



# **Developing Educational Leaders for Social Justice: Programmatic Elements that Work or Need Improvement**

Patricia L. Guerra<sup>†</sup>

*Texas State University-San Marcos*

Sarah W. Nelson

*Texas State University-San Marcos*

Jennifer Jacobs

*University of South Florida*

Erica Yamamura

*Seattle University*

In this qualitative study, Brown's (2004) tripartite theoretical framework on leadership preparation was used to explore the role programmatic elements played in development as social justice leaders within an educational leadership preparation program located in the United States. Findings from focus groups with twelve former graduate students revealed a number of programmatic elements were important in developing students' conceptions of social justice. The findings also suggest two main differences existed between White and participants of colour in the study. The first involved an affective response to programmatic elements and the second on continued leadership efforts to address inequities in schools.

## **Introduction**

Second to teaching, leadership has been documented as the next most important factor in improving student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In their meta-analysis of 30 years of research on the effects of leadership on schooling,

---

<sup>†</sup> Address for correspondence: Dr. Patricia L. Guerra, Texas State University-San Marcos, 601 University Drive, Academic Services Building South 313, San Marcos, TX 78666. Email: pg16@txstate.edu.

Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) found when leaders apply essential leadership knowledge, skills, strategies, and tools appropriately, student achievement rises. Conversely, when school leaders are ill prepared, student achievement suffers. Elmore (2003) concurs:

Knowing the right thing to do is the central problem of school improvement. Holding schools accountable for their performance depends on having people in schools with the knowledge, skill, and judgment to make the improvements that will increase student performance. (p. 9)

Given the persistent gaps in achievement, discipline, special and gifted education, and other areas many school leaders in the United States (U.S.) seemingly do not know the right thing to do for racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students. The majority of educational leaders in the U.S enter the principalship with little to no knowledge, skills and strategies to address aspects of social justice (Hawley & James, 2010; Lyman & Villani, 2002), which include diversity, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, disability, power, and privilege.

### ***One Program's Efforts***

In response to these concerns, over fifteen years ago faculty working at a university located in a southwestern state of the U.S., began the process of transforming its traditional educational administration program to an educational leadership program that prepared students to lead democratic schools where equal access and opportunity was the goal for all children (Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, (2010). The focus of courses and field experiences shifted from managing daily school operations, including student scheduling, discipline, transportation issues, fire drills, cafeteria problems, to leading schools. Teaching aspiring school leaders to oversee daily administrative tasks became secondary to helping them develop the knowledge and skills to address complex issues such as equity and access for traditionally underserved students and parents (i.e., African American and Latino). Curriculum and instruction were redesigned to provide aspiring school leaders with “strong planning, organizational, communication,

interpersonal, group process, problem-solving, and change process skills” (National Policy Board for Education, 2001, p 2).

Although the program faculty at that time did not explicitly focus on aspects of social justice leadership the all White, predominantly male faculty understood a different set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes were needed to lead increasingly diverse schools that provided equal access and opportunity to all student groups.

In 2003 the program hired the first tenure track faculty member with preparation in equity, culture, diversity, and feminism, a White female. The next year the first faculty member of colour, a Latino, with specialization in school and community leadership and engagement was hired. These two hires were followed by a Latina in 2006 whose focus was on equity and culturally responsive schooling and leadership. In 2009 the program’s name changed to the Education and Community Leadership (EDCL) program with the vision of developing school leaders with social justice knowledge, skills, and dispositions to better serve the needs of diverse schools and communities.

Over the next few years four more faculty members with social justice preparation were hired, resulting in a total of seven out of ten faculty members with this set of skills. Currently, the faculty is diverse in gender, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation, and six speak a second language. Each individual brings expertise in one or more areas, including diversity, race, culture, feminism, disability, community engagement, queer studies, and critical race theory, along with a strong commitment to social justice. The three remaining White, males, members of the original faculty who envisioned a different educational leadership program increased their knowledge of social justice over the years and incorporated it into their teaching and scholarship.

As a result of this capacity building, faculty have made and continue to make significant efforts to integrate social justice knowledge, skills, and attitudes across the curriculum, in their pedagogy, readings, instructional resources, classroom activities and assignments, and in the principal practicum (i.e., internship). A recent external accreditation team labeled the program “One of

the best in the nation for preparing equity-oriented leaders,” (Gooden, Venzant-Chambers, & Scheurich, p. 3). This paper discusses the impact of these efforts, in particular the programmatic elements instrumental in developing students’ conception of social justice and development as a social justice leader.

### ***Current Status of Leadership Preparation***

Marshall (2004) contends traditional leadership preparation “provides only isolated stabs at inequities or see them as management challenges” (p. 4). But even preparation programs identified as “exceptional or innovative” give significantly less attention than expected to issues of “social justice, equity, excellence, and equality” (Jackson, 2001, p. 18). Lyman and Villani (2002), in their national study of 279 educational leadership programs, found only 20% emphasized social justice. These researchers report their results might have been different if more than one aspect of social justice (i.e., poverty), had been included in their survey.

