooling reaches a tipping point, political leaders often put pressure on top leadership to reform their roles.

The 1950s and 1960s saw an increase in the federal government’s level of influence on education. Most significantly, the 1954 Supreme Court’s ruling on Brown v. Board of Education required superintendents to focus on ensuring that all students received a quality education via school integration. For the first time, superintendents were required to ensure that all students, regardless of race, were served by their schools. By 1957, superintendents were at the center of integration efforts within their communities. One of the most significant events was the 1957 integration efforts at Central High School in Little Rock, AK. The Board of Education and the superintendent were put in the national spotlight when the National Guard was ordered to ensure that the “Little Rock Nine” access their right to attend a White school. Björk et al. (2014) also discussed how the federal government influenced public education through the general welfare clause in the U.S. Constitution. He highlighted the importance of the federal school funding tied to the 1964 Civil Rights Act to support school desegregation.

Kerchner, Menefee-Libey, Mulfinger, and Clayton (2008) discussed the racial tensions in the 1960s and the impact on Los Angeles schools. They highlighted the outcomes of the 1963 Crawford v. Board of Education of Los Angeles desegregation lawsuit, the 1965 Watts Riots,

and the McCone Commission Report, which found that poor educational opportunities contributed to the racial tensions within Los Angeles. Similar to other school districts, Los Angeles's had to focus on uniting a community while remaining focused on educational outcomes for all students.

The signing of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA) by Lyndon B. Johnson on April 11, 1965, highlighted the pressure that education reforms added to the superintendency. President Johnson believed that education could help lift individuals out of poverty. As more and more research highlighted the low educational outcomes for minorities, pressure to change the educational system increased. The Johnson Administration believed that the ESEA could increase educational outcomes and reduce poverty (Kowalski, 2005). After the ESEA passed, superintendents had to analyze data in their communities and implement strategies to address the concerns highlighted by the data. Few superintendents received training to handle this new responsibility.

Kowalski (2005) discussed that when superintendents began to apply social science methodologies, such as empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty in their research and practice, they also began to question their ability to do this type of work successfully. The focus on scientific methods began to subside in the 1980s when a new crisis hit the field of education (Kowalski, 2005).

1980s to 2000s: Superintendents as Communicators

In 1983, another education alarm bell rang in the United States. The damning report on the state of education in America, *A Nation at Risk,* required superintendents to organize and lead committees and taskforces to address the crisis in education that the report highlighted

(Björk et al., 2014). The report underlined the need for the U.S. educational system to focus on math, science, and reading. The United States was falling behind other countries. Superintendents quickly realized they needed to focus more of their time and energy on communicating the successes and challenges of their districts. In the 1980s, communities heavily scrutinized the expertise and the role of superintendents. If schools were in such disrepair, the public wanted to know what superintendents had been doing for so many years and why schools were not doing better.

Given the intense pressure to reform schools, a debate about who should be in charge of school districts emerged. Should the board of education or the superintendent set the course for school improvement? The ongoing struggle between boards of education and superintendents defined the 1980s and 1990s (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Bolman and Deal discussed how superintendents had trouble establishing their position within their communities due to increasing role uncertainty and conflict with school boards. In addition, the larger role and influence of the U.S. Department of Education compounded the tension between superintendents and school boards.

School districts witnessed an increase in top-down reforms enforced by the U.S. Department of Education in the 1990s (Kowalski, 2005). To address the increased pressure resulting from statewide standards, testing, and accountability measures, superintendents evolved to become proactive communicators within their communities. Superintendents needed to adapt their leadership styles to effectively respond to the increase pressure placed on teachers and schools. Successful superintendents clearly communicated a sense of urgency, and at the same time conveyed a sense of calm and stability as teachers and schools endured countless changes

and reforms. Johnson (1996) discussed the need for superintendents to either lead the change or manage the change. Unsuccessful superintendents in the 1980s and 1990s did not proactively engage their communities in productive conversations about the changes impacting their districts, students, and families (Kowalski, 2005). As superintendents refined their skills to become better communicators, the expectation that superintendents become the community expert on educational issues grew.

Today: Superintendents as Community Leaders

Most recently, because of the intersection of educational policies and school management, the role of the superintendent has become more focused on being the expert in the community for all educational issues. Björk et al. (2014) detailed how the role of the superintendent has turned into the chief educational expert in the community where they serve:

> During the last two decades the intensity and complexity of educational reform in the United States of America have heightened interest among policymakers, practitioners, and professors in large-scale, systemic change. As a consequence, superintendents are being viewed as pivotal actors in the complex algorithm for managing districts and leading policy implementation efforts. (p. 444)

Communities now expect superintendents to discuss all issues related to education. In addition, communities now require superintendents to connect their school districts to social services, nonprofits, city services, and the business community (Björk et al., 2014). Superintendents must build and strengthen partnerships with community agencies to meet the social-emotional learning indicators of a child's academic success. Superintendents can no longer focus only on the instructional element of their schools.

In addition, superintendents must strengthen partnerships with the business community, colleges, and universities. Given the global competitive pressures on the U.S. workforce, a high

school diploma no longer guarantees a job. Björk et al. (2014) argued that superintendents must focus on large-scale systemic reform to prepare students so they can compete in the global economy.

Björk et al. (2014) highlighted the complex changes in the role of the superintendency, asserting, "During the past three decades, the intensity, magnitude, and duration of educational reform heightened interest in large-scale, systemic changes has fundamentally altered the way teachers, principals, and superintendents work" (p. 458). Given the complexity of these changes, superintendents must continually reflect on their leadership approach and adapt to meet changing demands and expectations.

The Changing Role of the Superintendent

This historical review of the superintendency highlighted how the role of the superintendent has evolved to mirror the social, economic, and political trends of the country (Björk et al., 2014). The research also highlighted how communities have historically rewarded superintendents who focused on management responsibilities and successfully responded to the pressures of school reform (Callahan, 1966). To better understand how to improve the effectiveness of the role of the superintendent, the next section reviews the research on the challenges superintendents face as they lead their districts.

Challenges of the Superintendency

The superintendent is surrounded by many influencers, including teachers, unions, parents, school board members, nonprofit leaders, principals, students, mayors, elected officials, and so on. When analyzing what impacts the tenure of superintendents, it is important to remain user centered. Bryk et al. (2015) highlighted in their work that it is important to remain focused

on the key user of your research rather than focus on all constituents. Although it is important to study the influencers and their relationship to the superintendent, the focus of this study centered on the research that examined the challenges of the superintendency through the lens of the superintendent.

Several researchers (Björk et al., 2014; Glass et al., 2000; Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Petersen et al., 2008; Wimpelberg, 1997) have discussed the multitude of factors that impact the tenure of a superintendent. This review of the literature identified five key challenges of the superintendency: (a) stressful working conditions, (b) expectations that superintendents be experts on everything, (c) funding issues and staff turnover within a school district, (d) federal, and state policy focused on quick results, and (e) the constant turnover of school board members.

Stressful Working Conditions

The historical review of the superintendency highlighted the need for superintendents to be effective communicators (Kowalski, 2005). Thirty-four percent of the 118 superintendents interviewed by Petersen et al. (2008) indicated that job-related stress was a moderate or major problem. Björk et al. (2014) stated, "Superintendents are challenged by the need to utilize leadership skills that enable them to work with and through others" (p. 459). In addition to managing stressful working conditions, superintendents must be experts in all matters that impact their school district (Björk et al., 2014).

Expected Experts

As highlighted above in the historical review of superintendents, the role of the superintendent has become more complicated over time. Superintendents are now expected to be the instructional, operational, political, and community expert for all educational items (Björk et

al., 2014). Wimpelberg (1997) described the role of the superintendent as a broker who is constantly navigating scarce resources. The expectation to be the expert and be responsible for every aspect of a district can often lead to a superintendent's resignation or termination. Grissom and Andersen (2012) proposed that growing superintendents from within a school district may be one solution to mitigate the challenge of a superintendent being a community expert since they are already intimately knowledgeable about the issues facing the community.

In addition, superintendents must constantly stay abreast of the changing educational landscape and speak intelligently about each of the current changes. More importantly, they must successfully lead their district through the various changes and shifts in learning, especially due to the nation's focus on standards and accountability (Glass et al., 2000). The next section takes a closer look at the impact of federal and state policy on the role of the superintendent.

Federal and State Policy

Björk et al. (2014) discussed the importance of superintendents strategically planning for the implementation of state and federal educational reform mandates. In the two decades leading up to 2018, federal and state expectations to raise test scores have placed significant pressure on both superintendents and school boards to produce quick results. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001, school districts across the country immediately felt pressured to have all students demonstrate proficiency on standardized tests by 2014 (Björk et al., 2014). NCLB created an immense amount of pressure for school districts and superintendents to implement strategies and support systems to help all students. Remarkably, however, this pressure to achieve higher results did not come with a significant increase in funding. Seventy percent of the 118 superintendents surveyed by Petersen et al. (2008) indicated

that state accountability programs were a moderate or severe problem that they had to address. This was particularly true for urban and rural school districts with large populations of students who are low income, English learners, and/or special needs. As Kirp (2013) highlighted in *Improbable Scholars*, there are no quick fixes to educating all children. It takes a persistent and methodical approach to improve school systems and requires adequate and consistent funding levels.

Funding Issues and Staff Turnover

Another factor that has led to the short tenure rate of superintendents is the lack of adequate funding. Glass et al. (2000) stated that school districts have faced inadequate funding since the Great Depression. Eighty-one percent of the 118 superintendents that Petersen et al. (2008) surveyed rated inadequate district financing as a moderate or major problem. Björk et al. (2014) also discussed the constant debate between progressives and conservatives over education funding levels. Conservatives want to focus on efficiency, while progressives want to focus on adequacy and equity. The constant financial debates increased the level of stress and uncertainty that superintendents experience, which also has an impact on staff turnover and stability within school districts.

Downturns in the economy can cause superintendents to drastically reduce their teaching and staff workforce. Kowalski's (2013) research showed that 71% of the superintendents he studied in 2010 stated that funding levels were problematic. The frustration of constantly finding quality principals and teachers can lead to superintendents resigning or retiring from their positions. Grissom and Andersen (2012) also highlighted the trickle-down effect of constant superintendent turnover and how it increases principal and teacher turnover. One of the major

factors in the tenure of superintendents is their relationship with their school boards (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). The next section explores this challenge more closely.

School Boards

Grissom and Andersen (2012) stated, "The relationship between the superintendent and the school board that supervises him or her is a central aspect of the superintendency" (p. 1,154). With most school board member terms averaging 4 years, it is very challenging for superintendents to build and maintain a cohesive governance team. This is especially true because most school board elections are staggered, resulting in most school districts having elections every other year. During some elections, opponents to the incumbent can leverage the superintendent as a target and campaign to oust the current superintendent. Glass et al. (2000) found that conflict with the school board is often a contributing factor in a superintendent's exit. In addition, coalitions can form that pit existing school board members against each other. All of this politicking can take a toll on a superintendent during a campaign. After the campaign, the superintendent is the person who mends relationships and rebuilds trust with existing and new board members (Grissom & Anderson, 2012).

In addition, most school board members are not required to pass a certification course in governance before they run for office. This lack of experience and/or expertise can result in a power struggle between the superintendent and new school board members. Some school board members, after they are elected, begin to micromanage the superintendent. Glass et al. (2000) discussed the challenge of inexperienced board members in key governance and school district management functions and the strain that can cause on superintendent and board relationships. Glass et al. highlighted the importance for new board member training and orientations.

Managing the Challenges of the Superintendency

Superintendents must rely on their leadership skills to manage the challenges of the superintendency. The next section explores and defines the following leadership styles—transactional leadership, transformative leadership, and social justice leadership—to better understand how superintendents can serve their students.

Overview of Leadership Styles

The topic of leadership has been studied extensively over the years. Northouse (2007) argued that the study of leadership is a complex process with multiple dimensions. Northouse has defined leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). Northouse explored how scholars defined leadership as a power relationship between leaders and followers, as a transformational process that motivates followers to do more, or through a skills perspective that analyzes the traits of leaders. The focus of this study is primarily on transformative types of leadership and how this style of leadership applies to the role of the superintendent. The rationale for this decision is the close relationship between transformative leadership styles and social justice leadership tenets.

In reviewing the literature on transformative and social justice leadership, there were several instances where the terms were used interchangeably. The research analyzed in this literature review often overlapped and intermixed the concepts of transformative and social justice leadership. This overlap has created some level of confusion within the field of researchers (Shields, 2010). Understanding the intermingling of the terms of transformative leadership and social justice is not necessarily a challenge, but it is important to the definition and intent of the authors and their research is important.

Some of the key differences between transactional, servant leadership, transformative, and social justice leadership are highlighted in Table 2. The following paragraphs describe each of these styles and explain the nuanced differences between each style to highlight the importance of clearly defining leadership for social justice. As the Table 2 shows, leadership is concerned with negotiations under the transactional leadership framework, advocacy under transformative leadership, and harmony with the individuals whom you serve in the social justice leadership model.

Table 2

Comparison of Key Leadership Tenets

Tenets	Transactional leadership	Servant leadership	Transformative leadership	Social justice leadership
Researchers	Northouse (2007), Shields (2010)	Sergiovanni (2013), Parris and Peachey (2013), and Lowney (2003).	Shields (2010), Van Oord (2013), Oakes et al. (2006), Young (2013), Weiner (2003)	Freire (1970, 1998), Theoharis (2007), Furman (2012), Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks (2009), Blackmore (2002)
Common Tenets	Exchange, negotiation, persuasion, and power	Being teachable, showing concern for others, demonstrating discipline, and seeking the greatest good for the organization	Liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, justice, moral courage, advocacy, activism, and, participation	Humanization, praxis, unfinishedness, dialogue, problem-posing pedagogy, critical literacy, trust, love, humanity, hope, responsibility, recognition, and reciprocity

Defining Transformative Leadership

Shields's (2010) analysis of transformative leadership highlighted that many researchers used different definitions of transformative leadership. One of the primary roles of

transformative leaders is to be an advocate for equity and a challenger of the status quo (Shields, 2010). While there are different definitions, advocacy is at the heart of transformative leadership. For this study, Weiner's (2003) definition of transformative leadership was used. Weiner defined transformative leadership as "an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility" (p. 89).

Shields (2010) also leveraged Weiner's definition and implemented a methodology whereby she could backward map, via interviews, the transformative leadership practices that two self-identified social justice principals demonstrated. This approach resulted in specific and actionable findings that school leaders could apply to their school communities. Even though this literature review identified several studies on the role of principals and their focus on transformative leadership tenets, there are few articles on superintendents who exhibit transformative leadership attributes (Maxwell et al., 2013).

To implement transformative leadership principles, leaders must work with their communities (Shields, 2010). Oakes et al. (2006) focused on the importance of transformative leaders dedicating their time to working with the community and developing leaders within the community to improve the conditions of a community. Young (2013) also discussed the importance of a shared action model to initiate change in contrast to a single leader who independently leads the change. She asserted, "It means that [we have] an obligation to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust" (p. 96).

Van Oord (2013) discussed the importance of engaging communities via a five-step process: (a) evaluation of current practice, (b) deliberation on how to improve, (c) drafting a development plan, (d) dialogue with all stakeholders, and (e) the decision-making process. He argued that engaging communities in all five steps enables individuals to be part of the change process. He also differentiated transactional leadership from transformative leadership by highlighting the concerns with transactional leaders and how their actions can lead to dehumanization (Van Oord, 2013). Although working with communities is an important skill for leaders, it is also critical to serve and build the community so its members are empowered to address the hardships they face.

Delineating Between Transactional and Transformative Leadership

While the literature clearly delineates the difference between transactional leadership and transformational types of leadership, it does not provide examples of how transformative leaders succeed in their roles. One study by Lugg and Shoho (2006) discussed how school administrators who fail to attend to the managerial functions in their districts will not last long in their positions. Lugg and Shoho also highlighted how school administrators who ignore the transformative leadership aspects of their jobs are still able to keep their positions. In their study, they discussed how leaders with a social justice lens have an obligation to focus their change efforts beyond the schoolhouse walls and must be prepared to address the politics they will face. Lugg and Shoho's research highlighted the tension between a managerial role and a social justice–role orientation. Managerial roles do not always place value on meeting the needs of the community. The authors do a good job of highlighting the tension superintendents encounter when trying to focus on social justice issues; however, their review did not identify the essential tenets for a

superintendent to become a successful social justice leader. The focus of this study builds upon their research and adds to the literature so superintendents can use it to reflect on the key social justice tenets leaders should exhibit within their roles as superintendents.

