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More Than Just Lip Service: A Phenomenological Study of Urban Public Charter School Leaders of Color in Los Angeles

Korey S. Hlaudy
Loyola Marymount University

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

More Than Just Lip Service: A Phenomenological Study of Urban

Public Charter School Leaders of Color in Los Angeles

by

Korey S. Hlaudy

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2022

More Than Just Lip Service: A Phenomenological Study of Urban

Public Charter School Leaders of Color in Los Angeles

Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045

This dissertation written by Korey Hlaudy, under the direction of the Dissertation
Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

02/10/2022

Date

Dissertation Committee

Karen Huchting, Ph.D., Dissertation Chair

William Perez, Ph.D., Committee Member

13:25 PST)

Tonikiaa Orange, Ed.D., Committee Member

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my patient, loving, and understanding partner, Heidi Lynne Jones, to our affectionate, fiercely independent, and goofy first-born, Arthur Christie Hlaudy, to our little human on the way who we are excited to meet, and to my stubborn big sister, Christie Maria Tania Hardway, who taught me more about life and love than she will ever know. I know you are proud of me wherever you are.

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ABSTRACT

More Than Just Lip Service: A Phenomenological Study of Urban

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Little is known about how school leaders of color implement social justice leadership praxis

within the urban public charter school context, especially amid a global pandemic and

heightened racial injustice. This study aimed to better understand the phenomenon of being a

social justice leader of color, specifically examining how these leaders implemented practices

and policies aimed to minimize the marginalizing conditions within their school communities.

The dissertation study was qualitative in nature and utilized a phenomenological framework to

provide an in depth understanding of the policies, practices, and mindsets of nine school leaders

of color (eight principals and one assistant principal). Approximately three, 90-minute semi-

structured interviews were used to build rapport with participants and explore their responses so

that they could reconstruct their experiences leading for social justice and make meaning from

them. The findings were clear: school leaders for social justice engaged in practices that were

student-centered, supportive of their staff, and involved community for insight, even amid socio-

political challenges. With every decision they made, which was influenced by their lived

experiences with oppression, they prioritized and considered the voices and experiences of those

who were and are traditionally marginalized to ensure that systems centering Whiteness were not

perpetuated within their schools.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Charter school expansion and reform efforts are hotly contested and represent one of the most polarizing topics in United States public education. Some have asserted that the charter school movement promotes market-based solutions for greater educational opportunities and is anti-public school. Traditional public school (TPS) teachers have often been criticized for their lack of skills and antiquated approaches to teaching and learning. This kind of negative rhetoric has been used in the political arena to make sizeable cuts to public education, which has ultimately pitted public charter school (PCS) advocates against those favoring TPSs (Honig, n.d.). Current research has revealed that the expansion of PCSs and school choice reforms have exacerbated issues with segregation in urban school contexts. Scholars generally agreed that PCSs are more segregated than their TPS counterparts (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Frankenberg et al., 2010; Garcia, 2008; Marshall, 2017; Ni, 2012).

Conversely, pro-charter advocates have argued that the creation of PCSs in the early '90s was a social justice movement to reestablish autonomy and accountability in the classroom, school, and district to counter TPSs' failures to meet students' diverse needs (Renzulli et al., 2011). Essentially, it has been the belief that, with more autonomy for teachers and leaders and less bureaucratic constraints than what exist in TPSs, there is more room for PCSs to be innovative around pedagogy and programming, and better meet the needs of all learners (Renzulli et al., 2011). PCS advocates also argued that "decoupling school assignment from intensely segregated residential neighborhoods should have a net positive impact on school

integration" (Monarrez et al., 2019, p. v), which directly counters PCS critics' concerns with them increasing racial and ethnic stratification. The opinions on PCSs are diametrically opposed; however, this has not stopped their growth.

PCSs serve more than 3.4 million students in over 7,700 schools and campuses in the United States (The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools [NAPCS], 2022). The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) reported in the 2019-20 school year that PCSs enrolled 7.2% of all public-school students. Since the 2005-06 school year, the number of PCSs and campuses has more than doubled, and their enrollment has steadily increased, more than tripling previous data (NAPCS, 2022). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) purported that PCS school enrollment increased by over 720% between 2000 and 2019 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021). NCES's (2021) public charter school enrollment data also found PCSs to be diverse, historically serving proportionately more students of color and low-income students than TPSs. According to recent from the 2019-20 school year, 69.7% of PCS students and 52.9% of TPS students were students of color, while 58.7% of PCS students and 51.6% of TPS students were students who receive free and reduced-price lunch (NAPCS, 2022). California PCSs serve racially, ethnically, and economically diverse student populations as well, with one in five of all PCS students in the United States attending a PCS in California (NAPCS, 2022).

Even though California is not exempt from the national charter school debates, it is important to know whom they serve, how they are created and authorized, how they are funded, and how they are held accountable since they serve the largest number of students compared to all other states in the country. As of the 2019-20 school year, California had 1,336 PCS

campuses, far surpassing any other state (NAPCS, 2022). PCSs in California served 11% of the

state's six million students, which came close to the number of students who were served in the

TPSs concentrated in urban areas (Fensterwald, 2019). Nearly 55% of California PCSs were in

urban areas, thus serving highly diverse student populations (NAPCS, 2022).

Like TPSs, California PCSs are subject to the following state and federal laws: They

must be free and open to the public, they must serve students of all backgrounds and educational

needs, and they are held accountable to the same educational outcomes as other public schools.

The California Charter Schools Association (CCSA) is an advocacy organization that focuses on

issues of social justice and civil rights, and reported that every charter school in California is

100% public, free, and open the everyone (California Charter Schools Association [CCSA],

2022). It is true that charter schools are, by design, subject to fewer regulations and bureaucratic

constraints than TPSs; however, there is a rigorous authorization process in California they must

complete successfully to be a legal and fully functioning entity. If a public charter school wants

to exist within a specific neighborhood, then they must get approval from that neighborhood's

school district to operate. Put simply, if a charter school wants to open within an area governed

by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), then LAUSD has the power to authorize

and approve (or not) the existence of that charter school. Once approved, the charter school must

demonstrate their effectiveness to the state and local authorizing agencies through the Local

Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). The LCAP is a three-year plan that "describes the

goals, actions, services, and expenditures to support positive student outcomes that address state

and local priorities" (California Department of Education [CDE], 2021). However, with the

recent passage of *Assembly Bill 1505* (2019), the new law revamped important sections of the

charter school law pertaining to approvals, renewals, and appeals of denials. The biggest change permitted charter authorizers "to consider for the first time the potential financial impact of charter schools as a factor in turning down a proposal" (Fensterwald, 2019). Los Angeles is a region that will be most affected by this recent revamping of charter law since there are more PCSs in Los Angeles, serving more students of color than anywhere else in the country (NAPCS, 2022).

Los Angeles is the home to more PCSs than anywhere in the country, many of which are also among the highest-performing public schools in California and the most diverse. PCSs continue to grow in response to demand from parents for high-quality school options in Los Angeles. Los Angeles truly represents the full diversity of the charter school movement with many small independent start-up schools, district schools that converted into charter schools, as well as larger networks of charter schools. Not only have PCSs in Los Angeles offered different approaches and missions including college preparatory curricula, programs emphasizing science, technology, engineering, and math or the performing arts, but schools have also prioritized a personalization of the learning experience through site based and distance learning programs, among others (CCSA, 2022). Most PCSs in Los Angeles were also autonomous meaning that they appointed their own board of directors, did not use the local school district's collective bargaining agreement, were directly funded from the state, and were likely to be incorporated as a 501(c)3 (CCSA, 2022).

Los Angeles autonomous PCSs serve a wide variety of students, most of which qualify for free and reduced lunch and are students of color. Using the most recent student demographic data from the 2014-15 school year, 71% of students identified as Latino, 12% as Black or

African American, 10% as White, 3% as Asian, 78% qualified for free and reduced lunch, 22% were Bilingual Emergent Learners, and 10% were students with special needs (CCSA, 2022). In terms of the academic achievement of students in urban PCSs, some have found no significant difference from TPSs, while other studies found that PCSs in urban charter contexts outperform TPSs in English and math (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2015). Other studies declared the opposite findings (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007). Regardless of the inconsistencies regarding student achievement, one component that is consistent in the achievement research between PCSs and TPSs (Zimmer & Buddin, 2015) was that having access to highly effective teachers and school leaders positively impacted students' learning experiences, their well-being, and their academic achievement (Cardichon et al., 2020).

Twenty years ago, nearly one-third of new teachers left the public education profession within the first three years, and one-half left after five years (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). As of 2022, teacher turnover was still rampant as teachers left the classroom at alarming rates, with 90% of open teaching positions available because teachers left the profession altogether. While some of these openings were due to retirement, two-thirds of the vacancies were because teachers were dissatisfied with their jobs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These issues have been further exacerbated in schools that primarily serve students of color and within the urban PCS context (Miron & Applegate, 2007; Ronfeldt et al., 2013) and due in large part to the stressors and consistent uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic (Diliberti et al., 2021).

Teacher burnout and job satisfaction were also worse in PCSs, where teachers left the profession or moved between schools at significantly higher rates than teachers in TPSs (Miron & Applegate, 2007). Specifically, Ndoye et al. (2010) found that attrition rates in PCSs were

sometimes 15-40% higher when compared to their TPS counterparts. Since PCSs often have more flexibility and autonomy when it comes to programming, curriculum, and hiring, it made sense that the effects of teacher turnover in PCSs could be different than in TPSs (Torres, 2014). Nonetheless, teachers in PCSs were leaving the profession at higher rates because they were dissatisfied. These rates were even higher for teachers of color (Olsen & Huang, 2018), namely due to the lack of school leadership and the administrative support they received (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

School leadership and support have consistently been associated with teacher job satisfaction (Brown & Wynn, 2009; Grissom, 2011; Olsen & Huang, 2018). Boyd et al. (2011) found that teachers' perceptions of support had the most significant influence on their retention decisions, which was consistent for first-year teachers and teachers who recently left teaching. Sutcher et al. (2016) corroborated these findings and found that the support from the school leader was one of the most significant factors teachers considered when contemplating whether to leave their school or the profession altogether. In fact, the 2012-13 Teacher Follow-Up Survey (Goldring et al., 2014) administered by the NCES revealed that 21% of teachers rated being dissatisfied with their school leaders as an extremely or very important factor in their decision to leave; whereas, only 13% wanted or needed a higher salary (Podolsky et al., 2016). Multiple studies also found that the quality of school leadership and support can have a substantial effect on teacher turnover. Kraft et al. (2016) found that when improvements were made to school leadership and support (e.g., quality of leadership skills, professional development (PD) opportunities, and feedback), they were strongly correlated with less teacher turnover, which has

had positive impacts on students' learning experiences, their well-being, and their academic achievement (Cardichon et al., 2020; Kraft et al., 2016).

School leadership and support are crucial to keeping quality teachers, which ultimately help create positive educational outcomes for all students; however, the abovementioned studies did not define school leader support connected to social justice explicitly. The world is currently experiencing a pandemic (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021) and has further exposed the deep-seated systems of oppression, racism, and the digital divide across nearly every urban locale, like Los Angeles. Furthermore, the pandemic has forced teachers to adapt to unexpected expectations amidst consistent uncertainty and increased stress levels, which has resulted in large amounts of teachers voluntarily quitting teaching (Diliberti et al., 2021). The kind of support that is needed from school leaders in 2022 transcends what has typically been defined in the literature as supportive school leader behaviors linked to job satisfaction, which traditionally does not take into consideration the re-burgeoning of racial injustice in the United States and the need for social justice leadership. Never before has it been more crucial to understand how leaders in urban PCSs, who serve and employ so many students and teachers of color negatively impacted by the current sociocultural and political climate, implement social justice praxis, which can be a deep form of support during these tumultuous times.

Statement of the Problem

It is a problem to have minimal access to examples published in the literature of social justice leaders doing the work necessary to improve the opportunities of all students, especially those in the margins. Even though school leadership preparation programs are shifting their curricula amid current racial injustices, current leaders need examples of how to implement

social justice practices now since the opportunity gap still exists and has been widening along economic and racial lines every day (Ladson-Billings, 2006). The global pandemic and rising racial tensions have intensified these problems, and there is even less published research that captures the practices of social justice leaders at this very moment in history. Furthermore, these gaps will continue to widen if classroom teachers and school leaders do not culturally, ethnically, and racially mirror their student body.

It was found that higher mover rates among teachers of color disproportionately impact students of color and students in poverty, whom teachers of color most often serve (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Olsen & Huang, 2018). If teachers of color are not being retained, then it is also true that teachers of color are not moving into leadership roles as frequently as their White counterparts, which creates a leaky pipeline to diverse leadership in all schools. And without diverse leadership in all schools, the practices of leaders for social justice in the literature only provide a myopic perspective centering Whiteness, which perpetuates dominant narratives related to the implementation of social justice practices. Without the voices of educational leaders of color for social justice and an exploration of exactly how they do the work that they do, true, radical change cannot happen.

Little is known about how school leaders of color in urban PCSs implement social justice leadership (SJL) praxis, especially during a global pandemic. In Los Angeles specifically, the same aforementioned issues exist that and in many cases are often compounded in the urban PCS context where primarily students of color from historically and currently marginalized communities were served (NAPCS, 2022). What exactly are the school leaders doing to address inequities in their schools to provide better educational and life outcomes for all students? How

are leaders ensuring that issues like segregation and racial injustice are being addressed in the urban PCS context? How are students in urban PCS in Los Angeles being best served? These are all questions that need answers, but the research around SJL in the urban PCS context is limited.

Research Question

It is imperative to know how urban PCS leaders of color oriented toward social justice enact radical change within status quo systems that inherently perpetuate dominant perspectives. Leadership has been found to be one of the most important factors for improving student outcomes (Day et al., 2016); therefore, it is critical that school leaders enact just and responsive school systems so that educational outcomes for all students, especially students who have been historically marginalized, are equitized. SJL is not always easy to enact, but its strengths in urban PCSs lie in the leaders' abilities to advocate for change without much of the bureaucracy that exists in more traditional educational sectors. This specific context provided an ideal setting to explore and make sense of how school leaders of color implemented SJL praxis. Therefore, to better understand the phenomenon of being a self-identified social justice leader of color, this study aimed to answer the question: How do urban public charter school leaders of color in Los Angeles integrate social justice leadership praxis?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenon of being an urban PCS leader of color leading for social justice in Los Angeles. Specifically, this study aimed to center the often-unheard voices and perspectives of school leaders of color in the urban PCS context. Additionally, this study sought to identify the characteristics, policies, and general praxis of these self-identified leaders, so that aspiring urban PCS leaders could learn from their life experiences

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and their implementation of SJL practices. Little is known about urban PCS leaders' actual implementation of SJL practices, so this study filled a void apparent in the current literature on school-based leadership for social justice by providing examples of how school leaders of color were implementing social just policies in the Los Angeles PCS context amid a global pandemic and increased racial tensions.

Significance of the Study

The global pandemic (CDC, 2021), which has further exposed the deep-seated systems of oppression and racism that are rampant in the United States. Across the country, and in Los Angeles specifically, the resurgence of Civil Rights Era demands and movements like Black Lives Matter have called school leaders to radically shift school practices, policies, and pedagogy towards greater inclusiveness and social justice. There has not been a time in recent history when moral and ethical school leadership for social justice has been more urgent. Grogan and Andrews (2002) called for aspiring principals to "understand their ethical and moral obligations to create schools that promote and deliver social justice" (p. 250). Foster (2004) also called upon leaders to serve as change agents in a system that perpetuates the opportunity gap for some students, and also solidifies already ingrained ideological belief systems for others. The question of how school leaders enact change and promote equity remains unanswered nearly two decades later, especially in the urban PCS context.

This study was significant because it explored and captured the SJL praxis of leaders of color who were already doing social justice work in urban PCSs amid a climate of racial injustice and social uncertainty. The findings of this study could guide aspiring urban PCS leaders in their attempts to form coalitions with like-minded leaders who aim to dismantle systems of oppression

that impact the opportunities and lives of all children they serve, especially if the current

historical context repeats itself in the future. Additionally, this study could help current urban

PCS leaders leverage and utilize aspects of their school-based autonomy to make social justice

central to their missions and visions. Lastly, but most importantly, studying how school leaders

of color implemented SJL practices at their schools can help other school leaders potentially

minimize the negative impacts to students' learning, experiences, well-being, and academic

achievement (Cardichon et al., 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Maxwell (2005) asserted that a researcher's theoretical framework is the "system of

concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs [one's]

research" (p. 33). Creswell (2014) further explained that a researcher's theoretical framework is

the lens and advocacy perspective by which the researcher shapes different elements of their

study (i.e., how the dissertation and interview questions are formed, how data are collected) and

allows for a call for action and change. Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for

Social Justice Leadership reconceptualized social justice away from being commonplace in the

ideologies and language of many leaders, to re-radicalizing it towards social action. Specifically,

they wrote:

> The noble intentions of social justice are becoming more codified and solidified in the
>
> language and imaginations of many educators across many fields. However, these
>
> intentions are lessened when these same individuals value social justice in terms of verbal
>
> articulation but not social action. (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 303)

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Beachum and McCray (2015) made it clear that speaking of the importance of social justice alone is meaningless unless it is coupled with action. For this study, it was important to amplify the voices of Black researchers like Beachum and McCray as a form of "social action" since the majority of published and widely cited SJL frameworks inherently align with dominant Western perspectives (Reagan, 2004). This was not to say that these researchers and their theories of SJL were invalid or did not contribute to the literature; however, positioning the voices of researchers of color in this study, especially given the current sociocultural and political climate in the United States, demonstrated a commitment to social justice in action.

Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership was largely influenced by Cornel West's book, (2004) *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* that outlines three democratic traditions: Socratic questioning, prophetic justice, and tragicomic hope, and Robert Starratt's (1991) development of "multiethical theory for practicing administrators, which entailed an ethic of critique, justice, and caring" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 313). Beachum and McCray's (2015) reconceptualization and re-radicalization of SJL combined the best of both models to support leaders in creating school environments where diversity and mutual respect are expected, practiced, and honored. Essentially, "the rationale is that when all members of the organization feel wanted, appreciated, comfortable, and their contributions and thoughts affirmed, then the organization can operate at optimum levels" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 305).

Their tripartite framework comprised the following elements: *active inquiry*, *equitable insight*, and *pragmatic optimism*. In short, active inquiry involved leaders asking questions about power relationships to interrogate them while also acknowledging that "things are not the way

that they are by destiny, but rather design" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 314). After active

inquiry, leaders gathered equitable insight. The goal of gathering equitable insight was to better

understand people's perceptions about the world through a justice lens, while realizing

everyone's responsibility towards social justice. Lastly, practical optimism was a way for leaders

to advocate for change by promoting dialogue, challenging status quo policies, and modeling

leadership through activism and action. Beachum and McCray (2015) purported that practical

optimism "encourage[d] hope in the midst of hopelessness, action and advocacy in the face of

hegemony, and a sense of spirit (and even humor), which replenishe[d] the soul and revive[d] the

will for change" (p. 316). This framework and its critical themes allowed this study to examine

the extent that principals of color implement the "life service" or action of SJL praxis instead of

paying more attention to words of "lip service" of social justice (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p.

307).

Research Design and Methodology

This study used a phenomenological research design (Moustakas, 1994) to explore and

better understand the implementation of social justice praxis among nine urban PCS school

leaders of color in Los Angeles. The decision to use this type of design was based on its

flexibility; allowing for more freedom during the interview process to explore the essences of the

school leaders' experiences, and the desire to posture the human elements in the data (Miles et

al., 2014). Additionally, this type of research design allowed the researcher to delve into the

"human consciousness as a way to understand social reality, particularly how one 'thinks' about

experience; in other words, *how consciousness is experienced*" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p.

19, emphasis in original). Seidman's (2013) three-series interview process was also used for this

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study because this type of "interviewing allow[ed] [the researcher] to put behavior in context and provide[d] access to understanding [the participants'] action[s]" (p. 19). Additionally, this approach helped the researcher "build upon and explore [the] participants' responses to [the open-ended] questions" (Seidman, 2013, p. 14) as the participants reconstructed their experiences becoming and being social justice leaders of color in the urban PCS context. This structure provided space to establish trust and rapport with the participants and follow up to go deeper into their examples of SJL praxis.

Each school leader was interviewed separately for approximately three 90-minute, semi-structured interviews on Zoom (www.zoom.us), a video conferencing platform. The first interview focused on the participants' life histories and how those experiences intersected with how they defined social justice conceptually in their work. At the end of this meeting and in a follow-up email, the researcher informed the participants to bring artifacts (i.e., school policies and practices) of their social justice work to the next interview. The email included a link to a Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com) survey that also collected their demographic data.

The second interview was a discussion around their experiences with the artifact(s) they brought and how they illustrated their social justice praxis. For this interview, it was important to focus on "the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience[s]" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) and their artifacts as it related to their social justice praxis. The goal of the second interview was to hear how the participants connected their artifacts to social justice themes, while minimizing their opinions.

The final interview had participants reflect on the meaning of their experience as school leaders of color for social justice and to member check initial codes from the first and second

interviews for accuracy. This interview was important because "making sense or making

meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring

them to their present situation" (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Even though Seidman's (2013) entire

three-series interview process was all about making meaning, the final interview positioned

making meaning as the primary focus.

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Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

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Limitations

The phenomenological research design, while it allowed me to explore the phenomenon

of social justice leadership more flexibly and gain understanding about the essences of others'

experiences (Miles et al., 2014), this type of qualitative research had potential concerns with

reliability and credibility. Since most of the data were sourced through interviews, most of the

data were self-reported. Even though the goal of qualitative research is to understand the human

side of data, this method relied on the honestly and truthfulness of the participants. It is also

important to note that I could not refrain from my positionality, as that was the lens with which

the data were analyzed and understood (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, another limitation of

phenomenological research is that the findings were non-generalizable, even within the specific

context being studied, because all lived experiences are unique and complex.

Delimitations

This study only interviewed school leaders of color who were self-identified social justice

leaders of urban PCS in Los Angeles. Narrowing the study in this way allowed me to focus on

the lived experiences of a specific group, within a particular context. Additionally, a benefit of

delimiting the study to self-identified social justice leaders of color who led urban PCSs filled a gap in the current, non-inclusive literature.

Assumptions

It is important to acknowledge my worldview, my known and perceived biases, and my assumptions upfront, especially because this study utilized a phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). Since this approach is qualitative in nature, I was the instrument of analysis and it was my salient interpretation of the data that ultimately led to the findings, so it is important for readers to know who I am to judge the credibility of the findings at the outset.

I am a White, privileged, cisgender, able-bodied, straight, male math teacher and instructional coach. For nearly 10 years I have been a classroom teacher at the same urban PCS network and have been vocal around issues of performative social justice and transparency. In my experience, I have also witnessed school leaders come and go, missions change, and issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion persist. I believe it is critical for everyone (organizations included) to interrogate their own biases to continuously gain higher levels of self- and system awareness, even if the journey is uncomfortable. It is also my firm belief that it is the school leader's job to facilitate this process, no matter the context. In my view, it is critical that school leaders begin building the knowledge and awareness that is necessary for all staff members to disrupt the dominant perspectives that inherently permeate school systems and are often unintentionally perpetuated. It is crucial for the individuals within school systems to commit to developing awareness and understanding of how one's identity interacts within the larger system of oppression so that problematic status quo systems will be critically analyzed.

As a White person, it is a privilege to be able to study the phenomenon of SJL praxis; however, the results of my research do not change the systems of White supremacy that continue to privilege Whiteness over darkness (Love, 2019). I believe that researchers of color bring to this specific work an experience and perspective that may not mirror the dominant perspectives in education, which enhances the authenticity and diversity of the literature in the field. Thus, the theoretical framework was a lens and an advocacy perspective that shaped various elements of this study (Creswell, 2014).

Patton et al. (2010) also stated that people have multiple identities that coexist in different aspects of their lives. The intersections are identity-based and often have concurrent positions of privileges and oppressions. In short, intersectionality operates at the individual level and one's various identities often complicate and interconnect each other at certain local contexts. One's positionality, as defined by Madden (2005), is an awareness of how one's position impacts one's perceptions of the world. In essence, for people to challenge the status quo and to develop alternative models to influence outcomes (Madden, 2005), people need to understand how their position and relative power in an organization affect their own behavior, as well as that of others. Positionality is different for every individual because no one person has the exact same experiences as another, and thus the intersections of one's positionality also are unique, which makes the relative power of every human being sacred and valid. I understand that my identities themselves give me immense power within systems built for White supremacy to influence outcomes both positionally and systemically because I represent nearly every sub-category of privilege.

However, I have come to realize that the privileges and power I inherently wield from a system designed for White, patriarchal supremacy, when I am critical of the dominant perspectives and systems, become less powerful to incite coalitional change for social justice. My ideas, which are byproducts of my positionality, are devalued, which gives me an extremely basic insight into how marginalization works. While nowhere near to the experiences that People of Color experience daily in the United States and in many parts of the world, my experiences speaking up against dominant perspectives have developed in my mind a self-reflective and critical instinct that informs and drives my social justice leadership praxis and my research. In short, I believe that my praxis is rooted in *not* just using my privilege and power for good, for if I did rely upon these, it would acknowledge and inherently condone the current system designed to center and privilege Whiteness. I must use my privilege and power to continuously work in solidarity and coalitionally with like-minded people to dismantle the very systems that give me my privilege and power.

I used member checks and audit trails to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in this study given my positionality and known biases (Madden, 2005; Patton et al., 2010). I also approached this study reflexively, keeping in mind my own experiences with the phenomenon I explored and how those experiences influenced and shaped my interpretations of the data. Using member checks further established credibility because the participants were able to verify and/or clarify their intentions and/or provide additional information from their narrative data and my interpretations and conclusions. Audit trails also allowed me to describe how I collected and analyzed the data, bolstering the transparency of this study. Additionally, the audit trails clarified

to readers why I made the decisions I did and that my analyses were dependent on the participants' narratives.

Definitions of Key Terms

Active Inquiry: The investigation, questioning, and self-examination of a school leader and their actions to interrogate power relationships acknowledging that "things are not the way that they are by destiny, but rather design" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 314). This is one of the three tenets of the Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership.

Equitable Insight: The act of reflection of the past, present, and future to better understand people's perceptions about the world through a justice lens, while realizing everyone's responsibility towards social justice and equity. This is one of the three tenets of the Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership.

Pragmatic Optimism: A mindset school leaders must have when advocating for change is to promote dialogue, challenge status quo policies, and model leadership through activism and action–even when situations seem hopeless. This is one of the three tenets of the Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership.

School Leader: For this study, school leader referred to the participants of this study who were mainly principals (eight) and assistant principals (one) within the urban public charter school context in Los Angeles.

People of Color: The term People of Color was used to describe participants who were eligible to participate in this study. In short, People of Color meant non-White. This term was intentionally used to be inclusive of the intricate combinations and intersections of gender,

race/ethnicity, and class of the participants, which were impossible to name completely. The participants in this study described their own identities and were referred to this way throughout the study; whereas, the term People of Color was used only in terms of defining eligibility criteria for this study.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 provided the background and context for the entire dissertation. Chapter 2 discusses the relevant literature related to SJL in PCSs. It first includes an overview of effective leadership in schools, then narrows its focus to reviewing various definitions of social justice, social justice leadership, and social justice leadership praxis. Each of the aforementioned definitions will also be discussed specifically in the PCS context. Lastly, Chapter 2 reviews various theories and frameworks of social justice leadership and explains why the specific theoretical framework was chosen for this study. Chapter 3 discusses the study design and methodology, specifically highlighting the context, participants, procedures, instruments/measures, and how the data were analyzed. Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings, discussed the findings, and provided specific and pertinent recommendations and implications for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership in Schools

Effective School Leadership

Effective leadership is a necessary ingredient of any successful school program; this is not surprising. Furthermore, school leaders are situated to influence the school climate, teachers, students, and the broader community. Previous research has extensively linked principal leadership to greater student achievement and educational opportunities, which is only second to good teaching (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Louis et al., 2010). Specifically, when effective principals can retain effective teachers, it brings about academic growth for students. However, when quality teachers are not retained, students suffer—especially students of color and students who live in low-income communities (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Effective principals impact school culture by crafting the vision for their schools, utilizing PD to live out the vision, which impacts school culture and student achievement positively (Louis et al, 2010; Sebastian et al., 2017). Without effective leadership and access to experienced teachers, students' learning experiences, their well-being, and their academic achievement are adversely affected (Cardichon et al., 2020).

While research has shown that effective leadership is necessary for school success, there is no objective, universally agreed upon definition of what "effective leader" or "effective principal" means. Researchers have long debated what variables should be included in the definition of effective leadership. For example, Grissom (2011) identified the difficulty of defining what an effective principal is using data from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

(SASS) (Tourkin et al., 2007). Grissom (2011) used six Likert-scale statements from the SASS to encapsulate various aspects of principal effectiveness and performance. He categorized the statements into specific performance attributes: clear school vision and communication of that vision, setting clear behavioral expectations for students, clear staff expectations, providing support and encouragement to staff, recognizing staff for a job well done, and overall teacher satisfaction with school operations (Grissom, 2011).

Additionally, researchers like Boyd et al. (2011) noted that administrative support like making teachers' work easier and developing their instructional expertise, was an integral part of effective school leadership. Many studies also used data from more simplistic teacher surveys to operationalize school leader effectiveness, then implemented those perceptual measures to predict the likelihood of teacher turnover (Grissom, 2011. Boyd et al. (2011) found that beginning teachers in New York City were less likely to leave their positions when they had more positive perceptions of their principal's effectiveness. Since the data in both Grissom's (2011) and Boyd et al.'s (2011) models were perceptual in nature, and therefore, highly variable given the varying contexts of the studies, it is hard to say that their results define effective leadership within all educational contexts.

While literature described what teachers perceived to be effective school leaders, six types of leadership emerged frequently to describe effective leaders within educational contexts: *instructional leadership*, *distributed leadership*, *situational leadership*, *servant leadership*, *transformational leadership*, and *transformative leadership*. For example, research suggested that strong school leaders are instructional leaders in that they foster and manage a positive school culture where rigorous learning is made possible through instructional modeling

(Hallinger, 2003). Similarly, literature pointed to the need for school leaders to practice distributed leadership whereby they promote a collaborative culture and share leadership responsibilities and decision making (Bolden, 2011; Mayrowetz, 2008). School leaders must also be able to adapt to a variety of situations, building trust and catering to teacher needs along the way (Leahy & Shore, 2019). Literature also suggested that effective school leaders serve the larger community and ultimately, implement positive and sustainable changes to transform educational contexts (Burns, 1978; Leahy & Shore, 2019; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Northouse, 2010).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a term that did not appear in the educational landscape, at least formally, until the 1980s. Many of the definitions for instructional leadership were more similar than they were different. Hallinger's (2003) definition of instructional leadership incorporated many aspects that previous authors had explained and was most frequently used by more current researchers. His model "propose[d] three dimensions of the instructional leadership construct: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school-learning climate" (Hallinger, 2003, p. 332). Words often associated with instructional leadership are strong, directive leadership, focused on mission, instruction, and curriculum.

While instructional leadership described how a school leader models instructional expertise and provides feedback in a culture of continuous learning, it did not ensure that the pedagogical guidance teachers received helped them deepen their levels of self-awareness, meet the needs of all students, and was culturally relevant.

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership is a relatively new term in education. Both Bolden (2011) and Mayrowetz (2008) suggested multiple usages for this theory of leadership that are still widely debated. This theory of leadership was most often associated with the terms: collaborative, team leadership, and shared leadership (Leahy & Shore, 2019). Essentially, a school leader who had distributive leadership tendencies is focused on trusting others within a school to make decisions without his or her direct influence. School leaders "shared" the decision-making burden with the teaching staff, which in turn, built trust and transparency and eliminated unnecessary power hierarchies. This kind of leadership was also most directly aligned with democratic decision-making within schools (Bolden, 2011).

While distributive leadership delegates decision-making to other staff members at the school to build trust, it does not always lead to justice and equity. This is especially important if the school leader is unaware or does not center issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in his or her leadership approach.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership is an older theory of leadership proposed by Hersey et al. (1979) to be both directive and supportive. Leahy and Shore (2019) described that this type of leader is adaptable and can cater his or her leadership styles based on the situation, as the title would indicate. For example, after a one-on-one conversation with a teacher, a school principal gets a sense for what his or her teacher is feeling and what needs he or she has, and then uses elements of different types of leadership styles to meet the teacher's needs and help him or her reach his or

her goals. Words often associated with the supportive aspects of distributed leadership are delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing (Leahy & Shore, 2019).

Situational leadership also has its shortcomings. While it is important for a principal to be able to cater to the needs of staff and have a level of emotional intelligence, if the principal's worldview does not include an awareness of social justice, then the type of support, coaching, or directing in schools may unintentionally perpetuate systemic injustices and dominant narratives (DeMatthews et al., 2015).

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is also an older theory of leadership that originated in the early 1970s as a prescriptive academic topic. More recently the topic has been clarified and substantiated by researchers (Northouse, 2010) and is still a popular leadership framework within education. Northouse (2010) explained that servant leadership "is an approach focusing on leadership from the point of view of the leaders and his or her behaviors" (Northouse, 2010, p. 227). This type of leadership also "emphasizes that leaders be attentive to the concerns of their followers, empathize with them, and nurture them" (Northouse, 2010, p. 227). It is important to note that a servant leader puts the concerns of the followers first, hoping to empower them to fulfill their fullest potential. Words often associated with servant leadership are listening, empathy, awareness, stewardship, and humility. The outcomes of servant leadership are follower performance and growth, organizational performance, and societal impact (Northouse, 2010).

Servant leadership also has its critics. As the name would indicate, a servant leader literally puts others' goals and aspirations first and consequently has the potential to lack a personal vision for his or her followers. In a school setting, this would mean that the school itself

may not necessarily have a vision, but rather include aspects of the followers' personal aspirations and goals. Essentially, the servant leader is interested is helping his or her followers self-actualize and meet their professional or personal goals (Northouse, 2010). Even though servant leaders get positive outcomes for creating community and behaving ethically among the adherents, there is not necessarily a focus on developing an awareness of how followers' social identities interact and exist within a system designed for White supremacy. Some aspect of self-transformation is crucial to help diminish or eradicate marginalizing conditions in schools.

