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## Leading for Social Justice: a call to action to improve society.

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**Cases for School Leaders and Social Justice:  
Preparing Leaders to Lead Change for the Betterment of Society**

School leaders are required to prepare students for a globally competitive society, and act ethically to facilitate a shared vision of school practices that serve all students equitably in a diverse society. Events such as the mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015, and the car-ramming at the “Unite the Right” white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 are two recent domestic examples that indicate the crucial need for social justice education to be taught in schools.

A recent study of principals’ potential contribution to social justice in their schools determined that the impact of school principals constitutes the conceptual basis for social justice leadership, where school leaders ascertain that all students are provided equal opportunities for quality education (Haim, 2019). Children, parents, and teachers need principals who prevent inequities in school systems and there has never been a better time to refocus on quality leadership and social justice (Marshall, 2004). The actions and behaviors of school leaders can improve the educational process and the greater society, and can counter social justice violations.

Current models of leadership emphasize both personal and professional characteristics of principals and their central role as agents of social change (Moral, Garcia-Garcia, & Martinez-Valdivia, 2018). Three major social justice practices recently discovered and commonly used by principals are:

- Promoting a collaborative culture
- Individual support, and working with communities and local administrations (Fessehation & Pai, 2019).

Schools are thrust into a position in which they must prepare children and communities for participation in a multicultural, multiethnic, multi-religious, and a multinational society (Capper, 1993). To prepare students to be globally competitive, school leaders and teachers need to acquire training on what it means to lead for social justice, what social justice is, how to develop and implement frameworks, define social justice, and collaboratively create best practices in their schools and classrooms.

Educational researchers contend that social justice has traditionally has been studied in law, philosophy, economics, political studies, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and public policy (Brooks, 2008), but only became a major concern for educational researchers and practitioners at the beginning of the 21st century. This development was driven by many factors including cultural transformation, the democratic shift of Western society, increased achievement and economic gaps of underserved populations, and accountability pressures with high stakes testing (Hughes & Silva, 2013).

Race and racism in this country are unresolved; schools receive children and youth into their classes who are impacted by many historical forces (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 47). In addition to the hate crimes and racially charged events occurring today, Jean-Marie and Mansfield (2013) point out that sixty-four years have passed since the landmark ruling of the civil rights case *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* (1954). Our society has much work to do to rectify educational inequities and bring awareness to generational narratives that continue today and produce racial divides in cultures.

Systemic inequities predate the landmark *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* case that was to end “separate but equal.” However, disparities continue to persist in the form of funding and treatment of individuals and groups. Funding alone, however will not create a level playing field (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p.14). It’s going to take leaders, teacher leaders, and the stakeholder communities to ensure equity is being infused within schools’ classrooms, and

across districts. It is how we use funding and monitor the effectiveness of how it used to grow students academically and socially.

School administrators and teacher leaders can consciously make curriculum choices, design programs, and approve expenditures that can fully support equality. To effectively lead in schools, educators should be culturally receptive, taking into account the traditions of the community in which learning takes place. The culture of a school is made up of the characteristics that set it apart from other schools.

Certainly, it could be argued that our society has improved and more changes are needed to continue the quest of social justice permanence in education. Some individual have consciously made a decision not to repeat or support the narrative of exclusion of certain types of people. It is up to leaders and educators to bring awareness to the narratives that have been passed down from generation to generation, and practices that have been in place in America's education system, government, accepted societal norms and through family cultures since the beginning of the United States.

Leaders must move to create change *now* so they don't pass the burden on to the next generation. Fundamental change in the way that many students are educated must occur or we will lose another generation of youth to poverty and/or lives of crime (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 14).

Leaders are defined as people in the P-16 arena who serve in a role where they have influence to make change. Roles in P-12 include district leaders, school executives, administrators, and teacher leaders. The P-16 arena includes deans of colleges, department chairs, and professors. Leaders co-create the vision for their schools along with stakeholders through collaboration which collectively focuses on the importance of social justice education to ensure that injustices are acknowledged and handled appropriately. School leaders act as

change agents in their school by providing specific short-term and long-term goals for implementation and professional development opportunities that include global education, leadership skills in communication, collaboration and distributive leadership.

One of the most effective strategies for bringing about changes in school leadership perspectives is the use of case studies or vignettes where social issues are the focus. Cases used in training provides school leaders with the opportunity to learn about events that happen in schools and to critically-think through, discuss, problem-solve, reflect on their own decisions, and learn about the decisions made that are different than the ones they would make.

