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Social Justice Leadership and Principalship

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by

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The dissertation of Greg Smedley is approved, and it is acceptable in quality in form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Dr. Christine Smedley, and my two sons Cormac and Rowan who encouraged me throughout this challenging process. Also, to my parents, Don and Kathie Smedley who have always supported my educational endeavors.

Epigraph

Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.

Nelson Mandela

Private power doesn't like public education, for many reasons. One is upon the principle upon which it is based, which is threatening to power. Public education is based on the principle of solidarity. So, for example, I had my children fifty years ago. Nevertheless, I am supposed to feel that I should pay taxes so that kids across the street can go to school. That is counter to the doctrine that you should just look after yourself and let everyone else fall by the wayside, a basic principle of business rule. Public education is a threat to that belief system because it builds a sense of solidarity, community, and mutual support.

Noam Chomsky

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Social Justice Leadership and Principalship

By

Greg Smedley

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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California State University, San Marcos, 2022

Professor Erika Daniels, Chair

Public schools in the United States are serving a more heterogeneous student population than ever before. Despite numerous educational reform efforts, opportunity gaps persist between marginalized students and their White peers. Deep-seated barriers make it difficult for districts,

schools, and especially site principals to effectively implement social justice practices in the service of equity and inclusion. This study examines the growing discourse on social justice leadership and the rising importance of the site principal in sustaining such practices when encountering opposition. Utilizing qualitative research, this study employed semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of K-12 principals who encounter resistance to their social justice leadership and the strategies they employ to overcome opposition. The findings in this study are in service of developing a keen awareness of how principals successfully overcome stakeholder resistance and strengthen their ability to lead socially just change in K-12 schools.

Chapter One

Introduction

Before going into administration, I was a classroom teacher for sixteen years in a Title 1 district. I prided myself on building relationships and getting to know my students' passions along with the obstacles they faced. For the most part, I was able to help the majority of my students elevate their learning, show academic growth, and find the best in themselves. Because of my enthusiasm for education, I wanted to expand my ability to help more young people, and, therefore, I moved into school administration.

In my initial years as a site principal, I felt like I was making a difference. I was supporting teachers in the classroom to build deeper relationships, instituting research-based intervention programs, and mentoring students for success. By building strong school culture, teacher satisfaction was high, and test scores and student growth trended in positive directions. Four years in, my school plateaued, opportunity gaps stagnated, and in some cases, widened. After twenty years of success in the classroom and the front office, I started to question my ability as an educational leader. This existential crisis was pivotal to me because I truly believed in public education, the democratic ideals it was founded upon, and the potential it holds for our students.

After much introspection, I came to the conclusion that I needed to stay in the fight and do what I could to transform public education with the time I had left in the field, especially for those furthest from justice. From that point, I came to understand that there were more to opportunity gaps than could be addressed through individual support, relationship, and culture building. I still had a lot to learn about the institutional barriers to equal opportunity in education. Over time, I slowly began to uncover two key insights: 1. My positionality as a white male

placed me in a position of privilege that isolated me from a rapidly changing educational landscape. 2. Opportunity gaps are a complex and layered issue with deep historical roots.

My own passion for building more equitable and inclusive schools was not always shared by those around me. I often faced pockets of resistance and refusal from stakeholders. As I moved in the direction of speaking out against institutional barriers and systemic racism, the more resistance I encountered. This resistance came in many shapes and forms, and was both covert and overt from those defending the status quo. Education were changing, but not everyone wanted to evolve with it.

Public schools serve an increasingly heterogeneous student population, and there is growing concern over the ability of educational leaders to deliver a socially just and equitable public education system (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Researchers estimate that by the end of 2021, more than half of graduating high school students will be from marginalized groups (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018; Prescott & Bransberger, 2017). As student demographics and identities shift, so must educational leadership practices. Knowing what to say about race and identity and how to say it is essential to being an inclusive, equitable, and empathetic educational leader, and it helps one understand how to engage with marginalized groups (e.g., Black, Native, Asian, Latinx, etc.) (Winburn et al., 2020). This is especially true for site principals whose dispositions, behaviors, and practices are crucial in addressing opportunity gaps between traditionally marginalized students and their more advantaged White peers.

Social justice leadership (SJL) in education is located at the intersection of leadership and social justice work. Often, leadership and social justice initiatives operate in silos instead of being united, whereas social justice leadership in education unifies the narratives of leadership and social justice work (Chunno and Guthrie, 2018). Though the pairing of leadership and social

justice is a fairly recent phenomenon (Noble, 2015), social justice leadership as scholarship positions itself at the intersection of these two important subjects, and for the remainder of this paper, will be referred to as "social justice leadership" (SJL).

Principals are some of the most influential change agents in K-12 schools, and one key strand of literature on SJL emphasizes the critical role a principal plays in school reform. Research on this aspect of SJL focuses on understanding social justice-minded principals who prioritize issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other marginalizing conditions in order to close opportunity gaps. These are difficult issues to surface with a staff and community and require training, practice, and support for principals working to lead for social justice when tackle opportunity gaps and striving to change dominant mindsets.

Statement of the Problem

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was a direct commitment on behalf of the federal government to address long-standing opportunity gaps in the American educational system. It attempted to do this by maintaining a predominately test-based accountability system with a federal mandate for intervention. However, this top-down and reductionist approach did not come close to reaching its goal of closing opportunity gaps (Fusarelli, 2004; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). The, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed in December 2015 that governs the United States K–12 public education policy. The law replaced its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act, and intended to give more power to states in order to curb overbearing federal administration in hopes of further closing opportunity gaps. However, this act also shows little promise in remedying the systemic under-resourcing that continues to plague our most marginalized students, which has effectively led to the widening of opportunity gaps in public education (Mathias and Trujillo, 2016). As public schools are serving an increasingly

heterogeneous student population, there is growing concern over the ability of educational leaders to deliver a socially just and equitable public education system. Researchers estimate that by the end of 2021, more than half of graduating high school students will be from marginalized groups that are experiencing opportunity gaps (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018; Prescott & Bransberger, 2017).

Opportunity gaps generally refer to the disparities in test scores, grades, graduation rates, discipline rates, and college acceptance rates between White or affluent populations and minority or less affluent groups. For example, African American and Latino high school students are suspended and expelled three times more often than their White counterparts (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Gaps also exist for minority students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds as well. A greater number of students of color are enrolled in high-poverty schools facing funding inequities and higher teacher turnover, which often leads to lower overall academic performance (Rojas-LeBouef & Slate, 2012). High school graduation rates also show White students graduate on time at or near 89%, Hispanics at 80%, African-Americans at 78%, and Native American/Alaskan Natives at 72% (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; NCES, 2018).

These significant gaps often have debilitating effects (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). Therefore, as student demographics and identities shift, so must educational leadership practices. Research asserts that in order to positively address socially just equity and inclusion initiatives, the site leader must be at the forefront of such change. The site principal serves as a crucial link between policy intent and policy outcomes for students (Rorrer, 2003; Skrla et al., 2004).

Yet, deep-seated and often institutionalized barriers make it difficult for districts, schools, and especially site principals, to effectively implement social justice practices in the service of equity and inclusion (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). From the multiple and divergent demands placed

on a principal (including a lack of formal social justice training, inadequate professional development skills, resistant stakeholder groups, and a lack of self-awareness), systemic change at the site level can be filled with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. This can be especially true when principals seek to enact change that collides with dominant ideologies, deeply held assumptions, and conflicting cultural values.

However, it is precisely the site principal who is essential to any effort in achieving socially just change in schools (Payne & Smith, 2018). This has significant implications for site principals who often set the school's plan and the moral tone of the work to be done. However, with SJL practices still in the early stages of development, many principals have not received the institutional training necessary for the sustainable implementation of socially just practices. Traditional leadership preparation programs have often only taken a perfunctory approach to social justice instruction (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Although principals may be inclined to do equity and inclusion work, many are self-taught and do not possess the necessary tools to do so, especially when confronted with resistance from stakeholders (Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Laura, 2017; Kowalchuk; 2019). This can result in negative consequences for equitable teaching and learning. Principals may give up on their social justice initiatives altogether or might not follow through on change initiatives when confronted with opposition. The emotional investment it takes to lead change makes social justice leaders uniquely vulnerable to stress, self-inflicted pressure, and isolation. I found this to be true in my own experience as a principal. Principals often struggle to make sense of how to keep the delicate balance of maintaining trusting relationships while still expanding stakeholder thinking around issues of race (Gorski, 2015; Swanson &Welton, 2019; Walker et al., 2011). To counteract these factors, principals need to broaden their social justice leadership stance in order

to successfully navigate resistance concerning equity and inclusion for all students (Congo-Pattern & Sohawon, 2014; Khalifa, 2013; Kose, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experience of K12 principals who face resistance to their social justice initiatives and explore the ways in which they navigate this opposition.

By exploring how principals successfully address stakeholder resistance to social justice initiatives on a K12 campus, we can better equip principals to effectively address efforts to maintain and validate dominant ideologies. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the characteristics, behaviors, and practices principals utilize to create more socially just K-12 schools when they encounter opposition.

Research details how principals have a far-reaching impact on site priorities, school culture, instructional practices, and teacher and student learning (Branch et al., 2013; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Rigby & Treadway, 2015; Wassell, 2019). However, many current leadership models are rooted in what is commonly referred to as "*successful school leadership*", an operationalized framework that focuses on transactional skills, and effectively and efficiently managing people and resources (Berkovich, 2014; McKenzie et al., 2008) Consequently, many principals have not been formally trained in SJL practices that resist marginalized students' systemic oppression and facilitate overcoming the maintenance of dominant racial ideologies. In this sense, *SJL* is not a top-down framework or set of prescriptive mandates like NCLB. Rather, it is a cross-grouping of dispositions and approaches principals can pull form that fit the context and situational integrity of each unique school and circumstance (Brown, 2004; Dantley and Tillman, 2009; Jean-Marie, 2009; Khalifa, 2016; McKenzie et al., 2008; Picower, 2009, Rivera-

McCutcheon, 2014; Theoharis, 2007). Therefore, many inclusion-minded principals are left to go it alone and rely on their negotiation skills and interpersonal abilities to navigate resistance while still maintaining trusting relationships. Principals must find effective ways to manage these pressures while still acting to create more socially just schools.

Research Questions

Overarching question: What is the lived experience of principals who encounter resistance when implementing social justice initiatives on the K12 campus?

1. What is your idea (definition) of Social Justice Leadership?

    What does *SJL* look like in your context?

2. What kinds of resistance do principals experience when implementing social justice initiatives?

    What is it like to work with resistant teachers?

    How would you describe your experiences with (insert type of resistance)

    What barriers exist with parents and community members?

    How does it make you feel when you work with resistant stakeholders?

3. How do principals respond to resistance to social justice initiatives?

    What are the most successful strategies and dispositions for responding to resistance?

    Can you elaborate on (insert strategy or disposition)

    Why is this (strategy/disputation) so important to your success?

Significance

It is more important than ever to support principal growth and confidence in their social justice leadership skills. In fact, research indicates that principals need to broaden their leadership approach beyond the transactional running of a school site in order to counteract resistance to equity and inclusion if real change is to occur in our schools (Congo-Pattern & Sohawon, 2014; Khalifa, 2013; Kose, 2009; Swanson & Welton, 2019; McDonald, 2020). Though not all principals face opposition to their equity and inclusion initiatives, research shows that many do (Dematthews, 2016; Evans, 2007; Oakes et al., 2005; Picower, 2009; Matias et al., 2014; Swanson & Welton; 2019). Understanding the lived experience of principals who encounter resistance to their social justice leadership is important for providing leaders with tools to productively address deficit perspectives. Studying the strategies and the real work these principals do to overcome the maintenance and entrenchment of the status quo will better equip principals for social justice leadership work and lead to better educational outcomes for all students.

SJL shows promise in detailing the dispositions and strategies required for principals to effect socially just change. There is also a larger body of scholarship that unearths the types and methods of resistance principals will face along the way. However, the research is much less robust on how principals are utilizing SJL to credibly address challenges associated with resistance and opposition to equity and inclusion at the K-12 level. More research is needed to understand the challenges principals face when raising issues of race and the strategies they employ to overcome resistance to creating equitable and affirming learning environments for all students. (Dematthews, 2016; McDonald, 2020; Payne & Smith, 2018; Swanson & Welton 2020) Principles play a crucial role in driving quality teaching and learning and are a particularly

important voice for traditionally marginalized students. We need to understand the real work principals are doing to overcome resistance in their communities. This study looks to build on and extend this line of inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

Principals must make tough choices regarding instructional decisions, curriculum solutions, and professional development implementation. Additionally, site principals play a crucial role in ensuring that teachers are prepared and continually develop socially just and culturally responsive practices in the classroom. Research shows that the utility and implementation of some current leadership frameworks have been limited in their ability to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students (Khalifa et al., 2017; Winburn et al., 2020). Questions like, why do opportunity gaps persist between students of color and their White peers? Why do we often see principals unable to see their socially just initiatives drive lasting change? These and other questions should make us take pause about our adherence to more traditional educational leadership paradigms.

SJL, on the other hand, has many different goals and priorities and emphasizes different practices and strategies compared to traditional educational leadership models. SJL has the potential to provide the conditions for transforming schools with the ultimate goal of enabling all students to find long-term social, emotional, and academic success, especially in disadvantaged communities (Demathews, 2016; Mcdonald, 2020). SJL will function as a conceptual framework for this study, to initiate, organize and develop concepts central to socially just leadership in K12 education. For example, the centrality of the principal for creating socially just changes in the school. This includes a principal's leadership voice and stance and the approaches they take to create and sustain change on behalf of traditionally marginalized students. It also provides a

framework to unpack the practices and dispositions of principals who face resistance while working to create greater freedom, opportunity, and justice for all students. An SJL approach to education will also guide this work in exploring the types of resistance principals face when implementing social justice initiatives and the strategies they employ to overcome stakeholder opposition.

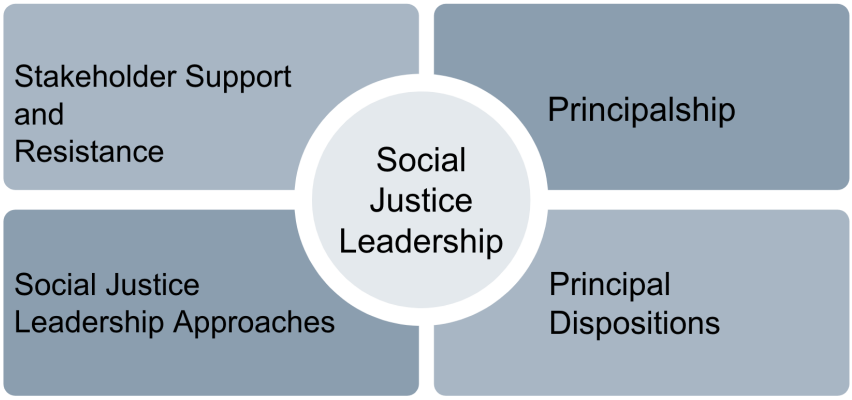

Figure 1 *Social Justice Leadership*

Methodology Overview

A qualitative study will inform the above research questions and sub-questions. The study will focus on interviews with five principals who have experienced resistance to socially just initiatives at their respective sites as a way to understand how they counter stakeholder opposition.