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) first introduced a leadership theory focused on transformation, which gained widespread attention in his seminal study. He recognized that change, rather than maintaining the status quo, is an inherent responsibility of true leadership compared to leadership styles based on transactions. Today, transformational leadership "is a process that changes and transforms people. It is concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals" (Northouse, 2010, p. 348). Similar to servant leadership, a transformational leader makes a connection with his or her followers, is attentive to their motivation and needs, and seeks to help them reach their fullest potential (Leahy & Shore, 2019). Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) identified six main characteristics of educational leaders who are transformational: building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, symbolizing professional practices and values, demonstrating high expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions.

Even though transformational leadership is most aligned with elements of social justice thus far, it still falls short in that it does not make diversity, equity, and inclusion the focal

point—transformational leadership's main goal is organizational change (Shields, 2010). Shields (2010) contented that transformative leadership, although it has wide variation in its meaning, connects "directly to the work of school leaders, [with] potential in practice to offer a more inclusive, equitable, and deeply democratic conception of education" (p. 559). Shields (2010) aimed to assess the usefulness of transformative leadership theory as a potential social justice practice for school leaders focused on effecting educational and broader social change.

Transformative Leadership

Burns (1978) emphasized the need for "*real change*—that is, a transformation to the marked degree in the attitudes, norms, institutions, and behaviors that structure our daily lives" (p. 414), which alluded to what would later be called transformative leadership in education. However, the foundational ideals of transformative leadership in education come from Freire (2017), who wrote about how transformation is a result of education undergirded by dialogic relationships. Other early articulations of transformative leadership show up in research focused on advocating for more inclusive education for severely disabled students (Capper, 1989). Specifically, Capper (1989) referenced the work of Giroux and McLaren (1986), who defined a transformative intellectual as someone:

> who resolves to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations . . . one whose intellectual practices are necessarily grounded in forms of moral and ethical discourse exhibiting a preferential concern for the suffering and struggles of the disadvantaged and oppressed. (p. 215)

Transformative leadership differs from transformational leadership in that it "explicitly attends to the moral and ethical issues related to power relationships of entire social systems that often perpetuate inequity and inequality in organizations" (Shields, 2010, p. 565). Shields's (2010) further explained the distinctions and various nuances among transformational, transformative, and transactional leadership in Figure 1. Transformational and transformative leadership are often used interchangeably; however, they have nuanced differences even among their similarities and represent two distinct leadership theories.

Figure 1

Distinctions Among Three Theories of Leadership

	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Transformative Leadership
Starting Point	A desired agreement or item	Need for the organization to run smoothly and efficiently	Material realities & disparities outside the organization that impinge of the success of individuals, groups, & organization as a whole.
Foundation	An exchange	Meet the needs of complex & diverse systems	Critique & promise
Emphasis	Means	Organization	Deep & equitable change in social conditions
Processes	Immediate cooperation through mutual agreement and benefit	Understanding of organizational culture; setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program	Deconstruction and reconstruction of social/ cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity, acknowledgement of power, & privilege; dialectic between individual & social
Key values	Honesty, responsibility, fairness, and honoring commitments	Liberty, justice, equality	Liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, justice
Goal	Agreement; mutual goal advancement	Organizational change; effectiveness	Individual, organizational, & societal transformation
Power	Mostly ignored	Inspirational	Positional, hegemonic, tool for oppression as well as for action
Leader	Ensures smooth and efficient organizational operation through transactions	Looks for motive, develops common purpose, focuses on organizational goals	Lives with tension, & challenge; requires moral courage, activism
Related theories	Bureaucratic leadership, Scientific management	School effectiveness, School reform, School improvement, Instructional leadership	Critical theories (race, gender), Cultural and social reproduction, Leadership for social justice

Note: From "Transformative Leadership: Working for Equity in Diverse Contexts," by C. M. Shields, 2010, in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *46*(4), 558-589, copyright 2010 by The University Council for Education Administration; used with permission.

As seen in Figure 1, the three theories of transactional, transformational, and transformative leadership are related yet distinct in that they each have different foundations and emphases, ultimately leading to varied outcomes in practice. Shields (2010) summarized transactional leadership to be a reciprocal transaction between people within an organization centered on advancing organizational goals; transformational leadership as improving organizational effectiveness by defining a common purpose; and transformative educational leadership as "challenging inappropriate uses of power and privilege that create or perpetuate inequity and injustice" (p. 564).

Transformative leadership is the most socially progressive of the leadership theories covered thus far; however, the implementation of this kind of leadership in practice is no easy feat. While previous theories of leadership lacked a focus on social justice altogether, this theory lacks the appropriate tools to bridge theory into practice, especially given the decisions and tradeoffs principals must make daily. Given Shields's (2010) comparisons in Figure 1, there would also be differences and varying implications for how school leaders make decisions depending on their style of leadership, especially when those decisions involve issues related to social justice.

Effective Leadership and Decision-Making

Researchers have also examined different leadership styles in conjunction with their various decision-making strategies to understand and define their overall effectiveness. Bogler (2001) used Leithwood and Jantzi's (2000) definitions of transformational and transactional leadership, and autocratic versus participative types of decision-making styles of school leaders, to further define their efficacy for his study. Even though there is no formal agreement of what

each type exactly represents, Bogler (2001) summarized what researchers often agree on regarding the four types of decision-making styles: autocratic, consultation, joint-decision, and delegated. The autocratic leader does not consult with anyone when making a final decision. The consultation type of leader consults with someone within the organization and may take the advice or direction into consideration when making a final decision. The joint-decision leader works collaboratively with others within the organization to devise the final decision together; each included individual has some influence upon the final decision. Finally, the delegated leader divides tasks and/or decisions to a group of individuals within the organization and they make the final decision (Bogler, 2001). It makes intuitive sense that leaders who espouse more participative, democratic decision-making styles would be more effective in leading a school; whereas, more autocratic decision makers might have more difficulty establishing trust among staff and thus perceived as less effective, which is exactly what Bogler (2001) found in his study. Newer authors on this topic, like Grissom (2011) and Leahy and Shore (2019), used similar variables in their regression models, factor analyses, and qualitative approaches, respectively, to understand the impacts of effective leadership in both TPSs and PCSs.

The struggle with categorizing school leaders as only having one management style and one decision-making style limits the overall complexity of their complete leadership methodology, which is heavily influenced by their life experiences (Santamaría, 2014). Certain decisions or contexts may take one specific kind of leadership style, whereas others take another, and school leaders may not, in all cases, fit into one category. The complexity of decision-making and leadership among school leaders makes it difficult to objectively define what *is* and what is *not* effective. However, what is clear is in the literature is that to be an effective leader

and make decisions, the leader must possess the skills necessary to model instructional expertise, have a level of emotional intelligence to assess situations and offer individualized support, and be able to help teachers reach their fullest potential.

What most of these leadership types and decision-making preferences is missing, is a proclivity towards social justice in education that "takes account of the ways in which the inequities of the outside world affect the outcomes of what occurs internally in educational organizations" (Shields, 2010, p. 584). Freire (2017) would define this as a kind of "critical pedagogy"—a form of deliberate intervention and decision-making that requires the moral use of power. Even though transformative leadership is tightly connected with social justice and acknowledges power in its processes, it is difficult to implement in various educational contexts.

Leadership is one of the most important factors for improving student outcomes (Day et al., 2016), and as the world experiences a global pandemic and racism permeates nearly every facet of institutions in the United States, more than ever, transformative leadership for social justice has never been more urgent. The success of schools in the future will be to enact socially-just school systems and implement socially-just practices so that educational outcomes for all students, especially students who have been historically and currently marginalized, are equitized.

Social Justice Leadership

Defining Social Justice and Social Justice Leadership

There are many definitions of social justice (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Gewirtz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Marshall & Ward, 2004). From a historical perspective, Williamson et al. (2007) argued that

social justice falls into two different categories: the promise of equity and mobility in society through assimilation, and honoring and appreciating the differences inherent in everyone, while using moral power to resist all forms of discrimination and inequity. Specifically, Williamson et al. (2007) indicated that:

> Scholars who subscribe to the notion of assimilation and individual advancement as social justice confuse the battle to acquire the privileges of Whiteness with the desire to assimilate. They paint a nostalgic picture of the past in which they assume that various immigrants and outsiders actively pursued the opportunity to shed their cultural and linguistic heritage in order to become American. (p. 195)

Some definitions of social justice have made acquiring the privileges of Whiteness and social mobility as major tenets of their leadership theories; however, this study assumed that these conceptualizations of social justice are fundamentally false and problematic. It is important to recognize that this viewpoint of social justice still exists; however, in alignment with those who reject notions of social justice as assimilating to White norms, social justice is more about promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) defined social justice as "the exercise of altering [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions" (p. 162). Gewirtz's (1998) definition of social justice focused on disrupting systems that promote and perpetuate exclusionary practices and marginalization, which is like Goldfarb and Grinberg's (2002) definition, which centers issues of social justice on situations of marginalization. Essentially, Gewirtz (1998)

purported that "social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). Marshall and Ward (2004) maintained that "social justice means ensuring that laws for individual rights are observed so that access to educational services is available . . . social justice can mean finding ways to 'fix' those with inequitable access" (p. 534).

Blackmore (2002) used a critical feminist lens to critique previous conceptualizations of social justice stating that principles of free market reform and new managerialism (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000), which undergird educational reforms in the United States, "do not provide us with any ethical ground upon which to base educational leadership for social justice" (p. 200). However, she also states that this should not dissuade researchers and practitioners to train principals to lead socially-just schools especially since "social justice and equity are more important as globalization creates new, or exacerbates old, forms of inequality inflicted by race, gender, class, and ethnicity" (Blackmore, 2002, p. 201). Conceptualizing social justice in this way acknowledges the ever-shifting sociocultural and political contexts that school leaders collectively experience, which is critical to consider if school leaders are to bring about change toward a more socially-just world (Blackmore, 2002).

Furman and Gruenewald (2004) furthered this notion by expanding previous conceptualizations of social justice to include an ecological perspective, which considers the relationship between social justice given certain physical surroundings. Furman and Gruenewald (2004) argued that an ecological perspective is inherently embedded in conceptualizations of social justice since youth are preparing to enter the shared, global economy. It was their claim that without an expanded ecological perspective that takes seriously the cultural and ecological

conflicts of coexisting in a global economy, social justice cannot be achieved (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004). In order to understand this expanded conceptualization of social justice, "leaders for social justice and other educators must become aware of the links between social and ecological systems by developing a critique of the ways in which dominant culture affects people and places, humans, and habitat" (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004, p. 55). Leaders for social justice must be willing to engage in the "communal challenge involving not only policy and practice but also moral commitments and the courage to work for transformation" (p. 67), which is often opposite to how leaders arising from historic school reforms practice leadership (Blackmore, 2002).

Bogotch (2014) asserted that social justice is a social construction and that "there are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices" (p. 153). He goes so far to state that it is impossible to define social justice separate from the practices of social justice leaders because "social justice as educational theories and practices can never be guaranteed as the world remains imperfect, unpredictable, and unstable" (Bogotch, 2014, p. 52). Thus, really understanding how leaders engage in their work on a day-to-day basis is what defines and continuously redefines what social justice leadership is. Bogotch (2014) assumed the following characteristics in his work regarding social justice and social justice leadership:

1. Social justice is both necessary and contingent with respect to education, that is, social justice can never be guaranteed or sustained without continuous efforts, including work within difficult, undemocratic circumstances.

2. Social justice, as a deliberate intervention, is different from good teaching and moral leadership.

3. Educational researchers come to know social justice through consequences experienced by participants.

4. As such, social justice is defined by participants and validated by researchers post hoc. (p. 56)

Therefore, Bogotch (2014) purported that research alone does not theorize social justice leadership, but rather validates the social justice experiences of leaders. Furthermore, leaders for social justice must deliberately intervene and use their power morally to challenge the systems in place that represent and, subsequently, reproduce the dominant culture and values in society (Bogotch, 2002). This is similar to the Freirean conceptualizations of social justice and Grogan and Andrews's (2002) work that claimed that leaders for social justice must "interrupt the continued maintenance of the status quo" (p. 115).

Dantley and Tillman (2006) clarified that such leadership is activist-oriented, morally transformative, and done with the intent of doing something to prevent and remedy socioeconomic and political inequity. They argued that leaders should advocate for freedom and fair and moral treatment for all people, especially when people experience inequity manifested by systemic forces, which often violate the civil and human rights of those particular groups (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Specifically, Dantley and Tillman (2006) claimed that a real social justice leader "interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of otherness" (p. 19).

Theoharis (2007) used Bogotch's (2002) notion that it is impossible to define social

justice separate from the practices of social justice leaders and defined social justice leadership to

mean that school leaders "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and

other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their

advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p. 223). Ultimately, Theoharis's (2007) definition

centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools by focusing on social justice

praxis.

Shields's (2010) conceptual and empirical work delineated a theory of transformative

leadership, which she argued is social justice leadership, and is distinct from other theories (e.g.,

transformational leadership, transactional leadership) by examining the practices of two social

justice school leaders. She argued that transformative leadership theory is social justice

leadership in that it focuses on equity, deep democracy, and social justice (Shields, 2010). It is

important to reiterate, however, that even though transformative leadership is tightly oriented

with social justice and acknowledges power in its processes, it has limitations in that it is

difficult to implement effectively because every educational context is complex, with deeply

rooted systems already in place.

Limitations of Social Justice Leadership Theories

Social justice leadership is an educational theory without one definition that encompasses

all its complexities. Even though it delves deeper into leadership complexities than traditional

leadership theories, which are inadequate for addressing complex social, historical, and personal

challenges of conflict resulting from discrimination and disparate perspectives, SJL still falls

short of fully encompassing the gravity of shifting leadership away from previous, exclusive,

outmoded practices to focusing upon inclusive social justice. This fact makes it difficult to empirically understand social justice leadership's complex facets and ultimately its praxis operationally, beyond individual, more qualitative cases.

For example, Johnson (2006) recounted the life of Gertrude Ayer, the first African American woman principal in New York City, who was a public intellectual, curriculum innovator, and social activist. She was a culturally responsive leader with a socially conscious and progressive vision—a model of a school leader who challenged the status quo. For example, she was critical of the New York City Board of Education's examination system, which was later proved to discriminatory to Black teachers and administrators. Additionally, she created the Activity Program, which centered student learning above everything else – students engaged in experiential learning, self-directed projects, interdisciplinary curriculum, and classroom experiments in "democratic living." If families of the school were in need, she also provided material resources to them, while maintaining an asset-based view of the cultural and community wealth of the surrounding neighborhood (Johnson, 2006). Ayer's life is a reminder and example that community-mindedness and lifting the voices that are not often heard are important aspects of social justice leadership. While this case highlighted the actions of one leader, it is hard to scale the actions of one person to that of an entire school environment.

Murray-Johnson and Guerra's (2018) study of an elementary school also highlighted how important it is for school leaders to gauge whether people are ready and willing to engage in social justice initiatives on a school-wide level (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018). Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018) wrote about Anne Davis and her assistant principal, Myra Garcia, who had won many awards for their social justice work in a fast-growing metropolitan area in

the United States. They were very much engaged in similar practices as Ayer from New York City; however, when trying to scale social justice initiatives school-wide, they ran into issues. While their own personal social justice leadership dispositions were aligned to shifting the culture of their school, they were not as effective in transforming the school because the teachers were not yet ready to take responsibility or reflect on how their classroom procedures and behavior management techniques perpetuated problematic power structures within the classroom, even though the faculty adopted the positive behavior interventions and support system the previous year. Additionally, Davis and Garcia did not start small and implement these changes over several years. Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018) noted the critical errors of overlooking the school community's readiness and rushing, but this example also highlighted how scaling social justice leadership practices school-wide is much different and more nuanced than being identified as a social justice leader. The fact that social justice leadership is defined on a case-by-case basis, but not the actual practices of implementing social justice leadership on a larger, more systemic-wide scale is why this theory is limited in its scope.

Conceptualizations of social justice and social justice leadership theories are complex and continue to evolve and deepen their applications to various educational contexts over time as sociocultural and political climates continually shift. These theories also have their limitations in practice, particularly when it comes to taking them to scale. Additionally, social justice and social justice leadership do not have universal definitions because of how complex each context is; however, the myriad definitions typically involve similar characteristics, attributes, or practices. Leaders typically have an overarching knowledge of systemic injustice, engage is some sort of critical reflection that centers how inequities show up and are perpetuated

contextually, and intervene deliberately when particular groups are marginalized, which again, is what Freire (2017) would call a kind of "critical pedagogy" that requires the moral use of power. Therefore, it is important to explore the literature on social justice leadership praxis to understand on a deeper level what leaders do and how their experiences leading for social justice vary contextually.

Social Justice Leadership Praxis

Similar to the literature on social justice leadership theories, the meaning of *praxis* varies from context to context. In the context of educational leadership, praxis typically mirrors Freire's (2017) conceptualizations of *conscientização* and praxis in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (2017) used the terms almost interchangeably, defining conscientização as "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). He defined praxis:

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)

Both terms are undergirded by one's critical perception of reality, engaging in some reflection based on one's unique reality, and then taking action to liberate oppressed peoples. Thus, it does not matter if someone has knowledge and they engage in reflection because without action, both are meaningless, and vice versa. Only having knowledge and reflection is mere "lip service," while action without knowledge or reflection is ignorant "life service" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 307). There must be authentic and continuous critical reflection and action to be

considered true praxis. This is how this study and other education leadership literature understand praxis.

Social justice leadership has emerged in the field of educational leadership as a leadership orientation that more effectively alleviates inequities within schools through praxis (DeMatthews et al., 2015). Current literature describes social justice principals achieving varying degrees of success with the following social justice leadership praxes:

- closing the racial academic achievement gap (Giles et al., 2005; Jean-Marie, 2008; Riester et al., 2002; Theoharis, 2007, 2008);

- establishing more culturally responsive pedagogies and practices (Cooper, 2009; Kose, 2007, 2009; Santamaría, 2014);

- including students with disabilities, English language learners, and racial minorities (DeMatthews, 2018; DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2014; Lewis, 2016; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011);

- engaging in community outreach, community improvement, activism, and advocacy (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; López et al., 2010; DeMatthews et al., 2016a);

- engaging in critical self- and systems reflection (Bogotch, 2002; Boske, 2014; DeMatthews, 2018; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017; Hynds, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2007); and

- practicing democratic and shared decision-making with marginalized families (DeMatthews et al., 2015; Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009; Wasonga, 2009).

At the root of social justice leadership is centering the voices of those who have been historically and currently marginalized in all school-based decisions. Across the literature, social justice

leaders have improved conditions for their community, including those in the margins. The research highlighted an inclusive mindset, bringing attention to students with disabilities, English language learners, and racial minorities. It also revealed that social justice leaders practiced democratic and shared decision-making with families who usually do not have a voice in school matters, engaged with the community, established more culturally responsive pedagogies, and closed the racial achievement gap, all of which will be discussed in the following section.

Racial Academic Achievement Gap

Data in the United States show the underachievement of students of color when compared to their White counterparts, suggesting the education system was set up for a few to succeed and thrive, but not others—Love (2019) called this the "educational survival complex." The term "racial academic achievement gap" is used for this section because it was frequently used in the literature; however, it is important to note the United States' problematic role in structuring an education system to reflect the political economy, which itself is structured to create poverty and inequality (Kucinich, 2017). An "achievement gap" exists because of how schools are funded (i.e., property taxes), not because students of color are academically inferior (Love, 2019).

Theoharis (2007) examined principals committed to equity and social justice, specifically aiming to close the racial academic achievement gap within in their schools. He conducted a critical, qualitative, positioned-subject approach combined with principles of autoethnography to study social justice-oriented principals from the midwestern region of the United States. Each of the principals in the study "felt they had a duty and a 'moral obligation' to raise achievement for marginalized students" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 232). Even though some of the principals critiqued

the state accountability measures for testing, they still felt that they needed to see students excel on the standardized tests and used testing data as evidence of their social justice leadership praxis (Theoharis, 2007). It was also found that the many principals were challenged and obstructed by "the momentum of the status quo, obstructive staff attitudes and beliefs, and insular and privileged parental expectations" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 240). Furthermore, one of the ways the principals felt they could face less resistance was to prove that their social justice-oriented decisions could still lead to their students being successful on state standardized tests. Each of the principals had this kind of "tenacious commitment to justice" (Theoharis, 2008, p. 17) and continuously sustained a persistent focus on equity for themselves and their staff.

Riester et al. (2002) examined the role of principals for social justice in highly successful elementary schools serving primarily students from low-income neighborhoods. They found that the principals in the study: (a) promoted a democratic culture, (b) adopted a prescriptive approach to literacy and academic success, and (c) demonstrated a stubborn persistence to make sure each student was academically successful no matter what. Riester et al. (2002) found that:

> Leaders problematized consistent academic failure by students from low-income homes, but also diligently supported and assisted staff and students in overcoming this history. Thus, literacy and academic success for students from low-income homes became part of a moral, democratic commitment to more socially just and equitable schooling. (pp. 301-302)

The principals and educators had the mindset that all students could learn, and they would be academically successful as a result.

Similarly, Jean-Marie (2008) explored the leadership praxis of four female secondary school leaders faced with challenges of social justice, democracy, and equity in their schools. Their actions as principals were largely influenced by their previous life experiences and all shared that "they believed in, valued, and were committed to the educability of all" (Jean-Marie, 2008, p. 345). From having conversations of issues related to diversity, equity, social justice, and ethics during PD, to understanding and having concern for how poverty reduced their students' opportunity to learn, these leaders not only developed relationships to better understand how context plays a role in learning opportunities, but were also "driven by moral purposes" and the understanding that "learning for all children does not conflate learning with measurable student data" (Jean-Marie, 2008, p. 353). These social justice leaders were energized to change the conditions of students' learning at their respective schools and led with purpose, knowledge, courage, and commitment even when they were faced with increased accountability measures and state testing (Jean-Marie, 2008).

Using an instrumental case study design, Giles et al. (2005) studied the practices of a principal from one challenging urban elementary school in the northeast United States. While the study aimed to explore the principal's actions within a transformational leadership framework, it found that a sustainable, caring, and supportive environment nurtured both effective and affective student achievement. Specifically, Giles et al. (2005) noted that the principal's strategies to achieve this kind of environment included: (a) articulating and acting on her own belief system and values as an educator, (b) conveying high performance expectations, (c) providing individualized support for parents, teachers, and students, and (d) creating a stimulating and safe environment in which learning could occur. In conjunction with these

strategies, the principal paid considerable attention to long-term goals by "restructure[ing] the school to facilitate learning through teamwork, collaborative planning, shared decision-making, and inquiry" (Giles et al., 2005, p. 540), which aided the closing of the racial academic achievement gap at the school. The researchers found the principal's practices to be socially transformative, grounded in moral principles, and rooted in democracy, equity, and social justice.

Each of the studies reviewed above highlight important aspects of social justice leadership praxis. Every single leader believed that every student could be academically successful and were relentless in their efforts to make this happen at their respective schools. They created sustainable, caring, and supportive environments that nurtured both effective and affective student achievement, regardless of any marginalizing conditions. It was also crucial for the leaders to be aware of how their lived experiences influenced their leadership praxis. Similar across all the studies was also a focus on learning through collaborative and inquiry-based structures to critique and adjust pedagogical practices to better meet the needs of and affirm students.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practices

Culturally responsive pedagogy emerged to address marginalization in schools and issues related to the academic achievement of students of color, and is another potential indicator of social justice leadership (Cooper, 2009; Kose, 2009; Santamaría, 2014). Regardless, the marginalizing factors that culturally responsive pedagogy aimed to address can still be perpetuated in schools experiencing demographic changes even if schools are led by equity-oriented principals (Cooper, 2009). In Cooper's (2009) comparative case study of two elementary schools experiencing changing community demographics at their schools, it was

found that when teachers did not engage families in culturally relevant practices, cultural tensions existed. For example, when a Latina parent said, "Good morning," but there was no response from the teacher, there was a lack of cultural awareness on the teacher's part, which spurred tension for the parent, who from a cultural perspective, would have liked a verbal acknowledgement. A Latina parent and part-time teacher assistant suggested and shared that "silence and disregard can also cause cultural tensions that students and families feel" (Cooper, 2009, p. 709). The principal of this school did not address these tensions with teachers and often felt that they were insignificant since there were other ways the school cared for culturally diverse groups (e.g., a library with a culturally diverse collection, classes that are numerically inclusive, a Spanish-speaking parent coordinator, class assignments that are inclusive of Black students). Regardless, the cultural tensions persisted.

Cooper (2009) insinuated that building relationships with family members could help minimize marginalizing factors and cultural tensions, and could represent more transformative, social justice leadership. Even though the principals in this study cared for the students and families in their schools, basic care alone was not enough to address rising tensions in schools with shifting demographics. Cooper (2009) found that when a leader helps his or her staff become of aware of cultural differences and is responsive to them (especially when tensions are high), he or she moves beyond basic care and really starts diminishing historically marginalizing factors in schools. Cooper (2009) also asserted that "students need leaders and advocates who are prepared to be cultural change agents—educators armed with the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive" (p. 695).

Cooper's (2009) findings were similar to Shields and Sayani (2005) who claimed that basic care for students and families who have been historically marginalized depoliticizes inequity and promotes a color-blind and culture-blind school that further perpetuates social division. Social justice leaders can and should do more than just tolerate or celebrate cultural diversity; "[they] can lead their school communities in implementing culturally relevant instruction across grade levels, [and ensure] greater representation of diverse families within the leadership and governance structures" (Cooper, 2009, p. 719).

Kose (2007) found that in order to implement culturally relevant instruction, social justice leaders must promote differentiated PD equally focused on subject matter expertise and social identity development. Principals that guided professional learning ultimately encouraged teachers to build cultural capital to access the culture of power (Delpit, 1988), particularly for historically marginalized students (Kose, 2007). This kind of professional learning not only provided the necessary content for discussions centered around equity and diversity, but also provoked "dispositions committed to providing students with the language, knowledge, and skills necessary to survive and thrive in the dominant culture of school and society" (Kose, 2007, p. 292).

Santamaría (2014) furthered this notion and found nine common leadership characteristics that aimed to establish more culturally responsive pedagogies and practices within her participants' respective schools (K-12 and higher education). In her study, she found that social justice leaders engaged in the following practices:

- Having critical conversations, in which leaders initiate and engage in difficult conversations with individuals and groups in formal or informal settings even when the topic was not popular in the whole group;

- Adopting a Critical Race Theory lens, in which leaders choose to consider multiple perspectives when critical issues arise;

- Believing in group consensus, in which leaders use consensus-building as the preferred strategy for decision-making;

- Avoiding stereotype threat, in which leaders are "conscious of stereotype threat or fulfilling negative stereotypes associated with their perceived racial, ethnic, or linguistic group" (p. 371);

- Engaging in academic discourse, in which leaders use current research to inform actions regarding serving historically marginalized groups;

- Honoring constituents, in which leaders made it a point to include the voices and perspectives of staff, parents, community members, stakeholders, some of which are historically silenced;

- Leading by example, in which leaders did not just pay lip service to social justice issues, but "gave back" to the communities they served;

- Trusting with the mainstream, in which leaders "communicated the need to win the trust of individuals in mainstream, as well as the need to prove themselves qualified and worthy of leadership positions and roles" (p. 374); and

- Engaging in servant leadership, in which leaders felt called to lead for social justice. (Santamaría, 2014)

It is important to note that some of the educational leaders in Santamaría's (2014) study who were also People of Color "[had] memories or direct experiences with institutionalized racism as a part of their schooling experiences that they [were] able to use to fuel their interest and effectiveness in the field of educational leadership" (pp. 382-383). Their experiences were an inherent and integral part of how they perceived the world and how their leadership practices were realized (Santamaría, 2014). The direct experiences of school leaders influence their leadership approach and may also align with them engaging in more inclusive practices.

Inclusive Practices

Current educational research has found that including racial minorities in the general school program (DeMatthews, 2018), English language learners (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011), and students with disabilities (DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2014) are ways that social justice leaders attempt to equitize the playing field in their schools, even when they experience push back. In DeMatthews and Mawhiney's (2014) cross-case study, they studied the practices of two principals in one urban school district as they tried to implement an inclusion model at their schools. This new model necessitated a complete shift in school culture, which made the transition difficult for both principals. The principals each had previous experiences teaching students with disabilities in environments where those students were segregated from the mainstream classroom; therefore, these leaders had a "heightened sense of awareness related to the marginalization of students with disabilities" (DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2014, p. 872). While each of the schools faced different challenges, they each had to make decisions that compromised their social justice efforts.

For example, one principal had to decide whether to follow the district's strict policy around enrollment of students with special needs. If the school were to increase their enrollment of students with special needs, teachers would have increased caseloads of students needing specialized instruction, which would limit the school's ability to meet the needs of this group of students. This is problematic because students with special needs are often a group along the margins and laws are in place to ensure that they get the support they need in their least restrictive environment. Another principal faced a dilemma with budget cuts that negatively impacted the school's culture and staffing prospects for his or her school to successfully implement an inclusion model. This principal had to consider adding staff members that would support an inclusion program, but in doing so would need to eliminate other meaningful programs (DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2014). Overall, the principals in the study identified how under-resourced districts, budget shortfalls, policy misalignment, and disgruntled parents hindered equity-oriented school improvement at their schools (DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2014). Even though the leaders themselves were inclusion- and social justice-minded in terms of their leadership approach, strict district policies made it difficult for them to enact inclusive actions.

DeMatthews (2018) conducted a secondary analysis of data from his previous studies of social justice leadership (DeMatthews, 2016; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014), focusing on the practices of three of the principals who aimed to include racial minorities in general education. Principal Jackson focused on making sure that all students were included in the general education environment, especially her African American males who were often labeled as behavioral issues and segregated from the general education classroom as a result. It was important to her that she redistributed resources and learning opportunities so that all students,

especially those who were often mislabeled, could access the general education classroom (DeMatthews, 2018). DeMatthews (2018) also found that Jackson took steps to equip teachers with strategies and PD when she noticed that her teachers were unable to manage student behavior appropriately and differentiate instruction. After Jackson spent time integrating special education programs and inclusive practices, it became clear to her staff that an inclusion model was best for all students. The school began to see results from their students who had first been placed in segregated programs (DeMatthews, 2018).

Despite her progress towards inclusion, various problems and social justice issues surfaced. Many of the parents who had students with special needs and had been in the district for some time, "did not want to see their child included in general education classrooms, partly because they lacked trust with the school district after having to initially fight for the special education placement" (DeMatthews, 2018, p. 551). The lack of trust unfortunately pushed many of the parents to view inclusion as a covert way to eliminate the special education services their child deserved. While it was clear that Jackson's goals were to help her meet the needs of the students with special needs at her school, her inclusion focus was not enough to sway parents who had distrust with the district, especially when the school did not improve by the percentage points the district wanted to see (DeMatthews, 2018).

Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) examined the practices of two urban elementary school principals to better understand how they created asset-based, collaborative, and inclusive learning opportunities and services for English language learners in their case study. Principal Lea engaged her staff in PD around English language learners through an adopted dual-language certification program. Principal Luke led his school to adopt a co-teaching approach where

general education and English as a second language teachers collaborated on the planning and delivery of lessons to all students (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). While each of the principals had a different approach, "they combined federal, state, and local resources to eliminate pullout English language learning programs and reduced class size so elementary teachers would take sole responsibility for building community and instructing English language learners and all students" (p. 646). By eliminating the pullout English language learner services and focusing on community building, PD, and collaboration instead, student achievement at both schools, and particularly for the English language learners, increased. It was also found that relationships and connections with English language learner families improved during these principals' tenures at their respective school sites (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). In terms of their leadership and mindset around inclusion, Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found that:

> When both principals discovered that the English language learners in their schools were underserved and underachieving, a key aspect of these leaders [was] that they felt they could and needed to take action. Committed to the stance that *all* learners can succeed with appropriate and adequate support, they prepared themselves and their staffs to critically examine English language learner services and make well-informed decisions about educating English language learners. (p. 677)

In both cases, a mindset that all learners can succeed with the appropriate supports ultimately emboldened these principals to take action toward shifting the overall school culture by developing their staffs around more socially just practices.

In each of the studies reviewed above, it is clear that social justice leadership praxis and inclusion are not mutually exclusive. Lewis (2016) aimed to understand exactly how social

justice leadership and leadership for inclusion were similar. She found that both kinds of leaders ultimately led alongside each other with similar goals of advocating for historically marginalized and underrepresented groups. Specifically, Lewis (2016) claimed that leadership for inclusion and social justice leadership are similar in that "inclusion is more than the equal distribution of resources; it is about equal access and the full participation of historically marginalised groups. Activism and advocacy have become essential components of inclusive leadership" (p. 336). In practice, activism and advocacy are necessary characteristics of social justice leaders if they are to be successful in their visions of uplifting groups that have been historically in the margins. Authentic involvement in the school community is another practice that can help propel and inform a social justice leader's vision and success toward more socially just school systems.

Community Involvement

Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) conducted a critical qualitative case study of a leader who fostered authentic community participation for advancing social justice within the Bolívar Community Center in Caracas, Venezuela. The community center is a nonprofit organization that is supported by a local chapter of International Social Services in Venezuela, private donations, and by a very small government national fund. Ultimately, it was created to "facilitate . . . urban sanctuaries by working with the communities and not on the communities" (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 157) that have historically experienced poverty, marginality, and social and economic alienation. Specifically, Goldfarb and Grinberg's (2002) study found that:

- authentic participation was possible even when extremely adverse material and social conditions existed;

- democratic participation created a very different type of dynamic in terms of relationships, ownership, and responsibilities for others, programs, and services; and

- everyday democracy helped people develop the skills and practices to sustain it and the capacity to dictate their own directions. (p. 171)

The educational space that the leader provided in the Bolívar Community Center enabled the "local community to control the destiny of their own institution" (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 157), which exemplified how the leader's orientation toward social justice not only encouraged community involvement, but also facilitated ownership and empowerment of its community members. Similar to Goldfarb and Grinberg's (2002) study, López et al.'s (2010) study also aimed to involve the community; however, the principal in this study focused on building rapport and connections with the community by working meaningfully with parents.

In their qualitative case study, López et al. (2010) described the effective leadership practices of one Latina principal in an elementary school on the US-Mexico border. In their study, there were many practices that highlighted the principal's social justice orientation—welcoming English language learners and immigrant children and their families was found to be the main way the principal involved the community (López et al., 2010). The principal adopted a proactive leadership style to work through the myriad of social justice issues the school had historically faced. She challenged her staff to constantly think about the issues of social justice in their own practices and to put themselves in their students' family's shoes when they experienced issues. The principal's proactive style also allowed her to focus on strategic planning, developing more effective instruction (e.g., two-way bilingual program), and engaging and welcoming families to the school where they often felt they did not belong (López et al.,

2010). Involving the families while working to develop more effective instruction for the specific school community, had its drawbacks for this Latina principal. She had the type of motivation and leadership style that self-identified social justice leaders in Theoharis's (2008) study also had: a sense of "arrogant humility," passion about their work in schools, and a "tenacious" commitment to social justice. However, her commitment and drive to bring about social justice and involve the school community resulted in her being reprimanded and transferred from her school site. The principal recognized injustices that existed outside of the school and was committed to making her school more socially just, no matter the cost.