Comparing and contrasting leadership decisions will help leaders determine the best leadership actions to take in any given situation. Cases provide scenarios in which leaders can review situations neutrally without the personal knowledge of the people in the cases. New information gained by studying cases can change outlooks, perceptions, and preconceived ideas about people and groups that can create a climate of respect (Cohen, Cardillo & Pickeral, 2011).

One of the biggest advantages to reading cases is that it keeps the reader become aware of different styles of leadership and varying cultures they will encounter. Case teaching involves carefully selecting and editing cases to emphasize particular themes (Fossey & Crow, 2011).

Cases also help leaders recognize that they are not the only ones dealing with a particular circumstance and can learn new ways to address a difficult issue. Principals acknowledge that cases identify the struggles they face and help them to understand those who come from challenging situations. Proponents of case teaching at law schools point out that the discussion of actual cases is generally more interesting to students than learning about legal issues through lectures and rote memorization.

Advocates maintain that, to learn effectively, students are required to read and analyze assigned cases in advance of the class discussion, which gives them an opportunity to reach their own preliminary conclusions about a cases' meaning (Fossey & Crow, 2011). Case reading identifies and improves strategies that address social justice issues and the importance of staying abreast of situations that can occur.

School leaders have yet to realize that to make systemic change for marginalized students, they must first acknowledge their own biases, identify their own deficit thinking, engage in ongoing critical reflection of their beliefs of oppression and social justice, thus becoming aware of the cultural influences in school settings and their own biases that perpetuate the inequitable practices within schools (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Kemp-Graham, 2014; Miller & Martin, 2015). Fostering an awareness of worldviews and cultures, and examining one's own judgments about others are the first steps into learning how to take action in order to handle social injustices in schools.

Public schools are becoming increasingly more diverse and poorer, the 21st century realities of the changing demographics of public schools in the United States will demand school leaders who embrace and are committed to the tenants of school leadership for social justice to ensure that all students are provided with equal access to a high-quality education (Kemp-Graham, 2014). "Marginalization of children and youth can be present based on their faith [religion], socioeconomic status [address], language acquisition [as a social class], and gender, [sexual orientation] the latter, one of the topics most avoided by the dominant culture in our schools and society" (Terrell & Linsey, 2009, p. 12).

Social justice leadership is evident when principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, central to their advocacy (Jean-Marie & Normore, 2014; Brooks, 2009). Social justice leadership is the practice of keeping social justice as a main focus, which works to eliminate discrimination based on ethnicity, or socioeconomic status by advocating for

the fair and equitable treatment of all students during their educational experience. Knowledge brings awareness to the violations of inequities against an individual or collective group and acts to counter those violations through opportunities that are inclusive and equitable.

While some teacher and leadership preparation programs have focused on social justice education, a more sustained, intentional focus could develop into model programs that make social justice education one of the top priorities. Preparation programs can provide a forum to implement these concepts in the undergraduate, graduate, and at the doctoral level. This forum could be accomplished through collaborative interdepartmental development of a Social Justice Education graduate certification (Thurston & Beniecki, 2016). Thurston and Beniecki (2016) write that the need for providing continuing education with theory-to-practice relevancy is critical in formal and informal lifelong learning initiatives.

Licensed candidates can participate in training programs on specific topics such as sustainability, human rights, and poverty, while learning about specific regions of the world. Study abroad, service projects, and travel experiences are ways leaders can enhance their understanding of other cultures and world issues.

Today's school demographics are more ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse than ever before (Capper & Young, 2014; Jean-Marie & Normore, 2014). Furman and Gruenewald (2004) noted that increased attention to social justice is part of a general shift in the field, to the moral purposes of leadership in schools.

To accomplish the task of preparing students for the world they will enter, and remedy social justice violations, school leaders must begin to think about strategies for how to take action to make effective preparation happen.

Leaders must learn to distinguish their own opinions and emotional responses from wider trends in research and data. When teachers and leaders begin to think-critically about

their own family's culture, and identify, analyze and solve the problems they discover, they can begin to plan and take action (Furman & Gruenwald, 2004).

