
Teresa Y. Nowlin

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Approved by:
Advisor: Dr. Catherine Marshall
Reader: Dr. Kathlene Brown
Reader: Dr. Melva Newsom
Reader: Dr. Susan Wynn
ABSTRACT

TERESA NOWLIN: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ENDARKENED SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: THE BATTLE WOMBS AND BELLY FIRES OF BLACK WOMEN LEADING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
(Under the direction of Dr. Catherine Marshall)

This dissertation presents the stories of seven Black women school level leaders as they seek equity and justice in South Carolina’s schools. Guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT), the researcher uses in-depth interviews as an analytical tool to re-tell the women’s stories as they lead for social justice. Although the women verbalized that their decision to do justice work was “just what… Black women do in schools every day,” the strategies used to embrace all cultures, center agendas on the elimination of all achievement gaps, and garner the support of all stake reveal that Black women practice leadership beyond the traditional perspectives of their job descriptions.

In addressing the grand research question regarding the strategies Black women school level leaders use when seeking equity and justice for marginalized students in school, four interrelated categories of strategies used to seek equity and justice in schools emerged. The first strategy involves ensuring that the racial groups within their schools’ communities are represented on advisory teams, in decision-making groups, and in staff membership at various levels within the school. Secondly the participants acknowledge value and celebrate their own culture, as well as those represented in their school. Lastly, the women focused on eliminating achievement gaps among and between all groups of students. A final section was added to highlight how Assistant Principals, within the role
of supporting actors of social justice, have successfully extended their job descriptions beyond ‘books, buses and behavior’ to become agents of change within schools.

Through the voices of Black women school level leaders, and the voice of the researcher, this study uncovered that while leading for social justice, Black women keep race at the center of their vision and practice automatically. The women repeatedly focused their stories and strategies on issues of race over their other identities (gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) Black women lead from an Endarkeded standpoint and thereby center their leadership practices on CRT, whether they knew it or not.
DEDICATION

To God.
You wrote my days
from beginning to end
while I was yet in my mother’s womb-
I know now, more than ever that
all things are possible-
I thank you!

To my parents, Mack and Sarah Nowlin.
In acknowledging your untiring support,
your unending love,
and your unbelievable faith-
I thank you!

To John Anthony Calhoun.
You were my eyes-
I am so grateful that you envisioned the end
when I saw none in (my) sight-
I thank you!

To my family and friends.
Present, past and future-
I thank you!

And

To the women of this study.
May your justice-work
Speak for you.
Thank you!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this process without the kindness, prayers and support of so many people. I am indebted to my committee and the women featured who made this study possible. I stand upon the shoulders of many.
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I. Once Upon a Time: Setting Up the Study

Introduction

My students live rough lives; many of them are the adults in their homes. School is their only chance to be a kid. I have one set of brothers who were riding the wrong bus in the afternoons... After talking with the boys I found out that they were riding the bus to another community so they could find their mother and take her home... she's a streetwalker and druggie and they were concerned about her safety and refused to go home without their mom. I have a hat full of stories just like this... some are even worse (Assistant Principal Edelman).

This dissertation is a story about leading for social justice. Or perhaps, more accurately, it serves as a medium for telling stories about social justice leadership. It focuses on the stories shared by seven Black women school level leaders about ways in which they have shaped their professional lives by enacting social justice within their schools. This dissertation is about their stories; but in the act of narrating those stories for you, they become my stories as well. The women passionately share stories of belly fires, as they passionately seek justice in their schools, and often show off their battle wombs (wounds), the evidence of their struggles along the way, as they weave their stories of trials and triumphs as school level leaders. Nash (2004) speaks of the importance of acknowledging that we are story creators, when he suggests, “As an author, you are always an insider; not omnisciently removed from what you write, but caught up personally in every work, sentence, and paragraph... in every comma and period” (p.36). Therefore, sharing in the ownership of storytelling, I have attempted to re-articulate the words of these women and disseminate their viewpoints to the world.
This dissertation is also a personal story for me. The stories are tales the researcher weaves together, narratives of seven Black women school level leaders, presenting their stories in the document you are now holding. As I share their accounts, you will gain a better understanding of the rich lives lived by women choosing to seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools. It is my hope that in sharing I shed light on the experience that many in the field of educational leadership may not have heard or experienced. These “counter-narratives,” defined as stories that challenge the dominant accounts and preconceived notions of how best to lead and manage schools, expose the realities of enacting social justice in schools that shape the professional, and sometimes personal, lives of these participants and those like the women in this study.

The four interrelated themes that emerged from this study of Black women school level leaders leading for social justice were:

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<td>(a) Forming partnerships with all stakeholders,</td>
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<td>(b) Developing and reviewing policies that promote inclusive relational organization culture and employing and</td>
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<td></td>
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*Figure 1: Graphic representation of study’s themes and subthemes*

**Statement of the Problem**

By the time they enter kindergarten, the achievement gap between Black students and Caucasian students is already about half its ultimate size. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the ethnic and racial achievement gaps between students in math, reading, and science have either increased or stayed the same as in the 1990s (NC Public School, n.d, ¶ 1). According to the 2000 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, Black students are already about two years behind other ethnic and racial subgroups of students by the end of grade 4, and approximately three years behind these groups by grade 8 (NC Public School, 2006, ¶ 1). Whereas 90% of Caucasian students and 94% of Asian students complete high school or earn a GED, only 81% of Blacks in the same age group receive the same credentials (NC Public School, n.d, ¶ 1; Nowlin & Gooden, 2005). However, these problems have not gone unnoticed.

America is concerned with the alarming disparities between racial groups. These academic and achievement gaps span across standardized test scores, graduation and dropout rates, and enrollment in advance-placement courses (Weissglass, 2001). Although many advances have been made on behalf of Blacks over the years, the achievement gaps between Blacks and Whites continue to widen (Newsom, 2000; Nowlin & Gooden, 2005).
Undoubtedly, America has produced, and continues to produce, students who succeed and excel academically. Indeed America, rich in resources and knowledge, should have the best schools in the world. However, global statistics shows that America’s students are far behind other nations.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a system of international assessments that measures 15-year-olds’ aptitude in reading, mathematics, and science every 3 years. PISA was first implemented in 2000 and is carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries. The average score for American students in reading literacy was not measurably different from the OECD average in 2000 or 2003, nor was there any measurable change in our reading literacy score from 2000 to 2003. In 2003, U.S. performance in science literacy, mathematics literacy and problem solving was lower than the average performance for most OECD countries. In both 2000 and 2003, about two-thirds of the other participating OECD countries outperformed the United States in these content areas. In an age of global exchanges and economies, America’s students are falling behind and America’s poor and minority students are being left even further behind the global citizenry.

In the greatest country in the world, two education systems have been created separate and unequal. Some forty years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision, some schoolchildren are taught well while others, mostly poor and minority, are left to struggle or drop out. And in the muddle of whose problem is it, we have left a growing
"achievement gap" between White and African American students unaddressed for far too long.

The No Child Left Behind Act has made closing the achievement gap a national priority. Schools are being held accountable for the annual progress of its students in general, and minority groups of students specifically. This increased level of accountability has incited discussions among school leaders on how best to provide an equitable education that meets the needs of all students. Indeed school level leaders must expand roles beyond managing the school to leading, caring and advocacy on behalf of groups that have been historically and traditionally marginalized in society (Hurley, 2001, p.4).

Manifestation of Racism in Schools

Racism is the often unquestioned and unseen norm of America’s society and is interwoven in the daily realities of our educational system (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Singleton, 2002-2003, Singleton & Noli, 2001). Murry and Clark (1990) found eight manifestations of racism in schools:

- Insensitive or hostile acts;
- Biased application of harsh sanctions;
- Inequities in the amount of teacher attention given to students;
- Biased curriculum materials;
- Inequalities in the amount of instructional time provided;
- Biased attitudes toward students;
- Failure to hire educators and school staff of color; and,
Denial of racist actions.

According to Murray and Clark (1990) racism is a significant contributing factor to the achievement gap between students of color and their White peers (Delpit, 1995; Ferguson, 1998; Noli, 2002-2003; Singleton & Noli, 2001). Students of color are seen as second-class citizens in schools. This ultimately affects their achievement and even their over-representation in special education (Riester et al., 2002, Theoharis, 2004). Unless the system of educating students change, these students, who are treated as second class in educational institutions, will later become second class citizens in society as well.

Leaders as Transformers

Freire (1990) suggests that the purpose of the educational system is to make possibilities happen where there were none before for marginalized students. He states that it is the duty of public education to end the oppression of these students (poor, of color, disabled). Although this is an immense task, there are many stories of leaders who are making these changes in schools (Bell et al., 2002; Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Grogan, 2002a, 2002b; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Riester et al., 2002).

These exemplary leaders transform their schools’ cultures and practices and impact the educational outcomes of their students. Some of these school level leaders are driven by the need to enact social justice for students and schools (Theoharis, 2004). But this work does not happen by chance. The struggle to make school more just is done purposefully by leaders who believe that “injustice in our school and communities is
neither natural nor inevitable‖ (Larson & Murtadha, 2002). These leaders create and purposefully use strategies to advance justice and equity.

Social justice work is the deliberate process of intervention that calls for the moral use of power to resist discrimination and inequity (Marshall & Parker, 2004). Being an advocate for social justice requires one to actively work for change both inside and outside of schools, particularly on the behalf of the marginalized. Having a social justice perspective implies more than “assessing needs, or providing service in order to mainstream marginalized populations with dictated services and program content” (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 170).

Rather, it means building participatory, equitable, and just relationships by creating safe and trusting spaces and working with parents and communities (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). A social justice perspective in educational administration also calls for school leaders to do the research to discover existing models of how this social justice is operationalized in real schools where agendas have been set and implemented that provide examples of principals and superintendents who work with teachers, parents, and children to create a set of core beliefs and organizational characteristics that emphasize high performance for each child, delivered in a passionately committed and loving way (Marshall & Parker, 2004).

Being a socially-just leader means moving beyond standard operation procedures and bureaucratic policies to using strategies and enacting actions that result in equitable educational results for minority students (Marshall & Parker, 2004). Moreover, the
literature indicates that social-justice leaders advocate for disenfranchised students, and create learning environments that encourage academic success.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand the strategies used by Black women school level leaders, presumed to be leaders of social justice, as they sought equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools. Leading for social justice was generally defined as advocating, leading and keeping at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States (Theoharis, 2004).

It was my intention to engage in an exploratory, narrative interview study of the strategies these leaders used to advocate for marginalized students in their schools. While documenting these experiences, I asked one central question that guided the inquiry: What strategies do Black women school level leaders, who are presumed to be leaders for social justice, use as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools? Hearing the stories of these school level leaders gave me the opportunity to gather information about feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviors related to sticky subjects that are not easily observable. I will go into more detail in Chapter 3 that explains that I was able to presume that these selected leaders were in fact leaders for social justice because of the triangulation methodologies used in this study.

As stated in the opening of this proposal, America is failing many of its students each year. The ailing problems of our educational system need to be cured. But when Black principals advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice issues of race,
class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and other marginalized groups in the US, then leading for social justice becomes part of the cure. I believe the Black women selected for this study would not only share needed strategies to enact social justice in schools, but would also bring to light the minority perspective of leading for social justice in schools today. Socially-just school leaders seek to challenge the status-quo by closely examining the effects that racism and other isms on the lives of the marginalized (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker, 2002). By providing an equitable educational opportunity for all students in their care, these leaders increased achievement, closed gaps and thus improved the condition of the lives of all students (Garsidem, 2001).

Accordingly, I offer this dissertation as a step towards addressing not only the gaps on Black women school level leaders in the literature, but also to intentionally inject social justice leadership from an endarkened epistemology, language that organizes, resists and transforms oppressive descriptions of sociocultural phenomena, into the discourse in the field of educational leadership (Dillard, 2003, p. 132).

The Grand Tour Question and Sub Question

From a personal perspective, I was hoping that the interviews I conducted would help uncover the strategies that are necessary for school level leaders to provide equitable and excellent education for students who have been historically marginalized in our society. I explored one main question: What strategies do Black women school level leaders, who are presumed to be leaders for social justice, use as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools? As a sub question, I focused on finding out what life experiences with social injustice these leaders experienced that has motivated them to improve things for others in similar situations. I anticipated that in the
process of conducting the interviews and analyzing the data that other conceptualizations related to strategies used by social justice would come to light.

In this study I have chosen to use the term Black, instead of African-American, to identify the race of the participants. Like Tatum (1997), I refer to people of acknowledged African descent. Using the term Black is more inclusive than using the term African-American, because not all Black people in America consider themselves African-American yet they may still feel the affects of racism. For example, Afro-Caribbeans are Black, not African-American. I have chosen to refer to other people of color using terms they use for themselves, which is sometimes interchangeable. For example, people of Latin American ancestry I refer to as Hispanic and I have used Native American to classify People of the First Nation or American Indians (Tatum, 1997).

Defining Social Justice

When it comes to defining social justice leadership, several scholars have contributed to the definition used in this study. Bogotch (2000) defines social justice as a social construction with “no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices.” (p. 153)

On the same note, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice “as the exercise of altering these arrangements (institutional and organizational power arrangements) by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights or equity, equality, and fairness in socioeconomic, educational, and personal dimensions, among other forms of relationship” (p. 162).

Gewirtz (1998) goes further and defines social justice around the ideas of disrupting and subverting exploitative relationships, marginalization and exclusionary
processes, and practices of cultural imperialism or violence. In this definition, social justice supports a process built upon respect, care, recognition and empathy.

On the issue of care, Blackmore (2002) adds that social justice is “about human rights and obligations towards fellow human beings.” Blackmore carefully reminds us that in seeking justice we must always answer the questions of “for whom and for what” (p. 212).

What I ultimately found was a definition that combined all of these elements. Theoharis (2004) builds on previous works by defining justice centered in the work of the principal. Responding to the daily endeavors and struggle of school leadership, Theoharis defines social justice as principals who “advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing factors in the United States.” (p. 8)

This definition coincides with Karagiannis et al. (1996b) who states that “education is a human rights issue” and suggests that schools need to “modify their operations to include all students” (p. 3). Karagiannis et al. (1996b) links this notion of inclusion and social justice by stating that:

By far the most important reason for inclusive schooling is the social value of equality. We teach students by example that, despite differences, we all have equal rights. In contrast to past experiences of segregation, inclusion reinforces the practice of the idea that differences are accepted and respected…we need schools that promote wider social acceptance, peace and cooperation. (p. 8)

Theoharis goes on to suggest that “inclusion of all students because of their differences of race, class, disability, language, sexual orientation, and gender is a central and necessary
part of social justice” (p.9). He states that justice work is not just about student achievement but also about “creating inclusive practices and inclusive communities” (Theohar, 2004, p. 9). This sentiment was shared by the participants in this study as well, and ultimately became one of the themes that emerged from stories shared in my interviews.

In Theoharis’ (2004) study, the principals sought equal rights for all and treated all people as individuals while providing equal opportunities by keeping a focus on and favoring students and families influenced by marginalizing factors. Theoharis’ (2004) study suggests that principals enacting social justice build inclusive communities that actively reject the deficit-thinking model. Theoharis (2004) defined leadership for social justice as advocating, leading and keeping at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States. This definition helped frame this study.

Merchant and Shoho (2005) conducted a study of school level leaders with reputations as stewards of social justice in the communities in which they lived. The participants in the study not only reflected a profound knowledge of self and a strong connection to their parents but they also possessed a clear understanding of the political, social, economic and educational inequities everywhere (Merchant and Shoho, 2005). All of the participants agreed that their personal and professional lives were permeated by their commitment to social justice and equity. These leaders displayed confidence and a deep sense of purpose; not only were these leaders passionate about change and action, they were also patient in their recognition that change is often slow and painful (Merchant and Shoho, 2005).
The participants in this study had a deep and personal connection to social justice which goes right along with the literature from Merchang and Shoho (2005). What they concluded was leaders of social justice often experienced or witnessed hurtful acts of discrimination and social injustice in other forms. In fact, the participants in Merchant and Shoho’s study recounted stories of times they experienced marginalization. Participants noted that these experiences motivated them to strive towards improving the lives of others (Merchant and Shoho, 2005). The leaders were persistent in their efforts to pursue social justice. When asked to define social justice one participant shared,

In terms of where you get that “fire in the belly,” I think that “fire in the belly” comes from the capacity to recognize the injustice but also having cultivated a kind of basic self-confidence and a basic self-assurance. We don’t develop a fire in the belly and social injustice in the absence of the cultivation of a strong philosophical base, a sense of competence and a sense of security in the individual. It involves self-examination; it involves teaching- not just to skills or to knowledge- but to the development of the total human being. And I can’t imagine that you can educate leaders without attending to that (p.23).

Social justice is both a process and a goal that means full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs.

The research participants in Merchant and Shoho’s study of socially just leaders shared the following characteristics:

a) a strong orientation to social justice and equity issues instilled early in their lives by parents/significant adults whose actions regarding these issues were unequivocal, consistent, and passionate
b) a strong sense of purpose and belief in their ability to succeed, from as far back as they could remember, that was communicated and reinforced by their parents/significant adults (including teachers and administrators, many of whom were White).

c) powerful experiences of marginalization that shaped their determination to succeed and to improve things for others in similar situations.

d) a lifelong commitment to social justice and equity issues that permeate their personal and professional lives

e) a deep appreciation for the value of creating community and high expectations among those with whom they work

f) a humility about their visibility in the community and an appreciation for the role of luck in shaping their professional and personal lives

g) an awareness of the influence of the social/political movements of the 1950s and 1960s and the ways in which their involvement in these movements strengthened their commitment to social justice and equity issues

Using these tenants I was able to refine my selection process of the participants of this study, Black women presumed to be leaders for social justice. Using the that leaders for social justice 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 marginalized conditions in the United States, I was able to identify those leaders who were seeking justice in their schools (Theoharis, 2004).
Limitations

The following assumptions will be made in the investigation:

1. The study assumes that recommenders will adequately identify social justice leaders.
2. This study is based on the assumption that participants will be candid in their response to interview questions.
3. The study assumes that there is no reason to not be honest and truthful since respondents are asked to participate in this study because their peers recommended them for their social justice work in schools.

Delimitations of the Study

The parameters of this investigation are as follows:

1. This study will be delimited to site level leaders identified by community organizations, parents, fellow administrators and district level leaders.
2. Due to the small sample size, this study may not be able to be generalized to other subgroups.

Significance of the Study

America needs school level leaders who are willing to lead for social justice. Socially just school leaders seek to challenge the status quo as they closely examine the effects racism and sexism has on the lives of the marginalized and bring to light the minority point of view (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, and Walker, 2002). These leaders
work to provide an equitable educational opportunity, where the condition of all students improves and the gaps decrease between the high and low performing students are eliminated, for all students (Garsidem, 2001).

I believe the stories of these selected Black women school level leaders offer guidance to other school leaders as to how to effectively maneuver the waters of educational leadership in order to advocate, lead and keep at the center of one’s practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States (Theoharis, 2004).

Giving voice to the stories and experiences of social justice leaders provides a unique perspective on the motives and strategies that women school principals use to bring to light the minority perspective. Dillard (2003) uses the term endarkend to describe the intersectionality of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities for Black women. My hope is that this study endarkens current research by providing a set of common characteristics that many Black school level leaders use when leading for social justice as well as providing some questions leaders can begin asking of themselves and others as we strive for change in schools. A literature review serves to provide a contextual framework for understanding the study.
II Review of the Literature and Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Prior to beginning this study, I reviewed literature in education that influenced my thinking on the topic and helped me situate my study within larger trends and discourses in the field. I focused my inquiry on three inter-related subjects that, when viewed holistically, serve as a conceptual framework for the study.

The shortage of literature on school leadership that places Black women school level leaders at the center of their studies signals a significant gap in discourses in educational leadership. Such a gap must be addressed if we wish to move social justice leadership forward. Thus, while this study was born out of my own personal agenda of becoming a socially-just school level leader, the actual need of the study is rather significant. Hence, in reflecting on the social justice leadership literature that incorporates the perspectives of Black women school level leaders, I offer a brief review of three related areas of literature: social justice leadership theory, Black women in educational leadership and critical race theory. These reviews, when regarded holistically, serve as a first attempt at generating a conceptual framework for this study as well as to further explicate the various forces I believe to be influencing the moment that gives rise to the study. This section begins with the conceptual framework of this study.
Towards a Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study combines using Theoharis’ (2004) theory of social justice leaders as an overarching framework along with other authored works about leadership and social justice, theories about Black women in educational leadership, and Critical Race Theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). This conceptual framework guided my data collection and analysis.

The purpose of this research is to understand the strategies of Black women school level leaders, presumed to be leaders of social justice, as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools by advocating, leading and keeping at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States (Theoharis, 2004). By conducting career case studies of the participants in this study, I heard the stories of selected school-level leader and gather information about feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviors related to sticky subjects that are not easily observable (Patton, 2002). By examining the data collected through the lens of Critical Race Theory I heard the counter-narratives (the stories related to the experiences of Black women school level leaders and their feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviors). This framework assumes that all leaders for social justice have a counter-narrative, a story that is outside the norms of the traditional, conservative nature of the field of educational leadership and that most (or all) Black women school level leaders who are leaders for social justice also have a counter-narrative. The following sections will elaborate upon these topics in greater detail.
The following figure illustrates the framework that will be used to analyze the data collected in this study. Social Justice Leadership from the Black Woman School Level Leaders’ Perspective Framework shows that Black women are at the center of this framework. This group is positioned within the existing framework used to describe Leaders for Social Justice because Black women share many of the same characteristics of those who are defined as Leaders for Social Justice. Additionally, both Leaders for Social Justice and Black women have a counter-narrative, a story that is outside the norms of the traditional, conservative nature of the field of educational leadership. By using CRT as the lens to analyze the counter-narratives or counter stories that the women will share, I acknowledge that their stories and depictions of their experiences may sound very different from those told traditionally in educational leadership research that has historically centered on the conservative, White, male school level leader. In Chapter 6, we will revisit this framework and show how the results of this study confirm and challenge this framing.

*Figure 2: Social Justice Leadership from the Black Woman School Level Leaders’ Perspective Framework*
Social Justice Leadership Theory


This stubborn persistence is related to what Capper (1993) argues as moral leadership. She believes that leaders needed to be concerned with freedom, equality, and the principles of a democratic society. Extracting from the scholarship of one critical theorist, Capper suggests that moral leaders are concerned with “suffering and oppression, and critically reflect on current and historical social inequalities” (p. 15). Capper believes that it is imperative that leaders “work toward the empowerment and transformation of followers, while grounding decisions in morals and values (p. 15).

According to Marshall and Ward (2004), a” paradigm of leadership for social justice … is appropriate for schooling in a democratic society (p. 559). They go on to explain leadership for social justice by stating,

(It) demands accepting that the primary interest of schools is the development of children as individuals and as part of a group. It demands that schools are accepting as institutions for the development of children, which supersedes the interest of business, postsecondary education, and the military. A fundamental leap into this paradigm demands recognizing the error of using
schools as tools in the societal process of sorting the haves and have-nots. Finally, recognizing that there is already evidence of (a) school where 'at-risk' children thrive under this different model of leadership; and (b) educational leadership scholars developing theory, research concepts, models, and training strategies for social justice leadership, challenged us to create the political will to transform our field” (p. 559).

Bogotch (2002) asserts that social justice is a “deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power” (p. 140). She states that social justice, as an educational intervention, is a relevant topic for two reasons. First, “our political and economic futures are not predetermined but rather affected by the quality of education provided by a free and democratic society” (p. 141). Secondly, social justice requires a struggle that is continuous and ongoing from a child’s youth through adulthood. Bogotch (2002) goes on to say,

(Social justice) will always be a struggle. Educational leadership is caught inside the tension created by the cultural images and power of having to be perceived publicly as a strong leader, while intellectually and morally recognizing the worth of others, inside and outside of schools (p. 154).

MacKinnon (2000) states that the quality of the relationships among all who are a part of the school community is positively influenced by leaders for social justice. MacKinnon (2000) states that leadership for social justice “can only arise through a critique of the status quo founded on a belief that schooling must be democratic, and an understanding that a school is not democratic unless it practices are excellent and equitable” (p. 7).
Rapp (2002) defines leaders for social justice as people who “resist dissent, rebel, subvert, possess oppositional imaginations, and are committed to transforming oppressive and exploitative social relations in and out of school” (p. 226). Rapp (2002) adds to this definition by stating that these administrators are people “who continue to keep utopian visions alive, who desire more than conventional wisdom, and who are only willing to concede their convictions to a minimal level” (p. 232).