DeMatthews et al. (2016a) also conducted a qualitative case study that explored one school leader's prioritization of the severe needs of families and students in one of the world's most violent cities, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Interviews and observations revealed how the leader described how she made sense of the community and its needs. The community experienced distributive (e.g., depravity of housing, health care, education, economic opportunity) and cultural (non-recognition, deficit perspectives) injustices, which limited certain families from participating in their children's education (DeMatthews et al., 2016a). These out-of-school issues ultimately affected students' in-school experiences, achievement, and well-being shifted the leader's focus toward meaningful family engagement via adult education, community advocacy, and critically questioning of the status quo (DeMatthews et al., 2016a). Critical questioning of the status quo that this leader engaged in is yet another practice of social justice leadership.

Critical Self- and Systems Reflection

The process of undergoing self-transformation through critical self- and system reflection is an integral part of social justice leadership praxis. Mezirow (1991) conceptualized critical

reflection as knowledge and was largely inspired by the critical social theory work of Freire (2017) and Habermas's (1984) theory of communicative action. Mezirow's (1991) andragogical approach also:

> [grew] of out the cognitive revolution in psychology and psychotherapy and "instigated by scores of studies that have found that it is not so much what happens to people but how they interpret and explain what happens to them that determines their actions, their hopes, their contentment and emotional well-being, and their performance. (p. 2)

It is imperative for principals to engage in critical self- and system reflection; however, they are often not prepared to engage in these practices (Boske, 2014). Boske (2014) argued that principals are traditionally trained to be managers, not andragogical experts who facilitate spaces for critical reflection. Critical reflection "promotes a connective process that precedes meaningful learning centered on a change of self, and ultimately, changing ways of knowing and responding to the world" (p. 289). Specifically, Boske (2014) purported that:

> Critical reflection centers on doing and being deliberate—Intentional practices centered on being critically aware of how and why presuppositions constrain the way in which people understand, respond, and feel about the world, in addition to revisiting how such assumptions permit inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspectives in making decisions or acting on new ways of knowing. (p. 291)

Critical reflection coupled with intention and action is foundational to the success of principals who aim to lead more socially just schools. Hynds (2010) found that when leaders engage in critical reflection for social justice, they often face resistance and are ill-prepared to counter it. School leaders need to have additional preparation to develop a social justice orientation that

helps them develop reflection skills to understand the complex systems and challenges at play in social justice reform work (Hynds, 2010).

Boske (2014) argued that school leaders must "actively engage in deepening their empathic responses and connections with school communities" (Boske, 2014, p. 296), which critical self- and system reflection promotes. Furthermore, principals must also develop and understand how significant context is if they are to truly understand what social justice is. Utilizing context as a pillar of their critical reflective work, principals can better identify various oppressive school structures affecting those in specific contexts. Without critical reflection, leaders run the risk of perpetuating status quo school practices, which are often undergirded by oppression (Boske, 2014). Hernandez and Marshall (2017) furthered this notion and added that school leaders should engage in critical self-reflection and equity audits to develop their capacity for social justice leadership, especially if they are from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from the students and communities they serve. Nonetheless, critical self-reflection is foundational and should precede any actions in leadership (Boske, 2014), which is also similar to what Khalifa et al. (2016) found in their synthesis of the literature on culturally responsive school leadership.

Khalifa et al. (2016) synthesized the culturally responsive school leadership literature to better understand how principals engaged in critical self-reflection to lead more socially just schools. While culturally responsive school leadership is not the exact same as social justice leadership, the two theories are tightly intertwined and have interconnected goals. Therefore, the practices explored for culturally responsive school leadership in Khalifa et al.'s (2016) study can also be viewed as practices of social justice leadership. Khalifa et al. (2016) supported the claim

that previous scholars (see Capper et al., 2006) made that "critical self-reflection or antiracist reflection supports the personal growth of leaders and unearths their personal biases, assumptions, and values that stem from their cultural [i.e., racial, linguistic, ethnic, national identity, or class] backgrounds" (p. 1285).

DeMatthews (2018) corroborated Khalifa et al.'s (2016) synthesis of the literature with his more recent findings of three well-intentioned principals addressing social justice issues at their respective school sites in urban school districts. Even though each of the principals in DeMatthews's (2018) study experienced different social justice dilemmas, each principal knew that constant reflection was integral to their ability to unpack the complexity of school leadership and identify their dominant social justice foci. Additionally, it was noted that "constant reflection is necessary to ensure one does not inadvertently make unjust decisions, or if the implications of a decision become unjust in practice, one quickly identifies and rectifies past harm" (DeMatthews, 2018, p. 555). DeMatthews's (2018) findings revealed how critical reflection allowed principals to better understand how their leadership decisions and actions connected (sometimes problematically) to how they viewed their school communities.

Critical self- and systems reflection are vital to creating more socially just schools. Principals must have the skills to be able to reflect not only on their own lived experiences, but also how their lived experiences are connected to larger systemic forces, which can better prepare them to challenge the status quo (Theoharis, 2008; DeMatthews et al., 2016b). Additionally, principals must also be "knowledgeable about decision-making processes and pitfalls so that they can select the best possible alternative and also recognize the implications of their actions" (DeMatthews et al., 2015, p. 18) because doing social justice work is a game with

high-cost tradeoffs that principals cannot afford to continuously risk. Therefore, it makes sense that social justice leaders engage in democratic and shared decision-making practices to mitigate the cost of tradeoffs.

Democratic and Shared Decision Making

Santamaría (2014) claimed that leaders' life experiences with injustice can inform and influence their educational leadership praxis; however, DeMatthews et al. (2015) also purported that "a principal's social justice orientation or worldview is necessary and important to the creation of more socially just schools, [but it is] not sufficient given the complexity of schools and decisions" (p. 18). Theoharis (2007) found that many principals were challenged and obstructed by "the momentum of the status quo, obstructive staff attitudes and beliefs, and insular and privileged parental expectations" (p. 240), which corroborated what DeMatthews et al. (2015) indicated when mentioning the complexity of decision-making in schools.

DeMatthews et al. (2015) claimed that principals can improve their decision-making for social justice by (a) focusing on values, (b) having ethical principles, (c) analyzing soft skills and previous decisions, (d) engaging in critical reflection and group discernment, and (e) making incremental and continuous decisions. By engaging in the recommendations for social justice decision-making, principals are better able to explore, understand, and articulate their values, which help them design better alternatives when making difficult decisions without the time or capacity to make a rational choice (DeMatthews et al., 2015). Additionally, these recommendations allowed principals to critically reflect on their own privilege (given their own positional power as school leaders) to make sure they were not unintentionally perpetuating inequities within their own schools. Overall, DeMatthews et al.'s (2015) descriptions of social

justice leadership as an approach to leadership that "identifies, focuses, and acts to address marginalization in schools and communities, but also an ongoing struggle complicated by personal, cultural, societal, and organizational dimensions associated with the leader, school, community, and society as a whole" (DeMatthews et al., 2015, p. 18), help to better understand the complexity for making decisions for social justice, especially as a leader for social justice.

Wasonga (2009) conducted a qualitative study to discover leadership practices that integrated social justice and a democratic community for student learning. It was found that shared decision-making was the most frequently used social justice leadership practice. Each of the participants in the study shared values of public participation of decision-making and "doing what is best for kids." The practice of shared decision-making was demonstrated by actions that "involved combining ideas or interests, adjusting decisions or actions based on others' input, and collective data analysis" (Wasonga, 2009, p. 209). Essentially, for the participants in the study there was an overwhelming belief that hearing the voices and perspectives of others was important for decision-making. It was not only the leader's job to make decisions, but rather "inviting and listening to other voices demonstrate[ed] a conscious understanding of the significant value of others, as discussed in deep democracy" (Wasonga, 2009, p. 209). Therefore, Wasonga's (2009) study reinforced the fact that democratic decision-making as a social justice practice can help minimize marginalizing conditions and be in the best interest of all children.

Through personal narratives and stories, Gerstl-Pepin and Aiken (2009) found that critical reflection was a significant practice that enabled school leaders to enact fair and equitable decisions within schools. All the participants in Gerstl-Pepin and Aiken's (2009) study realized "that their commitments to ethical behavior and democracy [were] rooted in their personal

biographies and that these life narratives influence[d] who they are as leaders" (p. 434), which connected to Santamaría's (2014) claim that understanding how one's life experiences impact one's leadership practices is crucial to doing real social justice work. As they looked back at their past experiences, they recognized some of the social, educational, and cultural reasons for their beliefs and actions as leaders. When the leaders reflected and considered why they decided to lead with a democratic and ethical leadership orientation, they were better able to enact equitable polices even amid increased accountability measures.

Social justice leadership can be enacted in a myriad of ways to help minimize the opportunity gap that exists between students who are historically or currently marginalized and their more privileged counterparts. Research has shown that leaders for social justice engage in critical reflection and democratic decision-making, ensure inclusive and culturally relevant practices to close racial academic achievement gaps, and involve the community in their advocacy practices. All these practices are ways of improving the conditions for marginalized students—students of color, students with disabilities, and English language learners, and highlight the *praxis* of social justice leaders.

Theoretical Frameworks for Social Justice Leadership Praxis

In the previous section, literature about the qualities of social justice leadership among principals was discussed. This section transitions from discussing the literature pertaining to the successful practices of principals, to highlighting key theories and frameworks that undergird these qualities of social justice leaders. It will then narrow its focus and explain why a framework that specifically radicalizes the praxis of social justice leadership within schools is necessary, especially within today's sociocultural political climate.

There are numerous theories and frameworks that aim to expand, enact, and/or further conceptualize the practices of social justice leadership within education. For example, researchers have developed frameworks that have explored the connections between social justice leadership and immigration (Brooks et al., 2017), have theorized social justice leadership frameworks seeking to retain quality teachers in urban school environments (Khalil & Brown, 2015), have investigated the principal's role in PD for social justice (Kose, 2009), have argued that culturally responsive school leadership frameworks best situate school leaders to enact social justice policies (Khalifa et al., 2016), and have proposed possible frameworks for conceptualizing the preparation of leaders for social justice at the university level (Bertrand & Rodela, 2017; Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2006; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007), some of which have centered race as an all-important element in their framework (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Each of the theories and frameworks call for the need of more social justice-oriented preparation if leaders are to equitize their schools when they finish their programs. But, what about the leaders who are no longer in school and/or may have missed the critical social justice elements in their own preparation programs? The question remains: What frameworks exist for leaders who are *already* in the field?

Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership aims to specifically "'crack the code' with regard social justice, thereby providing more clarity, insight, and illumination" (p. 304) into the kind of praxis current school leaders must engage in to advocate for radical change. All the theories and frameworks cited above have common language about what the practices of social justice leaders should be. Words like equity, critical self-awareness, reflection, action, advocacy, and different forms of activism show up in some

way. This is also true for Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework; however, the theory has been underutilized in research. Part of the reason I think it has not been embraced is that it centers social justice as a form of social radicalism. It serves as a framework to engage in the difficult work and not just value social justice in terms of verbal articulation (Beachum & McCray, 2015). Most of the frameworks play it safe, espousing what universities should consider to strengthen elements of social justice in their school leader programs, but the actual day-to-day practices of leaders who aim eliminate marginalizing conditions within the school space that inherently aligns with the dominant culture, are absent.

It is time for radical change in education and understanding the praxis of social justice leadership is a moral imperative. Frameworks and theories of social justice leadership have played it safe in their conceptualizations of social justice leadership practices; however, the sociocultural and political climate of this specific moment in history demand action and liberation from all forms of oppression. For example, the Black Lives Matter Movement, which was founded in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, was reenergized after George Floyd's extrajudicial murder by police in May 2020 (Dwyer, 2020) and the onset of the global Coronavirus-19 pandemic (CDC, 2021). This reenergizing of Civil Rights era demands coupled with the lack of political leadership during a global pandemic unveiled, again, the prevalence of immoral, unethical, and inhumane systems rooted in oppression in the United States. This may be because leaders aim to play it safe in a sociocultural and political climate that is uncertain, and tension filled. It may also be because maintaining status quo systems when racial, political, and cultural tensions and uncertainty are so high is easier in the short run.

What is easy, however, is not what is needed now—it is time for radical change. It is imperative that in this time of re-burgeoning racial injustice, amid a global pandemic that has further revealed the deeply rooted inequities within schools (and society at large), leaders need a framework that demands radical changes to the current system. Even though many frameworks for social justice leadership include reflection and action that are geared toward minimizing the marginalizing effects of oppression, none explicitly radicalize social justice leadership as an orientation to dismantle the current systems that make marginalization in schools possible in the first place. Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership radicalizes social justice leadership away from meaningless talk to action.

Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership

While there are plenty of examples explaining what social justice leadership looks like in practice, many cited frameworks of social justice leadership are meant for principal preparation programs, and those that have been published perpetuate epistemological ethnocentrism (Reagan, 2004). Essentially, there is an entire system about who gets published and who does not, which inherently aligns with the dominant culture and ultimately protects the dominant perspective. Therefore, perspectives that often counter the dominant narrative are less likely to be published or more widely cited. It is problematic that conceptualizations of social justice leadership praxis by researchers of color, for example, minimally show up in the literature. The voices and experiences of researchers of color, especially in the urban PCS context that serves predominantly students of color, must be uplifted. Thus, it is important to use a theoretical framework by researchers of color and consider their perspectives when conceptualizing social

justice leadership praxis in urban PCSs. This section further establishes why Beachum and McCray's (2015) tripartite framework was chosen for this study.

Beachum and McCray's (2015) tripartite framework reconceptualized social justice away from being commonplace in the ideologies and vernacular of many leaders, to re-radicalizing it towards social action. Specifically, they wrote:

> The noble intentions of social justice are becoming more codified and solidified in the language and imaginations of many educators across many fields. However, these intentions are lessened when these same individuals value social justice in terms of verbal articulation but not social action. (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 303)

This framework was developed by Beachum and McCray who are both Black, male researchers of educational leadership. Using the work of Black researchers in a field that is dominated by White researchers is a form of "social action." Researchers of color bring to this specific work an experience and perspective that a White researcher does not have and cannot ever have. Their lived experiences are an inherent and integral part of how they perceive the world and how their own leadership practices are realized (Jean-Marie, 2008; Santamaría, 2014), which gives an extra layer of lived complexity and urgency to their theories of social justice leadership praxis.

Beachum and McCray's (2015) tripartite framework was largely influenced by Cornel West's book, (2004) *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* that outlined three democratic traditions: *Socratic questioning*, *prophetic justice*, and *tragicomic hope*. Specifically, West (2004) asserted that democracy in the United States is weakening because of its unwillingness to confront difficult questions (i.e., Socratic questioning) as it pertains to the country's ongoing history of imperialism, its legacy of slavery, and mass-genocide of Indigenous

American peoples. Since Socratic questioning is far too rational to consider and be in solidarity with oppressed people, prophetic justice follows the Jewish tradition of compassionate justice, which condemns all forms of oppression and is in solidarity with those who are oppressed (West, 2004). Tragicomic hope refers to the optimism one must have as they experience the struggle, strife, and suffering that is commensurate with life (West, 2004).

Beachum and McCray's tripartite framework was also largely influenced by Robert Starratt's (1991) development of "multiethical theory for practicing administrators, which entailed an ethic of critique, justice, and caring" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 313). The *ethic of critique* is used to help leaders uncover who has advantages, to learn how the system became what it is, and to expose how status quo policies are legitimized through design and language (Starratt, 1991). The *ethic of justice* addresses the issues of governance and fairness in the system, and the *ethic of caring* examines the quality of relationships or interactions between individuals interacting in a system (Starratt, 1991).

Beachum and McCray's (2015) reconceptualization and re-radicalization of social justice leadership combined the best of both models, which aimed to support leaders in creating school environments where diversity and mutual respect were expected and honored. Essentially, "the rationale [was] that when all members of the organization feel wanted, appreciated, comfortable, and their contributions and thoughts affirmed, then the organization [could] operate at optimum levels" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 305).

Their framework combines the theories of West (2004) and Starratt (1991) and comes in three parts: active inquiry, equitable insight, and pragmatic optimism.

Active Inquiry

In short, active inquiry encourages leaders to question the practices in schools and to critique the existing power relationships, while also acknowledging that "things are not the way that they are by destiny, but rather design" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 314). Specifically, active inquiry, like Starratt's (1991) Ethic of Critique, "poses questions with regard to who benefits, which group dominates, who is not being heard, and who has privilege" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 314). Once leaders have inquired actively about how power relationships and marginalization often perpetuate each other, equitable insight has been gathered.

Equitable Insight

The goal of gathering equitable insight is to better understand people's perceptions about the world through a justice lens, while realizing everyone's responsibility towards social justice. In practice, school leaders would use equitable insight "by learning from experiences gathered from critique so that they might incorporate them into a more practical form of decision making" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 315). The insight that a school leader learns through their experiences making decisions for social justice, often highlights negative aspects of any system, which necessitates a need for practical optimism, especially for social justice leaders.

Practical Optimism

Lastly, practical optimism is a way for leaders to advocate for change by promoting dialogue, challenging status quo policies, and modeling leadership through activism and action. School leaders must assuage fears of problematic status quo policies, while providing a necessary, albeit realistic amount of hope and optimism to push forward for social justice. Beachum and McCray (2015), purported that practical optimism "encourages hope in the midst

of hopelessness, action and advocacy in the face of hegemony, and a sense of spirit (and even humor), which replenishes the soul and revives the will for change" (p. 316).

This tripartite theory (Beachum & McCray, 2015) extends frameworks on leadership for social justice and re-radicalizes the term social justice, which "involves increased commitment to the position [a school leader] has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality" (Freire, 2017, p. 37). This is a radical notion of social justice leadership in that at its heart it recognizes and embraces diversity, which situates leaders as moral members of a concerned community that seeks to realize critical ideological pursuits such as equality and democracy (Beachum & McCray, 2015). The very idea of radicalization recalls the Freirean (2017) notion of conscientização or praxis, whereby it "criticizes and thereby liberates" (p. 37), which makes Beachum and McCray's (2015) tripartite theory a worthwhile framework.

Additionally, the framework utilizes both the *immediate* and *ultimate responsibility* of ending all forms of oppression in schools. Dyson (2005) defined immediate responsibility as: "acting accountably to address issues, ideas and problems in the present time" (p. 214) and ultimate responsibility as: "acting accountably to address issues, ideas and problems with an eye on their personal and social impact in the long run" (p. 214). Dyson (2005) argued:

> To speak of immediate responsibility without figuring in ultimate responsibility . . . is to minimize the role of more distant and daunting factors that shape the choices at hand. To speak of ultimate responsibility . . . without understanding how immediate responsibility may still alter personal and social outcomes is to posit a determinism that dishonors individual effort and social transformation. (p. 214)

Social justice leaders must be able to balance everyday interactions with loftier goals of ending oppression, and taking responsibility is the first step. Since this study centers the experiences of principals of color leading for social justice, it makes sense to use a theory that focuses on the social justice praxis of the leader specifically.

The literature highlights the characteristics of effective leadership and decision-making styles, social justice and social justice leadership, and various social justice leadership theoretical frameworks. The tripartite theory solidifies social justice away from being commonplace in the ideologies and vernacular of school leaders and re-radicalizes it towards social action for and with those who fall along the margins. However, most of the studies reviewed in the previous sections center TPSs in their analyses of social justice leadership praxis. The question remains: Are social justice leadership practices the same in the PCS context? The next section delves into exploring what leadership for social justice looks like in the PCS context.

Social Justice Leadership in Public Charter Schools

Charter schools are independently operated public schools that have the autonomy to design and implement instructional programs and classrooms that meet their students' diverse needs and are an alternative to TPSs. PCSs are often authorized by the TPS districts where they are located, but can also be authorized by a nonprofit organization, government agency, or university. The authorizers hold charter schools accountable to the same high standards of TPSs, which are outlined in the authorizing "charter" agreement (NAPCS, 2022). Regardless, most PCSs are market-driven and must compete with traditional, non-public, and other charter schools for students to maintain the enrollment necessary for economic viability (Gawlik, 2018). The fact that PCSs have greater autonomy than TPSs indicates that they theoretically have more room for

innovation in governance and instructional practices, which is why I am interested in exploring effective leadership and the implementation of social justice practices within this specific context.

Effective Leadership in Public Charter Schools

The PCS landscape is complex as every school is unique in its design, mission, vision, and leadership structure. PCSs are facing continual growth, changes in local and state policies, governance issues, building and finance procurement, all of which make it necessary for PCS leaders to be effective in their practice and potentially prepared "differently" than traditional school leaders (Leahy & Shore, 2019). There is limited research that aims to understand what is imperative for long-term successful PCS leaders, but what the literature does suggest is that a charter leader is more comparable to that of a superintendent of a school district rather than a TPS principal (Leahy & Shore, 2019). Much like the difficulty in trying to generalize specific leadership types and their effectiveness in general, it is particularly difficult to generalize results specific to PCSs because every school is so unique. Kayes and Maranto (2006) noted in their research that every PCS has a mission that is unique to the organization or community, and every leader within each school has their own take on implementing the school's vision. Additionally, Leahy and Shore (2019) explained this uniqueness by comparing leadership at a Charter Management Organization and a single, small mom-and-pop public community charter school focusing on the arts.

Acknowledging this difficulty, Leahy and Shore (2019) did a qualitative study of two PCS principals in high-poverty, large metropolitan areas to understand their leadership styles and how those styles differed from TPS principals. The authors found that visioning skills,

communication skills, and managerial skills were what these PCS principals needed more than their traditional counterparts. Aguilar (2014) defined a visionary in education as one who "is clear about what he or she believes and knows is best for children—for their academic, social, and emotional learning. The leader's individual beliefs have developed in collaboration with other stakeholders and have been articulated into a vision or mission statement" (Visionary Leadership section, para. 1). Throughout their interviews, Leahy and Shore (2019) found that participants spoke of the importance of leading with this vision, and it was clear in how they communicated their vision with all stakeholders.

Communication was another skill that both PCS principals found to be an important element of their leadership. It allowed staff, students, families, and other stakeholders to be on the same page, despite obstacles and changes within the organization. It was also an important aspect of the PCS principalship because in addition to typical stakeholders like students, parents, and staff, PCS leaders also had to communicate their vision and mission to people outside of the school context. People like funders, real estate agents, and other individuals in business learned about the educational mission and vision of the school, as a means to procure a building or funding (Leahy & Shore, 2019).

Lastly, both leaders displayed strong managerial skills including knowledge of finance, real estate, and delegation, all skills that are not typically necessary of TPS administrators. Leahy and Shore (2019) noted that instructional leadership was also a significant skill necessary for success in their schools, which supports previous literature research from Foreman and Maranto (2018) and Hays (2013).

The literature provides an overview of effective PCS leadership in general, and details how different leadership styles may be necessary for school leaders of PCSs compared to TPSs. The PCS landscape is complex as every school is unique in its design, mission, community, and leadership structure; therefore, the leadership qualities and practices of PCS principals may vary within the PCS context, especially when leading for social justice.

There is an exhaustive amount of literature about social justice leadership in TPSs; however, this is not the case for PCSs. It is important to understand how social justice leadership is enacted within in charter schools that are more autonomous, theoretically making social justice-oriented policies easier to implement. The next two subsections examine the constraints and strengths of implementing social justice leadership praxis within the PCS context.

Constraints of Social Justice Leadership in Public Charter Schools

A Lack of Clear and Transparent Communication

Clear and transparent communication is integral to the success of social justice leadership within PCSs that create their own missions and visions; however, the lack of communication, coherence, and transparency in PCS networks can often constrain this success, especially if social justice is an aspirational goal. Owens and Valesky (2015) agreed "that a school administrator who does not have a clear and well-developed vision will find it difficult, if not impossible, to be an effective educational leader" (p. 16). Typically Charter Management Organizations have specific missions and visions and govern charter schools within their network to operationalize those goals, but there is often a lack of communication for how these missions should be actualized. Schoorman and Acker-Hocevar (2010) aimed to contextualize faculty governance within a framework of diversity and social justice and referenced the

struggles that come along with pursuing social justice: (a) neoliberalism and corporatization of academic institutions and (b) the perceived ineffectiveness of faculty governance to address substantive issues. Even though this was a community college context, the struggle to operationalize and communicate goals related to social justice is similar to the PCS context in that charter schools are driven by their unique visions and missions, but are not successful unless there is systemic coherence around their organizational aspirations. Additionally, Schoorman and Acker-Hocevar (2010) focused their leadership as faculty officers by using "voice and listening" communication practices, which helped to facilitate "partnership power" (p. 313) in democratic decision-making for action, which highlights the importance of communication and transparency when challenging the status quo.

Noble (2015) also referenced how important communication is as a starting point for inciting change. Noble (2015) made it clear that social justice is about "recogniz[ing] patterns of thought and behavior that support any manifestations of oppression" (p. 114). Specifically, she referenced six foundational terms that leaders must be equipped with if they wish to be stewards and communicators of social justice and cultural diversity: (1) privilege, (2) oppression, (3) cultural salience, (4) intersectionality, (5) critical consciousness, and (6) social equity. Since PCSs are often mission and vision driven, everything they do centers around their mission and vision. So, if a PCS does not have foundational concepts of social justice leadership as a part of their mission and vision, then it becomes difficult for any PCS leader to communicate, lead, and incite social justice change effectively (Noble, 2015; Tharp, 2012). Noble (2015) and Tharp (2012) both argued that the language of social justice is an important of social justice leadership if a leader wants to foster a community that is socially aware because how a leader approaches

social justice issues will ultimately standardize the critical consciousness of a population. To grow one's ability to combat social injustice, one must be able to talk about and reflect on their own experiences first (Boske, 2014). Within a charter school network, there is flexibility to do this deep work; however, in many charter contexts, the focus surrounds innovative pedagogical techniques or changes to curriculum that meet the needs of all students, and not necessarily critical self-reflection or social justice specifically. Therefore, the critical consciousness of many PCS communities does not progress. Banks and Maixner (2016) noted that curriculum cannot be the only thing to change within PCSs that hope to be more socially just. They argued that there must be a system-wide institutional push if social justice practices are to be concretized within the school's culture.

A Lack of Parental Understanding and Support

Parental support is also integral to the success of social justice leadership, especially as it pertains to PCS practices and policies that value social justice. However, when parents do not fully understand the purpose behind the mission and social justice practices of their PCS, there is often dissension between the school leaders trying to enact social justice leadership and parents pushing back against it. All of which, constrain the potential successes of PCS leaders trying to implement social justice leadership practices.

Banks and Maixner (2016) conducted a qualitative case study of an urban Montessori charter school to learn the extent to which social justice education was incorporated across the school community. School administrators and parents were invited to participate in the study. Specifically, administrators participated in semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, and group meetings that focused on how social justice education was implemented during regularly

scheduled staff meetings. Interviews with administrators centered on the general questions: (a) How is the school doing at implementing social justice education? (b) What, specifically, have you implemented as a part of your role? and (c) What do you need to succeed with implementation?

Parents were recruited via an anonymous, online survey where they reported their experiences with the school and then were invited by e-mail and a follow-up phone call to take part in semi-structured, 90-minute focus groups (Banks & Maixner, 2016). Parent groups were separated by race to "ensure all voices were given the opportunity to respond" (Banks & Maixner, 2016, p. 5) since social justice education acknowledges systemic inequities. Focus groups with parents focused on the general questions: a) Are you aware of why social justice education was deemed important enough to be a main part of the mission? and b) What are your thoughts about this aspect of the mission?

Banks and Maixner (2016) used the five tenets of social justice education theory (i.e., inclusion and equity, high expectations, reciprocal community relationships, system-wide approach, and direct social justice education intervention) as an a priori coding scheme to analyze the data from administrators and parents. They found that, even though the school administrators who were predominately White had been intentionally focusing on social justice efforts institutionally, like having social justice education embedded into the school norms, policies, and procedures, it was clear that parents were concerned about social justice education "overshadowing academics or garnering undue attention suggest[ing] that parents would rather be blind to issues of race and class or do not see the value in focusing on equity" (Banks &

Maixner, 2016, p. 11). Banks and Maixner (2016) alleged that this stance could undermine the system-wide approach of the administration.

For social justice to take root within any community or system at large, clear communication about one's goals to be more socially just must be intentionally stated, especially since "racism is an invisible norm" (Khalifa et al., 2013, p. 492). Specifically, for PCSs, the mission and vision must have social justice components not only stated, but every intention and action, big or small, must be made through that lens, especially when the effectiveness of PCSs in relationship to student outcomes and issues of equity is still inconclusive (Wohlstetter et al., 2013). It is also important to "acknowledge, validate, and engage difference, rather than minimize or be blind to it" (Banks & Maixner, 2016, p. 11).

While there are systems and procedures that help mitigate issues of injustice in the charter context, and there are even ways of communicating and "ways of being" (i.e., habits of heart and mind) that honor all identities and lived experiences, true communication and advocacy, like disrupting the status quo, are not always welcomed or taken seriously given the overwhelming (and often unnoticed) dominant White culture that permeates every fiber of the United States institutions, including PCSs.

Strengths of Social Justice Leadership in Public Charter Schools

Social justice leadership theory is not always easy to enact, but its strengths in PCSs lie in leaders' abilities to advocate for change with flexibility, often leading to innovation. PCSs are institutions that aim to provide opportunities for diverse students in flexible and autonomous ways. The flexibility and autonomy of PCSs and their leaders allows for the essential pillars of social justice leadership to be enacted without much of the red tape and bureaucracy that exists in

more traditional educational sectors. For PCS leaders to engage in social justice leadership, they must: (a) acknowledge power and privilege in various contexts, (b) critically self-reflect on their leadership practices, (c) understand social justice leadership theory enough to have a conversation about it, (d) be committed to equity and justice, and (e) be able to build and sustain relationships (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Reed & Swaminathan, 2012). Even though these foundational aspects of social justice leadership exist across sectors, the ways they are enacted in PCSs is unique given their inherent flexibility and autonomy. Luckily for PCSs, they establish their missions and visions, so putting social justice at the forefront is a decision and choice that can easily be made by the school leader. Additionally, PCS leaders have greater latitude in staffing, including hiring, firing, and non-renewal of at-will teacher contracts (Wohlstetter et al., 2013), which makes it easier for leaders of charter schools to choose and develop a staff who are open to, or already value, a social justice orientation.

Additionally, the PCS context is one where solutions to problems can be enacted and tested relatively quickly when compared to their more traditional counterparts. For example, if a school leader understood Khalifa et al.'s (2013) statement that, "Racism is an invisible norm" (Khalifa et al., 2013, p. 492), and also realized that their staff was ready to engage in conversations about privilege and power, they could get started disrupting that reality on a structural level immediately through PD, curricular shifts, policy shifts, et cetera. The school leader of a PCS has the positional power to make change when they identify an issue—they plan their own PD, they hire their own staff, and most of the time decide what the focus and mission is of the school (Wohlstetter et al., 2013).

Social Justice Leadership in Urban Public Charter Schools

Social justice leadership is complex and takes in to account various contextual factors when school decisions are made. The literature has shown that leaders for social justice aim to minimize the marginalizing factors that exist in their schools through various practices. Some of these practices include closing the racial academic achievement gap (Giles et al., 2005; Jean-Marie, 2008; Riester et al., 2002; Theoharis, 2007, 2008)**,** establishing more culturally responsive pedagogies and practices (Cooper, 2009; Kose, 2007; Santamaría, 2014), including students with disabilities, English language learners, and racial minorities (DeMatthews, 2018; DeMatthews & Mawhiney, 2014; Lewis, 2016; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011), engaging in community outreach, community improvement, activism, and advocacy (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; López et al., 2010; DeMatthews et al., 2016a), engaging in critical self- and systems reflection (Bogotch, 2002; Boske, 2014; DeMatthews, 2018; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017; Hynds, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2007); and practicing democratic and shared decision-making with marginalized families (DeMatthews et al., 2015; Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009; Wasonga, 2009). What remains to be understood is how social justice leadership is practiced within the urban, PCS context.

This study explored the phenomenon of being a social justice leader of color in the urban PCS context, which is methodologically explained in the following chapter. There was minimal literature on the leaders of urban PCSs, especially those who are People of Color and those leading for social justice (see Banks & Maixner, 2016); therefore, it was important to explore the implementation of social justice leadership practices in this context. Specifically, it made sense to conduct a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994) that focused on the urban PCS context

and the lived experiences of the People of Color who led them to be more socially just. The goal

of this approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of being a social justice leader of

color in the urban PCS context (Creswell, 2014) to better understand the phenomena.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature pertaining to social justice leadership (SJL) and the practices social justice leaders enact to promote more inclusive schools. Various socially just practices in the traditional public school (TPS) context have been shown to minimize marginalizing factors; however, there is a lack of literature that focuses on the practices of leaders in the public charter school (PCS) context. To better understand this phenomenon in the PCS-specific context, this study expanded on previous research to describe how self-identified social justice principals of color in Los Angeles describe their experiences being leaders for social justice.

In this chapter, the study's methodological design is explained in detail. It includes the research question, method, participants, procedures for collecting data, and how the data were analyzed to establish credibility and trustworthiness. Additionally, I further articulate the limitations and delimitations of this study.

Research Question

To achieve the purpose of exploring the phenomenon of being a social justice school leader of color in Los Angeles urban PCSs and identifying the characteristics, policies, and general praxis in the schools they led, the following research question guided the study: How do urban public charter school leaders of color in Los Angeles integrate social justice leadership praxis?

Method

To answer the research question, I conducted a qualitative study of urban PCS school leaders of color in Los Angeles who led for social justice. A phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994) was specifically used since the goal of the study was to better understand the phenomenon of being a social justice leader within a specific context. Phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994) allows researchers to collect and analyze the rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences and, from those descriptions, to identify and synthesize common themes to holistically capture the essential elements of the phenomenon. The very fact that multiple participants' rich descriptions of a specific phenomenon are integral to phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013), made this methodology appropriate because it explored the complexities and the myriad of experiences leading for social justice entails.