A study conducted eight years later by Hawley and James (2010), however, suggested otherwise. These researchers surveyed 62 universities across the U.S. affiliated with the University Council on Educational Administration (UCEA) on “the courses, resources, and strategies they use to enable educational leaders to ensure that students of diverse races and ethnicities learn at high levels” (p.1). Even though their survey encompassed multiple aspects of social justice (e.g. race, diversity, socioeconomic status), only 18 (30%) responded. Moreover, these 18 programs reported that most diversity-related education occurs in a single course and centers on broad issues of social justice such as discrimination, inequitable school resources, poverty, and the principal’s duty to pursue social justice. From their findings, Hawley and James concluded preparation programs appear to be focusing on broader societal conditions that affect students and families while failing to provide future educational leaders with the necessary skills to address these inequities in schools.

Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker (2002) added support for this conclusion through their study of leaders in 21 schools across the country. They learned, “while diversity is given a certain degree of lip service in administrative credentialing programs, these leaders had not been prepared with tools to analyze racial or ethnic conflict, or with specific strategies for building positive interethnic communities” (p. 4). Hawley and James (2010) also found teaching social justice is often left to the discretion of individual faculty members who often lack expertise in the area. Marshall (2004) agrees and explains:

Many educational administration faculty members may not have the knowledge, materials, strategies, rationales, or skills to infuse their curriculum content (e.g., public relationship, principalship, school finance, school law, interpersonal relations, and so forth) with issues related to poverty, language minority, special needs, gender, race, and sexuality. (p. 4)

Furthermore, once on the job, most faculty receive no professional development in social justice (Bell, Washington, Weinstein, & Love, 1997). Lopez (2010) and Brown (2004), however stress while preparing faculty with knowledge and skills is important, it is not enough. Faculty must be willing to teach social justice.

The few faculty who do come to the post with social justice knowledge and skills, often do not question departmental policies, procedures and practices for fear of not being promoted by predominantly White faculty holding traditional views of leadership preparation (McCarthy & Kuh, 1997). Marshall (2004) maintains senior faculty with traditional views often tolerate social justice faculty “as long as they do not propose changing the normal activities or standards of practice” (p. 5).

### ***Preparing Social Justice Leaders***

In spite of this resistance, the literature suggests that leaders who have the ability to transform schools into equitable contexts focused on social justice are needed (Brown, 2006; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007). Student achievement, critical consciousness, cultural competence, and

inclusive schooling practices are at the heart of this leadership style (McKenzie et al. 2008). Social justice leaders:

- “advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 222);
- “counter the sorting mechanism of schools” (Villegas, 2007, p. 378) and treat diverse students, families and communities “fairly and equitably” by being responsive to their needs and not just those of the dominant group (Villegas, 2007, p. 371);
- engage in critical self-reflection to identify and understand their own sociopolitical identities (Brown, 2006; Evans, 2007; Kose, 2007; Marshall & Olivia, 2010);
- identify inequities in school policies, procedures, and practice (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; McKenzie, et al.; Villegas, 2007);
- work as change agents to eliminate them (Brown 2006; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008) while facing much resistance (Theoharis, 2007);
- promote inclusive practice and equitable access to the curriculum (McKenzie, et al.; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007) by providing teachers support in developing curriculum and instruction, which is inclusive of students and families’ perspectives and experiences (Kose, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2004); and
- challenge, deconstruct, and change staff’s negative beliefs and misperceptions about diverse students, families, and communities and in doing so, change values (Theoharis, 2007).

From this list of leadership actions, it is apparent aspiring leaders require a different set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes than those currently offered in many educational leadership preparation programs. Given that many faculty members in these programs reportedly do not have social justice knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Hawley & James, 2010; Jackson, 2001; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Marshal, 2004), how will aspiring school leaders

acquire these critical requisites in order to lead efforts to improve schooling for diverse students and families?