Blackmore (2002) believes that leaders for social justice “practice moral outrage” when faced with social injustices (p. 218). Blackmore (2002) goes on to say that leaders for social justice “defend and extend principals of human dignity, community and realization of democratic process…develop learning networks and partnerships premised upon trust and reciprocity between schools, communities, and among individuals” (p. 218-219). Blackmore (2002) goes on to define social justice leadership as:

A social practice, not just an intellectual matter, and as a social practice it is also a moral and emotional matter…[this] leadership is about passion, changing hearts as well as changing minds…[Social-justice] leadership is not just about good ideas or vision but also about giving intuition and emotion a respected role in the change process. Leadership is about learning; learning to focus on the particular while keeping the context in mind; learning to listen; learning to recognize significant cultural shifts…[This] leadership is also about being able to read the global and relate it to the local. (p. 213)

Dantley (2002) describes socially-just leaders as people who “will create agendas to deconstruct racist, sexist, and ageist epistemological monoliths and will simultaneously construct strategies for resistance and reconstruction” (p. 351). According to Dantley
(2002), leadership for social justice is grounded in passion, which is the groundwork for creating better schools for students and families who have been historically marginalized.

Riester et al. (2002) suggests it is the principal’s personal belief system that is central to making schools more just. Principals leading for social justice make their work personal through their passion and outrage at issues that affect marginalized students and families. These leaders use collaboration, care and conviction to create equity within their schools.

Furman and Gruenewald (2004) describe leadership for social justice as “a systemic, communal challenge involving not only policy and practice but also moral commitments and the courage to work for transformation” (p. 69). Seeing social justice as leadership for socioecological justice, principals change people’s mind-set away from self-centered beliefs to other-centered. Socially-just leaders believe that:

…administrators, teachers, and community members working together with students to construct a pedagogy and a school culture aimed at socioecological justice through all of the ongoing relational processes of communication and decision making that transpires in and around the community and school setting.

(p. 68)

These pieces of literature on social justice leadership assert that it is the leaders’ personal passion and persistence that is pivotal to transforming schools (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Reiser et al., 2002; Scheurich, 1998; Theoharis, 2004). And although all of these studies were not centered on the topic leadership for social justice, they did focus on principals who fit the definition adopted for this study of leaders for social justice. Leading for social justice will be generally defined as advocating, leading and keeping at
the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States (Theoharis, 2004).

It is no wonder that reports on school leadership reveal the principal is the key factor in the success of a school. “No single decision affects the survival of an organization more than that of the people selected to run it” (Sessa & Taylor, 2000, p. 1). School level leaders who lead for social justice have the ability to take three very important actions. As Fink (2004) explains, they must identify and address deeply embedded inequities. “We must not be afraid to name and engage these inequities!” (p. 3). Second, they must accept their share of responsibility in upholding the status quo and exert the leadership necessary to change the policies sustaining it. Third, they must mobilize the community, particularly the part of the community that has suffered at the hands of these inequities for so many years (Fink, 2004, p. 3) In essence, a leader for social justice transforms her school because it is the school’s leader who is the key to changing that school (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Grogan 2002; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Riester et al., 2002).

Some of the key leaders who are changing schools today are Black women.

Black Women in Leadership at the School Level

In a special edition of the Educational Administration Quarterly, Marshall (2004) referenced previous work on the topic of social justice in educational leadership (Chase, 1995; Hall, 1999; Marshall, 1993) by stating “(i)n the professional culture, women and minority administrators often feel they must hide feelings of difference and exclusion and
become more like the dominant White men to be successful” (p. 4). Scholars discuss the insider-outsider reality of many Black women in educational leadership.

In Dillard’s (2003) chapter from "Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership," she defines endarkened feminist epistemology by stating she has “deliberately sought language that attempts to unmask traditionally held political and cultural constructions/constrictions, language that more accurately organizes, resists and transforms oppressive descriptions of sociocultural phenomena and relationships” (p.132). She cites the work of Asante (1988), Thiongo (1986) and others who have suggested “language has historically served –and continues to serve—as a powerful tool in the mental, spiritual, and intellectual colonization of Blacks and other marginalized peoples” (Dillard, 2003). Dillard (2003) states she uses the term endarkened as opposed to enlightened (a way of expressing new and important feminist insight that has come primarily from White feminist thought) because endarkened feminist epistemology is based in the historical roots of Black feminist thought “embodying a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities … for Black women” (Dillard, 2003, p. 144).

Fine (1992) suggests the study of gender focus makes us deploy and legitimate essentialist understandings of gender and “reproduce dualities/beliefs about gender, sexuality, and race and ethnicity” (Fine, 1992, p. 8). However, Black feminist ideology “does not mean that all Black women generate such thought or that other groups do not play a critical role in its production” (Collins, 1990, p. 22). “Being biologically female
(or male) does not automatically a feminist thinker make” (Dillard, 2003, p. 144). Dillard (2003) goes on to say,

From an endarkened epistemological ground, all views expressed and actions taken related to education inquiry arise from a personally and culturally defined set of beliefs that render one responsible to the member and the well-being of the community from which their very definition arises. For example, in the narrative of the principal, she talks passionately about being responsible to Black and other students of color, particularly, and students more generally. However, as she describes the motivation for that sense of responsibility, she takes us back to her childhood and her own schooling experiences as a source of self-definition (Dillard, 2003, p.146)

Race and gender are both socially constructed categories (Collins, 1990). Both constructions are filled with problems; however, the constructions of gender are clearer biological criteria than those with race (Collins, 1990). Although women are united by biological sex, they do not all share the same meaning of woman (Dillard, 2003). As Dillard says,

Although most feminist scholars would recognize and subscribe to at least some common experiences based on culturally engendered experience of being female, the experiences are qualitatively different for those who stand outside the circle of “acceptable” women, most particularly Black women. This is not meant to suggest an additive analysis is ever useful in educational research—that is, that the greater the multiplicity of oppressions, the purer the vision of group members on marginalization or subjugation. Instead, what is suggested is the struggle for a
self-defined feminist consciousness for Black women in our roles...seems to require embracing both a culturally centered worldview (in this case African-centered) and a feminist sensibility, both necessary in embracing an endarkened feminist epistemological stance (2003, p. 147).

We see the dilemma for Black women in leadership is to embrace her culture (race/ethnicity) as well as sex. According to Dillard (2003) this helps maintain sanity (good sense, reason, wisdom, and understanding). For if a Black woman renders herself “insane,” she misses the mark of who she is and was meant to be, and is helpless in the pursuit of social justice for and with others. Thus, the issues for Black women indicate these women leaders must carefully balance their gender and race in their leadership roles. Their stories are informed by endarkened and feminist ways, because they are both Black and woman.

In an intensive case study, Lyman (2002) interviewed Authur Perkins, a Black woman principal who is a highly successful principal of a high poverty school. She described Perkins as a dynamic, forceful and caring woman who fights for her students to have a bright future by giving them high quality learning experiences. Although 12 of the 37 schools in Peoria, the site of the study, were on the academic watch list in Illinois because of low student achievement scores on state tests, Mrs. Perkins’ school was not one of them. Perkins cites her upbringing, filled with poverty and other challenges, and her outrage that so many Black children could not read and no one seemed to care as her motivation to enter the education profession. In fact, Perkins sees her work as a calling. She insists principals should be risk-takers and creative. Perkins’ perspective is similar to other women profiled by Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper’s (1998) work on principals who
exhibit determination and courage as well as “a sense of compassion towards all children and a determination to help children to learn, grow, and overcome whatever obstacles are placed in their way. Their sense of equity and justice has been enhanced by their own experiences as minorities” (p.144).

Likewise, Dillard (1995), describing a principal in her study, states “she nurtures, and leads, by her presence, by her example, by the way she conducts her life and work in ‘putting herself on the line for [her students]’” In a study of twenty-five Black women in leadership positions, Murtadha-Watts (1999) states these leaders “often draw upon profound historical traditions of inner spiritual strength as well as an activist ethic of risk/urgency” (pp. 155-156).

Ah Nee-Benham and Copper (1998) conducted a study of school level leaders whose stories “ground our understanding of leadership in culture and context, elements frequently missing in mainstream literature on leadership” (p. 3). And as Lyman (2002) suggested in her study of Aurthur Penkins, “It is past time to simply hear about the leadership patterns and practices of educational leaders who speak from a perspective of diversity. It is time to honor their voices by listening and following their lead” (p. 31).

Critical Race Theory

In his book, And we are not saved: The elusive quest for racial justice, Derrick Bell (1989) discusses the prevalence of racism and how the law works to prevent, rather than promote, racial justice. The arguments put forth in Bell’s work on the prevalence of racism and the methods reflect the tenets of a larger body of scholarship in legal studies known as Critical Race Theory (CRT). According to Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993), legal scholarship within CRT shares six common themes: (1) CRT
recognizes racism is a pervasive and permanent part of American society; (2) CRT challenges dominant claims of objectivity, neutrality, colorblindness, and merit; (3) CRT insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law; (4) CRT insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing law and society; (5) CRT is interdisciplinary; and (6) CRT works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression and marginalization as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. Although CRT in legal studies is a movement encompassing a wide range of scholarship (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995), the foundation of the theoretical perspective rests on these six themes (Matsuda et al., 1993).

Although it originated in legal studies, CRT is not exclusively applied to the study of the law. In 1994, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate presented a paper at AERA in which they asserted race remains a significant factor in society in general and education in particular. They argued, however, race remained “untheorized” in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

As a means to begin to address this void, they proposed CRT could be employed to examine the role of race and racism in education. In particular, building on the work of Bell and others, they detailed the intersection of race and property rights and the ways this intersection could be used to understand inequity in schools and schooling (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Both Ladson-Billings (1999) and Tate (1997) have argued the established literature on CRT in legal studies must serve as the foundation for work in education. Since that time, other scholars in education have also begun to use CRT as a means to explore the role of race and racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).
CRT is an emerging theoretical framework in the field of education that explores the ways in which alleged race-neutral policies, practices, and laws perpetuate racial/ethnic subordination. It emphasizes the importance of viewing policies, practices, and laws within a proper historical and cultural context in order to deconstruct their racialized meanings (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT comes face to face with colorblindness and meritocracy. Originally developed by legal scholars of color, CRT is grounded in a reality defined by the personal and collective historical experiences of Black communities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

CRT acknowledges as its most basic premise race and racism are a defining characteristic of American society. For people of color, each of these dimensions of one’s identity can potentially elicit multiple forms of subordination (Crenshaw, 1993), yet each dimension can also be subjected to different forms of oppression. DuBois foreshadowed the centrality of race in U.S. society for the twentieth century would be the problem of the color line.

According to Delgado (1995), racism is “normal, not aberrant, in American society” (p. xiv) and has become so imperceptible in America’s social order it appears to be both normal and natural within the culture. In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Ladson-Billings (1999) referred to Derrick Bell’s influential work on the historical and legal underpinnings of racism in America. She contented “that racism is a permanent fixture of American life. Therefore, the strategy of those who fight for social justice is one of unmasking and exposing racism in its various permutations” (p. 213)

Using CRT, one must use methodology for unmasking truths. Narrative storytelling enables researchers to get counter accounts, documented stories expresses
views and opinions opposite of the norm, of the lived realities of oppressed people. Oppressed people integrate their “experiential knowledge by drawing from a shared history as ‘other’ with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony” (Barnes, 1990, p.1864-1865). Therefore,” the experiences of oppressions such as racism and sexism have important aspects for developing a [CRT] analytical standpoint” (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p.213).

*Exploring the Counter-narrative*

Language that disrupts the dominant discourse is counter-narrative. Proponents of CRT and professional discourse believe groups that have historically been marginalized and silenced can, by giving voice in their own language, tell all—each with her own story. Those who have been historically marginalized are seen as "knowers"—as possessors of knowledge.

By studying Black women school level leaders presumed to be leaders for social justice, I placed women, people of color and social justice leaders, at the center of the study, as represented in Figure 2 on page 19. Each of the participants in this study have a story, or counter-narrative, that is different from the dominant (male, White and conservative) group’s story because they are Black, women and socially-just school level leaders. CRT proponents (Bell, Crenshaw, Delgado, Guinier, Ladson-Billings, Lawrence, Matsuda, & Williams) have coined the term *counterstories* and assigned to it the meaning of stories counter those told from a White social perspective (Hernandez, 2004; Ladson-Billings 1998,1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These counterstories are a challenge to the dominant discourse of leadership and leading.
The retelling of the leadership story from a Black woman’s perspective will, in many ways, be an effort to counteract the stories told by and about White males who dominate leadership research. The researcher’s proposed work will help scholars reconceptualize Black women’s leadership norms. It is in these retellings that the stories of Black women school level leaders will reject the concept of one universal truth about school leadership (Hernandez, 2004).

Maenette Beham and three of her doctoral students, all women of color, embraced this idea of narrative story telling in research. Coming together to produce three dissertations centered on Black women creating socially just learning environments, Beham pushed her students “to liberate their minds in order to view old problems through new lenses, and to guide them in the construction of vibrant texts that captured the courage and truths of the lives of their interviewees” (Sanders-Lawson, Smith Campbell, and Beham, 2006,p.31) As a result of this collaboration the women agreed that the stories they heard and shared illuminated what they had learned about the women of their studies and how these leaders were able to create socially just learning environments.

Similarly, this study captures the alternative realities of these educational leaders and focuses on their worldview. As a result, the narratives shared seem fresh and new to the field of educational leadership because these stories are not often included in the traditional theories of leadership (Dillard 2003; Hernandez, 2004) In this study, CRT allows for a reinterpretation of dominant leadership epistemologies, thereby reconceptualizing leadership norms through the stories of these Black women school level leaders (Dillard, 1995).
CRT informs the stories of women whose ways of leading are informed in an endarkened way and a feminine way. Because these selected women leaders embody the feminine, they carry a counter-narrative. CRT helped me recognize the counter-narrative during the data collection phase.

Reflections on the Literature

This chapter represents a review of literature that serves to help the reader situate the present study. It provides an overview of several issues to which I believe this dissertation speaks. As I analyzed my data, I reflected on this literature and the issues it raises in an attempt to examine the different ways these educators’ stories illuminated the problems highlighted and provided potential answers to those problems. During the analysis process, I also found the need to consult additional texts which are integrated into the concluding chapters.

In the next chapter, I provide an in-depth overview of the methods and methodologies that guided the data collection procedures used to capture the experiences of the Black women school level leader in this study. I also provide a detailed description of the data analysis processes engaged in to interpret that data.
III. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain, in sufficient detail, how I attempted to capture, and then re-present, the voices of the Black women in this study. In so doing, I discuss the means by which I collected the resulting data, and the process by which I analyzed its contents.

Research Design Rationale

This study sought to understand what strategies Black women school level leaders, who were presumed to be leaders for social justice, used as they sought equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools. The focus was how these selected leaders brought to light the minority perspective of leading for social justice in schools today. The women in this study sought to challenge the status-quo by examining the effects of discrimination on the lives of the marginalized, and at times these tactics proved to be dangerous and even damaging to their careers. However unnerving the situation they faced, the select Black women school level leaders were able to provide an equitable educational opportunity for students by increasing achievement, closing gaps and improving the overall conditions of all students in their care.

Qualitative research was the most appropriate for giving voice to the Black women school level leaders in this study. My reasoning for conducting a qualitative research study is based on the following assumptions as similarly set forth by Lincoln and
Guba (1985) and Creswell (1994) and serves as key guidance factors as "method" for my proposal.

1. Reality is subjective and consists of multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically.

2. The researcher/inquirer and the object of inquiry are inseparable; they interact to influence one another; I am the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

3. Research is value-laden and biased; influenced by the researcher’s values as expressed by the choice, framing, and focusing of a problem.

4. A personal voice and accepted qualitative words are employed as a means of developing an idiographic body of knowledge; these hypotheses are context bound, describe each individual case, and reflect an inductive, emergent design.

Phenomena are the result of mutual simultaneous shaping that cannot be separated into cause-and-effect relationships. For this reason I decided a qualitative research design was best suited for this study. Through this qualitative inquiry I sought to highlight the perspectives of Black women school level leaders who are presumed to be leaders for social justice.

The primary goal of qualitative research is to develop patterns, themes, and theories that are woven into an emerging story, told to give meaning to and promote an understanding of a particular phenomenon. Therefore the choice of using qualitative methodology becomes more relevant for this proposed study. A phenomenological approach differs from other naturalistic or interpretive approaches (i.e., ethnography, case
study, and grounded theory) in it involves examining and understanding the “lived experiences” of a small number of subjects via “extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationship of meaning” (Creswell, 1994, p. 12). By focusing on the experiences of the selected social justice oriented school-level leaders, this study promotes:

1. A theoretically based understanding of the participants’ unique perspectives, interpretations, and meanings attached to their experiences facilitated by detailed descriptions.
2. The discovery of commonalities in discerned themes or categories that not only link their academic and social experiences, but also reveal how school-level leaders who are leading for social justice similarly comprehend and interpret the social world.

This qualitative approach to inquiry will focus on the “lived experiences” of social justice leaders who are acting as school-level administrators in order to fully understanding their perceptions and actions as they advocate for social justice in their schools. Traditionally, racism, the subordinate experiences of race, is a sticky issue that has been misunderstood, suppressed, and avoided in the discourse of educational leadership (Rusch, 2004). Conducting qualitative inquiry with a CRT lens and Social Justice Advocacy questions perspectives was useful in asking research questions, reviewing literature, analyzing data and forming conclusions and recommendations during qualitative inquiry by placing race and its intersectionality with other forms of subordination at the center of research (Collins, 1990). Additionally, CRT allowed for a
connection of research and social justice issues and will acknowledge the importance of perspectives across disciplines that aim to enhance the understanding of the effects of racism and other forms of discrimination.

Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative research allows the investigator to get an intimate look into the lives of participants through in-depth interviews and observations. Because qualitative researchers acknowledge the multiple realities participants may have and seek to create a rich description of these realities, I used in-depth interviewing as the primary data collection method, thereby becoming the primary research instrument for this study.

In-depth interviewing provides the best means for fully grasping the meanings of participants’ experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described an interview as “a purposeful conversation, usually between two people, that is directed by one in order to get information” (p. 135). Patton (2002) stated the purpose of qualitative interviewing is to get another’s perspective, to gather information about feelings, thoughts, intentions, and behaviors that are not easily observable. Because I was the primary research instrument I was aware that the quality, amount and type of information the participants choose to share can be hindered by my skills and demeanor (Glesne & Peshkin, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002).

These interviews needed to be structured more like conversations than formal events. As stated earlier, the phenomenological approach involves examining and understanding the “lived experiences” of a small number of subjects via “extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationship of meaning” (Creswell, 1994,
In order to gain a better understanding of the participants’ experiences and the context of their lives, I used phenomenological in-depth interviewing by conducting a series of separate, semi-structured interviews with each participant (Seidman, 1998). Additionally, I utilized probing techniques to stimulate responses and encourage the responders to dig deeper to reveal any overlooked information about their life experiences as leaders for social justice advancing issues for marginalized students (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997).

Patton (2002) described these types of interviews as the standardized open-ended interview. The interviews of this proposed study were conducted using a structured protocol of open-ended questions. Questions were focused to gather the participant’s view and not to reflect the researcher’s views. The questions were generated from the research questions stated earlier (see Appendix F).

The first step in data collection process was to obtain IRB approval (see Appendix A). Then, I made a list of schools in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester county areas that have made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) over the past three years. Once a list was made, I identify those schools with principals who were Black women and had been in that particular school for three consecutive years.

The next step was to get a list of principals who have the reputation of being a leader for social justice. In order to get a listing of these names, I contacted district level leaders, parents and community members in order to get names of principals who would be suitable for this study, creating a pool of possible participants for the study. Once a list was composed, I selected the study’s prospective participants by matching names from
both lists (the once created from AYP data and the other from the community). If a principal was on both lists, I sent a letter to that principal explaining the research study and asking for her participation, along with an informed consent form (see Appendix C). With this initial contact, I included a copy of sample interview questions (see Appendix F) so respondents had all the information necessary for making a decision about their participation. The interviews took place after consent was given.

I developed a participant contact sheet that listed names, addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses, and included columns to notate (a) information about whether consent forms and confirmation letters were sent out, and (b) specifics about the scheduling of the first interview and follow-up interviews with participants. The participants received a letter inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix B), along with a consent form (Appendix C), outlining the scope of the study and specifics about the interview appointment. Each consent form included: (a) purpose, procedures, and potential risk or/and benefits of the study; (b) detailed information about participants’ rights; (c) how anonymity and confidentiality of the data will be maintained; (d) how the finding will be disseminated (i.e., dissertation, publication of articles, and conference presentations); and (e) a request for permission to participate in the study and for Ito utilize the interview data collected. I provided another opportunity to discuss these issues prior to conducting initial, face-to-face interviews. During this discussion, I emphasized the fact pseudonyms would be used to identify participants and data collected would be kept confidential through the maintenance of secure files accessible by me and my dissertation Chair.
Initially, school leaders were hesitant to participate in this study. Although I work within a position that gives me access to leaders in the Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester schools, many of the women to whom I sent a formal IRB approved invitation to take part in the study, turned down the request. I later learned many of the school leaders were leery of what would happen during the interview and what ramifications they would feel having talked to me about issues of social justice. One principal even stated to another administrator, “I’m not letting her study me. She can forget that!”

To overcome this resistance, I asked for advice from my dissertation chair, Catherine Marshall, who gave me a lengthy list of strategies to use. One strategy that benefited me almost immediately was using the participants whom had already been interviewed to encourage other Black women to participate in the study. The two principals I initially interviewed emailed and called their friends and urged them to help me. One principal sent out emails and followed up with phone calls. After meeting one of her recruits I learned the importance of what was termed as “the underground network” of Black women school level leaders in this area. After two participants went through the set of interviews and shared their experiences with their peers, who were also invited to participate, the other women deemed it was “safe” to talk to me and agreed to be in the study.

Each participant had three separate interviews. The purposes of the first interview was to gather background information, establish the context of the participant’s life experiences, and create a non-threatening rapport between me and the participant and to ask questions about the participants past experiences with social justice. In the second
interview, I focused on strategies each participant used to promote social justice in their schools. In the third and final interview I encouraged the participants to reflect and add any additional information to the data. The first two interviews lasted roughly 90 minutes each while the third interview session only lasted approximately 30 minutes. All interviews were spaced three to four days apart to give respondents the time needed to reflect on what was discussed at the previous interviews, but not enough time to allow the participant to lose the connection between meetings (Seidman, 1998).

Site and Sample

As indicated by the literature review, the achievement gaps in our nation’s schools exists throughout the United States. However, due to the nature of qualitative research, as well as time and financial restraints, I focused the research study on principals located in the Tri-County area (Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties). Located in the lowcounty region of South Carolina, these districts serve over 130,000 students. Although there is a great amount of wealth in these counties due to tourism and an influx of new industries, at the same time, there is an equal or greater amount of poverty both within the inner city limits and in very rural areas of the lowcountry. In these three districts, there are schools that could be characterized as urban, suburban and rural, with rural being very rural.

In order to gather, interpret, understand and might use of the potentially rich and varied stories the selected leaders may be willing to share, it was necessary to make a commitment to spend significant time with a small number of participants. Targeted respondents for this study were women who are currently practicing as school-level
leaders (principals, assistant principals) of South Carolina schools. The following criteria were used to identify potential participants: 1) current principals or assistant principals in a public school, 2) demonstrated a perspective of promoting social justice as a driving force behind what brought them to their leadership position, 3) advocated, led and kept at the center of their practice/vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and or other historically marginalizing factors, and 4) have evidence to show their work has produced a more just school (Theorharis, 2004).

Seven potential participants, all Black and either principals or assistant principals in South Carolina schools were invited to participate in this study. Because this study’s framework proposes that Black women were presumed to be leaders for social justice, participants were selected based on their race and gender. The use of purposive sampling initially to identify participants was most appropriate for a qualitative study because of the need for the purposeful selection of socially-just school-level leaders who would provide data that best answered the research question (Creswell, 1994).

By utilizing a snowball sampling technique, I built a comprehensive base of identified leaders (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The technique of snowballing further added to the benefits of this type of sampling by securing the assistance of participants in identifying other administrators who were both Black and presumed to be leading for social justice in their schools, and whose personal characteristics and experiences are similar in nature to those already being studied. Patton (2002) describes this snowballing technique as a part of an emergent qualitative design.
Below is a chart that indicates pertinent demographic information on each of the participants.