Phenomenological studies also rely on in-depth interviews to collect the rich descriptions and data of the participants' lived experiences. The main goal of this methodology is to better understand the lived experiences of a particular group of people, which fundamentally positions peoples' stories as essential to understanding the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). This approach utilizes open-ended questions to build on and explore participant responses so that participants can reconstruct their experiences and make meaning from them. It requires that researchers set aside their personal experiences to understand those of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). In the sections that follow, I provide details about the participants, procedures for data collection, my analytical plan, limitations, delimitations, bias, and how credibility and trustworthiness are established in the study.

Participants

This study used purposive snowball sampling to select nine urban PCS school leaders of color in Los Angeles. I began by selecting participants that I knew and had a professional relationship with and then expanded the sample by asking those initial participants to identify others that should participate in the study given its scope and delimitations. The snowball sampling method (Mills & Gay, 2019) was used so that chosen participants could provide the necessary data to address the research question and provide the appropriate experience implementing social justice practices (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, since social justice leaders often work in coalitions with each other, it made sense for already selected participants to recommend other potential participants for the study. This sampling process also helped participants that I did not know feel comfortable to share their experiences with me given that they were recommended by someone they have a positive, professional relationship, and where trust was already established. See Table 1 below for participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Race, Ethnicity, or Cultural Affiliation	Sexual Orientation	Age	Years as a School Leader	Charter School Context/Type	Grades Served
Cecilia	Female	Chicana	Straight	44	8	Medium charter network (5-7 schools)	9-12
Denise	Female	African American/ Black	Straight	34	4	Large charter network (8+ schools)	K-6
Lisa	Female	Black	Straight	32	3	Single, community-based charter school	6-8
Pablo	Male	Mexican American	Straight	54	8	Small charter network (2-4 schools)	K-6
MDO	Male	Hispanic	Straight	39	3	Single, community-based charter school	K-12
Carla	Female	Cuban and Guatemalan	Straight	40	5	Large charter network (8+ schools)	K-6
Lauren	Female	Black	Straight	32	2	Small charter network (2-4 schools)	6-8
Campbell	Female	Black	Straight	46	10	Independent charter school	6-12
Erin	Cisgender Male	Black, Mexican, and Native American	Gay	31	5	Medium charter network (5-7 schools)	9-12

All recommended urban PCS principals of color from across Los Angeles who were perceived to be or were self-identified social justice leaders were considered for this study. No other cultural or demographic variables were targeted for inclusion or exclusion from the study, since I intended to seek a broad range of racially and ethnically diverse respondents at the outset.

Procedures

Participants first received an email thanking them for their interest in the study. The email contained an electronic informed consent form through Qualtrics that detailed the purpose, risks, and benefits of the confidential study. After reviewing the form, interested participants who electronically agreed to participate in the study were directed to complete a short demographic survey (see Appendix B). After I received their informed consent form and the contents of their demographic survey, I worked with each participant individually to schedule their first-round interview using Calendly, an online meeting scheduling tool, via email.

Then, I used semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013) to get the rich descriptions of the participants' SJL experiences and how they implement socially justice praxis. I also used thematic pattern analysis (Creswell, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Miles et al., 2014; Nowell et al., 2017) to synthesize the data into common themes after the interview process is complete. Participants were also asked to bring artifacts that exemplified their SJL praxis to further expand and explain exactly how they implemented social justice practices at their school site.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews included primarily open-ended questions to build on and explore the participants' responses so that they could reconstruct their experiences leading for social justice (see Appendix A). Seidman's (2013) three-series interview process was used for this study because this type of "interviewing allows [the researcher] to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding [the participants'] action[s]" (p. 19). Additionally, this interview approach helped "build upon and explore [the] participants' responses to [the open-ended]

questions" (Seidman, 2013, p. 14) as they reconstructed their experience becoming and being social justice leaders at the PCSs they led. Additionally, the three-series interview structure provided the space to establish trust and rapport with the participants so that the participants could delve deeper into their examples of SJL praxis. It was especially important for rapport to be established because in our society there is a history of racism, which can sometimes make it difficult for researchers and participants of different racial or ethnic backgrounds to establish an "effective interviewing relationship" (Seidman, 2013, p. 101). Since the participants of this study all self-identified as People of Color and I am White, it was important to be sensitive to the way issues of race and power could have been affecting participants (Seidman, 2013), and the three-series interview process was partly designed to alleviate and mitigate these kinds of tensions.

Each of the nine school leaders were interviewed separately for approximately three, 90-minute interviews on Zoom, a video conferencing platform. The first interview focused on the participants' life histories up until they became a school leader. At the end of this meeting and in a follow-up email, I informed the participants to bring artifacts that represented their social justice praxis to the next interview. The email also included another Calendly link to schedule their second- and third-round interview. Since Seidman (2013) recommended spacing interviews anywhere from three days to a week apart from each other, as that would allow the participants enough time think over the most recent interview, but not enough time to lose any sort of connection between the two, that was the goal for scheduling the following two interviews for each participant.

The second interview was a discussion around the school leaders' experiences with the artifact(s) they brought and how they illustrated their social justice praxis. For this interview, it

was important to focus on "the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience[s]" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21) and the evidence as it related specifically to their social justice praxis. The goal of second interview was to hear how the participants connected their artifacts of praxis to social justice themes.

The final interview concentrated on reflection. Participants reflected on the meaning of their experience as leaders for social justice and member checked initial codes from the first and second interviews for accuracy. This interview was important because "making sense or making meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation" (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). Even though Seidman's (2013) entire three-series interview process is all about making meaning, the final interview positions making meaning and reflection as the primary foci.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, it is important to be transparent about the process of analyzing data. This section details how thematic pattern analysis (Creswell, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Miles et al., 2014; Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña, 2016) was used to analyze the interview data.

All interview data was recorded (with the permission of each interviewee) and transcribed using Zoom's cloud recording feature, which provided an initial transcript. I cleaned up and edited the transcripts to make sure there were no transcription errors; however, the contents (e.g., syntax, diction) of the transcripts remained completely unchanged to ensure that the school leaders' voices and the descriptions of their experiences were verbatim. Recording the interview also gave me access to the non-verbal communication during interviews. After

conducting the interviews, the audio transcripts were reduced to assess pertinent data and were further synthesized into codes and themes using Dedoose (Dedoose software tool version 9.0.46 2021), a data analysis software. I then analyzed the data using thematic pattern analysis (Creswell, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Miles et al., 2014; Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña, 2016).

Specifically, this process involved downloading the Zoom audio text into a secure Microsoft Word document. Then a first reading of the transcripts was conducted, where important information was noted to create initial codes using the comments feature. These codes morphed and changed over time as each interview provided additional data and as the writing process progressed, where similar phrases and themes were grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, and when applicable, In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) was also used to make sure that the interviewees' personal reflections and words were not lost in the coding and analysis process, which ideologically aligned with the phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994).

Once each interview was completed and initial readings and coding were conducted using Microsoft Word, the transcripts were read again, and codes were uploaded to Dedoose to further organize the data and see trends in an organized way. This platform helped me visualize potential themes across all the participants' experiences, which were then solidified and noted in a systematic and reflexive way. I created categories synthesizing the data into more digestible forms, which helped me identify consistencies and patterns from the interview transcription data. At this stage, I also used the diagramming tools within Dedoose to make sense of theme

connections between the interviews, identifying when codes overlapped with each other (Nowell et al., 2017).

To further identify patterns from the interview transcriptions in a concentrated way, I focused specifically on finding similarities, differences, and paid attention to the frequency of actions, shared practices, and comments that existed within each code. I started by finding similarities and differences in the data because this was the best way to understand if the social justice practices happened in the same way contextually or in predictably different ways. Once I analyzed all the interview transcriptions using this approach, I was able to better understand exactly how this particular group of school leaders implemented social justice praxis in their work and how their lived experiences contributed to that. I made sure this happened transparently and in a trustworthy manner and had each participant member check their transcripts and my initial codes and patterns. Additionally, I met with my dissertation chair to vet the initial themes and subthemes to make sure the analysis process and initial findings were sound (Nowell et al., 2017). As with all qualitative research, it was critical to ensure that the study was conducted with the utmost credibility and trustworthiness.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness in this study given my positionality and biases, I used member checks and audit trails. I also approached this study reflexively, keeping in mind my own experiences with the phenomenon being explored and how those experiences could have potentially influenced and shaped my interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017; Saldaña, 2016). First, the data collected via interviews was member checked to establish credibility because the participants verified or clarified their intentions and/or provided additional information from their interview transcriptions and my interpretations and conclusions

between the second and third interviews. This ensured that the codes, direct quotes, and themes accurately represented their voices and experiences. Audit trails allowed me to describe how I collected and analyzed the data, which made sure the study was conducted transparently.

I also knew some of the people I interviewed and had positive collegial relationships with them. This provided an additional level of complexity to the study because of our prior shared experiences, and the varied level of closeness I felt with each of them. Some researchers might have anticipated that this nuance could have skew the overall descriptions of the data as it related to their social justice practices; however, I found this to be a strength of the study because the participants were candid and truthful in what they shared during the interview process.

Additionally, I was not any of the participants' supervisor, so there was minimal worry about any hierarchical power dynamics as it pertained to their jobs during the interviews. Since researchers spend a lot of time in the field and have extended amounts of firsthand engagements with their participants and the accompanying literature, it was important that I used a reflexive approach. I reflected about how my positionality, power, personal background, Whiteness, and any experiences could have potentially influenced the study. It was not just a matter of acknowledging my biases, but also how my background and experiences could have shaped the overall direction of the study (Creswell, 2014).

Limitations

Phenomenological Design and Self-Report Data

The phenomenological research design, while it allowed me to explore the phenomenon of SJL more flexibly and gain a deeper understanding about the essences of others' experiences (Miles et al., 2014), this type of qualitative research had potential concerns with reliability and

credibility. Since most of the data were sourced through interviews, most of the data were self-reported. Even though the goal of qualitative research is to understand the human side of data, this method relied on the honestly and truthfulness of the participants. It was also important to note that I was unable to refrain from my own biases, as that was the lens with which the data was analyzed and understood (Creswell, 2014).

The participants shared their life experiences with me as they remembered them. While it was my hope that the experiences and practices they shared were truthful and accurately represented the situations they described, there was a chance that the data shared were not wholly representative of the situations they described. Since memories vary and perceptions differ, recounting experiences could have reflected inaccuracies simply due to the participant's memory, their current context, and their ability to provide details. Additionally, since I asked the participants to bring artifact(s) exemplifying their integration of SJL praxis in their day-to-day work, I trusted that the artifact(s) they shared were truthful, factual, and representative of the situations they described and were utilized at their school sites.

Sample Size

I interviewed nine school leaders, which was an appropriate sample size for phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013). Even though the sample size was appropriate for phenomenological studies, the data from this sample were inherently non-generalizable, even within the specific context being studied.

Positionality

It is important to acknowledge my worldview, my known and perceived biases, and my assumptions upfront, especially since this study utilized a phenomenological approach. Since this

approach is qualitative in nature, I was the instrument of analysis and it was my interpretation of the data that led to the findings, so it is important for readers to know who I am to judge the credibility of my findings at the outset. I am a White, straight, cisgender, able-bodied male math teacher and instructional coach. For nearly 10 years, I was a classroom teacher within the same urban PCS network and was vocal around issues of performative social justice and transparency.

In my time working with charter schools, I also witnessed school leaders come and go, missions change, and issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion persist. I believe it is critical for everyone (organizations included) to interrogate their own biases and blind spots to continuously gain higher levels of self-and system awareness, even if the journey is uncomfortable. It is also my firm belief that a school leader at every level must facilitate this process, no matter their context, to begin building the knowledge and awareness necessary to disrupt the dominant perspectives that inherently infiltrate school systems and are often unintentionally perpetuated by school staff. A continued commitment to developing awareness and an understanding of how one's identity interacts within the larger system are crucial if school systems are to change, as it becomes more probable that problematic status quo systems will be critically analyzed if the individuals within the organizations interrogate their own lived experiences.

In a system that is intentionally structured to advantage Whiteness and disadvantage darkness (Love, 2019), my Whiteness, although intentionally decentered in this study, was important to highlight as a limitation because it is never wholly inescapable. I cannot escape my undiscovered biases and the privileges I am afforded because of my Whiteness, even if I continue to actively interrogate my lived experiences and everyday actions both working in

schools and in general. Ultimately, it was my interpretation of the data that led to the findings, and even though I will never be able to fully understand how the participants' lived experiences continue to impact their leadership practices because of my Whiteness, centering the voices of these leaders of color was the best way I knew how to honor and contribute to the work they have been doing in their schools.

I am also aware that my identities themselves give me immense power within systems built for White supremacy to influence outcomes both positionally and systemically because I represent nearly every sub-category of privilege. However, I have come to realize that the privileges and power I inherently wield from a system designed for White, patriarchal supremacy, when misaligned with these dominant perspectives, become less powerful to incite change for social justice. While my physical characteristics are never questioned, my ideas, which are byproducts of my positionality, are not as welcomed when I have challenged problematic status quo systems, which has given me very basic insight into how marginalization works, and how one's voice can be devalued. Even though this does not compare to the experiences that People of Color experience daily in the United States and many parts of the world, my experiences speaking up against dominant perspectives has developed in my mind a self-reflective and critical instinct that informs my SJL praxis and my research.

Delimitations

School Leaders of Color

While it is true that people can engage in SJL in a myriad of forms in schools, this study mainly interviewed current principals (all except for one assistant principal) who all self-

identified as People of Color. Additionally, all participants in this study self-identified as social justice leaders or were identified by their colleagues to be social justice leaders.

Principals were the purposely chosen as the main type of participant because previous research has extensively linked principal leadership to greater student achievement and educational opportunities (Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020; Louis et al., 2010). Recent research has also suggested that school principals can deeply impact instruction, student learning, and school culture (Branch et al., 2013; Louis et al, 2010; Sebastian et al., 2017). Additionally, of all the potential leadership positions in the school, the principal is typically the most knowledgeable about resources, and is best positioned to initiate, lead, and support school-level reforms (Leithwood et al., 2020; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). The principal is also the most recognizable leadership position in a school and is often the one held most accountable for student progress.

Delimiting the study to mainly principals of color allowed the study to focus on the lives and experiences of a specific group and within a particular context who rarely moved into leadership roles given that retention rates of teachers of color are disproportionately low (Carver-Thomas, 2018) and system designed to privilege Whiteness (Love, 2019), creating a leaky pipeline to leadership. Therefore, a benefit of delimiting this study to self-identified social justice leaders of color who led urban PCS filled a large gap in the current leadership literature.

Los Angeles Urban Public Charter School Context

Urban PCSs with Los Angeles was another delimitation for a couple reasons. First, I have worked in urban PCS for my entire teaching career and was interested in exploring the SJL practices of charter school leaders. Second, PCSs are, by design, subject to fewer regulations and

bureaucratic constraints than TPSs, which made the possibility of implementing social justice-oriented agendas theoretically easier for PCS leaders.

Additionally, I only interviewed PCS school leaders from urban schools in the Los Angeles area. Los Angeles was chosen because it is the home to more PCSs than anywhere in the country, many of which are also among the highest-performing public schools in California and the most diverse (CCSA, 2022). Additionally urban locales in Los Angeles provided a rich diversity of students by race, socioeconomic status, and cultural backgrounds, and also truly represented the full diversity of the charter school movement with many small, independent start-up schools, district school conversions, as well as larger networks of charter schools (CCSA, 2022).

Conclusion

In summary, I conducted a qualitative study that utilized a series of approximately three in-depth phenomenological interviews as its methodology. This method was chosen to learn about the life experiences of social justice school leaders of color in Los Angeles and how they implemented (and continue to implement) social justice praxis in their specific urban PCS contexts. As was noted in Chapters 1 and 2, SJL practices have been studied in the TPS context, but there was minimal research in the urban PCS context. Additionally, research that specifically centered the voices of school leaders of color was lacking, too. This study filled a gap in the literature and provided various examples to aspiring school leaders for how they can implement social justice practices at their respective school sites in the future.

The final two chapters of this dissertation focus on reporting the words, experiences, and results from the study as well as an overall summary, the implications, and a discussion of the

findings. Specifically, Chapter 4 focuses on reporting the data and shared the rich descriptions from the participant interviews. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and provides a discussion around the implications of the findings, including suggestions for future research and an overall conclusion.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Background

The purpose of this study was to better understand the phenomenon of being a social justice leader of color of an urban public charter school. Specifically, the study aimed to explore how social justice leaders of color implement practices, policies, and procedures within Los Angeles charter schools to bring about more equitable outcomes for their students who have been historically and are currently marginalized. The research question this study aimed to answer was: How do urban public charter school leaders of color in Los Angeles integrate social justice leadership praxis?

To answer the research question, a phenomenological study was conducted of nine charter school leaders of color with varying years of public charter school leadership experience. Each participant engaged in approximately three semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013) on Zoom where they shared aspects of their life history, explained how they implement social justice practices at their respective schools, and reflected on the entire interview process to make sense of how their life history has impacted their overall leadership approach.

This chapter opens with the participants' conceptual definitions of social justice leadership. The purpose of opening the chapter this way was to privilege participant voices and to amplify their deep understanding and embodiment of social justice leadership and its complexity, while also providing the necessary context for the findings. Even though each participant is a self-identified social justice leader, their conceptual definitions illuminated their deep understanding of social justice leadership in unique, albeit similar ways.

This chapter is also organized thematically, detailing the findings in a way that tells a story of the phenomenon of being an urban charter school leader of color in Los Angeles. It was found that the leaders in this study centered students, were supportive of faculty, and were community-focused when making decisions and implementing school policies and practices. Even though their implementation techniques were varied due to their contexts, their approach to social justice was not an approach at all, but rather a deeply ingrained mindset that was tightly woven into every question they asked, every reflection, and every action they took.

Participant Definitions of Social Justice Leadership

Social justice leadership is an educational theory with multiple definitions and contextual nuances. Bogotch (2014) stated that it is impossible to define social justice leadership separate from the practices of social justice leaders, and that social justice theories and practices are ever-evolving because the world is ever-changing. Therefore, prefacing this study's findings with the participants' similar, albeit unique definitions of social justice leadership provided the appropriate context for the findings, and illustrated their deep understanding of and commitment to this work. These definitions are nuanced and complex because they are manifestations of each participants' experiences in life, which beautifully intersect and weave together.

Cecilia

Cecilia grew up in a traditional Mexican Catholic household in Boyle Heights, California. Her mother and father emigrated to the United States in the early '60s. She described her upbringing as "sheltered" and "poor" even though she never knew she was poor because she always had everything she needed. She was one of five kids and was the only girl, which meant she was the only one of her siblings expected to balance household duties and school from a

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young age. Upon reflection, the traditional gender roles she experienced growing up provided the groundwork for her challenge and navigate the structures and systems that limited her, like her education. Cecilia attended Catholic schools for her compulsory education and received academic scholarships to attend a prestigious all-girls Catholic school outside of her neighborhood. She is a proud Chicana and a social justice leader who lives by her late father's wisdom: "Trabaja duro y en silencio, y deja que tu exito haga todo el ruido [work hard and in silence and let your success do all the talking]" (Cecilia, Interview 1). She has taught aspiring administrators to lead for social justice and has been the principal of numerous charter schools in Los Angeles for nearly a decade. She thoroughly believed that developing empathy is key for leaders who are leading for social justice. She defined a social justice leader as:

> One who's able to bring relevance, rigor, and build relationships with all stakeholders based on understanding the social and political context. Social justice leaders need to know everything that's going on that effects a student's community and be able to take those moving pieces, even including brain development, and make sure that students are able to become critical thinkers and problem solvers. This is especially true for students who live in low-income neighborhoods. (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Cecilia centered students and their learning in her conceptual definition of social justice leadership and made sure to highlight the complexities of the overarching sociopolitical context that affect this kind of leadership orientation. In her view, social justice leaders must not only genuinely care about what is going on in the student's sphere of influence, but must also be knowledgeable of current research if they are to truly minimize the marginalizing effects of public schooling.

Denise

Denise grew up with a nurturing family that was very active in the church and within the Long Beach, California community. Her mother was a parole officer, and her father was a pastor. They both instilled in her a sense of commitment and work ethic in everything. Even though both of her parents were college educated, it was not expected that her and her sisters go to college. Rather, it was expected that they had choices and opportunities in life, and education was a route that could help them thrive. Upon reflection of her own success in school (she has a doctorate degree in education), Denise understood the negative impact systemic racism has on Black students, particularly Black female students, to be successful in schools without relevant and consistent support. She identified as a proud Black, Christian woman who takes social justice very seriously in her role as a mother, counselor, and a principal of a charter middle school in South Los Angeles for the past three years. She thoroughly believed that her success in school and as a leader came from being at the right place at the right time, and having the right people advocating for her. Therefore, advocacy was central to her understanding of social justice leadership. Denise defined a social justice leader as:

> A leader focused on the progression of all students, but particularly students who typically fall through the cracks. Social justice leaders are not just trying to make the school look good, but make sure that everyone is thriving. Not only do these leaders aim to get students' needs met, but they also intentionally level the playing field. You know you are a social justice leader if your kids are leaving with the tools to gain access to spaces they wouldn't typically have otherwise, and they feel and own that privilege. It is also focusing on the whole person–not just academics but the social-emotional well-being

as well–you are helping the blossoming of every individual. You see them as someone

who is bringing funds of knowledge to your experience, not just you pouring into them

like you're the only expert. Social justice leadership is really about providing access and

equity, while grooming others to push the social justice initiative forward for all

stakeholders in the community and hopefully make change. (Denise, Interview 2)

Like Cecilia, Denise's definition of a social justice leader described someone who is student-centered, focusing specifically on the development of the entire human being, while pursing equity and access for those in the margins. Specifically, she believed a social justice leader understands that each person in the school community brings talents and gifts that ultimately enrich the lives and experiences of the leaders and the broader school community. She also believed that social justice leadership is about mentoring students, teachers, and other school staff to have a social justice mindset so that they can create positive change because she knows it is not done by the school leader alone. Overall, she was an advocate for students and aimed to build them up so they could fully live in the beauty of their unique humanity.

Lisa

Lisa grew up in Moreno Valley, California as an only child in a biracial home where she was always supported academically, socially, and emotionally. She very much valued the community on her cul-de-sac as the other kids and families became a part of her extended family since she did not have any siblings. When she reflected on her experience growing up and in school, she realized she never talked with a counselor about college or options after high school, which to her, was especially odd if she was the highest academically achieving student and a star basketball player at her high school. Regardless, her "small village" (Lisa, Interview 1) made

sure she knew what opportunities she had and ultimately matriculated to a prestigious private university in Southern California. She identified as a Black woman and her experiences growing up instilled in her values of community, growth, trust, and creativity. In 2020 she became the principal of a small charter middle school in South Los Angeles and had been working in the education sector for nearly 10 years. Lisa knew her values and explained that self-awareness was foundational to being a social justice leader. She defined a social justice leader to be:

> Someone who truly understands themselves first. Their experiences are intersecting identities and that creates their view and perspective of what education is. They must be aware and reflective of their experiences so that they can marry that to other people to create change for students and be able to inspire students to do the same for themselves. In order for all of this to happen, self-reflection is key, and not just like basic reflection, but like consistently reflecting on your actions, your practices, and the language you use. Social justice leaders also know important leadership is and how decision that are made at the school can either positively impact students' and teachers' daily working abilities, or negatively impact them. Then these leaders have to consider what impact does all of that have with the people you're brought to partner and serve in context. (Lisa, Interview 2)

Lisa believed that a social justice leader must know themselves first, acknowledging that their life experiences influenced the perspectives they brought to every leadership decision and really defined their value system. These leaders also consistently reflected on themselves and their actions so that they could best serve those within their school community, especially the

students. She also believed that it was important for social justice leaders to be aware of the language they use when communicating to anyone in the school community.

Pablo

Pablo was born and raised in East Los Angeles, California in the mid '60s to parents originally from Chihuahua, Mexico. He grew up with traditional Mexican values learning that women took care of the home and men worked to take care of the family financially. His family also grew up poor, and like Cecilia's experience, he was unaware of his family's financial situation; however, he just knew that his parents worked very hard to make sure all the kids in the family had everything they needed (including a private Catholic education). Upon reflection, hard work was a value that Pablo learned growing up in East LA from his parents. To him, "hard work [was] about being a productive person. Whether it's productive or having some kind of purpose to support or help others, especially family" (Pablo, Interview 1). In school, Pablo "was always told that [he] was a good student, but [he] often felt invisible; [he didn't] recall feeling smart or being that bright when growing up" (Pablo, Interview 1). Regardless, he went to college to study media arts because he dreamed of being a producer in Hollywood. However, after many impactful job experiences after college, he decided to be a teacher. He started teaching in LAUSD in 1990 and has worked in the education profession ever since. He has been the principal of the same dual-immersion charter elementary school for nearly a decade. His work in education has helped him hone exactly who he is, which in his eyes, is critical for a social justice leader. He defined a social justice leader as someone who:

> Is very secure in their own identity, knowing who they are, what they believe, and what's
> really important. Social justice leaders also have to be able to project and articulate who

they are–that's really important. Also, they have to have a real clear vision on what it is

that they're trying to accomplish, because that could mean different things to different

people. The leader really has to help people understand what the school vision is because

it isn't really about the leader themselves–it's about what they have come up with as a

vision for the school and how they implement that in their daily practices. You also have

to think of all other stakeholders, too–the community, your parents, your children. They

all must truly understand what it means to be in this type of space where we honor and

respect differences, where we look at some of the challenges that some of our members

of our community face, that others don't. All of this work is done through an equity lens.

We really have to think about what's best for each individual child within the context of

the learning space, but that doesn't mean that everyone's going to get treated the same,

which is hard for some folks to digest. (Pablo, Interview 2)

Self-awareness, communication, and respecting differences were key aspects of social justice

leadership for Pablo. Specifically, Pablo believed there must be a strong school vision that

decentered the leader and put the needs of the students and the wider community, especially for

those who had less privilege, at the forefront of all decisions. While he acknowledged that there

would be differences and some members of the community may not fully understand the

differences, social justice leaders always made equity the center of their decision-making, their

communication with families, and their school's instructional focus.

MDO

MDO was born and raised in Michoacán, Mexico, to a single mother who struggled to

put food on the table. Growing up in poverty in Mexico was a common experience for his

community; however, he happily recalled how family-oriented his upbringing was, always having what he needed and visiting his grandpa's house every Sunday. With the help of coyotes (people who help migrants cross the border between Mexico and the United States), MDO and his only younger sister entered the United States undocumented when he was 10 years old. MDO recalled how traumatic the experience was, but how it ultimately shaped who he was today and why he was so eager to "become someone" (MDO, Interview 1), especially an empathetic leader in schools who served children with similar life experiences. MDO used his life experiences as motivation for his future, which was continuously sprinkled with hardships. From living in the back garage of a rich family in Orange County and struggling to learn English, to being undocumented and having minimal opportunities to legally make money or graduate from college, MDO was determined to be someone who could provide everything for his family. After graduating college, he became a physical education teacher and, since 2018, he has been an assistant principal at a K-12 community-based charter school in Los Angeles. He attributed his success to the people in his life that mentored and empowered him with opportunities, which informed his own conceptions of social justice leadership:

> A social justice leader is someone who empowers their staff, students, and community members by addressing the learning needs of all students and confronting the inequalities in education. They really empower the people. A social justice leader is also someone who is willing to learn no matter what. They are able to balance their passions with the managerial aspects of running a school. They also encourage others to use their voice, especially voices that are traditionally not heard. (MDO, Interview 2)

MDO believed that a social justice leader gives voice to those who are not traditionally heard because he believed that encouraging them ultimately empowered them to be change agents in education. In his view, social justice leadership was also centered around the students. Specifically, social justice leaders were passionate about putting students' instructional and social-emotional needs first, while also balancing the compliance-based work necessary to successfully operate a public charter school. He believed it is critical for people to not be victims of their life experiences, but rather use those experiences to help others navigate the systemic roadblocks they were bound to continue experiencing.

Carla

Carla grew up in Diamond Bar, California, to an Afro-Cuban father and a Guatemalan mother. Her household was bilingual and biracial, so Carla was well-acquainted with being Cuban and Guatemalan, and specifically not Mexican given that, in her experience, that moniker was often automatically assumed for Brown people in Southern California. She recalled her mom and dad being intentional with explaining the differences (and similarities) of Cuban and Guatemalan cultures with that of Mexican culture to her and her siblings since Mexican culture was dominant where they grew up. From a young age, the complexity of intersectionality and privilege was ever-present in Carla's life and these concepts followed her throughout her education, which was valued immensely in her family. She acknowledged that she grew up privileged; however, she also grew up "different" (Carla, Interview 1) because she was Cuban and Guatemalan, not White. Her formative learning experiences at a predominantly White Catholic high school also influenced her to go to a college that was more ethnically and racially diverse, so her worldview could be broadened. After a lot of reflection, it became clear to Carla

that her family's value of education and her love of school were the ultimate reasons why she decided to teach and later become a principal. Since 2015, she has been the principal of an elementary charter school in East Los Angeles. Carla constantly reflected on how her various identities have impacted her life experiences in school and in general, and to her, this kind of reflection was critical for social justice leadership. She believed a social justice leader:

> Is a transformative leader, so someone who is concerned with their school and their students, and their equitable access to instruction. I also think a social justice leader is somebody who also has multiple conceptions of success and has multiple goals for the school that aren't all based on test scores. I also think social justice leaders fall in line with Freirean conceptions of justice and liberation where the school is freedom. This kind of leader would encourage all stakeholders to think and to make choices, which then also change the world around you. Social justice leaders also say and do the things that will help students plan for a career and college, but also help them to live and actually plan for them to live in a society cooperatively and like hopefully successfully with others, and then also make some changes, and so I think a social justice leader like puts that out there and is unafraid when people actually challenge that like you're doing too much as a school. Or you know, why social justice is the focus instead of just like the reading, writing, and math type of work. And I think social justice leaders leave us grounded in a value system, a belief system that really values a cooperative democracy as opposed to just the individualism inherent in the current system, which is often also the focus of most schools. (Carla, Interview 2)

Carla believed that social justice leaders were focused on students having equitable access to instruction and that "success" (Carla, Interview 2) was much more nuanced and complex than traditional school success indicators (e.g., state testing). She also believed that school leaders must be knowledgeable of current social justice research so that it could become embedded in all aspects of the school, even when there was resistance from some community members. They should also be aware of how their own intersecting identities showed up in their leadership decisions. Furthermore, in her view, social justice leaders actively resisted the individualistic structures omnipresent in current systems of schooling for more collective approaches (e.g., democratic decision-making).

Lauren

Lauren grew up in the Inland Empire and in South Los Angeles, California and was predominantly raised by her grandmother. She was not particularly close with any of her siblings (three sisters and two brothers) or her mother and experienced a lot of structural and emotional trauma. Regardless, Lauren always felt special as a kid because she was good at school (she was the only one with an advanced degree), while many of her family members fell victim to the structural inequities inherent in the United States's education system. Education was not necessarily valued in her family, so the fact that she excelled in it made her special–she always had a feeling that there "was no way [she] was destined to be poor and that [she] was adopted, there was no way [she] was part of that family and [her] like rich parents [were] going to pick [her] up one day" (Lauren, Interview 1). She realized that college was how she could work to undo all the chaotic aspects of her childhood, so she went to college to pursue teaching, and later administrative leadership.

Her identity as an African American female has influenced how she has shown up to certain situations. For example, as an elementary charter school principal since 2017, Lauren worked with two other principals who were not Black or female, so when discipline issues came up about Black children, "there [was] always a discomfort that exist[ed] . . . when you are not a Black person, especially because of like the current climate of our country" (Lauren, Interview 2). She felt like people put up immediate defenses, which ultimately led to an expectation that she had to speak up: "There's also an expectation that I say something, but like if I say something I will make them feel uncomfortable" (Lauren, Interview 2). Regardless, empathy was always her guide as a social justice leader, and she believed that "no mistake is too large to disregard a human being" (Lauren, Interview 2). In her view, a true social justice leader:

> Creates intentional spaces for students to reflect on their identities. Identity development and affirmation should take place within an understanding of the larger systems that exist–those that were built for them and against them. A social justice leader lifts the voices of the people that they serve and works to strengthen the tools students naturally have so that they are able to thrive. (Lauren, Interview 2)

Similar to Carla, Pablo, and Lisa, Lauren understood how important identity development and critical reflection were to effective social justice leadership. Without this level of self-awareness and understanding, she believed that leaders could not truly be focused on and support what mattered most–students. Lauren was asset-based in her thinking about students, too. She put their lives first and worked to strengthen their innate skills so they could navigate the systems that were not build for them when they left her school. Her experience growing up in similar contexts

provided a level of empathy and power that strengthened her abilities to be student-centered in the most caring of ways.

Campbell

Campbell identified as a Black woman and was born and raised in Long Beach, California to Christian parents who were very active in her formative years of education. Growing up Campbell and her two brothers could not listen to secular music since her parents "were very aware of what the world had to offer and really sheltered [them] as much as they could while [they] were young" (Campbell, Interview 1). They provided a loving home where Campbell and her brothers could enjoy the simple pleasantries of suburban living: playing in the front yard, minimal traffic, plenty of kids to play with on the block. She attended public schools her entire life and her parents advocated for her to get into specific magnet schools with the Long Beach Unified School District because they felt those schools were better than other neighborhood public schools. She found college to be important when saw that many of her friends who had large houses and pools had college-educated parents. Since her parents were not college-educated, she figured this was her way to do better than her parents. She knew that she was privileged, but she also wanted more than what her parents provided because that seemed to represent success to her. After high school she received a division one, full-ride scholarship to play volleyball at a public university in California. After college, Campbell got involved with education as a teacher's aide in a second-grade classroom. From there, she realized she liked working with older kids and began working as a history teacher in the middle grades, later transferring to a private school for very gifted students. The next school she taught at was the school she has led as a principal since 2011. Through her professional years in education, she has

learned that inclusivity was key when leading for social justice. When thinking about what defined a social justice leader, Campbell said:

As a social justice leader, it is important to constantly look through the lens of myself and someone else's lens to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. A social justice leader has to be open-minded because there will be times, when your beliefs are not same as another person's, but you are still fighting to be inclusive for them. Being this type of leader really challenges you to be critical of your own biases, so that it doesn't get in the way of making sure everyone's unique diversity is honored. Social justice leaders also say something when they see something–this is extremely important. Because, again, having a seat at the table allows you to reflect in ways you wouldn't necessarily if you didn't have that seat. Social justice leaders also have to be knowledgeable about current research and themselves, have confidence, stay humble in the work, and be reflective in conversations–everyone has an experience that you have to be aware of, again reflection is key. You also need to be who you are; you can't be fake and phony in this work. A social justice leader has incredible passion for the work and know where that passion comes from. They are also always learning and are open to learn and unlearn. Really, at the end of every day, social justice leaders reflect, reflect, and reflect some more–that part is constant. They never acting like they know it all because they don't. (Campbell, Interview 2)

Campbell believed that social justice leaders were self-aware, open-minded, reflective, and inclusive. This kind of leader made sure to fight for those who could not fight for themselves in general, but also in the classroom. In her mind, there was no real difference between what you

did as a social justice leader and what you thought about in everyday situations. Like many of the other leaders, she was aware that constant critical self-reflection and knowing who you were, and not being phony about it, essentially defined social justice leadership.