Scholars maintain preparation programs need to substantively change if schooling for racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students is to improve and persistent gaps eliminated (Brown, 2004; Byrne-Jimenez, 2010; Hawley and Jackson, 2010; Lopez, 2010; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002; McKenzie and et al., 2008). These scholars, along with others in the field, recommend the following changes to preparation programs:

- Develop faculty's commitment to social justice rather than giving lip service for structural changes to occur (Brown, 2004).
- Make human resource practices diversity conscious and hire more faculty of colour (Young & Brooks, 2008).
- Provide professional development in social justice to faculty (Brown 2004; Lopez 2010; Rusch, 2004) including individuals of colour, because membership in a racial or ethnic minority group does not guarantee social justice expertise (Rusch, 2004).
- Critically evaluate the program for assumptions, privilege, and power that underlie all actions and components and restructure them. Byrne-Jimenez (2010) contends systemic overhauling of the program "require[s] faculty to rethink underlying assumptions, actions and policies, roles and relationships, pedagogical approaches, and levels of preparedness that challenge current modes of operation and force faculty to answer 'why' and for 'whom'" (p. 6). Because educational leadership preparation is embedded with a privileged perspective that tends to ignore aspects of social justice (Poplin Gosetti, & Rusch, 1995), Contreras (2000) adds, "the opportunity structure that allocates privilege and power must be restructured" (p. 12) before faculty of colour with social justice expertise are perceived as change agents with authority to question programmatic policies, procedures and practices without repercussions.

*Developing educational leaders for social justice*

- Integrate social justice knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, rather than offering in a single, add on course (Brown, 2004, Hawley & James, 2010; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002).
- Move beyond teaching surface level knowledge to engage aspiring leaders at the critical or transformative level (Lopez, 2010) using a variety of instructional techniques, including inquiry based learning, case studies, life histories, films, cross-cultural interviews, cultural autobiographies, and student-to-student dialog to surface and challenge assumptions and biases, encourage reflection, and improve practice (Brown, 2004; Hawley & James, 2010; Rapp, 2002).
- Encourage reflection that identifies taken-for-granted assumptions, beliefs, and biases and their impact on others, considers multiple perspectives and different alternatives, and takes into account broader historical, social, cultural and political factors in the context that influence events and people's behavior (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Whipp, 2003). Brown (2006) reports reflection of this type increases aspiring leaders' personal awareness and understanding of diversity and improves attitudes toward it. Further, "by being actively engaged in a number of assignments requiring the examination of ontological and epistemological assumptions, values and beliefs, context and experience, and competing worldviews, adult learners are better equipped to work with and guide others in translating their perspectives, perceptions and goals into agendas for social change". (Brown, 2004 p. 87)
- Teach action research as a tool for school improvement. During this collaborative inquiry process, aspiring leaders identify an issue in the school, review literature related to the issue, collect data on the issue, analyze the data, and plan for and enact change (Glanz, 2003; Stringer, 2007). In addition to helping make theory to practice connections (Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, Meyerson, & Orr, 2010),



this form of inquiry helps aspiring leaders realize that many underlying causes of school issues are related to equity and social justice (Kemmis, 2006; Kinsler, 2010). Consequently, this inquiry can influence how aspiring leaders frame issues within the school, lead them to question the status quo and find alternative solutions for improvement (Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011).

- Encourage aspiring leaders to value and promote the development of relationships within the school (Shields, 2004) and community (Dantley, 2005; Marshall & Olivia, 2010), welcome different perspectives, and engage in sustained conversations about differences (Brown, 2006; Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwueguzie, 2009; Shields, 2004). Because social justice leaders working in the field report these relationships are critical to proactively combating resistance and sustaining the difficult work of social justice (Theoharis, 2007).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Drawing from Brown's (2004) work on leadership preparation for social justice, this study uses her tripartite theoretical framework to examine the impact of programmatic elements on aspiring leaders' development as social justice leaders. Adult Learning Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, and Critical Social Theory are "interwoven with the three pedagogical strategies of critical reflection, rational discourse, and policy praxis to increase awareness, acknowledgement, and action within preparation programs" (p. 78). Brown believes incorporating these three areas into leadership preparation are essential if aspiring leaders are to understand why and how school policies, practices and procedures value certain groups over others. Four constructs of Adult Learning Theory, self-directed learning, critical reflection, experiential learning, and learning to learn (Brookfield, 1995), inform her framework. She defines the latter construct as "adults possess a self-conscious awareness of how it is they come to know what they know—an awareness of the reasoning, assumptions,

evidence and justifications that underlie our beliefs that something is true”; an epistemological awareness (Brown 2004, p. 83).

Transformative learning changes aspiring leaders’ perspectives about themselves, others, and the environment in which they live. Specifically, when engaged in active learning (e.g., collaborative projects, simulations, discussion groups) and critical reflection, aspiring leaders learn their assumptions and expectations are culturally based and serve as the lens through which their world is interpreted (Brown, 2004).

Critical Social Theory “views people as subjects, not objects, who are constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation of their world so it can become a more equitable place for all to live” (Brown, 2004, p. 85). This theory calls for activism, recognition of the ethical and moral dimensions of providing a quality education for all children, working together with the community, and sharing power. Characterized by critical inquiry and self-reflection it “involves the examination of personal and professional belief systems, as well as the deliberate consideration of the ethical implications and effect of practices” (Brown, 2004, p. 89).