Defining Servant Leadership

In his research on servant leadership, Sergiovanni (2013) highlighted that "the most important thing is to serve the values and ideas that help shape the school as a covenantal community" (p. 377). Sergiovanni also delineated the difference of *power to* versus *power over*. He went on to discuss the desire for servant leaders to seek first to serve, to focus more on working with others to implement shared goals rather than trying to force or coerce others to do what they want them to do.

Parris and Peachey (2013) also identified the importance of team-level effectiveness. They discussed how servant leadership can result in greater effectiveness by creating a culture of trust and collaboration. Parris and Peachey identified the following four servant leadership values in their research: being teachable, showing concern for others, demonstrating discipline, and seeking the greatest good for the organization.

Lowney (2003) discussed similar principles when he discussed Jesuit leadership. In the book *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices From a 450-Year-Old Company That Changed the World*, Lowney discussed and defined the four main principles of Jesuit leadership: self-awareness, ingenuity, love, and heroism. Self-awareness is the process leaders undergo to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Ingenuity is the ability to study and understand the world in order to adapt and innovate. Love is the ability to engage with everyone in a positive attitude and

to focus on compassion. Finally, heroism is the ability to see a situation that requires change and to have the courage to address that situation.

Overview of Social Justice Leaders

Jean-Marie et al. (2009) stated that the concept of social justice for education leaders is not clearly defined and is often contested. Jean-Marie et al. argued that it is important for the field of education to take a step back and look at how researchers in other fields analyzed leaders who implemented social justice principles. Given the limited research addressing educational leaders who focus on social justice within their school communities, the work of Paulo Freire was used for this study. Freire (1998) argued that individuals who focus on social justice must focus on dialogue and, more importantly, must create conditions for the oppressed to become empowered.

A Freirean Lens to Social Justice Leadership

Paulo Freire is best known for his focus on developing teachers so they can work with their communities to overcome oppression. Many of his theories can and have been applied to leadership. Instead of encouraging leaders to be advocates, Freire encourages leaders to focus on how to create the conditions for addressing inequities via love, humanization, and dialogue (Freire, 1998). Freire asserted that social justice leaders tend to create the conditions for the oppressed to advocate and enact change (Freire, 1998). The next section discusses the historical leadership styles superintendents have exhibited and analyzes the literature that highlights superintendents who leveraged transformative or social justice principles.

Leadership Styles Historically Exhibited by Superintendents

After reviewing the literature on the historical role of the superintendent, it is clear that the role of the superintendent has tended to focus on either transactional or transformational leadership styles. Burns (1978) described a transactional leader as one who focuses on the means for leading. This type of leader exchanges one thing for another to lead an organization. Burns described a transformational leader as one who focuses on improving organizational qualities and effectiveness. For superintendents to truly address inequities in their communities, Shields (2010) argued that they need to exhibit transformative leadership tenets. Though the research on superintendents who have use transformative or social justice leadership principles is limited, the tenets of transformative leadership were explored in greater detail to determine if superintendents have use them as they lead their school districts.

Roles and Characteristics of Social Justice-Minded Superintendents

To better understand how superintendents implement social justice tenets, this review of the literature identified a small group of researchers who focused on defining the roles of social justice-minded superintendents. Alsbury and Whitaker (2007) called for researchers and practitioners to extend the research on how to implement social justice principles within organizations. In addition, Alsbury and Whitaker stressed the importance of superintendents listening to the voices of diverse stakeholders and interest groups.

Emerging Research on Educational Leaders Focusing on Social Justice

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in research that focused on social justice for educational leaders (Shields, 2010). Furman (2012) began to address the gap in the literature on how social justice principles can be applied in practice for school leaders. In her study, she

highlighted a social justice framework for school leaders that leader preparation programs can use (Furman, 2012). Furman identified five dimensions for social justice leadership: personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological. She then explored the importance of reflection and action in each dimension.

Personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological dimensions. Furman (2012) discussed the importance of leaders focusing on praxis across personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological dimensions. Each dimension requires a different and nuanced approach. However, Furman shows the importance of each dimension by nesting them within one another.

Reflection and action. Furman (2012) discussed the importance of reflection before taking action. Furman discussed the need to pause and ask the question, "What is the nature of reflection related to this idea, and what is the nature of action related to it?" (p. 204). Leaders must determine how their actions will impact the children that they serve. Furman highlighted the need to develop critical leadership. This type of leadership will deconstruct the systems of education and analyze how these systems perpetuated inequities in our society. Furman's analysis aligned with many of Freire's (1998) principles.

Other researchers who focused on the role of principals and how they implemented social justice tenets include Brown (2004, 2006) and Theoharis (2007). Brown studied 40 leaders in an educational administration program. Brown's research focused on how emerging leaders who focused on social justice emphasized critical reflection, rational discourse, and policy praxis. Although her research highlighted the importance of reflection, it did not focus on the importance of dialogue. Brown's focus on reflection was leveraged in this study, but I also

included an opportunity for participants to discuss the importance and challenge of having dialogue within their communities.

Theoharis (2007) also focused on social justice principles in his research on leadership. Theoharis's research focused on seven school leaders and how they were implementing social justice principles within their schools. His research provided a framework for other researchers to use when examining the traits of a leader with a social justice orientation. In addition, Theoharis's research discussed and analyzed the resistance social justice leaders faced. This research provided initial data for practitioners to develop strategies to address the resistance that they may encounter within their communities. Although Theoharis studied individuals with a social justice orientation, it is unclear if he focused on the most impactful tenets of being a social justice leader. The tenets Theoharis used included raising student achievement, improving school structures, recentering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture and community.

Although it is important to analyze previous research on transformative leadership and social justice leadership at the principal level, it is even more imperative to review research that is focused exclusively on the role of the superintendent. Even though there are many similarities between the roles, there are enough differences to make it necessary to study research that is focused exclusively on the role of the superintendent. Some of those differences include: working directly with a school board, being responsible for systemic/district-wide changes, and being the number one point of contact for the community. This review of the literature also analyzed research on transformative leadership and social justice leadership as it applies to superintendents.

Limitations of the Research Focused on Social Justice-Minded Superintendents

The review of the literature identified two research articles written by Maxwell et al. (2013, 2014) that focused exclusively on the superintendency and social justice. Maxwell et al. conducted two qualitative case studies of rural superintendents from Texas, which allowed them to gain a deeper knowledge of their subjects. By utilizing an interview methodology, they could ask follow-up questions and record additional insights.

The first study conducted by Maxwell et al. (2013) used Skrla et al.'s (2009) EOCA framework. The researchers found that the three respondents highlighted seven similar characteristics as mentioned in the EOCA. Those characteristics included: (a) demonstrates an equity attitude, (b) avoids demonization, (c) initiates courageous conversations, (d) demonstrates persistence, (e) remains committed but patient, (f) maintains an asset attitude, and (g) maintains a coherent focus.

Maxwell et al.'s (2014) second study did not use Skrla et al.'s EOCA framework; instead, it focused on the intersection of rurality, resiliency, and social justice. Maxwell et al. identified four themes in their study: (a) attraction to the work, (b) challenges encountered in the work, (c) strategies to approach challenges in the work, and (d) strategies to sustain the work.

Another study that focused on superintendents and how they viewed their leadership style was conducted by Bird and Wang (2013). Bird and Wang surveyed 301 superintendents in the Southeast region of the United States to determine which category those leaders would select to define their leadership style: autocratic, laissez-faire, democratic, servant, situational, or transformational. Bird and Wang found the respondents did not have a consistent view on how they viewed their leadership styles. This variability could be attributed to a lack of clarity in the

leadership style definitions. Another reason for this variability could be explained by the context of each superintendent's district at the time of the survey. To address the inconsistencies shown by how respondents categorized their leadership styles, Bird and Wang proposed implementing an "authentic" leadership framework that includes moral integrity, relational transparency, balanced processing, and self-awareness. As it did not appear that the tenets of "authentic leadership" would directly address the concerns of the oppressed or students who are not being served equitably, Bird and Wang's framework was not used for this study.

Another researcher that provided a framework for analyzing the intersection of leadership and social justice was Blackmore (2002). Blackmore's (2002) framework focused on leading "for whom and for what" (p. 212). To encourage more substantial conversations about leadership, Blackmore argued that the focus of the conversation should be on responsibility, recognition, and reciprocity. Compared to Bird and Wang's (2013) framework, Blackmore's framework provided more direction and clarity for social justice leaders. For example, rather than just relying on Bird and Wang's balanced processing approach focused on data, Blackmore argued that it is important to look past the data and recognize cultural differences and historical influences that impact the data. If the data are not critically analyzed for current and historical remnants of oppression, leadership will never be able to address the inequities that are so pervasive (Blackmore, 2002). Blackmore argued that data review should be only one piece of the puzzle that is analyzed. As Furman and Gruenewald (2004) suggested, it is critical for social justice leaders to question assumptions about data and progress. By looking past the data and engaging in critical dialogue from a human lens, superintendents can work with their community to enact authentic change to benefit everyone.

Analyzing the Research Methods Used for Social Justice Superintendent Studies

The primary methodology used by researchers to study social justice leaders was interviews. One of the challenges with interviews is that respondents do not always understand the terms. Alsbury and Whitaker (2007) highlighted this issue in their study. Respondents in their study had difficulty defining social justice. Therefore, Alsbury and Whitaker broadened their interview question to ask about "what was best for all students" (p. 160). Rather than broadening the definition of social justice as Alsbury and Whitaker proposed, another option would be to leverage a framework, like Blackmore (2002) and Maxwell et al. (2013) did to help superintendents make meaning out of the findings. If Alsbury and Whitaker added Blackmore's tenets of responsibility, recognition, and reciprocity, it is possible their findings provided better insights into how leaders view their role in enabling social justice.

An additional challenge with interviews is the time they require, which tends to translate into smaller sample sizes. Maxwell et al.'s (2013, 2014) studies are examples of research with small sample sizes. Their first study had three superintendents and their second study numbered five (Maxwell et al., 2013, 2014). Theoharis (2007) also had a small sample size of seven principals, and he included himself in the study. The number of interviews conducted for this study was eight, making it necessary to highlight the benefits and limitations as a result of the sample size.

Superintendent Preparation Programs

Currently, most superintendents receive their training for the position via a doctoral program or independent training academies (Petersen et al., 2008). Glass et al. (2000) noted that in 2000, 45% of all superintendents surveyed had earned their doctorate. While doctorate

programs are supportive (given the low tenure rates of superintendents), they must be assessed to determine what is needed to better prepare superintendents for their roles and to provide superintendents with strategies that will facilitate longer tenure rates and better prepare leaders to implement social justice practices within their districts. Petersen et al. (2008) noted that research on the effectiveness of superintendent preparation is limited. There is an opportunity for future researchers to explore this topic in greater detail.

Challenges With Current Superintendent Preparation Programs

There has been a debate about whether traditional university programs or new programs like the Broad Superintendents Academy adequately prepare individuals to become superintendents. Miller (2012) took a critical stance of the Broad Superintendent's Academy, stating, "My deeper concern is with the stated imperatives of neoliberal audit culture as the starting point and guiding reality in the training of educational leaders—regardless of its location in universities or the training academies of the venture philanthropists" (p. 9). Miller was concerned about the Broad Academy's focus on accountability measures and the achievement gap instead of focusing on justice. However, in response to Miller's article, Gabbard (2013) critiqued the role of universities in preparation of superintendents. Gabbard queried leaders and professors at schools of education: "Do we know for a fact that the curriculum of Broad's Academy differs significantly from their own programs?" (p. 1). Gabbard then challenged schools of education to clearly explain or detail plans for focusing on a new approach to educational leadership. Both authors echoed Brown's (2004) argument that developing leaders who focus on social justice will require a "fundamental rethinking of content, delivery, and assessment" (p. 88).

In Petersen et al.'s (2008) study, they analyzed the survey results of 118 novice superintendents from California, Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio to better understand how satisfied those superintendents felt their preparation programs prepared them for their roles. Petersen et al. defined novice superintendents as individuals who were in their first year as a superintendent. The results indicated mixed feelings; while 92% of participants felt they were prepared to be a democratic leader, and 84% felt they were prepared to be an instructional leader, only 57% felt prepared to work effectively with school boards, and a mere 41% felt capable of engaging in political activities (Petersen et al., 2008). Based on these survey results, novice superintendents highlighted how current preparation programs did not spend enough time addressing the challenges that influence superintendent turnover.

Brown's (2004) research concluded that most preparation programs focused on studying best practices and successes of superintendents. Typically, case studies and guest speakers highlight how they have been successful. Although this is important, it is also important to study failures. Brown argued that it is important for future superintendents to study life histories, controversial readings, and participate in diversity panels during their preparation programs. Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) advocated for preparation programs to dedicate a safe space for analyzing the successes and failures of superintendents. Capper et al. believed that if space is not created during the preparation program, future superintendents will need to learn how to cope with struggles and failures on the job in a very public setting. To improve leadership preparation programs, Capper et al. proposed a framework to guide participants through discussions about social justice.

Redefining Leadership Preparation Programs

By studying the current expectations of the role of the superintendency and marrying those expectations with social justice tenets, Capper et al.'s (2004) proposed framework could assist preparation programs in building social justice-minded superintendents. Capper et al.'s framework consists of the following domains: critical consciousness, knowledge, and practical skills. They argued that curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment must be oriented toward social justice. In addition, Kowalski (2005) argued that, given the historical dominance of White men in the role of the superintendent position, it is critical for women and people of color to be reflected in superintendent preparation program faculty and curricula.

Based on the literature, it is clear that current superintendent leadership programs do not provide prospective superintendents with enough support and research to effectively implement change within their communities. Even though current programs do not fully embed social justice tenets in their program, there is an opportunity to build upon prior research by interviewing superintendents within LA County to better understand how they were prepared for their role and to what extent social justice was embedded in their preparation program.

Conclusion

This literature review identified significant bodies of literature on superintendents and on social justice. However, there does not appear to be a comprehensive body of literature on superintendents who focus on social justice principles. In addition, there is not a common framework to review the superintendent's role from a social justice lens. Based on the results of this literature review, it is recommended to generate research that creates more actionable findings for superintendents who seek to focus on social justice in their school districts. Oakes et

al. (2006) provided some concrete examples of how to apply social justice practices within their districts. The results of this study proffer additional examples that can be used to expand upon Oakes et al.'s research.

This review of the literature has highlighted the opportunity for future critical research to become more structured in better understanding the core tenets superintendents leverage to implement social justice strategies. Shields (2010) took an initial step toward a more structured way of analyzing transformative leaders. Her conclusion that transformative leaders must focus on both critique and promise is a good start to how a framework can be applied by social justice-minded superintendents. Van Oord (2013) also acknowledged that organizational realities are very complex; however, there is value in applying frameworks to better learn about those complexities. By developing interview instruments with a research-based social justice lens, the results of this study collected evidence on the key role social justice-minded superintendents play in eradicating oppressive policies.

It is encouraging to witness the evolution of the role of the superintendent. However, without deliberate and critical reflection on the role of the superintendent, we will not see productive results for all children. The U.S. education system is doomed to maintain a system of inequity for too many students if a critical mass of social justice–minded superintendents is not fostered through actionable and practical research. Clear definitions, a refined social justice framework, and targeted interview questions could provide graduate schools and practitioners with better tools and support systems to help future and current superintendents. Researchers will be able to capture actionable examples for practitioners to use in their school districts. Given the

richness of information that can be gleaned from an interview, I conducted qualitative interviews with eight superintendents.

The next chapter defines the research approach used to better understand how superintendents in LA County viewed their role and leadership style, and how superintendents defined and implemented social justice principles within their districts.