Erin

Erin grew up and was raised in Santa Monica, California. He identified as a gay, Black, Mexican, and Native American cisgender male who had an immense amount of privilege growing up. His mother's family came to Santa Monica from Mexico in the early '20s and had a lot of struggles with family and abuse. His father was born and raised in Louisiana and lived in Watts when his family first moved to California, and "so there were a lot of outside influences that tried to determine his and his brothers' lives from academics or schooling, kind of based on poverty and survival" (Erin, Interview 1). Having this lived experience, his parents wanted Erin to be in a small, non-traditional private school atmosphere where he would get more individualized attention, which he soon realized was much less accessible for Black and Brown folks that looked like him. This was a unique experience for Erin and only became something he realized was incredibly unique when he got older. He also realized that his upbringing in a multiracial and multicultural family was nuanced and beautiful because mutual respect and appreciation for cultural differences were always centered. As he moved on to a private college as a Posse Scholar, he knew that he was never the status quo in any situation, which either surprised people or made them uncomfortable. Erin continuously reflected and deepened his understanding of intersectionality, and he believed those reflections were the foundation on which leaders could act intentionally for social justice. He commented that:

Social justice leaders actively and intentionally focus on illuminating blind spots in

efforts of driving equity across communities. It can only be implemented by leveraging

the diverse voices within and beyond the school community. Social justice leadership

does not exist within a single person, leadership body, or even staff, it is the result of

communal insight, experiences, and histories being used strategically to imagine and

reimagine what is possible. (Erin, Interview 2)

Erin deeply understood social justice leadership and, like Carla, knew that its potency extended

beyond individuals or groups of individuals within schools. It all started with critical self-

reflection. Social justice leaders were reflective by nature and intentionally centered critical

reflection to illuminate blind spots so that equity can be achieved within the school space and

beyond.

As abovementioned, social justice leadership has been characterized as a leadership

mindset engaged in critical reflection, to providing an intentionally inclusive environment for

everyone in the school space. Comparing to the literature, similar ideas have emerged. For

example, Boske (2014) found that it was imperative that school leaders engaged in critical

reflection because, without it, they ran the risk of perpetuating status quo school policies.

DeMatthews's (2018) study highlighted how important constant reflection was for principals to

effectively unpack the complexity of their school leadership approaches and helped them

navigate away from making unjust decisions. Additionally, Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) found

that when resources were used systematically to eliminate pull out class for English language

learners and include them in the general education space, achievement ultimately increased.

Additional themes also emerged that showcased the same kind of practices found in the literature

for traditional schools being implemented specifically in urban public charter schools. Those themes included a student-centered approach to learning and discipline, a focus on supporting staff through PD and coaching, and community engagement.

Thematic Findings of Social Justice Leadership Praxis

There was no one right way to lead for social justice in this study. In fact, the literature has stated repeatedly that true social justice leadership is contextual, taking into consideration the complexities of lived experience and intersectionality, which are so deeply intertwined within systems of oppression. The school leaders' unique approaches to decision-making, discipline, PD, relationship building, hiring, and community engagement were all informed by their lived experiences and their mindsets. Table 2 summarizes these data.

Table 2

Participants' Social Justice Leadership Praxes

School Leader, Level, and Identity	Practices, Policies, and Strategies Shared Indicative of Social Justice Leadership
Cecilia (principal), Chicana, female	• Practiced transparency in leadership • Looked to research-based culturally responsive teaching practices as focus of PD for teachers • Engaged in home visits as research about her school community to increase her cultural knowledge and understanding • Referred to culture, language, and race data first when addressing academic issues • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline • Used asset-based language when referring to historically and currently marginalized groups of students • Identified and shared connections to issues at school site regarding race, ethnicity, language, and other student difference with district leaders, teachers, and community members • Read current literature to stay up-to-date on social justice practices and knowledge • Provided information regarding education to Spanish-speaking families • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously
Denise (principal), African American/Black, female	• Met regularly with each teacher and staff member individually • Identified mentoring as critical for her sustainability in leadership roles • Created coalitions of individuals from interdisciplinary backgrounds to address issues of social justice on campus • Implemented campus-wide book study focused on culturally relevant text • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously. • Disaggregated school-based data to inform future policy changes and PD • Developed affinity groups for Black parents on campus • Communicated consistently with families about school initiatives tied to mission and vision • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline • Read current literature to stay up-to-date on social justice practices and knowledge • Utilized PD to build knowledge base and develop relational trust with staff

Table 2 (Continued)

Participants' Social Justice Leadership Praxes

School Leader, Level, and Identity	Practices, Policies, and Strategies Shared Indicative of Social Justice Leadership
Lisa (principal), Black, female	• Met regularly with each teacher and staff member individually • Used asset-based language when referring to historically and currently marginalized groups of students • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously • Disaggregated school-based data to inform future policy changes and PD • Advocated for voices often unheard or marginalized within the school community • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline • Read current literature to stay up-to-date on social justice practices and knowledge
Pablo (principal), Mexican American, male	• Practiced transparency in leadership • Used anchor texts that were culturally responsive and relevant • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously • Provided PD to teachers, building historical, social, and/or political awareness of social injustices • Utilized PD to build knowledge base and develop relational trust with staff • Advocated for voices often unheard or marginalized within the school community • Communicated consistently with families about school initiatives tied to mission and vision • Used school curriculum as a vehicle for equity-focused learning • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline
MDO (assistant principal), Hispanic, male	• Met regularly with each teacher and staff member individually • Advocated for voices often unheard or marginalized within the school community • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline

Table 2 (Continued)

Participants' Social Justice Leadership Praxes

School Leader, Level, and Identity	Practices, Policies, and Strategies Shared Indicative of Social Justice Leadership
Carla (principal), Cuban and Guatemalan, female	• Practiced transparency in leadership • Provided PD to teachers, building historical, social, and/or political awareness of social injustices • Utilized PD to build knowledge base and develop relational trust with staff • Found process of inquiry empowering for better understanding underserved student populations • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously • Advocated for voices often unheard or marginalized within the school community • Communicated consistently with families about school initiatives tied to mission and vision • Read current literature to stay up-to-date on social justice practices and knowledge • Rearranged the bell schedule to better meet the needs of emerging bilingual students
Lauren (principal), Black, female	• Provided PD to teachers, building historical, social, and/or political awareness of social injustices • Utilized PD to build knowledge base and develop relational trust with staff • Met regularly with each teacher and staff member individually • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously • Disaggregated school-based data to inform future policy changes and PD • Utilized hiring practices to screen teacher candidates for a social justice mindset • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline
Campbell (principal), Black, female	• Provided PD and coaching in the form of one-on-one conversations with teachers, building awareness of social injustices • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously • Co-facilitated "Tap In" structure where students could discuss relevant topics pertaining to social justice • Disaggregated school-based data to inform future policy changes and PD • Utilized hiring practices to screen teacher candidates for a social justice mindset • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline • Utilized PD to build knowledge base and develop relational trust with staff

Table 2 (Continued)

Participants' Social Justice Leadership Praxes

School Leader, Level, and Identity	Practices, Policies, and Strategies Shared Indicative of Social Justice Leadership
Erin (principal), Black, Mexican, and Native American, cisgender male	• Created coalitions of individuals from interdisciplinary backgrounds to address issues of social justice on campus • Questioned how identity interrupted or enhanced ability to see alternative perspectives • Utilized restorative practices in school discipline • Provided PD regarding trauma-informed practices to any visitors to campus • Utilized PD to build knowledge base and develop relational trust with staff • Engaged in critical self- and system reflection continuously • Advocated for voices often unheard or marginalized within the school community • Utilized hiring practices to screen teacher candidates for a social justice mindset

While there may have been variance in each school leaders' actions and implementation of social justice leadership in this study, the school leaders centered students in their decision-making and problem-solving processes, supported their faculty in personal and instructional growth opportunities, and engaged with the community for insight and guidance, and pushed back on problematic parental mindsets. With every breath they took, they were doing the work of social justice–it was never a choice, but rather a way of life.

Student-Centered Approach

All school leaders in this study put students first in every situation. They intentionally reflected on whether the decisions they made would have adverse effects on children's socio-emotional well-being, or their perceptions of self because of a decision, especially given the historical and socio-political context of the time. They also engaged in practices that centered student voices in the development of new school programs. Discipline was also an area that these

leaders were student-centered, making sure that any disciplinary measures were rooted in restorative justice practices, repairing any harm caused by students' choices.

Learning

Student-centered learning took on many different forms in a school setting in this study. From culturally responsive, trauma-informed pedagogy and curricula choices, to developing the socio-emotional well-being of all children, student-centered learning puts the child's experience in school at the forefront, leaving no questions about a school leader's intent to provide the best learning environment possible.

For example, Pablo, a dual-immersion charter elementary school principal was intentional with his decision to not teach Black history only during Black History Month. His approach focused more on embedding culturally responsive themes in everything the teachers teach, instead of one-off activities. In particular, he stated:

> For example, you know, let's do a whole heart thing in February, because it's Valentine's Day so we're counting hard candies, or let's do you know candy cane math in December, because it's Christmas time you know, all that kind of stuff. But the other flip side of that is really helping people understand the importance integrating concepts around justice and equity in our curriculum. It has to be embedded throughout the year; they can't just be a one-shot deal. Being a social justice educator and leader doesn't mean focusing on particular groups, a month at a time, it really means thinking differently about how you're approaching all aspects of your school's processes, including curriculum throughout the year on an on-going basis. (Pablo, Interview 2)

It was clear that did not believe in teachers teaching superficial themes because it was a certain time of the year. In fact, Pablo ensured that teachers were embedding culturally responsive themes by selecting specific mentor texts aligned with this approach. He intentionally chose texts that ideologically aligned with his student-centered approach so that, no matter what, students were able to explore themselves and develop their identity in everything they did academically. Pablo explained:

> We are going to be using Dr. Goldie Muhammad's book on *Cultivating Genius* (Muhammad & Love, 2020) as sort of a mentor text to help us have these conversations around equity in the book, it talks about sort of a foundation around culturally responsive and culturally relevant pedagogy. It also talks a lot about identity work and connecting identity to cultures; it talks about how we can support children in articulating how they're feeling or how they're experiencing the world through very specific academic processes. Her focus really is in writing, which I find fascinating and then the third thing is how to help really dig deep into some of these issues around race and racism and justice and power struggles, and not just learn about them, but learn how to take action based on the learning that that that's taking place. (Pablo, Interview 2)

His intentionality guided teachers to focus classroom learning experiences on kids' everyday interactions with each other, which inevitably and naturally sparked discussions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, rather than focusing the curriculum on particular groups during specific times of the year (i.e., Black History Month), which truly centered student learning. His thinking around student-centered instruction and learning challenged the "check-the-box" approach often associated with themed months, and truly integrated and centered the lived

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experiences and interactions of the students every day. In his eyes, it was much easier to teach a lesson every other month, but the difficult work was figuring out how to authentically have this kind of learning show up in the classroom with every discussion, every reading, and every project.

Similar to Pablo's approach to choosing a mentor text that would help teachers be student-centered in their approach to learning, Denise had all of the adults and students engage in a school-wide novel that they read and discussed together as a community of learners. She developed this practice with her assistant principal at her charter middle school because she, in her perspective, felt true social justice leadership was about providing access and exposure to learning and discussions that centered the experiences of the students. Denise explained:

> We had a school-wide novel that we had every student and every adult read on campus and the book was *Ghost Boys* (Rhodes, 2018). And so that was, I believe, a part of social justice, and it was risky because the rawness of the Black author that you're asking everyone to read. It talks about the killing of a middle school boy who was best friends with a Latino boy, and what does that all mean, and especially during this time it was definitely very relevant. (Denise, Interview 2)

Denise went beyond simply choosing a specific text that aligned with her social justice approach to learning. She made sure teachers and parents were prepared to have the rich discussions that were bound to naturally arise given the book's themes. She described her involvement after choosing the text below:

> For me, it had to be more than we just read it, I needed the teachers to explain to me how they were going to unpack it [with students]. I needed to understand how we were

providing the tools for parents to have these hard conversations with their students. What

questions did they have of me as a principal pushing this initiative? I also had PDs for

teachers to have a dialogue about the book and how it made them feel before they had

their students talk about how it made them feel. (Denise, Interview 2)

After ensuring that teachers and parents were prepared to discuss the book with the students,

Denise also arranged the author to come speak to both the staff and the students. This further

exemplified how student-centered her approach to learning was, especially since students were

able to meet a Black author, which exposed them and gave them access to someone who not only

provided context to the certain aspects of the book, but also was someone who looked like them.

She explained:

Then, we were able to have the author come and speak to the adults through Zoom [first].

In January, we were blessed to have the author come and speak to the entire school [in

person]. And so, not only is it great to have an author be able to break down their texts

and also like what motivated them to do it, but what was also great is that you're

exposing students who may have never had access to meet an author and ask questions

directly to an author, and then on top of that, be a Black author. (Denise, Interview 2)

Denise made it clear that student-centered learning was integral to the learning of every person

on campus. Her book project initiative centered the learning of students in multiple ways: the

book was culturally relevant especially given the socio-political context of 2020, the staff also

read the book and engaged in PD breaking down the difficult topics for themselves before

discussing them with students, the parents were included and provided tools to engage their kids

in conversation, and the author was Black, mirroring the majority of the students who attend her

school. In centering students by reading *Ghost Boys* (Rhodes, 2018), Denise also developed

teachers who had to critically reflect on their reactions to the book and how that could impact the

teaching of it. Her approach to learning was systematic and included all stakeholders so that

students could have the richest learning experience possible.

For both Denise and Pablo, their approach to student-centered learning was systematic,

introducing texts to be integrated into the learning experiences for students and the wider

community. Carla also approached learning systematically when she restructured the daily

school schedule to incorporate a block of English Language Development (ELD) sessions for all

students regardless of the English proficiency status. Carla explained the context for creating the

schedule change at her school:

> So, our organization was not doing a great job with English and with ELD. Really,
>
> actually, we were completely out of compliance, where we did not have an ELD block or
>
> ELD time. I don't know how we got away with it for so long honestly. But now we're
>
> just, you know, we shifted to like this 30-minute block of time to focus on ELD
>
> instruction specifically. (Carla, Interview 2)

Carla understood that learning English was not about excluding English Language Learners, but

rather about including them in a systematic way so that they still had access to the classes they

often missed due to being pulled out. Carla's school did not have a consistent history of offering

ELD classes, so this was a chance for Carla and the teachers at her school to experiment with

best practices. She explained her school's process with changing the schedule at her school to

offer all students some sort of ELD instruction:

We tried it first with a small group of teachers, like to see how the curriculum would go

and they were just teaching their whole class, and then the year after that everybody just

switched. I was like let's put all the kids and let's put all their levels together. So, from

2:00 to 2:30 pm we have ELD even if not every student is receiving English language

development from our ELD curriculum, but they switch according to proficiency levels,

or we attempt to, so we have a curriculum for that time called EL Achieve, and it has

three different proficiency levels. So, like you know it's almost like a middle school

schedule right, we were like master schedule the kids dependent on need, and so, from

2:00 to 2:30 [pm] there's nothing else happening. (Carla, Interview 2)

Carla changed the schedule at her school so that access to instruction was equitable for all

students, especially her English Language Leaners. Her inclusive approach highlighted the

power school leaders have to advocate for the students who are often on the margins, and that is

exactly what Carla did. Instead of focusing only on creating an ELD block for the students who

needed the support for compliance reasons, she viewed this as an opportunity to create a learning

experience school-wide that would be prioritized. Carla explained, "Like there's no preps,

there's no meetings, there's nothing, it's just ELD time. So that time was kind of a sacred time

for English language development for all students" (Carla, Interview 2). It was clear that Carla

had an asset-based mindset around ELD by prioritizing that time for students to develop their

speaking and listening skills, which ultimately every student would be able to benefit. This kind

of advocacy was another aspect of social justice leaders being student-centered in their approach

to decision making and leadership.

Advocacy and Student Voice

In addition to student-centered learning, social justice leaders in this study advocated for students and incorporated their voices in school-based decisions and practices. This kind of advocacy was how social justice leaders implemented practices that equitized the playing field in their schools. For the leaders in this study, they advocated for the special groups abovementioned in similar ways, but they also advocated for students during a socio-political context fraught with racial tensions and uncertainty.

For example, Campbell recounted a situation when a group of Black boys at her school spoke out against the uniform policy during a time of heightened racial tensions due to police brutality on Black bodies in the United States:

> When the police brutality was happening, and Black men were dying, there were lots of students, Black students, who wanted to wear "I can't breathe" t-shirts around the school, which some of the teachers felt uncomfortable with or wanted to put a uniform on them right away. I was like are you guys listening to the news at all, do you guys have any idea what's happening, we're going to let them wear this for you know, for today, because it's the only way they can express themselves since we are a uniform school. (Campbell, Interview 2)

The simple action of allowing her Black students to wear a t-shirt communicating their solidarity against police brutality on Black bodies, even while against some of the teachers' wishes, exemplified Campbell's student-centered advocacy and promotion of students' voice. Not only did Campbell allow it, but she also made sure she informed her teachers about the reality of police brutality to provide context and, hopefully, develop some level of empathy and/or

perspective from her teachers who wanted the students to change back into their uniforms. It was

clear in her response to her teachers that it seemed obvious to Campbell that this was the correct

decision, which revealed the mindset with which social justice leaders in this study approached

conflicts that were connected to social justice topics–it is an automatic response.

To further incorporate student voice in the discussion of topics like police brutality,

Campbell and the school's Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at her secondary

independent charter school created a structure called a "Tap In." Campbell described this

structure below:

> So, we have what's called a "Tap In" where students are invited to meet with the Director
>
> of DEI to talk about issues they are experiencing or witnessing or want to talk about and
>
> it's student-run with an administrator just kind of facilitating the conversation. It's
>
> completely student-run, which is nice. (Campbell, Interview 2)

The new structure was intended to create spaces where important topics related to diversity,

equity, and inclusion could be discussed openly and freely. Campbell explained:

> We get a lot of students who want to talk about bias, and we have a lot of diversity as it
>
> relates to students who opt in. Every voice is heard, I mean there are things that we
>
> haven't heard before, you know, underrepresented populations that aren't necessarily
>
> celebrated as they should be, so, we take that and figure it out as a school, how can we
>
> continue to make all students feel comfortable. And for the most part, it increases in
>
> participation, every time. Alright, so this month the topic is embracing cultural identity.
>
> So, again, the conversations vary each month and kids come out, sometimes it's the same
>
> kids, sometimes different, and sometimes those that want to participate, and those that

might just want to be quiet and listen in, and then some may contribute. (Campbell,

Interview 2)

Since the "Tap In" structure was only facilitated by an administrator, student voice guided the

discussion because students were the ones sharing their experiences with each other and

choosing the upcoming topics. Campbell noted that not everyone had to speak up; however, it

was expected that there was equity of voice for those who decided to verbally participate in the

discussion. Again, systematically providing a space where student's voices were centered, and

where equity and empathy-building were the focus, illustrated Campbell's a deep commitment to

advocating for all students to feel welcomed and comfortable. Campbell detailed the process of a

"Tap In" below:

> So, students will come in, it is not a virtual meeting, it's definitely an in-person meeting,
>
> and snacks and food are always provided. We get the kids to come, they come in and the
>
> teacher greets them all and then it's not a formal process. It's like, "Thank you for
>
> coming today, so do any of you know what the topic is?" They raise their hand, "Yes,
>
> embracing cultural identity." Then, "What does that mean to you?" And then someone
>
> will give a definition and then we'll give the definition we're working from for the
>
> session. Then, we ask, "How do you guys relate to that definition, if at all?" And it's just
>
> an ongoing dialogue and lasts for about 45 minutes, sometimes longer. They never want
>
> to finish early. It just evolves so there's no structure to it, it's like, yeah, it just evolves
>
> from what the definition is to how it impacts you and your school or your experiences.
>
> And then we kind of summarize what has happened, and then we will ask them what are
>
> some other topics they'd like to talk about in the near future, and they would provide

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those topics and then the administrator will determine what topic it'll be next month.

(Campbell, Interview 2)

The "Tap In" process began with the facilitator asking students what topic they would be discussing and then asking them to connect or relate that topic to their personal, lived experiences. After the initial discussion, the facilitators formally defined the topic and opened the conversation for students to share how they related to the definition, which sparked discussion for the rest of the time. The informal, albeit somewhat structured process of the "Tap In" illustrated that student voice was central to this practice because there was no planned outcome beyond students feeling welcomed and comfortable. The structure itself honored what students brought to the conversation, instead of a pre-determined, standards-aligned outcome by the facilitator.

The freedom with which Campbell and her colleague were able to create a structure that centered student voices is what MDO, an assistant principal, wished he could do at the K-12 single, community-based charter school where he worked. MDO understood that student voice was often not considered at his school; however, given that he was not the principal, and therefore, did not have the power to make that shift, he got stuck:

> It's like we don't really practice what we preach you know, we want to empower
> students, we want to hear their voice, but when they say, "I don't want to be at this
> school," we say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, you just don't know what you want or need, I'm
> gonna go to your parents," you know. (MDO, Interview 2)

In the quotation above, MDO was clearly frustrated that student voice and choice were not considered, and that hierarchical power dynamics were at play when people in charge made

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decisions without considering the voice of students they served. When MDO reflected on the situation, he questioned why this was his school's approach, especially because of the school's enrollment was dwindling. His reflective approach about the lack of student voice and advocacy was a form of student-centered advocacy in and of itself, and revealed aspects of his own lived experience, which allowed him to approach these kinds of situations with an empathetic mindset. He later explained that even though this was a frustration of his, there were other school practices that did consider student voice. MDO explained one of the structures below:

> We allow students to file a complaint or a concern about other students or teachers–so they do have voice and some power in school. Throughout the year, [the administrators] go to the classes and always check in with the students to see how the class is going. We ask questions like, "How's the teacher? What do you think about the teacher?" and we get their input. Then, we'll talk about it with [the principal]. If we find that certain concerns are valid, and if a teacher needs to be removed, for example, they will get removed, based on the students' concerns and some more investigative work by the administrators. (MDO, Interview 2)

Even though MDO was frustrated that student voice was not always considered in school-based decisions, he was able to explain how seriously the school leaders took student voice when it came to evaluating the classroom learning environments on campus. There was a systematic process for students to make complaints, or share their feedback about teachers with administrators, which illustrated how students were able to voice their opinions about their learning environment. Erin also focused on classroom environment when advocating for his students.

Erin was the principal of a charter high school that served youth navigating foster care, housing instability, probation, and/or other circumstances that caused disruptions in these students' academic journeys. He advocated for his students by ensuring that every visitor to his campus was trauma-informed before interacting with any of the students within their school environment. He did this by giving a presentation on trauma-informed pedagogy to every classroom visitor every time they visited:

> Usually, it's within our welcome [to our school] slides. Like well, I've been writing like what you're going to see, like what specific classes, then it's like we're going to talk to you about best practices and what being a trauma-informed environment means. We are trying to form new environment, which is complex and nuanced because everyone's situation is unique and so, the needs our students have can get very specific, but because people can only handle so much, [we focus on actions they can take to help create this new environment]. (Erin, Interview 2)

Erin understood how complex creating a new environment was for his students, especially given their unique experiences with systemic instability. In his eyes, the beautiful complexities his students brought to the school environment were not only worth his time during presentations, but were central to his deep advocacy on their behalf. His approach ensured that all visitors to his campus(es) are well-aware of students' needs so they were not unintentionally triggered by the visitor's interactions with them. Erin explained further:

> So, it's like when you're jumping into these classrooms make sure that if students are sitting, you're staying a sufficient amount of space away from them. Make eye contact with them and smile, so that they know that you're safe. Don't be afraid to say hi, just

because I think a lot of times adults can like bulldoze into a room and just like, you know, with their little notepads and like not looking at students and looking around students and talking over students and then it becomes too much. (Erin, Interview 2)

Erin knew his students so well that he was able to advocate on their behalf by informing visitors, in a digestible way, just how complex their situations were and how much care and awareness was needed to ensure they had a school environment that was safe and loving always. There was annoyance in his voice when he described adults taking over the classroom space when they visited, which was exactly what he and his team worked tirelessly to minimize in this educational space, especially since that kind of body language was potentially triggering to the students he served. His annoyance of this kind of behavior by unaware visitors revealed just how invested he was in this work, and the deep levels of care, awareness, and empathy he strived to develop in every single person who walked through the doors of the school. Erin described various hypothetical situations that could have happened if visitors were not primed with an introductory awareness presentation:

Sometimes we'll have visitors who students think are adults that might have existed in their life before. And so, it could have been like the person that separated their family, it could be like the person that you know is charging them with this felony you know, whatever it is. And so, it's like being very cognizant of like what outer space you might be taking in a room and then making sure that you're as actively, you know, positive and loving and caring, but also like sensitive to space and distance and level like volume as much as possible. (Erin, Interview 2)

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Erin aimed to view all situations from multiple perspectives so that his students had what they needed to be fully supported, even by people who were just visiting. Erin's trauma-informed presentations intended to build awareness and empathy with the visitors at his school and were a prime example of how he deeply advocated for his students. Charter school leaders in this study took similar approaches when it came to their discipline practices. Ultimately, school leaders were student-centered and restorative in their varying approaches to discipline, no matter how simple or serious the issues were.

Discipline

In addition to social justice charter school leaders advocating for students and incorporating their voices in school-based decisions and practices, discipline practices were also approached restoratively, centering the students, and seeking understanding in every situation.

For example, Campbell recounted a discipline situation that occurred when she was the principal at her charter middle school:

I have a Black male who was in middle school who just always made poor decisions, who always hung out with the group that wasn't reflective of who he was capable of being. So, he made a lot of bad choices, I'm not sure if it was peer pressure or just him trying to be funny, but it didn't work out for him, like ever. Personally, he was in my office lots, we had lots of conversations and I thought he understood and then, he did the same thing the next day or the next week. His parents were super supportive and would always be there, you know just be like, "Knucklehead, what are you doing? Like, what are you doing?" That was probably a good three years right so six, seventh, and eighth

grade, he had the same friends, same behavior, same consequences. (Campbell, Interview 2)

Campbell described one of her students who displayed maladaptive behaviors that she thought would stop after she had multiple conversations with him and his family. She never thought he was incapable of making better choices and she persistently communicated with him and his parents whenever he would get into trouble. Her consistent and understanding approach seemed to work when she reflected on his progress as a high school student:

Fast forward now that he's a junior now, he has like a 4.2 GPA, right, and all of these honors classes and just this past summer he came to my office and said, "Dr. Campbell, I just want you to know I just appreciate you never giving up on me." He's like, "I know that I was a knucklehead, and I was always in your office, but I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me and encourage me, you know, and I didn't benefit from that seed, when I was in middle school." You know, I never once shamed him or made him feel less than, it was more like, "Okay, you know right from wrong, why are you not doing right?" You know, that type of approach. I deal with the middle schoolers because they really don't try to do things maliciously, they just, their brains aren't developed yet. They just act on impulse, and they don't need the finger pointing to them it's more like, "Okay, obviously we know right from wrong . . . " and, if I have to have that conversation 10 more times, I'll have it. (Campbell, Interview 2)

Campbell never gave up on the student who consistently exhibited the same behaviors repeatedly in middle school. Even though she did not share exactly what actions he took to change course, she provided a safe space for him to explore his behaviors, nonetheless. Additionally, she

communicated with his parents so that school-based disciplinary conversations could be reinforced at home. In her recounting of the discipline situation, she never shamed him and remained asset-based in her conversations with him, asking questions to help him develop his reflection skills instead of giving him punitive consequences for his actions. It was clear that her actions had a positive impact on him, even if the repair came several years after her interactions with him.

Similarly, Cecilia recalled a discipline situation at a charter high school where she used to be the principal. Her story was between two boys, one who stabbed the other student who later had to go to the hospital as a result. Regardless, she used restorative techniques to help repair harm that had been caused and help other school leaders within the organization reflect on their own discipline practices. Just like Campbell, her experience with restorative discipline was not a quick fix, but rather a time-intensive process. She explained:

> A kid stabbed another kid with a pencil during one of their classes. So, yeah in that instance, I mean, it was an opportunity for not only like, I think our leaders to actually see how restorative justice actually works, but also for the families and students to see how it works. Because, in that case, I heard it from all ends like, "Send the kid home!" or "Suspend them!" But you know, it was just like they need to be suspended or expelled immediately without any real understanding of the situation, and so you know, obviously one of the boys was taken to the hospital. (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Cecilia shared that some of the school leaders in the organization would have approached the situation with an immediate suspension or expulsion; however, Cecilia understood that there was more to the situation, and it was important for her to uncover the context and story behind the

student's actions. She further shared her reasoning for not suspending or expelling the students immediately:

> And there was a whole story behind it, right, you never know like exactly [what happened], so it's like oh so he did this, okay, so then, just like one thing after another it snowballs and, if you would have seen this kid, the one who actually put the pencil in the other kid, he was pale, he looked like he was about to faint and he was just apologizing over and over again. Like it was clear that this is not a kid who just did it intentionally. It was wrong and he understood it immediately. He's like I know it was wrong oh my gosh like what do I do, he was in a panic, he was like hyperventilating. (Cecilia, Interview 2)

After talking to the kid who stabbed the other kid, it was clear to Cecilia that suspending him would be the wrong action because he knew he had made a poor decision. Her approach to seek understanding and uncover the intention behind the action further confirmed for Cecilia why a restorative justice approach was always the best approach. In addition to having conversations with students who were involved, Cecilia also detailed how involved the parents were in the restorative process as well:

> And what everyone didn't see is all the conversations I had to have with both parents with the students. With the dad of the student who had the pencil stuck in him, we had to have, I think, five conversations because they were adamant about having this other kid suspended, when in actuality these two kids were really good friends, since grade school like forever since first grade. And we were able to get them back there at that point, after several [restorative justice] conversations with both of them. And we did this for months and months, and finally, when the dad understood when I told him my actual experience

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during restorative justice circles in prisons. I learned he was a cop and he knew about

restorative justice from the time he worked at the Twin Towers. I said, "I was there, I was

doing it with the prisoners," and it was only until I said that, that he felt like, "Oh, shoot,

like I get it. You've actually had experience in this." And I was like, "Yes, and it works if

you talk to your son." (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Involving parents in the conversations was critical to Cecilia's success with the overall

restorative discipline process. She had to develop trusting relationships with the parents and keep

the lines of communication open if they were every going to understand why she was taking a

restorative approach with a seemingly serious discipline incident. Even though she mentioned

the process was time intensive, she knew that the boys' time in high school and the negative

effects from a poorly handled discipline situation would last a lot longer. She explained:

Him and the other boy are talking now. They were afraid to talk to each other for the

longest time. And, really, if they're going to spend four years in high school, is that what

you want, for your kid to be fearful of coming to school because of that incident? The kid

could have been arrested, in fact, the cops asked if we wanted him arrested, or we could

do a restorative circle. I'm like why wouldn't you approach this with restorative justice?

Like you're gonna mess that kid's future up in this one moment, and it was just, it

worked, but it took months and months for it to work. (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Before Cecilia understood the context of the entire discipline incident, she knew that her actions

could potentially have adverse effects on each child's future school experiences and life. The

mindset with which she approached the situation was common for the social justice leaders in

this study, which many of her colleagues at the time did not realize until they witnessed her success. Cecilia described other principals' reactions to her approach below:

> But then, after that you know the leaders actually were like, "Oh my God, did you hear Cecilia didn't suspend a student? What kind of principal is this?" And then they started realizing like, "Oh, like it's gonna, it's going to be better in the long run, because it's happened like now, this is not going to be issue, an issue that's going to come back later.
> (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Cecilia's experience with this discipline situation revealed just how nuanced discipline practices can be when using a restorative approach. Not only did she have to manage and facilitate repairing the relationship between the students and building trust with the families so they would allow her to follow-through with the restorative approach, but she also had to convince other principals within the charter organization that this was the correct approach. No matter how complex the situation was, Cecilia always kept the two boys at the forefront of her decision-making, reflecting on how her actions could, quite literally, change the academic and life trajectories of either student if she mishandled the situation. In this situation, restorative discipline was complex, especially because the students are mature enough to understand their choices and be able to take ownership of them.