The purpose of the study was to contribute to scholarly research on social justice, gauge principal's awareness of social justice issues, and underwrite the ethical practices of current and future school leaders who act responsibly to educate all children. The research question: *How do current school principals describe their awareness of social justice issues?*

Other purposes of the research were to initiate conversations among educational leaders on the local, state, national, and international levels. These conversations are needed to refocus teaching ethical practices to school leaders and to intensify the efforts to educate and make aware the significance of social justice education in the following areas:

- Learn about biases in self and in others and about underlying motivations of the individual, groups, and organizations.
- Act to encourage educators to think critically and more deeply about the competitive world students are entering.
- Learn about people from different cultures to establish a broadened and more accepting world view of people.
- Prepare the rising generation to be more empathetic, act as advocates for social justice and stewards of peace.
- Grow and develop the capacity for emotional intelligence in working to build trusting social relationships that will improve the task of conflict management and peacebuilding.

The research was a qualitative study. A variety of cases were selected on social justice topics and then reduced to the length of 1-2 pages in consideration of the busy schedules' principals have on a daily basis. Participants were asked to select one case out of six choices



to read, answer questions in a face-to-face interview, and share their perspectives on the cases.

Topics of the six cases included:

- Black Lives Matter
- Ethnicity
- Transgender
- Poverty
- Diversity
- Socioeconomic status
- Equal access

The cases were retrieved from scholarly articles. Each was selected because of the perspectives of transformative leadership, critical-thinking and problem-solving, challenges of leadership, fair policies, disrupting myths on poverty, attracting diverse students, and socioeconomic status. Corbin and Strauss, 2008 share that “in qualitative research the most important desire is to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so will make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge” (p.16).

The study took place in North Carolina in a district that serves transient and diverse populations. The study brought awareness of social justice issues among principals at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Participants gained knowledge about social justice topics, how leaders lead for social justice and how they decide what social justice is.

Both survey results and interviews were used. Interview sessions were held with six administrators: two principals at the elementary level, two at the middle school level, and with two principals at the high school level on urban campuses.

The results gathered from the survey added insights to the interview results about the principal’s unique experiences and perspectives. Both surveys and interviews added insights on how principals defined social justice, the significance of the case they selected to read, and whether the actions taken for the research study impacted their leadership practices. Their

responses to questions provided language which determined the leader's awareness of social justice.

Each principal stated they would be thinking more about social justice and injustices in their leadership practices and made additional comments:

"Reading cases such as these helps leader and staff stay abreast of situations that can occur."

"Reading cases teaches about different leadership styles and cultures that will be encountered each and every year."

"Discussing cases orally would be beneficial at grade level or whole staff meetings."

"Reading about situations helps leaders resolve issues and determine if what they did in their school would work for other principals."

"Leaders can determine which practices have only gotten mediocre results."

"Thinking about the practices in our buildings and what needs to change, can come from reading cases."

"Some leaders choose to speak out when they see an injustice; others choose not to go against what could be considered politically unacceptable in the district."

"The study is an affirmation of their belief system and that the world will always provide constant reminders of injustices, and opportunities to make change."

"The focus will be more on women and social injustices."

School leaders are expected to lead with a high level of competency and emotional intelligence; able to manage oneself through self-awareness and self-management, and are able to manage relationships through empathy, social awareness and relationship management (NCDPI, 2011). Educating students in poverty is an ongoing challenge to address equity in schools.

Recently, a study examined whether poverty simulation participation would lead to sustained changes in poverty attributions and whether these changes would predict subsequent behavioral differences among staff. The results indicated that attributions do significantly change in the long-term following a simulation and would impact future behaviors and challenge poverty myths and could be used in professional development (Engler, Strassle, & Steck, 2019),

and teacher and leader programs. The concepts can be included in teacher and leader preparation programs, and attempts to develop in rising school leaders, an understanding of poverty, by examining their own attitudes and beliefs about poverty (Lyman & Villani, 2002).

A study conducted in preparing teachers at the middle grades level in addressing the needs of "every" young adolescent learner, showed that a commitment to critical pedagogies that introduce justice-oriented ways of knowing and being that we continue to reinforce throughout course work in a certification program (Andrews, Gayle, Matthew, & Hilary, 2018). They described plans to strengthen the certification program's focus on the role of middle grades educators as change agents prepared and willing to push back against oppressive systems and practices to support social justice and equity for every young adolescent in their homes, schools, and communities (Andrews, Gayle, Matthew, & Hilary, 2018).