All interviews will be approximately 60 minutes in length and will be conducted over Zoom, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts will be subject to several iterations of coding. Strict precautions will be put in place to guard the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

The validity of this study will be strengthened by making certain that the researcher's bias is clearly stated (Creswell, 2013) while concentrating on thick and rich descriptions (Creswell, 2013; Geertz, 1972). This study will also utilize member checks: where participants in the study check the results of the research for accuracy and also to add any further insights or clarifications (Creswell (2013). Peer reviews and debriefings will allow colleagues to ask tough questions about data collection, analysis, and interpretation throughout the study (Rudestam, 2015).

Key Terms

Social Justice: making issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions central to a leader's advocacy, leadership practices, and vision (Theoharis, 2007).

Social Justice Scholarship in Education: Social justice scholarship in education exhibits some broad common themes: moral values, justice, respect, care, and equity, always in the forefront is a critical consciousness about the impact of race, class gender, sexual orientation, and disability on the schools and students learning (Cameron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005).

Social Justice Leadership (SJL): Centers on school leaders' holistic and authentic approaches to interrupting oppressive school practices to empower and advocate for those historically disenfranchised populations (Boskie et al., 2017).

Dispositions: Commitments and habits of thought and action that grow as the leader learns, acts, and reflects under the guidance of mentors in preparation, programmed, and in practice (Allen et al., 2017).

Critical Consciousness: An awareness of self and one's values, beliefs, and or dispositions when it comes to serving all students especially those traditionally marginalized.

This consciousness can be developed and should serve as the foundation to establish beliefs that undergird leadership practices (McKenzie, 2008).

Opportunity Gap vs Achievement Gap: Though achievement gap is commonly used, the term opportunity gap is used in this paper as it puts the onus of the challenge on educators to directly address this issue by consciously providing more opportunities to achieve (Khalifa et al., 20170.

Caring: A relationship between two people in which the person offering care is receptive to the other's experience and thinks about what the person needs.

Empathy: Although empathy and caring are closely related, empathy is more active. A synthesis of definitions offered by Rogers (1975) and Cooper (2004) is used in this study: Empathy is the process of understanding others that, in turn, helps them understand themselves. The quality of empathy involves valuing and caring about the person; having a non-judgmental attitude, listening, working to understand another's perspective; and helping the other person achieve his or her potential.

Deficit-thinking: Stakeholders with deficit thinking tend to believe that a student's academic failure is due to a student's inherent deficiencies: lack of experience in schooling, poor English proficiency, motivation to learn, inferior intellectual ability, and parents who do not value education (Keyon Murray-Johnson, 2018).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Historical Context

This literature review focuses on SJL and its implication for principals working to close opportunity gaps in K-12 education, addressing resistance to reform, and creating more inclusive educational settings. Principals are perceived today as the critical on-site leaders who can transform school environments into socially just spaces where all students thrive, regardless of race, gender, religion, national origin, ability or disability, sexual orientation, age, or other potentially marginalizing characteristics. The following literature review begins by foregrounding the conceptualization and development of social justice leadership for principals in K-12 education within the context of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and its current successor the, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Secondly, it examines the principalship as the critical change leader in a school and the locus point for social justice reform. Third, it considers the principal's social-justice-minded approaches and behaviors needed to transform schools and overcome stakeholder resistance on the path to more culturally responsive teaching and learning. Utilizing the above framework, this literature review aims to address the following questions:

1. What does existing research say about social justice leadership and K-12 educational leadership?

2. What types of disposition do principals need for their social justice leadership?

3. What social justice leadership approaches and strategies can principals employ to lead change and overcome resistance in their work with teachers and school communities?

Applying the above questions as a guide, the following literature review intends to provide readers with a clear understanding of how social justice leadership in K-12 schools has evolved through an analysis of practices employed by principals.

The Rise of Social Justice Leadership in K-12 Education

The American educational system has a long record of problematic achievement and opportunity gaps between marginalized students and their White peers. This can be traced to the history of legally mandated racial exclusionary laws. In 1896, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of Plessy vs. Ferguson established racially-based separate but equal policies and practices that were lawful and established the constitutionality of racial segregation (Zamudio, et al., 20011). While this law provided sufficient funds to educate all White children, it offered limited funding for school-aged African American children. The following period became known as the Jim Crow Era. The Jim Crow Era (1880-1950s) generated additional laws made to predominantly ensure racial control by the dominant White society (Zamudio, 2011). These laws wove achievement and opportunity gaps into our education system's fabric and institutionalized educational and social disadvantages for African Americans and other marginalized groups. The landmark U.S. Supreme Court case of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 was meant to remove the inequities in public institutions, including education. However, the opportunity gaps Brown vs. The Board of Education attempted to address have ultimately persisted.

In 2001, the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), to mitigate these enduring gaps (Evens, 2009; Fusarelli, 2004). NCLB created strict accountability mandates for schools to address long-standing racial inequities. The purpose was to close the achievement and opportunity gaps between high and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged

children and their more advantaged peers (Evans, 2009; Fusarelli, 2004; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). NCLB mandated test results be publicly reported for each school, disaggregated by race and socioeconomic status (among other factors), and instituted sanctions at the school level. This legislation spurred nearly two decades of subsequent research on SJL in education, focusing on equity and inclusion as a means to address the NCLB mandates meant to create more socially just schools (Furman & Shields, 2004; Jean-Marie, 2008; Larsen & Murtadha, 2002). Hence, SJL in education is inextricably tied to equity and inclusion.

The growing literature about educational leadership and social justice Is gaining momentum. This burgeoning research field of social justice leadership SJL interrogates the diverse academic landscape in education primarily since the landmark No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(Drago-Severson & Blum-Destafano, 2019). Delving into leadership preparatory programs, educational leadership models, institutional barriers to educational change, instructional practices and pedagogy, and stakeholder resistance, SJL has a wide scope of inquiry. One important strand in the literature is the rising prominence of the school-site principal as a gatekeeper of socially just initiatives and practices in schools, which will be addressed later in this study. First, a common understanding of SJL will be established.

The landscape of SJL in service of equity and inclusion for underrepresented students is an open expanse of complex terrain and intersectionality. The term itself is an elusive construct, politically loaded, and subject to numerous interpretations (Berkovich, 2014; Bogotch & Shields, 2014; Shoho et al., 2006). SJL can vary based on different political, social, and economic variables present in each school and community. Also, marginalized groups face different types of social justice issues that may be unique to their circumstances. That is to say, SJL is always focused on rectifying wrongs and overcoming inequities, but it is hard to pin down one cohesive

script or set of protocols. SJL seeks to create spaces to break down barriers and borders associated with institutional racism and dominant white ideologies. This includes expanding beyond traditional educational leadership models dominated by technical approaches to efficiency and effectiveness. SJL aims to demonstrate how leaders can build bridges between socially just practices and mainstream education administration (Khalifa, 2016; Moral et al., 2020). SJL is concerned with creating more equitable and inclusive schools, yet many scholars warn against any essentializing definitions or foreclosing on individual frames of reference or new areas of study (Cambron-McCabe, 2005; Demathews, 2016; Jean-Marie et al. 2009; Rivera-McCutcheon, 2014; Shoho et al. 2006). However, there is a broad consensus that SJL focuses on eliminating marginalization in schools, which includes challenging race, disability, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other emerging conditions limiting students (King & Tavers, 2017; Shields, 2014). Additionally, SJL is a relatively new focus in many educational leadership programs due in part to the 2001 NCLB equity mandates. Preparing leaders for social justice work has become a significant concern at all educational levels because many current K12 principals have limited social justice training (Brown, 2004; Furman & Shields, 2004; Jean-Marie, 2008; Larsen & Murtadha, 2002,). Limited training can lead to socially just initiatives being poorly implemented or even abandoned by principals who encounter resistance from stakeholders. This may be especially true when principals struggle to make sense of how to keep the delicate balance of maintaining trusting relationships while still expanding stakeholder thinking around issues of race (Gorski, 2015; Swanson &Welton, 2019; Walker et al., 2011).

SJL and Educational Leadership Programs

Principals have substantial influence over the priorities of a school. This includes professional development decisions aimed at achieving a more just and inclusive educational

setting for all students. Yet, many principals do not have the skill-set to successfully enact meaningful socially just reform. Many social-justice-oriented principals are self-taught and have attended leadership programs where limited time was given to social justice learning (Brown, 2004; Jean-Marie et al.; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014, Wang, 2016). Rather, most were oriented through more traditional educational administration topics like organizational theory, school law, and finances and budgets. Though principals may have an internal inclination toward SJL, many do not know exactly how or what to do, to incorporate sustained social justice work at their site. This has important implications concerning leadership preparation programs for prospective principals. New emphasis has been placed on deconstructing well-established leadership paradigms that primarily focus on transactional and managerial standpoints, which may limit a principal's ability to address oppression and institutional racism. There is a renewed call for leadership preparation programs to teach and cultivate the behaviors, dispositions, and knowledge around social justice leadership values and stances for equity and inclusion (Brown, 2004; MacDonald, 2020; Marshal, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2018).

One strand of SJL research focuses on retooling educational leadership programs to include more social justice training and a more robust induction process. This is vital to imbue principals with the tools necessary to lead social justice change and close achievement and opportunity gaps (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Marshall, 2004). There is a new generation of aspiring administrators who will need the theoretical knowledge base and practical skills to implement needed culturally responsive teaching and learning (Capper et al., 2006; Congo-Poottaren, 2014; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Miller & Martin, 2014; Shoho et al., 2006).

Bolstering and diversifying SJL work in principal preparation is vital because preparing social justice leaders is complex and multidimensional. It cannot be viewed as a prescribed list of tasks to check off. Educational leadership programs need to train social justice leaders to enact and develop strategies to overcome resistance in the face of significant barriers. They also need to provide aspiring leaders with opportunities to engage in the complexity of social justice reform and the opportunity to acquire the skills to overcome resistors along the way (Payne & Smith, 2018; Swanson &Welton, 2020; Theoharis, 2007). In the past, shadowing an experienced principal or attending school board meetings would be the extent of intern or induction programs (Theoharis, 2007). Quality internships will require significant investment and strategic placements on behalf of preparation programs so leaders can improve their social justice voice prior to leading a school. This includes broadening the skills of principals with experiences beyond their comfort zones and familiar school settings (Capper et al., 2006; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). One such method is to provide the structure for like-minded leaders to create social networks with mentor principals already engaged in social justice work. Developing supportive networks provide principals with opportunities to share ideas, with emotional support, encouragement, and with assistance in problem-solving for change (Rigby &Tredway, 2015; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Many school principals have had limited opportunities to cross school boundaries and form bonds and critical relationships with their surrounding communities, making it difficult to build and sustain supportive social networks and learn from the experiences of peers.

Since no two schools are exactly alike, the application of social justice practices will require principals to rely on understanding context, language, and the integration of topics not traditionally central to administrator preparation (Khalifa, 2017; Macdonald, 2020). Though

many challenges still exist, leadership programs are increasingly becoming spaces to train future principals for social justice resistance and resilience. Preparation programs committed to developing social justice leaders can and do play a major role in helping future administrators develop their leadership abilities. They help principals enact and develop resistance to institutional racism in service of all students, especially those who have been historically marginalized. Yet, many administrative programs continue to primarily focus on managerial training (Wang, 2016; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2010).

Social Justice Leadership and the Principalship

SJL also emphasizes a school principal's moral purpose in addressing the challenges of disparity, poverty, oppression, conflict, and prejudice in schools (Capper et al., 2006; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Kowalchuk, 2019). Many consider this the necessary first step in transforming schools. Typically, this moral purpose originates with the site principal who is responsible for setting the tone of the school goals (Khalifa, 2013; Theoharis, 2010). In essence, effective principals address the practical needs to run a school, but highly effective principals go beyond this by creating a supportive social justice awareness and the accompanying practices to achieve it.

In order to address these moral underpinnings, the importance of site-based leadership must be recognized. SJL identifies the principal as the key figure who can act as a gatekeeper or a potential architect and builder of a new educational setting where the traditionally underrepresented students have the same educational opportunities as their more advantaged peers (Horton, 2018; Jean-Marie, 2009; Payne & Smith, 2018). Much of the scholarship on SJL highlights the principal as the transformational leader essential to create significant school change. Since each school experiences distinct problems and obstacles, principals must enact

social justice work, reflecting the uniqueness of their community. Jack (2019) reminds us that "access ain't inclusion," and many subtle exclusion mechanisms are happening daily on campuses. In light of this, the research and practice communities agree the leadership stance of the principal is critical to change initiatives in schools (Ishimaru, 2013; Kim, 2018; Kose, 2009; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Payne & Smith, 2018; Rigby and Treadway, 2015). Effective school principals are the connective tissue to school reform and have substantial influence over teaching and learning, budgets, curriculum, professional development, site priorities, and hiring (Ishimaru, 2013; Kim, 2018; Kose, 2009; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Payne & Smith, 2018; Rigby and Tredway, 2015; Wang, 2016; Wassell, 2019). Thus, the site principal's SJL stance and actions play a vital role in improving the lives of the marginalized students they serve.

One such action is the need for principals to develop a strong reflective and moral consciousness to lead for social justice (Furman, 2012; Moral et al., 2020; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). This requires principals to take the necessary first step of building an internal critical consciousness before they can begin to raise a teacher/learner's consciousness concerning oppression and institutional racism in schools. To build critical consciousness, a principal must develop empathy as a social justice leader and the ability to deeply listen to the students and families they serve (Ishimaru, 2013; King & Travers, 2013). Learning to be authentically empathetic starts with a principal's ability to enter and understand the life experiences of the marginalized students they serve (Rigby & Tredway, 2013). It is empathy, which opens the space necessary to appreciate difference and then take action through another's eyes. Principals who embody this notion of empathy in their work can meaningfully embrace a nurturing and hopeful consciousness to actualize their social justice leadership (Boske et al., 2017). By developing this self-knowledge around empathic responses to marginalized students' lived experiences,

principals can deepen their understanding of systemic oppression and opportunity gaps perpetuated in their schools and be able to articulate this back to stakeholders (Boske et al. 2017; Kowalchuk, 2019). This internal work allows a principal to feel with and for their students and community. At the center of a principal's thinking about empathy, leading becomes less about management and test scores and more about a moral responsibility to take action against inequality and marginalization (Bogotch, 2017; Boske, 2017).