Lauren, an elementary charter school principal also relied heavily on restorative practices and believed that a proactive, restorative approach to discipline from a young age could mitigate larger discipline problems in the future. Lauren explained that at her school there was a school-wide, Tier 1 approach to restorative justice, which to her, meant that leaders within the organization had to be intentional about building community, because she strongly believed that

relationships would not be restored if there were no relationships in the first place. Lauren described her school's approach to discipline in ways that were completely student-centered:

> We have community circles as like our book ends of the week, Mondays and Fridays and in every classroom, and then Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays there is SEL [social emotional learning] based on different curriculums that we use. We also have a mediation structure for each teacher to use, so if a student comes to you and there's a low-level conflict, for example, like when a student says, "My best friend is older, and they won't let me play on the playground." So, like, how do you navigate a mediation, with just those two to restore their relationship, which is mostly a Tier 1 intervention, which teachers do. (Lauren, Interview 2)

At Lauren's school, community circles and social emotional learning classes were embedded in the school days, which provided students the opportunity to build relationships with their teachers and fellow classmates. These relationships and social emotional learning classes students established a strong foundation for restorative discipline practices to work if issues moved beyond a Tier 1 level, which teachers were expected to handle. Lauren explained what happened if discipline issues moved beyond the Tier 1 level:

> Then, there's Tier 2, which is when the AP or my School Support Manager might come in and hold a more formal restorative conference or mediation, depending on how tricky their relationship is, and so my AP hosts a lot of circles throughout the school year just to get kids to like discuss their emotions, the impact of whatever happened, and then come up with a next step together. (Lauren, Interview 2)

As abovementioned, when a discipline issue accelerated beyond the general classroom-level problem solving and informal restorative conversations led by the teacher, the assistant principal or the school support manager would hold a more formal restorative process. What Lauren explained was a multi-tiered system of support that had restorative foundations. However, regardless of how well designed multi-tiered systems of support were, disciple situations, like the stabbing incident Cecilia mentioned, were complex, and the school leaders in this study felt like it was their job to uncover the complexity. Lauren explained a complex discipline situation that involved an elementary student punching his teacher:

> I had a student punch a teacher because he was angry. The student also has autism and so for him, I was like we're going to get a social story understood together, because when you hit your teacher or friends it's not okay. And we did a story, together, we talked about like how he was feeling, he said something made him really frustrated. And we talked about what he could do in the meantime, like if he gets frustrated again because he will . . . so like what are your options, what are your calm down strategies, and he made a list of them. And then I said I need you to tell me who you hit today. He named his teacher, and I was like, "How can you fix the situation?" This is all happening during his recess, and I don't take the students during their recess because, like they need to get out, they need to run. But I will take a portion of it, so we can work on learning and restoring this relationship. (Lauren, Interview 2)

The situation Lauren described above was complex for many reasons. Firstly, the student had autism, so it was important to consider the type of support the student received in class to manage his behavior before deciding how he would be disciplined. For example, if his actions

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were a manifestation of his autism, and he did not have the necessary supports in place, then the school could be liable under The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (1990), which is a federal law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible students with disabilities and ensures that they get the services they need. The student was also elementary-aged, so it was important for Lauren to better understand the student's motivations before deciding how he would be disciplined. Lastly, the student was a student of color, which added a heightened layer of complexity given the socio-political climate of 2020, zero-tolerance policies, and suspensions for boys of color are disproportionately higher than any other subgroup of students (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Civil Rights, 2016). After these considerations, which were automatic for Lauren, and talking to the student:

> He recognized that he needed to apologize to his teacher. And, so, I was like, "How do you want to do that?" So, he wrote her a letter and wrote down the next time he's frustrated, he will. . . . And so, then he gave it to her he read it to her. I do not believe in public shame, like some folks will have them read the letter in front of the whole class, not me. The teacher was like, "This is great, I'm going to keep this on my desk so that when you do feel frustrated, you can go back to the strategies." (Lauren, Interview 2)

Having a conversation with the student was enough for him to understand that his actions were wrong. Lauren's actions highlighted how simple restoration can be if students are given a space to reflect and then, take action to repair the harm they caused. Lauren also mentioned how important it was to also give teachers the time and space to share their input on the discipline decisions that were made. She explained:

And then the other piece is, like sometimes the teacher feels harmed, right, like she just

got hit by a student, and so I was like here were the consequences. I said he wrote the

letter and we're going to talk to mom later today, and we have a behavior meeting for

him, and is there anything else you'd like to happen? And for me, like, that's like the

healing piece, making sure that the person who was directly harmed feels like the

consequence that occurred will restore their relationship. And if not, we figure that out

together. (Lauren, Interview 2)

Lauren not only made sure that the relationships were repaired and that the students knew they

had the power to make good choices, but there was also an incredible amount of teacher support

in the process, especially when they were involved in restorative justice situations. Lauren made

it a point to connect with the teacher and clearly communicate what steps were taken and what

her next steps were. Then, she asked the teacher if there was anything additional that she would

like to happen to ensure that all harm was repaired. Involving teachers like Lauren described in

the abovementioned quotation, revealed her mindset that teacher input was just as important in

the restorative discipline process as developing the reflective skills of elementary-aged students.

Lauren's example of communicating with the teacher and involving them in the

restorative process was a form of support and relationship building that social justice leaders in

this study also implemented in their everyday practices. In fact, staff support, especially when it

came to PD, relationship building, and coaching, was another finding in this study and is

discussed in the next section.

Staff Support

Supporting teachers and other staff members was another theme that surfaced with many of the school leaders in this study. PD was mentioned as the main practice these leaders utilized to support and grow their school-based staff. The types of PD within their schools ranged from large-scale organizational initiatives to individual coaching conversations. Regardless of what the PD looked like, the learning and growth that came from these experiences were what really supported and developed the staff professionally (and personally). Specifically, they helped grow teachers as compassionate instructional leaders and intentionally helped them personally reflect on their privilege, bias, and positionality.

Professional Development and Modeling Expected Behaviors

In this study, the school leaders utilized various forms of PD and modeled the behaviors and practices that they expected to see as a result of the professional learning. The ultimate goal of professionally developing their staff was to cultivate their deeper critical self-reflective practices, which they felt would also develop them personally.

For example, Cecilia explained an experience trying to bring an organization-wide anti-bias antiracist training for the charter organization where she used to be a high school principal:

> The first year was kind of feeling out what's kind of been done. And it didn't seem like there was a focus on [anti-bias antiracist training] too much, I mean within like specific classrooms and things like that, but as an organization, I think it was very kind of like a shallow understanding of it. So, I think the second year, we kind of you know, the whole country was like, "Let's do PD on anti-racism!" So, this was our in. It was an opportunity to start something at the school and organization. Once we started [discussing] that in the

summer, I mean, it was kind of like crickets everywhere. So, I reached out to [a colleague

at a neighboring university] and a couple other people, and [when this colleague] talked

to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), [they] were like, "Yeah, I'll bring [them] on; we

need this as leaders." (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Cecilia explained that the socio-political context of 2020 allowed her to pitch the PD idea to the

CEO. She admitted to somewhat taking advantage of the socio-political context because, based

on her observations the first year she was the principal, it was clear that the organization had no

history or experience with this kind of PD. Additionally, since no other leaders at the

organization initiated the PD planning process after their discussions, her observations were

corroborated, and she knew she would have to spearhead this work. Her relentless commitment

to social justice and supporting the development of her staff were present in this situation

because she took ownership of this work, even though she was aware that, as a Chicana, she

would more than likely be expected to do the job she was hired to do, and also advance the

organization towards a vision of racial equity, which they had yet to do. This modeled for her

staff the importance of social justice work and that, no matter what, forward was the only way to

go.

Even though Cecilia had experience designing and implementing site-based PD that was

social justice-justice focused, she mentioned that she still struggled with some of the

uncomfortable dialogue that naturally sprouted from these kind of PDs. She explained that this

was especially true when she was trying to start an organization-wide initiative at her previous

charter network that did not have any prior experience with this kind of PD:

I was excited that we were going to be able to bring this to a group of leaders first and then to each of our staffs and would be able to start the conversation on anti-racism, you know, and CRT [Critical Race Theory], and then social justice. But it didn't go that way. Yeah, so when we did it here, it was a little bit different. We had to kind of start slow. And even that was, you know, it was like, "Ooh, Cecilia you need to like to tell her (referring to her colleague from a neighboring university) to reel it in!" I was like, "Okay, this is where we're at." You know, taking baby steps, but at the same time trying to challenge not only our staffs but also the leaders to think in a different way, so that the whole organization could be actually focused on social justice. (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Her foresight and experience with these kinds of PDs foreshadowed the issues she ultimately experienced and referenced in the quotation abovementioned. The leaders at her previous organization were uncomfortable with the PD content and how it was facilitated based on their reactions, and Cecilia had to navigate the nuances of continuing this work to support her colleagues in their development as inclusive leaders and maintain her working relationships. It was important to note that the PD facilitator and university professor identified as a Black woman, which further illuminated the lack of organizational and individual awareness of anti-bias antiracist work. This put Cecilia in a stressful position because she was now clearly aware of how much work the organization needed to do and knew she could not be the only leader to take ownership of this specific work.

Nevertheless, she pushed forward and offered the PD series for her individual school site because she knew that this work was important if she were to fully support her staff to have critical and compassionate conversations with students, especially given that they were

negatively impacted by the socio-political context of 2020 (e.g., racial injustice and global pandemic). She modeled this kind of critical and compassionate approach with her staff, explaining in a professional way the purpose of the anti-bias antiracist PD and provided space for teachers to share how they were doing amidst teaching during a pandemic and the racially charged backlash of George Floyd's extrajudicial murder (Dwyer, 2020).

The supportive approach that Cecilia modeled was similar to how Pablo engaged his school community in PD. He shared how important it was for social justice leaders to model the kinds of behaviors they expected to see in other adults on campus, as this was just as much PD as anything else. He explained:

> I think we have an idea of what it means to be a social justice educator, but sometimes we don't see it in practice. . . . You can't just be talking, you gotta walk the walk; people have to see you modeling and demonstrating what you believe is a social justice educator every day. Right after the George Floyd murder, we were dealing with that situation as a school community and my Executive Director and I, we, made some pretty bold statements about our beliefs around what was happening and how we were going to address them at school. I had some special assemblies, for all the children virtually, of course, and how we were going to be dealing with some of these things and giving children some space to voice their concerns or their questions. I use these as teachable moments either with picture books or images or poems or quotes to help guide the conversation. And my expectation was that this was going to continue in the classrooms. (Pablo, Interview 2)

Pablo described that social justice leadership was more than just lip service. He not only had to make statements that demonstrated his positionality, but also had to consistently model how he wanted his teachers to engage with students who were also experiencing many feelings because of the George Floyd murder (Dwyer, 2020). Pablo understood that supporting staff started with modeling; however, he also knew that he had to provide additional support to staff when modeling certain instructional practices or facilitating tough conversations was not enough for his staff to feel comfortable doing the same. He shared:

> Well, some teachers felt very comfortable having these challenging conversations in the classrooms, but others clearly did not. So, helping teachers navigate this type of situation has also been a part of a social justice leader's role in developing staff. Having conversations like, "How can I help you if you're not feeling comfortable having these conversations? What can we do together to get you to a place where you would feel comfortable?" Because if you're calling yourself a social justice educator, well, you got to practice what you preach. But I'm here to help you if you're not sure how or if you're worried. Sometimes teachers are worried, like, I just have a gut feeling maybe, not so much here in LA, but in other parts of the country. There are teachers that are scared to death, right now, about what they say and how they say it in class. Because of what's going on right now. So, really helping our teachers and our staffs navigate these situations is going to be really critical. (Pablo, Interview 2)

Pablo started by individually supporting his teachers who were uncomfortable facilitating conversations about current events in the classroom after a whole school PD session. These conversations involved asking questions to help the teachers reflect on why they were

uncomfortable facilitating these conversations instead of continuing whole group PD, which

clearly had not met the needs of all staff members. His questioning approach modeled his own

reflective practice and illustrated how much he valued developing and supporting his teachers to

be critically reflective in their own practice as well. He had to individualize support for his staff,

and this started with building trusting relationships and continuing these individual conversations

coaching conversations.

In fact, intentional relationship building allowed for Pablo and other leaders in this study

to have coaching conversations that supported staff and further developed them professionally

and personally. The importance of relationship building as an intentional coaching practice that

supported the development of staff within a school is described in more detail below.

Intentional Relationship Building and Coaching Conversations

In addition to various forms of PD and modeling expected behaviors, the school leaders

in this study were also intentional about building relationships with their staff and having

conversations that coached them to grow professionally and personally. While it could be argued

that relationship building is central to everything school leaders do to maintain a positive school

climate where teachers feel supported and valued, the social justice leaders in this study

cultivated relationships for all the anticipated reasons *and* to better navigate the uncomfortable

waters of critical self-reflection for their staff. Every school leader shared how integral building

relationships was to support their staff.

For example, Cecilia shared how important understanding her staff's backgrounds and

building relationships were to challenging deficit mindsets and uncovering implicit biases. She

described:

The best way I know how to shift peoples' deficit mindsets without pushing it down their

throats, is to be a leader who models getting to know their peers and understanding them–

understanding some of their culture, some of their values. (Cecilia, Interview 2)

Getting to know her entire staff, not just the teachers, but also front office and custodial staff,

was central to Cecilia's work as a social justice leader. By gaining more understanding of the

people she worked with at all levels, she was better prepared to support them and anticipate how

she would need to communicate with them if problematic issues arose. Cecilia had enough

wisdom and experience to know that to shift the larger systems that negatively impacted

marginalized groups in schools (and in general), she also had to build a coalition of critical, self-

reflective adults to join her in the work, which had been difficult at her previous charter high

school. The only way she knew how to do this was through authentic and intentional relationship

building and individual coaching conversations.

Campbell agreed with Cecilia and shared a situation in which she engaged in numerous

one-on-one coaching conversations with a teacher at her charter middle school after a student

reported some problematic teacher behaviors. She noted:

I had a teacher, there was a student who wore a hair wrap, a Black female student who

wore a head rap, and teachers have a tendency of being at their doors greeting students

into their class, and he approached this young lady and said, "Take off your head wrap,"

and she was just looking at him like, "Wait, but no, this is part of me, this is part of my

head wrap you know." And his response was, "No, I need you to take that off." So, she

came and told me about it, and was obviously upset, so I had [to make] arrangements

with the teacher to speak to him to ask why he did that. (Campbell, Interview 2)

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What Campbell described above was a prime example of the kinds of situations that often surfaced during the interview process of this study. Teachers or other staff members would say problematic statements or give directions that unintentionally offended students of color. In Campbell's mind, as a Black woman herself, the only way she would be able to uncover a teacher's intentions (or lack thereof) was to have an individual conversation. These difficult conversations were a kind of support to her teachers–they were not meant to shame anyone, but rather to gain deeper understanding of where teachers were in these kinds of situations. After talking with the teacher, she found out that:

> He had no idea that [head wraps] were part of Black culture. He just thought, "Okay, this is not allowed because we don't allow hats in the building." But he had no idea that that was part of, like, her hair dressing and hair accessorizing. (Campbell, Interview 2)

By asking this teacher why he said what he said to the student, Campbell understood that he had no knowledge of certain aspects of Black culture. Even though this did not excuse the teacher's comments, especially since the school valued teachers building culturally responsive classrooms, Campbell was able to educate him and provide a space for him to reflect. These conversations were often on-going because she noted that teachers were always learning about what is appropriate and make a lot of mistakes along the way. For example, she shared:

> With that particular teacher, there have been several instances with Black kids where he might have said something that was offensive. The same girl said, "Amen!" when he had said something that she agreed with, and his comment back to her, which was serious, was, "This isn't church." So, I had to bring him back to my office again and we spoke about why that was his response to that. You know this young man grew up in Colorado;

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there were no Black people in Colorado, so he's definitely fascinated with the culture, but

at the same time he doesn't understand he's being offensive to certain students by saying

and doing certain things. (Campbell, Interview 2)

Campbell understood that her teachers were going to continue to make mistakes, and she

believed that learning happens when mistakes are made. It was her responsibility to ensure that

the teachers were supported wherever they were in their learning trajectory, so that students

ultimately did not experience unintentional racism in the classroom. She further described her

responsibility as a social justice leader:

So, for me as an administrator, when it comes to social justice, it's a private conversation

with that individual. And it's not going in on them, but it's more of like the why, where

did that come from, but as a result of what you said, this is the reaction of the students, or

educating them as to this is why, when say these things [kids are offended]. So, I try to do

that with everyone. It's not a public display of shame, it's not even something that I even

tell anybody else. (Campbell, Interview 2)

The conversation itself communicated that Campbell took issues related to unintentional racism

seriously, and in a way that encouraged her staff members to continue to reflect because she did

not make them feel shame. While not all social justice leaders in this study approached this kind

of situation the same, Campbell's focus on relationship building in these conversations not only

allowed staff members to feel safe asking questions, but also allowed her to facilitate future PD

that seemed tailored to these individual conversations, when in reality, PDs focused on topics

related to racism and culturally responsive teaching would have happened regardless.

Campbell also shared that even though many of these conversations are uncomfortable, her staff typically responded well. In her 11 years as a principal, she could not remember a time when teachers or other staff members were defensive during a one-one-one, often uncomfortable coaching conversation. She explained:

> For the most part, [the reactions have] been, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't know," or "Thank you for telling me," or "I'll apologize to the student and let them know, you know, that I am sorry." It's never been defensive like, usually people just do things or say things they don't know are wrong. So, that's kind of how I tackle it, and that goes for everybody, that could be a fellow administrator, that might even be a parent that I have to have a conversation with. You know people just say things for the sake of saying things and don't realize there is a consequence that follows. (Campbell, Interview 2)

It was clear that the type of supportive environment Campbell created for her staff members may be a reason why they have not reacted defensively during an uncomfortable conversation. Nevertheless, the fact that she took the time to individually address problematic situations with her staff (and in some cases with fellow administrators) revealed a deep commitment to supporting her staff while simultaneously building their capacity to reflect professionally and personally.

Denise, who was also a middle school charter principal like Campbell, also developed individual relationships with her staff so that she could help them meet their professional and/or personal goals. This kind of support and development Denise gave was truly staff-centered because she did not necessarily focus on school-related issues, but rather focused the conversations on staff members' passions and dreams. She explained:

As a principal, I make sure that I am in the room together with my staff building

individual relationships with each of them, understanding what their next steps and

desires and dreams are for like a three-to-five-year plan. This helps me coach them. I

want everyone to be seen, heard, and valued. Meeting people where they are and

understanding like there's pain within our community and like still acknowledging that

all these things that we're doing are placing a stake in the ground. And if that person

doesn't feel cared about with their particular identity marker, then we need to like figure

out how to make them feel like they're supported through that. (Denise, Interview 2)

Denise knew that building relationships with her staff was more than getting to know them. She

built relationships so that she could effectively and intentionally coach them to reach their goals

and make their dreams (even if they were not school-related) a reality. She truly cared for her

colleagues, and this was evident because if people within her school did not feel valued for any

reason, she took responsibility for making sure she found the appropriate kind of support they

needed to feel welcomed and included. Denise aimed to help her staff recognize their own power

and include them in school-based decisions, and it was this mindset that communicated her deep

level of support for and trust in them.

She knew her staff were truly supported when they began pushing the social justice

initiative forward, following their individual dreams, and coaching students to do the same. She

commented:

Making sure that social justice leadership is about growing other leaders to really own

their craft to push the social justice initiative, including the students. Because students

should also be social justice leaders and push back on the curriculum or the teachers if

they don't feel like it's right. And this also includes the parents, so I'm not the only one

doing this work in the right way. It literally is a community. (Denise, Interview 2)

Denise described just how important it was for school leaders to develop and grow the other

leaders on campus so they, too, could be a part of a coalition of people that furthered social

justice initiatives forward, and followed their own dreams. Furthermore, she detailed that this

kind of relationship building and coaching did not stop with the teachers and other staff members

at the school. This kind of relationship building and coaching should also be absorbed by the

students and family members so that there is a community of people holding each other

accountable and engaging in social justice work. This kind of community-focused leadership was

yet another practice and mindset of many of the social justice leaders in this study and is detailed

in the next section.

Community Focused

Many school leaders in this study were also community focused in their various approach

to social justice leadership. The term community had unique meanings for every school leader,

which made sense given that each charter school's context was also unique. Regardless, being

community focused was broadly defined as prioritizing families and the overall school

environment. From their proximity to historically marginalized families within their unique

school communities, to personally reflecting on how their lived experiences influenced their

community-focused mindset, many of the school leaders shared that social justice leadership was

about authentically integrating the wide range of families into the school community so that they

felt truly welcomed. Additionally, many of the leaders had transparent communication with

families, even if this meant calling in some of their problematic mindsets.

Asset-Based Thinking and Honoring Community Values

Many of the school leaders in this study grew up valuing community in some capacity. Some of the leaders had personal connections with community values that mirrored those of the families they served, while others developed deep community connections given their own upbringing and experiences working with marginalized groups. School leaders also illuminated how they thought through difficult situations, which revealed an inquiry- an asset-based approach to authentically understand their respective community's needs within their charter contexts. Ultimately, the school leaders approached their families and the general school community with empathy and understanding, which provided the necessary foundation for a deep level of support catered to specific needs of each community.

For example, Cecilia grew up learning and experiencing the value of community from her parents who emigrated to the United States from Mexico. Being born in the United States, she learned at a young age the difference between community-focused living and the more individualistic culture in the United States. She shared her reflections about losing aspects of her Mexican community values below:

> The more I moved away from [my community values], the more I felt like I was losing that like that sense of empathy that respect, that love, I had just for people in general, um, and, and that understanding that I think is essential, like for education, you know for the families you work with, for the teachers you work with. So, I think once I met him, I started going back kind of to that notion, and that those ideas and those ideals and when we had kids trying to raise them in that way as well. (Cecilia, Interview 1)

Cecilia's reflection revealed that she learned empathy, respect, and love by growing up and marrying her husband who also had these community values instilled in him; however, these values faded when they were overshadowed by the staunch individualism of her formative schooling experiences in the United States. She further explained:

> Community means anyone who is a minority, no matter what you know or what your background is because no matter what our culture and experiences are what we have in common. If it's not the imposter syndrome, it's something similar where you have to constantly deal with struggle of having to try to connect your culture to the American culture; it's a constant back and forth. This experience connects all minorities and really is always in the back of your mind. (Cecilia, Interview 1)

The constant back and forth Cecilia experienced trying to connect her Mexican culture to the dominant culture in the United States was a commonality she had with many of the families she partnered with as a charter high school principal. She defined this commonality, this shared experience, as a community, which she inherently valued given her upbringing and life experiences. Therefore, her personal connection with community values was foundational to why she prioritized the community in her approach to social justice leadership.

Cecilia shared an experience connecting with her Spanish-speaking families that further exemplified her focus on supporting community. Her identity as a Spanish-speaking Chicana and an English Language Learner allowed her to not only break down communication barriers between the school and the community of Spanish-speaking families, but also connect with them in ways that made them feel comfortable. Building these relationships, especially given her

personal connections to the community and shared experience, was what allowed her to support them. Cecilia explained:

> We always focus on building those relationships first, no matter what. And that's what's really needed, building [relationships] with them, with parents as partners. Just speaking from my experience with the Spanish speaking parents [at my school]. That was like a like a gap in that first year. I think those parents were even scared to reach out. I'd email them and/or call them until we were able to build relationships and they would contact me, email me in Spanish, you know just feel more comfortable knowing I could understand their needs. To have those conversations about their children and not be afraid to say, like, "Hey I'm working two jobs," or like, "I'm sorry I can't, you know, really be there, but what can you do for my child?" I learned they were afraid to say that they weren't able to help their child through their work or be there physically with their child because they were trying to run a household and bring in income, things like that.
>
> (Cecilia, Interview 2)

For Cecilia, supporting the Spanish-speaking community was first about building relationships with the parents. It was important for her to view "parents as partners," which communicated the inherent levels of respect Cecilia had for these families. It also revealed that the support these families needed was empathy and understanding. The fact that many of the families Cecilia referenced were ashamed to share that they could not support their children academically or be at certain school events because of their work schedule, revealed the lack of community support these families felt prior to Cecilia being principal. Cecilia's personal connections to the same

experiences many of these families felt, provided an extra layer of empathy and understanding, which was a form of authentic community support.

Like Cecilia, Lisa, a charter middle school principal, approached her school community with empathy and understanding, too. Lisa shared that her proximity to the families, given her position as principal, helped to develop her leadership style to be community focused when she did not necessarily share the same cultural backgrounds as some of her families. She shared how much more community focused she became when she began to witness how identity impacted the lives of her families. She explained:

> We talk about identity and where people come from [in general and in PD], but then when you're actually able to see the impact of that identity and see how people treat our students and approach our families, or could have deficit-based thinking, it's more prevalent for you, so I think sometimes it's just the proximity you have to the people and certain aspects of identity and to certain marginalized communities that make it more real. This makes you actually have to, like, prioritize [the community] a little bit more than you may have in a different context. (Lisa, Interview 2)

Lisa was able to see firsthand how structural inequities and deficit-based thinking affected the families at her school. Her experiences listening to their needs during school drop offs and hearing what they were experiencing in the broader community during Student Site Council meetings, helped her better understand just how complex supporting families really is, and if she wanted to truly support the community at her school, she would have to move beyond the more traditional forms of parental involvement. In reflecting on the gaps that existed at her school for community support, Lisa explained:

One way we're trying to [involve families] is like, I would like to see a lot more of our

families in the building and helping us make decisions. And like them being like staples

in our school community and not just like cycling through meetings. (Lisa, Interview 2)

Lisa recognized the importance of involving families in the school and having them be central to

school operations. Her asset-based mindset that families brought an important and critical

perspective to the decision-making process in the school communicated that she valued the

parents, which was a necessary mindset for true community support. Even though she alluded to

the fact that her school needed to improve their parental involvement on campus, the fact that her

reflective mindset positioned families and their perspectives as important in the decision-making

process, revealed a necessary ingredient to true social justice leadership: a reflective mindset

focused on providing community support, which many of the leaders in this study had.

Erin embodied this kind of reflective mindset that focused on providing community

support when he and his colleagues were designing their charter high school. He shared how they

proactively embedded community support, and continual reflection, as a part of school's design:

I'd say, well, we built a community specifically for foster, homeless, and students on

probation, so I think that what we realized when building the school is that those

populations are the students most likely to be underserved not only by school institutions,

but also by the larger institutions, and also just in general, like society. And so, with that

in mind, we're always needing to seek out blind spots in the challenges that first and

foremost, stop our students from getting to the door. (Erin, Interview 2)

His way of intentionally designing a charter school around a community that has been and is

currently marginalized illustrated his commitment to a kind of community support that was

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unmatched by any public charter school model in Los Angeles, and in the nation. His acute awareness of how social, political, cultural, and economic systems interact and interlock to inhibit his "students from getting to the door" (Erin, Interview 2), highlighted his deep understanding of how complex community support was to navigate especially when institutional factors were deeply rooted roadblocks for his students. Erin further described the consistent reflection that is necessary to continue supporting this specific community:

> We have to figure out what are the blind spots, what are the assumptions that we have, what deep-rooted biases we have around this work. What should be true about a student's experience that they should be able to get to school easily? And when that's not the case, how do we take some of those boundaries out of the way? Okay, now that we know the assumption is that the students should be able to access this learning, [and] why maybe they can't access something right now. How does that route them to mental health trauma stability? How do we provide some of that? And so, it's consistently, rather than blaming and shaming the student or the person going through the trauma, we have to consistently look at how do we create an institution of healing so that we can provide access to these things that maybe have not consistently been provided. (Erin, Interview 2)

Erin described that school leaders (and everyone else for that matter) must take responsibility for their personal blind spots and continuously interrogate the deeply seated biases they have to truly and consistently provide support to marginalized communities. Erin modeled the kind of reflective thinking and problem-solving necessary to provide real community support and create an "institution of healing" where students have access "to the things that maybe not have consistently been provided" (Erin, Interview 2). Erin exemplified a school leader that takes

ownership of removing some of the barriers his students have when accessing learning, and this was a deep from of community support. He described further how:

> I'd say that I have a lens of consistently trying to think around social justice because you kind of start to see the trends and all of that. For example, you know when looking at behavior challenges. What's the precipitating factor of this student lashing out in class? Okay, well, maybe it's rooted in this piece of trauma or maybe something in that class was a trigger. If we're not addressing the trauma of the trigger and we're just addressing the behavior, then, in fact, we're just continuing to promote the school-to-prison pipeline, without ever being a stopping point, and providing the resources that were the means for the incident in the first place. And I think that we're always trying to look at what is that, how do we get to the root and the cause of what this is, versus only being worried about how it impacts, the staff and the adults in the building, and just being focused on the impact. (Erin, Interview 2)

Erin approached every situation, like behavior challenges, with a mindset of curiosity and inquiry. He aimed to understand the root cause of behavior and what trauma was connected to the behavior. Providing support was about understanding and addressing the underlying trauma instead of focusing on the behavior, or the impact of the behavior. Erin explained that focusing on the behavior itself would be perpetuating systems of oppression because the behavior itself is not the real issue–the real issues were the precipitating factors that led to the behavior. Erin's root cause analysis of the issues the students within the school community were facing was evidence of his deep, community support. Erin finally described how he knew whether the community support the school provided was working:

To then provide the social justice lens for the student to see and be able to speak upon

their own needs and experiences and any inequities in their life that have caused them to

feel, act, and react in the ways that they do, and ways of being able to move forward

more healthfully when getting support to do so. (Erin, Interview 2)

If students were able to communicate their needs and develop self-awareness about how their

lived experiences have contributed to how they feel, act, and react to certain situations, then Erin

knew, as a school, they were making headway on truly supporting this community.

Consistent, critical reflection and approaching situations from a place of inquiry and

understanding must be consistent if a community is to be supported authentically and to the

fullest. There must also be consistent and transparent communication with the community, and

within the community, to evaluate if the decisions a school has made are providing the support

they sought to provide, or not. The next section describes how transparent communication with

the community, even amid challenges, is another form of community support that the school

leaders within this study practiced.

Transparent Communication Amidst Challenge

As was shared in the previous section, the school leaders in this study valued community

for various reasons and supported their communities in a myriad of ways. Whether they

interpreted community to mean the families who had children at the school, or the students

themselves who made up the school community, the leaders honored these communities through

their empathetic approach to understanding the nuances of lived experience. They also engaged

the various communities within their schools by communicating with them transparently,

challenging deficit mindsets and being resolute in their leadership towards social justice. This

was a different kind of community support where leaders challenged problematic mindsets of certain community members, while simultaneously standing up for the those who were often on the receiving end of such deficit ideologies.

For example, Pablo intentionally aimed to create a school that was "diverse by design" and transparently communicated that message in the mission and vision of the school. He also focused his elementary dual-immersion charter school's outreach efforts on finding and attracting families that would have a wide range of backgrounds, which further communicated his value in community diversity and multiculturalism, which was also written into the school's mission and vision. He shared:

> We try, really, really hard through outreach efforts to make sure that we are attracting different families from different types of backgrounds that want to come together in this space to help their children learn and grow, especially in a dual-language environment. (Pablo, Interview 2)

It was clear that Pablo understood the value of different people from different backgrounds coming together to learn and celebrate those differences. This made sense given what he shared previously about embedding a social justice lens through every learning experience and interaction instead of teaching thematically based on the time of year. The fact that Pablo intentionally incorporated community diversity in the mission and vision of the school revealed an intentional kind of community support that may not always be central to a charter school's mission and vision. Centering the families and the school community in this way communicated the importance of the community members whose voices may not always be heard.

However, the diversity of the community coupled with the school's approach to social justice education also birthed some conflicts with some parents within the school community. Pablo explained his stance when dealing with parents within the school community who did not necessarily agree with the social justice initiatives at the school:

> The pandemic, it's been a tough year all around, but it doesn't help when you've got a few people that have a difficult time accepting reality because it's not their reality and helping folks understand that when decisions are made, when processes are in place, it's not because we're trying to harm any particular individual, but we're thinking more in terms of the bigger picture. We think, "What is going to best for everyone?" (Pablo, Interview 2)

What Pablo alluded to in the quotation abovementioned was that a focus on equity within the school community was interpreted as providing certain benefits to some students/families while not providing the same to others. Even though approaching problems and familial needs with an equity mindset a deep form of community support, it has been interpreted as unfair when other families in the school community did not receive the same kind of support (ultimately because they did not need that additional support). Pablo did his best to explain his thinking and his intentionality to support members within the school community; however, the misperception of unfairness often fueled additional problem related to social justice issues. Pablo explained:

> Social justice leaders also have to navigate political conversations with parents who purport that we are indoctrinating children with "left-wing propaganda." I have to constantly remind parents that we don't indoctrinate, we help students understand the complexity of life in America. We do not try to sway the child one way or another, but

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we do want them to be well-informed, so they can start making their own decisions as they grow up. But we can't do that if we're holding back information because we don't want to offend somebody or because we don't want to whitewash history; people need to know the truth and there's nothing wrong with that. (Pablo, Interview 2)

Pablo shared that, amidst the racial injustice and the uncertainty of the pandemic in 2020, many families were concerned that the social justice approach to learning was adulterating the academic learning experiences for the kids at Pablo's school. He was always transparent with his communication with the school community, but when families did not agree with his communication, he resorted to using the school's mission and vision as a shield since it had social justice embedded in it. In this case, the problematic ideas or opinions that certain family members had were not debated because these family members had a choice to come to the school because it was a public charter school, not a traditional district school. Pablo also shared, "We often say that we're here to meet the individual needs of children, but we can't really meet the individual needs of the parents, and that can be tricky for some folks" (Pablo, Interview 2).

Ultimately, in Pablo's view, his school was providing learning experiences that helped to develop critical thinkers who were well-informed, even if certain parents disagreed with what was being discussed in school. Pablo communicated students were still engaging and developing academic skills and standards, regardless of what books they were reading or what they were discussing, which was difficult for some parents to understand and accept.

Carla shared a similar experience when she had a conversation with a parent about their disapproval of certain texts being read in class. She explained:

I did have a parent question what a teacher in the third grade was reading. It was a

Harvey Milk story; I think it's called *Pride* (Sanders & Salerno, 2018). Anyway, she had

a problem with [the content], you know, like, it's making my son feel uncomfortable, and

I said, "Okay. . . " and then she said, "Why are we, like there's, like, I've talked to

parents from other schools and they're not doing this, why are we doing it?" And then, I

said, "Well, actually, what I saw when I was in the lesson was I saw the teacher read

something, I saw the teacher pose a question, and the child answered the question, and he

said he was fighting for social justice for gay people and so that's actually a text-based

question, so, this is actually a reading lesson rather than I understand the content from the

lesson. You know, so then it's like, what's the actual problem you're having because this

is actually based in standards. You know she knew where I was going, but, of course, it

still makes them uncomfortable. (Carla, Interview 2)

In her conversation with the parent, it was clear that Carla was not going to change what the kids

were reading in their third-grade class, but rather help the parent reflect on the real reason why

she was uncomfortable with texts involving gay protagonists. Carla used her instructional

expertise to explain to the parent the purpose of the lesson because she knew that the parent

would not argue with the fact that her son was learning academic standards related to reading and

writing, regardless on the book's content. This approach provided an opportunity for Carla and

the parents to have a transparent conversation about the real reason the parent had an issue with

the book. Carla challenged the parent's deficit mindset towards gay people and proposed that

maybe her uncomfortableness with the book was being projected onto her son, especially when

Carla observed that he was engaged during the lesson and was able to answer the teacher's

questions, which were aligned to reading and writing standards. In other words, her son was not

the one who was uncomfortable with the text, rather it was rather her, and Carla aimed to

highlight this fact in their conversation. Carla's ability to connect with this parent revealed her

savvy communication skills, her instructional expertise, and her ability to challenge deficit

mindsets within her school community, which is a form of radical community support. She

further explained:

> They're, you know, reading and writing, so that's how if anyone challenges it, like, I
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> always come back to that, like. Actually, when I was observing the teacher asking text-
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> based questions, which we're supposed to do, and the teacher is actually asking them to
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> write multiple paragraphs or a multiple sentence paragraph. The teacher is also asking
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> them to use relevant vocabulary from the textbook, like I think I can start naming the
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> instructional work that we're doing, and I think that's how I approach these situations
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> with parents who have issues. You know, I was like, you know, you can try to check me
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> on academics, you know, but you're just not, not like in here, in this office. And they
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> don't really try to, you know, but you know they're wondering how they can. (Carla,
>
> Interview 2)

Carla explained why being skilled in instructional practices and standards provided an

opportunity to have deeper conversations with various community members within the school.