For the analysis of transformative leadership, Shields (2010) was able to backward map, via interviews, the transformative leadership practices that two self-identified social justice principals demonstrated. This approach resulted in specific and actionable findings that school leaders could apply to their schools. I leveraged Shield's approach and conducted semistructured interviews with superintendents. Those results were analyzed against Furman (2012) and Skrla et al.'s (2009) frameworks and are presented in Chapter 5 to provide new insights into the actions superintendents have taken to enact change within their school districts and communities.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The previous chapter explored how the role of the superintendent has evolved over the last several decades, and how the role change and expectations of superintendents has dramatically impacted the way the approximately 13,500 urban public K–12 superintendents in the United States view their leadership role (Glass et al., 2000). The research was encouraging as it traced the evolution of the superintendent's role from a managerial leader to a community leader. This evolution, however, will not yield productive results for all children without deliberate and critical reflection on the role of the superintendent in relation to social justice issues.

Historically, superintendents have not had a significant impact on educational outcomes for students (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). However, superintendents today appear to have greater influence over their districts and communities. Waters and Marzano (2006) found a 0.19 correlation suggesting that the length of a superintendent's tenure in a district is positively related to student achievement. To help superintendents better serve their communities, I built on previous research and dug deeper into how superintendents can approach their work via a social justice lens.

This chapter outlines how this study was conducted. In this chapter, the research question is revisited, the research design is explained, participant selection is outlined, and data collection and data analysis are explained. Issues of internal validity and study limitations are also discussed. Semistructured interviews were conducted with superintendents who work in districts within LA County. The goal of the interviews was to better understand how superintendents

view their leadership style, define social justice, and how they implement social justice tenets within their districts.

Research Question

The overarching research question that was addressed was: How do superintendents within LA County define social justice and how have they implemented social justice tenets within their school districts?

As discussed in the previous chapter, Shields (2010) highlighted the challenge of having multiple definitions for social justice and transformative leadership. Furman (2012) argued that a clear definition of social justice is necessary to assist researchers and practitioners to develop improved preparation programs and support systems for social justice–minded leaders. The purpose of this study was to identify the common themes superintendents within LA County referenced when they defined social justice. These themes were used to assist in the expansion of a common social justice definition. In addition, some concrete examples of how superintendents implemented social justice tenets within their districts were identified. This expanded definition and accompanying examples can be used to create a social justice framework that aspiring and current superintendents can use as they lead their school districts to better outcomes for all students, especially historically marginalized students.

Qualitative Research Design

Given the broad and complex issue of leadership and social justice, I relied on a qualitative approach. If the review of the literature was able to identify studies that clearly indicated the impact superintendents had on student outcomes, a quantitative analysis would have been used. However, as shown in the previous chapter, not all research studies have shown

a clear connection between superintendents and their impact on student outcomes (Wimpelberg, 1997). In addition, the lack of consensus on a definition of social justice has created issues with previous researchers who issued a survey asking superintendents to reflect on the degree to which they implement social justice tenets within their districts (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007). In addition, Bird and Wang (2013) highlighted their challenges with issuing a survey when they studied 301 superintendents. They noticed that the respondents did not have a consistent view on how to define their leadership styles, making it challenging for Bird and Wang to summarize their survey results and draw meaningful conclusions. Given the challenges previous researchers have had with administering surveys, I used semistructured interviews instead of surveys to conduct qualitative research.

The qualitative method that I used allowed for richer conversations with participants. In Flick's (2014) research, he stressed the value of qualitative research since it does not reduce objects to "single variables: rather, they are represented in their entirety in their everyday life" (p. 15). He then explained that the purpose of qualitative research is to explore and discover new empirically grounded theories. Given the limited research focused on superintendents and their role in implementing social justice practices, I relied on qualitative methods. I found this approach helped me identify opportunities to expand current social justice frameworks and provided examples that can be used to guide and support superintendents.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Given the complexities associated with school districts and the role of the superintendent, I used semistructured interviews instead of open-ended interviews or structured interviews (Flick, 2014). This approach allowed for the conversations to flow between topics and insights

that were not identified in the interview protocol, but at the same time provided a high-level framework by which to guide the conversation. Galletta (2013) discussed the versatility of semistructured interviews and how they can yield multidimensional data. In addition, Galletta discussed how semistructured interviews can "attend to the complexity of your research topic" (p. 24). For this study, semistructured interviews were the best method to use to understand the complex nature of how superintendents define and internalize social justice practices.

Flick (2014) encouraged researchers to leverage a framework or guiding questions when they conduct interviews. In his research, Van Oord (2013) recommended applying frameworks to better study and learn about complex organizational realities. Although leveraging a framework is valuable, Galletta (2013) reminded researchers that they must remember the role of reciprocity and reflexivity. Researchers must conduct the semistructured interview in a manner that is productive for the participant and the researcher. The researcher must be flexible and attuned to the needs of the participant.

One example of a researcher who successfully conducted semistructured interviews with her participants was Shields (2010). Shields backwards mapped via interviews the transformative leadership practices that two self-identified social justice principals demonstrated. This approach resulted in specific and actionable findings that school leaders could apply to their schools. I leveraged Shield's approach and conducted semistructured interviews.

After conducting the interviews, I analyzed the results to identify patterns and themes that provide new insights into the actions superintendents can take to enact change within their school districts and communities. The results were compared to Furman's (2012) framework, which identified five dimensions for social justice leadership: (a) personal, (b) interpersonal, (c)

communal, (d) systemic, and (e) ecological. The results were also compared to Skrla et al.'s (2009) framework, which includes the following elements: (a) having an equity attitude, (b) avoiding demonization, (c) initiating courageous conversations, (d) demonstrating persistence, (e) remaining committed but patient, (f) maintaining an asset attitude, and (g) maintaining a coherent focus. The goal of the research was to better understand how superintendents in LA County viewed their role, leadership style, and approach to implementing social justice tenets within their districts.

Elite interviews. As Flick (2014) discussed, it is important to be cognizant when conducting elite interviews. I believe that superintendents fall into the category of elite participants, since they are highly visible within the communities they serve. Anything a superintendent says is likely to end up on the local news or in the local newspaper. In addition, many individuals look to superintendents to receive feedback or guidance as they are setting policy or procedures for school systems and individuals schools.

Even though the participants were comfortable attributing themselves to their comments, I needed to ensure they felt comfortable sharing their true thoughts on sensitive subjects. Flick (2014) summarized this phenomenon in his research, "Furthermore, the problem of confidentiality comes up here—often delicate issues for an organization, also in competition with other players in the market, are mentioned" (p. 231). Given the elite role of the participants in this study, each participant was asked if they wanted to remain confidential. All participants signed the IRB Informed Consent Agreement (see Appendix B) and indicated that they wanted to be on the record. I also ensured they received the Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights (see Appendix C) so they were aware of their rights. In addition, I believe my role as a superintendent

allowed me to connect with the participants at a deeper level. I stressed my understanding of the complicated, challenging, and rewarding role of the superintendency.

Positionality

Because I used interviews, Whyte's (1981) reflection on his work was a poignant reminder of the importance of fully immersing oneself in the research. Although Whyte spent years conducting his research, I still applied his approach to my interview procedure, especially because I am a superintendent and I understand many of the challenges the participants face in their work.

Given my role as a superintendent, I decided to have a fellow graduate student conduct a semistructured interview with me as well. In Chapter 5, I compare the results of my interview to the results of the study participants. This allowed me to reflect on my growth as a superintendent. It also allowed me to reflect on what I learned during my time at Loyola Marymount University. Finally, this appraisal allowed me to connect more deeply with the participants in the study.

My level of intimacy with the role of the interviewees allowed me to gather richer and more honest stories and reflections. Instead of divorcing myself from the process, I was not afraid to allow for the interview to take a natural tone. However, at the same time, it was important for me to heed Flick's (2014) advice on ensuring the interview was conducted in a professional manner. It was also important to obtain consent to publish the results in a nonconfidential manner before the interviews were conducted so the superintendents clearly understood how the results were going to be used.

Participants

Research Setting

I selected 8 of the 80 superintendents that work in LA County to participate in this study. According to the LA County of Education's 2016 Fact Sheet, the 80 school districts in LA County served over 1.5 million students. Sixty-five percent of the students was Latino, 15% was Caucasian, 7.8% was African American, and 7.6% was Asian. However, over 60% of LA County superintendents was White and over 60% of superintendents was male.

Sampling Criteria and Participants

Participants were purposively selected based on their previous comments about or reputation with respect to equity or social justice issues. Patton (2002) contrasted random sampling with purposive sampling and highlighted the value of each approach. To study differences in opinions based on personal backgrounds and characteristics, a diverse group of participants was selected based on race, age, gender, and district characteristics. The participant pool represented a mixture of small (< 9,000), medium (9,001-16,000), and large districts (> 16,000), as well as rural, suburban, and urban school districts. Finally, the participant pool included a mixture of superintendent experience (> 3 years, 3-5 years, and > 5 years). Table 3 summarizes the characteristics of the participants.

Table 3

Summary of Participants

Name	District	Size	Years as a Superintendent
Dr. Michelle King	Los Angeles	640,000	2
Dr. Ben Drati	Santa Monica Malibu	11,000	1
Mr. Winfred Roberson	Glendale	26,000	8
Dr. Mary Sieu	ABC Unified	21,000	5.5
Dr. Tom Johnstone	Wiseburn	4,000	9.5
Dr. Steven Keller	Redondo Beach	9,000	11.5
Dr. Maribel Garcia	El Monte City	9,000	6
Dr. Ruth Perez	Paramount	15,000	8

Participants were recruited via "network sampling" and a "snowball" approach (Galletta, 2013). The process began with a short list of potential participants who were expected to have the potential to reflect on the research questions. After interviewing each participant, each person was asked to recommend other individuals who may be interested in this study.

To recruit participants, the purpose of the study was clearly explained. The potential benefits to subjects included the opportunity to reflect on how they defined leadership and social justice. It also provided them with a space to reflect on how they implemented social justice tenets within their districts and what barriers they faced. In addition, the risks of the study were explained. Subjects had a minimal risk of feeling discomfort or embarrassment if they realized that their definition and level of fidelity to implementing social justice practices did not match their expectation. This risk was mitigated by building a rapport with each subject to ensure that a safe environment was created during the interview. No participants exhibited any feelings of discomfort or embarrassment.

Ethical considerations and confidentiality. Before participating in the interviews, subjects were given a consent form (see Appendix B) that highlighted the option for having responses remain public or confidential. All subjects agreed and signed the form, indicating that they were okay having responses attributed to them. The consent form took less than 5 minutes to read and sign, including time for any questions about the survey or the consent process. At any point during the interview, subjects could opt out of the study. The consent form highlighted that there were minimal risks associated with the study.

In addition, subjects were only audio recorded. There were no video recordings. The primary investigator (me) and two other LMU doctoral students were the only individuals who had access to the data. The other LMU doctoral students were used to help triangulate the data. More details about this process are discussed later in this chapter. Finally, the recordings, field notes, and research findings will be under the care of the principal investigator for a period of 3 years. By May 2021, the documents and recordings will be destroyed by the principal investigator.

Data Collection

For this qualitative study, an interview protocol was used as a guide, but did not restrict the interview process. The advice of Goodall (1993) to "willingly surrender to mystery" (p. 5) was applied. The interview process resulted in richer insights since the conversation flowed in and out of the interview protocol.

Each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes. A current doctoral candidate used the interview guide to interview me as well. In Chapter 5, the results of my interview are compared

to the other interview findings. I served as the primary investigator for all of the other interviews. Each superintendent was asked the following initial questions:

1. Please share with me your journey that led you to the role of superintendent.
2. How do you define your leadership style?
3. What is your definition of social justice?
4. How have you implemented social justice principles in your district?
5. How were you prepared for the role of the superintendent and what was the focus on social justice?

Depending on the participant's answers, additional probing questions were asked. The goal was to capture the participants' thoughts and experiences in a free-flowing manner.

Procedure

To accommodate the challenging schedules of the superintendents, the interviews were conducted at a time and place that was convenient for the participants. Six interviews took place at the office of the superintendents, with two interviews being conducted at a restaurant. The goal was to create a comfortable environment for the participants to reflect on their beliefs and practices. Although I intended to foster a more relaxed interview, I was also mindful of the pressure on the interviewer to collect data from a research point of view. This balance was highlighted by Briggs (1986):

> The interviewer in thus subjected to conflicting pressures. She or he expects to be able to keep the interaction within the confines of the interview. The very success of that interview depends, however, on the researcher's capacity for allowing native communicative routines to work their way into the interview situation. (p. 28)

Field Notes

During the interview, field notes were used, but I was also mindful of not disengaging from the interview process. I wanted to be relaxed and engaged in the interview process, but I also needed to ensure that I captured key information from the interview. Jackson (1995) summarized this dilemma, "Field notes are thus in several respects both an aid and a hindrance to fieldwork -- another ambiguous, liminal status" (p. 48). To assist with this dilemma, a recording device was used so I could spend the majority of the interview engaging in the conversation rather than taking notes. I also blocked time on my calendar immediately after the interview so additional notes and reflections from the interview could be recorded.

Recording

An iPhone and a separate recording device were used to capture the content of the interviews. Two devices were used in case there was a technical issue during the interview. Each participant was asked before the interview began if they were comfortable with a recording device being used. If a participant was not comfortable being recorded, a device was not used. Only one respondent was not recorded. I relied on field notes instead. That interview highlighted the challenge of capturing field notes and engaging in the interview when the interviewer knew a recording device was not being used. I used a recording device to become more engaged in the process rather than focusing on taking field notes.

Triangulation

To strengthen the quality of the research, investigator triangulation was used. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described investigator triangulation as the approach whereby different observers detect or minimize biases. For this study, two LMU graduate students reviewed the transcripts

and field notes and compared them to the findings of the primary investigator to determine if similar findings and conclusions were reached. The students independently reviewed the findings and transcriptions to determine if they agreed with the findings I identified.

Data Analysis

Following the recommendation that Flick (2014) highlighted in his research, several levels of data analysis were conducted for this study. The data analysis focused on the definitions of social justice that each superintendent provided and the approaches they used to implement social justice within their districts. It was also important to note what was not said or discussed during the interviews. The gaps created by what was not said helped identify future research opportunities.

Data Preparation

The transcription service Rev.com was used to transcribe all of the digital data. All handwritten field notes were transcribed by the principal investigator. After the interview, field notes were transcribed and then compared and analyzed to identify patterns.

Data Summary and Data Chart

To begin the data analysis, each participant's short individual biography was used to introduce the subject. Quotes from the interviewees are used in Chapter 4 to highlight key patterns and findings from the interviews. For this study, I used inductive analysis. McMillan and Schumacher (1984) stated that "inductive analysis means that categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on data prior to data collection" (p. 502). This process involved several cyclical phases of analysis. Tentative patterns were identified throughout the process and then revised each time additional analysis was conducted.

Coding and Analysis

I coded the data myself. Given my positionality and the personal nature of this research, I wanted to immerse myself in the data. In alignment with McMillan and Schumacher's (1984) approach, analysis began as soon as data were collected. However, even though I was interviewed first by another LMU doctoral student, I did not begin to analyze or code that interview until all other interviews had been conducted and coded. I did not want the analysis of my interview to bias the other interviews or data analysis. Rather, I compared my interview to the other interviews at the end of the process to see if my views on the topic evolved during the study. In Chapter 5, I compare and contrast my beliefs with those of the other participants.

Besides my interview, all of the other interviews were sent to be transcribed as soon as possible during the summer. I also began to review and code the field notes as soon as I could. To maintain intimacy with the data, I manually coded the transcriptions and field notes. The transcriptions of the interviews were printed and hand-coded. Key phrases were highlighted and coded. In addition, Post-It notes were used to highlight key patterns.

To initially identify patterns, phrases or words that repeated themselves in the data were coded first. As patterns emerged, the data were reprocessed to fully understand the context. To assist in the analysis of the data, a table was created to summarize similar concepts and key patterns discussed by the interviewees. As McMillan and Schumacher (1984) discussed, I used a repetitive approach wherein I constantly looked for negative evidence and alternative findings to ensure the identified patterns were supported by data. This process ensured that the analysis was not biased by initial hunches or conclusions.