The call to invest in moral leadership training has come from scholars, policymakers, and professional organizations in the field of educational administration. Shields (2003) suggests that the most prevalent theme in the literature overall is that social justice leaders are proactive change agents, engaged in transformative leadership and discusses transformative leadership practices and believes it is about making societal change, while reformative educational leadership aims to create school communities in which educators take seriously their responsibility for advancing equity, social justice, and quality of life through access and opportunity, respect for difference and diversity, advancement of knowledge, and personal freedom along with accountability.

Principals revealed their level of awareness, actions, and initiative to learn more about leading for social justice. Participants expressed their awareness in their language, in action taken to prevent social injustices and in proactively seeking and teaching about social justice in formal and informal settings. Actions associated with social injustices such as bullying,

othering, and racism can be addressed in the form of professional development, teachable moments, discipline and actions taken to counter social injustice.

The literature provided several common themes based on change, transformative leadership, preparation programs, and action in schools and the rationale for driving change. Seven topics emerged in the next filter in the processing and organizing the findings from the literature, and were noted. Several themes emerged: (a) leading for social justice; (b) advocacy for social justice awareness; (c) preparation programs; (d) self-reflection and examination of one's own bias; (e) trust, ethics and relationships; and (f) transformative action and change. A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and is an analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself coded (Saldaña, 2009). Graduate programs must prepare future leaders to be more aware of their ethical and moral responsibilities as well as being better equipped to execute them if they are to effectively steward the increasingly complex and high-pressure school of the 21st century (Pijanowski, 2007).

Advances in our society have happened as a result of the heroic acts of individuals who made a decision to focus on an issue for change with persistence, communicated their vision and modeled actions for others to follow. Eleanor Roosevelt, worked to have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted from 1946-1948, and Dr. Martin Luther King, led the Civil Rights movement from the mid 1950's-1968. Jean-Marie (2013) adds that it is persistence that orchestrated the hard work of cultural transformation in schools. Singleton and Linton (2006) support this idea of persistence; persistent educators consistently and collectively push forward their transformative ideas. These heroic acts happen through a leader's focused action and a personal commitment to lead change in their circle of influence; in order and until, things begin to change. Brooks and Miles (2006), Jean-Marie and Mansfield (2013), Shields (2003, 2012) and Singleton and Linton (2006), all discuss transformative leaders who can make proactive change to bring about awareness.

It is the belief of this researcher that countering social justice violations is about realizing and learning from our history through a social justice education lens regarding actions in our past: racism, domination, non-inclusive, and the current challenge to overcome the marginalization of people and groups. It is not a problem for the next generation to solve; it is every educational leader's responsibility to begin to make changes now. Brooks and Miles (2006) suggest that "leaders alter their work for social justice and develop a heightened and critical awareness of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization" (p. 5). Teaching the awareness of narratives that have been passed down through generations ultimately impacts society's behaviors toward one another.

The decision to increase awareness of social injustices can be expedited by globalizing schools and offering courses that serve as a resource to support change and sets the tone for individual, intergroup, and social transformation. It aims to equip students with the intellectual, emotional, interpersonal, and social action skills necessary to critically understand issues of dominance and oppression and to take individual and group action to build trust in multicultural communities (Scalera, 2018). Thus, the research contains an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life (Creswell, 2013).

The discoveries made through the research process provided new pathways to pedagogical alignment for social justice education, programs and leadership. Emerging information can be transferred to practicing leaders in schools and districts, to higher institutions that prepare teacher and school leaders, it can add to the research for social justice, and inform emerging cultural and diversity programs.

As a result of the principals' participation in the study, preventative actions are being taken to address behaviors of students and staff associated with social injustices. Bullying, inequities,

unequal access to resources and a quality education were all viewed as opportunities to address these challenges as a result of taking part in the study.

One of the high school principals is committed to training administrators, support staff, and teachers on social justice awareness and plans to use the cases selected for this study to begin dialog and teach about social injustices. Four out of six principals, exhibited advanced awareness about social justice. They were knowledgeable, action-focused and passionate enough to ensure that social justice education, programs, and activities were a part of the everyday culture at their schools.

Four principals actively take the initiative to read about social justice, take part in cultural events, and are quick to teach about social injustices when faced with situations that calls for it. They are proactive in teaching their staff about poverty and how to relate to and teach students in this population.

Principals can come into a position with a skill set and passion for social justice, and it is not aligned for the school they are assigned to or with district in which they serve as a leader. Leaders step into the culture of the school they inherit and in districts that have their own agendas and priorities which may or may not align with their personal beliefs. Their reflections came from an understanding that their leadership style is an extension of who they are as people and acknowledged the limitations of training and education that is, in their words, inadequate for today's challenges in schools.