She knew that when working with families who had deficit mindsets about people within the

school community who were historically and are currently marginalized, highlighting the

instructional practices was her way to start a deeper, more complex conversation. Her experience

as an elementary principal developed her ability to communicate with all her families, especially

when certain deficit mindsets were present about classroom content. Having these uncomfortable conversations with families was a form of community support.

Like Pablo's experience, Carla also used the school's mission and vision, and the fact that the school was a charter school, to shield her and her teachers from any parents who were not open to having the deeper conversations like the one she described above. She shared:

I don't actually have to spend a lot of time convincing; I think that is also a reason why I also work in charter schools. It's because parents choose to be here, and so, they have some choice, and so I put it out there, like we're a community that values social justice *and* your kids are going to get an excellent education, and you know they will also learn social justice values, how to change their world, right, and I think when parents hear that they might interpret that in a lot of ways. But I think at the end of the day, what they would eventually see is like, oh, they're really just like reading and writing. (Carla, Interview 2)

Carla and Pablo used the charter school mission and vision to circumnavigate some parents' problematic ideologies if they were not yet open to reflect on why they had issues with certain books or ideas being discussed in classes. These leaders advocated for and supported the community members within their schools that were marginalized by having these uncomfortable conversations with families who had deficit mindsets about marginalized groups. These conversations were a form of deep community support because they transparently challenged deficit mindsets, clearly prioritizing the safety and inclusivity of marginalized folks within their schools over the comfort of community members with problematic ideologies.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicated that the school leaders were student-centered in their approach to leadership, they developed teachers personally and professionally, and deeply supported the community, even amid challenges, during unprecedented times in education (i.e., racial injustice and global pandemic). The research question attempted to understand how public charter school leaders of color in Los Angeles integrated social justice leadership practices into their everyday work. Across all the findings were indications of critical self-reflection, conversations about equity, and a focus on inclusivity and empathy. The actions the social justice leaders took in this study were filtered through a social justice lens, which was highly influenced by their own lived experiences. From the way they planned PD, to the way they interacted with their front office staff and academic coaches, they brought their authentic selves to every interaction. Social justice leadership praxis in this study was not *solely* about how these leaders implemented certain practices or exactly how they altered existing systems, it was also a deeply threaded mindset within the leaders that consistently brought into question the inequities that permeated every institution in the United States–especially schools. Their mindsets were highly influenced by their lived experiences, which was why they aimed to humanize people (themselves included) who experienced and continue to experience marginalization.

Using Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Theory for Social Justice Leadership, the findings suggested that the school leaders in this study went beyond just lip service and performative actions of social justice and embodied social justice leadership with every fiber of their being. Their varied approaches, however, differed based upon their unique contexts and included engaging the community.

The following Chapter 5 discusses the theoretical, practical, and policy implications as a result of the findings, in addition to recommendations for future social justice school leaders.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

Background

This study specifically aimed to explore how social justice leaders of color implemented practices, policies, and procedures within urban public charter schools in Los Angeles. The research question for this study was: How do urban public charter school leaders of color in Los Angeles integrate social justice leadership praxis?

A phenomenological study was conducted with nine self-identifying social justice charter school leaders of color to answer the research question. Each participant engaged in approximately three 90-minute semi-structured interviews where they shared their life history up to the point of becoming a school leader, explained the various social justice practices they implemented, and reflected on the connection between their life history and their school leadership approach. After the interviews were conducted, the data were transcribed, reduced, and codes were created that were later developed into themes. Throughout the coding and writing process, themes changed and morphed, which was to be expected given the qualitative and reflexive nature of this study.

This chapter discusses in detail the findings from Chapter 4. It also discusses the findings specifically through theoretical analysis lens, highlighting certain aspects of this study's theoretical framework that aligned with the findings, and other parts where another, more practical framework seemed more suitable. After restating the study's limitations, this chapter also outlines several theoretical, practical, and policy implications, as well as areas for future

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study and recommendations. Lastly, the chapter ends with the participants' voices. Their specific recommendations are shared for two intentional reasons: (1) to better understand the everyday practices of current school leaders who are living and breathing social justice leadership because their expertise, their mindsets, and their experiences are invaluable, especially given the sociopolitical and sociocultural climate in Los Angeles (and the United States and world) between 2020 and 2022; (2) and to elevate the voices of these leaders so that aspiring school leaders for social justice could have relevant examples to guide their own practices.

Discussion of Findings

Social justice leaders implemented practices at their school sites every day that helped minimize and ultimately equitize any marginalizing conditions. The findings were clear: school leaders for social justice engaged in practices that were student-centered, supportive of their staff, and involved community for insight, even amid challenges. With every decision they made, which was influenced by their lived experiences with oppression, they prioritized and considered the voices and experiences of those who were traditionally marginalized to ensure that systems of oppression were not perpetuated to the best of their ability within their schools.

Across all the participants, there were indications of critical self-reflection, conversations about equity, and a focus on inclusivity and empathy. Every reflection and every resultant action were filtered through a social justice lens, which was highly influenced by these leaders' lived experiences and truly defined them as social justice leaders.

Theoretical Analysis of Findings

Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership

Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership aimed to support current leaders to foster a school culture where diversity and mutual respect were honored and embedded within all aspects of a school's operations. By advocating for this approach, school leaders would be empowered to challenge status quo thinking within educational leadership that has historically silenced women and People of Color, and work to minimize marginalizing factors in schools (Beachum & McCray, 2015). The tripartite framework was ultimately developed for "the reradicalization of social justice in educational leadership" (Beachum & McCray, 2015, p. 303), whereby social justice rhetoric and practice were aligned, providing more clarity and insight about what social justice leadership looked like in praxis. It also challenged the dominant narrative of "education excellence" (e.g., higher test scores, higher graduation rates, more accountability, more academic rigor) to be more balanced with a deep social justice approach guided by equity (Beachum & McCray, 2015).

Specifically, the tripartite framework consisted of three parts: active inquiry, equitable insight, and pragmatic optimism, which were developed from Starratt's (1991) multi-ethical theory for practicing administrators and West's (2004) book *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership

Multiethical Theory for Practicing Administrators (Starratt, 1991)		*Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (West, 2004)		Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership (Beachum & McCray, 2015)
Ethic of Critique Posed questions regarding which group dominated, who benefitted, who was not being heard, and who had privilege	**+**	**Socratic Questioning** Asked and confronted difficult questions, especially as it related to issues of oppression	**→**	**Active Inquiry** Encouraged leaders to question the practices within schools and to critique existing power relationships
Ethic of Justice Addressed the issues of governance and fairness in the system	**+**	**Prophetic Justice** Condemned all forms of oppression and was in solidarity with those who were oppressed	**→**	**Equitable Insight** Encouraged leaders to better understand people's perceptions about the world through a justice lens, while realizing everyone's responsibility towards social justice
Ethic of Caring Examined the quality of relationships or interactions between individuals interacting in the system	**+**	**Tragicomic Hope** Referred to the optimism one had as they experienced the struggle, strife, and suffering that was commensurate with life	**→**	**Pragmatic Optimism** Encouraged leaders to advocate for change by promoting dialogue, challenging status quo policies, and modeling leadership through activism and action

Note: Adapted from "Cracking the Code: Illuminating the Promises and Pitfalls of Social Justice in Educational Leadership," by F. D. Beachum & C. R. McCray, 2015, in *Urban Educational Leadership for Social Justice: International Perspectives*, pp. 303-322, copyright 2015 by Information Age Publishing, *"Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism"* by C. West, 2004, Penguin Press, copyright 2004 by Penguin Press, and *"Building an Ethical School: A Theory of Practice in Educational Leadership,"* by R. J. Starratt, 1991, in *Education Administration Quarterly, 27,* pp. 185-202, copyright 1991 by Sage; used with permission.
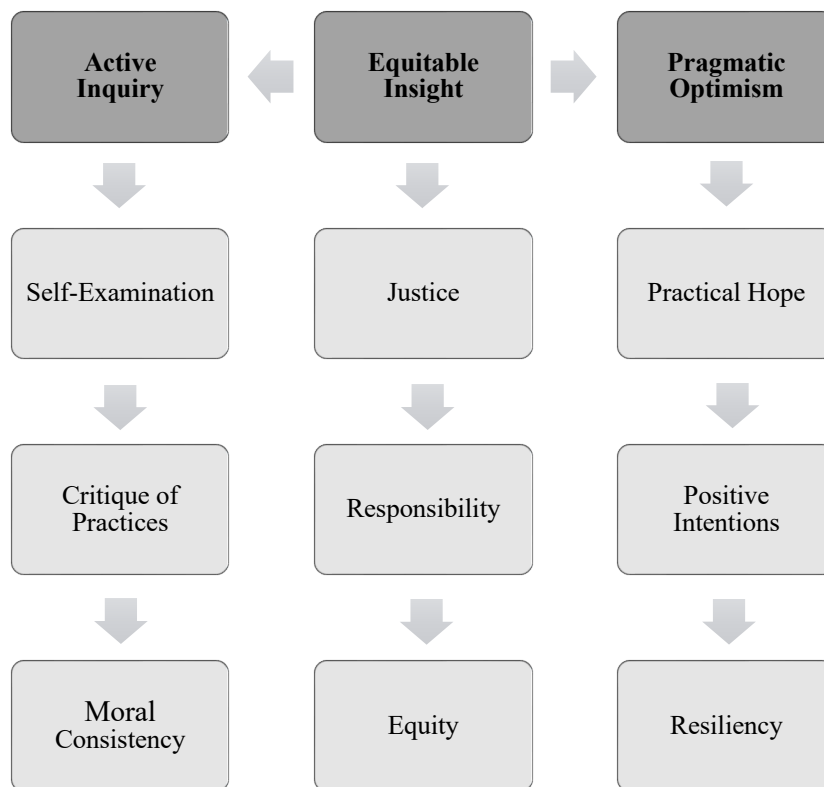
Figure 2 visually connects the theoretical underpinnings that influenced the three elements of

Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership. They

utilized the ethic of critique (Starratt, 1991) and Socratic questioning (West, 2004) to develop a

mindset of active inquiry among education leaders. Active inquiry was an action-based

perspective whereby school leaders question the practices in schools (and themselves) and critique the existing power relationships in everyday decision-making situations (Beachum & McCray, 2015). They used Starratt's (1991) ethic of justice and West's (2004) concept of prophetic justice to create equitable insight, which was a construct that developed leaders to better understand people's perceptions about the world through a justice lens, while realizing everyone's responsibility towards social justice. Lastly, Starratt's (1991) ethic of caring was coupled with West's (2004) idea of tragicomic hope to develop the construct of pragmatic optimism, which encouraged leaders to advocate for change by promoting dialogue and relationship-building, challenging status quo policies, and modeling leadership through hope, activism, and action.

     The major themes within the tripartite framework are listed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Major Themes of Beachum and McCray's Tripartite Framework

Specifically, Beachum and McCray (2015) noted that active inquiry included continuous self-examination and a critique of practices, all with moral consistency. Equitable insight was gained after active inquiry whereby an individual leader developed a justice mindset and understood their responsibility in the fight towards equity. Lastly, pragmatic optimism was a kind of hopeful mindset the leader modeled through their positive interactions, which allowed for the leader to move social justice work forward with resiliency. Beachum and McCray (2015) argued the major themes within the tripartite framework allowed principals to re-radicalize social justice and

ultimately implement the "life service" of social justice leadership praxis instead of "paying more attention to lip service" (p. 307).

Based on what the participants of this study shared in their in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2016), Beachum and McCray's (2015) framework and analysis of what social justice leadership should be, did not fully elucidate or align with the wide variety of *practices* social justice school leaders utilized on a day-to-day basis. What the framework did provide, however, was a broad understanding of the kind of mindset and perspective social justice leaders must have if they are to begin to minimize the oppressive structures that inherently exist within schools, and what they have experienced just living.

Active inquiry was an aspect of social justice leadership focused specifically on self-examination, a critique of practices, and moral consistency throughout the inquiry process (Beachum & McCray, 2015), and most tightly aligned with the study's findings and the literature regarding self-examination and critiquing one's practices (Boske, 2014; Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Boske (2014) argued that principals must develop their critical self-reflection skills if they are to understand how significant context is to social justice work. Because without critical reflection, they run the risk of perpetuating status quo school practices, which are often undergirded by oppression (Boske, 2014). Hernandez and Marshall (2017) also furthered this notion by adding that when school leaders engaged in critical self-reflection, they were able to better understand how inequity impacts the overall culture of their school, which often perpetuated dominant perspectives and policies.

It was also found in literature that social justice leaders are "driven by moral purposes" and the understanding that the learning environment is more than measurable achievement data

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(Jean-Marie, 2008, p. 353). Moreover, transformative leadership frameworks were consistent with the moral consistency aspect of active inquiry. Transformative leadership "explicitly attends to the moral and ethical issues related to power relationships of entire social systems that often perpetuate inequity and inequality in organizations" (Shields, 2010, p. 565), which Beachum and McCray argued was necessary to re-radicalize social justice in schools.

Undoubtedly, the construct of active inquiry was a particularly important aspect of Beachum and McCray's (2015) framework considering how the sociopolitical and sociocultural context of 2020-22 has made the phenomenon of being a social justice leader even more crucial. The school leaders in this study often shared that the problematic rhetoric of President Trump contributed to increased racial tensions as a result of George Floyd's extrajudicial murder, which catalyzed school leaders to examine (sometimes for the first time) school policies that perpetuated White supremacy, and therefore, provided PD opportunities for charter school employees to learn about implicit bias and how that may show up in grading practices and other aspects of school policies and data. The sociopolitical context provided a ripe opportunity for social justice leaders in this study to strongly advocate for change in ways that may have been more covert before.

Equitable insight focused specifically on aspects of justice, responsibility, and equity (Beachum & McCray, 2015). Even though these themes were integrated in the mindsets of the leaders of this study, especially equity, the framework did not provide more clarity on what exactly leaders did once they gained equitable insight. Additionally, the leaders in this study already had gained equitable insight through their lived experiences and did not need to actively interrogate their school-based decisions to be aware of systemic oppression, and then brainstorm

ways to dismantle them. Equity was embedded in nearly every definition of social justice and was present in nearly every study of social justice leadership (see Chapter 2), and, therefore, including it in a framework of social justice leadership made sense. However, this did not change the fact that equity as a part of equitable insight, seemed synonymous. In other words, Beachum and McCray (2105) used an adjective synonym to describe the concept of equity itself, which did not elucidate a clearer understanding of what equitable insight was in practice. What was missing was a clearer articulation of what justice, responsibility, and equity meant in the context of practicing social justice leadership.

Pragmatic optimism focused specifically on practical hope, positive interactions, and resiliency (Beachum & McCray, 2015). The third construct of Beachum and McCray's (2015) tripartite framework was also abstract; however, building positive interactions was a practice found in the social justice leadership literature, especially as it pertained with the community (DeMatthews et al., 2016a; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Jean-Marie, 2008; López et al., 2010;). For example, in Jean-Marie's (2008) study of female secondary school leaders faced with challenges of social justice, she found they had various positive interactions with their staff and the community. From having conversations of issues related to diversity, equity, social justice, and ethics during PD, to understanding and having concern for how poverty reduced their students' opportunity to learn, these leaders focused on their positive interactions with their staff and community so that they could better understand how context and resiliency played a role in the learning outcomes of students (Jean-Marie, 2008). The social justice leaders in her study were energized and demonstrated what Beachum and McCray (2015) called practical hope to shift the conditions of students' learning at their respective schools, leading with of sense of

resiliency even when they were faced with increased accountability measures (Jean-Marie, 2008). Similar to equitable insight, what was missing from Beachum and McCray's (2015) pragmatic optimism element of their tripartite framework was a clearer articulation of what practical hope, positive interactions, and resiliency meant in the context of actually practicing social justice leadership.

While active inquiry, equitable insight, and pragmatic optimism outlined mindsets for an orientation towards social justice leadership, it was unclear how social justice leaders embodied these mindsets *in practice* from the framework itself. Therefore, Beachum and McCray's Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership had theoretical implications.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework

Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) defined four distinct, albeit interconnected behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders in their synthesis of the literature. The four behaviors included: (a) critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors, (b) development of culturally responsive teachers, (c) promotion of culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, and (d) engagement with students, parents, and Indigenous contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). The researchers also noted that these behaviors were complex and "were so intricately linked" (p. 1282) that there was crossover between the actions that aligned with each of the defined CRSL behaviors.

Based on the findings from this study, which were that school leaders engaged in practices were student-centered, supportive of their staff, and involved the community for insight, there was a salient alignment to Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL Framework. When the school leaders in this study engaged in practices that were student-centered, this finding aligned

with the following CRSL behaviors: critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors and promotion of culturally responsive/inclusive school environment. For example, the leaders in this study were committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts of their students, which Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) found to be integral to the practices of multicultural leaders in urban settings in their earlier study. Furthermore, Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found that building relationships with students helped in reducing anxiety among them, which was similar to what many of the participants described when they intentionally spent time getting to know students during lunch or recess, so that when there were discipline issues, they were not scared to come to the principal's office. The student-centered mentality of the leaders in this study corroborated what Khalifa et al.'s (2016) claimed in their CRSL Framework.

It was also found that the school leaders in this study were supportive of their staffs in various ways. This finding corresponded to the following CRSL behavior: development of culturally responsive teachers. For example, the leaders in this study were committed to developing their teachers professionally (and personally) and modeling the types of behaviors they expected to see from their teachers in the classroom. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) found that modeling culturally responsive teaching was a social justice leadership behavior. It was also found that developing teacher capacities for culturally responsive pedagogy and creating culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers were indicative of social justice leadership practices (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003), which many of the leaders in this study also shared as practices they believe are evidence of their social justice leadership.

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This aspect of CRSL also aligned with the actions the leaders of this study took amid the current socio-political landscape and its inherent effects on their schools. For example, the school leaders created spaces where teachers were able to discuss both the uncertainty of the pandemic and how to appropriately support their students (and themselves) who were negatively affected by the extrajudicial killings of Black bodies by police and the fear of the U.S.'s Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents removing family members from their homes due to their immigration status. Whether the leaders facilitated community circles, or engaged in one-on-one conversations, they were purposeful in their varying approaches to make sure they were being supportive of their teachers, both pedagogically and personally. Supporting staff was a finding in this study corroborated by Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL Framework, specifically the promotion of culturally responsive/inclusive school environment.

The final finding in this study was that the leaders involved the wider community into the school community, even amid challenges. Engagement with students, parents, and Indigenous contexts was the CRSL behavior that aligned with this final finding of this study. For example, the leaders aimed to get to know their communities so they could provide the best learning environment for their students. Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) found similar findings in their study and explained the importance of developing meaningful, positive relationships with community contexts of their students. Additionally, they engaged in critical reflection on their biases and blind spots to resist deficit images of students and families and develop positive understandings of them, which Flessa (2009) also found to be true in his study on principals in urban school settings. Additionally, Cooper (2009), Ishimaru (2013), and Khalifa (2012) found that school leaders aimed to find spaces for school and community could collaborate and build

strong school-community connections, which aligned with leaders in this study who aimed to incorporate community members into school-based decisions as much as they could.

It was clear that Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL Framework more tightly aligned with findings of this study and provided more robust practical connections to the abstract and complex concept of social justice leadership. This framework not only provided specific practices that other researchers had studied to buttress the four CRSL behaviors, but also communicated that there were no true distinctions between the behaviors given their inherent interconnectedness (Khalifa et al., 2016). Calling this fact out, indicated that there were larger theoretical implications to consider for both Beachum and McCray's (2015) Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership and Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL Framework.

Theoretical Implications

It makes sense that a social justice leader approaches situations with inquiry and seeks to understand the complexity of situations actively; however, the Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership (Beachum & McCray, 2015) did not give specifics for exactly how to engage with the elements that defined their framework. Their framework was rather an advocation and call for a different approach to leadership without practical elements for current leaders, which it was committed to doing. While it was difficult to generalize practical applications from theoretical frameworks, practical tools were useful and necessary to guide leaders to use their social justice-oriented mindsets toward social justice leadership praxis that changes outcomes for marginalized students and community members, especially amid a sociopolitical context where every action by a school leader is highly scrutinized.

The mindsets that leaders must have to be a social justice leader included elements of active inquiry, equitable insight, and pragmatic optimism, but the abstract and nuanced notions of social justice leadership did not become clearer after conducting the study with this framework. The tripartite framework did not effectively link how mindsets of social justice leaders connected to their actual practices. It appeared that at least among this sample, school leaders of color approached the implementation of social justice practices and decision-making with a mindset that was foundational to the Beachum and McCray's (2105) tripartite framework, but also included practical behaviors that better aligned with Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL Framework. More practical frameworks that understand the complexity of context and the interconnectedness of social justice leadership praxes are needed. This is especially true for new school leaders who do not have the experience to authentically support teachers and families during the uncertainty of a global pandemic and the trauma inflicted by racial injustice, while also managing the day-to-day operations of a school. Researchers must further refine this body of literature and be able to amalgamate the theoretical and practical aspects of social justice leadership because social justice leadership in this study was more than just the practices of the leaders; it was an authentic way of being.

Implications of Practice and Policy

In addition to the theoretical implications, there were practical and policy implications that should be considered as a result of this study. Given that we are currently in the middle of a social movement against systemic oppression and racism and managing the lingering effects of a global pandemic, it is increasingly critical for public charter school leaders to make social justice practices foundational to all learning and action within schools.

The resurgence of Civil Rights Era demands has called school leaders to radically shift school practices and pedagogy to be more inclusive and socially just. There has not been a time in the last 50 years when school leadership and keeping quality teachers in the classroom have been more urgent. The nature of traditional leadership has not been, and will no longer be, effective in education. Transformative social justice leadership should no longer be an aspect of leadership, it should be the foundation that school systems engage to incite practical and policy changes.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings of this study, there were two practical and timely implications to consider. Given that this study aimed to better understand the phenomenon of being a social justice leader and how these leaders implemented various social justice policies and practices, the practical implications are vital to current and aspiring school leaders for social justice. Every school leader mentioned restorative discipline practices as evidence of their social justice approach to leadership. The discipline structures varied site-to-site; however, the leaders explained that these proactive restorative structures helped move school practices and policies around discipline towards more social justice outcomes. Current literature also has corroborated what participants in this study shared regarding how their proactive, restorative discipline practices often resulted in schools where students felt safer, heard, and understood (Brown, 2017; DeMatthews, 2016b; Fronius et al., 2019; Gullo, 2018; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Additionally, current literature has indicated that equity audits were a practical way to challenge school leaders to critical analyze their practices and policies consistently so that entire school systems could move towards more just outcomes (Brown, 2010; Green, 2017; Harris &

Hopson, 2008; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017; Palmer et al., 2021; Skrla et al., 2004). The participants in this study self-identified as social justice leaders; however, none of them mentioned equity audits during the interview process as a practice they implemented. Given there is a large body of literature that supports equity audits as a good place to start when school leaders are trying to shift school systems to better support marginalized groups, or further critically analyze school- and community-based data, they are another practical tool that should be considered when implementing social justice practices.

  Restorative Discipline. In schools, restorative justice practices often served as an alternative to traditional exclusionary discipline practices like suspension or expulsion. It was no surprise that racism and the racial discipline gap remain deep-rooted within educational systems, policies, and practices (DeMatthews, 2016b). In a report from 2018, it was found that while Black students represented 15.5% of all students in the country, they represented 39% of students suspended from schools, and that while students with disabilities represented 13.7% of all students, they represented 25.9% of those suspended (Government Accountability Office, 2018). In another analysis, LAUSD's 2014-15 discipline records indicated that suspension rates for misconduct dropped for Black, Latino, Asian, White, disabled, English Language Learner, and free and reduced-price lunch eligible students after implementing restorative justice practices (Hashim et al., 2018). It was clear that restorative practices are necessary given the disproportionate discipline data and the efficacy restorative practices have been shown to have post implementation.

  In the last 10 years, restorative justice has been defined as a general term and growing social movement to institutionalize non-punitive, relationship-centered approaches for avoiding

and addressing harm, responding to violations of legal and human rights, and collaboratively solving problems (Fronius et al., 2019). Historically, restorative justice began as a victim-offender mediation or reconciliation practice to ultimately divert people away from traditional justice systems while also repairing any harm caused in an inclusive and collaborative way (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). It has also been applied in various ways to the school setting, especially in the urban public charter schools in this study.

Morrison and Vaandering (2012) noted that restorative justice proponents in schools often turn to peacemaking circles, which are grounded in traditional indigenous practice in North America. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) more specifically explained:

> Peacemaking circles developed from talking circles, and include intentional structural elements: ceremony, a talking piece, a facilitator or keeper, guidelines, and consensus decision-making. Circles aim to create a space where participants are safe to be their most authentic self, share stories, and develop understanding of self and others. (p. 143)

This restorative practice of peacemaking circles intentionally centered the student by creating a space that is meant to safe, where participants could be vulnerable and gain deeper understanding. This peacemaking circle restorative practice was exactly what Campbell, Cecilia, and Lauren shared during their interviews about the social justice practices they implemented most often. Brown (2017) found that school-wide restorative justice practices that are built on culture of listening and relational trust, like the peacemaking circles shared by Morrison and Vaandering (2012), "can contribute to a positive relational ecology that supports members of a school community as they go through the challenging and sometimes difficult process of changing their school culture" (p. 53).

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Within school settings, restorative discipline practices have many different program types. Restorative justice can be a whole school initiative, where the entire school community is trained in the foundational principles or restorative justice, or it can be used as an add-on to existing discipline approaches that need a different approach. It also has been combined with other non-punitive discipline approaches, such as Social and Emotional Learning and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (Fronius et al., 2019). Regardless of how restorative justice is practiced in schools, it is a relational practice that centers the experiences of all involved parties involved and seeks to understand people's choices and the complexity that often is not immediately understood in situations involving discipline.

Restorative practices in discipline should be considered for aspiring school leaders who inherit a school with data that disproportionately disciplines students of color. Additionally, any school leaders with decision-making authority should alter their discipline practices to be restorative, focused on repairing harm, instead of solidifying the school-to-prison pipeline. Another way school leaders should begin to dismantle the harmful, and often unintentional school systems is to conduct equity audits.

Equity Audits. Equity audits (also known as representivity audits) have roots in United States educational and civil rights history, and thus were an appropriate, practical practice that should be used by school leaders and other stakeholders to address issues related to equity and deficit-based school norms. They have also been used in leadership preparation and doctoral programs (Brown, 2010; Harris & Hopson, 2008; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017; Palmer et al., 2021). Skrla et al. (2004) noted that equity audits have been conducted by school districts voluntarily or because they were thought to be out of compliance with specific civil rights

statutes that prohibited discrimination. It is no surprise, however, that teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders may be aware of the inequities that exist in their schools, but rarely have systematically examined these areas and then devised sustainable ways to eliminate the inequities (Skrla et al., 2004).

Researchers have studied equity audits in administrative preparation programs (Brown, 2010; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017) and in doctoral programs in educational leadership (Harris & Hopson, 2008; Palmer et al., 2021) to prepare aspiring leaders to rethink how schools and districts can approach data from an equity-based lens. From analyzing aspiring leaders' reflections and written assignments pertaining to school-based data on poverty and race/ethnicity (Hernandez & Marshall, 2017), to examining equity audit presentations of educational leadership doctoral students through a content analysis lens to identify common themes (Palmer et al., 2021), equity audits were used as an objective tool to identify areas associated with equality, ethics, or social justice. Ideally, equity audits would be integral to all programs preparing leaders for educational leadership in urban public charter schools; however, the reality is that they are not widely studied in these educational leadership preparation programs. Thus, it is important to pay particular attention to what current leaders, who may have missed this critical development in their leadership preparation programs, can practically do to move their schools' systems towards more equitable outcomes for students.

Skrla et al. (2004) studied equity audits as a practical tool to help current education leaders to identify and shift inequitable school systems towards equity. They created an equity audit simple formula where "achievement equity" is achieved through analyzing data on "teacher quality equity" coupled with data on "programmatic equity." In this case teacher quality equity

referred to the number of students with a school system who have access to quality teachers, which Skrla et al. (2004) defined as the degree level of teachers, the number of hears of teaching experience, the percentage of attrition rates of teachers on a campus, and teachers certification teaching a subject they are credentialed.

Programmatic equity referred to the quality of the programs that students were placed (or excluded). The researchers similarly included four indicators for programmatic equity: special education, gifted and talented education, bilingual education, and student discipline (Skrla et al., 2004). For these four categories, overrepresentation or disproportionate data were analyzed to uncover whether all student groups for each specific context were represented proportionately.

Achievement equity, which might seem out of place in a true equity audit was included by Skrla et al. (2004) because it kept a critical public focus on equity outcomes, expanding the traditional view of achievement data and accountability. This measure included graduation rates, access to college-prep high curriculum, and higher-level assessments such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), American College Test (ACT), and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. To start the equity audit process, Skrla et al. (2004) advised that schools begin by following these steps:

1. Create a committee of relevant stakeholders.
2. Present the data to the committee and have everyone graph the data.
3. Discuss the meaning of the data, possible use of experts, led by a facilitator.
4. Discuss potential solutions, possible use of experts, led by a facilitator.
5. Implement solution(s).
6. Monitor and evaluate results.

7. Celebrate if successful; if not successful, return to step three and repeat the process.

(p. 153)

While the process was not perfect, it provided an example of how equity audits could be practiced by relevant stakeholders. Skrla et al. (2004) acknowledged that the simplicity of this formula and the step-by-step process did not fully encapsulate the dynamic complexity of school systems, however they posited that "practical tools that make intuitive sense to educators and are easy to apply, while getting beyond old biases, can be highly useful" (Skrla et al., 2004, p. 141), and this was the place to start. Green (2017) agreed that equity audits are an objective tool that school leaders can use to begin analyzing data to surface expected equity gaps. His approach centered the community in the audit process and used different forms of data compared to Skrla et al. (2004).

Green (2017) posited that community-based equity audits, which are grounded in the Freirean dialogue (e.g., love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking) could also be used as a practical tool to help school leaders promote community equity and foster solidarity among a range of stakeholders. To engage in community-based equity audits, Green (2017) found that school could engage in four phases to develop context-specific, equity-focused actions: disrupt deficit views of the community, conduct initial community inquiry and shared community experiences, establish a Community Leadership Team, and collect equity, asset-based community data for action. These phases were not intended to be completed in any specific order (except for starting at the first phase); however, in Green's (2017) study the phases were discussed sequentially from the perspective of a principal facilitating the equity audit process with a team.

The first step was to disrupt deficit views about community, which was central to Green's (2017) community-based approach to equity audits. To do this, Green (2017) explained the importance of creating a team that was as representative and the community as possible. For example, he shared having team members be from various racial, social class, gender, and age backgrounds as well as come from a variety of educational positions. The team should also be representative of the community where the school is located (Green, 2017). It was important to note here that the urban public charter school context should mirror the actual demographics of the school community given that charter schools often have students from a myriad of communities, especially in Los Angeles. Additionally, this group should have specific norms so that the purpose and intention of the team are clear. The specific norms used in Green's (2017) study were to adopt a Freirean and asset-based views of the community and establish equity-based core beliefs. In practice, this looked like the school leadership team reading and discussing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2017) and deconstructing deficit thinking. Then, the team would establish equity-based core beliefs by defining asset and equity-based core beliefs and non-negotiables about how the school and community should engage with each other (Green, 2017). Once these terms have been established, the team should then test their core beliefs against their current practices and make the necessary changes, so they are aligned to the new set of core beliefs.

During the second phase, the school leader and the initial audit team went into the community to make connections and develop relationships with community leaders. Green (2017) detailed that "this part of the audit process [had] three key actions: conduct initial community inquiry through asset mapping, interview community leaders, and have shared

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community experiences" (p. 20). It was also critical that the school leaders and their teams engaged in critical thinking to better understand how systems and school structures were intentionally enmeshed and promoted community inequity (Green, 2017).

Then, leaders established a Community Leadership Team who collected equity, asset-based community data for action during the last step of the process. During this phase, the school leader and the team chose a community leader to join the Community Leadership Team. The community leader should be demographically representative of the community and live in the area (Green, 2017). Green (2017) noted how important this part of the process was because the Community Leadership Team facilitated the rest of the equity audit.

The final phase of the community-based equity audit "[had] several action steps and [was] used to help the Community Leadership Team better contextualize the community-based setting of the school, its assets, and its inequities" (Green, 2017, p. 25). This phase included the Community Leadership Team: (a) collecting data on school-community history, (b) collecting data on community opportunity indicators, and (c) engaging in critical community dialogues.

Collecting data on school-community history meant doing interviews with community members to better understand where the school has been, where it is, and where it is going. Horsford (2010) explained the importance of understanding school-community experiences when she studied superintendents' engagement with the school-community and their legacy with school desegregation, and so did Khalifa (2012) when he studied the principal's role visibly and transparently advocating for the community. Green (2017) used the previous studies to outline the main goal of the interviews, which was "to develop a deeper and comprehensive understanding about people's experiences in the community and to learn more about the most

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pressing school-community inequities" (Green, 2017, p. 26). Next, the Community Leadership Team collected data on community opportunity indicators. Practically, this meant that the Community Leadership Team should examine at least seven community opportunity as a start. Green (2017) suggested the following demographic indicators by zip code: (a) total population, (b) total population disaggregated by race, (c) median household income and disaggregated income levels by families, (d) total unemployment rate and disaggregated by race, (e) total poverty rate and disaggregated by race, (f) graduation rates, and (g) number of individuals 25 years and older with an associate degree or higher. After these data were collected and critically analyzed, the Community Leadership Team can better understand the conditions before strategizing about future changes (Green, 2017).

In the final part of the process the Community Leadership Team engaged in critical community dialogues, which "is most important for transforming the previously collected data into useable information to act toward equitable change" (Green, 2017, p. 28). Green (2017) explained the critical community dialogues are an intentional space where school-community stakeholders can engage in discussions about a myriad of community concerns and begin brainstorming solutions together. This should not be a one-time meeting and should occur at least four times. Green (2017) explained that the four meetings should be organized as such: (1) establish group agreements to create boundaries for the conversations, (2) discuss and share data about community opportunity indicators and equity collected during phase three, root causes to inequity, and potential solutions, (3) collectively develop an equity-focused vision statement for the community and school, and finally (4) transform the information from the previous meetings into a succinct action plan. It is important to note that the work would not end here, but rather the

Community Leadership Team would continue to engage in an iterative equity audit process until there is complete equity within the school *and* in the community (Green, 2017).