Table 3.1: Demographic data about participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of Administrative Experience</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cadoria</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edelman</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elders</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgerald</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Questions

As stated in Chapter One, the following research question focused this study:

What strategies do Black women school level leaders, who are presumed to be leaders for social justice, use as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools? The sub-question for this overarching research question was: (a) What life experiences with social injustice have you experienced that has motivated you to improve things for others in similar situations? These guiding questions, which served as the foundation on which the interview questions were formulated, also served as the
cornerstone for the analysis of the data. Table 3.1 presents the reader with an outline of the research question and sub-question and the subsequent interview questions (see Appendix F) that were designed to explore them.

Table 3.2: Research Questions and Correspondence to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions and Sub-Questions</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What strategies do Black women school level leaders, who are presumed to be leaders for social justice, use as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools?</td>
<td>Questions from Second Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What life experiences with social injustice have you experienced that has motivated you to improve things for others in similar situations?</td>
<td>Questions from First Interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Design

The method of data collection best suited the questions and purpose of this study was qualitative interviewing. I have chosen this method because of its proven ability to generate rich data for descriptive and exploratory purposes (Weiss, 1994). Qualitative interviewing allowed me to tailor the interview questions to each respondent to achieve a “fuller understanding of the experiences of our respondents” (Weiss, 1994, p. 3). This allowed for a greater depth of information gained from interviews, therefore a fuller picture or story of experiences.

From a personal perspective, I had hoped these interviews would uncover the strategies necessary for school level leaders to use when providing equitable and excellent education for students who have been historically marginalized in society. I
explored one main question: What strategies do Black women school level leaders, who are presumed to be leaders for social justice, use as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools?

After participants were identified, I contacted these school level leaders to provide a brief description of the purpose and structure of the proposed study and to request their participation. Those leaders who agreed to participate in the study arranged an initial interview. As previously mentioned, all participants received a confirmation letter and a consent form sent to each participant prior to the interview, to allow for an ample review.

Research Procedures

The main type of data recording strategies used in this study was field notes, interviews, transcripts and audio taping. Having identified the seven school level leaders, the second step was to initiate contact with these women. I sent theses leaders a letter explaining the study (see Appendix B). An informed consent form was enclosed and the participants were asked to read and sign it (see Appendix C). I also enclosed a copy of sample interview questions (see Appendix F). Those who agreed to participate were asked to return the informed consent form in a self addressed, stamped envelope.

I contacted each of the selected Black women school level leaders by phone to set up the initial interview. The leader selected the interview site. All of the participants opted for me coming to their school, with the majority of the interviews taking place in the leader’s office. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher discussed the study with participants and answered any questions. Confidentiality was assured and the
participant had the opportunity to discuss the informed consent form at that time. The interview was semi-structured with questions that served as a guide for the conversation (see Appendix F). I reserved the right to deviate from the questions should the conversation takes unexpected turns, which often happened. Following the first and second interview sessions, I discussed the scheduling of the next interview.

Along with the initial contact, the participants were invited to have on hand any documents related to their accomplishments as a leader for social justice. I kept a reflective journal and gave each leader a journal to reflect in between interview sessions as well. I also took extensive field notes throughout the process. These field notes served as an alternative source of information and should provide an account of non-verbal components of the interaction not captured; they were an important component of this qualitative research study (Creswell, 1994). These field notes also recorded the researcher’s reactions to what the respondents said during the interviews (Patton, 2002).

Data Recording Strategies

With the participant’s permission, I taped the interviews and took notes, as well. An audiotape was used to develop an accurate transcription of each initial, face-to-face interview and supported the fieldnotes by recording what were seen and heard (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I transcribed the interviews to capture participants’ complete stories. In addition to recording information from the initial interview via an audiotape, I wrote field notes in spiral bound notebooks, leaving space in the left margin for comments. These notes provided a handwritten account of interviews, as well as a description of observations made about the setting, participant non-verbal behaviors, methodological
issues, and interpretations of the interviews (Patton, 1990). Interviews ranged from 75
minutes to two hours, with the average interview lasting about one and a half hours.
Audiotapes were labeled and notes were coded so correct retrieval of information was
assured.

Follow each interview, I reviewed the tapes and field notes to clarify information.
As Huberman and Miles (1998) note, field notes must be “corrected, extended, edited,
and typed up” and audiotapes must be transcribed (p. 183). I transcribed the interviews
and completed reflective journal entries after each interview. Each interviewee had a
folder with information from interviews, and notes were maintained, dated, and coded for
easy retrieval.

Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis is an ongoing process. However, as Merriam (1988) notes, data analysis
becomes even more intensive when all the data are collected. This process can be
overwhelming when a novice researcher is confronted with mounds of data. However, I
felt the focused research question and sub-questions, the conceptual framework, the sites,
and the sample made this research study feasible. Miles and Huberman (1998) explain
that, “(t)hese choices have a focusing and bounding function, ruling out certain variables,
relationships, and associated data, and selecting others for attention” (p. 185).

I began with complete immersion in the data: transcripts, interview log, reflective
journal, and notes. Through questioning the data and reflection on the conceptual
framework (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), I then looked for categories. “These categories
then become buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.154). The identification of these categories aided in the coding process, as well as in the process of data reduction. Data reduction is described as the process by which “the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks and interpretation…” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p.152). This process was particularly important for this novice researcher who had assiduously collected voluminous data and assigned it to various categories. The assignment to categories assisted in an interpretation of the data, which is presented in Chapter V.

Coding the data obtained through interviews, complemented by observational data, helped me make sense of and interpret the meaning of patterns and themes that emerged. This activity allowed me gain an understanding of the participant’s perspective. Corresponding to the inductive nature of qualitative inquiry, data analysis is essentially an interactive, flexible process involving re-reading, rethinking, and reinterpreting data which ultimately develops a familiarity with the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Major codes and sub-codes will be changed during this process. The interpretation of this data “…requires that I be comfortable with developing categories and making comparisons and contrasts…open to possibilities and see contrary or alternative explanations for the finding” (Creswell, 1994, p. 153). Such attention to the researcher’s central role in interpreting data and drawing conclusions, and the potential impact of researcher biases, was addressed in the narrative text that emerged.
Patton (2002) suggests a list of several approaches for beginning to think about organizing and reporting data. I began to organize the analysis of this data by (a) using the individual as the primary unit of analysis; (b) designating the key issues; and (c) sorting the responses to the questions asked (Patton, 2002).

The design of this proposed study called for an analytical approach that involved reviewing, reconsidering, and revising the codes used to label chunks of data resulting from interviews with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). This form of data analysis resulted in the identification of themes and patterns of meaning that were in line with the typical outcomes shared by Miles and Huberman (1994), by identifying “regularities, patterns, explanations…causal flows, and propositions” (p. 11). It is this aspect of qualitative data analysis that was crucial in providing an accurate account or interpretation of the experiences of participants currently serving as school-level leaders in the Tri-County schools.

The method of allowing themes to emerge helped me make adjustments in strategies as the study progressed. In order to make the data manageable, data reduction became necessary. Computerized files were created to assist with the management of the data.

To deal with emerging themes, another analytical tool I needed to use was memo writing. In this case, I wrote memos about methodological issues, concerns, and discoveries as they occurred. I kept a notebook where I wrote down my thoughts as I interviewed. These were notes on the body language of the participant, the setting of the interview, and how comfortable I perceived the interviewee was to share information. For
example, stars drawn beside notes in this notebook indicated the participant was freely sharing information that hadn’t been requested of her. These notes helped me to take brief notes without taking my attention totally away from the content being shared.

By definition, a reflexive journal is described by qualitative researchers as “a kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about self… and method” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327). The memos provided an effective and valuable approach because they encouraged me to closely examine the data of interviews with social justice leaders and the process of collecting this data. I used memo writing to document my thoughts as I came up with insightful ideas or theories about emergent themes and how they were related. I wrote key words in the margins of my notes when I was reminded of common themes that had been previously shared by other interviewees. For example, three themes that were brought up in most interviews centered on standardized testing, parent involvement and cultural differences, both race and economic. When I heard these themes arising in the conversation, I placed the key words in the margins and prompted the interviewee to give further examples relating to those topics. Miles and Huberman (1994) similarly place enormous value on using this type of analytic tool and consider memos to be “one of the most useful and powerful sense-making tools at hand” (p. 72) for qualitative researchers.

The use of a phenomenological approach produced detailed descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of school level leaders identified as socially-just. Such descriptions provided a foundation of data that increased the potential transferability or applicability, similar to quantitative external validity, of findings to other similar
contexts. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the burden of making transferability judgments does not fall upon me but on others who will potentially apply the findings. Therefore, the themes that emerged from this study should endarken future research studies by focusing not only on getting the counter-narratives of Black women, but also on looking at how Black school level leaders address the themes of bringing stakeholders to the decision table, acknowledging, valuing and celebrating all cultures and raising student achievement. These themes can later be used to create evaluative tools that could be used by school districts and schools of education to inform hiring practices, professional development and admission into Educational Leadership programs.

The interpretations and conclusions gathered from the data met the qualitative criteria of dependability and conformity, equivalent to reliability and objectivity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prior to interviewing each participant I, in an effort to get a sense of the leader and her school’s demographics, reviewed the AYP school report card and visited the school’s website. The schools webpage was useful in gathering data specifically about the mission of the school, the diversity of the staff and school culture in general. Additionally, I asked participants to review the content of their interviews and to add, delete or clarify any statements they felt did not accurately express their stories, experiences or views.

Crafting (Counter) Narratives

According to Seidman (1998), creating profiles most often entails working with those interviews that are “complete and compelling,” have a beginning, middle, and end, and possess some sense of conflict and resolution (p.102). A vignette then is a shorter
version of a profile which covers a more limited aspect of a participant’s experience. Consequently, the counter-narratives offered in the next chapter possess characteristics of both profiles and vignettes. The stories are more than a little compelling in that, while they reveal a substantial amount of conflict, there is often little resolution.

In the process of writing the stories found in the next chapter, I attempted to be as methodical as possible. Specifically, I began by reading through the transcripts for the interviews to re-present the stories that evolved of these women as they discussed what led them to this field in general and to leadership for social justice specifically. I read through the transcripts marking passages relating to, or dealing specifically with, what experiences motivated these women to lead for social justice. I then color-coded each interview so when I assembled all the passages I would know from which interview each passage came. In their final presentation, I attempted to arrange the stories into passages that display the lived lives of these school level leaders.

To the best of my ability, what I present here are the women’s own words. However, blending my commitment to be as faithful as possible to their words with a desire to make each story as smooth and accessible as possible necessitated a few adjustments. Specifically, I deleted from the stories a substantial number of the speech utterances, such as “uh,” “ah,” and “you know,” for reasons of readability and flow. Finally, I used my own words in those places where it was necessary to provide a transition from one idea to another and to give the reader some contextual information that was essential to understanding each narrative. The counter-narratives are meant to
give you a glimpse into the lived experiences of these Black women. They are in no way meant to be comprehensive accounts.

**Role of the Researcher**

I provided a medium for the school level leaders’ voices to be heard. The counter-narratives in this study came from people who represent a group that has been traditionally silenced and marginalized, especially in the lowcountry areas of South Carolina. These stories, filled with language that disrupts the dominant discourse, provided a different understanding of these realities (Lopez, 2003). The participants in this study had the opportunity to tell their own stories in their own way. Participants cited that they were “being open and honest” and “not holding back” when sharing their experiences. To help the school level leaders feel more comfortable, I shared stories from my own experiences as a teacher, administrator and even stories about my parents’ school experiences when they were students in this area of South Carolina.

As researcher, my job as the instrument for collecting the data was to use interviewing skills to receive knowledge from the participants. Chase (1995) says that in order to get the full story, the data collector has to put the burden of transmitting the story on the speaker, the participant. Chase suggests that as with CRT methodologies, the locus of power should be positioned towards the participant’s and not the researcher’s agenda. Throughout the interviews I often prompted the participant to delve deeper or share more of a story if I felt she was cutting the story short or giving me a superficial answer. “Could you tell me more about that experience?” or “How did that make you feel?” were just two of the prompts I would use to get the participant to open up more.
The desire to dedicate my career to the improvement of those marginalized, particularly in the Black community, through the institution of schooling comes from my own experiences growing up as a Black woman of this society. I arrived at this topic through my own interests in issues related to racism. I have both experienced and exerted racial oppression. Becoming more aware of my own biases makes me accountable for my actions while holding others accountable to their own prejudices and biases. When I became a teacher, I saw first hand that the effects of racism had not ended with the ending on segregation in schools and society, but the ramifications of racial oppression yet continues to taint our schools. My own acknowledgements of racism and hearing the experiences of others have increased to critiquing and enhancing the educational experiences of today’s youth.

I found out that the selected Black women school level leaders who were presumed to be leaders for social justice cited their own personal experiences with racism and other isms as their motivation for promoting social justice. I expected that their stories would be similar to mine and other Black women educators I know. I imagined that leaders of social justice are born out of their own desires to right the wrongs they have experienced in our society.

In accordance with the assumptions of the qualitative research paradigm, I proposed to conduct this study serving as a participant-observer, actively engaging in interview conversations with selected participants, to create a narrative (based on themes) of their experiences (Creswell, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). As the researcher, my decision to explore race and social justice leadership was heavily influenced by my own
background. I have had to constantly struggle with learning the value of my black skin in this society, how to overcome the obstacles presented, and ultimately how to uphold the integrity of those who share my struggles. Additionally, because of my experiences with being Black, I am a leader for social justice too, both in my community and in my school.

As an Black woman I felt that many times I had to choose whether to identify more closely with my race or with my gender. It’s almost as if I had to choose who to be: Black or a woman. And although many women, like myself, learn to cope with the duality of living in what is sometimes two opposing worlds, gender and race, we somehow overcome the barriers and succeed.

I have shared with other Black women stories of the effects of this tension results from having to choose between being black or being a women. For example, while an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the mid 1990s, I had seen many women bullied by Black men on the topic of the Million Man March. The leaders of that rally urged Black women to stay home “with the children” that day and support “their black men.” I felt that if I could not participant by attending the march, I shouldn’t “have to stay home.” After many open debates in one of my Black studies classes on this issue I was personally told that if I didn’t stay home on the day of the march “I was against the black man.” Insulted and hurt, I had to make a choice that I felt comfortable with choosing. After much thought on the morning of the march, I got up and went to all of my classes that day. Not many Black women were out on campus that day, but there were women with black faces that passed and smiled as they too went to class.
No doubt my personal experiences and biases affected the way I conducted this study. It affected the way I perceived, interpreted, and communicated the findings to the larger education community, as well as to participants in the study. Knowing that my experiences would have this effect on my study, I made every effort to counterbalance my biases by:

- Setting my interviews in the participants’ setting so that the context of the data-gathering felt natural for the selected school-level leaders. In this study, I was surprised that most of the women I interviewed asked me to come to their school. This was primarily for the benefit so they could “kill two birds with one stone.” On many of these trips I was introduced to the other administrators and given tours of the facilities.

- Recognizing that as the primary data collection instrument for this study I both interacted with and influenced data and need to maintain the integrity of the research process as well as the outcomes. For example, if I felt the interviewee being hesitant on a subject I often offered a story I personally experienced to help break the ice. However, I did not want to put words in their mouths so I was quite aware that nodding my head and smiling was often enough to ensure a participant that I understood her standpoint while putting the burden of the interview on her;

- Analyzing the data as continuous and on-going, making it necessary for me to remain open to allowing the data to lead the research and not the other way around. After each interview I wrote reflections in my reflective notebook and immediately reviewed all notes and tapes; and
Using member-checking as a valuable tool for remaining objective during the analysis phase of the study. Each participant was encouraged to review her interview and to add, delete and clarify any statements she felt did not accurately state her story.

Methods of Verification

The method of verification for this research study was primarily through triangulation of data. As Miles and Huberman (1998) noted, “…triangulation is less a tactic than a mode of inquiry. I built in triangulation into my ongoing data collection process by collecting and double-check findings and using multiple sources and modes of evidence. The data was verified by using multiple data collection methods: the in-depth interviews, reflective journal keeping by participants and researcher, document analysis and field notes. Obviously, “…the more sources tapped for understanding, the richer the data and the more believable the findings” (Glesne, 1999, p. 31). Through triangulating the data in this fashion any biases that emerged could be identified and removed. As Gall et al., (1996) explain, “Triangulation helps to eliminate biases that might result from relying exclusively on any one data collection method, source, analyst, or theory” (p.574). I felt that these multi-methods were complementary and along with thick, rich descriptions and extensive verbatim quotations the data was verifiable. The 8 interviews were also additional means of triangulating the data, since I looked for emerging themes, generalizations, and concepts. Using guidance from Wynn (2004) the interviewees aided me in explanation building and inference-making process.
In this qualitative study, it was important to incorporate the analysis of data into the research process as soon as data are collected (Creswell, 1999; Glesne, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The goal of data-analysis is to arrive at reasonable conclusions based on the data. Through data analysis, common characteristics emerged from the interview sessions. As stated earlier, as I interviewed the participants, and heard repeating themes from previous interviews, I wrote key words in the margins of my reflective notebook. I was always looking for patterns that emerged while in an interview setting and as I reviewed my notes and tapes after the interviews. Therefore, qualitative data analysis became the search for generalized statements about the relationship among the categories of data were collected and served to build grounded theory (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) and make sense of the collected data.

Outcome of the Study and Its Relations to Theory and Literature

Although there are a large number of studies done on schooling and leadership, the voices of Black women school level leaders have been scarce. This research study is a descriptive narrative that emerged from the data analysis (Creswell, 1994). Reporting the qualitative data and analyzing it was not a separate task. The words used to shape the data resulted in me “engaging in the interpretive act” of transforming raw data into meaning (Marhsall & Rossman, 1999, p. 157)

This study sought to give voice to a group of leaders whose perspective is commonly overlooked. Narrative inquiry focuses on an individuals’ life story. In chapter four, I explore stories told by the participant through the construction of narratives. I
assumed that these women’s lives are a story and then sought to collect data to describe those lives. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) suggest that the main reason for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans individually and socially lead storied lives. Narrative methodology was therefore a means of documenting the ways humans experience the world. Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1994) argues that Black story telling infuses these narratives and serves as a link between the process of narrative to discovering and attaining identity. Likewise, this study was an account of Black school level leaders revealing their lives journey through sharing stories of personal and cultural experiences.
IV. Narratives Introducing Seven Black Women School Level Leaders

Introduction

In this chapter and the one that follows, I offer two iterations of the study’s findings. In Chapter V, I offer an analysis of the Black women’s experiences with social justice leadership. In this chapter, I offer counter-narratives crafted from the participants’ own words.

Narrative inquiry focuses on an individual’s life story. Like Benham and Cooper (1998) who grounded their study of nine diverse women school leaders in narrative inquiry, this research study explores the stories told by seven Black school level leaders and recorded those stories through the construction of these narrative. Benham and Cooper (1998) rationale for using narrative is that “Narrative methods might very well be more responsive to the researcher’s and practitioner’s intent to bring to the surface those experiences that go beyond superficial masks and stereotypes” (p.7).

As mentioned in Chapter 3 of this study, Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (1994) use of narrative in her research and writing confirms its suitability for this type of study. She argues that by allowing her participants to be active storytellers she considered them “modern day griots, perceptive and courageous narrators of personal and cultural experience” (p.606) who found storytelling to be a creative process.

One of the research questions this study set out to answer was what life experiences with social injustice have these leaders experienced that has motivated them
to improve things for others in similar situations. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the readers to the seven Black women who participated in this study and to find out what has been their personal motivation to do justice work in their schools. This section is thus composed of seven narratives documenting my first interview session with each participant where this research question was the center of discussion. The narratives here are presented in both my voice as well as the voice of the participants. Each individual subsection begins with me sharing with the reader some contextual information about interviews and the participant followed by. So as not to water-down the spoken words of the participants in this research study, much of the narratives here are presented in the actual words of the women interviewed.

Marianne Davis

At the time of the study, Marianne was a 54 year-old Black woman who was born in Louisiana and raised in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Davis, the principal of Jefferson, a very large black rural middle school located in Berkeley County has a story filled with inspiration, adventure, ethics, and the spirit of activism.

I had heard of Marianne Davis long before inviting her to join this study for she had a story the reputation of being a fair leader who really looks out for her students. “She’s very hands on,” one parent told me.

Our first interview occurred in her office. She insisted that I meet her at her school so she could show me around the campus and introduce me to some of her staff. Upon my arrival, I signed in and was immediately escorted back to Davis’ office. As I approached Davis’ office, my eyes wandered from one wall to the next observing the colorful artwork and pictures of children at play that lined the walls. In silence, we
walked pass what looked like a teachers’ lounge, copier room and perhaps what may have been a conference room all in one. The tour came to an abrupt stop just outside a large door slightly cracked. The door bore a bronze nameplate upon which Davis’ name was engraved. I stood there while the secretary silently slipped beyond the entrance and into Davis’ office. A minute later, she reemerged with a tall statuesque woman behind her. Marianne Davis was a beautiful cocoa brown woman with smooth skin and long braids that fell just past her shoulders. She was wearing red-framed reading glasses low on her nose and her gaze fell across my face and then the length of me as if she was sizing me up. She invited me in.

Davis grew up in an all black area where everyone was black and everyone looked like her. Although there were Whites in her hometown, her immediate community was all black. After growing up in this all-black community, attending an all-black church and going to all-black schools, she chose to go to a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Davis shared, “Black is all I knew and to be honest I would have been scared to death to be with White people all the time on a college campus.” So she attended South Carolina State, an HBCU located in Orangeburg, South Carolina. “I loved State. I loved everything about it.” Davis became an integral part of the campus community by joining a sorority, playing sports, and participating in black cultural events.

During her first years as an undergraduate, Davis joined the newspaper staff and wrote many columns. One project that had the most impact on her future was a news piece she wrote about the Peace Corp. During the data collection phase of this project, Davis met she met with Professor Elizabeth Chambers who had done some work on the
continent of Africa through the Peace Corp herself. Professor Chambers was eager to
interview with Davis because she wanted State’s students to hear about the benefits of
studying abroad or joining the Peace Corp after graduation. “I was so fascinated by her
mementos and her stories that I looked into the Peace Corp myself,” Davis shared, “and it
looked like an excellent extension of my education.” Davis looked at the Peace Corp as
an opportunity to travel. Davis, a self-proclaimed “country girl” had only been out of the
state of South Carolina three times since moving from Louisiana when she was seven.
Davis shared that since she wasn’t sure what she was going to do after graduation, joining
the Corp seemed like a good choice, “It gave me more time to plan my next step.” So five
weeks after graduation, Davis packed her bags for Botswana.

“The trip was amazing,” Davis shared as a big grin spread across her face. She
told of stories of the picturesque land that was “more gorgeous” than she could have
imagined. Davis began to describe the beauty of the Africans she saw on her first few
days in Botswana, noting the tone of their dark completions, high cheekbones and strong,
broad noses. She went on and on, sharing short stories about her trips into town with one
of her guides, stories about little children who would come up to her and give her big
hugs, and stories of learning to adapt to a more primitive lifestyle than she was
accustomed to in the states. She eagerly pulled out an album she kept in her desk of
photos she had taken from her travels to Botswana, Kenya, and what is now known as the
Democratic Republic of the Congo. “My travels were exciting and adventurous, but more
than that it was a deep learning experience.” Davis continued,

Before the Peace Corp I thought that the only folk who were struggling were us
Blacks in the South. In Africa I learned that poverty was an international issue;
but not in just terms of money and stuff, but in terms of lack of knowledge. In Botswana, I worked with the young people. We educated them; they educated us. I worked with teachers there and fell in love with teaching. Really, I fell in love with the kids. I knew that as much as I liked reading and writing, I loved working with kids all the more. So I decided within the first three months working in our camp that I needed to work with kids. It was my passion and I had finally found my direction in life. When I returned home, I ran with it.

I sensed a deep and abiding peace in Davis as she willingly shared stories without much prompting as if she had been waiting for an opportunity to chronicle her thoughts in this way. Inspired by her time in Africa, and more specifically by her work with the children she met there, Davis decided to go back to her undergraduate institution and get her teaching credentials. Davis taught for about three years before considering the principalship. I loved teaching but I also saw how much more of an impact I could have as an administrator.” She paused and said, “I remember those first years in the classroom and how my room was always full of students, not just my own, but young people who were just looking for someone to hear them, really hear them.” Davis’ “open door policy” was an invitation for students to come by her room and hang out with other students or seek her advice on a myriad of life’s issues.