Credibility

The interview protocol was reviewed by a fellow doctoral student and my committee chair to ensure that the initial questions were aligned to the purpose of this study. In addition, I sent data back to each participant to confirm the accuracy of the field notes (Flick, 2014). Finally, throughout the study, I was mindful about the possibility of researcher bias. Therefore, I did not review my interview transcriptions until Chapter 5.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following section will discuss assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this study.

Assumptions

It is my assumption that participants answered the interview questions candidly and truthfully. It is also assumed that interviewees felt comfortable speaking with another superintendent about their experiences.

Limitations

One major limitation is the number of participants interviewed during the timeframe of this study. Only eight superintendents were included in this study. Rather than conducting a large-scale survey, I decided that spending more time with a few superintendents would provide richer insights into how they view their roles and how they apply social justice tenets to their work within their districts.

In addition, since I currently am a superintendent, I was worried that some superintendents may not feel comfortable participating in this study due to confidentiality concerns. However, after giving each superintendent the option of keeping their responses

confidential or having them attributed to them, all superintendents agreed to have their responses attributed to them.

Another limitation to this study was the lack of consistency in defining social justice and transformative leadership. To ensure participants did not become confused by these terms, during the interviews, I ensured I clearly defined the terms I used in this study.

Delimitations

One major delimitation of this study was the focus on superintendents within LA County only. Given this geographical limitation, participants may have reported similar experiences based on student demographics and district characteristics within LA versus a different geographical area.

Another delimitation was that, since I conducted interviews with superintendents, I needed to be mindful that it was unlikely that they would give me the time to conduct multiple interviews. Instead, I conducted one interview with each superintendent during the summer months, which tended to be a slower time for superintendents. However, I was also cognizant that many superintendents take vacation during the summer. Therefore, I was flexible with my time to accommodate their schedules.

Timeline

A review of the literature, confirmation of the research method, and consultation with my dissertation chair began in September 2016. The dissertation proposal defense took place in April 2017. Interview instruments and application to the Internal Review Board occurred in May 2017. Superintendent interviews took place from June to August 2017. Preparation, coding, and analysis of data began in June 2017 and ended in October 2017. Implications and

recommendations were written from October 2017 to December 2017. The final defense took place February 13, 2018.

Summary

After conducting the semistructured interviews, I coded the data and identified patterns. Chapter 4 presents the findings and analysis of the study. Key patterns identified by the data are highlighted and discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings on the role of the superintendency. In Chapter 5, I compare the findings of this study to the literature and other research studies. Specifically, I compare the patterns identified in Chapter 4 to Furman's (2012) and Skrla et al.'s (2009) framework. Furman's framework identified five dimensions for social justice leadership: (a) personal, (b) interpersonal, (c) communal, (d) systemic, and (e) ecological. In addition, the patterns were compared to Skrla et al.'s. (2009) EOCA framework, which includes the following elements: (a) having an equity attitude, (b) avoiding demonization, (c) initiating courageous conversations, (d) demonstrating persistence, (e) remaining committed but patient, (f) maintaining an asset attitude, and (g) maintaining a coherent focus. This analysis identified opportunities to revise and put into practice their frameworks for social justice to prepare and support superintendents as they implement social justice practices within their communities.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Study Background

As discussed in the previous chapter, the overarching research questions of this study were: How do superintendents within Los Angeles County define social justice? How have they implemented social justice tenets within their school districts? To address these main questions, it was important to better understand each superintendent's leadership journey and hear about what influenced them along the way. These leadership journeys were highlighted in Chapter 3. Some of the additional questions asked during the semistructured interviews included:

1. Please share with me your journey that led you to the role of superintendent.
2. How do you define your leadership style?
3. How were you prepared for the role of the superintendent and what was the focus on social justice?
4. What advice do you have for current or aspiring superintendents?

To answer these questions, interviews were conducted with each superintendent and data were captured via field notes and audio recordings. The audio recordings were transcribed by a transcription service called Rev, and field notes and transcriptions were then analyzed and coded by hand.

The purpose of this study was to identify the common patterns superintendents within LA County reference when they define social justice. These patterns can be used to assist in the development of a social justice framework that current and aspiring superintendents can use. In addition, concrete examples of how superintendents implemented social justice tenets within

their districts were identified. This definition and accompanying examples can be used to create a social justice framework that can be shared with practitioners.

To address the research questions, I conducted semistructured interviews with 8 current superintendents who were leading districts within LA County. Before each interview was conducted, participants had the opportunity to select on the Informed Consent Form whether or not they wanted their responses to be anonymous or attributed to them. All of the participants declined to remain anonymous and agreed to have their responses attributed to them.

Because I am a current superintendent, a fellow graduate student interviewed me for this study. In this chapter, I have only included my response to the question about how I define social justice. I compare my responses to the other superintendents' responses in Chapter 5. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, and the interviews were held in a location that was convenient for the interviewee.

Data Analysis

To identify patterns, this study used inductive analysis. After each interview, I identified repetitive words or patterns and logged them in a Microsoft Word table. I then reviewed field notes for additional patterns and compared those patterns to the words documented in the Microsoft Word table. Next, each interview recording was sent to Rev transcription services. Those transcriptions were then analyzed for patterns and subpatterns. Field notes and transcriptions were reviewed numerous times to support the findings with data. Finally, the transcriptions were color-coded for each identified pattern. To ensure my own bias did not impact the analysis, I waited until I coded all other interviews and wrote Chapter 4 before I started to code my own transcription. For the first section of this chapter, I summarized the

definition of social justice that each superintendent provided. I included an example they each gave to describe how they are implementing social justice practices within their districts. After discussing these definitions, I explained the four patterns that were identified via the data analysis. Finally, this chapter summarizes the four patterns related to the advice the superintendents gave to current or aspiring superintendents who want to implement social justice practices within their districts.

Defining and Implementing Social Justice

The primary research question asked to each of the eight superintendents was to provide a personal definition of social justice. In addition, superintendents were asked to provide an example of how their respective district was implementing social justice practices. The overarching patterns identified by their responses was a focus on every single child and family and the need to address systemic barriers that prevent students from achieving. A narrative of how the superintendents defined social justice and an example of how social justice practices were being implemented within their district are presented in the following sections. After these narratives, the patterns noted across their responses are discussed.

Dr. Michelle King, Superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District

Dr. King defined social justice as "a movement to creating fairness for all kids." She also talked about how equity is not equal. There must be an "awakening" whereby individuals realize that "bias and privilege" impact historical and current decisions. She talked about how conversations on privilege can be challenging. It is difficult for individuals to talk about an unleveled playing field, but it is essential for those conversations to happen. One example she provided to illustrate how the Los Angeles Unified School District was implementing social

justice practices was the focus on ensuring that all students would graduate high school eligible for college (A-G requirements). Although it has taken over 10 years, Dr. King stressed the importance of setting high expectations for all students and changing the "mindset" of the adults within and external to the school district. By changing "hearts and minds," they reallocated resources and budgets to help support students in reaching the goal of 100% students graduating high school college and being career ready.

Dr. Ben Drati, Superintendent of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District

Dr. Drati talked about social justice via his "Excellence Through Equity" framework, a three-pronged approach that focuses on cultivating a culture of shared accountability, teaching cross cultural and social emotional skills, and implementing social justice standards. Michael Fullan's work has guided Dr. Drati's approach to transforming the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District. He talked about how 20% of a person's work must be focused on what they care about most. He said, leaders are going to "live and die" by your site plan to ensure it gets implemented. One example of how Dr. Drati implemented this work was in his focus on social justice standards. Dr. Drati talked about how "students will develop language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people, including themselves, are both similar to and different from each other." Through this process, they expected students to recognize stereotypes and the power of privilege.

Dr. Ruth Perez, Superintendent of the Paramount Unified School District

Dr. Perez acknowledged the challenge of trying to define social justice. She did not have a conclusive definition, but described social justice as "focusing on every child." She talked about the importance of hiring individuals who have a "heart for children." She also talked about

how social justice practices must permeate through everything they do. One example she provided was related to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT). Historically, students paid for those fees. One challenge in Paramount Unified School District was that 94% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Therefore, it was very difficult for them to pay for the exams, which then inhibited their ability to apply for college. Paramount Unified was now paying for those exams so that this barrier no longer existed for students and families.

Dr. Maribel Garcia, Superintendent of the El Monte City School District

Dr. Garcia also talked about not having a clear definition of social justice. She talked about how equity plays a big role in her thinking. She wanted to make sure schools have enough resources to "prepare our kids for 21st century learning, or for these global jobs that nobody knows what they're going to be." In El Monte, they were putting supports and systems in place to ensure all students were on par with any other child in the world. An example of this was their implementation of a family center. This was a one-stop shop for families that included a dental clinic, mental health services, bicycle repair, food pantry, financial planning services, parenting classes, and so on. The goal was to provide support and resources to families without access to them so they could better provide for their children.

Dr. Mary Sieu, Superintendent of the ABC Unified School District

Dr. Sieu's definition of social justice focused on providing the same rights and opportunities for every student. Her personal past of being an immigrant greatly impacted her definition. She understood the life history of students who had come to her district without the advantages of other students. These disadvantages could take the form of socioeconomic

challenges, language barriers, or lack of parental education. She recognized that a district must plan to support students who did not have the same systemic advantages as other students and families. One example of how ABC Unified was working to provide for all students was their focus on collaborations with community partners. They worked with over 25 different community agencies across five different cities. Although it was time consuming, Dr. Sieu stressed that the investment of time and effort was worth it. The district now could provide support to students who were struggling with chronic absenteeism, depression, suicidal thoughts, or financial challenges, to name a few.

Dr. Tom Johnstone, Superintendent of the Wiseburn Unified School District

When Dr. Johnstone reflected on his leadership style and issues of social justice, he highlighted his Jesuit background. His focus on social justice aligned with servant leadership. He always tried to work with others to make "a difference in the world." He talked about leaders having to make a conscious commitment to social justice. Dr. Johnstone said, "Social justice is a lifestyle, and I think it's a belief system and it is not something you can fake." One example Dr. Johnstone shared was Wiseburn Unified School District's commitment to its English learners. They implemented full-day kindergarten for English learners that provided them with 27 extra days of instruction. This commitment to providing additional quality instruction for English learners resulted in academic gains for those students and gave a concrete example to his team for how to align resources to better support the needs of underserved students.

Winfred Roberson, Superintendent of the Glendale Unified School District

Mr. Roberson's definition of social justice was based on Cornel West's explanation that social justice is a four-letter word— "love." Mr. Roberson talked about how he thought about

social justice within the context of education and how groups have been treated over the years. He wanted to try and even the playing field. Mr. Roberson reflected on Mr. West's statement, "If you don't love people, then you won't love social justice." To implement social justice practices within his district, Mr. Roberson was "going to do what it takes to make this environment safe and welcoming for every student, regardless of his or her background." Mr. Roberson was working toward this goal in a manner similar to Dr. Drati in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District by focusing on awareness and training. The first step in this process was a self-reflection that crucially looked at ideologies and beliefs in a nonjudgmental way. Mr. Roberson said, "If people feel judged, then they will shut down." Mr. Roberson spent time getting individuals with power and privilege to reflect on why it is important and beneficial to help level the playing field for all students and families. He was working with the community to show how equity can benefit all children, not just those who have been underserved.

Dr. Steven Keller, Superintendent of the Redondo Beach Unified School District

Dr. Keller talked about having a simple definition of social justice: "Doing something good for folks who are marginalized." For him, it was not just talking about doing something, he talked about how words must be backed up by action. In the Redondo Beach Unified School District, he talked about ensuring that everyone has high expectations for all students. He reflected on when he started at Redondo Beach Unified 11 years previously. At that time, he felt that not everyone had high expectations for all students. He made it a personal mission to ensure that everyone was focused on ensuring that all students graduated from high school prepared to attend college. He talked about how this focus has to start in kindergarten. Redondo Beach Unified had to put in programs and supports at every level to help all students realize that goal.

Dr. Keller acknowledged that not all students want to go to college, but he wanted to make sure that each student had the choice. It was up to them and their families to decide whether or not they wanted to go to college. A student's decision to attend college should not be determined by the school.

Matt Hill, Superintendent of the Burbank Unified School District

My definition of social justice is engaging, listening, and working with the community to address systemic barriers that have marginalized individuals. Similar to Dr. Keller's position, our primary focus in Burbank is to set high expectations for all students. For example, when I joined the district, I set a goal of 100% graduation for all students and have been allocating resources and implementing support to ensure students can obtain their diploma. Some examples of these supports include adding more mental health and wellness resources, expanding our hybrid learning academy (ILA), and expanding adult school classes and counseling on Saturdays to better support working adults.

Summary of Narratives

As seen in the preceding sections, each of the superintendents had different personal and professional backgrounds, worked in different communities, and had different examples of how they implemented social justice practices within their districts. However, some common patterns emerged from their definitions. Those patterns included a focus on students and families, an acknowledgement of systemic barriers, and a personal commitment to addressing those barriers to support all students.

Leading with a Focus on Social Justice

In addition to the patterns that emerged from their personal definitions of social justice, four patterns emerged when the superintendents talked about how they led their districts with a focus on equity and social justice. Table 4 summarizes the patterns and subpatterns that were identified.

Table 4

Pattern and Subpattern Overview

Servant Leadership
A personal approach to working with the community
Servant leadership defined by life experiences
Building a Strong Team
Ensuring team members are aligned with the same beliefs and values
Empowering your team
The importance of the principal
Board members as team members
Data-Informed Decision Making
Multiple measures
Data informed versus data driven
Telling your story with data
Aligning Systems of Support
Engaging community partners
Social emotional supports
Alternative approaches to discipline

A Focus on Servant Leadership

The first pattern that emerged from the interviews was a reference to a "servant leadership" style of leadership by 6 of the 8 superintendents interviewed. As each superintendent reflected on his/her leadership style, a common pattern emerged with a focus on helping others.

For example, Winfred Roberson in Glendale described his leadership style as rooted in servant leadership. He talked about "starting with the people, trying to be collaborative." He went on to talk about how his leadership style had evolved. He had "really learned how to bond with the community." He shared:

> Let me bond with stakeholders, find out what their interests are, find out what they want for their children, and take that and see how I can use it to offer some good solutions, versus being the one coming and saying this is what I'm getting ready to do.

Maribel Garcia in El Monte made a statement similar to Mr. Roberson's. She said, "And so for me, it's always been about giving back to a community. And it's always been about servant leadership." Her example stressed the importance of giving back and working with the community you serve.

Ruth Perez in Paramount also talked about working with families to "influence change and create opportunities for kids." She shared, "It's a passion for me, it really is." As mentioned by the other superintendents, Dr. Perez emphasized working with families versus trying to implement a top-down approach. She reflected on her family upbringing, which helped define her approach to servant leadership.

Tom Johnstone in Wiseburn also spoke about servant leadership by referencing Hermann Hesse. Dr. Johnstone said, "To be a good leader, one must first be a good servant." This was another example of a leader talking about serving the community instead of trying to impose an individual's view of the changes that need to take place.

Ben Drati in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District expanded the definition of servant leadership by talking about "having a moral purpose, leading through a moral purpose."

This focus on taking a personal approach to the work was a repeated subpattern often discussed by the leaders when they spoke about servant leadership.

A personal approach to working with the community. As was seen in the definitions each superintendent provided for social justice, many of the superintendents approached this work with a hands-on and personal focus on the work. For example, Dr. Johnstone at Wiseburn talked about cutting the grass at the district headquarters so his team could take care of the schools. Dr. Johnstone wanted his team to know he would roll up his sleeves and do the work with them. No job was too small for him. He wanted to emphasize that everybody's role was important within the district. Dr. Roberson at Glendale also spoke about being hands-on with his work. He said:

> Servant leadership is that we do the work. I have to be seen and visible doing this work. Recognize the higher the title, then the bigger servant you end up becoming. Meaning that I have to show up first and I have to leave last. Even as a superintendent in a large district as a servant, recognizing that I don't mind helping set up the chairs for the community group.