This inside-out approach positions principals to be clear about why they do the work and to then take an active vocal stance for equity and inclusion. Principals must cultivate values, perspective, and the critical reasoning imperative to combat policies, programs, and stakeholder resistance continuing to cause harm to marginalized students. An SJL stance provides the groundwork for creating these values and dispositions that can lead to more equitable outcomes in schools. (Brown, 2004; Dantley and Tillman, 2009; Jean-Marie 2009; Lindsay, 2014; Mckenzie et al., 2008; Rivera-McCutcheon, 2014). Principals must build their critical reflective consciousness by deepening their self-knowledge and solidifying their belief that equity and inclusion are possible. This will help empower them to model socially just practices and counter potential resistance. This key first step of looking inward and building one's critical consciousness will help build the confidence needed to lead socially just reform.

Correspondingly, SJL work must be dynamic as principals transform their moral understandings into actions that resist educational inequities. By engaging their critical consciousness and praxis, principals become genuine change agents (Drago, 2019; Furman, 2012; Kim, 2018; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). In this sense, SJL is a moral mindset, spurring principals to align their personal and professional values and act against barriers to equity and inclusion. This has significant implications for site principals who stand as the major role models

on campus who signal to others what is relevant and essential in school culture. A principal will most likely have to unlearn some traditionally held assumptions concerning leadership roles and absorb what it means to be a social justice (Capper et al., 2006, Weng, 2016). Principals who cultivate deeply reflective practices can increase the critical consciousness necessary to promote socially just change within their school's environment. Without first developing personal reflective practices and establishing an authentic and moral voice, a principal will find it difficult to change stakeholder beliefs and willingness to build bridges away from the status quo. Hence, the principal must be the first moral touchpoint in advocating for the voiceless and the primary architect for dismantling the barriers to inclusive policies and practices (Theoharis, 2007).

SJL Approaches

Approach to Professional Development

Principals need to change their traditional approach to professional development and focus teacher learning on equity and inclusion (Kose, 2009; Koli et al., 2020; Zymblas & Iasonos, 2016). Leaders are faced with growing accountability measures, such as achieving higher standardized test scores for all students, while still having to cope with a larger, more polarized political environment. Yet, principals are still primarily tasked with making instructional decisions, navigating curriculum choices, and having to provide specific teacher mentoring and classroom direction. Therefore, principals need to deepen and augment their skills leading socially just professional development for teachers (Capper et al., 2006). Often, it is the principal who determines the yearly scope and sequence of teacher learning. The realities of competing priorities and limited time make these learning opportunities for teachers critical for the success of marginalized student groups. These decisions are vital because many young teachers leave the field of education within their first five years. Though there are several causes,

one identified reason is the challenges associated with supporting students in today's diverse classrooms (Brooks & Theoharis, 2012; Brown, 2004; Congo-Poottaren et al., 2014; Furman, 2012; Kose et al., 2009). A principal's professional development focus can have immediate, lasting effects on teacher retention and classroom teaching practices. Professional development, focusing on eradicating opportunity gaps, helping staff and students develop their critical consciousness, and creating more inclusive classrooms can affect all students' achievement and their connection to school (Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008). Principals who align both academic and justice-oriented learning can positively impact teachers who will enact social justice measures in the classroom.

School principals are the primary catalyst for sustaining social justice work in their schools, and they must support teachers when they institute equitable practices in their classrooms. Accordingly, teacher professional development, and prioritizing social justice can help teachers build their capacity and expand their inclusive practices' toolkit (Kowalchuk, 2019). Such development should provide opportunities for teacher exposure to terminology and literature on equity and inclusion, which would help create a common language and safe space around re-examining their own beliefs and practices (McKenzie et al.2008; Reihl, 2009; Shaked, 2020; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). By helping teachers comprehend social justice concepts, and build and deepen their own critical consciousness, principals can inspire teachers to transfer an equity and inclusion mindset into their daily practices. For principals to create the conditions necessary for social justice work in their schools, they need to focus substantial energy on capacity building with their staff through critical professional development (Kowalchuk, 2019). This would center the teachers' role in transforming schools and communities by providing space for complex reflections on structures, policies, and practices, perpetuating opportunity gaps

(Kohli et al., 2020). Principals are key to creating these professional development opportunities for teachers to confront racialized structures of school inequity through the following: cooperation and authentic dialogue; unity through community building; shared power and learning, more closely reflecting the holistic needs of their students and themselves. Principals can achieve these goals by harnessing the existing teacher leadership as a resource in rethinking dated and institutionalized practices (Kohli et al, 2020; Kose, 2009). This can be done by creating a school culture where honest and ongoing communication during professional development becomes the norm. By developing a staff's ability to reaffirm the school's values through individual and school-wide conversations, social justice-oriented principals can set the foundation that all critical incidents on campus will be unpacked and deconstructed. This kind of communication expectation for examining institutional racism will further develop the teachers' orientation toward equity in the classroom and on campus.

When educators participate in professional development and training in areas such as antiracism, unconscious bias, and leading for social justice they must be given adequate time to reflect. When prompted to consider their own deeply held assumptions, many educators, especially White educators, may experience an emotional response, including resentment and even outright resistance. This is concerning because over ninety percent of the nation's current teaching force is White. It is possible that many students of color will graduate only being taught by white teachers (Douglas et al., 2008). Therefore, principals need to be skilled in helping many White teachers transform many of their deeply held assumptions about the intersections of race and education. Many White teachers resist change by evoking Tools of Whiteness (Picower, 2009). Illustrated through her empirical research, Tools of Whiteness generate from three main areas: teachers' emotional experiences, existing dominant racial ideologies, and performances of

identity. In other words, when teachers are challenged to think beyond their current white-normative ideologies, they draw from these three areas to avoid, refute, or subvert issues that challenge their ways of knowing, thereby, making it difficult for a principal's social justice leadership.

Consequently, for genuine change to occur, emotional investment in one's own discomfort is paramount (Matias et al, 2014). Therefore, principals must afford their staff the time and space to process their responses to racial dialogues. This reflective work cannot be rushed because raising the consciousness of others takes time, effort, and continual reinforcement. Principals must also balance between maintaining trust and relationships with staff members and developing adults' professional capacity by expanding their thinking around issues affecting racially minoritized students (Swanson and Welton, 2019; Wassell et al., 2019). By helping educators step out of their comfort zones in a supportive and productive manner, principals can mitigate some of the deficit thinking, arising from addressing systemic inequalities. However, more research is needed to better understand how principals are working with their stakeholders to address race and the challenges they face in the process (McMahon, 2007; Ryan, 2003, Swanson & Welton, 2019).

One important tool for a principal's social justice leadership is to utilize the diversity already existing within a school for professional development. Though students of color now represent half of the student enrollment, teachers of color make up only twenty-one percent of the teacher workforce in the United States (USDE, 2016). Typical approaches to teacher learning and professional development have historically paid little attention to the needs and experiences of teachers of color. Traditionally, professional development has focused on educational structures such as grades, literacy, and classroom management, but not race and structural

inequalities (Kohli et al., 2020). Principals guiding social justice change in their schools can lead by example and incorporate teachers of color in leadership work. Many teachers of color choose to teach because they want to help students of color and transform educational conditions for these communities (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012, Gist et al., 2018). However, teachers of color are often overlooked in this mostly White profession, limiting principals' capability to create real and effective cultural shifts in schools (Mensah & Jackson, 2018). Consequently, principals need to encourage and develop teachers of color to bring their skills and experiences into a school's critical professional development. This can strengthen the perceived authenticity and gravitas of social justice professional development and expand and diversify the leadership voices on campus.

With the above in mind, a principal must also be very careful concerning the benefit and burden of using teachers of color in social justice work. The reality remains that teachers of color often bear an overlooked and burdened disproportionate to white counterparts when it comes leading for equity and inclusion (Osagie & Zuker, 2019). The costs can range from not being paid for their labor, micro and macro aggressions, ostracization at work, re-silencing from colleagues, and other mental-emotional hardships.

Rather than placing the burden of "educating and enlightening" on people of color, principals should approach professional development as a community collaboration among allies (Fine and Weisburg, 2022). Building allyships and accomplices in and among our teaching ranks, will bolster the viability of teacher professional development centered on social justice.

Participatory Approach

Principals who align with SJL will need to promote a participatory social justice approach at all levels of school life and culture (King & Travers, 2017). By doing so, principals can

positively affect a socially just school climate, teacher relations and learning, and student achievement. An SJL approach is defined as the nexus of all the behaviors, dispositions, and methods that school principals use to meet their challenges and influence their stakeholders' actions (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011). Principals need to be dynamic and pull from an expanded toolkit, addressing all aspects of a school and its community. In this sense, principals need to create democratic or participative opportunities for all staff, students and families to engage in social justice work in schools (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011). A participatory approach facilitated by the principal allows groups on campus to have a say in the decisions affecting all students. This approach harnesses a site's social capital and can release a staff's inherent potential to own the equity and inclusion work. As a principal, this is vital because social justice leader needs to model what they want teachers to do in their classrooms. An SJL participatory approach can promote democratic and inclusive processes, laying the groundwork for social justice leadership at all school levels (Boske et al., 2017). This includes an equity and inclusion focus for department-level teams, grade-level teams, and even stakeholder teams such as Parent Teacher Organizations. A principal who can develop his stakeholders' social justice orientation can improve learning outcomes in disadvantaged contexts (Moral et al., 2020).

Another important socially just participatory approach is promoting community involvement. SJL acknowledges schools are all very different and, therefore, principals need to understand the community's needs and concerns relevant to their particular school (Berkovich, 2013; King & Travers, 2017). Principals should incorporate a participatory approach into their social justice work to creatively utilize networks external to their school. By seeking to develop networks and partnerships with parents and community groups, principals can gain valuable resources, funding, and human capital not available through standard district budgets

(Macdonald, 2020; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Examples of this work can be seen in community book drives, day of service campus clean-ups, and technology donations from surrounding businesses, which help schools thrive through non-traditional revenue streams. These types of community-based partnerships can enhance the school-home-community relationship and can have positive effects on academic achievement across gender, race, socioeconomic status, and academic access for students (Ishimaru, 2013; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). These positive relationships are statistically significant, not only in terms of overall academic achievement, but also for GPA, standardized tests, and other mandated academic measures (Howland et al., 2006).

A principal can also strengthen the links and bonds between school and community by advocating on the community's behalf. This can be seen in the principal's decision-making processes when it comes to school events. Social justice-minded principals need to be considerate and sensitive to the time frames of working families whose work schedules might not conform to typical school hours. This can also include the need to find meeting places closer to family homes, like community centers (Boskie et al., 2017). Principals can use their SJL lens to bring cultural events to the campus that honor the community, its members, and their values and beliefs. This positions the school as a hub, not only for learning but for community interaction and partnership. Along with providing quality education and qualified teachers, a social justice-minded principal must demonstrate how marginalized students and their external communities are truly valued (Chambers & McCready, 2011). This is significant because principals are the central actors in schools who can harness the resources and networks necessary for incorporating these types of authentic expressions of community and culture. By inviting the community and community groups to be a part of school decision-making and co-planning, principals can

mitigate some cultural conflicts and misunderstandings, which typically arise around campus (Khalifa et al., 2016; King & Travers, 2017). Developing meaningful connections between parents, community, community partners, and schools requires reflective, caring, and respectful school principals who are willing to learn about, and act to dismantle the barriers impeding all students' progress and their connection to the school.

Principals can develop a participatory process for creating a clear policy agenda around a mission and vision of inclusion. Many traditional educational leadership paradigms are based on a top-down managerial approach, focusing on student outcome measures and notions of effectiveness and efficiency (i.e., planning, organizing, and supervising) (Heffernan, 2019). This narrow focus on compliance-based leadership has done little to address enduring opportunity gaps for marginalized students. On the other hand, SJL positions principals to take an increasingly critical role in the administration and management of a school. Principals who utilize an SJL approach can move beyond a mere managerial role and provide a sense of meaning, commitment, and purpose for stakeholders to support (Davies & Davies, 2010; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). A principal who initiates a bold social justice vision can align it with similar concrete actions and practices, challenging the power relations and structural inequalities experienced by marginalized students. This vision statement requires a collaborative and democratic process, so stakeholders could have a voice and take ownership in developing it. This type of co-creation helps cultivate a deeper sense of commitment for those involved (King & Travers, 2017). A principal is the key architect in constructing a socially just consensus around a school's identity. Structurally speaking, the principal must also provide the necessary planning and staff development time, resources, scheduling, and finances to support this vision. This approach can create the groundwork for a transformative, socially just working environment.

This would include linking socially just initiatives with the school goals. Social justice work on behalf of marginalized students is complex, varied, and frequently contested and resisted (Marshal & Oliva, 2017). Therefore, it is vital for principals to develop a community of care for staff to engage in the tough work of dismantling barriers to change. Principals need to move their staff and schools beyond mere awareness of marginalized students and into real transformative actions and practices. This can be done by using SJL to cultivate deep relationships and a caring school environment where empathy with marginalized communities can build bridges within the larger school community (Boske et al., 2017; Tomlinson & Murphy, 2018).

Empathetic Approach

In 2015, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) were updated with a focus on equity to help leaders center the success of all students, especially those traditionally marginalized. The goal was to help leaders make progress on student learning and achieve more equitable outcomes for all (Winburn et al, 2020). PSEL standard number five provides administrators with new guidelines for promoting a community of care and support for students. This standard has helped spur the emergence of scholarly discourse in SJL, creating more empathetic and caring schools (Boske et al., 2017). Principals incorporating an ethic of care and empathy into their practices can bolster and sustain their SJL in profound ways. An ethic of empathy is a caring and respectful, no-fault understanding and appreciation of someone else's experience (Winburn et al., 2020). This suggests that empathy generally means understanding the experiences and perspectives of those who share an educational space and making decisions based on what would serve them best. It is a disposition and practice principals can utilize to foster radically new change possibilities for students. Through a Principals SJL, caring and empathetic responses will recognize and act on emotions like joy, satisfaction, success, and

engagement, as well as feelings like distress, fear, isolation, anger, loneliness, and hopelessness (Murray & Guerra, 2018; Winburn et al., 2020). Leading for social justice and equity is in many ways dependent on deepening empathetic responses among the communities a principal serves. Principals can use their SJL to cultivate a culture of empathy by creating school spaces that appreciate difference and rely on strength-based practices (Boske et al., 2017).

Principals possessing a high level of empathy are better able to advocate effectively for their students and communities by cultivating caring school environments (Winburn et al., 2020). This is done by a socially just vision, fostering a culture of mutual support and providing authentic experiences affirming students' cultural ways of knowing (Boske et al., 2017; Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018; Winburn et al., 2020). Such practices consistently give students and their community a voice in what they learn, how they learn, and how they best show what they know.