By her third year of teaching Davis had worked up the nerve to talk to her own principal about going into administration. Davis described her principal, Mr. Harrison, as an older White male, who always seemed more preoccupied with paper work than the work of serving the students. She paused and then reflected on how shocked she was that he encouraged her to pursue the administrative path. He became a mentor for her, giving
her additional leadership duties, taking her to leadership meetings, and introducing her to higher ups in the district. Mr. Harrison wrote her letter of recommendation for her admissions into a Masters program and allowed her to use students and staff for action research projects and papers she had to complete. After graduating from her Masters program, Harrison hired her as his assistant principal. Davis went on to share that Mr. Harrison retired the next year and campaigned for her to become his replacement. When the district was interviewing people for the position, he urged them to strongly consider Davis stating “Davis knows these kids, she loves these kids, and they love her too.” Harrison insisted that she was a natural fit and that he didn’t care that she had only been the assistant principal for only a year. Davis, who was now sitting behind her desk, folded her arms across her chest and leaned back in her leather chair paused and said, “When you have someone speak highly of you, particularly someone as respected as Harrison was, people listen.” The school board unanimously voted in favor of Davis as the new principal of Banister Middle School.

Davis shared with me that her love for students has always come from her desire to improve the lives of others. “Now, as a principal, I can improve many lives everyday.” Davis commented that she knows that her decisions directly affect the students in her care. “I take that very seriously.” I wondered out loud what strategies Davis felt contributed to her success in increasing student success at her school. Davis shared that the key to guaranteeing the success of each of her students was supporting her teachers and being personable with all of her staff members.

I’m convinced that many of the teachers I work with aren’t motivated by the money, although who wouldn’t want to make more money? I know that my
interest in their lives, my ability to garner their support at the ground level of projects and my commitment to backing them up when they are right, makes a difference to them. I may be the General of the Army, but they are my foot soldiers. No good leader goes into battle alone. So everyday I give them my best.

Davis elaborated that she wanted her staff to be excited about their jobs and she wanted her students to know how important their success is to her. In essence, students are her focus, and their success, in school and beyond, is her goal.

Michelle Giovanni

Throughout my three interviews with Giovanni, I never felt comfortable in her presence. It was as if her whole being consumed the room and everything in it, including me. On the afternoon I visited Giovanni’s school, we decided it would be best if we just met out front since she would still be supervising dismissal at the car loop. I almost didn’t notice Giovanni, who blended with the students. She was wearing a White polo t-shirt with the school’s name on it and a faded blue denim jean skirt. Her hair was pulled back in a low ponytail and it didn’t appear to me that she had any make-up on at all. Her dark-skin and small frame made it difficult to distinguish her from some of the middle schoolers waiting for their ride home.

When most of the students were gone home, we walked into the building and into her office, which was located at the front of the school. Giovanni’s office was small but organized. Her desk was void of loose papers and her shelves were carefully stocked with storage bins and file folder baskets labeled with bright orange stickers. On her desk were pictures of what appeared to be family and friends. She sat down and smiled at me, then asked, “So what do you want to know about me?”
My initial request was for her to tell me a little about her background and how she ended up in education. Giovanni shared that both of her parents were originally from the area but had moved to Georgia right after her older sister was born. Although she grew up in Georgia, Giovanni was a regular visitor to the lowcountry area of South Carolina to visit her where her grandparents. Detailing how fun it was to come to her grandparents’ home recalling the many days of following her grandfather as he milked cows and “fed slop to the hogs.” Giovanni shared that she didn’t remember much about the town beyond her grandparents’ farm, but remembers the stories her parents told her about Kings when they were youths.

But I guess that’s true with small town and county living. Everything moves slower here, the people, things; even the cows chew in slower motion here (laugh). My mom says it is because people don’t want Kings to change. They are scared that if things change then they will have to change and no one wants to change.

“Who’s afraid of change?” I wondered aloud as I wrote notes in the margins of my reflective notebook. “Everyone is,” she responded softly.

Giovanni shared that even in the year 2007 the town of Kings was still quite segregated. “Whites and blacks don’t mix much, and that’s by choice. They prefer it that way.” She paused and then said, “No one wants integration, progress, not any of that stuff. So they resist change.” Giovanni shared that as she approached her teens, Kings seemed less fun and farm life wasn’t as interesting as it once had been. She shared that as her sister and she got older, they began to dislike going to South Carolina for annual visits to her grandparents’ homestead. “We thought South Carolina was backward. There
was nothing to do ever, the shops downtown closed up at five, even on the weekends, and the closest mall was an hour and a half away in Myrtle Beach.”

I asked Giovanni how she ended up back in South Carolina if she had such distaste for the area. She shared that when she went off to college at a predominately Black, well known all women’s college in Atlanta she had no intentions of being a teacher at all. Giovanni started her college career as a business major. Once she graduated she got a job as an accountant at a large financial institution in the Risk Management Department. “I hated that job,” Giovanni exclaimed. “I was miserable.” So she began looking at postings online for other jobs, hoping to find something she was passionate about. At the same time, Tonya, her sister, who was an elementary school teacher, asked to come to her school and volunteer in her classroom. Tonya knew her sister’s frustrations at work and thought that spending some time with her kindergarten class would lighten her spirits.

Giovanni shared that she began going to the school about an hour a week. “The kids were great and they made me laugh,” she shared. Then Giovanni began to describe that her one-hour a week visits soon became two hours and then three hours. Before she knew it she was stopping by on her lunch break almost daily, and that was in addition to her regular visits. “I just couldn’t get enough being around little ones. I knew that the love bug had bitten me.” Giovanni shared that she knew she had to make a choice. She could stay in her current position with the bank, making over $60,000 a year or she could take a serious pay cut and follow her heart. It didn’t take her long to realize that she actually had only one choice, to follow her heart and become a teacher.
After completing a two-year Masters of Arts in Teaching program at a local college in Atlanta, Giovanni got her first teaching job at a school downtown. “My students were poor but they were bright.” Giovanni talked at length about the caliber of teachers, “some of the best teachers I’ve ever worked with” and described the principal as strong and thorough.

The teachers taught well, the principal was a strong leader everyone was pushing for excellence. The school was always getting accolades for their achievements. Everyone wanted his or her kids there. It was a school I could have stayed at and retired from for sure.

But after about two years there, Giovanni moved to South Carolina to be closer to her aging grandmother. She found a job near her grandmother’s home, “I could go and check on her after school each day if I wanted.” And although this new school helped Giovanni be close to her grandmother, Giovanni soon learned that she was in for the challenge of her career. Giovanni described Green Elementary School as the exact opposite of her first school back in Atlanta.

Green Elementary was a school filled with kids who were not being challenged, didn’t want to be challenged and had poor test scores. Before taking the position at Green I did my research. I knew there were problems but I was up for the challenge. Or so I thought.

Giovanni explained that the kids in Kings were poor, but so were the ones back at her school in Atlanta. All of the students at Green were Black, but so were the ones at Myers. Giovanni shared that she even thought that the teachers “seemed to be teaching well,” and “the principal was decent” but quickly noted that her fifth grade students were so far
behind her fifth graders in Atlanta. “I was teaching fifth grade but the kids were like on the second grade level in reading and math.” She began to wonder if the students in her class were regressing or perhaps there were major gaps in what their previous teachers had taught and what the students learned and retained. Her students would complain, “This is too much work,” or “This is too hard,” and “We don’t know how to do this.” After hearing day in and day out that she was tougher than the other teachers, Giovanni said she would often go home at the end of the day feeling frustrated and defeated. “I just didn’t know what else to do.” Giovanni was torn.

Right before Christmas break that year, Giovanni admitted that she had toyed with the idea of transferring to another school at the end of the year. But at the same time, she didn’t want to give up on the students at Green. Giovanni shared that she had tried reaching out to other staff members for advice, but met resistance. “I could not have been the only one who was struggling this much.” Giovanni began to wonder if there had been a conspiracy and she had been the only teacher who had an unmotivated group of students or perhaps she had gotten stuck with the low kids since I was the new teacher at the school. “So being the loud mouth I am, I began asking questions.”

Giovanni recalled the afternoon she decided to approach her principal, Mrs. O’Mallory, about this dilemma. Looking for support, and at the very least some answers, Giovanni asked, “Why are all these kids so far behind? And, why are we acting like everything is fine?” Looking directly at me, Giovanni went on to tell that she knew just by her principal’s body language, crossed arms and a glaring stare that O’Mallory was put off by Giovanni’s questions. “I don’t know why she looked at me that way. The data was there in black and White. Our school was failing.” Giovanni knew she was “ruffling
some feathers,” but didn’t care because she felt the principal needed to face the facts and do something about the low achievement of her students.

O’Mallory’s response to Giovanni was “everyone was doing the best they could for the students.” Giovanni recalled O’Mallory stating, “Our students are very low and very poor” and that was just the way it was everywhere in Kings, South Carolina. O’Mallory’s final statement was “All we can do now show up to work everyday to do our jobs and hope for the best.” Needless to say, Giovanni was outraged. “How was she so sure everyone was doing their jobs or even hoping for the best? All I knew was whatever we were doing wasn’t enough.”

So Giovanni began reading books on student achievement and studies about high performing schools and effective teachers of black students. She shared her findings with Mrs. O’Mallory, and when she wouldn’t listen, she shared what she had learned with other teachers. “And when they didn’t listen, I shared it with the community and that was supposedly the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

Giovanni wrote a letter to the editor describing the low expectations of the staff and dismal achievement of the students at Green. She compared Green’s statistical data with schools with similar populations of students in the area. Giovanni concluded that Green needed to find new ways to reach the students and expect more from the students. Her letter expressed her frustrations with teaching at Green and her desire not to see them “end up jobless, pregnant, behind bars or dead at an early age.” Giovanni paused and then continued saying, “It wasn’t a pleasant letter, I know. But it did what I wanted it to do. It got the attention of my fellow teachers, the principal and as high up as the superintendent.” The principal berated her in a private conference the day the letter was
printed. Teachers at Green distanced themselves from her, some even going so far as to call her a “sell out” and a “snitch” for basically airing their dirty laundry.

Giovanni described the day when she got “the call” from the Office of the Superintendent. Dr. Tisdale requested a meeting with Giovanni immediately. I noticed the nervous tension as she readjusted herself in her swivel chair as she recalled that day.

I remembered the day of my appointment. I mentioned it to my principal who just rolled her eyes and smirked. I’m sure she was thinking, and perhaps hoping that that would be the last day she would have to see my face in her building. I felt horrible. Yes, I wanted to get everyone’s attention. But I was hoping the attention would be on the problem, not on me. That was the longest three minute drive to the Central Office.

Giovanni prepared for the worst as she walked into the Dr. Tisdale’s office and awaited her inevitable judgment. “I went to the meeting, just knowing that this guy was going to tear into me and probably fire me.” To her surprise, he did just the opposite.

Giovanni could hardly contain her relief as the Superintendent expressed how well written the letter to the editor. She recalled that Tisdale complemented her on her tenacity and sharp analysis. “I couldn’t believe it. I know I must have had the craziest look on my face.” Sitting there in disbelief, Giovanni then got the best opportunity for which she could have ever hoped. Dr. Tisdale offered Giovanni a chance to head up a task force focused on raising student achievement at high risk schools in the district.

He told me to put together a team and he offered suggestions of who to include on the team. But he left the final decision on who would serve on the committee up to me. He sent the task force to neighboring districts and schools who served
similar populations of students and asked us to seek out schools that were producing high achieving students. And that’s what we did. We visited schools, talked with principals, curriculum coordinators, testing coordinators, teachers, parents and even kids about what made their schools work for them. We brought back the information and presented it to the superintendent and his leadership team. We presented our findings and suggestions to the school board. And suddenly I realized that all of my efforts to get their attention had worked. There was talk among leaders and educators about improving schools, initiating new programming, and doing a better job tracking schools and student success.

Giovanni became so intrigued with her project she decided to enroll in an administration program and began working towards her Masters degree and principal’s licensure. Dr. Tisdale promised that once she finished her program, he would find a position in the district for her. While enrolled, Tisdale kept Giovanni at work on special projects. “He must have sent me to four or five conferences on student achievement.” Giovanni would return with exciting ideas that she would share with the Superintendent’s Cabinet and administrators. Numerous principals, even O’Mallory, asked her to visit their schools and facilitate staff development workshops for teachers recruited her.

When our Director of Professional Development went out on maternity leave, I took over her position. And when she decided to be a stay-at-home mom, Dr. Tisdale appointed me as the Director.

Three years later, Giovanni graduated from her administrative program applied for an opening as an assistant principalship at Green Elementary. Mrs. O’Mallory had retired and the former Assistant Principal was not the new principal of Green. When asked if
things have changed since she was a teacher at Green Giovanni replied, “Hell, yeah! I’m still standing, still fighting, still loud, still looking at my school and others and wondering what else could be done. There’s still work to do.”

Hannah Fitzgerald

My first interview with Mrs. Fitzgerald was held at her school in the front office. The school’s secretary was out that day and Fitzgerald was covering the phones in the main office. Upon first sight, Hannah Fitzgerald looked somewhat out of place. Not because she was the Assistant Principal subbing in for the secretary, but because she looked like she should be co-starring in a blockbuster movie with Brad Pitt or Will Smith. In fact, if she were in a movie with either one of these handsome actors, she would steal the show. Her beauty was almost a distraction.

I found Fitzgerald perched on a stool behind the high counter near the office’s entrance. She greeted me with a friendly smile and a firm handshake, then invited me to sit on a tall stool beside her. I’m sure from the other side of the counter we looked as if we were waiting for an order of fries and two milkshakes at 1950’s diner.

Not yet comfortably seated, Fitzgerald asked me what I wanted her to tell me. “Let’s just start at the beginning, how did you get into education?” I questioned. Fitzgerald explained that she had come from a long line of educators. Her mother and grandmother were both educators. “My mom was a principal for 14 years before retiring. I grew up in schools, literally,” she shared. Fitzgerald described how she was always at school during the day as a student and then there in the evenings as the principal’s daughter. “I had my first everything at school, my first dance recital, made my first best
friend, and had my first kiss at school too.” To Fitzgerald, her mom’s school was the backdrop of her life growing up.

I bet I have seen it all. I’ve seen parents ready to fly up in my mother’s face. I’ve seen students crying because they knew that her phone call home meant a beating. I went to PTA meetings with mom, very long and boring school board meetings and everything in between. People were so used to seeing me with my mom at these places and meetings that they would call me “lil principal.” I even had a small desk and chair in the corner of my mom’s office. I thought I was something!

I guess that’s how I ended up in my own school and office.

When asked what strategies she had picked up from her mom over the years that have helped her in her role as the Assistant Principalship, she suggested that using her looks and femininity has been an asset in “getting men folk to do as you wish.”

I am my mother’s daughter. People would look at me and say, “You must be Evelyn’s daughter; you look just like your mama!” And I do. She’s so beautiful it’s almost distracting. At least that’s what I hear (laughter).

Fitzgerald continued to share how she saw her mom “wrap the men, and some women, around her finger.” And that she learned how to use her own looks to her advantage.

I used to see how she could just bat her lashes and give a coy smile to an angry father and immediately his anger would diffuse. Janitors would drop anything for my mom and so would the teachers, particularly the males.

Fitzgerald went on to share with me that her mother was more than just a pretty face. “She was a great leader, an excellent friend to the teachers and she was loved by her students.” Fitzgerald recalled that her mother was insistent on making her school the best.
She shared that many times when her mother wanted something done and it wasn’t done quickly enough, she saw the “ugly” side of her mom come out. “Boy, you did not want to cross her the wrong way. She didn’t play with you one bit.” Fitzgerald recounted times when her mother didn’t “wait for something to get done” but often did “the cleaning, the bulletin boards, the newsletters, and even covered classes when a sub couldn’t be found.” She continued to describe her mother’s work ethic by stating,

But she also knew that in a male-oriented field like administration, she had to sometimes use her feminine ways to help her get an edge. I learned that being soft and a little helpless acting at times isn’t always a bad thing.

Figuring she had gone far enough with this topic, Fitzgerald abruptly changed the subject. “I love my job but as an Assistant Principal you can get stuck doing the traditional Bs, books, buses and behavior.” Fitzgerald stated that she actively seeks opportunities to go beyond her traditional job description by re-envisioning her position.

I’m very hands-on with the kids and teachers. I’m active on grade level committees and visible in classrooms. I initiate student programming and serve as the student council sponsor. And my teachers love me. They know that I’m here for them, not just with discipline but also for anything else they may need.

Fitzgerald added that her current principal is very supportive of her. “He likes me because I take some of the pressure off of him.” Fitzgerald shared that all the extra work she does around the school helped to build a trust level between her and Mr. McDougal, the principal. Proud that he often asks for her opinions on major school matters, Fitzgerald noted that McDougal sides with her opinions when making important decisions. “I know this probably gives me a false sense of authority, but I like it!”
But when I have pushed, prodded and pled my case to my principal about some program I want to do for the students or about getting more money for activities, you best be sure that I pull out all the guns, I bat my lashes, flash a few smiles and play the role. Fitzgerald, proud that her voice always gets heard, commented, “I’m a person that just makes things happen.”

At the end of our session, I thank Fitzgerald for her time and for being so open with me. As we walk out the front door, Fitzgerald leans over and whispers that she’s glad to have made a new friend. “Come back next week and I’ll give you a tour,” she promises and then disappeared back into the building.

Dr. Anna Mae Baker

There’s something unsettling about Dr. Anna Mae Baker, I thought to myself, as I saw Dr. Baker in the front parking lot of the school. She was just driving back to the school from a meeting at the central office. Exchanging waves, I waited by the entrance as she got out of her car only to be stopped by a teacher in the parking lot who needed to talk. So I waited, and observed.

Dr. Baker, probably in her mid-40s, was a beautiful woman with finely coiffed hair that she wore tight in a bun at the base of her neck. Baker was wearing a tight fitted burnt orange dress suit with matching low heeled pumps. Perhaps what was most unsettling about her appearance that afternoon was that she had on thick black panty hose and it was nearly 101 degrees. You could see that she was hot by the sweat stain at the back of her jacket. She looked terribly uncomfortable.
I had heard quite a bit about Dr. Baker prior to our first meeting. I had heard rumors about problems in her career. I secretly wondered if she would tell me the details. I had wondered what effects educational politics had had on her ability, or even desire, to lead for social justice.

Our first interview took place in Dr. Baker’s office after school hours. Only a few staff members lingered in their classrooms. That sunny afternoon Baker escorted me into her office and hurriedly closed the door behind us. After we settled into two chairs placed at a small conference table in the corner, we began talking about her experiences being a principal in the Crossland community.

“I enjoy being a principal. I couldn’t imagine doing anything else” Baker said without cracking a smile. This was the second school Baker has been principal of and it was her twentieth year as a principal in this district. She informed me that she was the principal at her former school for 17 years before being reassigned to the Crossland Intermediate School. She explained that Crossland Primary was the feeder school for this one, so she still felt very connected to her former school. She shared that she had been successful balancing both home and work, both as a mother of a second grader at Crossland Primary, and as a wife for seventeen years. “My husband was an educator too but now he’s retired,” she shared, again without a smile on her face.

Baker, reared in Crossland herself, decided to return once she finished college. Initially a guidance counselor, Baker had been in administration almost her entire career. She has never, however, been a classroom teacher.

The people I serve are from my community. They are my people. I understand them and they understand me. I guess I have a reputation for getting the job done.
As a little girl I always knew I wanted to work with people. I wanted to help and make life better for others. We grew up poor but I knew I was more than a poor, little black girl from Crossland. I wanted to make something of myself. So I did.

Baker commented that her school was a haven for many of her students. “These kids are country poor. You probably don’t know anything about the county poor.” Baker shared that most of her students are Black and almost ninety-five percent of her students receive free and reduced lunch. She described the parents as undereducated, underemployed and unemployed, stating, “Some don’t care, couldn’t care less, whether their kids came to school today as long as they left the house this morning.” Baker continued,

I feel for these kids. For most of them I am like their mother or grandmother. They share their good and bad with me. I know their parents because many of them were my students. I know who’s on crack, whose daddy is in jail, and I know which of them have to go home after school houses filled with unfamiliar men, booze and drugs.

To solve some of these home issues, Baker stated that she has tried to get social services involved. “I try to get the grandparents involved, the pastors even. But at the end of the day I have to send my babies home to a world that couldn’t give a damn about them.” Baker paused and continued, “This can be a lonely job, especially when you are a lone ranger.” She shared that she had spent most of her life fighting her own personal issues of poverty and abuse, and now she has spent most of her career fighting her students’ battles. “You fight and fight but sometimes it’s like fighting the machine.” Baker defined the “machine” as “stupid policies, limited powers, weak leaders in central office and overbearing school board members.” She shared with me that she once played their
political games too, “being seen and not heard,” “not making waves” and “doing as I am told,” but she was now tired of the games and didn’t need to “follow their dotted lines” anymore. Baker stated,

I used to think that hard work would get you anywhere and that people really judged us by our character and work ethic when it came to promotions. There’s no such thing as loyalty even in the business of running schools.

Then Baker told me the infamous story about which I had only heard rumors.

You know I was hesitant at first to even do these interviews with you. My family has been hit so hard over the past few years. I’m sure you already know this but my husband was the superintendent here in Crossland. He was a good leader. But this area of South Carolina is so political. It’s still being ran by the good-ole-boys. They think we should be overjoyed just be given the opportunity to do some of this stuff. But when you get in these high positions, they think they own you and you work for them. It’s the Master-Slave mentality. You make the wrong person mad and you spend the rest of your career dodging bullets. I’m tired of dodging.

Baker looked at her watch and informed me that our meeting was over. “I have to pick up my daughter from her sitter. Can we continue this later?” We agreed to schedule our next session for later in the week. I thanked Baker again for her time and proceeded to exit her office when she asked me if my research study would be shared with anyone outside my committee. I assured her that she would remain anonymous. She frowned and then said,

Hell, I don’t care about being anonymous anymore. I’m sure what you are finding needs to be shared with school boards and superintendents. Use my name. If they
want to get rid of the other Dr. Baker, let them try. They’ll have another fight on their hands.

Krystal Edelman

The note that I wrote in the margins of my reflective notebook in the middle of my first interview with Edelman was “she means well.” Krystal Edelman referred to herself as a “children rights advocate.” And it appeared to me that she has good intentions when it comes to helping the students at her school. “I used to be one of them. I believe that’s why I feel such a connection to the black faces at the back of the class.”

Edelman was very open with sharing how she grew up. “I wasn’t blessed to have a two-parent home,” she announced. Her face seemed sad when she shared that as a child, she pretended to be “one of those little girls” who had their mothers waiting for them at home in the afternoons. Edelman stated that she “was the poorest of the poor” and she “scratched her way up to the top.” However, after our first interview session together, meeting quietly in the back of the library on a soft leather couch, I easily concluded that the wounds Edelman received along her way “to the top” still oozed from time to time; just enough to make her scared of ending back up at the bottom of the pile.

Edelman came into administration a little differently than typical. She was a teacher for four years before returning to school to complete her Masters in Social Work. Edelman was recommended to me as an “up and coming” administrator in her district. “You have a reputation of doing good things for Black students,” I shared with Edelman who was sipping water from her “Weight Watchers” water bottle. She quickly corrected me by saying, “Well, I do good things for all students Ms. Nowlin. That’s my job.” Although she kept repeating that she wanted the best for her students, I felt I was playing
a tug of war game with Edelman that evening as I asked questions centered around how she advocated for the marginalized students in her school. When asked how far she would go to implement initiatives on behalf of marginalized students Edelman responded, “Pretty far, but I don’t want to rock the boat too much.”

Throughout the interview she kept pulling away from calling herself a “leader for social justice,” “I’m not sure I would say I’m that.” She assured me that she does work to make instruction better for her minority students and that she would “go to bat” for any of her students who needed her help. However, appearing to be playing it safe, she added “You have to know what you can do and what’s beyond your control.” Edelman shared that she has hopes of become a principal in a few years and perhaps a superintendent one day too. Knowing her aspirations, it became apparent that she was playing it safe when it came to looking like she leading social justice. “You have to learn how to do some things under the table. I’m a black woman, they are definitely watching me.” Perhaps the game of tug of war was more like playing a game of cards. Edelman held her hand close to her chest and often folded, in our interviews and perhaps in her position, when she should be betting it all.