As seen by the example above, both superintendents were very hands-on with their community and the work that they did. They both talked about doing the work jointly with their community. Mr. Roberson stated, "How do I work right there beside you so that you know that I'm a partner in your journey?"

Dr. Drati at Santa Monica-Malibu also talked about working very closely with his community to do the work. He said:

> I think it has to do with just collaboration, assuming positive intentions, and just digging in and actually doing the work and not wavering from what's right and what we are supposed to do, even though it may be unpopular at times.

As can be seen by his quote, Dr. Drati emphasized working in collaboration with the community and being an active participant in the work. Collaboration was a word Dr. Drati emphasized over and over again during his interview.

Dr. Garcia at El Monte grew up in the community she was now serving; so for her, it was very personal. She shared:

> My leadership style has always been about . . . not leadership style, it's just my philosophy with leadership has always just been about serving and about giving back and providing resources and making sure that needs are being met.

The personal connection of Dr. Garcia to her community kept her focused on making the difficult decisions that are necessary to ensure all students receive the resources they need to succeed. The connection of personal experiences and servant leadership is further explored in the next subpattern.

Servant leadership defined by life experiences. Many of the superintendents reflected on how their personal experiences shaped their leadership style. Dr. Garcia spoke about how she grew up in the community and how the district's mail would mistakenly be delivered to her house when she was younger. She went to the schools, played in the neighborhood, taught at the schools, and was now the superintendent of the schools. She knew the community well and felt an accountability to serve the community well.

Dr. Perez and Dr. Johnstone both referenced their religious upbringing. Dr. Perez spoke specifically about how her parents influenced her: "I grew up in a ministerial home, so my parents were always serving, so I know that influenced me a lot." Dr. Johnstone referenced his Jesuit education when he spoke about his leadership style:

> I think my journey of professional growth, I think was very, very much dictated by my Jesuit upbringing and the desire to make a difference in the world. We had a really good

> friend of our family who was a Catholic priest and his whole premise on a daily basis was you have to give more than you take.

It is clear by the previous quotes that Catholic and Jesuit values influenced how Dr. Perez and Dr. Johnstone thought about their leadership styles.

Dr. Drati spoke about how his leadership style reflected who he is as an individual, right down to his core: "This is who I am, you know, and I use the restorative justice type of approach. Building community." He went on to say, "We are a team. We are in this together." Work with all individuals within the community was a major focus of how Dr. Drati spends his time. He wanted to ensure that everyone felt engaged in the process, especially those who had not always had a seat at the table.

Dr. King also spoke about collaboration as a key element of her leadership style in how she approached work in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She spoke about the need to "lead through relationships." She mentioned that it was critical for her to be "on the ground and acknowledging the work." She stressed the importance of leaders showing appreciation to others to inspire them to do more. She developed this type of hands-on approach by watching others and reflecting on their leadership styles. She witnessed what other leaders did well and how she would approach the same situation in a different way. One of her key reflections from watching others was that it all comes down to relationships. She believed that if people do not invest the time in building strong relationships, it is very difficult to move the work forward. When the superintendents spoke about building relationships, they focused on internal and external relationships. The next pattern directly talks about building a strong team.

Building a Strong Team

The next pattern that emerged was the focus on building a strong team with a common sense of purpose. All of the superintendents interviewed discussed the importance of selecting, supporting, and relying on their team. Dr. Sieu at ABC Unified summed up the importance of having a strong team by saying, "I depend a great deal on my cabinet members, which I'm so privileged to work with." She went on to stress that she could not focus on addressing the systemic inequities within her district if she did not have a strong team. By investing time to build a strong team, she could focus on setting a strong vision for the district, work with the Board to implement that vision, and form new partnerships within the community to align the resources needed to achieve that vision.

Dr. Garcia at El Monte also highlighted that leaders need a strong team "you can trust." She reflected on the importance of the superintendent setting the vision and working with community partners to secure resources to achieve that vision. She discussed the importance of having a strong team so a superintendent could focus on those critical activities. She stressed the importance of a superintendent being able to oversee everything and not "get bogged down in any particular area." She said, "I have a really strong team that's very passionate about the work they do." By taking time to hire and retain a team with deep expertise in their respective disciplines, the superintendents had the confidence to address social justice issues within their districts.

Dr. Johnstone at Wiseburn Unified also acknowledged the importance of his leadership team: "They are the ones that make it all happen, and if they don't believe in it, and if they believe it is top down, you are not going to be as successful as you want to be." Several

superintendents highlighted the need to lay out a clear vision for their teams and continue to support and reinforce that vision so the entire team bought into the culture of the district.

Within the pattern of building a strong team, three subpatterns emerged: (a) ensuring team members are aligned with the same beliefs and values, (b) empowering the team, and (c) the importance of the principal. The first subpattern identified was the concept of trust and beliefs. These phrases were often repeated by the superintendents when they talked about how they formed a united and aligned team.

Ensuring team members are aligned with the same beliefs and values. Several of the interviewees stressed the importance of hand selecting their team members to ensure that each of them shared belief systems, especially if they were going to have difficult conversations. Dr. Garcia spoke about the importance of surrounding yourself with people with whom you feel comfortable:

> If you don't trust the people that are around you, make some decisions to bring in people you trust, to bring in people that you feel really comfortable with, because, at the end of the day you have to be able to sit down and have really clear, concise, free-flowing conversations, and be able to make things happen.

Dr. Garcia also highlighted that you need this level of trust and comfort to have honest and difficult conversations about what needs to change within your district to improve conditions for all students.

Most of the superintendents emphasized the importance of interviewing candidates to ensure they held the same beliefs and values as they did. For example, Steven Keller interviewed every single person who worked for the Redondo Beach School District. He talked about the importance of bringing in the right people who are like minded by sharing with them up front what is expected of them. He reflected on how some people appreciated his candor and decided

that Redondo Beach was not the right fit for them. He discussed the importance of having individuals come to this realization before they are hired. It saved the district and the individual a lot of pain and suffering by ensuring a correct match up front. He viewed his role as the "bouncer at the night club." He ensured that no one gets past him without his vetting. He wanted to make sure they had the same belief system as he and his team did. He also wanted to ensure that interviewee could strengthen the skill set of the team. Finally, he wanted to make sure the interviewee was a fun person with whom to work. He talked about how challenging and stressful this work could be, so it was critical to hire people others want to be around.

Dr. Keller also provided a good clarification that having a similar belief system did not mean there was no debate about how to approach the work. Everyone on the team had to have high expectations for students, but he stressed, "You want likeminded people who may have had a different way of getting there, but knew that's where we needed to go." Dr. Keller encouraged his team to engage in productive debates about what needs to be done to serve their students. The other superintendents also highlighted the need to have productive conflict. They did not want people to just agree with their point of view. Having a team that a superintendent could trust leads to the next subpattern: empowering your team.

Empowering your team. The superintendents also spoke about the need to empower their teams to do the work. After a superintendent selected and built a team they trusted, they then felt comfortable empowering that team to do the work. Many of the superintendents talked about how they preferred to set the vision for the district rather than micromanage the details. Dr. King talked about the importance of providing her team with the autonomy to do the work. She did not "like to dive into their territory." She stressed the importance of setting clear expectations

and managing the results, but she also gave her team the freedom to do their work without barriers from her. She talked about "empowering [her] people so that they know that they have purpose."

Dr. Drati also spoke about supporting his team by being a collaborative leader, but he also stressed the need to create an environment of "shared accountability." He defined shared accountability as having a conversation with his team to understand what they cannot control and then defining and focusing on what they can control. Dr. Drati gave examples of the things his team could control, which included parental issues and socioeconomic issues; but he also spoke about what his team can control:

> We can control that we have a guaranteed curriculum, whether we have common assessments, whether we collaborate together, whether we actually ask the question, what are the outcomes we want of our students?

As seen by the above quote, Dr. Drati empowered his team to focus on the items that could have a direct impact on student outcomes. After agreeing on the items they could control as a team, he held his team accountable for implementing those strategies. Dr. King also spoke about accountability. She called it "reciprocal accountability." She expected to be held accountable the same way that she held her team accountable for results. Dr. King worked with her team to identify what those outcomes should be and then set up a system to review those outcomes.

Dr. Sieu also talked about the importance of collaborating with and empowering her team to lead this work at ABC Unified. She said:

> There's not too much that I will ever say "No" if someone comes to me and says, "I have an idea." I'm always willing to hear and to share moments with others about how they would like to see new ideas being placed in ABC.

Dr. Sieu recognized the importance of empowering her team to identify solutions to systemic challenges facing her students. Like the other superintendents interviewed, she talked about investing time into building relationships with her team so they would feel comfortable coming to her with new ideas.

Dr. Johnstone had a similar approach, he called "the culture of yes." He said, "If people really want to do something and it makes sense, then I'll usually let people do it." He went on to say, "I don't like to slow people down. If somebody's got a really good idea, I want them to be able to run with it." However, he had a similar accountability approach to what Dr. Drati mentioned during his interview. Dr. Johnstone made it very clear with individuals that they would be held accountable for their decisions. If a principal had a good idea that they could defend, Dr. Johnstone would let them implement that idea. However, if that idea did not produce positive outcomes for students, the principal would be held accountable for the decision. The principal would need to explain what worked and what did not, and more importantly, what they would do better next time. The trust in principals and the importance of the role of the principal was identified as the next subpattern.

Dr. Perez also spoke about the importance of empowering her team. She was rolling out new technology for her schools. Instead of mandating it, she made it voluntary because teachers were stressed by all of the new standards and curriculum. She invited her third-grade teachers to volunteer to be part of the initiative. She was surprised that all but three teachers volunteered to be part of the initiative. She was thinking about using a similar approach for professional development and training.

Mr. Roberson at Glendale Unified took the concept of empowerment one step further. He wanted to move toward a concept of "shared power." He explained his distinction between "empowerment" and shared power with the following quote:

> This isn't easy work. Equity work is probably the most challenging work in public education that I've found, simply because it is perceived as a shift in power. By the nature of the fact that we use terms like "I want to empower you," still shows a position of authority and power, that I'm the one that would empower you, so ultimately, I would paint or dictate the terms of that power that I'm willing to allow you to have, which isn't necessarily empowerment. How do we get to a place of shared power?

Mr. Roberson's quote provides a good reminder of how careful superintendents must be when working with others. Are they sharing power, or are they still holding on to power? This is critical topic when discussing the next subpattern of working with principals.

The importance of the principal. Several interviewees stressed the importance of hiring strong principals who are key members of their team. For example, Ruth Perez talked about having a lot of responsibilities as a superintendent, but she felt that the most important position in a school district was the principal. She highlighted this point by saying, "I lose sleep over finding that quality person as the leader of a school." She went on to say that it is important to "hire a person who has a heart for kids." Several of the superintendents talked about how the principal sets the vision and culture of the school. They also spoke about how selecting the right principal leads to better outcomes for students.

As seen in the quote above, Dr. Perez firmly believed that social justice "permeates everything," and said that it all started "with the hiring of principals" who had the same belief in students as she did. Dr. Keller echoed this sentiment by saying, "I do think it is important having principals on the ground believe it." He shared how important it was for him to share leadership, especially at the principal level. He realized it could not just be him leading the work. All of his

principals had to have the same belief that all students were going to be prepared to go to college. Dr. Keller also stressed the importance of principals believing in what the district was trying to accomplish. When asked which role was the most important to lead this work, Dr. Keller said, "I would say, first and foremost, it's your administrators." Several superintendents also said that, without the buy-in and support of their principals, they did not believe they could implement the changes needed to address the social justice issues their districts were facing.

Many of the superintendents spoke about investing a lot of time working with their principals to identify an approach to better serve students. For example, Dr. Drati talked about leveraging Michael Fullan's work to help his principals become the "lead learners." Dr. Drati was providing his principals with the tools and supports they needed so they could have conversations on equity in a collaborative manner instead of a top-down approach. In the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, they were leveraging their professional learning communities (PLCs) to have conversations about equity, privilege, and bias together. Dr. Drati gave a powerful example of how he was challenging behaviors, assumptions, and attitudes with his principals:

> An example would be, somebody would say, "I want to teach EL students first, before I put them in a content class." The intention is good, saying let's make sure that they master English first. As a result, they will say, "Let's pull them out of a class to teach them English before we put them in these hard classes." Not realizing that is a dangerous thing that you can do. You can actually teach English through the content. But now, once you expose that, the issue now becomes, do you want professional learning, to be able to do that or not? There will be resistance. I think when you see that resistance, that is an equity issue, because the assumption there is that you must know English in order to think.

It takes a lot of time to build trust and respect with your principals so you can have those type of courageous conversations. Dr. Drati talked about how you must also empower your team to have these conversations and how the superintendent must support them in leading this type of work.

Dr. King also talked about how they focused on the importance of "empowering principals to do the work" at the Los Angeles Unified School District. After giving them the appropriate tools and supports, she held them accountable for results. She reflected on the importance of allowing principals to have the autonomy to meet the unique needs of their students, families, and community members.

The superintendents also expected their principals to have what Dr. Johnstone referenced as "a good nose for talent" when they hire teachers. The superintendents shared their expectations that the principals were just as involved in the selection of their teachers as the superintendents were in the selection of their teams. This type of hands-on involvement in selecting and supporting employees permeated the school districts represented by the superintendents in this study. Each superintendent stressed the importance of having every employee committed to the same vision. This focus on vision for the school district started with a good working relationship with the school board, as can be seen with the final subpattern that was identified.

Board members as team members. Several of the superintendents highlighted the need to view board members as team members as well. They spoke about the need to invest time to build a cohesive governance team. Dr. King stressed the importance of building a trusting relationship with all of her board members. By working closely with the Board, she felt they could develop policies to better meet the needs of students.

Mr. Roberson at Glendale Unified spoke about always working hand-in-hand with his board members. He emphasized twice, "Never get ahead of the board on this work. Never get ahead of your board on this work." He went on to say:

> The speed of change has to be constantly negotiated with the board, checking their comfort level, reminding them and showing them how it's going to benefit students and benefit the organization and the community over time. Keeping data in front of them as to why this is important, and that's how I work with my board.

As seen by Mr. Roberson's quote, building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships with the board is a critical skill set for superintendents. Board members were elected officials, and they were the superintendent's boss, but they also must be viewed as teammates.

Dr. Drati also reflected on the importance of viewing board members as teammates. He invested a lot of time with the Board to explain his vision and where he wanted to take the district. He wanted to make sure they were on the same page as him, and he did not want them to be surprised. As he moved forward with the work, he constantly talked to his Board about where they were heading and what adjustments they needed to make. He also invited the Board into the conversations he was having with his team. When he reviewed each school's plan and their evidence, he was inviting board members to join him as they reviewed, discussed, and debated the progress they had made.

Several of the superintendents advised against getting caught up in the politics. Just because the school board members are elected officials does not mean superintendents should be political. Dr. Keller said, "You put kids first. You don't play the politics and you let your deeds speak for themselves." He went on to say, "I guess I just don't get caught up in the politics, and just do good work. Do the work that matters." Dr. King had a similar comment when she said,

"You are not the politician that needs to get re-elected. Don't be hindered, cautious, or leery. Don't look at the clock. Operate like you are in your last term."

Mr. Roberson gave a good illustration of how the work is political, but how it was important not to play politics. He said, "Every decision in public education is political, but how do we have bold leadership and make sure that students are at the center of our thought processes—the decision we make." He went on to highlight the need to understand the politics, but to lead the work with honesty and integrity. Mr. Roberson felt that if someone tried to please everyone, then they would end up pleasing no one.

When Dr. Drati was asked about how he planned to balance the fact that organizational change takes 3 to 5 years, and the average superintendent only lasts 3 years, he said:

> It's a calling for me. We take these jobs knowing that, you've got to see it as a calling, or you've got to be crazy, one of the two. There's no stability. To me, it's a calling and I think I have a perspective I want to bring to the table. I have a vantage point, just with my life experience and all that. I think I can add to a conversation and then strategically, I have to engage. I have to get the community engaged in what I'm doing and be out there. I think that is my protection.