Poverty is the topic most current principals are concerned with because it is what they are experiencing in their schools. Another consideration for this case selection on poverty is that participants viewed this as the least controversial and most conservative topic to read about and discuss.

Of the six cases read, case #4; Disrupting Myths of Poverty in the Face of Resistance (Pollock, Lopez, & Joshee, 2013) was the most selected case to read. Table 1 shows the organization of cases and key words.

Table 1

Cases and Key Words

| Case | Topic                           | Title   | Key Words   |
|------|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 1    | Ethnicity                       | #BlackLivesMatter: A Call for Transformative Leadership   | Leadership for social justice, Transformative leadership, Race  |
| 2    | Ethnicity                       | Decision-Making in School Racial Conflict: Challenges of Leadership for Social Justice                    | Decision Making, Conflict, Racial Discrimination, Racial Bias, Social Justice, Case Method (Teaching Technique), Vignettes, High Schools, Whites, Leadership Effectiveness, Learning Activities, Questioning Techniques, Educational Administration |
| 3    | Transgender                     | Transgender policy: what is fair for all students?  | Leadership, Social justice, Transgender policy, Leadership for social justice, Transgender Equity, Transformative leadership  |
| 4    | Poverty                         | Disrupting Myths of Poverty in the Face of Resistance   | Leadership, Diversity, Equal education, Inclusion, Leadership, Poverty, Educational Improvement   |
| 5    | Diversity                       | Attracting Diverse Students to a Magnet School: Risking Aspirations or Swallowing One's Beliefs           | Social justice, Principals, Magnet schools  |
| 6    | Socioeconomic Status and access | Case teaching 6: Socioeconomic Status and Student Opportunity: A Case of Disrespect or Teenage Rebellion? | Intersectionality, Socioeconomic status, Race, Summer programs  |

A coding matrix based on Saldaña (2009)'s model was used to organize the data retrieved from the interview questions and reflective responses. This system of organization allowed for sections to develop as words were coded.

The language was placed into the coding matrix grounded by the pillars of Real, Abstract, Particular and General. The themes were identified and concepts began to emerge as Themes/Concepts and Subcategories. “Real” represents a more detailed concept while “Abstract” represents a big picture.

Real topics emerged by using the coding matrix and provided information on abstract perspectives, identified through the language school executives used in their reflective responses and perspectives. Important themes and subcategories emerged as a result of using the coding matrix system of organization and a call more research.