Edelman continued our conversation by declaring, “It’s all about the children. That’s my bottom line. My job is to take care of the precious little children in my care.”

For me, it’s always been about the children. As a product of the welfare system, and a girl who grew up very poor, I wanted to dedicate my career to letting other children know that this world isn’t just for the wealthy, it’s theirs for the taking too.
Edelman was a smart girl in school. She shared with me that she knew that her intelligence would be her “ticket out the projects.” Edelman grew up in a low income housing area about two miles from her elementary school. She paused and then said that it wasn’t the rats running through her bedroom at night that scared her, but the thought that she would always have a life filled with rats in her bedroom that made her determined to do well in school.

So I studied hard, I was serious about my work. When others would be outside playing or going to the movies on Friday nights with friends, I would be at home with my nose in a book. I wanted to be the best student so that someone would come rescue me from the projects. My mom is a great woman, a loving mother to five, and did it all by herself for the most part. But, I saw her struggle and I didn’t want to become my mother. I didn’t want to have to work two jobs to put food on the table. I didn’t want to take handouts from the government. I didn’t want to end up like my older sisters, pregnant and on welfare, too.

Edelman’s hard work and sacrifice didn’t go unnoticed. She graduated at the top of her class in high school and got a full scholarship to the University of South Carolina (USC). “That scholarship saved my life.” Once at USC, Edelman decided to major in education. “I picked education because I knew that that was a job that would always be needed.”

After teaching for a few years Edelman felt that she needed to get a Masters degree to open up more career options. She looked at several programs and found that she was drawn to the idea of pairing her teaching credentials with a Masters in Social Work. “USC had a great program and I knew that there would always be a need for social
workers.” Edelman then commented that she loved the program, but hated the career outlook. “Who knew Social Workers made less money than teachers?”

So after finishing her Masters program she returned to the classroom, “same classroom and all” she adds with a giggle.

But I don’t regret the degree. I have my Masters now and I love the ethical dimensions of the field of social work. I could still use the theories in my teaching. After the Social Work program, I started work on my Masters in School Administration. To me both programs focus on social justice. I use my background in social work in my life as a school administrator daily. It’s an asset when working with children and families. Perhaps it should be a prerequisite for principals.

I was relieved to know that Edelman had knowledge of social justice. Being optimistic about the situation I said to Edelman, “So you are a leader for social justice.” Edelman sat quietly and sipped from her water bottle. After about twenty seconds of silence, Edelman began to speak again, making direct eye contact, “Social justice is risky, especially in schools.” Then she explained,

You would think that schools would be the breeding ground for socially just novices who are determined to make a difference in the life of a child, but it’s not. It’s tricky business and you must be careful if you want a long career in administration. I’m not as naive as others. It takes a lot more than a colorful bulletin board, cute nametags on desks and a pretty smile to reach a child. It takes long hours, it takes taking work home when you don’t want to, and it takes going
on home visits when you can’t get the parent in for a conference. We have to stop writing these kids off as lost causes!

When asked what strategies Edelman used to seek equity and justice in her school, she said, “I make sure the teachers do what they are hired to do, teach.” “But what else do you do?” I inquired. Edelman paused again. This time she placed her bottle on the floor and shifted her body weight so that she was facing me straight on, “I’m just the Assistant Principal. What else could I do? Right now my powers are limited.”

I suppose she saw the confused look on my face because she reached out for my hand, placing hers on top of mine and continued, “But when I do become principal my hands will be untied and I can do some of the things I dream of doing; but not right now.” Edelman released my hand, reached for her water bottle and concluded, “Everything has an appointed time and timing is everything in administration.”

Lucy Elders

There once was a commercial that said that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Good thing Lucy Elders is in the school business, and not selling deodorant.

Elders, a once self-proclaimed “outspoken and progressive” principal, found out first hand the consequences of appearing to be “too aggressive” in the field. Her outspokenness led to an early dismissal from the principalship at St. James Elementary School. Elders shared with me that she was dismissed for speaking up on the behalf of the superintendent when the school board was trying to oust Baker out of office. “They didn’t like the fact that I supported my superintendent. So after getting rid of Dr. Baker, they came after me.” Elders was demoted and was given a position as a Career Tech
Coordinator at one of the elementary schools in the district. “But they let me keep my pay. So I didn’t complain too much.”

After being out of the principalship for a year, Elders began applying for principal positions in neighboring districts. After several interviews and no job offers in sight, Elders assumed that her career as a school administrator was officially over. After a year being turned down several times, Elders was finally appointed as the new principal at a school almost an hour away from her home. She has been at Kormen Elementary for three years now.

At our first interview session, this “comeback queen” came off stuffy and slightly nosey, all at the same time. She kept asking, “Why did you pick me?” and “what are you going to do with this information again?” She wouldn’t even agree to participate in this study until her close friend, Marianne Davis, said, “It’s okay to talk to Nowlin.” Even this endorsement didn’t stop Elders from questioning me constantly during our sessions. At times I wasn’t sure if I were interviewing her or if it was other way around.

Skeptical and cynical, I wondered if this prickly principal was ever a warm fuzzy. But by the end of our second interview, I had been won over by her sharp wit and her deep sense of what Black students really needed from school.

I’m fairly new to this district but not to the principalship. I was a principal for many years in Harrison County School District. But I lost my position as principal over some political mess. At the time, the school board was trying to get rid of our superintendent. We had just had an election and the board changed. Before the election the superintendent had a great relationship with most of the board. But as you know, school board members can become temperamental and he made
an enemy or two along the way. His last two years as superintendent were filled with tension. He was meeting resistance by the two board members on every issue. It didn’t help that he was a black man either.

Elders shared with me that after the school board elections in 2002 things changed. “Dr. Baker lost some of his greatest allies,” she explained. “He was outnumbered because two old fogies got their friends elected.” She shared that five of the school board members began to fight to get rid of Dr. Baker. “I won’t go into it now but basically some of the board members began making some accusations about the finances. Baker was just outnumbered.” Elders, with her mouth clinched tightly stated, “With all the gray hair that man got in his last few months on the job, I’m not sure if he would have wanted to stay anyway.”

Elders, a personal friend of the Bakers, commented that former Superintendent Baker was a great friend and she had a good deal of respect for him as a leader. Elders was determined not to sit quietly by and watch her friend “go down like the Titanic.”

I’m not one to keep quiet about how I feel, so I was very vocal during the time they were trying to oust him. I wasn’t the only one who got burned either. When they got rid of Dr. Baker, they turned their attention to some of his supporters who were still mumbling about the controversy. One year I was principal, the next I was demoted to a play-play position they just made up and gave me. They did let me keep my pay so I didn’t fight them. I was too tired to fight by then.

Elders explained that she only has two more years until retirement and if she doesn’t go through the Tarry system, and work an additional five years, she’s “going to ride out the next two years quietly, and call it a day.” Elders added,
I’m tired, I really am. There isn’t that many of us (black women principals) in this district. So I know I’m watched. The good thing is that the majority of my students and families are black also. I don’t have to deal with White parents that often. And the White families in my school are poor like the black families. So I don’t have to worry about anyone looking over my shoulder wondering if I’m doing more for black kids than the White kids.

Elders shared that most of her social justice work was done “under the table.”

If I need to move some funds from one account to another to pay for in-service consultants to come and train teachers on how to analyze and plan using MAPS data then I do it. If I need to juggle class schedules around so that my best teachers are teaching my lowest students, I do it. If I need to give a teacher flex schedule because she did something extra for the school, I do it.

She concluded that as long as the test scores were good, and as long as parents weren’t complaining, her supervisor stayed out of her hair.

Connie Cadoria

There’s a commercial that says, “There’s strong and then there’s Army strong”. Connie Cadoria is both. During our initial meeting Cadoria proudly stated that her job was to “put in long hours, go beyond her job description and rally the teachers.” Cadoria is one of those leaders you can’t help but admire. When I first met Cadoria, I immediately noticed her youthfulness and charisma. No wonder she has climbing the promotion ladder as if her glass ceiling has already been shattered. Her goal is to become a superintendent within eight years. Having moved up through the ranks as a teacher, assistant principal
and now in her second principalship, all within ten years of graduating from college, Cadoria may become a superintendent long before then.

Cadoria’s office was filled with pictures of her family and their travels. Being a “military brat,” Cadoria lived in Germany, Korea, New Mexico, Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina. Her husband is currently a Colonel for the U.S. Army and Cadoria serves the country in the Reserves. She claimed that her military ethics spreads to her work in schools.

I’ve worked my way to the top. No one has give me anything, but I’m sure some of my comrades would disagree. It’s not everyday you have someone as young as I make it to this point this fast. This is my second principalship and I’m in my mid-thirties. My goal is to be a superintendent within the next eight years. I think I’ll do it, too.

Cadoria credited her military background for teaching her to appreciate different cultures. “No matter what color you are, what language you speak, or anything else you have to work hard or no one will take you seriously.”

Cadoria explained that she inherited her work ethics from her parents, who grew up during a time when blacks were limited by what they could do.

They grew up here in South Carolina before joining the Army. My dad was in the army not my mom. He married my mom right after boot camp and they’ve been together ever since. My dad demanded the best from my brother and me. He pushed us to excel in school, athletics, and life. My mom was the quiet one. But she didn’t play. She made us accountable to doing our chores and taught us
morals and values. She’s the one who took us to Sunday School while dad took us to the gun range (laugh).

Cadoria said that when she was a child, her father would tell her that since she was Black she would have to work twice as hard as Whites to have half as much as her White peers. After high school Cadoria received an Army scholarship and attended the University of Texas at Austin. “I always wanted to be an educator. My dad wanted me to be a doctor. Mom just wanted me to be happy.”

I taught for five years while I worked on my Masters in School Administration. I was an assistant principal for three years before my first principalship. I was at Calhoun Elementary for two years before the district moved me to Smallville Elementary and I’ve been here four years. I work hard and I require that anyone working with me work just as hard. I can’t complain; I have excellent teachers. Some of these ladies are here until 8:00 at night. When I leave the building and still see cars in the parking lot, I smile.

Cadoria explained that her students work hard for her. At the start of each school year, Cadoria challenges them to outperform themselves. She gives prizes and throws special parties throughout the year for good grades or proficient scores on MAPS. “I tell them that they are responsible for each other.” Cadoria makes sure to tell her students that “we all win when we all win, and not until then!”

Summary

These seven extraordinary African American women school level leaders were selected for this study because they were identified as leaders for social justice. They have withstood pressures, both external and internal, that could have stopped them short
of being justice-workers, but they pressed on. Many didn’t claim the title of "leader for social justice" at first. But once they began talking about the policies they’ve instituted, the programs they’ve started and the political position, often strategic and sometimes fatal, they’ve taken, most admitted they were social justice leaders. Some were reluctant at first, but eventually they divulged their strategies and the stories that surround their justice-work in schools. Ultimately these African American women school level leaders were glad to pass on their experiences, stories and strategic ways of leading for social justice to me and other school level leaders.
V. Bringing Everyone to the Table: Analyzing the Stories of Seven Black Women

Introduction

In this chapter, I use a significant portion of the study’s data to offer a response to the grand research question that guided the study. In the following chapter, a subset of the data is offered in conjunction with my own thoughts in an attempt to flesh out the potential consequences and implications of the findings presented in this chapter.

School level leaders who lead for social justice have the ability to take three very important actions. First, they must identify and address deeply embedded inequities. Second, they must accept their share of responsibility in upholding the status quo and exert the leadership necessary to change the policies sustaining it. Third, they must mobilize the community, particularly the part of the community that has suffered at the hands of these inequities for so many years (Fink, 2004).

In addressing the grand research question regarding the strategies these Black women school level leaders use when seeking equity and justice for marginalized students in school, I have divided my discussion into four interrelated categories of strategies used to seek equity and justice in schools. The first theme presented examines the explicit strategies Black women school level leaders use to ensure that the racial groups within their schools’ communities are represented on advisory teams, in decision-making groups, and in staff membership at various levels within the school. The subthemes in this section include (a) forming partnerships with all stakeholders, (b)
developing and reviewing policies that promote inclusive relational organization culture and employing and (c) promoting educators who reflect the ethnic and cultural makeup of the student body. A second related theme that emerged from the data is structured around how the participants acknowledge, value and celebrate their own culture, as well as those represented in their school. The sub themes in this section include (a) providing opportunities for learning about various cultures, (b) displaying materials that have culturally diverse images and (c) sponsoring Black and Hispanic activities to encourage making acquaintances with people of different cultural groups. The third theme addresses eliminating achievement gaps among and between all groups of students. The sub themes in this section include (a) using disaggregated data analysis to drive school improvement, (b) keeping the students at the center of all decisions, and (c) holding educators accountable for demonstrating high expectations. A final section was added to highlight Assistant Principals of this study. This section shares how these school level leaders, within the role of supporting actors of social justice, have successfully extended their job descriptions beyond ‘books, buses and behavior’ to become agents of change within schools.

Ensuring Representation

In an effort to better understand the strategies Black school level leaders use when seeking equity and justice in their schools, participants cited that it was important to make sure there was fair representation of the school’s racial membership when it came to positioning marginalized parents in schools, either as members of parent councils or as leaders of such committees. Additionally, these leaders felt it imperative to consider the racial makeup of their student body when hiring and promoting staff members.
This section addresses the sub themes that emerged related to ensuring fair representation both vertically and horizontally in their schools. As the interviews revealed, several participants expressed their belief that they should model and monitor social justice by integrating all ethnic and cultural groups into the school at various levels. Parents who are members of groups that have been historically marginalized were actively recruited, not just invited, to work as volunteers in classrooms, serve as parent liaisons on decision-making councils and work within the school, and host PTA meetings at their neighborhood community centers and churches. Additionally, these participants actively recruited, mentored and tapped into positions of leadership, educators who reflect the ethnic and cultural makeup of the student body.

*Lil’ Black Girls from the Country: Building Community Partnerships*

Theoharis (2004) suggests that “inclusion of all students because of their differences of race, class, disability, language, sexual orientation, and gender is a central and necessary part of social justice” (p.9). He states that justice work is not just about student achievement but also about “creating inclusive practices and inclusive communities” (p. 9). The participants of this study felt it was important to build partnerships within the community. The leaders served within schools with large populations of marginalized students who have historically been low-performing students as well. As a result, these leaders were passionate about making sure that their school was welcoming place for all students and their families.

This passion for their students was closely tied to their own experiences as being “lil’ black girls from the country.” In the opinion of Principal Baker, when you work with a population of students who remind you of yourself, you work harder to meet their
needs. Baker has close ties to the community in which she works. She felt that her connections to the community was advantageous when it came to getting information out to the parents and community.

I am from this area. I went to Burke High. My students often remind me of me when I was their age. I was one of these lil blick girls from the country. My family grew up here, I came back after college. It’s hard to leave family and the place you know so well. I grew up with these families. I go to church with these families. It’s nothing for me to see Mrs. So-and-So at church on Sunday and remind her about the advisory board meeting next week. Or even to ask the church secretary to put an announcement in the bulletin about the PTA meeting coming up.

Principal Cadoria acknowledged that building partnerships meant you had to get “buy-in from the community.” She believes in bringing everyone to the table, no matter what income bracket you fall into. One the topic of building partnerships with parents Cadoria made the following comment.

You have to get buy-in from the community. You either sink or swim based on how you are perceived by the residents. That’s why I always make sure I talk to the movers and shakers in Cashous. My school is almost entirely Black, so to get diversity I have to make sure it’s not only the active, middle class professional parents leading our PTA or fundraisers. This is everyone’s school. Little Brandon’s mom who’s struggling on welfare to raise a four kids alone is just as important to whether or not we are successful as Jeffery’s parents who are
professionals and have a more stable household. It takes a village, right? Well, in
my village, I get all the tribe’s men involved in building this hut.

The experiences shared by Assistant Principal Fitzgerald are very similar to those
experienced by a Black women principal in a study conducted by Dillard (2003). That
study analyzed the experiences of a principal who talked passionately about being
responsible to Black and other students of color. Similarly, Fitzgerald stated that she felt
it was her duty to make sure to include all parents, particularly her black parents. “I
personally call parents and invite them to get involved in some of our programs.
Sometimes you have to put in the extra effort.” She also felt that being a black woman
put some of her black mothers at ease because they could easily relate to her.

Assistant Principal Edelman leaned on her knowledge from her social work
background that many parents have anxieties when it comes to schools. Because of her
work with many Black and Hispanic families, she knows that she must use “soft gloves”
when dealing with both communities. Edelman noted,

What I am learning is that many parents don’t feel comfortable in schools. You
know, they may have had a bad experience with schools growing up. Some of my
parents didn’t finish school themselves. But whether or not you have a high
school diploma or not doesn’t mean that you can’t have a voice or an opinion that
needs to be heard. I make it my effort to include my Black parents and my
Hispanic parents on our governance board as parent reps. I need to know what
they need, what their kids need, what their communities need so I can do my job
better.
Participants in this study also talked about the importance of making their schools a more inviting place for their English as Second Language populations. Several of the school level leaders serve in communities with growing populations of migrant families. In their justice work to be inclusive of these families, several leaders offered these strategies:

I purposefully hired an ESL teacher and two assistants who are bilingual. Sophie’s work with our Hispanic population is invaluable. She translates newsletters, fliers and any announcements I want to distribute to my Hispanic parents.

Principal Elders shared that she used her English for Speakers of Other Languages teacher as a translator in meetings and with written materials sent home. “Mrs. Sanchez sits in many of the parent-teacher meetings to translate. I think the parents appreciate having her as a liaison.” Elders added that Mrs. Sanchez also made her teachers feel more comfortable with talking to parents by relaying messages to her parents in Spanish.

Last year, Principal Davis said that her school started having special PTA meetings just for their Hispanic population in Spanish. She used her Spanish teacher to translate but stated that Spanish-speaking teachers and community leaders facilitated the majority of the meeting. “We were able to discuss many of the issues that are important to the families.” She went on to add that at one meeting a parent wanted to know if the school could offer evening classes for parents who wanted to learn English. “I looked into it and we were able to get a class for them. The class was well attended and we even added additional nights.” This extra effort proved to Davis that connecting to her
Hispanic parents meant speaking their language and asking them what they needed from her. “If we never had that meeting how would I have known that that was a need?”

Another principal, Cardoria, encouraged her faculty to take a Conversational Spanish course. “I’ve personally asked members on my staff to take a Spanish class.” Cardoria added that she has even taken Conversational Spanish herself to learn to talk with her Spanish-speaking students and parents. She quickly added that she was far from fluent. “I am trying my best to pick up the language a little bit at a time. I think my Hispanic families appreciate my efforts.” Clearly, these principals viewed that being able to communicate with all parents was of the utmost importance for bridging the gap between home and school.

*When Touchy Issues Arise: Reviewing and Developing Policies with Stakeholders*

A recurring comment made by the respondents in this study centered around and promoting an inclusive, relational organization culture by bringing stakeholders to the table when reviewing and developing policies for unintentional discrimination. Leaders felt it was imperative to have representatives from different pockets of their schools’ population on committees, task forces, and in parent leadership roles at the schools. Thus, one of the strategies each participant employed was actively inviting parents from minority groups to play an active part in the school. Principal Davis made the following comment.

“I’ve never heard of the term ‘leader for social justice’ but it does sound like something I am (laugh). I guess I’ve always brought stakeholders to the table. Everyone’s perspective needs to be shared. Some of these conversations happen in intimate settings. Sometimes it’s just me and a few teachers around the table in the
cafeteria during lunch. Other times touchy topics come up at advisory council meetings with parent leaders and staff reps.

Assistant Principal Fitzgerald shared stories about recruiting parents on committees whom may have otherwise been overlooked by others as potential parent-leaders. Fitzgerald shared that her school has a Family Academy which is lead by a parent nominated by her peers. “This year the parent leader is a single, black mother of three of our students. She’s a hard worker, a Christian woman, well known in her neighborhood and church.” Fitzgerald goes on to add, “She’s not rich, or even close to it. But she cares about her kids. She cares about other people’s kids too.” Fitzgerald continued, “The parents like her and trust that she will represent them, and she does!”

Principal Elders talked openly about the growing Hispanic population in her school and how her black parents who have traditionally lead the parent committees, had to learn to share leadership and responsibilities. “Traditionally the PTA’s president and most of the leaders with PTA were black parents. When I saw our population change, I wanted the leadership in PTA to better reflect the families of my school.”

Elders explained that she talked to her black parent leaders about “how great it would be if they would personally invite some of our Hispanic parents to attend our meetings and perhaps join some of the parent councils.” She shared that one of the black parents, who worked with the mother of one of the new Hispanic families to the school said she would invite her co-worker to attend the next business meeting. Another parent-leader said he would invite some of the parents who had recently moved in his neighborhood. “And it went on from there.” Elders said that the changes didn’t happened over night, nor was it a smooth transition. But eventually, with persistent urging from
Elders, they were able to get some of the Hispanics families more involved in our parent groups. “Once a few Hispanic families came to our meetings and got comfortable, they invited other families. And it has grown from there.”

Assistant Principal Giovanni talked about inviting her Indian families to participate on school committees. Giovanni has four teachers from India on staff. She shared that many of the Indian teachers in the district planned to work here the following year and possibly bring their families back with them to stay. One teacher, who had been a teacher at her school for two years, just brought her husband and children to America. “I have tried to get her husband involved with our School Improvement Plan parent board. I want him to feel invited to take part.” Because Giovanni knows that next summer she may have even more Indian families in her school she said that she has to start planning ahead. “I’m looking down the road and trying to prepare our faculty and school for the influx of other cultures.”

The participants were asked to elaborate on how parents helped them review and develop policies for unintentional discrimination. Some alluded to heated discussions they have witnessed. Everyone felt that inviting parents from marginalized groups to the decision-making table helped promote an inclusive organization culture at their school. Principal Edelman shared the following story.

Girl, you should have been at this one PTA meeting where a black parent brought up a bus incident that had happened the day before. To make a long story short, her daughter was being bullied by a fellow classmate, who happened to be a White boy. He was pulling her hair and saying that she was a “nappy lil girl.” I thought we were
going to have to call the police that night. This was shortly after the Imus situation so I’m sure that the young boy had overheard conversations at home. Black parents were outraged. Some of our White parents were obviously horrified and embarrassed. Another black mother said that she refused to continue to send her daughter to a school that would make her child feel ugly or unworthy. I mean really, this conversation was getting out of hand. We had never had an incident like this before, but all of a sudden, we weren’t doing our jobs and she was going to pull her children out. Our principal is a White male and boy was he sweating bullets. I made a motion that we establish an anti-bullying parent task force to look into this matter. The task force consisted of parents from all racial backgrounds. But in a more controlled setting, healing conversations began to take place. No parent wants their child to be bullied and no parent really wants their child to be that bully on the bus either.

Parents met with administration to look at the current district and school policies on bullying and made some recommended changes at the school level.

Principal Cadoria stated that every summer “when I’m pulling together our student handbook I invite parents from all backgrounds to come in and sit with me.” Cardoria gives selected parents draft copies of the handbook and they sit and talk about the policies. “If a parent has a suggestion on something they think is unfair or needs to be changed, I take note of it and take it up with my supervisor.” Cadoria continued,

This isn’t just my school; this school belongs to the teachers, staff members, students and families. I believe having families weigh in on our policies helps to make this a more inclusive school environment for all.
Assistant Principal Edelman stated that her school’s PTA actively reviews their policies every year. “The president is always a good liaison between our office and the parents.” She shares that the principal often invites the president to sit in staff meetings that will focus on discussions that they feel parents would want to know about.

Assistant Principal Giovanni said that she needed as many eyes available as possible when formulating new school policies or trying to make amendments to current policies. “The more people I have looking at policies the more likely we will catch any problems.” She goes on and adds, that “parents have a different perspective. I need that perspective to make the school run smoothly.” Giovanni conviction showed that she valued the partnerships with her parents and the perspectives they shared.

*You Must Go After Them: Employing and Promoting Black Educators*

Participants, particularly the principals, revealed that they use the power of their position to increase the number of Black teachers in their schools. They all noted how important it is to have a staff that is diverse. These leaders interview and hire many quality Black candidates each year. One principal boasted that she has hired and retained at least one black teacher at each grade level for the past five years. Many of the participants, particularly those at majority-black schools, talked about how hard it has been to recruit any teacher, especially Black, to their schools. To overcome this barrier, these leaders went “above and beyond the call of duty” by offering what many other schools do not have, the ability to be nurtured, mentored, and “tapped” by an Black woman principal in school leadership.