As post-structuralist researchers (Capper, 1998; Lather, 1991), we reject the notion that there is one best way to develop social justice leaders. Thus we deliberately avoid recommending an essentialized list of programmatic elements. Rather, we describe elements that our aspiring leaders reported worked for them, needed improvement or were missing. As an educational leadership program that is in a state of continuous becoming (Lather, 1991), these findings inform our future efforts and may be useful to other preparation programs in their transition to a social justice leadership program. As two White women researchers and two of colour (i.e., Mexican American and Asian American), we brought to bear on this study different lenses shaped by our racial and ethnic identities, gender, culture, age, lived experiences, and educational preparation. Additionally, two of us work as faculty where this study was conducted and two are formerly associated with it.

## **Methods**

The data for this qualitative study were part of a larger research project focused on understanding students' experiences within an educational leadership preparation program. The question guiding the findings of this paper is "What role do programmatic elements play in developing students' conceptions of social justice and development as social justice leaders?" Using purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) program faculty were asked to nominate former students who had graduated from our educational leadership program and completed an action research project focused on a social justice issue.

To guide this identification process Theoharis' (2007) definition of leadership for social justice was shared with faculty, but we stressed identifying action research projects focusing specifically on improving schooling for students of colour and their families was the goal. Since faculty had served as either the instructor of record for the action research course, supervisor of principal interns implementing action research projects, and/or member of oral panels assessing action research reports, they were very familiar with students' work and easily selected a list of 26 students. From this list, we recruited 12 former graduate students who participated in this study. The sample included two African American females, four Latinas, one Latino, four White females, and one White male.

To understand both individual and group level experience focus groups were utilized as the data collection method to elicit individual participant experiences as well as allow for dialogue and participant interaction (Krueger, 2000). To provide a "safe" and welcoming environment where participants felt comfortable discussing controversial social justice issues, which included race, culture, and discrimination, participants were divided into racially homogenous focus groups (e.g., White students and students of colour), and assigned facilitators by race (e.g., White students focus group had White facilitators). Each focus group was recorded and the dialogue was transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were first open coded and analyzed for themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) across both groups and

then by racial group (e.g., White students). Trustworthiness was supported by multiple researcher analyses and debriefing throughout the process. These debriefings included meetings to negotiate possible areas of researcher bias (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also, the researchers engaged in member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by sharing and debriefing themes with each of the participants.

## **Findings**

Five themes emerged from the data. Both racial groups identified similar programmatic elements as having “Increased Self Awareness and Conceptions of Social Justice”, however, these elements seemed to serve different purposes for each group. While programmatic elements “Provided a Means and a Voice” for participants of colour they “Created Cognitive Dissonance and Concern in White participants.” Two additional themes focused on “Personal Needs vs. Ability to Make Change” and “Collaboration and Support.”.

### ***Increased Self Awareness and Conceptions of Social Justice***

Similarities were found across the racial groups in programmatic elements that developed conceptions of social justice. Both groups reported learning about their identity in the entry level course, Understanding Self, reading literature highlighting inequities in schooling, multiple exposure to equity-related issues by different professors, participating in tough classroom conversations where their deficit thinking was challenged by professors and peers, and undergoing the action research process were all elements that contributed to their understanding of social justice, created a desire to make change, and provided an approach and skills for doing so in their own schools.

### ***Provided a Means and a Voice***

However, differences were discerned in the purpose these programmatic elements served. For the majority of participants of colour, the elements reportedly made them aware of the widespread nature of inequities they already knew existed, gave them a “label” for social justice work, and helped them understand

political power for the purpose of making systemic change. Because the majority of participants of colour in this study had personally experienced institutional racism while in public school, observed its impact on siblings or classmates of colour, and/or witnessed it as a teacher, they entered the program well-aware of inequitable practices, came with a calling to change the system and in some cases, made attempts at social justice work. As one participant stated:

I have always had a deep passion in my heart to provide an opportunity for all students to be educated equally...I knew it was a bad system because I grew up in the system.

For this group, it appeared programmatic elements gave them the “means” for channeling their passion into social justice work. In other words, they came with a deep commitment to doing the work but in some cases just did not know how to put it in action. Teaching in a majority minority school another participant explained:

I was struggling a lot in the school where I was working as a fourth grade teacher and I wasn’t exactly sure why and [I think] a lot had to do with the fact that I was seeking social justice or trying to pursue that action but I really didn’t know enough to understand what were the systems that needed to be in place in order for me to mobilize different people whether they were parents, students, or teachers...I think what I didn’t understand about social action, not necessarily social justice before, social action before coming into the masters program I [now] think I have a greater understanding.