These empathetic practices also support positive student conduct as well. Principals can guide staff to look for the problems behind misbehavior rather than seeing the student as the problem—and find solutions rather than consequences (Grant & Mac Iver, 2021). In this context, principals would join with teachers to craft restorative discipline practices based on empathy responses tied to social-emotional health. High trust and empathetic environments allow for more innovation and reframing of problems into possibilities (Daly et al., 2005; Larson, 2002; Sinek, 2014). Principals who incorporate empathetic approaches into their social justice leadership can create caring schools that cultivate their staff's social and emotional capacity for the challenging work of eliminating opportunity gaps in schools.

Ultimately, it is the principal who must develop, observe, and share empathetic narratives—examples, illustrations, and stories that reinforce the reasons for caring and mutual

support (Nowack & Zak, 2020). Maintaining these types of narratives and keeping them central to educational conversations will create the conditions for school communities to be more likely to sustain their social justice work.

Public schools are among the few social institutions bringing staff and students together across racial, ethnic, and social-class lines for shared learning and mutual understanding. Accordingly, the principal must help sustain staff and student energy and productivity over time. This includes supporting all stakeholders to derive satisfaction and joy from working and learning with others. By utilizing an empathetic approach to social justice work, the principal can help create what Ladson-Billings (1995) describes as an "informed empathy", where truly valuing marginalized communities is feeling with them and not just for them. This type of deep connectivity will lead to more socially just schools where staff and administration act as advocates to meet students' needs rather than the privileged few.

Summary and Conclusion

A social justice leadership stance, SJL has taken on increasingly important meaning as students of color and other marginalized groups now comprise more than half of the students enrolled in public school. This is especially true because opportunity gaps between traditionally marginalized students and their White peers persist despite federal educational policies like NCLB that were put in place to eradicate such disparities (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). SJL locates the principal as the key leadership position to lead school change. Yet, many principals have had no formal training in leading for social justice or, at best, minimal exposure during their institutional training (Macdonald, 2020). Many principals have to go it alone and are effectively having to learn SJL on the job (Laura, 2017). With this in mind, principals must first find ways to develop their critical consciousness and understand their own social justice beliefs, values, and

dispositions regarding marginalized students' needs, so that they can shape a compelling mission and vision of inclusion (Khalifa et al., 2016). From this position, principals can lead for social justice by influencing professional development. Principals can utilize an SJL stance to move away from typical approaches to teacher learning to one that does not neglect race, structural inequalities, and perspectives of communities of color (Kohli et al., 2020). Principals who are working to eradicate opportunity gaps and create more equitable schools will need to use their SJL to lead with empathy and participatory inclusion (Boske et al., 2017; King & Travers, 2017). By taking an SJL stance, principals will be in a stronger position to promote an overall community of empathy and inclusion for all students, which includes strengthening the voice and participation of parents and community partners alike.

Principals who utilize their social justice leadership SJL to lead change is not unilaterally accepted or desired among stakeholders. In fact, SJL research details many overt and covert methods of resistance and opposition to social justice reforms (Picower, 2009; Matias et al.; Macdonald, 2020). Yet, SJL literature is much less robust when it comes to the experiences of principals overcoming stakeholder resistance and opposition (Boske et al., 2017; Dematthews, 2016; Kowalchuk, 2019; Matias et al., 2014; Payne & Smith, 2018; Rivera & McCutcheon, 2014; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Walker et al., 2011; Winburn et al., 2020). Additional research is needed to understand the lived experience of K12 principals who face resistance to their social justice initiatives, and how they negotiate this opposition. By exploring how principals successfully address stakeholder resistance to social justice initiatives on a K12 campus, we can better equip principals to effectively address efforts that seek to maintain and validate dominant ideologies in opposition to more equitable and inclusive schools.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

Chapter one describes the rise of SJL in K-12 education. This is a developing and promising approach to creating a more equitable and inclusive school for our traditionally marginalized students. Though SJL focuses on several aspects of the K-12 experience, one important strand is the primary position of the principal as an advocate of socially just change. Effective school principals are the connective tissue to school reform and have substantial influence over teaching and learning, budgets, curriculum, professional development, site priorities, and hiring (Ishimaru, 2013; Kim, 2018; Kose, 2009; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Payne & Smith, 2018; Rigby and Treadway, 2015; Wang, 2016; Wassell, 2019). Thus, the site principal's SJL stance and actions play a vital role in improving the lives of the students they serve. Chapter two discusses a review of the literature in terms of SJL and principalship. This literature review pays particular attention to principal training, a principals' SJL approach on campus and with staff, and the important dispositions and strategies principals use to create more inclusive campuses.

A principal's SJL can often be met with substantial resistance. Stakeholder opposition can range from the subtle to the most blatant forms of entrenchment (Theoharis, 2008). Therefore, principals must be prepared to counter a complex myriad of aversion tactics. Additional research is needed to understand the lived experience principals who are actually countering and overcoming such stakeholder opposition. The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experience of K12 principals who face resistance to their social justice initiatives and explore the ways in which they successfully navigate this opposition.

By exploring how principals successfully address stakeholder resistance to social justice initiatives on a K12 campus, we can better equip principals to effectively address efforts that attempt to maintain and validate dominant ideologies. Specifically, this study seeks to examine the characteristics, behaviors, and practices principals utilize to create more socially just K-12 schools when they encounter opposition.

Research details how principals have a far-reaching impact on site priorities, school culture, instructional practices, and teacher and student learning (Branch et al., 2013; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Rigby & Treadway, 2015; Wassell, 2019). However, many current leadership models are rooted in what is commonly referred to as successful school leadership, an operationalized framework that has focused on transactional skills, and effectively and efficiently managing people and resources (Berkovich, 2014; Mckenzie et al., 2008). Consequently, many principals have not been formally trained in SJL practices that resist marginalized students' systemic oppression, nor have they been trained to facilitate practices that overcome the maintenance of dominant racial ideologies (Brown, 2004; Dantley and Tillman, 2009; Jean-Marie, 2009; Khalifa, 2016; Mckenzie et al., 2008; Picower, 2009, Rivera-McCutcheon, 2014; Theoharis, 2007). Therefore, many inclusion-minded principals are left to go it alone and rely on their negotiation skills and interpersonal abilities to navigate resistance while still trying to maintain trusting relationships. Principals must find effective ways to manage these pressures while still acting to create more socially just schools.

To reiterate, the research questions guiding this study are:

Overarching question: What is the lived experience of principals who encounter resistance when implementing social justice initiatives on the K12 campus?

4. What kinds of resistance do principals experience when implementing social justice initiatives?

    What barriers exist with teachers?

    What is it like to face staff resistance

    What barriers exist with parents and community members?

5. How do principals respond to resistance to social justice initiatives?

    What are the most successful strategies and dispositions for responding to resistance?

    Can you elaborate on (insert strategy or disposition)

    Why is (strategy/disposition) so important to your success?

Qualitative Phenomenology

Qualitative studies strive to describe and interpret the experiences and reactions of participants to events from their individual perspectives expressed through language (Frankel et al., 2012; Rudestam, 2015). This type of research is important to this study as qualitative inquiry looks to understand a person's perception and meaning-making of the activity being studied as opposed to the actual event itself. As individual experiences differ, so their perceptions differ as well, and qualitative research will be crucial to understanding how principals are making sense and meaning of their SJL experiences.

Qualitative research methods will also help in analyzing how these circumstances and events influence others (Mertler, 2019). Qualitative research allows for holistic description that can render accounts in thick, rich detail as compared to a snapshot of the topic (Mertler, 2019). This type of research can be instrumental in improving existing practices. This can be achieved by delineating narratives to see how this specific population, K12 principals, make sense and

meaning of their lived experiences (Seidman, 2019). This includes but is not limited to non-numerical data such as interviews and interview transcripts, observation memos, notes, audio recordings, as well as any associated documents. Collecting this thick and rich detail will help with the integration of meaningful experiences that principals articulate in order to understand what is common in their experiences (Emerson et al., 2011). Finally, this research method will afford me the opportunity to participate and collaborate with my participants in a deep and discovery-oriented context.

Phenomenological research will also inform this study to help analyze these principals' experiences and describe the substance that connects their ideas and perceptions.

Phenomenology is a method that can describe a shared experience of a group, where the researcher can analyze the data gathered and can describe the shared experience and how it was experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In considering the study, I would focus on the shared experiences of principals' who encounter resistance from their perspective and the strategies they employ to overcome opposition.

I am looking at these two phenomena (resistance and overcoming resistance) and how they intersect to create a shared experience. A potential challenge for me will be bracketing, where the researcher sets aside their personal experiences to have a fresh perspective on the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As an administrator, I am interested in this topic because I see colleagues struggling to leverage their change initiatives in the face of resistance.

Figure 2 *Research Design Flowchart*

Participant Selection

The participants in this study will be secondary principals in the North County San Diego area who have encountered resistance to their social justice initiatives at their respective campuses. Through purposeful sampling, this study will include five principals who have encountered opposition to their social justice leadership. These principals will be selected for interviews in an attempt to identify aspects of their perceptions through actively reliving their experiences (Mertler, 2019). Participant selection will be determined by email and phone call invitations, and through professional recommendations and snowball sampling (Mertler, 2016; Rudestam, 2015). Once I have received recommendations, I will send an email to perspective principals outlining my study and the criteria for participation. I will also be asking for their voluntary consent to participate based on their experience with stakeholder opposition. This study involves identifying and locating five k12 principals that have a minimum of four years of experience and have encountered resistance to their socially just change initiatives. Therefore, I will be seeking participants that provide the potential for information rich experiences that can significantly contribute to learning about the types of resistance principals face and the strategies

they employ to mitigate such resistance (Patton, 2002; Rudestam, 2015). If more than five participants are found to meet the above criteria, a purposeful selection will take place to identify those that most closely match the criteria of this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study will conduct semi-structured interviews with five principals to ensure a breadth of experiences to draw from (Brown et al., 2020). Interviews will take place on Zoom, and every effort will be made to ensure the participant's comfort level and confidentiality. These interviews will be approximately one hour in length and will be audio recorded. Pseudonyms will be used for participants and their school site to protect confidentiality further. Interviewing provides context into people's actions and thereby helps the researcher understand the behaviors being studied (Seidman, 2019). I developed my research questions based on my chapter two literature review on social justice leadership and the challenges principals face regarding stakeholder resistance to change. My interview protocol includes questions related to a principal's social justice initiatives and stance, their social justice training or lack thereof, types and methods of stakeholder resistance, and strategies used to mitigate resistance and opposition. This line of questioning will help me explore my research questions and will be used as a tool to develop a rich discussion in order to draw out the participants to reflect on their experiences and its implications (Rudestam, 2019). The interview questions, located in Appendix A, contain questions that are formatted to gain a deeper understanding of my research questions and are intentionally open-ended to allow participants to use their own language and concepts in responding (Emerson et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

Every consideration will be given to accommodate participants for their interview, including reviewing their interview transcripts. The researcher will present a written invitation to

potential principals outlining the study, located in Appendix B, and a verbal explanation of the study at the time of the interviews. The information sheet document, located in Appendix C, will be reviewed at the time of the interview as well. Participants will be given every opportunity to review the information sheet and ask any questions before proceeding with the interview.

Interviews will last approximately sixty minutes and will be recorded. The researcher will also take field notes during the interview and utilize follow-up questions during the interview to prompt the interviewee to elaborate on key experiences. At the end of the interview, the participants will be informed that they will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview and to clarify or amend any information from the interview.

All participants and their school sites will be given carefully composed pseudonyms to protect their identity and to reduce any risk to confidentiality. All interview data will be electronically stored on my computer which is password protected. Any paper notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, then hand-coded initially for recurring codes and themes using a constant comparative method of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I will also be reviewing my interview notes and writing several memos in order to grasp what the participants experience as meaningful and important (Emerson et al., 2011). Open coding will be used to identify initial ideas derived primarily from my conceptual framework to classify data associated with social justice leadership (social justice training, types of stakeholder resistance, leadership actions, and strategies and disposition to overcome resistance). I will conduct a second round of coding to organize themes and to distinguish any subcategories specifically and directly related to the study, and organize them in graphic format (Maxwell, 2013; Rudestam, 2015). Further rounds of coding my data will take place to re-examine the themes and categories

I've created during the analysis process. In this phase, I will look to re-name, re-code, merge codes and re-categorize the work I've done for reanalyzing, finding patterns, and getting closer to developing theories and concepts.

The practice of memo writing, also known as ethnographic field notes, be utilized during analysis. Memos will be employed for a richer and more meaningful textualization and assist in reflecting on my research questions, study goals, my own prior experiences, and my interaction with the participants (Rudestam, 2015). Memo writing provides for a deeper immersion into the participants' world in order to grasp what they experience as meaningful and important (Emerson et al., 2011). This will also accelerate my own analytical thinking and insights. I will also maintain a reflective journal over the course of the study in order to deliberate on my own positionality, assumptions, and interpretations (Dematthews, 2016).

The trustworthiness of this data will also be confirmed through member checks and peer review to confirm interpretations and understandings taken from the data (Creswell, 2012; Rudestam, 2015). Through member checks, participants will be provided the transcripts of their interviews to validate the data (Maxwell, 2013). After being given time to reflect upon their interview and transcripts, participants will be asked to share their thoughts or clarifications. They may also omit or edit their interview answers as a way to deepen the work and add credibility to the findings. Utilizing peer review will allow my dissertation chair, dissertation committee, and colleagues to ask tough questions and critique my data collection and data analysis for accuracy and honesty (Mertler, 2019).

With explicit permission from the participants, and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, data will be collected and stored utilizing strict privacy standards. All interviews and electronic data will be saved on my personal laptop computer that

is password protected with data encryption. Any paper notes or other material collected will be stored securely in a locked file in my home office.

Limitations

As an identifying White male and former secondary principal, I recognize my positionality may influence my interactions with the participants. I will contextualize this study on the corresponding experiences of principals encountering resistance to socially just initiatives. I will also build rapport with the participants by acknowledging my ties to their community while maintaining my researcher role (Emerson et al., 2011). My positionality and familiarity with the experiences of the participants can be used as a resource and allow the researcher to remain transparent and sensitive to the subject while allowing participants to express themselves more fully during their interviews.

It is important to note a few other potential limitations and delimitations of this study. Since this study will be employing a semi-structured interview methodology, findings will be grounded in the self-reported data of the participants. No efforts will be made within the scope of this study to validate if the reported beliefs are consistent with site realities (Mertler, 2021). Though the content of this study may reflect a larger body of work on social justice leadership, this study's findings may be delimited by its bounded and specific geographic location of North County San Diego (Goes and Simon 2017). Therefore, external generalizability will be limited.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

As stated in chapter one, this study explores the lived experiences of K-12 public school principals who encounter resistance to their social justice leadership and the strategies and dispositions they employ to mitigate that resistance.