Participants talked about working with Schools of Education to recruit Black applicants. Several leaders, who were alumni of Historically Black Colleges and
Universities (HBCU), talked about the importance of enlisting help from their alma mater in these recruitment efforts.

Principal Davis, a graduate of a HBCU in South Carolina, stated that she was active in her alumni council. “I try to go back to the school of education, visit with professors and sometimes talk to pre-service teachers in classes about working in schools.” Davis said that was important to be seen, not just at recruitment fairs, but during the year as well.

I am a visiting professor at SCC, so I know the students who are coming through the program there. They see me, talk to me, come visit my school and usually I am able to place a few of the student teachers in my building.

Assistant Principal Fitzgerald shared that she makes plans to attend educational events at SCC. She continued to share that she makes sure that she takes plenty of business cards with her and passes them out at these events. If they have tables for vendors at an event on campus, she takes displays and invites a teacher from my school to attend with her.

Fitzgerald knows how valuable it is to hire Black teachers. “When you want teachers, particularly teachers of color, you must go after them.”

Principal Baker emphasized that it was extremely challenging to recruit qualified Black teachers. “It’s hard to get good teachers. It’s hard to get Black teachers. It’s real hard to get good Black teachers.” To solve this problem, Baker said that she began recruiting for next year, last year. “Recruiting Black teachers, good teachers, that’s hard work and it can’t be done at one job fair or the last minute.” She stated that she knows she’s competing with all the schools for the same pool of qualified candidates. Therefore,
you have to go the extra mile to make sure you have “an edge” on the competition.

“Heck, you may have to almost camp out at Schools of Education to do it. I have.”

Many of the participants said that they are always thinking about how to best recruit new teachers. Assistant Principal Edelman said, “I have some good friends at SCC who let me filter application information to the listserv.” These are just a few of the strategies used to connect to pre-service teachers from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Most of the participants noted that being an Black woman helped when it came to recruiting Black women teachers. They talked about the “instant connection” they felt with these women during recruitment events. There was a feeling of being “at home” and comfortable that these new hires felt. One principal said that when one novice teacher she found out she had been recommended for hire at her school said, “I feel like I’m finally home.” Others talked about that instant connection coming from the traditional values of dressing to impress that Black women share. Assistant Principal Fitzgerald shared,

I use my looks to my advantaged. Most people think of school administrators as older, chubby, short hair, bi-focals. They envision their elementary principals from back in the day. So when the district hosts its employment fairs, I pull out all the guns. I’m clean, you hear me. I have on my St. John suit, my Pete Banner heels, my hair freshly done, manicured nails, make-up, the whole works. I give them my best. I think half of the people who end up at our booth come over just to find out who I am. It doesn’t matter that they are mostly women; they still like a pretty lady.
Principal Baker noted that she often hears from my new teachers that they were so glad to end up with an Black woman principal. They find it comforting, “like I will be a second mother to them.”

The young girls are usually nervous anyway. This is probably their first real job and they are trying to make a good impression on me and other principals. When they come over to me, it’s like an instant connection. One of my teachers told me that she had researched schools and asked around about who would be a good principal to work for. She said I was highly recommended and when she finally met me she knew why I was highly spoken of.

Principal Cardoria shared that “you can’t help but fall in love with the young ones.” Like the other participants, Cardoria observed that these pre-service, Black females “always remind me of myself. I guess that’s why I go out of my way to make sure they feel supported.” Most participants agreed with this sentiment.

**Benefits of Hiring Educators who Represents the Students**

Participants didn’t limit the benefits of having a Black teacher as being something that is good for just the Black students, but for all students. The study’s participants at school that were predominately Black emphasized that even though their students had plenty of Black adults in their lives, nothing replaced the positive role model Black teachers are for students.

I was a teacher at a school where the principal made sure to have Black teachers on each grade level. So even if you weren’t in the Black teacher’s class you still felt close enough to feel the effects of having a Black teacher.
Assistant Principal Giovanni shared that although her school was predominately Black and she has a large population of Black teachers already, she still actively recruits Black teachers. “You can never have enough positive Black role models in schools.”

I was talking to one of my new hires and she told me that she found out she was the first Black teacher any of her students ever had. And this was a fourth grade class. Her class was about 75% White. Sure there was initial tension but they worked through it and had a successful year.

Assistant Principal Fitzgerald stated that “no matter what was the race of the teacher, kids are going to fall in love with a good teacher.” Fitzgerald went on to add, “But if you get a great, Black teacher in a class of students, no matter what their color, the kids fall head over heels.” Fitzgerald shared,

Most of our students don’t interact with Black adults outside of the school setting so being in an Black teacher’s classroom is major…Within a few weeks the kids have picked up on all the innuendos of the teacher…. It’s funny to see little, blonde-headed White girls emulate a grown Black woman.

Definitely, these participants in this study recognized the benefits of hiring qualified Black women as teachers.

*Promoting Educators who Represents the Student Body*

Overall, the participants who discussed promoting Black educators felt it was an opportunity for them to give back or “pay it forward.” Two participants talked about letting teachers who showed an interest in administration shadow them and attend leadership conferences with them. Their words are illustrative:
I do encourage those who have leadership potential to go back to school. I encourage my great teachers to get their National Boards first. If they can show the level of dedication it takes to complete that process, learn about curriculum on a deeper level and really become a reflective practitioner, then they have the beginnings of what it takes to become a good principal (Principal Davis).

Mentoring or coaching is what I owe my teachers. Those who show that they are interested in more leadership; I give it to them (Principal Elders).

In the opinion of Principal Cadoria, mentoring and potentially promoting Black women required a great deal of self-sacrificing. “I use my mentoring time with my teachers of color as an opportunity to get to know them and see if there is more than meets the eye.” Cadoria shared that she offers her assistance if the teachers come to her and personally ask her for help. She believed that some teachers need some extra “hand holding.” She adds, “I’ve had teachers come to me asking whether or not to enroll in administrative programs.” Cadoria interjects, “I do what I can to help them because someone did it for me.” Cadoria shared that her district has a leadership academy specifically for those teachers who show leadership interest and potential and have nominated several teachers to participate. “Two of my former teachers are currently working on their Masters in School Administration. That’s a lot to be proud of!”

Principal Elders said that there “are a lot of ways to empower a teacher to take on more leadership duties.” Elders shared how she selected teachers with leadership potential to serves as committee heads, grade level teachers or represent the school on
district level teams. She emphasized that “not all teachers want to become a principal, but many would like to become a grade level rep or lead a committee.”

Principal Baker reflected on how she was determined to help “up and coming leaders” in any way she could. “I particularly want my young, Black teachers to see education as a career, not just teaching as a career.” She felt that her job was “to show them that there is life, if they so choose, beyond the classroom.” Baker concluded by stating that it was her job to make sure that when she retires, she has mentored and promoted at least five Black women who could take her spot.

*Barriers to promoting educators who racially represent the students.*

Participants discussed the barriers of employing and promoting educators who racially and culturally reflected the students at their schools. They cited lack of time as a restraint while others suggested that employing or promoting Black educators meant potentially losing these recruits later to administrative roles.

Each participant mentioned that they wish they had more time to do even more work with novice Black teachers. Assistant Principal Edelman spoke of the importance of coaching teachers into administration but added, “But who’s got that much time?” She declared that her students are her primary focus and takes most of her energy. “If a teacher approaches me and asks me to mentor them, I do. I try to be there for the teachers but it helps if they show an interest first.”

Principals Elders and Baker both talked about the potential of losing good teachers to the principalship. Baker concluded,

You know it comes with the territory. If you hire a superstar teacher and she’s Black too, you know that she’s not going to stay long. You just accept that off the
bat. But what’s the other choice, not to hire the superstar? That’s not a choice. I hire the best teachers I can find, I place them in the classes that need them most and I support them when they leave.

Elders shared that she once told a teacher that she was too smart to stay in the classroom. “She was. This woman was young, Black, sharp and goal-driven. I would have been less of a person, let along her principal, not to encourage her to pursue administration.” Losing a good teacher was a concern but Elders kept the big picture in mind. “Sure, I hated losing her, I really did. But she’s an awesome assistant principal at a school in the district now. I feel I am a part of that success story!” Although she had to replace a great teacher, she felt confident that coaching this educator into administration was in the best interest. “Losing Mrs. Tuttle as a classroom teacher of twenty meant having her available to many more kids.”

Summary

Building partnerships with parents was a decision the participants had all made. This decision was based largely on their strong feelings of building an inclusive, relational environment in their school. By extending a welcome to partake in decision-making, these leaders created shared learning environments in which parents from traditionally marginalized communities felt valued.

Closely connected to building partnerships with diverse families was the topic of employing and promoting educators who reflected the diversity of the student body. Although the participants went to extraordinary lengths to recruit teachers who represent the diverse backgrounds of the students, they were not afraid of losing their investment by coaching gifted educators into leadership positions. The participants clearly
remembered when they were once teachers and someone tapped them. They, in turn, have nurtured their teachers who exhibited leadership potential. They did not negatively associate coaching teachers into administration with losing a teacher they would have to replace. Instead, the participants focused on the bigger picture of preparing the future leadership pool with quality candidates when they retire.

Acknowledging, Valuing and Celebrating Cultures

As mentioned earlier, school level leaders who lead for social justice have the ability to take three very important actions: identify and address deeply embedded inequities, accepting their share of responsibility in upholding the status quo and exerting the leadership necessary to change the policies sustaining it, and mobilize the community, particularly the part of the community that has suffered at the hands of these inequities for so many years (Fink, 2004).

In this section participants addressed these tenets of social justice leadership by sharing stories of learning about their culture, other cultures, and acknowledging, valuing and celebrating all cultures in their schools. By taking these steps the leaders displayed artifacts that reflected their own culture, both in their offices and around the schools, showcased the talents of others, and invited the community to share their stories and customs with students and staff.

Black Girls in Pigtails: Celebrating Their Own Culture

Several of the participants talked openly about how proud they were to be Black. They displayed artwork, books and played music in their offices that reflected their culture. From paintings to sculptures on bookshelves, almost every participant shared
how they decorated their office spaces to showcase African artwork and books written by Black authors. One participant even talked about her love of Black music. Elders shared,

I love jazz. I’m hooked on it, especially the old greats like Dizzy and Monk. If you would ever to visit me at my school and come to my office, I’d bet there would be music playing. I like it when kids come to my office and they catch me humming along to some old jazz tune.

Two leaders talked about their collection of books written by Black authors. Assistant Principal Giovanni declared that she loved to read, “I’m an avid reader. There’s nothing like a Toni Morrison classic or a steamy Omar Tyree novel to make you feel like a strong Black woman.” Giovanni stated that her bookshelf at work was filled with books “many written by Black authors.” Principal Davis, another lover of books, talked about her love of children’s books, “I love going to Barnes and Nobles and just sitting in the children’s section myself.” She bragged that she has almost every book written by a Black author.

Principal Cadoria talked about her love of colorful picture books.

You know what I love, I love picture books. I’m addicted to them in fact. I guess it’s because I taught at the primary level for many years. I love a book with a bright colored cover and a pretty dark-skinned Black girl in pigtails on the cover. My shelves are full of picture books with Black faces on the cover (Cadoria).

Assistant Principal Edelman shared with me her love for her beloved collection of Black angels. “You know how some teachers have hundreds of apple thingies in their classroom. I have a collection of Black angles in my office.” Edelman shared that she began collecting Black angels about ten years ago. “Some I’ve bought, others have been bought by people who know I love them.” As an assistant principal, Edelman usually has
students sent to her office for misbehavior. She declares that the Black angels “has a calming effect” on the students. “I think it helps when I have a child in my office for discipline reasons. They often ask me questions about the angels.” Edelman hopes that the students view angels as “guardians over them” She shares that one little boy who was in her office for kicking the teacher asked her “if the angel saw him being bad.” She responded, “I don’t know. What do you think?” Edelman concludes that whether it helps her students act better or not “it’s good to have beautiful Black angels watching over my school.”

Assistant Principal Fitzgerald articulated her appreciation for artwork created by Black artisans. “I collect artwork by Black artists and display them around my office and in the lobby area of the school.” Fitzgerald shared that some mornings when she is monitoring the hallways just before the morning bell she stands by one of her art pieces displayed near the main entrance and find herself captivated by the beautiful Black woman holding the hands of a small child. “I just love that piece because it reminds me of a parent walking her son to school.” She pauses for a moment before finishing her thought, “Art has a magical way of taking you to another place.”

Principal Cadoria considered her affections towards Black art and shared that she had “little Black children” all around her office. “All round my office you will see sculptures and trinkets of little Black children. As if I don’t have enough little Black children to look after in the building.” Cadoria talked about walking the halls and visiting classrooms then coming back to her office to find “there are even more little Black children to look after.” She appreciated her porcelain collections of school-aged children on her window sill and added with a laugh, “At least they don’t talk back though.”
Giovanni traced her roots and talk about the importance of displaying pride for both sides of her family’s history. “Being part American Indian, I have both Black and Indian pieces of art in the office.” Giovanni pronounced that she felt it was her duty to show her students that “you have to celebrate every part of yourself. I don’t want to just show one part of me and not the other.” She concluded that not only does her extensive collection of Native American artwork show others how proud of her heritage she is but also “it’s a great conversation starter.”

The participants also talked about how they were committed to their continued learning about their own culture. One participant talked about going to museums and exhibits focused on the Black experience. Most felt that knowing their “roots” was essential and learning more meant finding ways to expand their knowledge base. Principal Baker considered the impact one guest speaker for Black History Month had on her.

I had this one gentleman who came to my school to talk about his experiences with the civil rights movement. He was an older gentleman and he lived in Beaufort all his days…But once he started talking and sharing his personal stories about how he grew up in the cotton fields and about missing so much school during tobacco season that he had to do third grade three times himself, I was hooked. The kids were hypnotized by the colorful characters Mr. Day painted. The stories reminded me of those my own father shared with me when I was growing up… I learned a lot that day. More than I could have from just reading a book about the civil rights movement.
Assistant Principal Edelman talked about learning African and Black culture from her weekend excursions to Charleston.

I love living down here in the Charleston area. There are so many things to do and see. Last Saturday, my family and I went over to the Gullah Island for a Gullah tour.... I watched women weave the sweet grass baskets. It made me proud to know how dynamic our culture is; and all you have to do is make yourself available to learn more.

Assistant Principal Giovanni talked about her quest to learn more about her family’s history.

My grandmother is half Indian and half Black. Her father was from the Iroquois tribe. I grew up hearing bits and pieces about Iroquois but as I’ve gotten older I’ve really delved into reading books and looking up documents online. The culture is my culture and I don’t want the richness of the tribe to get lost. I want to keep that part of me alive to pass on to my children.

Five of the participants in this study went to Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) and declared that they learned so much about their own Black history while attending an HBCU. They shared that they believed that they have more “Black pride” today because of their Black college experiences and coursework. “I went to a HBCU and am proud of it,” Principal Davis shared. Davis said that on dress down days at school she tries to wear her HBCU paraphernalia. “When I see someone with an HBCU shirt or car plate, I know that they share a similar Black experience. It’s an instant connection.”
A Photo, a Cigar and a Hanky: Sharing and Learning with the Staff

Each of the participants shared with me how they nurtured sharing and learning about cultures with their staff members. One participant said that she even started a ritual at her opening of the year retreat with her staff. Principal Davis said that each year she asks the teachers to bring in a tiny box of items that describes their culture. At their beginning of the year retreat, each teacher has an opportunity to open his or her box and share what each item represents. One principal commented that “sharing who you are makes us all see how much alike we actually are.”

Each teacher brings a small box with them to our beginning of the year retreat. On the first night of the weekend retreat I ask that they each bring their box to dinner… One of my Black teachers brought in a box with just three items. She pulled out… her grandma’s handkerchief. She told us how she was reared by her grandmother and how her grandma always had a handkerchief stuffed in her bosom. The second item she pulled out was a cigar. Then she talked about how her uncle was notorious for having an empty cigar in his mouth every time he came over to take her and her sister to the store. She shared with us how it was to be a young, Black girl growing up in the fifties and having to go outside around to the back of the restaurant to be served her meal. The last item she pulled out of her box was a photo of Dr. King. She talked about the day he died and how hurt she felt and how lost she felt inside. She said that that day she felt the dreams of the whole race die on that balcony. But then she closed her box and looked around the room. Some of us had tears in our eyes. She paused for a few moments and
began to talk about the things she couldn’t physically place in the box because they were in her heart, the love of teaching children and her love for each of us.

Assistant Principal Giovanni said that she tried to keep up with what’s going on in her area. “If there’s an event celebrating Black or Latino I always ask my teachers to make a special effort to attend.” Giovanni not only asked her teachers to attend cultural events but also bring some information back to share with the rest of the staff. “I want my teachers to keep learning about the communities that we serve.”

Assistant Principal Edelman talked about the benefits of her staff sharing foods from their culture with one another.

My staff is very social-oriented. If there’s a party, they’re there. If there’s no party, they find a reason to have one. Some of my teachers started something called First Fridays. Every first Friday of the month, each teacher brings in a pot luck dish. They try to emphasize to expand beyond cupcakes from Food Lion and two-liter drinks. Mrs. Krebbs asks for dishes you cook for your family at home or your mother’s favorites. What we usually get is a hodgepodge of slow cooked kidney beans and cornbread on one end and enchiladas with guacamole on the other side of the table. Nothing on the table goes together but it all makes sense. It’s like my staff, a diverse and spicy mixture that somehow works and makes sense.

Assistant Principal Fitzgerald, who loves to read, started a book club outside of work where her staff could share their love of reading.

I started a book club primarily because I love to read. The ladies I had in mind when I was formulating the list of possible members were women on my staff.
who I often catch reading during their planning time or at the lunch table…not all
of them were Black women either…. But what really makes the book club
wonderful are the conversations…and the personal connections made. It’s
something when a middle-aged White lady compares a part in the story of a Black
woman character to her own life. It just shows how we all have similar problems
and life issues. Some evenings we just sit around the circle and have a good cry or
a great laugh!

This willingness to share her love of reading books by authors of color was expressed not
only in her book selections but was apparent in her desire to share with not only other
Black educators but White ones as well. For Fitzgerald and the other open oneself up to
their staff and sharing stories, interests and thoughts about their own culture, gives others
the permission to do the same. When educators are not afraid to share their heritage with
each other, or ask questions about other’s, build a more inclusive and connected group
that is able to learn with each other and even laugh at themselves.

*Reaching Today’s Youth: Cultivating Cultural Celebrations in their Schools*

Social justice leadership demands accepting that the primary interest of schools is
the development of children as individuals and as part of a group (Marshal and Ward,
2004). In this study participants talked about cultivating a school atmosphere that valued
and celebrated all cultures.

We have a committee of teachers who are in charge of bringing in cultural groups
to our school. This month we had a community drum team from Manning, South
Carolina. The group was made up of kids ranging in age from five years old to
probably early teen. The band consisted of all Black students who have been with
the group for years. They performed for about an hour and my students enjoyed it so much. It was cute seeing the smallest ones play drums and you can barely see their little heads above the drums.

Principal Cadoria considered some of the cultural events her school hosted last year.

Last year we had a puppeteer come in from the Arts Council to do a rendition of “Why Do Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears.” The book is based on an African proverb so she had puppets of these animal characters from the jungles of Africa. The music was melodic beats of drums and cymbals and the dance of the puppets made the kids move around in their seats. I love bring books, particularly books by Black and Brown authors to life.

Another principal, Davis, talked about how much fun her students had with a dance troupe that came to her school last month.

I have to tell you about this one group. They were dancers, all different ethnicities. And in each set they did a dance that represented a different culture from somewhere across the world. The African dance part was the best. They got some of the students to volunteer to join them. Boy, if you could see it. The kids were jumping and gyrating to the music. Those in their seats were clapping to the drum beat and cheering their classmates on. The kids and teachers had a ball. One of the students who got up on the stage came running over to me and asked me if the dance team could come back the next day.
Assistant Principal Edelman talked about the benefits of working at a magnet school when it came to learning about and celebrating all cultures. Her school was an arts magnet school that received grants that support their “Artist in Residence” program. “Last year we had two painters from Harlem work with our students. Mr. Brown and Mr. Petersons did a unit on the Harlem Renaissance that blew my mind.” Edelman explained that the unit incorporated students watching a documentary about the Harlem Renaissance and taking an internet museum walk through the Renaissance. Then students read books and looked at artwork birthed out of that movement. Finally, students worked in groups to create a mural on the fifth grade hallway, with the help of their teachers. “Not only did they see Black art but they got to work with artist who looked like them.” She shared that that project sparked an interest in art and perhaps becoming artist for many of her students. “It was wonderful watching Brown and Peterson share their work with the students and hearing them tell the students how they got their start.” The fact that the art teachers started drawing and painting in elementary school “showed the students that they too could become the next Beardman if they put their minds to it.”

Another participant, Principal Davis, believed that her music teacher tapped into today’s culture by tying the interests of his students, music videos, to a strong message of building good character. “Hip hop is its own culture. I have to learn it and be able to use it to reach today’s youth.” Although the message was mature, Davis felt that many of her poor, rural students understood the message.

I love my music teacher. He’s got a real ear to what’s going on in the world and what the kids are listening to. Last fall he started a unit with the students where the classes did their own music video. Now the context at first was a little shaky. I
mean, when I first sat in on his class I was wondering how I was going to explain to parents why their child was doing a video on the dangers of crack. Yes, you heard me right. Okay, the first part of the video was a parody of a drug dealer offering a group of kids some drugs and the kids shake their heads no. Then the group moved on to a corner where they ran into some other kids who were drinking and the bad kids offered them something to drink but the good kids shook their heads no. Then it showed the good group witnessing domestic violence and seeing the man get taken off to jail….ok, don’t laugh. I know it sounds crazy but in the end, with the music and movement, it was absolutely spectacular. And I didn’t have any calls from parents!

*We are Black History Everyday: Bringing Along Parents and the Community*

Parents were an integral part of the celebrations at many of the schools. In many of their schools the parents were not only invited to attend these cultural fairs but were integral parts of planning these events. In many cases, parents were eager to bring in dishes or invite speakers from their communities to take part in the festivals. Principal Cadoria believed that “bring along parents” was essential to pulling together the cultural programs her staff planned each year.

My parents go way out for Black History month. They help plan the events with the classroom teachers. Each classroom takes part in a grade level assembly. Most classrooms do some type of play because you can get more kids involved that way. It’s nothing to have parents take time off from work to come in and help with costumes or to spend time after school helping students practice their speeches.
Assistant Principal Edelman shared that they “definitely have parents come in during Black History Month.” Her staff used parents as guest readers of Black books in the primary grade levels. In upper grades, parents work with students on their writing. “Some parents help students put together books that document the Civil Rights movement or highlight a famous Black historian.” Principal Elders said that sometimes parents work with the classes on special projects. “I think whether or not its Black history or some other history month a parent can share his or her perspectives on life with a class.” She continues, “At my school, we don’t need a separate month to celebrate Black history. We are Black history everyday.”

Principal Baker proclaimed that she was proud that her school celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month.

Each year we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. In the month or two leading up the October we organize a committee of parents and teachers to come up with some activities for the month. Each day, on the morning news, we highlight a famous Hispanic hero or we share something interesting about the culture. On the last Saturday of October we plan to have an outdoors festival on our playground. Parents are bringing food; we are having games and rides. It’s going to be a culmination of all the neat things we have learned this month.

Baker added that it was important to her to have diversity on committees that were in charge of planning Black History and Hispanic History events for the school.

Parents are always invited to help us plan our events. Sometimes they have good suggestions or are able to offer us resources we wouldn’t have access to on our own. White parents and Black parents can work together to plan Black History
programs. Black parents and Hispanics work together to plan Hispanic History Month. We haven’t gotten to Women’s History month but perhaps we will try that this year. And if so I’ll have men on that committee.

Assistant Principal Giovanni held that they needed as many parents input as they can get when they are planning for our big events and programs. To get as many parents in attendance at their PTA meetings she suggested that they schedule meetings right after work hours instead of later in the evenings. “To encourage parents to come to the school instead of going home for the evening, we offer them dinner and child care during the meeting.” Giovanni explained that her PTA leaders order the basics from the grocery store or deli, “the finger sandwiches, the chips and punch.” Then they asked each parent to bring a covered dish. Although they do not always have 100 percent participation from parents they have plenty of food to share. “We have enough food to feed the parents and kids and we get more parents there by planning for dinner.