Dr. Perez also spoke about this working being a calling for her:

> I look at the girls a lot and how they are treated because they are Hispanic and how their parents won't encourage them to go to college because Latino parents don't encourage their daughters to go to college, they want them to stay home. I look at all of that because I lived it. I'm passionate about it today. I just feel for me it's a calling, it's not a job it's a calling, it's my purpose in life to do that, and it's a joy to do that obviously.

By being true to who they are and by focusing on the work instead of the politics, these superintendents mobilized change within their communities. To mobilize change with their teams, the superintendents relied on multiple measures of data. The superintendents used these data to tell a compelling story of why change is needed and to check progress as change is implemented.

Data-Informed Decision-Making

The next pattern that emerged from the interviews was how superintendents used data to inform how they implemented social justice practices within their districts. Seven of the eight superintendents referenced how they used data to inform their decision-making. For example, Mr. Roberson spoke about how "sometimes data might be a motivating factor to say, 'Look at a different approach.'" He also stressed the importance of using data in a "nonjudgmental way." By bringing in data, the leader needed to be careful to ensure that individuals did not shut down. The goal was not to assign blame. Instead, it was to start a conversation on how the team could work together to help students. Dr. Drati talked about how the process needed to be collaborative. He said, "I'm not demonizing anybody. You can't do that in this work. You have to assume everybody has good intentions." He focused his work on "lead by learning, learn by doing."

Dr. King also spoke about how she "starts with data to start an awakening." She asked her team and the community what they see. She viewed data as a "doorway into the conversation." A specific example she provided was the student needs index the Los Angeles Unified School District developed. This index looks at the needs of homeless youth, special education students, foster youth, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Dr. King talked about how using data allowed her team to "peel the onion" to identify additional resources schools needed. Data helped to highlight the inequities within the schools and provided her team with "ah-ha moments." As a result, Los Angeles Unified allocated additional arts and technology resources to schools. In our discussion, Dr. King stressed the

importance of using multiple measures to make decisions instead of relying on just one form of data.

Multiple measures. Several superintendents stressed the importance of using multiple measures, not just academic measures, when identifying opportunities to meet the needs of students. Dr. Sieu gave an example when she spoke about how they ran their school board meetings:

> During every board meeting, one of the things that I've incorporated is I do a Spotlight on Teaching and Learning and part of that teaching and learning isn't just the academic results . . . we spent as much time on other related issues like for example how do we deal with social, emotional issues.

As seen by her example, academic data are important, but they are not the only measure she uses when leading the district.

Similar to work in the Los Angeles Unified School District, Dr. Garcia at El Monte used multiple measures to create and index the services her students needed. They took a map of the city and color coded the map based on where the neediest kids lived. Then they looked at what services were available in those neighborhoods and found that there were no services. They took it a step further and overlaid public transportation and supermarkets and found out that those services and supports were missing as well. This level of data allowed them to initiate conversations with city officials. They were now trying to link services to kids and families so they could be ready to learn when they went to school.

Data-informed versus data-driven. When the superintendents spoke about data, they often referred to being data-informed. This model contrasts to the NCLB days of data-driven decision making or using data solely for accountability purposes. Dr. Johnstone differentiated that he was "data-informed, not data-driven." He highlighted how data for English learners

highlighted the need to try different strategies to support those students. His team worked with parents, teachers, and a local university to assist with math and science teaching strategies for English learners. The results were dramatic for his district. Under the old state data system (Academic Performance Index), the results for English learners grew from 752 to 828.

When the superintendents reflected on how they viewed data, they gave examples of inquiry and continuous improvement. Dr. Perez spoke about the need to let everyone know that she was looking at the data: "If people know that you're looking at outcomes and you are looking at the data, they will stay on top of it too." She talked about the importance of "active leadership." She defined active leadership as working with her team to review the data to find strategies that would better meet the needs of students.

Dr. Drati at Santa Monica-Malibu Unified also spoke about continuous improvement. He highlighted the importance of using well-informed data that teachers helped to create. There needs to be buy-in up front with the development of the data so everyone felt comfortable using it. He created a process where the school sites worked with PLCs to develop their site plans. Based on the district goals, the sites developed plans to meet the needs of their students based on their school data. The district office supported them, but would not mandate what needed to be developed. However, if a school site said, "I'm good," then that was trouble. All sites needed to identify opportunities for improvement. After the plans were developed, there would be quarterly reviews. Dr. Drati stressed that "data's a key element." Even the Board would be involved in the appropriate data reviews. He also talked about how it could not be a superficial review of the data. He said they needed the following mentality: "Okay, let's dig deeper. What's missing? . . .

Did we actually look at the data as accurately as we can?" This type of reflection is needed for true change to occur.

Telling your story with data. The superintendents also stressed the need to constantly use data to tell your story and the importance of telling your story over and over again. It cannot be a one-time conversation. Dr. Garcia gave an example of how her community started a conversation about childhood diabetes and high blood pressure based on LA County data a couple of years previously. However, they stopped telling the story, and when she recently launched a breakfast in the classroom initiative, she received a lot of resistance. She said:

> I realized we constantly have to tell the story that exists. And there's this narrative that people just need to hear over and over. Not the same one. I think we have to keep it lively, but we constantly have to remind our stakeholders about the work that we're doing.

She noticed that as she kept telling the story and using data, parents, teachers, and students started telling their stories as well, and eventually everyone understood why they needed to focus on providing a healthy breakfast in the classroom.

Dr. Johnstone also spoke about the importance of using data to tell the story of Wiseburn Unified School District. Wiseburn had previously experienced a drop in enrollment due to the perception that "beach town" districts did better than districts further east. However, over the previous couple of years, Wiseburn had outperformed those districts in high school student outcomes. Scores started good at elementary school, got better in middle school, and were the highest at their high school. Dr. Johnstone invested the time to meet with parents to share the data and tell the story of why Wiseburn was a good district.

Dr. Drati talked about the importance of being transparent with the data. He shared how important it is to go out to the community to tell people what they are doing:

> Be transparent and tell them our faults, our struggles, and our successes and tell them the truth of this work, what this means, that we have to change culture and it will take time, and get some wins along the way. There are certain wins that we can give them, whether someone is enrolled in AP classes or note, we can control that now, so let's give that victory now, so people have confidence while we work on the culture.

Dr. Drati's quote speaks volumes to the importance of honest dialogue with the community. Data do not convey the story. Leadership must tell the story with data to support the story and help guide the next conversation. He also stressed the importance of keeping it simple: "Let's not make it more complex . . . pick one or two strategies." He urged against trying to cover too many strategies with the community. If your message is complex, you will not build a coalition to engage in the change that is needed.

The next pattern that emerged from the interviews highlights how the superintendents leveraged the data they analyzed to mobilize their teams and align systems of support to help marginalized students and families.

Aligning Systems of Support

The last pattern that emerged was a focus on aligning systems and supports to ensure children and families received the resources they needed to succeed academically. This pattern went beyond the traditional academic focus of school districts. As seen in the third pattern, the superintendents reviewed multiple data sets to identify areas that needed to be addressed. The superintendents used these data to engage community partners to address the social and emotional needs of students and to provide for the physical well-being of students so they and their families could be successful. Dr. Keller at Redondo Beach Unified talked about how they "advocate for the whole child, social emotional well-being, and the physical and mental fitness for all kids." Multiple superintendents highlighted the work they were doing in this area as

critical to addressing social justice issues within the communities they served. Dr. Garcia provided a very vivid example of how the students in her district were wrestling with challenges beyond academic ones:

> They've arrived in this county, and they live in conditions that are traumatic. And then there's these other elements, where our kids are exposed to domestic violence, drugs, gangs, a whole list of things. And so, then these kids are expected to show up at school, and listen to the teacher, and sit up straight, and raise their hand, and be able to answer the questions that the teachers are asking, when they're not getting a full night's rest. They're not sleeping well. They're not eating well. And their living conditions are sub par.

To combat these challenges, Dr. Garcia talked about how El Monte took a holistic approach. One example she provided was the family center they had created. The goal of the family center was to bring in the necessary resources to address the trauma in the lives of the students and families. She went on to say, "And some of the trauma, like I said, it's very visible, and there's other issues that are invisible, and we are dealing with those just the same."

Engaging community partners. Several superintendents talked about reaching out to community partners to assist families in overcoming the trauma and challenges they faced. Dr. Garcia in El Monte was working with over 30 community partners to support the family center in El Monte. She talked about the approach they used in El Monte:

> Is called a warm handoff, that if you're at the dental clinic there, and you happen to share with someone that you're being evicted next month, or that your husband has been abusive, then that person, the dentist will then walk you over to someone that can assist you with whatever needs you have.

By taking time to listen to the needs of her community and invest in relationships with community partners, Dr. Garcia had created wraparound supports to help families with all of their needs. She stressed the need to focus on these challenges in collaboration with partners "so that kids can come to school prepared and ready to learn." These relationships caused the district

to think differently about the relationships they had with the community. At the time of this study, the district was thinking about how to leverage resources across the community, not just within the district, to better support families. She went on to say:

> We are going to work with kids, and we're going to make sure that we're doing whatever it takes in our classrooms, but we have to support our families and build their capacity, so that they can support their kids. And so, to me, that's social justice.

As seen by her quote, the work in El Monte City School District had moved beyond the classroom and was now a more holistic approach.

Another example of a superintendent working with community partners was from Dr. Sieu at ABC School District. She worked with over 25 community agencies. Although time consuming, Dr. Sieu stressed the importance of sitting down with the agencies on a monthly basis to coordinate services for students and parents. To facilitate this level of engagement, ABC School District hired a social worker at every school within the district. These individuals were often times the coordinator of all services.

Several of the superintendents talked about how important it was to invest time in these relationships. They came to the realization that the school district could not do this work alone. They must work to provide students and families the support they need. For example, Dr. Perez in Paramount talked about how, historically, the community would raise $30,000 for the city's scholarship fund. This was an impressive amount for a community in which 93% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. However, under her leadership, they engaged the city, schools, and community partners to raise over $200,000 in scholarships the previous year. Dr. Perez did not mandate the fundraising drive; instead, she laid out the vision and shared stories of

the students who were going to benefit from the scholarships. This approach allowed her to set high expectations for all students and engage the entire community.

Another example of how a superintendents engaged community partners was when Dr. Johnstone worked with El Segundo and Continental Development to develop an aquatic complex that would benefit both communities and allow for Wiseburn to add a high school to the district. He talked about the importance of continuing to work on relationships to make things happen for kids. Building those relationships is not easy and takes a lot of time, but he said the benefits are worth the effort.

Socioemotional supports. It was interesting to hear that many of the superintendents stressed the importance of socioemotional supports. Dr. Sieu reflected on the importance of having multiple tiers of support available within the district. Her advice for superintendents was to "focus on the supports across the spectrum, not just looking at the academics." She highlighted that ABC's 98% graduation rate was due to this support: "We can say it's not just the academic support, it's also all of the social [and] emotional support that a family and a student need as well." Mr. Roberson at Glendale also talked about how you cannot just focus on academics. He said, "pedagogy alone isn't the answer. It's the environments, it's about the environments that we create for students to feel welcome and feel safe, and that's social justice."

To create these positive environments several superintendents discussed the supports they provided. Dr. Drati spoke about how, in Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, they were working on developing cross-cultural and socioemotional skills. These skills would help students demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, pride, and positive social identities. He stressed the importance of allowing students to express pride "without denying the value and dignity of

others." An example he gave was how to facilitate conversations about slavery and connecting that to Ferguson:

> If you are studying slavery, if Ferguson is occurring, are you having and accurate conversation about why that conversation is happing now. Long history occurred or built that response, where Blacks are looking at the situation differently than Whites . . . what happened? So, you've got to dig deeper into why it happened in America? That way you build empathy at least for Blacks, it helps Whites, it helps African Americans. Everybody understands what's happening.

Conversations about race are difficult to have, but they are even more difficult to have in school settings unless you invest the time to create the space for honest and thoughtful dialogue. However, as you build the culture and the language to have these conversations, you can foster dialogue about race, socioeconomic challenges, disabilities, mental health, and so on.

Several of the districts mentioned the importance of providing mental health supports. For example, ABC School District added wellness coordinators at their schools who focused on the mental health needs of their students. Focusing on mental health issues had been a challenge for several superintendents, given that in many cultures, people do not feel comfortable discussing mental health issues. Dr. Sieu shared that, especially in Asian cultures, parents think, "Oh my gosh. My child is afflicted with some kind of social disease." Dr. Sieu discussed the importance of parent education to address this stigma.

Alternative approaches to discipline. Many superintendents looked at alternative ways of discipline. Dr. Sieu shared that ABC had had very few suspensions over the previous couple of years and had had "zero expulsions in the last 6 years." Twenty-three of ABC's 30 schools had implemented a new approach to discipline called *positive behavioral intervention and supports*.

Dr. Perez discussed Paramount's shift in its approach to discipline. It was leveraging the Flippen Group's program called Capturing Kids' Hearts. This program focuses on creating strong connections between students and teachers. In addition, Paramount had shifted to a restorative justice approach to discipline. Instead of suspensions or detention, students had opportunities to make amends via restorative justice practices.

Advice for Superintendents

In addition to their definitions of social justice and patterns related to implementing social justice in their districts through servant leadership, building a strong team, aligning systems of support, and using data-informed decision-making, superintendents provided suggestions for aspiring superintendents. The final section of this chapter focuses on the advice the superintendents offered for current or aspiring superintendents who would like to implement social justice practices within their districts. The following four patterns emerged after analyzing the responses from each superintendent: (a) define what is important, (b) find the right pace of change, (c) strengthen board relationships, and (d) be true to yourself.

Define What Is Important

Each of the superintendents reflected on how critical it is to define what is important for them to work on each day. Dr. King spoke about not trying to "be all to all." She stressed the importance of being clear about the work and staying focused on that work. Dr. Drati also spoke about not trying to please everyone. He said that he had witnessed leaders who tried to be everything to everyone and it never worked. He talked about being clear about what was important and being focused on the work.

After defining what was important, the superintendents stressed the need to prioritize their time. Dr. Drati emphasized the need to spend at least 20% of his time on the most important priority of the district. The rest of the day-to-day duties and operations took up 80% of his time, but he shared that the 20% was sacred. Dr. King also spoke about being clear on how you a superintendent spends his/her time and how that time will impact students.

Dr. Keller recalled the advice he had received from the former LA County Superintendent, Darlene Robles. She said, "What you put on your schedule is what you prioritize, what you believe in." Dr. Keller acknowledged that importance; otherwise, you are "just playing whack-a-mole all day long." He stressed the importance of visiting schools to hear firsthand how policies and initiatives were impacting schools. He wanted to hear from principals, teachers, and students. He wanted to find out how he could help them. He stressed the importance of "having that connection and not being stuck in the ivory tower."

Dr. Garcia spoke about leveraging breakthrough coaching to free up her time to focus on social justice issues. She partnered closely with her administrative assistant to push a lot of items off her desk. She said she believed the "superintendent's job is really to be the ambassador for the district and to be the connector." To be that ambassador, you need to identify what you can delegate to others. By delegating and building a strong team, she said, they could focus on thinking really big to address the challenges their students and families face. More importantly, they had the time to focus on implementing the solutions they identified because they were focused on the right things instead of working on the things that just take time.

Find the Right Pace of Change

Determining the right pace of change for implementing social justice initiatives within a district was the next area of advice highlighted by the superintendents. The superintendents discussed how challenging it was to find the right pace of change. Dr. Drati spoke about not moving too fast, but also warned about moving too slow.

> I've learned a lot, that impulsiveness isn't good. There's a lot of impulse. I also learned, but the same type of people that do impulsive also taught me that you can't come in sit passively and say, "Oh, let me sit back and learn what I need to do." No, you've got to come up with a game plan. You've got a limited time to exert your influence and get people captured.

As Dr. Drati mentioned that superintendents were constantly trying to find the correct pace for change. Mr. Roberson highlighted Stephen Covey's advice of "moving at the speed of trust." He talked about having the right relationships and the right conversations to determine how fast he should move when implementing changes within his district. Dr. King focused on the work of Jim Collins, and said she tended to "go slow to go fast." She acknowledged it was not "sexy" to go slow, but she had seen throughout her career when leaders try to push through too fast, their initiatives would often fail. She said there is no silver bullet, and change could take 3 to 5 years. In one example in El Monte, Dr. Garcia spoke about how it took 5 years for them to implement their family centers. They had to invest in the relationships for that work to move forward. Although evaluating the comfort levels of all stakeholders is important, the superintendents highlighted the importance of ensuring they, in fact, knew the comfort level of their school board at all times.