This chapter describes the findings that emerged from the data intended to understand the perspectives and experiences of five K-12 principals as they work to create social justice change at their respective campuses.

Social justice leadership functioned as the conceptual framework for this study to initiate, organize, and develop concepts central to a principal's social justice leadership on campus. This includes a principal's leadership voice and stance and the approaches they take to create and sustain change on behalf of traditionally marginalized students. It also provides a framework to unpack the practices and dispositions of principals who encounter resistance while working to create greater freedom, opportunity, and justice for all students. The connections between the key attributes of this study and the research questions are summarized in the chart below.

Table 1 *Study Attributes in Relation to Research Questions*

Study Attributes	Research Questions	Social Justice Leadership Training	Staff and Community Resistance	Strategies to Overcome Resistance
Qualitative		X	X	X
Participant Criteria		X	X	X
Research Questions		X	X	X
Participant Voice		X	X	X
Interview Protocol		X	X	X

Approaches to Data Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via the Zoom platform. All interviews were recorded via Zoom and transcribed utilizing Rev.com. Rev is a powerful software platform that provides accurate speech-to-text transcription services. After the transcripts were checked for accuracy, I initially hand-coded the transcripts for recurring codes using a constant comparative method of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I reviewed my interview notes and written memos to grasp what the participants experienced as meaningful and essential (Emerson et al., 20011). Open coding was employed to identify initial themes derived primarily from my conceptual framework to classify data associated with social justice leadership (social justice training, types of stakeholder resistance, leadership actions, and strategies and disposition to overcome resistance). I then conduct another coding round to organize themes, distinguish any subcategories directly related to the study, and organize them in graphic format (Maxwell, 2013; Rudestam, 2015).

Table 2 *Summary of Research Questions in Relation to Themes and Subthemes*

Research Questions	Themes	Codes
What types of training have you experienced in Social Justice Leadership?	Levels of training Allyship/partnership	Credential programs County Office of Education District Office Finding allies/partnerships
What types of resistance have you encountered from staff and community to your Social Justice Leadership?	Deficit thinking Coded language Personal attacks	Low expectations Baiting tactics Questioning motives
What types of strategies did you employ to mitigate resistance to your Social Justice Leadership?	Relationships Communication Student voice	Seeking common ground Consistency/inquiry-based questioning Storytelling/empathy interviews

Further data coding took place to re-examine the themes and categories created during the analysis process to find emerging patterns and trends and move closer to developing theories and concepts that addressed the research questions.

Participant Profiles

The participants in this study were K-12 principals who had at least four years of experience as site leaders. The participants' demographic information varied. All principals and their schools were given pseudonyms. Candidate selection was most notably done through professional references. However, special consideration was given to candidates that not only had some experience in leading for social justice, but also had faced resistance along the way. Contacts at the San Diego County Office of Education were very knowledgeable as to the equity and inclusion initiatives taking place around the county and were extremely helpful in identifying potential principals to interview. Secondary considerations involved obtaining a variety perspective, including but not limited to, geographic region, gender and race. Table X represents an overview of the background information regarding participants.

Table 3 *Participants' Background*

Pseudonym	Title	K-12 Range	Number of years as principal	Number of years in education	Identification
Dr. Luis Manuel	Principal	9th - 12th	10 years	20 years	Mexican-American Male
Dr. Cesar Beltran	Principal	9th - 12th	9 years	20 years	Mexican-American Male
Georgia Douglas	Principal	6th - 8th	4 years	15 years	African-American Female
Ruby Ann Bridges	Principal	9th - 12th	11 years	28 years	Declined to State
Dr. Frank Dorsett	Principal	9th - 12th	5 years	24 years	Filipino-Black Male

Dr. Luis Manuel (all names are pseudonyms)

Dr. Manuel is a principal at a comprehensive public high school serving students in ninth through twelve grades. He has ten years of experience as a principal and over twenty years of experience in the field of public education. He identifies as a Mexican-American Latino male. The way he approaches social justice leadership is to tell the stories of his marginalized students to stakeholders to expose the blind spots that exist within his school and the greater school community.

Ms. Georgia Douglas

Ms. Douglas is currently a principal at a public middle school serving students in sixth through eighth grade. She has four years of experience as a principal and fifteen years of experience in the field of public education. She identifies as an African-American female. The way she approaches social justice leadership is to consistently address issues of equity to ensure no students are excluded and to amplify the voices of her marginalized student groups to fuel site change efforts.

Dr. Cesar Beltran

Dr. Beltran is currently the principal of a comprehensive public high school serving ninth through twelfth-grade students. He has nine years of experience as a principal and over twenty years of experience in the field of public education. Dr. Beltran identifies as a Mexican-American male. His approach to social justice leadership is to always meet students where they are and to provide more options for all students to pursue their passions.

Mrs. Ruby Anne Bridges

Mrs. Bridges is the principal of a comprehensive public high school serving students in ninth through twelve grades. She has eleven years of experience as a principal and over twenty-

eight years of experience in the field of public education. She declined to provide any identifying information. The way Mrs. Bridges approaches social justice leadership is to ensure that every student, regardless of their appearance or identity, has the opportunity to learn without roadblocks or impediments.

Dr. Ricard Dorsett

Dr. Dorsett is the principal of a comprehensive public high school serving students in the ninth through twelfth grades. He has five years of experience as a principal and twenty-four years of experience in the field of public education. Dr. Dorsett identifies as a mixed-race Filipino African-American male. His approach to social justice leadership is to make sure he is working towards equitable outcomes for all students regardless of gender, ethnic background, or language ability and making deliberate approaches to interrupt oppressive school practices.

Emergent Factors and Themes

I constructed my interview questions in a fashion that would allow participants to reflect deeply on their lived experiences as principals. My research questions are particularly focused on Principals who are leading for social justice at their respective schools to create more equitable outcomes for all students, especially those traditionally marginalized. The intent was to have participants reflect on the types of resistance they encountered from staff and their community when leading change and the strategies they employed to mitigate resistance. Seven major themes arose from the participants' reflections on their lived experiences and are discussed in the rest of this chapter. The themes were: social justice leadership training and allyship, deficit thinking, coded language, personal attacks, relationships, communication, and student voice.

Social Justice Leadership Training and Allyship

The literature on social justice leadership suggests that many current K12 principals have limited social justice training, which can lead to socially just initiatives being poorly implemented or even abandoned by principals who encounter resistance from stakeholders. On the other hand, social justice leadership training can build capacity and confidence and put principals in touch with like-minded leaders.

Social Justice Leadership Training

Cursory or minimal training in social justice leadership was described by participants, regardless of whether they were in an administrative credential program, master's program, or educational doctorate program. All participants completed their administrative credentials before the killing of George Floyd in May of 2020, and two participants noted that seminal event as a turning point in awareness regarding social justice leadership in k-12 education. For instance, Mrs. Bridges said, “My Masters’ in Administration was over fifteen years ago. I'm sure there were discussions including all students, but I don't recall any specific training that addressed social justice or social justice in K-12 education.” Dr. Manuel noted something similar when he stated, “I did have one course on equity, but it was not very prominent.” Dr. Beltran and Ms. Douglas also discussed their credential program's sporadic and/or periodic training in equity and social justice work. Only Dr. Dorsett reflected that he received training in social justice leadership training in his doctoral program.

County and District Level Training

All participants spoke about the need for county and district-level training around social justice leadership, especially in the service of equity and inclusion change initiatives. These participants shared that they have been in education for no fewer than fifteen years, most of them

for over two decades. Over that time, the county where they worked played a crucial role in supporting districts with their social justice work. Ms. Bridges pointed out, “I have been to the County Office of Education’s Equity Conference for the past couple of years, which has been great.” Ms. Douglas had a similar experience working with the County. She stated, “My district partnered with the County Office of Education to help us learn how to form equity teams on campus made up of teachers, counselors, classified staff, and admin. This included training regularly led by county experts.” All participants expressed that having access to trained professionals was crucial to improving their learning, thereby improving their ability to lead for socially just change. Dr. Manuel summed his experience as, “ I’ve been trained by the County Office of Education in restorative justice, training related to LGBTQ inclusivity, and English language learners' access to the curriculum and their education. So all of those things, you know, are really around the idea of social justice and how I can successfully bring those ideas back to my site.”

This same sentiment was true for participants when speaking about the need for district-level support as well. What the district Superintendent and Cabinet prioritize will filter down through that system. Participants expressed that support across a District was vital so that a school site wasn’t going it alone or sites weren’t going in several different directions simultaneously. For instance, Ms. Bridges posited, “My district has provided some consistent and important training on addressing unconscious bias. This definitely needs to continue because, in our current moment, it can be very uncomfortable to call it out without continual practice. And now it's all of our agenda, not just my personal agenda; you know what I mean?” Ms. Douglas reinforced this idea when she reflected on her district's recent change of course. “Last year, we began some identity work as a district. We then moved into building equity teams at each site,

including my own. I've received support at the district level on this, which has been really helpful."

Allyship

Participants in this study often spoke about the risks and fatigue of working alone to achieve socially just changes in their schools and the need to find allies in the work. Ms. Douglas stated, "I'm still growing and learning about myself, but what I appreciate most is having a like-minded community or like-minded people to access for support. For me, I think if that weren't there, I would not be able to persevere. I need systems of support all through the system because this work is hard." The-go-it-alone mentality makes for a very risky and lonely model of principalship. Dr. Beltran surfaced the importance of allyships and partnerships when he stated:

> I want to stay in the fight, fighting for what I know is right. I work with my ethnic studies teacher a lot, and we share so many of our beliefs. He likes dunking the ball, and I'm just trying to move in the box and create a little bit of space in the lane. We have different roles but are on the same team. It is the same with my colleagues. We need to have collaborative conversations on how to stay in the fight and commit to a more just educational system. It's not something we can wave a wand at or the benevolent hand of a dictator when you're asking people to change their beliefs. You need partners and teams and allies.

Ms. Bridges had a similar observation when reflecting on the importance of finding like-minded people to move the work forward.

> This is such difficult work that I really rely on my community partners because they know so many people in our community. If there is a difficult situation in the community spilling onto our campus, I rely on those partnerships to have conversations with those in the community and bring the needed people together to solve challenges constructively. In one phone call, they will say you need to call this person, or I will go meet with this family, whatever. Partnerships are your go-to resources. I recently partnered with a local community college when we were building our ethics studies class. It was so helpful to have those experts with you, those partners to help in the work

Dr. Dorestt echoed this sentiment as well. He explained, “I think you find allies. You find allies that really appreciate and understand the situation. There are parent groups that can really advocate with and for you, and you need those other voices for impact. I've been working to really increase our leadership opportunities for our Black community on campus, not only for the students but the parents as well. It has been really critical for me seeing the positive influence and partnership these parent groups can have. These ally groups can also be a part of that communication pipeline on what you are trying to accomplish.”

All participants agreed that building our strategic partnerships and allies makes the slow and challenging work for socially just change more plausible and likely.

Types of Staff and Community Resistance to Social Justice Leadership

Principals who utilize their social justice leadership to lead change is not unilaterally accepted or desired among stakeholders. In fact, there are many overt and covert methods of resistance and opposition to social justice reforms that various groups perform. Oftentimes, when teachers, staff, and community members are challenged to think beyond their current white-normative ideologies, they actively avoid, refute, or subvert issues that challenge their ways of knowing, thereby making it difficult for a principal to enact socially just change. Below are the most prominent types of resistance experienced by the five participants in this study.

Deficit Thinking

A prominent theme that surfaced for all five individuals was resistance from staff and community to socially just change in the form of deficit thinking and low expectations for marginalized students. Stakeholders with deficit thinking tended to believe that a student’s academic failure is due to their inherent deficiencies: lack of experience in schooling, poor English proficiency, motivation to learn, inferior intellectual ability, and parents who do not

value education. Dr. Manuel reflected, “I often hear comments like, ‘not everyone needs to go to college,’ or ‘their parents don’t care,’ even, ‘the apple doesn't fall far from the tree with those kids’.” Dr. Dorsett has experienced similar forms of deficit thinking among staff. He recalled, “For some, there is a level of cynicism out there. I’ve heard staff say, ‘Well, you can’t save them all.’” Ms. Douglas has seen an uptick in parents' willingness to express their deficit thinking in public. When trying to use some Parent Organization funds to celebrate English Learners, she ran into strong resistance. “Parents at the meeting were like, why are we supporting those kids, and not all kids? All the money we have collected and raised didn't even come from that group. Can you believe that?” She went on to say, “When I did away with an old practice that was benefiting only a small group of affluent students, both teachers and parents alike started saying things like, here we go, back to Ghetto Hills Middle School, instead of Oak Hills Middle School. I was like, oh my God, people; you are using that language? I mean, this is a middle to upper-middle-class area; there is no ghetto here!” Dr. Beltran has also faced his share of resistance from teachers with deficit thinking. He stated:

> You know, many times, they ultimately blame the student, and the framing is that they need to take responsibility and they need to, um, you know, do the work, their education, and no one's gonna be holding their hand in college. And that mindset, I think, ignores so much of the journey of the student. I think that you need to have high expectations for students without attributing it to a character flaw within the student. Ultimately, that's what they're doing. They're making a statement that the student's flawed, you know, that the student is lazy or that they don't believe in education, that they have flawed values. Students subconsciously, they see it, they feel it, they experience it, they've seen it all their lives and in so many adults. So, it's kind of like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mrs. Bridges discussed another type of staff resistance associated with deficit thinking, where staff fall back into patterns and beliefs, they feel most comfortable with. She pointed out that there can be a disconnect when working to change staff perceptions and those new ideas hit

the wall of their personal beliefs. She asserted, “Staff may sit passively, and some make general comments like, ‘well, I was raised differently,’ or ‘my personal beliefs are just different.’ In the end, some staff just return to their classroom, shut the door, and continue doing what they have always been doing.

Personal Attacks

In these interviews, it became apparent that staff and communities would resort to personal attacks as a tactic to resist socially just change on campus. Email and social media attacks were some of the most common modes of resistance experienced by these participants.

Interestingly, ‘baiting’ was a specific tactic utilized over email and social media in an attempt to goad principals into saying something that could be used against them or discredit their social justice leadership. All five principals experienced baiting techniques used against them by staff and the community to try and get them to say something they may regret. Ms. Douglas recalled, “I’ve been yelled at and screamed at, you know. I just can't be combative, especially me, right? They are trying to get me to be that stereotype of the angry black woman so they can use it against me.” Dr. Beltran shared a similar experience when trying to make a socially just change on campus that would expand opportunities for more student recognition. He stated, “Parents went to the Superintendent, to the board, they even filed a lawsuit. There was extreme hostility and resistance towards me in the form of speculation and insinuation, seeing if anything they threw out would stick and if I would respond in a way they could use. Ultimately, my compassion towards students could be easily weaponized in this struggle, so I had to be very careful.” Dr. Manuel also spoke about several experiences where he felt baited into responding. “I recently received an anonymous racist email, and it made me reflect that over the course of my career, I need to be careful with my generalizations about people and people of color and not

putting everybody into a box, either. Because that is then used against me and put in my face." He went on to explain about needing to be very careful with responding to extreme and baiting emails. "People write these letters, then walk away from it and want you to engage back so that now they can take a picture of it, put it on social media, and now I got'm!" Dr. Dorsett noticed the following: "In a more affluent school I was at, there was this belief system that kids don't need help. Those kids will just show up, and they will do well. Especially in this politically charged arena, some people try to pigeonhole you and label you so they can use it against you."