Summary

Choosing to lead for social justice, by acknowledging, valuing, and celebrating their own culture and others, was a decision this study’s participants all made. This decision was based largely on their strong feelings of personal identity, particularly racial identity. The research overview on Black women educators presented in the Literature Review supports this finding. Without question, these leaders acknowledged, valued and celebrated their own cultures by displaying their appreciation for culturally-rich artwork, music and books. Then, these leaders for social justice, by keeping at the center of their practice and values issues related to race and other forms of marginalization, created customs among their staff that nurtured sharing artifacts about their own roots, learning
and sharing information they learned from community events and reading books authored by people of color. At the school level, the participants celebrated diverse cultures by inviting groups in to share their traditions and customs through song and dance; or by allowing teachers to use their talents to enrich the curriculum with cultural materials that matter most to students from diverse background. Lastly, the participants lead for social justice by creating an inclusive, relation-oriented environment at the school through partnerships with parents and the community at large. Not only were parents and the community invited to attend these cultural extravaganzas, but help plan them as well, thereby making their schools a communal place of acknowledging, valuing, and celebrating cultures by sharing cultural histories with all.

Eliminating the Achievement Gaps

Freire (1990) suggests that the purpose of the educational system is to make possibilities happen where there were none before for marginalized students. In 2000, the U.S. Department of Education reported that the ethnic and racial achievement gaps between students in math, reading, and science have either increased or stayed the same as in the 1990s (NC Public School, n.d, ¶ 1). The leaders of this study found that it was important to eliminate the achievement gaps among and between all groups of students. The leaders discussed (a) using disaggregated data analysis to drive school improvement, (b) the importance of keeping the students at the center of all decisions, (c) and holding educators accountable for demonstrating high expectations. The following sections discuss these strategies in more depth.

Knowledge is Power: Using Data Analysis to Drive School Improvement
During the interviews, participants readily talked about analyzing disaggregated data to better inform their school improvement efforts. Participants felt that the No Child Left Behind legislation has required school leaders accountable to better educating each subgroup, not just the top students. Principal Cadoria talked about how she uses data analysis in her building.

My staff comes together and we really take the data apart. We look at which subgroups are not performing up to par and where we need to place our instructional emphasis for the following year. It’s not enough to say that the Black males in this grade or that grade scored below proficient in math and reading, we must then ask ourselves, why are our Black boys not proficient and what can we do this year to increase the number of those who are?

Principal Davis suggested that the data doesn’t just tell her how students performed but helps her make projections about which groups are “in trouble and which ones are not.” Davis recalled a Student Achievement Parent Summit she facilitated last year about their school’s School Improvement Plan. She shared that she went over the data in “layman’s terminology” and carefully gave parents a narrative of how the school had performed on last years assessments as well as what benchmarks they had in place for increasing the number of students scoring proficient and advanced for the coming year.

Assistant Principal Giovanni also talked about sharing the data at faculty and PTA meetings. “My principal and I agree that knowledge is power. If you look like you have something to hide, parents will not trust you to tell them the truth.” Giovanni bragged on her school when she commented that her school is a school of excellence, “We’ve made
AYP for the past two years in a row.” She credited “data-driven decision making” as the key to her school staying “at the top of the pack.”

Assistant Principal Edelman discussed pairing AYP with other holistic pieces of data to get a better picture of the needs of each student and the sub-grouping of students.

I’ll take the data on a group of low performing students and make a file on each of those students. Once I have their scores and a copy of their last year’s report card, I begin collecting qualitative data on the child… It takes awhile to compile all of this data but that’s what I do during those quieter summer months. By the opening of school, I have a summative report to share at our Student Intervention Team meetings…I feel confident that I am advocating for the child when I have the data that gives me a clear, whole picture of the child.

Principal Baker stated that she considers herself a data-driven decision maker too. In fact, she boasts that in her office she has a “Wall of Future Achievers” where she profiles students who have scored below proficiency and tracks their improvements on the benchmark assessments the districts gives to students three times a year. She said that having the board up in her office and in her face everyday makes her keep students in her focus and achievement as a priority in every decision she makes. “I look at that wall several times a day.” She added that when a student scores proficient on the gateway tests, she adds a star by his or her name. The star indicates that the student is no longer projected as being in danger of failing the end-of-year tests. “My goal is to turn each of these students into stars!”

*I’ll Take Care of my Kids: Keeping Students at the Center of Decisions*
During the interviews, each participant shared that being an effective administrator meant keeping students at the center of every decision she makes. Several participants noted that this strategy was an important key to ensuring that students, not managing the schools, remained the focus of their practice. Principal Elders suggested that “if a decision isn’t going to be in the best interest of the students, it’s a decision that shouldn’t be made.” Principal Davis went even further and noted that “any principal who would put their career stability or advancement ahead of what’s best for her students, doesn’t deserve the title of principal at all.” She shared the following story:

One day the police came into my school to arrest one of my seventh-grade students…I protested and told the officers that these were my students and I would not allow them to come into my building and handcuff any of my students in the midst of class. One officer started raising his voice and me and said that I should step aside and let them do their job. I said to them ‘let me do mine.’…The officer …warned me that since I was interfering with police matters I would not have the support of the department from that day forward…. But I don’t care, this is my school. I’ll take care of my kids on my time.

Putting students at the center of one’s decision-making doesn’t just limit itself to holding off police officers, as in Davis’ case, it can also include turning your office into a “beauty shop” as in the story shared by Assistant Principal Fitzgerald.

There was a little girl who would come to school everyday with dirty clothes. Sometimes she would have the same outfit on two or three days in a row. Her little shirts and pants would be so wrinkled you just knew that there were many times should would sleep in the clothes and have to wear them back to school the
next day. Kids would pick at her and talk about how she smelled…So I bought
some things for her that I kept in my office… In the afternoon she would change
back into the clothes she wore to school and return home. I would wash her
school clothes myself. Some days I would do…hair too. Now you know no little
Black girl wants to walk around all day with her hair a mess…I would do hair for
at least six or seven girls before the first bell.

Fitzgerald shared that being a school level leader meant wearing many hats. She didn’t
limit her role as an Assistant Principal to her written job description. “You have to go
beyond the call of duty when it comes to dealing with children. If it were not for them, I
wouldn’t even have a job,” Fitzgerald commented. She was not alone, the other
participants’ stories resonated the same message. One must keep the students, and every
issue they bring to school with them, at the center of one’s practice.

_Holding Educators Accountable_

Several participants talked about how holding educators accountable for
demonstrating high expectations was necessary if you want to raise student achievement
in schools. “If the teacher doesn’t believe in the child, the child doesn’t have a fighting
chance.” Principal Baker commented, “I find it frustrating when I hear a teacher who
says ‘these students can’t learn at the same pace as White students.’” Baker concluded that
teachers like this can become “poisonous” to the rest of the staff.

When I asked participants what strategies they used to hold the teachers
accountable to setting high expectations for all students, Principal Cadoria suggested that
“you must lead by example.” She went on to say, “How can I expect my teachers to have
high expectations on students unless I have high expectations of my students first.” This
idea of leading by example was the sentiment of Assistant Principal Edelman too. “We must model what it means to expect all students to learn for our teachers. We have it written in our mission, but what exactly does that look like.”

Assistant Principal Fitzgerald believed that using classroom observations was an effective way to hold teachers accountable to having high expectations for each student. I use classroom observations as a way to assess and formally document whether or not a teacher has high expectations for all learners. If I notice a teacher not asking higher order thinking questions or if her assessments do not have varied questioning on it, I make a note of it. If I walk into a classroom and the teacher is working with a group of students while the rest of the class is goofing off, I make a note of it. Documentation is a great tool. Of course, after you do the documentation you have to confront the teacher. Most teachers get a little testy when you suggest perhaps her expectations of students aren’t high enough. I had one teacher tell me that she determines her level of expectation based on the performance of the student. If the student didn’t show that they were putting forth an effort to learn, then that was a clear indication that he did not want to learn. I corrected her and challenged her to look at the statements she made in the reverse. Instead of letting the child’s past performance dictate your level of expectations for him, try raising your expectations and see if that will raise his performance.

Principal Davis said that she used teacher evaluations as opportunities to assess the rigor of a teachers’ instruction. If she felt that the teacher is watering down the curriculum for certain teachers she calls her out on it. “I’m all for differentiated instruction but come on…you can’t tell me that the Black kids getting different work
from the other students is what differentiation is all about.” Davis shared that she has seen teachers give “easy work to the Black student, all of the Black students” and the more challenging stuff to the White students. In one instance, Davis said that she sat down between one of the Black students and the White students during math class. As the students completed their seatwork, she sat there quietly and observed. It appeared to her that the work was very easy for the Black student, “She was breezing through the sheet.” So after about five minutes Davis asked the teacher if she had an extra copy of the more challenging math worksheet and gave it to the Black student. “She breezed through that one, too.” After the lesson was completed, Davis said she asked the teacher to step out into the hallway for a minute. When she shared with the teacher her “little experiment,” the teacher turned bright red in the face and said that she was not aware that the work was that easy for the Black child. Davis made the following comment.

From that day forward, Ms. Moore was on my radar. I made it my personal mission to sit in her math class at least twice a week until I felt sure that she had rectified the situation.

Assistant Principal Giovanni said that she noticed that having low expectations of students was not just a White teacher’s issue, “My Black teachers are the hardest ones to convince that they have low expectations for their Black students.” She continued:

I approached one of my fifth grade teachers after a lesson I observed and asked her if she thought she had high expectations for her students…‘I’ve done my part. I taught them. If they didn’t learn, that’s their fault.’ Then I asked her why she thought her students didn’t learn and she said, ‘You saw them, they don’t pay attention, Tyrell walked around the class the whole time. Qualik had his head
down. Shavonda didn’t have her book so she didn’t get any work done.’ I pointed out to her that …by letting them get away with not learning, she was sending them the message that she didn’t care if they learned or not.

Principal Elders concluded that “teaching is an act of faith. Faith without work is dead just like teaching without faith in your students is a mute point.” Elders stated that if “educators don’t expect their students, who are in their charge, to learn, they won’t.” Indeed if educators demand excellence then the students will rise to the occasion.

Assistant Principal Edelman said it best. “My Black students are like water, they will settle at the lowest point or they will rise to the highest point.” She went on to add, “We are the tipping point. What we believe about of Black kids determines where they will fall.”

The Particular Strategies in the Assistant Principalship

Introduction

By and large, as school level leaders, the participants in this study were concerned with advocating on behalf of their students. Like the participants in Blackmore’s (2002) study, these Assistant Principals created agendas that deconstructed racism while simultaneously constructing strategies for resistance and reconstruction (p. 351). For the Assistant Principals interviewed, leading for social justice sometimes meant using subversive measures to seek justice. At other times it meant distancing oneself from defining oneself as a leader for social justice while enacting socially-just ways of leading. In this section I will discuss specifically some of the strategies used by these participants to redefine their role and learning what strategies Assistant Principals use to seek equity and justice in schools.
And the winner is…: Committing to the Role of Best SupportingActivist in a School

When initially designing the parameters of this study, my dissertation committee and I felt it was important to include school level leaders, both Principals and Assistant Principals, in this study to see whether there was a distinction in these two groups sought equity and justice for marginalized students in schools. What I found out was that the Assistant Principals often talked about their role as supporting the agenda of their principals while nudging their principals to create equitable environments and opportunities for marginalized students. Assistant Principal Fitzgerald shared that her principal often asks for her opinion on student affairs, and particularly with matters concerning Black students. Responding to a question about her commitment to do justice work, she remarked:

I take my work with students quite seriously…Last week I was called into a meeting with my principal after a student had started his second fight this year. My principal was ready to expel him, but I asked him to reconsider, to bring the parents in and let’s talk about this more…After talking to his mom we learned that he was witnessing his mother getting abused by her boyfriend…Now with more information, we can get Rasheed the counseling he really needs.

Fitzgerald was quick to point out that such advocacy efforts were not restricted to her Black students. She stated, “…After Jena 6 tensions started to arise on campus. …One of my White male students came to my office and told me he was scared for his personal safety…I took his concerns to heart and worked with the guidance counselors to plan a talk-session with our students.
Bogotch (2002) asserts that a leadership for social justice is deliberate intervention. In one example, Giovanni talked about actively working to get a Black student she was tutoring after school moved from a regular math class into an honors class. Giovanni felt that her assessment of the young girl’s math skills warranted such a move. She explained,

I told her teacher that I had been working with her and felt that she was academically gifted in the area of math…Although her teacher disagreed at first, she agreed that we should at least nominate her for testing…She passed the test with flying colors and was able to move into the accelerated math class immediately.

Responding to a question about how she ended up in Diane’s class in the first place, she remarked:

I don’t know why she couldn’t be placed in an honors class to begin with. I’m sure it has something to do with low expectations…Some of these old school honors teachers still have a hard time thinking our Black kids are honors material…My job is to make sure they accept the fact that there are so many talents students of color at our school… and to make sure they don’t forget it.

By far, one of the most effective vehicles for leading for social justice, particularly for Black school leaders, is through their beliefs and ideas about the best ways to educate Black students (Irvine, 2002). For example, when asked about her activism regarding Black students, Assistant Principal Edelman relayed the following:

I try to encourage them not to underestimate themselves…I get to know each of my students, their likes and dislikes…I attend recitals, games, choir
anniversaries…I encourage them to sign up for challenged classes, to join student committees.

Edelman talked at length about the importance of building relationship with students as a component of leading for social justice (Bogotch, 2002). Developing a firm understanding of her students as individuals, as well as an awareness of their personal circumstances, represents a significant aspect of her ideas the role of an Assistant Principal and is evident in the following comment:

Some of my students have to go home to a place that is not conducive to doing homework….If there are multiple families living in a two bedroom apartment…kids running around…how will their homework get done?

Here, Edelman makes the connection between a student’s home life and their experiences at school, something leaders who are less focused on leading for social justice. Edelman’s leadership philosophy is also heavily cognizant of only acknowledging her race, but also talking to her students about race.

I pull them aside when I see them misbehaving…Because I’m Black I sometimes get really real with them…I put it out there and let them know that being Black means they are already starting the game at a deficit…I tell them that they have to be better than other students just to get the same opportunities.

The above example shows that leading for social justice means not being scared to name and engage deeply embedded inequities (Fink, 2004). Acknowledging race is an additional element in Black school level leaders’ unique sense of care and justice orientation in that it speaks to the necessity of being truthful with students about the
challenges that they face, particularly as they are related to being marginalized in North American society.

Analysis

In conclusion a close reading of the ways in which these school level leaders talked about seeking equity and justice for marginalized students in schools, I was able to glean from their reflections and perceptions, strategies that a leader for social justice might enact. Accordingly, leaders for social justice (Jay, 2006):

- seek out opportunities to serve their communities; particularly the community in which they grew up;
- are willing to use their power, position, and voice to positively impact the lives of Black students, and students of color;
- acknowledge injustices and the role they play in the lives of those marginalized;
- maintain an open-door policy for students and faculty;
- understand their students’ backgrounds and familial situations and acknowledge and understand their implication for the students’ academic success (or lack thereof);
- use data to drive instructional leadership;
- builds partnerships with parents and other community stakeholders;
- acknowledge, value and celebrate racial and cultural differences;
- hire and promote Black educators, and educators of color;
- use staff development to prepare all teachers to work with Black students and students of color;
- are willing to network and develop allies;
• make it a priority to decrease the achievement gaps between and among all groups of students while increasing achievement of all groups;
• are prepared to deal with the ramifications of oppositional forces (i.e. political climate of the field);
• have, and seek out, experiences with White educators, inside and outside of schools.

With respect to the literature on social justice leadership, these strategies are by no means unique. Indeed, they are rather consistent with the literature, and with what committed leaders of social justice know to be essential to effectively seek equity and justice in schools. The findings of the study are concurrent with those from the literature. These participants recount stories where they practiced moral outrage when faced with social injustices (Blackmore, 2002, p. 218). These justice workers use strategic ways of leading to initiate real changes in the political climate of education. Their counter-narrative endarkens leadership theories and practices, embraces all races and cultures, creates agendas that will lead to eliminating all achievement gaps, and garners the support of all stakeholders.

From Battle Wombs to a Fire in the Belly: Summary of Strategic Ways to Lead for Social Justice

The experiences of the participants in this study lend support to Marshall and Ward’s notion of social justice leadership as an “activist, intervention craft” (Marshall & Ward, 2004, p. 531). These seven Black women were dedicated professionals who contributed in numerous ways to the school in which they led. The participants who had been principals at their respective school expressed a deep sense of responsibility for
cultivating pluralism through their pursuits of social justice. These principals expanded their definitions of the principalship in order to achieve a higher sense of community among all diversities represented in their buildings.

As a group, the participants expressed passionately about culture and were proud of their personal racial identities. They put tremendous amounts of effort in learning and sharing their own culture. In many instances they had a vision for the school community and worked with the staff and families to achieve the vision. As leaders, they saw the need for hiring and promoting educators, who reflected the diversity of their students and actively sought opportunities to recruit, support and coach talented teachers of color into the field of school administration.

The findings of this study revealed a complex mix of leader and learner for these participants who choose to keep at the center of her practice and vision issues related to race, gender, class, language and other forms of oppression. However, the participants’ decision to continue to do justice work was perceived by all of them to be the only choice to be made. As they considered the barriers, heated debates, language barriers, small pool of Black teacher applicants, and showing oneself vulnerable, they noted that the risks were worth the efforts and the benefits of creating an inclusive community of learners was well worth the efforts.

In the beginning of this chapter, it was stated that school level leaders for social justice have the ability to take three very important actions. First, they must identify and address deeply embedded inequities. Second, they must accept their share of responsibility in upholding the status quo and exert the leadership necessary to change the policies sustaining it. Third, they must mobilize the community, particularly the part
of the community that has suffered at the hands of these inequities for so many years (Fink, 2004).

Bogotch (2002) stated that social justice requires a struggle that is continuous and ongoing. Likewise, we could infer that a leader for social justice suffers many “battle wombs” within her tenure as a Principal or Assistant Principal. I use the term battle womb intentionally. It is the Black woman school level leader that carries the feminine within, because she is a woman. She bears the responsibility of being accountable to Black students, because she’s Black too (Dillard, 2003). And yet, she “labors in the vineyard,” seeking equity and justice for those who are suffering and oppressed (Capper (1993). And as Lyman (2002) suggested in her study of Black women school level leaders, “It is time to honor their voices by listening and following their lead” (p. 31).

Merchant and Shoho’s (2005) study revealed that socially-just leaders often experienced or witnessed hurtful acts of discrimination and social injustice in other forms. In fact, the participants in their study recounted stories of times they experienced marginalization and noted that these experiences motivated them to strive towards improving the lives of others. The leaders were persistent in their efforts to pursue social justice and maintained that their “fire in the belly” comes from the capacity to recognize the injustice. Developing a fire in the belly towards social injustice is both a process and a goal that means full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs (Merchant and Shoho, 2005). This study seeks to deliver the stories of these courageous women who practice stubborn persistence and lead for social justice (Capper, 1993).
VI. Social Justice and Endarkened School Leadership:
The Battle Wombs and Belly Fires of Black Women Leading from a Center of Race.

Introduction

It’s risky to call yourself a leader for social justice. First of all, what exactly does that really mean? If I have to stop and clarify the term every time I use it, then it’s too sticky of a name to call myself. And I sure don’t want to leave it to others to come up with their own definition. To me, what you call leading for social justice is just what we Black women do in schools every day. (Principal Davis)

Reflecting on what it meant to lead for social justice, this participant’s comment brings forth the realization that the relationship between Black women school level leaders and social justice leadership has yet to be fully addressed. Is it important to look at leadership from an endarkened feminist perspective? As the discourses of the participants in this study were deconstructed, the counter-narratives revealed that the participants in this research study choose to practice leadership beyond the traditional perspectives of their job descriptions. Therefore, though they all verbalized that their decision to do justice work was “just what… Black women do in schools every day,” the strategies used to embrace all cultures, center agendas on the elimination of all achievement gaps, and garner the support of all stakeholders are much more complex and ambiguous.

In this chapter I present a summary of the study, implications for policy and practice, recommendations for future research, and concluding thoughts. The summary recaps the study via its relationship to the framework of Social Justice Leadership, the
research of Endarkened Epistemology and the major tenets of Critical Race Theory. The implications provided speak directly to two specific audiences: school administrators and schools and colleges of education. Through the research recommendations and personal reflections, I bring the study full circle to remind myself and my readers why it was that I engaged in this endeavor.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to illuminate, and subsequently better understand, the experiences of Black women school level leaders regarding the ways in which they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools. Further, it sought their reflections regarding the ways in which they both their view and experience manifestations of injustices in schools. Every aspect of this study, from its conceptualization to the presentations of its findings, has been guided by Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory is what got me here (see Figure 2). First and foremost, Critical Race Theory’s assertion that race and racism are endemic and permanent in American society was central to this entire research endeavor (Matsuda et al., 1993). Not only do my own personal experiences reflect this reality, but it was clearly echoed in the experiences of the study’s participants. Consequently, race was intentionally placed, and remained, at the center of the project.

As the major lens for this study, its tenets also became the center of this study. Since race is at the center of CRT it was also the center, or the belly, of this study. By centering race e this study contributes to the volumes of work concerning endarkened research (Dillard, 2003). Additionally, because the stories told by the Black women adds
to the work of school level leaders seeking justice in schools this study also gives detail to the body of work on leadership for social justice (Marshall and Ward, 2004; Theoharis, 2004; Blackmore, 2002; Bogtoch, 2002). What emerged from this study was a framework that highlights the connection between the strategies used by Black women school level leaders, which can be utilized by any leader seeking justice in her school, and the importance of acknowledging that leading for social justice in schools requires leaders to center their leadership on race. Figure 3 shows a graphic representation of this framework.
Figure 3: Theoretical Framework for Social Justice and Endarkened School Leadership

Critical Race Theory

Endarkened Leadership and the Counternarratives of Black women school level leaders

Race
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Leaders for Social Justice

Strategies used by Black women school level leaders when leading for social justice
1. Forming partnerships
2. Developing and reviewing policies
3. Promoting educators
4. Providing cultural opportunities
5. Displaying diverse materials
6. Sponsoring Black and Hispanic activities
7. Disaggregating data
8. Keeping students at the center of all decisions
9. Holding educators accountable
Language that disrupts the discourse, or the dominant language, is counter-narrative. Proponents of CRT believe that groups that have historically been marginalized and silenced should be given a voice in their own language, in order to tell their own story. Those who have been historically marginalized are seen as "knowers"—as possessors of knowledge (Hernandez, 2004; Ladson-Billings 1998, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

This study was based on the assumption that Black women school level leaders have a story to tell (Hernandez, 2004). Their counter-narratives contradict the White, conservative male’ chronicles specifically, and challenges the dominant discourse of leadership and leading in general. The retelling of the leadership story from a Black woman’s perspective is an effort to counteract the stories told by and about White males who dominate leadership research. By capturing the alternative realities of these Black women school level leaders, this study calls for a reinterpretation of dominant leadership epistemologies, thereby reconceptualizing leadership norms through endarkened ways of leading. Because the study’s participants embody the feminine, they carry a counter-narrative; and because these women identify themselves as Black, they carry a counter-narrative.

In studies conducted by Beham’s three doctoral students (2006) narratives were used to share the finding of their studies. Beham and her doctoral students shared their work using through narratives they called leadership vignettes, where the researchers used both the voice of the interviewees as well as their own to tell a story. Likewise, I used narratives to share the life experiences of the seven Black women school level
leaders in this study. As a result, CRT gave voice to the endarkened leadership practices that are heard throughout (Sanders-Lawson, Smith Campbell, and Beham, 2006; Hernandez, 2004; Dillard, 2003).

Social Justice and Endarkened School Leadership: Making the Connections

The constructs of endarkened feminism are applicable to all discursive practices and are useful for demystifying social justice leadership. As Dillard (2003) notes, Endarkened feminist epistemology can also assist school level leaders in examining the political climates and revealing weak points that might provide opportunities to challenge and transform the existing order. The practical application of the constructs of endarkened feminist epistemology should be considered as it relates to education in general, and specifically to the desire to lead for social justice. In doing so, the field of education might challenge and move beyond the existing mediocrity of educating some students better than others and in the process find ways for leaders to seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools by advocating, leading and keeping at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States (Theoharis, 2004).

Additionally, Dillard (2003) suggests that endarkened feminist epistemology is located at the intersection of race, gender, and other identities for Black women. She proposes that when it comes to education, all views expressed and actions taken arise from both a personal and cultural set of beliefs. Consequently, Black principals are oriented to be passionate about students in general, and Black and other students of color more specifically. This passion heightens a leader’s sense of responsibility by “taking
her back to her own childhood and her own school experiences as a source of self-definition” (Dillard, 2003, p. 146).