Similarly, another one reported:

I always knew that [it] was just [a] passion for me to be a big role model for Latino children and students and tell them that you can be whatever its is that you want to be because all of my life I was told no you can’t be...but I didn’t know how to do it...and that is what the program did for me...The master’s program gave me a means. I knew what I wanted to do and I knew what was important to me, but I didn’t know how to get there or I didn’t know how to implement and create change in schools until I started reading more about it and collaboratively

*Developing educational leaders for social justice*

working with groups and all the things they [the professors] did...it gave me the process to create change.

Even the two participants of colour who entered the program without this awareness reported once they realized the inequities described in the literature were the same as those observed at the schools where they worked, their passion was ignited and they became strong advocates of students and parents and changing the system. In recalling the exact moment of her epiphany, one participant recounted:

I was working at Star [pseudonym] Elementary where 85% plus were Latino children and African-American children...and then my *gañas* [desire] got bigger as far as making a difference for them and their parents for educating them...just telling them you can do it, you can do it but then I kept coming to barriers thinking, gosh! Why is it so difficult [to make change]? Reading articles about how segregation no longer exists [and seeing] yes it does! That school was segregated...They built it for the neighborhood kids because they wanted to keep all the neighborhood kids in one school. So then I began to realize that the system is doing this to the kids. Its not that they are choosing to be stuck in it...because its not...

Although upon entering the program these two participants were “blind” to systemic inequities, once exposed to programmatic elements, they no longer denied what had been evident for years and immediately concentrated their efforts on social justice.

The impact of programmatic elements on participants of colour, particularly for the Latinos in the study, appeared to eliminate self-doubts about their ability to lead. One participant explained:

I guess I had more self esteem at the end because I realized I could do this and even when I first started the program, the first class I took I think was 5339 Understanding Self, I wasn't sure this was for me. I never saw myself as a leader and so just having gone through the program and then working on that [action] research project and realizing that I was able to do it to come up with a [action] plan and make a difference I gained a lot of self esteem...

As a result of this newfound self-confidence, it appeared Latinos in the study found their “voice” and became outspoken advocates for students and parents of colour in their schools and realized this calling would be a “life long endeavor.” As one participant concluded, “I have become a lot more vocal.”

### ***Created Cognitive Dissonance and Concern***

Like the participants of colour, White participants in this study entered the program with varying degrees of awareness about school inequities, ranging from no awareness to some. Programmatic elements also increased their knowledge of social justice from creating awareness in two participants to broadening it in the other three.

The three White participants who entered the program with more awareness reported they observed and/or heard inequitable practices at the schools in which they worked and wondered about them. For example, one participant reported that as a Title One reading improvement teacher “on the very first day of school I noticed there were no White children in my classroom...I remember having that experience in my classroom and wondering why and kind of knowing all of these things.” Another participant explained that as the student population in the once “more affluent and homogenous” White school in which she worked began to change and students of colour enrolled:

The attitude of the district toward our school, the attitudes of the people at my school and whether I was a teacher or assistant principal I have been aware of these comments, perceptions well before I could even put the word social justice to it. And frustrated with the decisions people were making at a higher level that impacted our kids and our school, our teachers, and our community...

A third participant in this group stated that before entering the program she was aware “and leading the parade, thinking that everyone else in education was where I was” but was later shocked to discover that many of her peers did not share her same beliefs. She reported, once enrolled in the program:

*Developing educational leaders for social justice*

...my eyes were opened even wider as I started observing things. I had experienced here and there but I thought they were unusual, but to see more and more what was the norm it was really deeply unsettling—talk about needing counseling.

For these three participants who came with some awareness of inequities in their schools, programmatic elements shed light on how widespread the problems were and highlighted the many educators in their school and district who did not share their value of social justice. Like participants of colour, programmatic elements provided an approach and tools for challenging inequities, including the deficit beliefs of educators at their school. One participant noted:

So what grad school did, was it organized all of those ideas and gave me research and it backed me up because I would try to share these ideas with teachers and some were like “That’s crap!” and “I don’t believe that!” ...Because I knew all of this inside but I didn’t have it in an organized manner that I could fight an argument and sound educated with it, but I had all these ideas in my head or reasons why and theories so that’s what school did for me.

In reflecting about the programmatic elements that affected her conceptions of social justice, another participant added:

I guess environments [Understanding the Environment], one of the projects [the community profile and mapping], and doing the work and talking with people in all different communities about what’s going on about how their culture and experience impact who they are. And then bringing it back and I would say the majority of what changed [me] is really reading literature and the impact it has on the kids we teach and the families that come to our school and having those really rich discussions with each other and being pushed by professors to step outside what we think even though we thought we already knew it.