Board Relationships Are Critical

All of the superintendents talked about the need to create and maintain strong relationships with board members. As mentioned earlier, the superintendents highlighted the importance of viewing board members as teammates. The superintendents spoke about ensuring that the board worked as a team, but also made sure they respected and honored each board member.

The relationships with the Board starts during the interview process. The superintendents talked about the importance of defining the work and their personal approach during the interview so there would not be any surprises. Dr. Drati talked about how he was very clear in his interview about how he was going to focus on the inequities within the district. He laid out his vision and approach during the interview. By being clear from the beginning, he could hit the ground running. Mr. Roberson also stressed the importance of "a superintendent having a Board that believes in equity." He continued, "If a superintendent is equity-minded and hasn't prepared that Board to be equity-minded, and that isn't their vision, then that work won't get done in that district."

Dr. Johnstone also spoke about the importance of "doing your homework and making sure that you align yourself with a district that shares your philosophy, and if you don't you're going to be miserable." He highlighted the need to really understand the direction the Board wants to take and the type of leader they want, "because if there's alignment there, it can be a lot of fun and you can really do a lot of good." Several other superintendents stressed this point. They talked about the importance of finding the right district—not just any district. Mr. Roberson had good insights on finding the right district:

> I think it's important to make sure that they're truly a match for the district. If you're equity-driven by wanting to create equitable learning environments, then you have to have a board that has shown that they have the resilience, the desire, and the will to see that through on behalf of their children and their students. If not, then that may not be a district you want to go to.

As seen by the quote above, it is essential for aspiring superintendents to ensure the school board has the same vision they do before agreeing to work for that district.

After getting hired, it is important for superintendents to maintain their relationship with the school board. Dr. Keller stressed the importance of working closely with his Board so they understood why he was doing this work and to ensure it had the same belief in all kids. He said, "For me, making sure the Board above me understands enough of what this is, and can put their politics aside." He went on to say, "You never want to hear from a Board member, 'Well, they're just going to have to pull up their boot straps and figure it out.'" Dr. Sieu also spoke about the importance of maintaining board relationships. She said:

> I have an incredible board, a seven-member board that I have to give a lot of credit to because they allow me to do my work and they also support this very issue of making sure that social justice and the equity issues in our district are attended to.

This philosophy of knowing what you want to accomplish and being clear with your Board leads to the next piece of advice provided by the superintendents—be true to yourself.

Be True to Yourself

The last pattern that emerged was being true to yourself. Dr. Drati said, "Biggest thing is, be yourself. Don't try to be somebody else." He went on to say that you need to have your own voice on things. He also stressed the importance of being happy. He said, "You're the leader. People, they have got to see you positive all of the time." He talked about the importance of the leader setting the culture for the organization. All eyes are on the superintendent. How you

respond can have ripple effects throughout the organization. Dr. Drati spoke about how even if you are struggling or stressed, you cannot let your team see that. You need to show that you are human, but also show that you are going to work with them to address the challenges facing them. Focus on solutions and focus on positivity. He talked about the importance of being authentic about your plan and being able to do that. If you are authentic with your vision and remain true to yourself, you will be successful.

Mr. Roberson had similar advice about being true to yourself. He said, "Whatever I do needs to be centered around some type of integrity." His parents instilled in him at a young age to be an honest person and always ensure that your words and actions reflect integrity. This focus on integrity greatly influenced Mr. Roberson's leadership journey. He went on to talk about the importance of having a belief in this work:

> Equity work, is for one, you have to believe in it. We talk about gaps in achievement and gaps in access. They are belief gaps that we don't often talk about. We don't necessarily talk about belief gaps. Until you can close belief gaps in public education, those that are doing the work in public education, it is going to be very, very difficult to have leaders that are actually able to mentor and coach folk to do equity work. This is tough work, and for all the reasons that I've stated, equity, it challenges beliefs, upbringings, it may ask for privilege to be relinquished or power to be shared. There is still resistance to equity within public education, yet public education is supposed to be the level playing field. It is supposed to be the great equalizer.

Dr. Johnstone also spoke about being true to yourself. He talked about how you need the energy to "have your foot on the gas the whole time." The job is very exhausting, so you have to know how long you want to do the job—he did not want to be a superintendent for more than 10 years. You have to assess your energy level and have a mental plan for how long you want to do the work. After you commit to that, you have to be all in. As the superintendent, you cannot dial in this work. You need to be actively engaged and have the passion for this work.

Conclusion

The primary research question attempted to gain additional insights into how superintendents within LA County defined social justice. The primary pattern that emerged from their definitions and examples was a focus on every single child and family and the need to address systemic barriers that prevented students from achieving. After analyzing those definitions of social justice, four patterns were identified via data analysis of the interview transcripts. Those patterns were: (a) focusing on servant leadership, (b) building a strong team, (c) aligning systems of support, and (d) data-informed decision-making. Finally, this chapter summarized the patterns related to the advice the superintendents gave to current or aspiring superintendents who want to implement social justice practices within their districts. Those patterns were: (a) define what is important, (b) find the right pace of change, (c) strengthen school board relationships, and (d) be true to yourself.

Chapter 5 compares these definitions of social justice against the definitions identified in the Literature Review. In addition, the four patterns identified are compared to a Freirean framework of love, dialogue, and humanization. Next, Furman's (2012) framework is used to analyze the patterns. Furman's framework identifies five dimensions for social justice leadership: (a) personal, (b) interpersonal, (c) communal, (d) systemic, and (e) ecological. Finally, these patterns are compared to Skrla et al.'s (2009) EOCA framework. Maxwell et al. (2013) also used this framework. The EOCA framework includes the following elements: (a) having an equity attitude, (b) avoiding demonization, (c) initiating courageous conversations, (d) demonstrating persistence, (e) remaining committed but patient, (f) maintaining an asset attitude, and (g) maintaining a coherent focus.

Finally, Chapter 5 explores the opportunity to incorporate the findings from Chapter 4 into superintendent preparation programs. Recommendations and suggestions for additional research are discussed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I started the doctoral program at Loyola Marymount University the same time I became the superintendent of the Burbank Unified School District. The timing of these two opportunities provided me a good opportunity to examine how superintendents within LA County defined and implemented social justice tenets within their school districts. I also wanted to take the opportunity to reflect on how I defined social justice and to compare my definition and experiences to the literature and the interview results in this study. Although there is a significant body of literature on superintendents and on social justice, there is not a comprehensive body of research on superintendents who focus on social justice issues (Maxwell et al., 2013). This qualitative study focused on expanding the research base that is focused on the intersection of social justice practices and the role of the superintendent.

Through a series of eight semistructured interviews, the goal of this study was to analyze how superintendents implemented social justice tenets within their school districts and how each superintendent's leadership journey influenced him or her along the way. The results of the interviews were transcribed and then coded by hand. After analyzing the coded interviews, patterns were discussed in Chapter 4.

This chapter includes a summary of the patterns from Chapter 4 and compares them to findings from previous studies and other theoretical frameworks. In addition, recommendations for aspiring and current superintendents are discussed. Also considered are opportunities for superintendent preparation programs to improve their programs so as to better prepare

superintendents to study and address social justice issues within their school districts. Finally, areas for future research are suggested.

Discussion of Findings

After coding and analyzing the data from the interviews with the eight superintendents, two key findings were identified in Chapter 4: (a) common phrases identified by superintendents when defining social justice, and (b) leadership tenets identified when defining social justice. These findings are discussed and compared to existing research and literature, as are my own personal reflections from when a fellow graduate student interviewed me during this study.

Defining Social Justice

Furman (2012) argued that a clear definition of social justice can assist researchers and practitioners as they improve preparation programs and support systems for social justice-minded leaders. Bogotch (2000) also discussed the challenge of not having a common definition of social justice, especially when leadership programs are trying to focus on the intersection between theory and practice. Shields (2010) also highlighted that, during her study of transformative leadership, she noticed other researchers used different definitions of transformative and social justice leadership. Shields mentioned that the terms "transformative" and "social justice" leadership were used interchangeably. However, in this study, the eight interviewees never mentioned transformative leadership, they only used the terms social justice and servant leadership.

This study leveraged Weiner's (2003) definition of transformative leadership: "an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility" (p. 89). When analyzing

the interview results of this study, I found some similarities and differences to Weiner's definition, specifically related to power and authority, questioning justice, questioning democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility. The next section includes a comparison of the key elements of Weiner's definition to the patterns that emerged in this study's interview data.

Power and authority. The first element of Weiner's (2003) definition is power and authority. As can be seen by the patterns identified in Chapter 4, many of the superintendents understood the power and authority they had to make a difference for their students. The superintendents spoke about the need to lead conversations on the inequities children face in their communities. They also spoke about the challenge of having conversations on power and privilege within their districts, but they recognized the importance of ensuring those conversations occurred. In addition, many of the superintendents spoke about investing time to create the conditions for thoughtful conversations on power and privilege without placing blame on others. The superintendents wanted to push for those conversations to occur so their community could begin to address the systemic barriers in their respective communities.

Questioning justice. The next component of Weiner's (2003) definition of transformative leadership is questioning justice. Each superintendent in this study had a keen awareness of the injustices their students and families face and the need to address those injustices. When speaking about justice and injustices, equity was a common term used by the superintendents. They stressed the difference between equality and equity and reflected on the need to ensure all students received the appropriate level of supports to help them succeed. For these superintendents, equality meant ensuring every student received the same level of support,

but equity meant that every student received the support necessary for them to be successful. For example, one superintendent spoke about the need for additional resources to support the students and families living in extreme poverty within their school districts. These students did not have access to quality healthcare, did not have enough income to buy appropriate clothing, were living in food deserts, and their parents lacked access to quality housing and jobs. The superintendents talked about the need to study these conditions and work strategically to ensure they provided additional resources and supports to help these students.

Questioning democracy. Although Weiner (2003) used the term democracy in his definition of transformative leadership, it was not mentioned specifically during the interviews I had with the eight superintendents. However, the superintendents did question the systemic issues and challenges facing their students. They spoke about how this country was founded on democracy, but history also showed that the founding of this country had inherit flaws.

As leaders work to address historic and systemic barriers that inhibit equity for all students, it is important for the superintendents to critically analyze our democratic systems. Democracy is a double-edged sword that can both enable change and ensure that those who have power remain in power. Social justice–minded leaders must continue to question and reflect on how our democratic system enables change and how it continues to reinforce systemic barriers that ensure the oppressed do not gain power.

Dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility. The final component of Weiner's (2003) definition is the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility. It was clear that the superintendents interviewed for this study shared a commitment to being personally invested in leading this work and committed to doing whatever

it took to help their students. In addition, the notion of shared accountability was mentioned several times by the superintendents. They spoke about the need and desire to constantly engage their community to improve outcomes for all students. They also wanted to ensure their students developed a language for and understanding of social justice so they could better engage in the conditions needed to effect change and to ensure students know what their responsibility is to enact that change.

Expanding the Definition of Transformative or Social Justice Leadership

Although there were several similarities between the definitions the superintendents provided and Weiner's (2003) definition, many superintendents expressed facing challenges in defining social justice. For many leaders, the term social justice is still an ambiguous term. Based on the results highlighted in Furman's (2012) study and the results from this study, there still appears to be an opportunity to refine the definition of transformative leadership and social justice so leaders may speak the same language as they lead this work within their communities. Based on the responses from several superintendents in this study, adding Freire's (1998) lens of social justice to Weiner's definition could provide a more meaningful definition of social justice leadership. Although Freire's work mostly focused on teaching, his message of love, humanization, dialogue, and empowerment of the oppressed could be applied to the role of superintendents. Surprisingly, when asked to define social justice, several of the superintendents spoke of social justice being connected to love. I did not expect this response. Other superintendents spoke about social justice leaders having a heart for children. By including Freire's personalized and intimate approach to Weiner's definition of transformative leadership,

it is expected that this will help practitioners to focus on the human element of this work instead of just the systemic elements.

Social Justice–Minded Leadership Tenets

This next section compares the leadership tenets the superintendents identified in this study to other studies that defined leadership tenets. After analyzing the notes from the eight superintendent interviews, four patterns related to the leadership tenets of social justice–minded superintendents were identified: (a) focusing on servant leadership, (b) building a strong team, (c) aligning systems of support; and (d) using data-informed decision-making. Table 5 builds on Table 2, presented in Chapter 2, to showcase the key leadership tenets in the scholarly literature. Based on the patterns, the four tenets of social justice leaders that emerged from the interviews have been added to the Table 5 for comparison with the other leadership tenets.

Table 5

Comparison of Key Leadership Tenets Including Interview Results

Transactional Leadership	**Transformative Leadership**	**Servant Leadership**	**Social Justice Leadership**	**Interview Results**
Northouse (2007), Shields (2010)	Shields (2010), Van Oord (2013), Oakes et al. (2006), Young (2013), Weiner (2003)	Sergiovanni (2013), Parris and Peachey (2013), and Lowney (2003).	Freire (1970, 1998), Theoharis (2007), Furman (2012), Jean-Marie et al., Normore & Brooks (2009), Blackmore (2002)	
Exchange, negotiation, persuasion, power,	Liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, justice, moral courage, advocacy, activism, participation	Being teachable, showing concern for others, demonstrating discipline, and seeking the greatest good for the organization	Humanization, praxis, unfinishedness, dialogue, problem-posing pedagogy, critical literacy, trust, love, humanity, hope, responsibility, recognition, and reciprocity	Focus on servant leadership, building a strong team, data informed decision making, and aligning systems of support

Comparing patterns to transactional leadership. As seen in the interviews, it was encouraging that none of the superintendents referenced the transactional leadership tenets of exchange, negotiation, or persuasion. Although the superintendents referenced power, they did not discuss it in a transactional leadership manner. Northouse (2007) has defined power in terms of a power relationship between leaders and followers or power over others. Instead of defining power in terms of a transactional leadership style, the superintendents in this study referred to power in reference to transformative leadership or social justice leadership, which tends to address how to shift power and privilege to those who have been oppressed or underserved.

Comparing patterns to transformative, servant, and social justice leadership. The four patterns that emerged from the interviews with the superintendents referenced several of the key tenets identified in the research on transformative, servant, and social justice leadership. It was interesting to see the blend of key elements across the different leadership styles.

The first pattern identified after analyzing the results of the interviews was a focus on servant leadership. When the superintendents spoke about servant leadership, they referenced a desire to serve their communities and families. They often spoke about doing the work in congruence with the community, rather than leading from afar. These superintendents are focused on serving their team and the community to address issues of injustice. These superintendents are focused on advocating and addressing the inequities within their school systems. It was not expected that the superintendents identify a specific leadership style during the interviews. I expected them to identify specific tenets or characteristics instead of stating servant leadership, especially because when I was asked the question about my leadership style, I

focused on the tenets of dialogue, engagement, and working together to address systemic inequities within the community I serve instead of naming a specific leadership style.

The second pattern that emerged from the interviews was a focus on building a strong team. This pattern was not highlighted in any of the other leadership styles specifically. In addition, I did not highlight building a strong team as a key component to leadership for social justice. However, the overarching theme of working with others to advocate for change is very similar to the research related to transformative leadership. My definition of leadership for social justice and the literature on transformative leadership is very focused on working with others to address the systemic barriers that are preventing the oppressed from achieving better outcomes.

The next pattern of being data-informed is very consistent with the tenets identified in transformative leadership. For example, Van Oord's (2013) 5-step process includes the following: (a) evaluation of current practice, (b) deliberation on how to improve, (c) drafting of a development plan, (d) dialogue with all stakeholders, and (e) decision-making. Several of the superintendents interviewed highlighted a similar approach to their work by using data to identify inequities and then tapping that knowledge to engage the community and work with it to address those inequities. I also use a very similar approach to Van Oord's when I engage with my community to improve our practices. We recently used this approach to develop a master plan to address our community concerns with our special education and mental health offerings and arts instruction. By engaging the entire community in a comprehensive and inclusive approach to developing a plan for change, we created a strong coalition of advocates to ensure those plans were implemented. Several of the superintendents in this study spoke about using a similar approach.