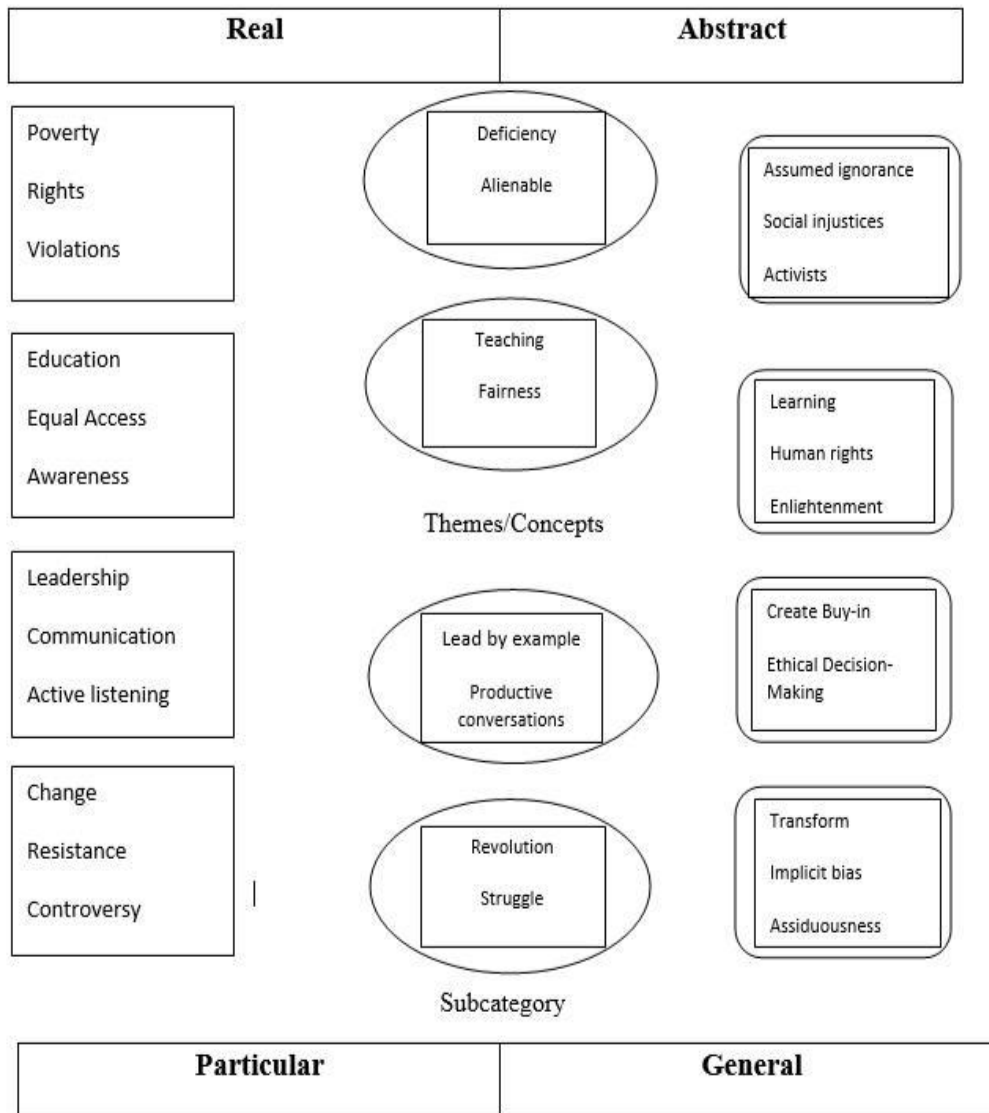
The coding matrix organization revealed important ideas that came as a result of assimilating new information from very different yet specific information. The emergent themes and sub categories were identified, coded, labeled and entered into the coding matrix. The concepts of Real/Particular were identified as a result of analyzing these concepts. Subsequently, overarching concepts were recognized as Abstract/General.



Table 2 shows the language and themes that emerged and were added to the matrix.

Table 2

*Coding Matrix*



The information that the participants shared provided authentic information that was unique to each principal's experience and enriched the core findings of the study. Reflective thinking was evident in the principal's responses.

Participating in the study caused immediate action for one principal who stated they intended to use the six cases for their next faculty training session. Reading the cases allowed participants to view issues and actions that occur in schools, and learn about perspectives that they may not have thought about or considered prior to the study. Personal experiences were added to the data which made the research applicable to real world situations and brought about new ways to think about a common topic.

One principal stated that people do not understand diversity and how deeply connected it is to ethnicity. Another principal pointed out that as educators it is important to be sensitive to students, their home environment, emotional needs and social economics. He brought up the case where the boy came to school with a girl's shoe on. After investigating the situation, the action was a result of poverty and it was really all about what the family could afford. Schools are a microcosm of society and transformative leaders and traditional leadership is inadequate to fully satisfy the needs and unique challenges of today's schools. Now, more so than ever, educators have to know their students better in all aspects not just where they live but where they are emotionally. Leaders need to be willing to help them no matter what it takes. Principals need to figure out what it takes to build relationships with the parents, guardians and communities, and to maintain those relationships. Additionally, professional development extended to all leaders will keep them hyper aware of social justice issues, current language used, and how to address situations in a way that can be learning experiences. The principals' personal insights enriched the study. One principal stated that it is important to realize that there are teachers at every school that would not be sympathetic to students and parents with the problems they present. To educate teachers and leaders about diversity means to inform them of the fact that schools can be successful with the students they have.

Principals come into roles with their own experiences, perceptions, beliefs and biases, and as a result, consciously or unconsciously, principals can project those onto a person,

situation or event. An example of this is when the principal raised in poverty used that experience to help him relay the important message that students who live in poverty, have the ability to learn. He believes that it is necessary for the staff to know how to have more understanding of all populations and make a sincere effort to meet the child's needs. The role requires a solid skill set to communicate well, in speaking, writing, active listening, and the ability to help people make connections to ideas and experiences.

It is important to take advantage of teachable moments and address certain situations with the appropriate level of communication and discipline to signal opposition to social injustices. Relevant situations require conversations with staff and students and with people outside of the school to include the central office, advocacy groups, faith based, and business and community organizations.