The two remaining White participants in the group reported that upon entering the program they did not believe inequities existed. Because they had not personally observed overt acts of intolerance such as placing “African American students in a corner” of a classroom as one participant pointed out, there was no reason to



believe the system was problematic. For this group, programmatic elements such as reading literature uncovered hidden inequities in schooling and convinced them that the problem does exist and needs addressing. As one participant explained,

I read a story about a kindergarten student and how she was treated in class instructionally and this kindergarten student was of Latin background. And the way the story was told it showed how the discrimination was built into the curriculum...That kind of blatant discrimination was not what I was seeing so there was some cognitive dissonance. But when I read this story it was a big slap in the face. It's built into the curriculum and how we talk to our kids in the classrooms and the opportunities that we give them."

Additionally, these programmatic elements taught these two participants to be concerned about social justice. As one pointed out:

It did teach me to care a lot more than I thought I would. If I think we can teach people to care then ultimately that's where it's at right?

The impact of programmatic elements appeared to be different for White participants. Learning about inequities in schools was "unsettling" for them and this cognitive dissonance led to changes in their perceptions and taught them to "care."

### ***Personal Needs vs. Ability to Make Change***

Other programmatic elements instrumental in developing participants' conceptions of social justice were reported but differed by racial group. White participants cited course sequence, challenging thinking in a "safe environment", having an intern supervisor who had expertise to deal with obstacles during implementation of their action research plan as additional programmatic elements contributing to their conceptions of social justice. In contrast participants of colour reported a focus on building relationships, culturally responsive teaching, instructional supervision, deficit thinking, social action, and challenging policy, oral histories, reflection on beliefs and practice, having professors who acknowledged and valued their experiences and

understanding, exposure to individuals who believed students of colour could be successful, and the action research findings as additional elements developing their conceptions of social justice and development as a social justice leader. Participants of colour not only identified more programmatic elements than their White counterparts, but the majority of these elements seemed to center on human relational aspects of the curriculum and instruction, such as building relationships and culturally responsive teaching, elements that increased their ability to make changes in schools. In contrast, the elements White participants cited appeared to focus on their personal safety and support needs. This difference might be attributed to the fact that the latter group began their journey of awareness while in the program and the former came with lived experiences of inequities.

### ***Collaboration and Support***

Finally, both groups recommended additional programmatic elements that would have assisted in furthering their development as a social justice leader. White participants made the following recommendations:

- Assistance in identifying the “right” or “realistic” entry point to begin implementing the action plan from their action research project;
- Intern supervisor should work with principal to develop initial buy-in of the action research project;
- Intern supervisor, principal and intern should work collaboratively throughout the process to facilitate implementation of action plan;
- More professors who have equity expertise and can assist with implementation of the action research process and plan; and
- More courses that challenge participants’ thinking and beliefs.

Participants of colour also recommended that site and intern supervisors should work collaboratively to facilitate the intern’s implementation of the action plan and provide support to the intern but not the type of support White participants described. The latter group indicated they needed more upfront support from

the intern supervisor in determining the “right” entry point to start their action plan and “buy-in” from the principal who is ultimately responsible for supporting their social justice work. As one White participant pointed out:

I think that piece of your supervisor working with you on what are we dealing with here, what’s realistic here so you still have that outside voice, but also working with that inside voice of the main guy that’s in charge that’s going to be the one to say we’re doing this and sticking their neck out.

Participants of colour on the other hand appeared to want backup support as one explained:

I needed it to be just a supervisor and not necessarily a mentor because...I need to get in there and I need to see what I didn’t have and the only way I could do that is for me to discover it. So I didn’t necessarily need a mentor from [the university] to tell me, look this is what I see, or spending more time with me there or engaging in conversation, trying to facilitate between my campus mentor and me. It was being supportive to the extent that I am going to back away and I [university mentor] am here. Knowing that they were there was sufficient for me.

The types of support needed by the two groups in implementing their action research project during the principal internship suggest a difference existed in their development as social justice leaders. Nonetheless, both groups experienced similar programmatic elements that developed their conceptions of social justice and development as a social justice leader.

## **Discussion and Implications**

Findings of this study indicate a number of programmatic elements helped to develop participants’ conceptions of social justice and their development as social justice leaders. These programmatic elements, which resulted in transformative learning, included: developing awareness of their identity, reading literature that highlighted inequities in schools, participating in tough classroom conversations where their thinking was challenged by

professors and peers, and leading and implementing an action research project. Additionally, participants indicated that addressing social justice content across courses and multiple exposures to equity-related issues by different professors were also important to their development.

Although there were many similarities among the participants, two main differences emerged between the White participants and the participants of colour. The first difference involved an affective response to programmatic elements. For participants of colour, programmatic elements seemed to validate the awareness, knowledge, and experience they brought. In turn, this strengthened their self-concept and eliminated self-doubts about their ability to lead. They felt the program gave them a “voice” to speak out against inequities and ignited a “passion” for life-long social justice work.