Finally, the pattern of aligning systems of support is not a specific tenet highlighted in the research on servant, transformative, or social justice–minded leadership. However, it is a critical component to include in future definitions. If leaders of schools aim to address the inequities within their systems, they need to look beyond the walls of their districts and engage other community partners to secure resources to meet the needs of all students. The superintendents and I focused on building and strengthening partnerships to address the social justice issues identified within our districts. We realized that it was next to impossible for us to address the lack of resources by ourselves. We acknowledged the need to invest the time to build and nurture community partnerships.

Limitations to Consider

Given the research design of this study, there are some limitations to highlight. First, the sample size of only eight superintendents is a limitation. Although the interviews were rich and informative, the sample size only represented 10% of the superintendents in LA County. The sample size of this study could have an impact on the patterns. For example, one unexpected pattern was the focus on servant leadership. It would be interesting to see if that pattern would reoccur if the sample size were increased with other superintendents in future research that builds upon this study.

Second, because this study focused only on superintendents within LA County, it is unclear if the patterns are generalizable outside of Los Angeles. One pattern that may have been impacted by the geographical limitations was the focus on aligning systems of supports. The rich base of city and county resources within Los Angeles may explain why the superintendents focused on this as a key pattern. Expanding this study outside of Los Angeles would help

determine if this is a pattern outside of Los Angeles. To mitigate the geographical concern, I selected superintendents who represented a mixture of district demographics: large, small, affluent, low-income, urban, and suburban districts. In addition, I identified a diverse group of superintendents by gender, race, tenure at current district, experience, and primary language.

The next limitation was the process used to select interviewees. I intentionally identified superintendents who made public statements about equity or social justice. In addition, I used a snowball approach by asking interviewees to recommend other superintendents whom they knew focused on social justice issues. This approach was used so current or aspiring superintendents could leverage concrete examples of how social justice–minded superintendents thought about and approached this type of work. However, I did not compare the superintendents selected for this study to other superintendents who may not explicitly focus on social justice. There is an opportunity for future research to compare and contrast the different leadership approaches.

Another limitation to this study was the lack of consistency in defining leadership for social justice. Participants may have been confused by these terms when answering the interview questions. To mitigate this limitation, I used probing questions in my interviews to ensure the interviewee did not have questions about the term being used.

Finally, because I conducted interviews with superintendents, it was difficult to schedule time and conduct multiple interviews with the same individual. This limitation may have prevented the interviewee from reflecting deeper on the questions being asked. To mitigate this risk, I sent the initial questions I was going to use in the semistructured interview to each participant. However, it was difficult to tell if all participants had the opportunity to read the questions in advance of the interview.

Theoretical Implications

The results from this study have implications at the theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, the patterns from the current study can be examined through the lens of Furman's (2012) framework and can also be compared to Skrla et al.'s (2009) EOCA framework. On the practical level, there are implications for superintendent preparation programs and current superintendents.

Comparing Patterns to Furman's Theoretical Framework

Furman (2012) highlighted a social justice framework that included five dimensions for social justice leadership—(a) personal, (b) interpersonal, (c) communal, (d) systemic, and (e) ecological. She then explored the importance of praxis, or reflection and action, within each dimension. When discussing the art of reflection and action, she referenced Freire's (2002) definition of praxis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed:*

> It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection; only then will it be a praxis. (p. 65)

Although the interviewees in this study did not specifically mention Furman's (2012) framework, it was clear from their responses that each superintendent participated in a level of reflection across similar dimensions. The superintendents discussed how they made space for reflection in their personal routines, especially when they were working to remove systemic barriers that prohibited students from being successful within their districts. In Table 6, Furman's framework is compared to the key patterns from this study: (a) focusing on servant leadership, (b) building a team, (c) aligning systems of support, and (d) data-informed decision-making.

Table 6

Comparison of Furman's Framework to Interview Patterns

Furman's Dimensions	Interview Patterns
Personal	Servant leadership, data informed decision making
Interpersonal	Servant leadership, building a team, data informed decision making
Communal	Servant leadership, data informed decision making
Systemic	Aligning systems of support, data informed decision making
Ecological	Aligning systems of support, data informed decision making

Note. Adapted from *Educational Administration Quarterly* by Furman, 2012, pp. 205–210.

As seen in Table 6, many of the patterns can be mapped from the personal to the ecological level. Even though Furman's framework was developed to assist school leaders who want to focus on social justice issues, the patterns from this study highlight the opportunity for superintendents to leverage Furman's framework.

Comparing Patterns to the Equity-Oriented Change Agent Framework

Skrla et al. (2009) developed the EOCA framework that includes the following elements: (a) having an equity attitude, (b) avoiding demonization, (c) initiating courageous conversations, (d) demonstrating persistence, (e) remaining committed but patient, (f) maintaining an asset attitude, and (g) maintaining a coherent focus.

Maxwell et al. (2013) found that the three respondents highlighted the same characteristics that were identified in the EOCA. The results of this study had several similarities and differences to Skrla et al.'s (2009) framework. All of the superintendents in this study mentioned all of the EOCA elements, except for "remaining committed, but patient." All of the superintendents discussed the importance of staying committed to this work, but many struggled with being patient. Given that students only have once chance at success, many of the superintendents did not have the patience to take things slowly. They wanted to create a sense of

urgency. However, other superintendents discussed the need to move at the "speed of trust." They acknowledged that if you move too fast, you may end up standing alone, instead of with your community.

Implications for Practitioners

When analyzing the results of this study and comparing them to other research studies focused on this topic, I found that the implications for practitioners are primarily centered on suggestions for superintendent preparation programs and current superintendents. Although most of the prior research centered on social justice leadership focused on school leadership preparation programs, it seems appropriate to use similar frameworks for superintendent preparation programs.

Improving Superintendent Preparation Programs

The patterns identified in this study highlight the opportunity for superintendent preparation programs to continue to improve how they prepare superintendents to tackle social justice issues within their districts. Currently, most aspiring superintendents receive training for the position via a doctoral program and/or independent training academies. Recently, a couple of programs were created that focus on supporting new superintendents during their first 2 years as a superintendent. For example, the School Superintendents Association (AASA) created a certification program to support new superintendents in 2014. In 2015, Leadership Associates created a new program to support new superintendents.

Although these leadership programs are important, there is an opportunity for them to expand their focus on equity and social justice. These traditional programs are supportive, but Brown (2004) has argued that it is important for future superintendents to study life histories,

controversial readings, and to participate in diversity panels during their preparation programs. Capper et al. (2006) advocated for preparation programs dedicating a safe space to the analysis of superintendents' successes and failures. Capper et al. believed that if space is not created during the preparation program, future superintendents will need to learn how to cope with struggles and failures on the job in a very public setting. To improve leadership preparation programs, Capper et al. proposed a framework to guide participants through discussions on social justice.

Traditional superintendent preparation programs cover a breadth of topics throughout the program. Although the programs may have one strand focused on social justice or equity, most programs do not have a deliberate social justice focus throughout the program. Instead of bringing in experienced superintendents who are currently experiencing challenging situations related to social justice issues, most programs bring in former superintendents to talk about policy and/or theory. Going forward, there is an opportunity to increase the number of case studies and critical conversations related to social justice issues within school districts. This study provided some concrete examples of how superintendents address social justice issues within their districts. There is an opportunity for leadership programs to expand upon these types of examples and develop them into case studies for students to leverage in their coursework.

Implications for Current Superintendents

Current superintendents have an opportunity to leverage this study to develop a framework and an approach to addressing social justice challenges within their districts. Furman's (2012) framework on praxis can be extended beyond school leaders to superintendents. It is critical for superintendents to take time to reflect on each dimension (i.e., personal,

interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological) to determine the best approach for change. This level of reflection will be strengthened by including the patterns identified in this study: (a) focusing on servant leadership, (b) building a team, (c) aligning systems of support, and (d) data-informed decision-making.

In addition, because there remains a lot of confusion about what it means to be a servant leader, transformative leader, equity-focused leader, or a social justice–focused leader, it is important for superintendents to continue to read the literature and compare how their leadership styles compare and contrast to the frameworks that exist. As Bogotch (2000) discussed, the tension between the theoretical and practical can have a tremendous impact on leaders; therefore, it is necessary to study the intersection between both to have the greatest outcome for students.

By being self-reflective, engaging with, and listening to the community, analyzing current student and community data, developing a shared vision, and working with the community to address necessary changes, superintendents will be able to better address the inequities their students face.

Recommendations for Superintendent Preparation Programs

Preparation programs have the opportunity to incorporate some of this study's recommendations into their programs. These recommendations include: (a) leverage case studies, and (b) ensure all participants have a mentor.

Leverage more case studies. Most preparation programs focus on studying best practices and the successes of superintendents. Typically, case studies and guest speakers highlight how they have been successful. But it is also important to study failures. To build resiliency in future superintendents, they must hear about the failures and, more importantly,

how superintendents have learned from those failures. Preparation programs need to provide a safe space to analyze the failures of superintendents who attempted to address social justice issues within their districts.

Ensure all participants have a mentor. Most programs, including doctoral programs, the Broad Academy, and so on, do not partner fellows or students with a mentor until after they are selected to be a superintendent. There is a lost opportunity to form longer-lasting bonds by waiting until after the program to connect fellows/students to a mentor. It is recommended to increase the number of mentorships formed during the preparation program rather than waiting until after the program to form mentorships. It would be helpful for a fellow/student to hear the struggles a current superintendent is experiencing as they focus on equity issues within their communities.

Recommendations for Superintendents

The final finding focuses on the advice the superintendents had for current or aspiring superintendents who would like to implement social justice practices within their districts. The following four patterns emerged after analyzing the responses from each superintendent: (a) define what is important, (b) find the right pace of change, (c) strengthen school board relationships, and (d) be true to yourself.

Define what is important. By becoming data informed, superintendents can guide their districts to focus on what is important. Leveraging data will help superintendents identify equity issues within their districts. After identifying the issues, superintendents can prioritize their time. It is critical for superintendents to look at the data to focus on how they will adhere to the 80/20

rule, where 20% of their time is focused on the important issues of the district, and the remaining 80% is focused on managing the day-to-day business of the district.

Find the right pace of change. To determine the best way to engage their communities, superintendents must have time for reflection; however, the daily grind of being a superintendent is intense and there is little time for reflection. Given this lack of time, it is even more difficult to ground reflection in research. Without appropriate reflection, superintendents will not be able to find the right pace of change. Superintendents must constantly gauge the commitment and comfort level of their Board and community as they navigate their pace of change.

Strengthen school board relationships. As shared by many of the superintendents in this study, superintendents must be aligned and have strong relationships with each of their board members to be successful in this work. In addition, it is critical that superintendents invest time in working with the Board to ensure they are a cohesive governance team. There are too many examples of when a superintendent did not maintain strong relationships with their board members. When those relationships no longer exist, it is very difficult for the superintendent to rectify inequities within their district. Change is very difficult, and it is next to impossible to effect change when superintendents do not have their school board standing beside them.

Be true to yourself. It was clear during the interviews how personal the work was for all of the superintendents who were interviewed. An immediate recommendation for current superintendents is to be very deliberate about sharing personal stories. By sharing the personal stories that define who they are as leaders, superintendents can better engage their community. Once the community understands the events that shaped the leaders who serve their children, they will be more willing to engage with the leaders to address the district's challenges. In

addition, by sharing their personal stories, superintendents will be reminded of how important it is to be true to themselves when they are under pressure to make difficult decisions.

Future Research

Future research would be beneficial in the following areas:

1. An expanded study that interviews additional superintendents within LA County to better understand how they define social justice and implement social justice practices within their districts.
2. An expanded study that interviews additional superintendents outside of LA County to better understand how they define social justice and implement social justice practices within their districts.
3. A follow-up study with the nine superintendents involved in this study to see how student outcomes in their districts changed and what new insights the superintendents gained in regard to social justice.
4. A study focused on detailed case studies of how superintendents implemented social justice practices within their districts and the impact on student outcomes.
5. A study asking superintendent preparation programs what their definition of social justice is and how they prepare superintendents to implement those tenets within their districts.
6. A study of aspiring superintendents to determine the impact of the mentors.
7. A comparison study of the different preparation programs social justice–minded superintendents attended and the impact they are having on their districts.

Personal Reflection and Conclusion

The role of the superintendent is a challenging but rewarding one. If superintendents are prepared well and supported throughout their tenure, they can have a dramatic impact on a community. Alsbury (2008) highlighted that constant superintendent turnover can lead to lower staff morale due to uncertainty in leadership; therefore, it is critical for successful superintendents to stay in their positions. Given the short tenure of less than 6 years for most superintendents and less than 3 years for urban superintendents (Glass et al., 2000), it is important to determine ways to increase the tenure of superintendents. As demonstrated by the results of this study, if superintendents focus on creating conditions for authentic dialogue and conversation with their community, they will be able to implement systemic changes. Superintendents need to build a team and create the space to work hand-in-hand with the individuals they serve, rather than try to convince them that their ideas will "save" them.

It is my hope that this study adds to the research base that provides aspiring and current superintendents with concrete examples they can use when they find time for reflection. I find that when I take time for reflection and rely on best practices, I make better decisions to benefit historically marginalized students. My goal with this study was to give practitioners a larger tool box they can use to pause and consider multiple perspectives before making a leadership decision that could impact communities for generations to come.

Given some of the recent policy changes having an impact on our most vulnerable students, it is critical for superintendents to reflect on how they can better serve those who have been left behind by the current education system. This is especially true for lower income families, immigrants, LGBTQ+ students, and students who do not speak English as their primary

language. The current policies and practices are treating those individuals as a drain on the system rather than focusing on them as children who need to be supported and nurtured to reach their highest potential. Now, more than ever, we need to develop and support superintendents who are willing to tackle social justice issues. These superintendents can leverage the findings from this study to advance their work. The findings from this study highlight the opportunity for superintendents to focus on servant leadership, build strong teams, leverage data, and align systems of support to better address the challenges in their communities. By locking arms with their communities, superintendents will be able to tackle the systemic barriers preventing all students from succeeding in school and in life.

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1. Please share with me your journey that led you to the role of superintendent.
2. How do you define your leadership style?
3. What is your definition of social justice?
4. How have you implemented social justice principles in your district?
5. How were you prepared for the role of the superintendent and what was the focus on social justice?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation: March 18, 2017

Loyola Marymount University

Social Justice and the Superintendency: A Study of How Los Angeles County Superintendents Implement Social Justice Practices Within Their Districts

1. I hereby authorize Matthew Hill, Ed. D. candidate to include me in the following research study: Social Justice and the Superintendency: A Study of How Los Angeles County Superintendents Implement Social Justice Practices Within Their Districts
2. I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to better understand how superintendents view their role in implementing social justice tenets within their districts and which will last for approximately 90 minutes.
3. It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a Superintendent within Los Angeles County.
4. I understand that if I am a subject, I will participate in a 90-minute interview and may be contacted for follow up questions.
5. The investigator will be Matthew Hill. These procedures have been explained to me by Matthew Hill, principal investigator.
6. Yes, I _____ agree to have some or all of my comments attributed to me.
7. No, I _____ do not agree to have some or all of my comments attributed to me. I do not want my identity to be disclosed.
8. I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these recordings will be used for research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed unless I signed "Yes" on item 5 above. I have been assured that the recordings will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the recordings made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.
9. I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: Subjects will have a minimal risk of feeling discomfort or embarrassment if they realize their definition and level of fidelity to implementing social justice practices do not match their expectation.
10. I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are the opportunity to reflect on how I define leadership and social justice. It will also provide me with a confidential space to reflect on how I implement social justice tenets within my districts and what barriers I face.
11. I understand that Matthew Hill who can be reached at 818-299-1941 will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.
12. If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.
13. I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice.

14. I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.
15. I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.
16. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.
17. I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.
18. In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the Subject's Bill of Rights.

Subject's Signature _____ Date _____
Witness _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

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