Cases read for professional development can be a reminder to be proactive and to continuously build relationships with stakeholders. It is a reminder that many students and parents fall into these circumstances and can help leaders enjoy the challenges and be successful with meeting those challenges.

One participant in the study reminds school leaders that some of our parents cannot read when they send a letter home. Parents and guardians can have respect for or have fear of school administrators. He shared a scenario about making judgements when there is a lack of response from parents: If there are parents who have a child with continuous negative academic and behavior issues, and teachers cannot connect via telephone or get a response to a letter, as principal, I would make a home visit. One principal added, "One time I visited a parent and she lit up when I came to her home. She offered something to drink and I accepted it. It continued the openness of the meeting. There was talk about the son, numerous notes with no response and, she goes into the kitchen and brings in a mason jar to me. She said she knew the notes that she had received were important so she saved them. The parent stated that she

did not know what the letters said and it became obvious to me that she could not read. She did not have transportation, and that is why she did not respond. Details and steps. Practices in our schools are about teaching, learning, and the broader lens of caring for and improving society.”

Schools are to be a safe place where students come willingly to learn. When any of their rights are violated, school leaders have to acknowledge what occurred and take care of it right away. School leaders and teachers have to shut down situations immediately in which social injustices occur. Bullying behavior has to be interrupted by whoever sees it or is informed about it, which may require formal discipline. The underlying question for school leaders should always be, “Would I want this to happen to my child?” If the answer is yes, then move forward. If the answer is no, then it is not the right solution.

Leaders need to question an area that they might be closed-minded about or ask if they are seeing everything. It is always important to put students first to see if they have been treated differently. In doing so, they can determine if there is anything, they are doing that marginalizes anyone and think about how the schools are running; examine systems, programs, curriculums, and discipline procedures. Could there be something they need to modify, adjust or completely change in the way they go about things? School leaders are taught to examine the facts and details of the issue. Principals must take a look at the facts and decide which ones need further investigation. Take the time to invite parents and guardians to events, and have crucial conversations with them. In most cases, parents work with us to the best of their ability, some use public transportation, and have multiple jobs. When reviewing case details, principals can look at what they have done or would do in a situation and compare that to what some else has done to determine what can be done differently.

The principals were asked to provide a definition for social justice in their own words. It is important to note that the following words and concepts emerged several times as the principals' defined social justice: understanding, rights, equity, and being treated fairly.

Social justice defined in their words:

"Social Justice is understanding from an educational standpoint, that all children and parents have the same rights; to be treated fairly in a teaching and learning environment."

"Social justice is acknowledging a problem or injustice. All of the human race is treated fairly and equally in a teaching and learning environment."

"Social justice is for every student to have the opportunity to have it. Ensuring that all organizations and regions have the same needed resources to be successful: human, financial, emotional, and that everyone is seen, heard, valued, and supported."

"Social justice is when everyone is treated equally and not dependent on race, gender, age, or religion."

"Social justice is making decisions in the best interest of students. Keeping students first and not worrying about the political outcry of what best meets student's needs."

"Social justice is ensuring that all schools and regions have the same needed resources and access to them in order for them to be successful; human, financial, and emotional resources. That everyone is seen, heard, valued and supported."

## **Discussion**

The study showed that the participants strongly believed that they are ethically and morally responsible for leading and teaching social justice in their schools. All six principals stated leaders have to have a belief that all children can learn and that it is their responsibility to ensure that happens.

*Literacy is a right* and educators have a responsibility to all students to satisfy that right. Whether that child comes from poverty or high-wealth school, leaders and teachers have the responsibility to educate them all equitably. How leaders spend their money indicates where their priorities are; allocating resources should satisfy the needs of all children.

The study has deepened the principals' commitment to lead for social justice and the cases read have increased their own knowledge and will be used to teach others about social justice. Each reflected on the experience of participating as positive and served as a reminder to keep equity and fair treatment for students at the forefront of their leadership. The principals will think more about social justice moving forward with a stronger commitment to educating staff and administrators on how to build relationships with all students and provide more training on social justice topics.

These leaders learned to revolutionize the way they think about and take action on social justice education and issues. The participants feel more empowered to teach their staff and administrators to be empathetic and have an altruistic outlook for society as a whole through the field of education.

It is imperative that leaders and teachers understand their perception on the world and realize their perceptions can be limited. When school executives lead with an open mind, they learn from other people's perspectives which can broaden, enlighten, and transform who they are as people and leaders, in addition to doing what is right for children.