Another common tactic used to resist socially just changes is personally attacking the motives of the principal. Dr. Beltran remembered, "They were questioning my ethics, my relationship with a certain type of parent, insinuating I only advocate for brown-skinned students. The lesson for me is never to underestimate the resolve of the highly privileged. I think a less experienced principal would have been less willing to stand their ground, knowing that, ultimately, you know, I might have to pay politically for my actions at some point in my career. But I have this awesome responsibility as a principal, to look out for all my students, even when being personally attacked." Dr. Manuel experienced this attempted undermining of a principal's character and leadership stance and remembered his experience as the first Latino principal at two major high schools. "I remember in a leadership meeting with teachers and classified staff, the person next to me said, next time you send us emails, make sure you have two English teachers read it first." He also spoke of hearing through back channels that there was talk that all he cared about was the brown kids. Dr. Manuel said, "Yeah, I get those emails questioning my motives. You know there's a lot of courage behind a keyboard. I've learned to respond by inviting them to my office, and it's rare to get folks to come in to really have a discussion. They'd rather not. They'd rather blast an email." Principal Douglas also received similar email attacks

when she tried to provide cultural information about Ramadan and support this specific student group during prayer. She recalled receiving emails, “Why are you letting students pray? What about Catholics and Christians? Pray? I only sent out a letter to try to help build our understanding and capacity. You know, sometimes it gets back to me that the staff feels like, especially me being an African-American woman, that my agenda is only to benefit minorities and people of color. It's tough.”

Coded Language

When questioned about types of resistance encountered by stakeholders, participants were able to articulate types of coded language being used as arguments against change. Coded language allows racist views to be expressed without seeming to be racist. By perpetuating racist beliefs through seeming nonracist, neutral, and “common sense” language, privilege and the status quo is engaged and reproduced (Bush 2004). For instance, Dr. Manuel reflected on one conversation with a white parent. He stated, “I remember one of our science teachers was speaking about George Floyd, and I got a call saying that I needed to stop all of this in the classroom. I said, ‘sir, I’m going to look into it.’ You know he goes, ‘sure you will.’ You put that conversation on paper, you might not think that very racist, but hearing it, it was.” Principal Douglas spoke about an incident where a student was performing some racially inappropriate acts. When she met with the father, he told her they were just words and that she could call him “honky”, and the students were just being over-sensitive. This is important because one of the ways coded language works is that it operates by concealing the power, privilege, and oppression that it perpetuates. Dr. Beltran spoke about this when he received emails about the classroom pedagogy in their new Ethnic Studies elective class. “I started receiving some emails from a concerned group of parents, you know, about the ‘the impact’ the lessons were having on society

and their kids. I knew what they really meant. Then, our Young Republican Club started meeting regularly, and their rhetoric was growing. I started to notice an uptick in racially motivated vandalism on campus as well." Dr. Dorsett pointed out that talking with staff and parents can be touchy, especially when you talk about race. It's a hard challenge to help people find more situational awareness and move away from colorblind perspectives. He stated, "it's a hard challenge to move people from their default of colorblindness, where they can hide their discomfort, to color consciousness."

Strategies to Overcome Stakeholder Resistance to Social Justice Leadership

Public schools are among the few social institutions bringing staff and students together across racial, ethnic, and social-class lines for shared learning and mutual understanding. Ultimately, it is the principal who must develop participatory and deeply caring approaches that will lead teachers, staff, and the community to truly change educational practices. Leading for social justice and equity is in many ways dependent on deepening empathetic responses among the stakeholders a principal serves. The five participants in this study clearly identified relationships, communication, and student voice as seminal strategies for overcoming stakeholder opposition.

Relationships

The literature on social justice leadership has acknowledged the importance of building and maintaining relationships when moving forward with socially just change to maintain trust. All five participants echoed this point as a key strategy to mitigate resistance from stakeholders. Dr. Manuel stated, "It is about relationships. Your best move as a leader is to affirm what you are hearing, to say, I appreciate your opinion, so that they feel heard. Even though I might disagree and even feel offended, I have to welcome the conversation." Dr. Manuel said he literally

responds to upset stakeholders with, ``My door is always open.” He went on to talk about the importance of listening to create some neutral and common ground.

Dr. Beltran echoed this same sentiment about the importance of relationships. He pointed out, “Teaching and parenting are very emotional and sacred practices for individuals. I think being perceived as blind to that context will not help with an outcome. My goal is to listen and understand. I mean, if I were just to sit there and preach to them, it's not going to get the outcome I want. It's not going to do any good if I'm on a soapbox.” Principal Douglas also spoke on this subject: “A lot of the time, it comes down to relationships. I have to make sure they feel heard and valued; it has to be my number one go-to. You know, I may strongly not believe the way they believe, but I can't push on them too much because I can’t be effective if they think I'm against them. Especially as a Black female, I need to stay positive, be courteous to people, and not be combative. I really have to lean on the relationship piece and create common ground.”

Dr. Dorsett surfaced the importance of relationships in overcoming resistance from stakeholders. He stated, “As a principal with a passion for social justice, it comes out in a natural way of advocating for students. This can be both formal and informal in nature. I am always talking to teachers about topics important to them and our students, trying to build that confidence and trust. You know it's easier to teach someone when you can reach someone. It's about making that connection with someone.”

Principal Bridges put the importance of relationships into perspective in this manner; ”I really believe that being available and having personal connections with staff is hugely important. So, if we have to have a courageous conversation, the connection has already been made; you already have common ground to work from even if there is disagreement.” She went on to discuss the importance of being at all different events on campus to get that personal

interaction with folks. She believes this action shows that she cares about the students, not just their education, but about them as people too.

Move Slow to Move Fast

Participants also delineated trust as an important aspect of relationships, especially in utilizing the strategy of "moving slow to move fast." Principal Douglas asserted, "It's a delicate balance you're walking to try to break down barriers but also keep your job, your livelihood for your family. You are trying to do good work, but you can't push too hard. You can't push it on them. They have to come to it themselves. It takes time." Dr. Dorsett echoed this statement. He reflected, "From a leadership standpoint, change is time-consuming. You have to take a long-run perspective on it. Change is difficult and such a gradual process, especially when you are trying to change a mindset." Dr. Beltran puts it this way: "I have to be very strategic in engineering environments where students succeed incrementally, you know. I want their success to reinforce what we are trying to do overall. It's a tightrope that a principal walk, you know. I think the lesson I have learned over the years is that it's OK to be incremental. I think the twenty-three-year-old me would be disappointed with the forty-seven-year-old me, with how deliberate and slow I am in fighting for what is right. I wanna stay in the fight."

Principal Bridges also expressed the importance of a sustained effort. "Standing up for students takes time and practice. People need continuous reminding and practice. We just need to continue the work." Dr. Manuel sees it as broadening the work outward but reducing the speed of change. He stated, "I like to use the phrase, go slow to go fast. It helps people feel like they are in control. They feel like we are being methodical and thoughtful, but yeah, we are still gonna talk about it. We go slow to go fast, and it will be OK." He warned that relationships can be

exhausting and that it's a lot of work to make others feel better about themselves so the work can move forward.

Communication

Participants identified consistent and careful communication as a key strategy to mitigate stakeholder resistance to their social justice leadership. Dr. Beltran stressed, “I need to act consistently with my integrity and ethics. You know, if I come across as overly defensive, this will be interpreted as levels of culpability or guilt in some way. It shouldn't, but it's just kinda what happens. I really need to come from a place of advocacy and love for our students.” Ms. Douglas stressed, "I think I just need to communicate as much as possible and put it out there that we are working for the best interest of all of our students. I always try to explain the reason behind things. If I am doing what I think is in the best interest of our students, then I know, even if it gets ugly, it's harder for them to spread negativity.”

Ms. Bridges spoke of communicating consistently in terms of systems. “We have communication systems, and, you know, we talk about how we communicate in these systems. Everything from communication protocols and how that looks all the way down the line. We really try to have those systems in place, which really helps with challenges that arise. Also, keep it consistent. I send out a weekly communication to my community and a separate one to staff with pictures and text about where I have been during the week, what I have done, and what I saw.” Dr. Manuel is adamant in his commitment to consistency. He asserted, “You have to be consistent. If you are going to pursue anything related to race, ethnicity, and gender, you have to be consistent in your language. So, it is really a strategy to be consistent. Otherwise, they will turn your language around on you.”

Dr. Dorsett emphasized the need for transparency and open communication. He asserted, “You have to take the time to vet issues with your community. I find that most people can be reasonable when they feel heard, and we do a good job of explaining what and why we are doing something with our resources to create better opportunities for all of our students.”

Inquiry-Based Questioning

In conversation with participants, inquiry-based questioning surfaced as a strategy to help stakeholders make their own connections. Questioning helps stakeholders engage in thinking and gain a deeper understanding of a topic of their own volition. Ms. Douglas expressed, “Instead of pushing something on them, I ask questions about how they feel about it, or what they believe about it. I have to let their voices be heard in the room.” Dr. Beltran reflected, “Often, I start with a rhetorical question and let that lead to conversation. I also like to lead with the question, what would you do for your own children? This type of vision keeps the doors open.”

Dr. Manuel approaches questioning along the same lines. “My strategy is just to ask inquiry-based questions. This is probably the best strategy not to cause a defensive reaction. Instead of saying, why isn’t this in Spanish? You can say something like; I wonder if our parents would benefit from this being in Spanish? Then it becomes about the process, not the person. I don't scream or yell. I just ask questions. It's a good way to create some space and let it simmer until the rubber band snaps back.”

Dr. Dorsett insisted, “Oftentimes, you need to ask questions. What is it like to be an English Language Learner? Build empathy through questioning exercises. I like to ask teachers about their relationships with their students. Get into that heart space and surface the faces and emotions behind the names.”

Student Voice

When questioned about effective strategies to mitigate stakeholder resistance to social justice leadership, participants detailed the significance of student voice. Ms. Bridges explained, "I think hearing from students is the main thing because a lot of times teachers don't even realize the impact they can have on students. It's so impactful when students talk directly about things that have impacted their life. We have done some student forums, and we are moving towards empathy interviews with students too." Empathy interviews are typically conversations that use open-ended questions to elicit stories about specific experiences that help uncover unacknowledged needs. Ms. Douglas reflected, "We've done empathy interviews this past year. I need to create opportunities to include more students with different cultural observations, you know, and different cultural backgrounds." She went on to speak deeply about her belief in the power of a student's voice as a strategy to overcome resistance. She stated:

> I think it has been key for us so far and has had the highest impact, you know, collecting students' voices. When students have the opportunity to talk about their experience specifically at our school site, the teachers hear that because those are their students. There is ownership of that experience; there's interest and buy-in that can be immediate. One powerful example is we went through all the logistics, got permission, and made a video. There were some open-ended questions that were answered by our students of color. It was extremely impactful.

Dr. Manuel spoke about the importance of student voice in the slow change process with staff. He said, "We start talking about the story of our students, and then we start to decide, wow, what must it be like to be an English language learner here? I wonder if they have any books at home? We start getting to that human level. I followed up with a video of the state of the school where I had students interviewed. They spoke about the state of their city, family, and lives. Then I just keep broadening and inviting more people into the conversation." Dr. Beltran reflected on the importance of student voice driving change. He recalled a student grassroots movement that

stood up to speak against certain labels of privilege. Students believed that certain signifiers of privilege, like only some small groups of students having access to unique graduation gown colors, was a divisive issue on campus. Dr. Beltran stated, “A group of exceptional students, who were not in a specific program at the site because they had other passions and interests, could not wear a certain exclusive gown at graduation. I mean, these are students with 4.6 GPAs going to Stanford. Their voice got the faculty advisory committee to be one hundred percent on board with making a substantive change in direction.”

Similarly, Dr. Dorsett found high value in utilizing students' voices as a strategy to counter stakeholder resistance:

> It is powerful to ask marginalized students how they feel and why they feel that way. It's important that kids aren’t just a number, that there is a reason why they might not be performing. This is what will move a teacher more than any quantitative data. It's an empathy-based approach. When I show the parents or teachers the story behind a lot of these kids, I think that is where we see the biggest impact. It's probably my biggest go-to, you know. I find a lot of inspiration in student voices. I may be saying the same thing, but if they hear it from a student, it just matters more.

However, Ms. Douglas and Ms. Bridges signaled a warning regarding utilizing student voice in a socially just change process. They both pointed to the need to keep students safe. Ms. Bridges cautioned, “After I shared some of the student's voices with staff, some went out and pulled random African-American students and asked them about what they thought about having met with us and why they felt the way they did. So, moving forward, I have to make sure that it's a safe place for our students because that can cause adverse effects on our students. So that is a challenge.” Principal Bridges warned, “It's so impactful when teachers hear from students, but we have to be careful. We don't want students to feel uncomfortable sharing their concerns and

experiences for fear of retaliation from teachers or anyone on campus. We are still trying to figure out how to do this effectively."

Conclusion

This chapter contains the findings from five semi-structured interviews designed to elicit the participant's perceptions of their social justice leadership and the resistance they encounter from stakeholders when implementing socially just change. This study was informed by a social justice leadership conceptual framework that was meant to unpack the practices and dispositions of principals who face resistance while working to create greater freedom, opportunity, and justice for all students. The process of data analysis sought to answer the research questions posed by this study and to highlight the lived experiences of the participants. The data were coded manually and organized into themes. The themes illuminated in this chapter were: social justice training and allyship, deficit thinking, coded language, personal attacks, relationships, communication, and student voice. Together, these themes paint a picture of the difficult work principals face when leading socially just change in K-12 schools, the resistance they encounter from stakeholders, and the strategies they utilize to overcome opposition.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of K-12 principals who encounter resistance to their social justice leadership and to explore the strategies they employ to overcome opposition. Deep-seated barriers make it difficult for districts, schools, and especially site principals to effectively implement social justice practices in the service of equity and inclusion. However, it is precisely the site principal who is essential to any effort in achieving socially just change in schools (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Payne & Smith, 2018). Social justice leadership in education is located at the intersection of leadership and social justice work. Often, leadership and social justice initiatives operate in silos instead of being united, whereas social justice leadership in education unifies the narratives of leadership and social justice work (Chunno & Guthrie, 2018). Therefore, developing a stronger awareness of how principals successfully overcome stakeholder resistance will, in turn, strengthen their ability to lead socially just change initiatives in K-12 schools.