Social change is hard work, and without a framework or systems approach to the work, it is almost certain that any institution, including schools, will experience additional painful and emotionally laden pitfalls than successes, especially when people struggle to move away from well-established status quo systems. For example, Horsford and Heilig (2014) highlighted the challenges associated with community-based education reform, like Green's (2017) community-based equity audits, in communities where social agency, economic resources, and effective coalition building is low. They concluded that the urban communities, that have the greatest need for competitive grant funding to make community-based reforms possible, are often the least able to gain access to this kind of federal support (Horsford & Heilig, 2014). Nevertheless, equity audits are an appropriate, practical next step for school leaders leading for social justice.

Any school leader with decision-making authority should embed equity audits as an integral part of their yearly review and to inform their long-term goals. Nonetheless, if the conversation on equity and accountability is going to be useful for real equity where students and the communities they come from are not adversely affected by deficit-based school systems and structures like Horsford and Heilig (2014) mentioned, the complexity of policy and their equally complex effects requires that researchers and policymakers "adopt an orientation to dialogue and debate that is careful, reflective, and respectful of different viewpoints, including a willingness to thoughtfully consider data supporting opposing viewpoints" (Skrla et al., 2004, p. 136), and not only during times of heightened stress (e.g., global pandemic, racial injustice). These policy

implications, especially as they pertain to the professional standards of school leaders in California, are discussed in the following section.

Policy Implications

There are also policy implications that rise above the day-to-day practices of school leaders that should be considered as a result of this study. Social justice leadership is highly nuanced and involves contextual factors that make it difficult to implement a generic set of professional standards like the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders (CPSEL) (2014). Therefore, there must be at least two critical policy changes so that expected behaviors of school leaders better align with social justice leadership approaches: (1) the CPSEL (2014) and how school leaders are assessed must be shifted and co-created with the community to better align with the complexities and specific needs of the communities and (2) there must be a mindset shift away from traditional policy analysis that assumes strategies are straightforward and can be broadly implemented, with little attention paid to how things are interrelated and connected (Diem et al., 2014). In short, any set of professional standards for school leaders must move beyond performative updates and additions and be community focused.

The CPSEL (2014) were the professional standards for education leaders and broadly described effective leadership. In the last 10 years, they were updated calling for "the need for 'refreshing' to better reflect that 21st Century leader expectations, the current context of schooling, and needs of California's widely diverse students" (California Professional Standards for Education Leaders [CPSEL], 2014, p. 2). While making it known that a "refreshing" was necessary in terms of leader expectations and diversity, this ultimately implied that there was not an orientation towards diversity before. To simply add the word, however, did not wholly

incorporate diversity as a value and seemed performative. Beachum and McCray (2015) noted

that "rhetoric can mask covert behaviors that do not match [the] positive assertions" (p. 307).

Whether intentional or not, when the language used to categorize the behaviors and expected

professional standards of school leaders is compared to the actions taken to train current and

aspiring leaders to embody these practices, there was vast discrepancy. One way Young and

Diem's (2017) analyzed policy was by exploring the difference and concern between policy

rhetoric and practiced reality. Utilizing this approach, it was clear that there should be concern

for what is written in the actual CPSEL (2014) standards versus the implementation

recommendations that are accompanied with the standards.

Specifically, the discourse, linguistic codes, and content of the CPSEL (2014) revealed

what appeared to be an orientation towards diversity and equity; however, it was clear that word

choice of specific sub standards revealed varying levels of covert discourse, which could serve to

perpetuate inequitable systems of power and the status quo of failing educational systems. This is

why there must be a mindset shift away from traditional policy analysis that assumes strategies

are straightforward and can be broadly implemented, with little attention paid to how things are

interrelated and connected (Diem et al., 2014). In a traditional approach to policy analysis,

critical details are often missed, and covert language is often threaded into implementation plans,

which perpetuates inequities (either intentionally or unintentionally). Bertrand et al. (2015)

agreed with this notion, purporting that "discourses are deeply implicated in social structures,

serving constitutive and legitimizing functions" (p. 7). To better understand how word choice of

specific sub standards revealed varying levels of covert discourse, Standard 1: Development and

Implementation of a Shared Vision and Standard 2: Instructional Leadership were explained in further detail (CPSEL, 2014).

Standard 1 (CPSEL, 2014) focused on leaders implementing a student-centered vision that is shared with all stakeholders. *Element 1C: Vision Planning and Implementation* (CPSEL, 2014) indicated that leaders guide and monitor decisions, actions, outcomes using the shared vision and goals for all elements, CPSEL (2014) had *example indicators* that delineated leader action(s) to be used or adapted. The second indicator for this element mentioned that a leader should "use evidence (including, but limited to student achievement, attendance, behavior and school climate data, research, and best practices) to shape and revise plans, programs, and activities that advance the vision" (CPSEL, 2014, p. 4). It seemed that developing and implementing a vision on evidence that could include attendance and behavior, which does not provide an asset view of students. Typically, conversations in a school setting about attendance and behavior are not positive ones. Visions are meant to be aspirational but focusing on metrics like attendance and behavior seem to use control and power for compliance. Additionally, the next example indicator read, "marshal, equitably allocate, and efficiently use human, fiscal, and technological resources aligned with the vision of learning for all students" (CPSEL, 2014, p. 5). Word choice in this example indicator was especially telling. To "marshal" provides imagery of a medieval king having charge of the cavalry, or more modernly, command of military forces. The use of militaristic language was interesting, especially since in this section of the standards the leader should be developing a "shared" vision. It may be covert, but hierarchical structures of control from the leader exist. Additionally, using the word "efficiently" when explaining human resources seemed to indicate that people are meant to be used to push forward the vision, without

any regard for the complexity of each human. From a critical perspective, this could communicate that people are simply the cogs in the capitalist machine, which insinuates little regard for their humanity, and what many of the leaders in this study viewed as an integral mindset in their leadership approach.

Standard 2 (CPSEL, 2014) focused on how leaders shape a collaborative culture of teaching and learning informed by professional standards and focused on student and professional growth. *Element 2A: Professional Learning Culture* (CPSEL, 2014) aimed to promote a culture in which staff engages in PD that results in continuous improvement and high performance. The example indicator that provided the most interesting analysis was indicator 2A-3: "Capitalize on the diverse experiences and abilities of staff to plan, implement, and assess professional learning" (CPSEL, 2014, p. 5). Capitalize means to gain advantage from something when competing with someone or something else. In this context, it seemed odd to include the word "capitalize" when referring to the "diverse experiences and abilities of staff." While "diverse" was not being used to reference ethnicity or race specifically here, the fact that "capitalize" and "diverse experiences" were used in the same sentence indicated inherent values and underlying purposes of policies to legitimize and maintain the dominant culture and power structures (Bertrand et al., 2015). It also seemed to negate the collaborative culture aspect of the standard. When someone capitalizes on something, they are not looking to collaborate unless they will gain from the interaction. One might think that student growth as an outcome would be a positive byproduct of capitalization; however, since "discursive strategies are commonplace, they are often subtle or covert" (Bertrand et al., 2015, p. 4), it was important to critical analyze

the words to better understand "the relationship between strategies and discourses and their function in upholding or challenging educational inequity" (Bertrand et al., 2015, p. 4).

After the first two standards of the CPSEL (2014) were reviewed in detail, it was clear that a traditional view of policy implementation was at work, especially when the guidance for how to implement the standards used traditional indictors of success that often perpetuate oppression in schools. While there may not be a way to articulate example indicators that considers the nuances of various human experiences, the indicators used still oriented towards an ideology focused on accountability disguised as growth. It was also clear that CPSEL's (2014) intentions seemed to be aligned towards equity and diversity; however, the first two standards, which are arguably the most important ones, included covert mechanisms undergirded in their language to perpetuate the status quo of educational inequity.

The last two sections gave me hope: *Standard 4: Family and Community Engagement and Standard 5: Ethics and Integrity* (CPSEL, 2014). These standards focused on education leaders making decisions, modeling, and behaving in ways that demonstrate professionalism, ethics, integrity, justice, and equity (while also holding the staff to the same standards). They also aimed to collaborate with families and other stakeholders to address diverse student and community interests. Even though many aspects of professionalism covertly maintain systems built for White supremacy, the fact that "examining personal assumptions" and "continuously improve cultural proficiency skills and competency" revealed an aspect of leadership that aligned to critical reflection (CPSEL, 2014, p. 9), which Boske (2014) argued "promote[d] a connective process that precedes meaningful learning centered on a change of self, and ultimately, changing ways of knowing and responding to the world" (p. 289). Even though principals have been

traditionally trained to be managers, not andragogical experts who facilitate spaces for critical reflection (Boske, 2014), a focus on *Standards 4 and 5* could catalyze a mindset shift away from traditional policy analysis and implementation (Diem et al., 2014), and shift how school leaders are assessed to be co-created with the community.

Focusing on these standards and developing success criteria for them with the community was my hope for future policy work. Training programs for principals and teachers must all include an orientation toward understanding one's own bias and working towards "safely examining personal assumptions and respectfully challenging beliefs that negatively affect improving teaching and learning for all students" (CPSEL, 2014, p. 10). More principals should be starting with Standards 4 and 5 (CPSEL, 2014) first because critical reflection coupled with intention and action with the community will be foundational to the success of principals who aim to lead more socially just schools.

The school leaders in this study agreed with this notion and included similar recommendations for aspiring leaders, which is discussed in the next section.

Participant Recommendations

The participants in this study consistently and relentlessly advocated for those on the margins and implemented social justice practices and policies that provided diverse, equitable, and inclusive school environments. Therefore, their recommendations for aspiring school leaders are critical and timely, especially given that they have been leading schools through a global pandemic and a tense racialized socio-political context unlike any other in recent history. The following recommendations came directly from the school leaders who participated in this study. As a collective, they wanted future leaders to understand the importance of being honest with

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themselves as they continuously learn, listening so that they continuously hone their critical reflection skills, and prioritizing wellness so that a career in education could be sustainable.

Be Truly Yourself

The participants overwhelmingly recommended that aspiring social justice leaders stay true to themselves and take ownership of their ever-evolving process of growth and unlearning. The leaders in this study felt it was important for school leaders to also model the kinds of behaviors and vulnerability they hoped to see developed in their school communities.

MDO shared that "It's okay to disagree. Let your ideas be heard and, honestly, defend your perspective because you are the only one who has it" (MDO, Interview 3). MDO acknowledged that doing social justice work will undoubtedly surface disagreements; however, as a leader, it is important to own your perspective, be honest with where you are in your development, and know that your perspective is unique, and it matters.

Lauren agreed with MDO and shared her advice for leaders to be unapologetically themselves as she reflected on being a woman of color in this work. She advised aspiring leaders:

Don't second guess yourself, your questions, or your thinking. Show up as your authentic self because people will misinterpret who you are no matter what. I think People of Color, especially in leadership spaces, we think we have to adhere to a certain model, at least in the beginning, and I would say no. Just be you the entire time. (Lauren, Interview 3)

When Lauren began her principalship at her charter elementary school, there were times when she felt she had to quell aspects of herself to be successful at her job. As she grew into her

leadership, she realized the importance of being authentically herself, even when people within her organization did not agree with her approach to social justice leadership. She advised aspiring leaders to know they are where they are supposed to be exactly as they are.

Cecilia also shared the importance of being honest in the leadership journey. She advised leaders to "be honest with [themselves]. Be open. Be open to learning, to own [their] learning and be patient with it. It's a life-long process of learning because you're constantly evolving and constantly changing (Cecilia, Interview 3). It was important for Cecilia to communicate to future social justice leaders that they must approach social justice work with empathy. An empathetic approach, from Cecilia's perspective, was crucial for leaders to develop because if they were truly honest with themselves, they we recognize that they, too, need empathy as they continuously evolve and change their approach to social justice leadership. Empathy and taking time to learn from the community was another collection recommendation that the leaders of this study wanted to share with aspiring social justice leaders.

Learn From the Community to Empathize With the Community

The second collective recommendation from this study's participants was to learn from the community so that they could better empathize with them and be responsive to their needs.

Cecilia wanted future leaders to know that their mindsets about the community and about students will ultimately drive their success towards to social justice outcomes. She shared:

> I always have the mindset that it's important to focus on the student and on the
> community, so that you can learn as much as you can about before trying to move things
> around or change things. You really have to try to understand and empathize and learn
> from the community. (Cecilia, Interview 3)

Cecilia mentioned in further detail in her third interview that a leader cannot empathize with community members situation if they have not taken the time to learn from them, especially if they do not live in the same community and do have similar cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it was important for her to communicate to budding leaders that they must invest the time and do their best to understand the surrounding community if they want to be trusted by the community.

Carla furthered Cecilia's notions by advising future leaders to think about where they can begin to connect with community. She explained:

> Try to find the entry points to what [you] care about and what [your] community cares about. Listen and create the space for them to share [wants, needs, concerns, etc.]. Like if you don't provide those spaces, if you don't have those spaces, then that stuff just doesn't generally naturally come up. (Carla, Interview 3)

In her experience as the principal of a charter elementary school, Carla understood the importance of finding the places where, as the leader, she could connect with the community. Specifically, she wanted future leaders to know that if community members do not have a space to share their concerns or what is important to them, then they will not share it. She shared that, leaders often think that if they do not hear problems, then there are no problems, but explained that this idea is undoubtedly false. Leaders must create this open space for the community so that communities feel included in the overall school community.

Cecilia also felt that it was important for aspiring administrators to be open to learning from other school leaders within the community. This was especially important to her as she reflected on how lonely the principal job can be at times. She shared:

Be open to learning from other leaders that are in this process. Reach out to other leaders who have been doing this quite a while because those who have been doing it are willing to go and talk to you about it. When you're an administrator, you're kind of in the lonely place, you're in your own silo, but as soon as you start reaching out to people who have done this for a while, you'll see that there's they're very much willing to share their experience. I think, reaching out to those leaders and then really, really reflect like self-reflection is so necessary. (Cecilia, Interview 3)

Cecilia mentioned that no matter what she learned from other leaders, it was always important for her to take the time to self-reflect on her learning so that she could make decisions that aligned with her school community's needs. After listening, she intentionally reflected, which was another recommendation that the leaders in this study wanted aspiring school leaders for justice to know was important as they move into leadership roles.

Reflect Intentionally and Learn to Listen

The participants also recommended that reflection should be integral to everything school leaders for social justice do. From the decisions they make to the people they surround themselves with, they must be intentional about choosing to reflect in ways that continuously push their practice towards social justice forward. Denise shared:

You need to surround yourself with those who will question your decisions, but in the right way, you know, so if you start going off track or off course, they will help make you reflect and push you back, and not just agree with everything you do, because if you don't have people actively helping you reflect, that's dangerous. (Denise, Interview 2)

She described the importance of reflection, which is also fortified by people school leaders choose to surround themselves. The people they work with should challenge them and question their decisions so there is no doubt they are leading the school towards social justice outcomes. Pablo agreed with this sentiment and added that social justice leaders, "Don't just talk the talk, but they walk it. And like, they surround [themselves] with people who believe in the vision and are willing to put in the time and the effort" (Pablo, Interview 3). Pablo valued continued reflection and thought that leaders must model critical reflection. Denise agreed and when she engaged in consistent reflection, she commented:

> Be humble enough to honor and pay homage to your ancestors and acknowledge the wisdom that comes from for you. One quote, that really resonates with me is, "Nothing is new under the sun." And so, even though it may look different it may feel different, the truth is, if you really pause, it's just something by another name, and so, in that you can learn from the wisdom and the actions of the ones before us. (Denise, Interview 2)

Denise truly believed that a leader honors themselves by acknowledging those who came before them. So, it was important for her to communicate to aspiring leaders to be humble in the work.

Lisa, who is also a middle school principal like Denise believed that learning to authentically listen would also help aspiring leaders be more reflective and effective in their work. She believed that really listening to the people in the school community allows school leaders to be humble in the work of social justice leadership. She described:

> Do a lot of listening. Listen to your teachers, listen to your families, really get a pulse of the community and what the community values are. Then, reflect so you can know yourself as much as possible. What are your personal values and what do you really

believe should happen for students, and not just some students, but for all students? And [when you] enter those spaces, know that the people are already full people and it's not your job to like, add into who they are, you can definitely allow them to experience things so they can evolve as people, but you're not filling them into being what you want them to be. (Lisa, Interview 3).

Lisa advised aspiring school leaders for social justice to reflect on their personal values so that they know who they are, and how those values coincide with the community values. She also noted how important it is to recognize that the students and their families are not made whole by the education system, and it is only through deep reflection to leaders come to realize this fact. School leaders must view the people within the school as people who are experiencing school to evolve in their own time and in their own way.

All the leaders in this study valued and practiced intentional reflection because they understand first-hand its power to critically analyze the world where they live and work together to make it better for the students and families they serve. The practice of intentional reflection and listening also led many of the leaders in this study to share how important wellness was to preserve an aspiring school leader's body, mind, and soul, which is critical to combat burnout. Prioritizing wellness was the final collective recommendation the leaders in this study made for aspiring school leaders for social justice.

Prioritize Wellness

The last recommendation participants in this study wanted aspiring leaders to know was that school leaders must prioritize wellness for themselves and for their staff. Prioritizing wellness must be approached systematically and move beyond proverbial self-care practices.

Instead, school leaders were advised to focus on embedding wellness structures that authentically communicated and modeled the importance of wellness to the school community.

In Campbell's over a decade of experience being a principal at a charter middle school, she experienced first-hand how stress can affect a leader's ability to lead for social justice, especially when there is consistent resistance. She shared that finding the right school culture and environment coupled with engaging in consistent wellness practices is paramount to any other practices leaders can do to ease the stress of social justice work. She advised aspiring principals:

> I think you need to ask yourself, you know, is it worth it, because I mean I've seen people get really sick over the years, you know, stressing out of their minds, because they're constantly fighting every year for the betterment of the school community, which is facing resistance. (Campbell, Interview 2)

Social justice leadership is difficult work; however, Campbell advised that it should not override a leader's health and wellness. She shared that if a social justice leaders finds themselves unwell because they are constantly facing resistance from the current leadership and school structures, it is time to take your talent somewhere else.

Lauren also shared the importance of wellness in this work, especially by creating spaces that allow the school community to process and re-energize frequently. She said:

> Make sure you like create intentional space to process and to re-energize, because it's going to be hard. And there are no quick solutions. I think we come in really optimistic thinking, "You know, two years, three years, we got this!" And, in reality, it's like not like that at all. Things get muddled along the way and you might have to re-evaluate your plan. (Lauren, Interview 3)

As a leader, Lauren understood the importance of creating the spaces that allowed everyone in the school environment to process the state of the world during the global pandemic and the racial uprising post George Floyd's murder. She created the space for processing, which was a way she systemically integrated wellness into her school. Lauren wanted aspiring leaders to know the power and importance of creating these spaces so that people could grow and evolve in healthy, consistent ways.

Erin agreed with Lauren's approach that wellness should be owned by the system, not the individual. He advised aspiring leaders:

> If you want to be in [education] for a long time, try not burning yourself out in a year because it's going to take you more than a year, more than 10, to make any drastic change. For you to jump in and jump out so fast is challenging for the adaptive systems we create [as social justice leaders], so I think focus less on purpose and more on wellness and that will usually drive the rest. (Erin, Interview 2)

Erin made it clear in the interview that wellness is not the same thing as self-care. Self-care puts the responsibility of wellness on the individual, which insinuates that taking care of oneself if an individual responsibility. Erin believes deeply that wellness is a communal at of caring, and the systems must take responsibility for integrated wellness into the everyday structures at a school site. In other words, wellness is social justice.

The recommendations shared by the participants of this study aligned with many of the underlying findings from Chapter 4. If leaders are to create school environments that center students, support staff, and involve the community, the leaders must know themselves and they

must be well. They also must model reflective practices and create spaces where staff and the community can be vulnerable and in ways that allow a safe, vulnerable space to created.

Future Research

In future research, limitations should be considered. As with all empirical research utilizing a qualitative methodology with interviews, the findings of this study are limited by the study's phenomenological design, the overall context, and therefore cannot be generalized. Even though the study's findings could be considered to apply to other similar contexts, it was not assured that these same findings can be extrapolated beyond the confines of this particular study. It was important to note that the sociopolitical and sociocultural context of this study (e.g., global pandemic, racial injustice), while a limitation for other studies conducted during this time, actually aided this study in understanding the complexity of social justice school leaders' implementation of socially just practices. Additionally, it was also important to note that I could not refrain from my positionality and lived experience, which was the vehicle by which the data were analyzed and understood (Creswell, 2014).

It is important that future research examine the equity audit process to better understand how dialogic and coalitional relationship building happen to equitize systems and structures within public charter schools. There is an inherent assumption in traditional leadership preparation. It is treated as a one-size fits all approach and treated as if leaders simply need to be taught specific areas and implement them to be successful. There is no attention to the nuance, context, human relationships, and community. In this study, the school leaders did *not* approach leadership in that way–they paid attention to the nuance and were doing social justice leadership

work differently than how traditional preparation programs are training aspiring leaders. And they were successful.

The community and coalitional approach to social justice leadership is complex and, thus, looking deeply at a specific case could illuminate contextual factors beyond the individual social justice leader, and more about the power, lived experience, and nuance of coalitional groups of leaders. Moreover, current social justice leadership researchers must shift away from understanding the individual actions and behaviors of social justice leaders themselves and move towards examining the actions and behaviors of coalitional social justice leadership, whereby the actions and lived experiences of coalitional groups are studied, which I believe would have greater impact on dismantling deeply entrenched systemic inequities. If the focus remains on individual behaviors and figuring out how to standardize the practices into a one-size-fits-all professional school leader standards, then the research will continue to be concealed in scientific management and seduced by neoliberal market-based ideologies, especially in the urban public charter school context. A new framework that centers relational trust and lived experiences as core components of social justice leadership must be explored–toward an abolitionist coalition leadership framework (Love, 2019).

Conclusion

Social justice leadership must exist at every level within a charter school organization for change to be initiated and sustained. It is a collective mindset that every individual with decision-making authority must have. Whether the CEO is establishing a committee to a refine a mission and vision for their charter network, or a math teacher is helping to create a grade-level intervention plan based on the most recent assessment data, every level of leadership must have a

mindset that is student-centered and is empathetic to the complexities of intersectionality and critical of how oppressive systems show up and are perpetuated in schools. Furthermore, it is everyone's responsibility to take action towards social justice, while continuously and collectively reflecting and resting.

Upon beginning this dissertation journey, I was under the assumption that the practices and strategies that social justice leaders used would be straightforward and could be broadly implemented. I had not realized how nuanced school situations could be and missed how interrelated and interconnected so many aspects of decision-making were. Furthermore, the larger systems and structures in place made it nearly impossible for school leaders in urban public charter schools to make sweeping changes in the name of social justice. I went so far as to choose a theoretical framework that I thought outlined a recipe for what leaders could do to equitize the marginalizing conditions that are prevalent in the education system in the United States; however, I learned how important complexity and context were and no theoretical framework fit all social justice leaders. Just like there was no one way to define social justice, there is no one way to approach the implementation of social justice leadership praxis. Everyone's lived experience is unique, and even though there are instances where people have similar lived experiences, the way leaders approach social justice will also be unique to their specific lived experience and how they reflected on their life and took action resultantly. The lived experiences of school leaders are a type of leadership preparation–our traditional education preparation paradigm must shift.

Since charter schools have the autonomy to make quick policy changes aligned to their mission and vision, the people who have decision-making power in traditional organizational

structures must have a social justice orientation and work in coalition with other like-minded individuals to sustain change toward social justice. If the power is in the hands of someone who does not have a social justice orientation (or a lived experience that makes this kind of approach automatic) and there is no strong coalition of social justice leaders within a charter organization, then positive social justice outcomes will simply cease to exist. Moreover, if the leaders lack a social justice knowledge base, then social justice outcomes will be performative in nature and never truly achieved. Social justice must not only be in a charter school's mission and vision, but it must also be the culture and in the hearts, minds, and souls of every single leader at every single level of the school–it must be the life blood by which all systems within a charter organization operate.

Final Reflection

"Social justice" as a stand-alone phrase is inherently action-oriented if one believes social justice to be more than just words. However, when "justice" stands alone, it is a meagre principle that espouses fairness or equity in the name of the law, knowing the law has historically been and is currently designed in such a way, where fairness and equity are not defined by the people most affected by "justice" within United States's judicial system, and other institutions. When "social" stands alone, it refers to an informal gathering, with no specified goal or initiative beyond being together, and, therefore, does not have much meaning.

Like "social justice," "leadership" is a word that is also action oriented. It often provides imagery that centers an individual guiding a group towards some established goal. So, when the words "social" and "justice" are fused with the word "leadership," there is a doubling action effect toward equity. In other words, "social justice leadership" is a double action, which

incrementally pecks at the 245-year-old trunk of systemic oppression and White supremacy deeply rooted in all United States institutions. Relative to the stand-alone words, the doubling effect of the words together catalyzes a movement towards positive change for social justice and equity, even considering the unfortunate reality that not all actions in the name of justice are genuine.

However, assuming you double the actions of individual social justice leaders, that will not mathematically equate to enough action for real, radical change to happen–the kind of change that systematically uplifts marginalized communities from generations of poverty and oppression. The kind of action that is necessary is a kind that has an exponential effect, whereby every resultant action exponentially reverberates every subsequent action from other like-minded social justice leaders. This exponential effect of collective actions in the name of social justice is the kind of rift needed to truly dismantle the deeply ensnared systems of White supremacy in the United States and within schools and underserved communities. Therefore, no kind current social justice leadership theory that focuses on the practices of *individuals* will disentangle the nation's schooling problems; there will only be an incessant pecking that incrementally moves social justice initiatives forward at the expense of leaders' minds and bodies. The tireless hours will continue and will only result in more burnout for leaders (especially those who receive no benefit from White supremacist systems). This "life service" only serves to further appease those in power who create charter school law in the name of social justice, to divert true social justice leaders' attention away from coalition building, and thus harden a false sense of altruism in those trying to truly lead for social justice. None of which is unintentional.

Therefore, what is necessary is an *abolitionist coalition leadership framework* where leaders are not bogged down by the day-to-day needs of a school site all the time, which often in the charter context, are perfunctory and tedious, leading to burnout, and ultimately minimizing the efficacy of leaders to organize and continue taking action. School leaders and their coalitional networks need time to connect with each other and weave systems of support across school sites within the same county, to sites across states, and within the nation. Providing school leaders with this invaluable time is true PD and true leadership in the name of social justice.

I know there are school leaders who are ready to do this work–the participants in this study are ready. We need to figure out how to leverage the collective power of leaders in academia and site-based leaders to dismantle a system designed to weaken the hearts, minds, and souls of those ludicrously deemed other.

Semi-Structured Interview Questions Organized by Interview

The following is the complete set of interview questions grouped by specific interview that follow Seidman's (2013) three, semi-structured interview structure for phenomenological studies. It is not the intention to ask all the questions; therefore, some of the listed questions may not be used during the interviews. Additional questions will be asked if the responses to the initial questions need to be supplemented, which is expected given the design of this qualitative study.

Interview 1: Life History

Introduction: "Thank you so much for committing to this research project. I am excited to hear about your experiences as a school leader with a passion for social justice. This first interview will focus on your life history, so I would like to learn more about your background up until you became a school leader/principal."

- How would you describe your upbringing?
  - Where did you grow up?
  - What was your family dynamic like?
  - Siblings?
- What was the role of education in your home growing up?
  - Can you describe specific conversations about education that took place?
- What was your experience being a student like (in elementary, junior/middle school, high school, college, etc.)?
  - Can you describe a time when you felt seen/validated in school?
  - Can you describe a time when you felt invisible in school?
- When did you know you wanted to be a school leader/principal?
- How did you come to be a school leader/principal?
- If you had to sum up your life history in 10 minutes, what would you say/what story would you tell?
- Is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we did not cover?

Closing: "Thank you so much for sharing about your life up until you became a school leader/principal. I'd like to schedule our next two interviews and make sure you are prepared for the next interview before we leave. Does that sound okay? Great! Our next interview will focus on the details of your experience being a social justice leader. Please bring and be prepared to

share any evidence that illustrates your leadership for social justice. I will be sure to send you a follow-up email today with the specifics."

Interview 2: The Details of Experience Being a Social Justice Leader

Introduction: "It's nice to see you again. This interview will focus on the details of your experience being a social justice leader and you explaining any evidence you selected. To begin, I understand that you are principal @ _____ and it's a _____ school..."

- Help me understand a day-in-the-life of _____.
    - What does a typical day look like for you as a school leader/principal?
    - What do you like most about your job?
    - What could you do without?
- How would you define "social justice leader" (conceptual definition)?
- What aspects of your job necessitate an orientation towards social justice?
- How do you implement social justice practices at your school?
    - Can you explain how the evidence you brought exemplifies social justice leadership?
    - Were school processes different than they are now? Explain.
    - How did the processes become what they are today? Explain.
- Transition to specifics: What social justice practices do you engage in most often?
    - Can you describe an instance when these practices were crucial to your success as a school leader/principal? Success of a school program?
    - Can you describe an instance when these practices resulted in an outcome you did not expect?
- What do you do to continuously hone your social justice leadership praxis?
- How has your social justice leadership been perceived by other people?
    - How has it been received?
- What challenges have you faced in implementing social justice leadership practices?
- How has your social justice leadership changed/developed over time?
- If there were no restraints or restrictions, what would your ideal school look like?

Closing: "Thank you sharing your experiences with me again. We will have your final interview on _____ @ _____. Does this day and time still work for you? Our last interview together will focus on making sure I have accurately represented what you have said and reflect on this entire interview process. I look forward to seeing you then!"

Interview 3: Reflection on the Meaning

Introduction: "Now that we have completed two interviews, I would like to make sure I have accurately captured what you have said and then, I have a couple final questions." I would share some of the ways the school leaders/principals implement social justice leadership praxis so that connections can be made.

- You have dedicated almost four hours of your time to share your experience with me. Why did you agree to participate?
- The main focus of my study was to better understand the implementation of social justice praxis by school leaders/principals in public charter schools in Los Angeles. What was this experience like for you?
- What does it mean to you to be social justice leader in today's sociopolitical climate?
- Given what you have shared in Interview 1 (Life History) and Interview 2 (Being a Social Justice Leader), how have you made sense of your present work as social justice leader? (Share what I have in previous interviews)
  - How has your life history influenced the implementation of your social justice practices?
  - Current context vs. "normal" context
- What recommendations do you have for aspiring school leaders who want to lead for social justice?
  - What advice would you give a new administrator to hone their social justice leadership skills?
- Is there anything else you wanted to say before we finish up our last interview? You can always reach out me via email if there is anything else you want to share.

Demographic Data Survey Questions

1. First Name

2. Last Name

3. Preferred Pseudonym

4. Email Address

5. Cell Phone Number

6. Age (0-100)

7. Ethnicity (self-identify)

8. How would you describe your gender identity? *If you prefer not to share, please leave blank.*

9. Do you describe your sexual orientation? *If you prefer not to share, please leave blank.*

10. Preferred pronouns
    a. they/them
    b. she/her/hers
    c. he/him/his
    d. Not listed above (*please specify*)

11. Total # of years as a school leader/principal (including current year)

12. Total # of years as a school leader/principal of a public charter school

13. Total # of years as a school leader/principal of a public charter school in Los Angeles

14. Name of current school

15. Name of the Los Angeles neighborhood where school is located

16. Zip code where school is located

17. Type of current school
    a. Elementary

b. Middle School/Junior High
c. K-8
d. K-12
e. High School
f. Alternative Program (*please specify*)
g. Not listed above (*please specify*)

18. Context of current school
   a. Single, community-based charter school
   b. District school converted to charter school
   c. Small charter network (2-4 schools)
   d. Medium charter network (5-7 schools)
   e. Large charter network (8+ schools)
   f. Not listed above (*please specify*)

APPENDIX C

Loyola Marymount University
1 LMU Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90045

February 24, 2022

Dear Carolyn M. Shields, Ph.D.:

My name is Korey Hlaudy and I am completing a doctoral dissertation at Loyola Marymount University entitled "More Than Just Lip Service: A Phenomenological Study of Urban Charter School Leaders of Color in Los Angeles."

I would like your permission to reprint "Figure 1. Distinctions among three theories of leadership" in my dissertation from the following article:

Shields, C. M. (2010). *Transformative leadership: Working for equity in diverse contexts.* Educational Administration Quarterly, *46*(4), 558-589. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10375609

The figure will be used as a part of my literature review highlighting the nuances of various theories of leadership. Your figure is a concise synthesis of transformative, transformational, and transactional leadership and would help readers visually see these theories' intersections and dissimilarities.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by UMI. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please digitally sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me via email at your earliest convenience. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Korey Hlaudy

Korey Hlaudy

PLEASE SIGN AND DATE BELOW FOR PERMISSION TO BE GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Carolyn M. Shields, Ph.D. ___*Carolyn Shields*_____

Date: ___Feb 25, 2022_____

Loyola Marymount University
1 LMU Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90045

February 25, 2022

Dear Dr. Beachum and Dr. McCray,

My name is Korey Hlaudy and I am completing a doctoral dissertation at Loyola Marymount University entitled "More Than Just Lip Service: A Phenomenological Study of Urban Charter School Leaders of Color in Los Angeles."

I am currently in the pre-publication editing process and need permission to reprint "Figure 14.1. Major themes of the tripartite framework" in my dissertation from the following:

Beachum, F. D., & McCray, C. R. (2015). Cracking the code: Illuminating the promises and pitfalls of social justice in educational leadership. In J. S. Brooks & M. C. Brooks (Eds.), *Urban educational leadership for social justice: International perspectives* (pp. 303-322). Information Age Publishing.

With your permission, the figure will be reprinted as a part of my final discussion chapter. I utilized your Tripartite Framework for Social Justice Leadership for my study's theoretical framework and the figure will be used as a reference when I discuss my theoretical analysis of my study's findings.

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by UMI. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please digitally sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me via email at your earliest convenience. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Korey S. Hlaudy

Korey Hlaudy

PLEASE SIGN AND DATE BELOW FOR PERMISSION TO BE GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Floyd Beachum, Ed.D. *Floyd Beachum*

Date: 02/26/22

Carlos McCray, Ed.D *Carlos M. McCray*

Date: 02/26/22

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