The participants stated that professional development training and leadership programs that have a social justice focus is imperative to further evolve teaching and leading in this area. Education and training are needed that explore cultural sensitivity, bias (of self and others), how to create buy-in, how to build relationships with students and their families, how to facilitate a change process, and influence policy making.

For the human resource aspects of recruitment, principals identified canvassing teachers and leaders who have a belief that all students can learn and having a commitment to lead for social justice, both of which would be a requirement for getting hired. A suggestion was made to have a candidate read a short case and then share their insights on what they would do in a particular situation where an injustice occurred in preparation for an interview.

Principals that practice purposeful vetting in the hiring processes can filter out the best candidates for the positions of superintendent, district supervisors, principals, and teachers. Intentional selections of candidates in the hiring process gets the right people on the team, and promises that our schools will run equitably and justly. It means that students will have teachers in their classes who have their best interest at heart; academic success will come as a result of this. Screening candidates for the skill of program evaluation is also important to ensure that programs will be running sufficiently and effectively.

Schools in the district and schools across the state have a complicated path toward leading for social justice because they are faced with new policies, programs, and new directions all the time. They are distractions. New directions are in constant play in the school business; schools move in directions based on what is embedded into state budget for education; monetary allotments dictate the school or district focus and what they are expected to achieve. New directions add to the diversion that keeps educational systems vacillating from a balanced, set agenda to one of constant redirection and reinvention of programs.

The participating principals recognize the hurdles and diversions in leading for social justice. They named lack of education, minimal experience with diversity, and the distractions that come from governing offices as all possible reasons for a lack of focus on social justice education in school systems. They understand why it is important to lead for social justice and what it means to be advocates and activists for social justice and how to go about implementing social justice in schools.

This implementation can include contextualizing language, serving violations with appropriate actions, and instilling in the staff a sense of urgency and an altruistic framework from which to lead. Staff and leadership development about empathy, bias and creating change in schools and in policy can be addressed through on-going training. Dantley (2005) states “Self-critique is powerful in itself, but self-correction is a courageous step often initiated through a spiritual motivation that celebrates the human dynamics of individuality and community at the same time” (p. 665).

Community, business, faith-based, organizations, non-profit, special interest groups, and colleges and universities can provide enrichment for programs within the community and invite global participants that can offer expertise on specific areas of social justice. Building relationships between schools and organizations (local and around the world) can inform decisions, create awareness and add experiences that teach about injustice and offer support for leading social justice.

Local governments and municipalities can contribute to training programs and benefit from collaborating with districts about how to identify and solve local issues that stem from injustices. United efforts will support moving away from the inequities in education. It can repair the unjust treatment of citizens and move toward a fair system of solving problems with knowledge, data, and wisdom, to create an evolved understanding of a diverse population of citizens.

## **Conclusion**

Changes need to be made on the federal, state and district levels, and need to be woven into and aligned from governing office to governing office at these levels. Collectively, the education systems can drive positive societal change; making what is right for your child, right for any child. Principals and teachers are called to be allies, advocates and activists for all



children and staff while they stand together for the right side of humanity. Preparing to be knowledgeable and culturally sensitive to all students will make a difference to ensure that students receive what they need to be competitive academically and feel that they have a place at the table in life.

As conscience and ethical leaders, educators can no longer provide an education to certain groups and not others. We can no longer refresh technology in one school every three years and continue to leave outdated systems in the school down the street. We can no longer accept the status quo and turn a blind eye to social injustices. We can no longer hire people in places of position who will not take to heart the mission of educating all students and we must rid our buildings of those who refuse to do so. We must raise our standards of educating all students to ensure excellence in teaching and learning.

Our history beckons us to learn from our past mistakes: slavery, the deculturalization of indigenous people, discrimination, bigotry, bias and prejudice. It is our civic and world duty not to allow the narratives of our past to continue to seep through the walls of our classrooms, board rooms and state offices. Providing a basic education for students, is a detriment to our future society.

Moving forward, leading for social justice in education will become the continuity that is needed to carry the torch and fill the gaps between world changing movements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Civil Rights. Leaders have much work to do to prevent lulls from happening again by keeping social justice at the forefront of every action we educators and community make for students. Leaders have much work to do in providing an equitable high-quality education to every student. The result will be continued growth and advancement for society, as citizens, as a nation and across the globe.

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