The research questions for this study focused on three central themes: types of social justice leadership training principals have experienced, types of resistance principals have encountered in their social justice leadership, and strategies that have been successfully employed to overcome opposition. The first question was designed to establish the extent of social justice training at the credential and county, and district levels. The second question explored the most prevalent type of stakeholder resistance currently encountered by principals. Finally, the third question aimed to discern key strategies principals utilize to overcome opposition to their social justice leadership. Taken as a whole, these questions aspire to tell the

story of difficulties principals face as leaders of social justice and, consequently, the approaches and tactical moves they make to mitigate resistance.

Qualitative studies strive to describe and interpret the experiences and reactions of participants to events from their individual perspectives (Frankel et al., 2012; Rudestam, 2015). This qualitative study utilized a social justice leadership lens to initiate, organize, and develop concepts central to socially just leadership in K12 education, namely, the importance of a principal's leadership voice and stance and the approaches they take to create and sustain change on behalf of traditionally marginalized students. This qualitative approach was designed to help build an understanding of how principals are making sense and meaning of their SJL experiences. This included non-numerical data, such as interviews, interview transcripts, observation memos, notes, audio recordings, as well as any associated documents (Emerson et al., 2011). This process empowered the five principals in this study to articulate their lived experiences in a rich and nuanced manner. This allowed for a strong understanding of the commonalities delineated from their individual journeys.

The data collection and analysis process included semi-structured interviews and several rounds of coding. Coded data were grouped and organized by emergent codes and themes based on the research questions associated with social justice leadership (social justice training, types of stakeholder resistance, leadership actions, and strategies and disposition to overcome resistance). (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Maxwell, 2013; Rudestam, 2015). This process was important because it allowed for identifying recurrent language and concepts associated with social justice leadership.

Discussion of Findings

Principals have substantial influence over the priorities of a school. This includes professional development decisions to achieve a more just and inclusive educational setting for all students. With this in mind, the Wallace Foundation commissioned a systematic synthesis of research over the past two decades, which identified the need for renewed attention to cultivating, preparing, and supporting a high-quality principal workforce. This included an emphasis on orienting principals towards social justice leadership and educational equity (Grissom et al., 2021).

As the diversity of the K-12 student population grows, so does the need for new leadership approaches so principals can address the deep-seated opportunity gaps entrenched for traditionally marginalized students. Social justice leadership offers one such approach. Though SJL has a wide scope of inquiry, there is a broad consensus that *SJL* focuses on eliminating marginalization in schools, which includes challenging race, disability, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other emerging conditions limiting students (King & Travers, 2017; Shields, 2014).

All five principals in this study expressed a deep commitment to creating more equitable and inclusive schools for all of their students. However, this goal is not easily achieved, and the path to change is fraught with obstacles. Several themes emerged from this study that illuminated these challenges. They include the need for adequate social justice leadership training, the veracity of overt and covert stakeholder resistance, and the need for effective strategies to overcome opposition.

Social Justice Leadership Training and Allyship

All participants in this study expressed a continued need for training to build their own capacity and confidence to lead for socially just change. Cursory or minimal training in social justice leadership was described by participants. Principal Bridges said, “My Master’ in Administration was over fifteen years ago. I'm sure there were discussions including all students, but I don't recall any specific training that addressed social justice or social justice in K-12 education.” In fact, all participants completed their administrative credentialing programs over a decade ago or longer, where they predominantly focused on administrative skills. This is consistent with the current research that details how many social-justice-oriented principals are self-taught and have attended leadership programs where limited time was given to social justice learning (Brown, 2004; Jean-Marie et al.; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014, Wang, 2016). Therefore, it is vital that leadership programs incorporate meaningful social justice leadership training into their programs as there is a new generation of aspiring administrators who will need the theoretical knowledge base and practical skills to implement needed culturally responsive teaching and learning.

In their current leadership roles, participants expressed the importance of county and district-level support for their everyday equity and inclusion work. Dr. Manuel summed his experience as follows: “I’ve been trained by the County Office of Education in restorative justice, training related to LGBTQ inclusivity, and English language learners' access to the curriculum and their education. All of those things, you know, are really around the idea of social justice and how I can successfully bring those ideas back to my site.” Principal Douglas reinforced this idea when she reflected on her district's recent change of course. “Last year, we began some identity work as a district. We then moved into building equity teams at each site,

including my own. I've received support at the district level on this, which has been really helpful."

This demonstrates that central leadership at the county and district level can significantly support principals to lead for social justice. Through substantial engagement, central offices can truly help principals build their capacity to lead change efforts for equity and inclusion, as evidenced by the participants in this study. However, this type of central office transformation is currently spotty at best and oftentimes unavailable to all principals leading for social justice.

On the other hand, principals can seek other like-minded leaders to help support their work. All five participants expressed the need and the benefit of allyship in their struggles to build more inclusive schools. According to the Anti Oppressive Network, allyship is not an identity; it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. In essence, it is advocating and actively working to include marginalized groups. Oftentimes, allyship can benefit from strategic partnerships as well. Dr. Dorsett explained, "I think you find allies. You find allies that really appreciate and understand the situation. There are parent groups that can really advocate with and for you, and you need those other voices for impact." This sentiment is supported in the literature as well. Finding like-minded leaders to create social networks with mentor principals or community partners also engaged in social justice work can bolster a principal's social justice leadership position. Developing supportive networks provide principals with opportunities to share ideas with emotional support, encouragement, and with assistance in problem-solving for change (Rigby &Treadway, 2015; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Many principals have had limited opportunities to cross school boundaries and form bonds, allyship, and critical relationships with their surrounding communities. However, the rise of social media options like Twitter, Facebook,

and even educational blogs and online conferences are changing the connectivity landscape for principals who seek new forms of social justice leadership support and allyship. Principal Bridges stated, “You know I’ve been to the county Equity conference and, more recently, a Pride conference and met some great leaders I now follow through social media. They are so inspiring.”

Types of Staff and Community Resistance to Social Justice Leadership

All five principals described meeting resistance from stakeholders regarding their social justice leadership, and four out of five communicated instances of intense opposition. This common experience is supported in the literature. Principals who utilize their social justice leadership SJL to lead change are not unilaterally accepted or desired among stakeholders. In fact, SJL research details many overt and covert methods of resistance and opposition to social justice reforms (Picower, 2009; Matias et al., 2014; Macdonald, 2020). The findings in this study indicate that deficit thinking, coded language, and personal attacks were the most common forms of resistance utilized by stakeholders to resist socially just change.

Stakeholders with deficit thinking tended to believe that a student’s academic struggles were due to their inherent deficiencies: lack of experience in schooling, poor English proficiency, motivation to learn, inferior intellectual ability, and parents who do not value education. This often manifests itself in low expectations for traditionally marginalized students. Dr. Manuel reflected, “I often hear comments like, ‘not everyone needs to go to college,’ or ‘their parents don’t care,’ even, ‘the apple doesn't fall far from the tree with those kids’.” Accordingly, stakeholder professional development prioritizing social justice leadership can help a school community build its capacity for inclusive practices and counter deficit thinking (Kowalchuk, 2019). Professional development should provide opportunities for stakeholder exposure to

terminology and literature on equity and inclusion. This would also include creating a common language and safe space around re-examining stakeholder beliefs and practices. For principals to create the conditions necessary for social justice work in their schools, they will need to focus substantial energy on capacity building at all levels of their schools.

When questioned about types of resistance encountered by stakeholders, participants could also articulate types of coded language used to oppose change. Coded language allows racist views to be expressed without seeming to be racist. By perpetuating racist beliefs through seeming nonracist, neutral, and "common sense" language, privilege and the status quo is engaged and reproduced (Bush, 2004). Principal Douglas spoke about an incident where a student was performing some racially inappropriate acts. When meeting with the father, he said they were just words and that she could call him "honky", and the students were just being over-sensitive. This type of coded language is important to surface because one of the ways such coded language works is that it operates by concealing the power, privilege, and oppression that it perpetuates. Training principals to identify and address these subtle signals of racism is an important strategy to disrupt the narratives perpetuated by dominant ideologies.

Personal attacks were another common form of resistance experienced by participants in this study. From inflammatory emails to hateful Facebook and Twitter posts that often questioned the principal motives, personal attacks were a common denominator. All five principals experienced "baiting" techniques used against them by staff and the community to try and elicit a response they might regret. False accusations were one common type of baiting technique principals experienced that were deployed to trip them up. Like any kind of bait, false accusations are intended to get a reaction. Baiting relies on initiating or eliciting instinctive tendencies in the target to get them to respond defensively. Principal Douglas recalled, "I've

been yelled at and screamed at, you know. I just can't be combative, especially me, right? They are trying to get me to be that stereotype of the angry black woman so they can use it against me."

Similarly, Dr. Beltran stated, "There was extreme hostility and resistance towards me in the form of speculation and insinuation, seeing if anything they threw out would stick and if I would respond in a way they could use against me." In this sense, social justice leadership can function as a moral mindset, spurring principals to align their personal and professional values so they can withstand personal attacks. Principals must cultivate the values, perspective, and the critical reasoning imperative to combat policies, programs, and stakeholder resistance continuing to cause harm to marginalized students. A strong social justice leadership stance can provide the groundwork for creating the moral mindset and dispositions needed to successfully withstand personal attacks. Dr. Beltran asserted, "I really developed my mentality working with students in South Central Los Angeles in one of the lowest performing schools in the state. Those students faced so many obstacles, but they kept coming to school; they kept trying. So, I come from a place of advocacy and love for students. I owe them high expectations."

Strategies Used to Overcome Stakeholder Resistance to Social Justice Leadership

The literature on social justice leadership is clear that more research is needed to understand how principals work with their stakeholders to address race and the challenges and opposition that come with it. Though social justice leadership is a burgeoning academic field of study, there are gaps in the literature when it comes to understanding the experiences of principals overcoming stakeholder resistance and opposition (Boske et al., 2017; Dematthews, 2016; Kowalchuk, 2019; McMahon, 2007; Payne & Smith, 2018; Matias et al., 2014; Rivera & McCutcheon, 2014; Ryan, 2003; Swanson & Welton, 2019; Walker et al.; 2011; Winburn et al.,

2020). This study addresses this gap and explores how principals successfully address stakeholder resistance to social justice initiatives on a K12 campus. The five participants in this study clearly identified relationships, communication, and student voice as seminal strategies for overcoming stakeholder opposition.

Relationships

Building relationships among diverse groups of stakeholders was an essential strategy repeated by all five principals in this study. Principal Bridges put the importance of relationships into perspective: “I really believe that being available and having personal connections with staff and my community is hugely important. So, if we have to have a courageous conversation, the connection has already been made; you already have common ground to work from even if there is disagreement.” She went on to discuss the importance of being at all different events on campus to get that personal interaction with stakeholders. She believes this shows that she cares about the students she serves; not just based on their education or grades, but more holistically, more deeply as people. This focus on relationships demonstrates a key understanding of how current principals overcome resistance. They are present and interacting with the people they serve to cultivate levels of trust.

The literature points out that principals often struggle to make sense of how to keep the delicate balance of maintaining trusting relationships while still expanding stakeholder thinking around issues of race and social justice (Gorski, 2015; Swanson &Welton, 2019; Walker et al., 2011). Principal Douglas spoke to this very point when she discussed the importance of relationship building. “A lot of the time, it comes down to relationships. I have to make sure stakeholders feel heard and valued; it has to be my number one go-to. You know, I may strongly

not believe the way they believe, but I can't push on them too much because I can't be effective if they think I'm against them."

All five principals identified trust as a component of cultivating relationships to mitigate opposition. The central strategy for building trust was "going slow to move fast." It is a delicate balance that principals must walk to try to break down barriers but also keep the trust of the people they are leading. All five principals expressed that they are trying to do good work, but they cannot push too hard or just shove their social justice goals on their staff and community. Rather, they need to slowly bring their stakeholders along so they can come to new and more inclusive ways of thinking and acting on their own terms. However, this takes a long time. Dr. Dorsett put it this way. "From a leadership standpoint, change is time-consuming. You have to take a long-run perspective on it. Change is difficult and such a gradual process, especially when you are trying to change a mindset while still maintaining trust." Therefore, principals must afford their community the time and space to process their responses to socially just change. This reflective work cannot be rushed because changing the mindset and deeply held beliefs of others takes time, effort, and continual reinforcement.

Communication

Participants identified consistent and careful communication as a critical strategy to mitigate stakeholder resistance to their social justice leadership. Principal Bridges shared that she really works to keep her messaging consistent. She sends out a weekly newsletter to the community and a separate one to the staff. These communications include pictures and text concerning key issues happening during the week and important talking points so that all stakeholders are hearing consistent and steady messaging. Dr. Dorsett emphasized the need for transparency and open communication. He asserted, "You have to take the time to vet issues with

your community. I find that most people can be reasonable when they feel heard, and we do a good job of explaining what and why we are doing something."

All five participants identified using inquiry-based questioning as a primary communication strategy as well. Inquiry based-questioning allows stakeholders to make their own connections, and engage in thinking to gain a deeper understanding of a topic of their own volition. Dr. Beltran reflected, "Often, I start with a rhetorical question and let that lead to conversation. I also like to lead with the question, what would you do for your own children? This type of vision keeps the doors open." This inquiry-based questioning approach is a pivotal strategy for principals because a social justice leader needs to model a change process that allows people to grow and develop at their own pace. This type of reflective work cannot be rushed because raising the awareness of others takes time. Working on changing people's responses to equity and inclusion literally requires individual transformation, which is slow and methodical work.

Student Voice

When questioned about effective strategies to mitigate stakeholder resistance to social justice leadership, participants emphasized the significance of student voice. All five principals pinpointed how powerful it is to ask marginalized students how they feel and why they feel that way. Student voice is an important strategy that shows a student is not just a number and that there is a reason why the student might be struggling. It is an empathy-based approach that will move a teacher more than any quantitative data. This idea is supported in the literature that details how principals who incorporate student voices to build empathy into their practices can bolster and sustain their social justice leadership in profound ways (Winburn et al., 2020). An ethic of empathy is a caring and respectful, no-fault understanding and appreciation of someone

else's experience. Dr. Dorsett emphasized, “When I show the parents or teachers the story behind a lot of these kids, I think that is where we see the biggest impact. It's probably my biggest go-to, you know. There is a lot of inspiration in student voices.” Principal Bridges has found that hearing from students is the main thing that can lead to real change. She stated, “It's so impactful when students talk directly about things that have impacted their lives. We have done some student forums, and we are moving towards empathy interviews with students too.” Leading for social justice and equity is dependent, in many ways, on strategies that deepen empathetic responses among the communities’ principals serve. Student voice is a practice and strategy principals can utilize to foster radical new change possibilities for their traditionally marginalized students. However, Principal Bridges reminds us that we need to keep in mind the psychological safety of students when engaging them in transforming stakeholder perspectives. She cautions that even though it is very impactful when teachers hear from students, we have to be careful. It is imperative that students do not feel uncomfortable sharing their concerns and experiences for fear of retaliation from teachers or anyone on campus or the community. Student voice is a powerful strategy for overcoming opposition, but educators must always prioritize student safety.