Although White participants also expressed an emotional response to programmatic elements, they did not convey that they had doubts about their ability to speak out and to lead. For White participants, the emotional impact of the program seemed to come from disturbing their taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of inequity and racism. Because they tended to define inequity as overt acts of intolerance rather than institutional racism, White participants reported being surprised to learn about the widespread nature of inequities in schools and found it “unsettling.” This cognitive dissonance convinced them that indeed problems existed, taught them to be concerned and created the desire to make change.

The other important difference between White and participants of colour involved leadership efforts. When White participants encountered barriers while leading social justice work, their efforts tended to halt due to a reported lack of principal support. To prevent this situation from occurring, White participants indicated they needed more upfront faculty support during the internship to help them determine the “right” entry point to start their action plan and to develop “buy-in” from the principal. Some White participants even recommended that the faculty supervisor work

collaboratively with the intern and principal to develop the principal's conceptions of social justice.

Participants of colour experienced similar barriers and lack of support, but they tended to continue their efforts on a smaller scale with like-minded individuals. They also wanted a different kind of support from the upfront guidance that White participants sought. Just knowing back-up support was available seemed to be enough for participants of colour. They wanted the opportunity to apply their social justice knowledge and skills on their own and learn from their mistakes. If they needed help then, they knew their faculty supervisor was there for support.

These differences in leadership efforts suggest that aspiring social justice leaders may need different forms of support. Our findings suggest that aspiring social justice leaders are likely to face resistance when addressing issues of inequity in the field. Further, our findings suggest that those aspiring leaders who have personal experience with injustice may be more likely to persist in the work than those aspiring leaders who have no such personal experience. What does this mean for preparation programs?

As other scholars have asserted, preparation programs seeking to develop leaders for social justice must help students develop awareness of the ways in which systemic inequities manifest in schools and how social justice work can begin to redress these issues. This study suggests preparation programs must also help aspiring leaders develop a moral imperative (Fullan, 2003) to persist in the work when faced with barriers. For the participants in this study who had personal experience with injustice, a moral imperative was developed, or perhaps simply awakened, through programmatic elements that helped surface personal experience, provided the language and constructs to analyze the experience, and helped understand how to tap into this experience as a source of motivation to persist in the work. For participants who did not have personal experience with injustice, the process for developing a moral imperative is less clear.

These findings leave us with the following questions and the need for further research:

- Do White students need additional or a different set of skills for social justice leadership than students of colour?
- What fears and reservations prevent White students from continuing their work as social justice leaders and how can leadership preparation help to overcome these concerns?
- Since students of colour (and White students) bring intra-group differences in phenotype, bilingualism, experiences (i.e., poverty) and sexual orientation, which likely influence their beliefs about their effectiveness of being a social justice leader, how can preparation build on their differences to create multiple models of social justice leadership?

Finally, developing a moral imperative in White students appears to be fundamental to social justice leadership. The reality is, however, that the majority of White students leave their jobs nightly, go home and close their doors to the inequities they see but don't personally experience. So how do we develop this moral imperative? These questions are the next issues for us to address as we continue in becoming a social justice leadership program.

## **References**

- Bell, L. A., Washington, S., Weinstein, G., & Love, B. (1997). Knowing ourselves as instructors. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.). *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 299-310). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brown, K. M. (2004). Leadership for social justice and equity: Weaving and pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), 77-108.
- Brown, K. M. (2006). Leadership for social justice and equity: Evaluating a transformative framework and andragogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(5), 700-745.
- Byrne-Jimenez, M. (2010). Point/counterpoint: Preparing leaders for diversity. *UCEA Review*, 51(3), 6.

- Bustamante, R. M., Nelson, J. A., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009). Assessing schoolwide cultural competence: Implications for school leadership preparation. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 45(5), 793-827.
- Cambron-McCabe, N., & McCarthy, M. M. (2005). Educating school leaders for social justice. *Educational Policy*, 19(1), 201-222.
- Capper, C. A. (1998). Critically oriented and postmodern perspectives: Sorting out the differences and applications for practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34(3), 354-379.
- Contreras, A. R. (2000). *Hispanic values and viewpoints about centers: Don't homogenize us in!* Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.
- Dantley, M. E. (2005). African American Spirituality and Cornel West's Notions of Prophetic Pragmatism: Restructuring Educational Leadership in American Urban Schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 41(4), 651-674.
- Dantley, M. E. & Tillman, L. C. (2006). Social justice and moral transformative Leadership. In C. Marshall & M. Oliva Eds., *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education*. (p.16-30). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Darling-Hammond, L., La Pointe, M, Meyerson, D., & Orr, M.T. (2010). *Preparing principals for a changing world: Lessons from effective school leadership programs*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Elmore, R. (2003). *Knowing the right thing to do: School improvement and performance-based accountability*. Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices.
- Evans, A. E. (2007). Horton, highlander, and leadership education: Lessons for preparing educational leaders for social justice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 17(3), 250-275.
- Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Glanz, J. (2003). *Action research: An educational leader's guide to school improvement* (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