Implications for Social Justice

Educational injustices can have lasting and life-changing consequences for those who encounter them. Therefore, principals who utilize social justice leadership approaches and practices can have a profound impact on creating inclusive school cultures that meet all students’ needs, not just the privileged few. Due to institutional racism and systemic barriers to change, schools can be damaging places for both students and stakeholders because of the reproduction of inequalities inherent in educational systems. School leaders must not take a passive role in the educational reproduction of inequality. With this in mind, the principal is uniquely positioned to

support school-level reform on behalf of marginalized students. Research suggests that unless prompted by the principal, implementation of social justice initiatives can fall victim to becoming fragmented at best and possibly not enacted upon at all (Khalifa et al., 2016).

The principal is the most recognized leadership position at a K-12 school and is the most knowledgeable about the resources available to address change. A principal's social justice leadership stance provides the groundwork for creating the values and dispositions that can lead to more equitable outcomes in schools. (Brown, 2004; Dantley and Tillman, 2009; Jean-Marie, 2009; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsay, 2014; Mckenzie et al., 2008; Rivera-McCutcheon, 2014). Therefore, the principalship can profoundly influence socially just change on a school campus. From school climate to school structures, to teacher professional development, to community outreach, to student outcomes, the principal can change the static and deficit-based narratives perpetuated in schools. Principals can successfully reduce disadvantaged contexts by bringing to the surface the circumstances of inequality and working on transforming the staff and community's social justice mindset.

Accordingly, through the principal's position, social justice leadership and educational leadership must be fundamentally intertwined. Every principal's challenge is prioritizing social justice leadership practices that address the pragmatic concerns of running a school while acting upon the complex challenges of class, poverty, oppression, prejudice, and racism that detrimentally affect many of our student populations (Capper et al., 2006; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Kowalchuk, 2019). Social justice leadership is vital for developing site-based advocacy and the policies and practices for addressing the underlying causes of achievement and opportunity gaps perpetuated by institutional racism and other systemic barriers to change in K-12 schools.

Implications for Educational Leadership

Alternative leadership orientations have been developing in response to opportunity gaps that marginalized students continue to endure. SJL is one emerging approach that shows promise for principals who meaningfully address equity and inclusion gaps in their schools. Effective school principals are the connective tissue to school reform. They have substantial influence over teaching and learning, budgets, curriculum, professional development, site priorities, and hiring, and equity and inclusion initiatives (Ishimaru, 2013; Kim, 2018; Kose, 2009; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Payne & Smith, 2018; Rigby and Tredway, 2015; Wang, 2016; Wassell, 2019). In this sense, principals become the lead advocates for traditionally marginalized students. They must use their position to build a critical consciousness within stakeholder groups around institutional and systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. By helping the school community reflect on their own educational beliefs, principals can develop stakeholders as an essential resource in rethinking the school status quo. Principal Douglas spoke about this slow process. "Remember, you are trying to do good work, but you can't push too hard. You can't push it on them. They have to come to it themselves. It takes time." Dr. Dorsett echoed this statement. He reflected, "From a leadership standpoint, change is time-consuming. You have to take a long-run perspective on it. Change is difficult for people, and such a gradual process, especially when you are trying to change a mindset."

For principals to effectively accomplish this goal, they need continual social justice leadership training. Preparing leaders for social justice work has become a significant concern at all educational levels because many current K12 principals have limited social justice training (Brown, 2004; Furman & Shields, 2004; Jean-Marie, 2008; Larsen & Murtadha, 2002). Such training should start at the credentialing level, where leading for social justice must be embedded

in the program as a whole and not as a singleton class or a 'check the box' offering. Social justice leadership training also needs to occur at the county and district levels. Principal Douglas pointed out, "My district partnered with the County Office of Education to help us learn how to form equity teams on campus made up of teachers, counselors, classified staff, and admin. This included training regularly led by county experts." All participants expressed that having access to trained professionals was crucial to improving their learning, thereby improving their ability to lead for socially just change.

Training should also include strategies to overcome stakeholder opposition as well. Though a full menu of prudent strategies should be available for principals, the five participants in this study clearly identified building relationships, maintaining clear communication, and highlighting student voices as seminal leadership strategies for overcoming stakeholder opposition. These three strategies were effective when addressing stakeholder resistance in the form of deficit thinking, coded language, and personal attacks.

In essence, principals who utilize a social justice leadership lens can dramatically impact all leadership decisions at the site level. However, they need continual training to do so effectively. Through applying social justice leadership practices and strategies, principals can better serve their traditionally marginalized student populations and prune back opportunity gaps deeply rooted in our K-12 educational system.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the lived experience of K-12 principals who face resistance to their social justice initiatives and explore how they navigate opposition. Further research should be conducted to analyze the gaps in how current educational credential programs address social justice leadership preparation. Several studies

have identified a new generation of aspiring administrators who will need the theoretical knowledge base and practical skills to implement needed culturally responsive teaching and learning (Capper et al., 2006; Congo-Poottaren, 2014; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Mckenzie & Scheurich, 2008; Miller & Martin, 2014; Shoho et al., 2011). Future studies could address what a high-quality social justice-centered credential program looks like and the corresponding skills and strategies needed to be taught in such a program. Studies could also explore how counties and districts are taking the initiative to train their educational leaders in social justice leadership as well.

A principal's social justice leadership is often met with substantial resistance. Stakeholder opposition can range from the subtle to the most blatant forms of entrenchment (Gorski, 2015; Picower, 2009; Swanson &Welton, 2019; Walker et al., 2006). Therefore, principals must be prepared to counter a complex myriad of aversion tactics. This study looked at the type of resistance encountered by principals to their social justice leadership and the strategies they employed to overcome opposition. Though the participants in this study clearly delineated relationships, communication, and student voice as three indispensable strategies to overcome stakeholder opposition, more research is needed in the area of allyship, particularly how principals form allies and social networks to support their social justice leadership in the face of opposition. Developing supportive networks may provide educational leaders with opportunities to share ideas, obtain emotional support and encouragement, and gain assistance in problem-solving for socially just change (Rigby &Tredway, 2015; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Many school principals have had limited opportunities to cross school boundaries and form bonds and critical relationships with their surrounding communities. Therefore, more research in this area

would build an understanding of how to sustain supportive social networks that promote learning from peers' experiences.

Conclusion

Social justice leadership work on behalf of marginalized students is complex, varied, and frequently contested and resisted (Marshal & Oliva, 2017). Therefore, it is vital principals have access to proven strategies to overcome such opposition. In this study, participants identified relationships, communication, and student voice as three essential strategies for overcoming stakeholder resistance to social just change in k-12 schools. These three strategies are crucial for developing a community of empathy and care for those engaged in the tough work of dismantling barriers to change. Principals need to move their staff and schools beyond mere awareness of marginalized students and into real transformative actions and practices. The strategies detailed above will help equip principals to more effectively counter efforts that seek to maintain and validate dominant ideologies in opposition to more equitable and inclusive schools.

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

Participant Solicitation Email

Social Justice Leadership and Principalship

Dear Principal (*Fill in name here*),

My name is Greg Smedley, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership in the School of Education at California State University San Marcos and the University of California, San Diego.

Your name was shared with me by (*Fill in name here*) who believes you fit the criteria for the five principals I hope to interview for my research. You are invited to participate in a research study to understand better the resistance principals face to their social justice leadership and the strategies they employ to overcome this opposition.

If you choose to participate in this study, I will interview you twice over a two to three-month period. Each interview will last one hour over the Zoom platform and will be in a conversational style. During the interview, you will be asked to describe your social justice leadership experiences. I am particularly interested in your experience with resistant stakeholders and the strategies you use to overcome that opposition.

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study, and your identifying information will remain confidential. You will be given a very detailed description of risks and safeguards should you elect to participate. Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty. You will not receive payment for taking part in this study.

Should you be interested in participating, please reply to this email so I may schedule a time to meet with you and send an official information sheet about this study.

I look forward to the possibility of hearing about your leadership experiences.

Sincerely,

Greg Smedley

Doctoral Candidate

CSUSM/UCSD

Appendix B: Study Information Sheet

Social Justice Leadership and Principalship

Information Sheet

Dear Principal,

My name is Greg Smedley, and I am conducting a dissertation study that explores how k12 secondary principals experience resistance to initiatives designed to create more equitable learning environments for all students and the strategies they use to counter opposition. The purpose of this information sheet is to inform you about the study.

Why am I being invited to take part in this study?

You are being invited to participate in this study because you meet the following criteria: (1) you have four or more years of experience as a principal at a school site, (2) you have experienced stakeholder resistance to social justice initiatives, and (3) you have utilized strategies, and methods to overcome opposition. If you choose to participate, I will ask you about your experiences with social justice leadership, whether you have encountered opposition in this work, and any strategies you have used to overcome resistance.

What will I do if I agree to participate?

If you agree to participate in the study, you will take part in two interviews of approximately one hour in length each. The first interview will have set questions and the second and final interview will include a one-hour unstructured interview to revisit key ideas and themes from the initial interview. The interviews will take place via the Zoom platform and will be recorded and transcribed and kept on my personal laptop that is password secured. You will be given the opportunity to review your transcript at the end of the second interview in order to

clarify, revise or strike any of your answers to ensure accuracy and confidentiality. Your estimated total duration of time for participation is two to three hours.

What happens if I say yes, but I change my mind later?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate at any time, even after the study has started. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study, I will completely understand and will thank you for your initial consideration

What are the benefits to me of being in this study?

Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is that the knowledge gained from this study will contribute to the field of social justice leadership and help our educational leaders understand the types of resistance principals face and the strategies they used to overcome opposition in building more inclusive and just schools for all students.

What happens to the information collected for the study?

The data collected in this study will be confidential, and I am the only person who will have a record of your e-mail, which will be stored on my password-protected laptop only. At the end of data collection, your email and any communication associated with your email will be permanently deleted. At the beginning of the first interview, I will choose a pseudonym, and I will use that during the interview process and in any reporting of the data to further protect your confidentiality. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. The data will be retained for three years after the project is completed. At that time, any paper records will be shredded and all digital files will be deleted.

Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me? Is there any risk to me by being in this study? If so, how will these risks be minimized?

There are minimal risks and inconveniences to participating in this study. The inconvenience includes the two to three hours of time you will give to this study. You may also be asked questions you find to be uncomfortable regarding resistant stakeholder groups. In order to minimize these inconveniences, you can opt to skip any question(s) during both interviews and you may opt-out of the study at any time for any reason.

Risks include potential confidentiality concerns and sensitive interview questions that may be uncomfortable. To more clearly identify the safeguards that will be put in place to mitigate any risks, the following measures will be taken:

You may opt-out of any questions during either of the two interviews. This will be stated verbally before both interviews take place.

You have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. This will be stated verbally before each of the two interviews takes place and again during the member check process at the end of the second interview where you will be afforded the opportunity to review and edit your interview answers. Interview transcripts will be dropped in the chat function for confidentiality. You will be given two weeks to review and amend your transcripts. I will set up a confidential google drive folder for you and provide you with the link. That way, you can privately access your interview transcript for revisions.

All data will be stored on my password-protected laptop in a password-protected file. Your email and any email communication will be deleted directly after data collection. The remaining data will be deleted after three years. Any written or typed documents will be professionally shredded and all digital files will be deleted.

You will be informed that your identity will not be revealed at any point in this study. Your name will not be connected with the audio or Zoom recordings or on any transcripts.

Pseudonyms will be used for you and your school at the outset of data collection. Pseudonyms will be used during the interviews and there will be no record in the transcripts of your name or school name in order to ensure your identity is protected.

Your email data will be kept on the researcher's password-protected laptop in a password-protected file. This data will be deleted directly after data collection has been completed.

Member checking will function as a safeguard for potential concerns that you may have about being embarrassed or uncomfortable with any of your interview answers. You will be given the opportunity to review your interview transcript at the conclusion of the second interview. Transcripts will be dropped in the Zoom chat to ensure confidentiality and will not be sent over email. Member Checking will give you the opportunity to clarify, edit or strike any of your answers to secure accuracy and confidentiality. You will be given two weeks' time to review and amend your transcripts. I will set up a private google drive folder for you and provide you with the link. This way you can confidentially access your interview transcript for revisions.

Who should I contact for questions?

If you have questions about the study, please call me at (*add phone number)* or e-mail me at smedl002@cougars.csusm.edu. You may also contact my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Erika Daniels at *(add phone number*) or by email at edaniels@csusm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or at (*add phone number*)

PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Social Justice Leadership and Principalship

Our interview should last 60 minutes.

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Please see the information sheet form I have dropped in the chat. (Go *over the information sheet in detail and give time to review it and answer any questions).*

I am very interested in hearing about your experiences as a principal and your social justice leadership, the resistance you have faced from stakeholders, and the strategies you have employed to overcome that opposition.

If it's ok with you, I would like to audio record this interview to help ensure I can make sense of our conversation in subsequent portions of my study. You may choose to stop the interview at any time or skip a question(s). Any identifying information will be removed when discussing the interview with my advisor or dissertation committee. Pseudonyms for you and your school will be used at all times.

Date	
Time of Interview	
Location	
Participant Pseudonym	
School Pseudonym	

Demographic Information:

Number of years as a principal	
Number of years in education	

How do you identify	

Questions:

Background:

1. Tell me about your experience as a principal at your current school
2. How do you define social justice leadership?
3. How is social justice leadership important in your work as a principal?
4. Explain any educational leadership training in social justice leadership you have experienced? (For instance, in your credential program, Masters or Doctorate program? any county-level and district-level training or support for social justice leadership?)

Working with Staff:

5. How do you motivate your staff to engage in social justice change?
6. Explain any types of staff resistance to socially just change that you faced? (Tell me more about....) (What other types of resistance have you faced if any?)
7. Explain the strategies you use to overcome staff resistance to socially just change. (Tell me more about...) (what other types of strategies have you employed, if any?)

Working with Community Stakeholders:

8. Explain the types of resistance you face from your community stakeholders. (What other types of resistance have you faced if any?)
9. What groups do you find to be the most resistant? (Age, race, ethnicity?)
10. Explain the strategies you use to overcome stakeholder resistance to change. (What other strategies have you employed to meet this resistance, if any?)
11. Is there anything else you feel I should know about your experience leading socially just change?

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