- Glickman, C. D., Gordon, S. P. & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2010). *Supervision and instructional leadership: A developmental approach*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gooden, M. A., Venzant-Chambers, T., & Scheurich, J. (2011). *Report of the UCEA Executive Committee Review Team*. University Council for Educational Administration.
- Hallinger, P. & Heck, R. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1980-1995. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1), 5-44.
- Hatton, N., & Smith, D. (1995). *Reflection in teacher education: Towards definition and implementation*. Sydney, Australia: The University of Sydney: School of Teaching and Curriculum Studies. Retrieved from <http://www2.edfac.usyd.edu.au/LocalResource/Study1/hattonart.html>
- Hawley, W., & James, R. (2010). Diversity-responsive school leadership. *UCEA Review*, 51(3), 1-5.
- Henze, R., Katz, A., Norte, E., Sather, S. E., & Walker, E. (2002). *Leading for diversity: How school leaders promote positive interethnic relations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jackson, B. (2001). *Exceptional and innovative programs in educational leadership*. Paper commissioned for the National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Preparation (ERIC Document Reproduction No. 461179).
- Kose, B. W. (2007). Principal leadership for social justice: Uncovering the content of teacher professional development. *Journal of School Leadership*, 17(3), 276-312.
- Kemmis, S. (2006). Participatory action research and the public sphere. *Educational Action Research*, 12(4), 459-476.
- Kinsler, K. (2010). The utility of action research for emancipatory change. *Action Research*, 8(2), 171-189.
- Krueger, R. A. (2000). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lather, P. (1991). *Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy within/in the postmodern*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2000). The effects of transformational leadership on organizational conditions and student engagement with school. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 38(2), 112-129.



- Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahtstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation.
- Lopez, G. (2010). Mainstreaming diversity? “What’chu talking about, Willis?” *UCEA Review*, 51(3), 6-8
- Lyman, L. L., & Villani, C. J. (2002). The complexity of poverty: a missing component of educational leadership programs. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12(3), 246-80.
- Marshall, C. (2004). Social justice challenges to educational administration: Introduction to a special issue. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(3), 3-13.
- Marshall, C., & Oliva, M. (2010). *Leadership for social justice* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- McCarthy, M. M., & Kuh, G. D. (1997). *Continuity and change: The educational leadership professoriate*. Columbia, MO: The University Council on Educational Administration.
- McKenzie, K. B., Christman, D. E., Hernandez, F., Fierro, E., Capper, C. A., Dantley, M., Gonzalez, M. L., Cambron-McCabe, N., & Scheurich, J. J. (2008). From the field: A proposal for educating leaders for social justice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(1), 111-138.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A source of new methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2002). *Standards for advanced programs in educational leadership*. Retrieved from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration website: [www.npbea.org](http://www.npbea.org)
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perez, L.G., Uline, C.L., Johnson, J.F., James-Ward, C., & Basom, M.R. (2011). Foregrounding fieldwork in leadership preparation: The transformative capacity of authentic inquiry. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 47(1), 217-257.
- Poplin Gosetti, P., & Rusch, E. (1995). Re-examining educational leadership: Challenging assumptions. In D. Dunlap & P. Schmuck (Eds.), *Women leading in education* (pp. 11-35). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Pounder, D. Reitzug, U., & Young, M. D. (2002). Preparing school leaders for school improvement, social justice, and

- community. In J. Murphy (Ed.), *The educational leadership challenge: Redefining leadership for the 21st century* (pp. 261-288). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rapp, D. (2002). Social justice and the importance of rebellious, oppositional imaginations. *Journal of School Leadership, 12*(3), 226-245.
- Rusch, E. A. (2004). Gender and race in leadership preparation: A constrained discourse. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 16-48.
- Shields, C. M. (2004). Dialogic leadership for social justice: Overcoming pathologies of silence. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 109-132.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London, England: Sage.
- Stringer, E. (2007). *Action Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(2), 221-258.
- Theoharis, G., & Causton-Theoharis, J. N. (2008). Oppressors or emancipators: Critical dispositions for preparing inclusive school leaders. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 41*(2), 230-246.
- Villegas, A. M. (2007). Disposition in teacher education: A look at social justice. *Journal of Teacher Education, 50*(5), 370-380.
- Young, M. D., & Brooks, J. S. (2008). Supporting graduate students of colour in educational administration preparation programs: Faculty perspectives on best practices, possibilities, and problems. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(3), 391-423.
- Waters, T., Marzano, B. & McNulty, B (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Whipp, J. L. (2003). *Scaffolding critical reflection in online discussions: Helping prospective teachers think deeply about field experiences in urban schools*. Retrieved from: Marquette University at <http://epublications.marquette.edu>.