Certainly, the discourse of the participants in this study reflects agreement with this point. Women profiled by Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998) also showed “a sense of compassion towards all children and a determination to help children to learn, grow, and overcome whatever obstacles are placed in their way. Their sense of equity and justice has been enhanced by their own experiences as minorities” (p.144). As policymakers continue to address issues of achievement gaps among and between brown, Black and White students, school level leaders must reconsider how we define, structure and enact justice-oriented leadership in schools. The constructs of endarkened feminist epistemology would indeed be a productive way to analyze these discourses.

Is it valuable to look at reframing social justice leadership and leadership in general though an endarkened feminist epistemology? This study does indeed provide a way to reconsider the strategic ways of leading for equity and justice in schools. For people who value looking at school leadership from the minority perspective then embracing the endarkened ways of leading holds great promise for reconceptualizing the role of the principal and assistant principal.

The Black women of this study told their stories from a center of race. These stories, or counternarratives, challenge the dominant discourse. In telling their story, the women showed how impacting race is to them, personally, and to those in their charge (staff, students and even their communities). From their stories we hear how race plays a factor in much of what these women do as leaders. We also hear of how the effect of race, which is racism, is wounding and hurtful. We acknowledge the weight of race that
these women, and perhaps all Black women, carry with them in the wombs of their spirits.

Although Black women encounter victimization under the dual discrimination of racism and sexism (King, 1988), this study concluded when it comes to leading schools, Black women automatically place race, over other identities, at the center of their vision and practice. As stated previously, and detailed by Dillard (2003), Black women carry their race (along with their other identities). However, the Black women in this study repeatedly focused their stories and strategies on issues of race over their other identities (gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) What the shared stories told us was that Black women often felt empowered and wounded by their race and the institution of racism. While the participants shared that they were concerned for all of their students, the women’s experiences with race caused them to feel particularly responsible for their Black students. Because of these deep feelings, the leaders tended to stay with a leadership approach that centered on race when addressing most school issues. Therefore Black women lead for an endarkeded standpoint because they centered their practices on race thereby centering their leadership practice on CRT, whether they knew it or not. And since the literature shows that the leadership approaches of Black women school level leaders are similar to those of leaders for social justice, the strategies used by the women in this study are also assessable to other socially-just leaders; and therefore ought to be used by all leaders for social justice (Dillard, 2003).

Just as the women in my study do, all leaders for social justice, should center their practices and vision on race. Consequently, by centering one’s practices on race, other isms will be centered in ones practice as well. When leading for social justice, centering
race is not only needful, it is a necessary component to successfully leading for social justice and ultimately bringing about needful and positive changes in schools.

Using part of Theorharis’ (2004) definition of a leader for social justice we can conclude from the results found in this study that a leader for social justice is a school level leader who keeps at the center of her vision and practice issues related to race (and thus other isms). What this study shows is that Black women lead from a center of race and use strategies and tools that center on race to change schools (policies, discourses and structures). Thus what I urge is that any leader who seeks justice and commits to changing schools for the betterment for all students, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized, should incorporate these same tools and strategies that center on race as well. As a result we can honestly conclude what’s good for the goose is indeed good for the gander.

It is not good enough for one’s vision and practice to have a center of oppression. We must start with the obvious, seeing one’s race or color. Leaders for social justice must purposefully center their vision and practice on race which centers the other isms in return. Daily school leaders must move beyond the ‘being’ part of leading for social justice, those things one values, strives for, and shows passion towards, to the animation of doing justice work, those on-going actions that one does in order to change schools and schooling. And as Marshall and Young (2006) emphasize “working for social justice can be exciting, meaningful, and inspiring, it can also be difficult, uncomfortable, and draining” (p. 311).

So how do we begin centering our leadership from the center of race? We begin by asking ourselves questions about race and assessing our own proficiency towards
social justice leadership in terms of race and racism. We proceed by gathering more information, seeking out stories told from the counternarrative, and incorporating these strategies used by Black women school level leaders to improve and change our own schools. And we persist in our efforts by seeking out networks and allies (both Black and White) in order to continue addressing issues of race and racism.

As stated previously, the participants in this study practiced leadership beyond the traditional perspectives of their job descriptions. An implication from this research study is the need to expand the pool of participants to include even more narratives from Black women, and other women of color, who are school level leaders seeking equity and justice in schools. This could be a shared responsibility for both universities and school districts and could be accomplished through coursework and evaluating school level leaders through annual equity audits (Skrla, L., Scheurich, J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2004).

Implications for Policy and Practice

Implications for School Administrators

The leaders in this study hoped that this research would be most useful in providing school administrators with important insight about seeking equity and justice in schools. In particular, those genuinely interested in improving the educational experiences of marginalized students may benefit by drawing on the results of the study to inform their leadership. As Marshall and Young (2006) assert, “leaders can support social justice in their school, and when they do, the results can be phenomenal” (p. 310).

First and foremost, school administrators should consult Black women school level leaders before they decide to implement initiatives related to social justice. The
leaders in this study suggested that seeking advice and guidance before such initiatives efforts are undertaken would be a welcomed gesture. While they may not have all the answers, engaging these leaders in conversations about initiatives in which they will be expected to play key roles is not only effective, but professional. Likewise, inviting faculty of color, parents of color, and other community members to sit on advisory boards for initiatives related to social justice was viewed as more than appropriate (Jay, 2006).

Second, any social justice initiatives undertaken by a school should include components that examine race, racism, classism, and other issues of marginalization. School level leaders become sensitized to both the covert and overt forms of unjust actions to which their students, parents and faculty of color are subjected. Most importantly, when issues of marginalization are brought to their attention, school administrators must not ignore, explain away, or attempt to minimize the experience that their students, parents and faculty members of color share with them (Jay, 2006).

Ultimately, what we know for sure is CRT says that racism is normal, it’s a part of the very fabric of our American lives. If race and racism are normal, then we can no longer look past these entities in hopes that one day race and racism will disappear. Nor should we sit in denial of race and racism and the wounding of those marginalized by its sting. Yes race, a social construction that separates us by the hue of our skin tone, is real and normal. Yes, racism is also a problem, and our students are not exempt from its affects. So let’s begin centering race by posing some tough, and perhaps, touchy questions of ourselves, our practices, our values and our programs of educational leadership.
Here are some questions we as school leaders must begin and/or continue to ask ourselves:

- What does it mean to me to lead for social justice from a center of race?
- What strategies do I use to lead for social justice from a center of race?
- What issues of race have I encountered while leading for social justice? How did I address these issues? How effective were my strategies? What evidence do I have to show the effectiveness of these strategies? What was the ultimate outcome of this situation (these situations)? What would I do differently?
- How has leading for social justice from a center of race impacted student achievement in my school? How do I know?
- How do I encourage others to lead for social justice from a center of race?
- What networks are available to me as a leader for social justice from a center of race?
- What has best prepared me for leading for social justice from a center of race?
- In what ways would my school be different if I lead for social justice from a center of race? In what ways would it be the same?
- What resistances do I anticipate as a leader for social justice from a center of race? How do I address these resistances?
- If I choose to no longer lead for social justice from a center of race, how would this affect my faculty, students, families and community?
- What am I willing to risk in order to lead for social justice from a center of race? What (do I anticipate) would I lose? What would I gain?
What evidence do I have to show as a leader for social justice from a center of race in regards to student achievement, teacher recruitment and retention, school culture and climate, parental and community involvement?

As the instructional leader for my school, how does my leadership impact instruction for social justice from a center of race?

How often do I talk with my staff about race and racism? What impact do these conversations have on my staff personally and professionally? What evidence do I have to show the residual impact of these race-talks on the achievement of students?

How does race and racism impact the way I talk about schooling?

How does race and racism impact the way I structure my day?

How does race and racism impact the way I interact with my teachers, students, families?

How does race and racism impact the way I monitor student achievement? Conduct teacher evaluations? Structure my daily assessments of my staff and school?

How often, in the course of a day, do I think about race and racism?

How often, in the course of a day, do I address issues with students related to race and racism?

How often, in the course of a day, do I resolve conflicts that arose from issues of race and racism?

What am I most afraid of when it comes to leading for social justice from a center of race?
• What am I most proud of, in my practice as a leader for social justice when it comes to centering my leadership on race?

• If race were not an issue, how would my leadership practices be different? What would change? Why?

• How many of my school problems arise from issues of race? What are they and why?

*Implications for Schools and Colleges of Education*

The leaders also felt that the results of this study should be shared with faculty of educational leadership programs. Viewing educational leadership programs as potential sites for social justice, the leaders expressed hopes that changes in programming could help upcoming school level leaders develop a greater appreciation for the role played by social justice leaders in schools (Jay, 2006).

Required coursework could help facilitate the instruction that focuses on the necessity of teaching leadership for social justice and which would assist in the development of a knowledge base that draws heavily on the contributions of Black women school level leaders specifically, and educators who have been traditionally marginalized in general. The participants in this study felt it was important for Educational Leadership programs to offer required courses that specifically address the discrimination and inequities to which people of color have been, and continue to be, subjected.

Finally, it is recommended that a strong educational leadership program would be one in which the curriculum is structured to facilitate as many opportunities as possible for pre-service administrators to work in diverse school settings. Exposure to diverse groups
of children, as well as placements in schools where the principal or assistant principal is known for using socially justice leadership strategies, is critical to the students’ future success in working with marginalized students in schools (Jay, 2006).

What Marshall and Young (2006) assert, and what I believe as well, is no one should be allowed to be a school leader unless they have social justice skills and dispositions. Therefore, Educational Leadership programs should begin and/or continue to assess their mission, admission requirements, and their coursework to ensure they are equipping their students with the necessary strategies that will enable them to seek justice and improve schools. Below are some questions we must ask of those programs that prepare our school leaders:

- How can our current program be structures (re-structured) so we have race at the center of our mission and coursework?
- How do we focus our recruitment efforts to advertise our vision of centering school leadership on race and consequently other isms?
- How do we recruit students who oriented towards leading for social justice from a center of race, and who currently center their leadership vision and practices on leading for social justice from a center of race?
- What course do we need to add to our program of study that will focus on leading for social justice from a center of race?
- How do we infuse leading from a center of race into all coursework (via discussions, curriculum, reading assignments, projects and assessments)?
What strategies do we have in place that allows us to effectively deal with resistance to our program’s focus of leading for social justice from a center of race?

What else is needed to ensure our success in aiming our mission towards leading for social justice from a center of race?

Does our present faculty center their research on race and social justice?

How important have we made finding new faculty members who meet the requirements of being a leader for social justice? Do they lead from a center of race themselves? Do we?

What evidence do we have that our program is centered on CRT, and therefore we produce new school leaders who graduate and continue to lead for social justice from a center of race?

What does it mean to our program to lead for social justice from a center of race? What evidences shows that that is what we do?

What readings and/or projects do I incorporate in my classes that encourage my students to lead for social justice from a center of race?

How often does the issue of race and racism come up in my classes? How do I address these issues?

How comfortable am I in talking about, challenging and resolving issues of race and racism in my class?

How often do I bring up issues of race and racism with my students in class? What are these conversations like? How do students react to these matters?
• How often am I affected by race and racism? How often do I suspect my students are affected by race and racism? How does this information affect how often, and at what depth, do we discuss race and racism in my classes?

• How do we talk about race and racism and its affects on the populations we work with?

• What strategies do we come up with to help the populations we work with resolve, address, challenge and make peace with race and racism?

Recommendations for Further Study

This dissertation has served as a vehicle for telling the stories of seven Black educators about their experiences seeking equity and justice in schools. Through their stories, we have gained access to a very different view of schooling than we normally encounter. However, further research into these experiences, particularly through the eyes of additional Black women school level leaders, would go a long way toward developing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of doing justice work at the intersection of race, gender, class, and other forms of subordination. Briefly, I offer a few suggestions for future avenues of research as well as some reflections on my own pending research agenda. The suggestions made here also reflect, directly and indirectly, some of my thoughts about the limitations of this study.

Research Recommendations

The most obvious avenue for future research may be an exploration of how different school level leaders of color seek equity and justice for marginalized students in different contexts; consequently, there are several different possibilities. My study focused on Black women only; however I believe that the experiences of the other
women of color would add to the knowledge base of the literature on leadership for social justice.

Further, I wonder if there is a positive correlation between leaders who are identified as leaders for social justice and student achievement at their schools. I also wonder if there is a difference in the way principals’ perceive leadership for social justice verse assistant principals. One clear difference revealed in this study was the fact that principals talked more about taking the lead in their schools when it came to building inclusive environments, in comparison to assistant principals who discussed their positions as more of supporting roles in creating these inclusive communities.

Further, I wonder how the stories it might change if the focus shifted to White women, presumed to be leaders for social justice. Although some of the shared stories would be somewhat similar to those Black women school level leaders for social justice, I think there would be some very interesting differences in how they see race play out in schools.

Lastly another useful research study would be to conduct an equity audit of schools led by Black principals. From these audits a matrices of strategies could be compiled. Additionally, this matrix could later be used to design an evalulative tool that could be used to identify social justice leadership proficiency among current principals and assistant principals. Likewise, an assessment could be created for use by departments of educational leaderships and school districts to determine one’s orientation towards leadership towards social justice for admittance or employment.
Concluding Thoughts

In studying social justice leadership through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the use of experiential knowledge shared through personal narratives can be transformative. This research study highlighted seven school level leaders who transformed their schools’ cultures and impacted the educational experiences of their students. Some of these school level leaders were driven by the need to enact social justice for students who have been traditionally marginalized (Theoharis, 2004). Others were motivated by their own personal and cultural set of beliefs (Dillard, 2003). Whatever the case, it is important to acknowledge that this work does not happen by chance (Bogtoch, 2002). The struggle to make schools more just is done purposefully by leaders who believe that their work is a calling (Lyman, 2002).

I am excited about the possibilities for using these educators’ narratives within my future work as a school level leader or in the professorate. I am also excited about the potential changes that may come about by school level leaders who are willing not only to listen to these stores, but enact their own ways of leading for social justice. Finally, I hope that in sharing their stories with me, the participants in this study felt affirmed throughout the process. I hope that these women have become empowered by hearing their own stories and the stories of others. I hope their stories are empowering to you as well.
Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

TO: Teresa Nowlin
School of Education
3210 Tracy St Winston Salem NC 27105

FROM: Behavioral IRB

Authorized signature on behalf of IRB

APPROVAL DATE: 8/30/2007
EXPIRATION DATE OF APPROVAL: 8/28/2008

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review (under 45 CFR 46.110)
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial
EXPEDITED CATEGORY: 6.Voice/image research recordings, 7.Surveys/interviews/focus groups
STUDY #: 07-1275

STUDY TITLE: Rebellious, Stubborn, Persistent, Resistant and Subversive: A Narrative Interview Study of African-American Women Leading for Social Justice

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated. It has been determined that the risk involved in this research is no more than minimal.

Study Description:

Purpose: The primary focus of this study is to acquire a better understanding of how women, presumed to be socially-just school level leaders, seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools.

Participants: 6-10 participants will be selected to participate in the study based on their positions as principals or assistant principals in the Charleston, Berkeley, Williamsburg and Dorchester County School Districts. All of the participants will be African-American women.

Procedures: By using career case study methodology, I will conduct interviews to get beneath the surface of the participants’ perceptions of social justice in leadership to the deep, rich stories of how these school level leaders use strategies to lead their social justice by seeking equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools.

Investigator’s Responsibilities

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator’s responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

When applicable, enclosed are stamped copies of approved consent documents and other recruitment materials. You must copy the stamped consent forms for use with subjects unless you have approval to do otherwise.

You are required to obtain IRB approval for any changes to any aspect of this study before they can be
implemented (use the modification form at ohre.unc.edu/forms). Should any adverse event or unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others occur it must be reported immediately to the IRB using the adverse event form at the same web site.

Good luck with your research!

*********************************************
Lawrence B. Rosenfeld, Ph.D.
Office of Human Research Ethics
Co-Chair, Behavioral Institutional Review Board
CB# 7097, Medical School, Bldg 52
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7097
aa-irb-chair@unc.edu
phone 919-966-3113; fax 919-843-5576
*********************************************

Appendix B
Letter for African-American Women School Level Leaders

Dear _________________,

My name is Teresa Nowlin and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As partial fulfillment of the doctoral requirements, I am planning to conduct a study on the perspectives of socially-just women who are currently serving as building level administrators in SC schools. The overall aim of this study is understand the strategies of African-American women school level leaders, presumed to be leaders of social justice, as they seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools. At this stage in the research leading for social justice will be generally defined as advocating, leading and keeping at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States (Theoharis, 2004).

Your participation in this study is being requested because you have been identified as a principal who practices social justice intervention.

Participation in the study will require approximately 3 hours of your time for a series of two 90 minute in-depth interview followed up by a 30 minute interview for member checking purposes. The interviews will be taped, with your permission, and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on any reports or publications. I will transcribe the tapes and keep them in a locked box in my home. If requested, each participant will be offered a copy of the tapes as well as a copy of the transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to the tape. Once tapes are transcribed, a master tape will be made of the originals and they will be erased. The master tape will remain in my possession at all times.

Interviews will be arranged at a mutually agreeable location at a time of your convenience. Your name and the name of your school, and any other information gathered for this study will be disguised. Upon completion of this study and final approval by the dissertation committee, all transcripts and audiotapes will be destroyed.
Please complete the consent form return this copy in the self-addressed stamped envelope to let me know whether you are willing to participate. Please keep the other copy of this letter for your records.

In the next week, I will contact you to answer any questions you might have concerning your potential participation in this study. At that time we can arrange a meeting to discuss the details of the interviews for the study.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my request. I look forward to your participation in the study.

Sincerely,
Teresa Nowlin

Enclosure

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Teresa Nowlin
3000 Epson Plantation Dr.
Moncks Corner, SC
(843) 568-6430 (home)
nowlin@email.unc.edu

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Catherine Marshall
School of Education
CB #3500, Peabody Hall
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599
(919) 962-2520
marshall@email.unc.edu
Appendix C

Informed Consent

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants: African American women school-level leaders in the Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester and Williamsburg school districts
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study # 07-1275
Consent Form Version Date: August 29, 2007

Title of Study: Rebellious, Stubborn, Persistent, Resistant and Subversive: A Narrative Interview Study of African-American Women Leading for Social Justice

Principal Investigator: Teresa Nowlin
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: School of Education/ Educational Leadership
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919-966-1354
Email Address: nowlin@email.unc.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Catherine Marshall

Study Contact telephone number: 843-568-5430
Study Contact email: nowlin@email.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above any questions you have about this study at any time.
What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to acquire a better understanding of how women as socially-just school level leaders. Participants will be selected to participate in the study based on their positions as principals or assistant principals in the Charleston, Berkeley, Williamsburg and Dorchester County School Districts; and because they are all African-American women. By using career case study methodology, I will conduct interviews to get beneath the surface of the participants’ perceptions of social justice in leadership to the deep, rich stories of how these school level leaders use strategies to lead for social justice by seeking equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately ten people in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?

Participation in the study will require approximately 3.5 hours of your time for a series of two 90 minute in-depth interview followed up by a 30 minute interview for member checking purposes.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you choose to participate in this study interviews will be taped, with your permission, and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will not be identified by name on any reports or publications. The Principal Investigator (PI) will transcribe the tapes and keep them in a locked box in her home. You and the PI will be the only ones with access to the tape. You will only have access to your own taped interviews and your own transcribed interviews, not anyone else’s tapes or transcripts. Once tapes are transcribed, a master tape will be made of the originals and the other tapes will be erased. The master tape will remain in the PI’s possession at all times.

Interviews will be arranged at a mutually agreeable location at a time of your convenience. Some suggested locations may include: the participant’s home or a private meeting space at a local church or building. Your name and the name of their school, and any other information gathered for this study will be disguised. Upon completion of this study and final approval by the dissertation committee, all transcripts and audiotapes will be destroyed.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may also expect to benefit by participating in this study by allowing your stories to not only provide a unique perspective on how to use tools to advocate for social justice, but will also provide
a set of common characteristics that could inform evaluative tools, enrich educational administration preparation programs, and ultimately help change the way administrators are leading America’s schools.

**What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?**

There is a slight risk of breach of confidentiality if you choose to participate in this study.

**How will your privacy be protected?**

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

As stated earlier, the PI will transcribe the tapes and keep them in a locked box in her home. You and the PI will be the only ones with access to your taped interviews. Additionally, you will only have access to your own taped interviews and your own transcribed interviews, not anyone else’s tapes or transcripts. Once tapes are transcribed, a master tape will be made of the originals and the individual tapes will be erased. The master tape will remain in the PI’s possession at all times. Your name and the name of your school, and any other information gathered for this study will be disguised. Upon completion of this study and final approval by the dissertation committee, all transcripts and audiotapes will be destroyed.

**Will you receive anything for being in this study?**

I will provide refreshments at our interview sessions and give you a journal as a gift for participating in this study.

**Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

There will be no costs for being in the study.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact either Teresa Nowlin (nowlin@email.unc.edu) 843-568-6430 or Dr. Catherine Marshall (marshall@email.unc.edu) 919-962-2520
What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

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Participant’s Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

_________________________________________  ___________________________
Signature of Research Participant                  Date

_________________________________________
Printed Name of Research Participant

_________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
Appendix D

Information Sheet for Potential Participants

Do you have powerful experiences of marginalization that has shaped your determination to succeed and to improve things for others in similar situations?

Do you have a lifelong commitment to social justice and equity issues that permeate your personal and professional life?

If you answered yes to these questions, this study may be of interest to you!

If you are an African-American woman (or know of one) who is known for her work to keep at the center of her practice and vision issues related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other historically discriminated groups in the US, you/she may qualify to participate in this research study. The purpose of this study is to acquire a better understanding of how African-American women school level leaders seek equity and justice for marginalized students in their schools. Your stories will not only provide a unique perspective on how to use strategies to advocate for social justice, but will also provide a set of common characteristics that could inform evaluative tools, enrich educational administration preparation programs, and ultimately help change the way administrators are leading America’s schools.

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately ten women in this research study. Participation in the study will require approximately 3.5 hours of your time for a series of two 90 minute in-depth interviews followed up by a 30 minute final, follow-up interview.

If you would like to participate or to hear more about participating in this study contact Teresa Nowlin at nowlin@email.unc.edu or 843-568-6430 (local number)
Appendix E
Telephone Script

(Telephone script when calling back a potential participant who has contacted me to express an interest in the study)

Hello my name is Teresa Nowlin and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I have received a message from you that you are interested in participating in the study of African-American women school level leaders who practices social justice intervention.

Participation in the study will require approximately 3.5 hours of your time for a series of two 90 minute in-depth interviews followed up by a 30 minute interview for member checking purposes. The interviews will be taped, with your permission, and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you and your school will not be identified by name on any reports or publications. I will transcribe the tapes and keep them in a locked box in my home. If requested, you will receive a copy of your own taped interviews as well as a copy of the transcription from your interview. You and I will be the only ones with access to your tapes and transcripts. Once tapes are transcribed, a master tape will be made of the originals and they will be erased. The master tape will remain in my possession at all times.

Again I will reiterate that your name and the name of your school, and any other information gathered for this study, will be disguised. Upon completion of this study and
final approval by the dissertation committee, all transcripts and audiotapes will be destroyed.

Do you have any questions concerning your potential participation in this study?
Do you have any questions about the study itself?
Are you still interested in participating in this study?
When is the best time to set up our interview sessions?
Where would you like the interviews to take place?
What is the best way to contact you again in the future?

Thank you for your interest. I look forward to your participation in the study.
Appendix F

Interview Questions

First Interview-

1. Tell me about your experiences with seeking equity and justice for marginalized students in your schools.

2. What life experiences with social injustice have you experienced that has motivated you to improve things for others in similar situations?

3. What commitment have you made to yourself or others to do justice work in your personal and professional lives?

4. Do you think your race, gender, class, marital status and/or religious beliefs factor in your decisions to do justice work in your school? If so how?

5. How do you think your experiences with doing justice work in schools compare or contrast to those of a white woman who commits to doing justice work in her school?

Second Interview-

1. How do you identify marginalized students in your school?

2. Can you tell me the ways in which you seek equity and justice for marginalized students in your school?
3. What strategies do you use to advocate for, lead and keep at the center of your practice and vision issues related to race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and religion?

4. How do you measure the effectiveness of the strategies you have used to improve things for marginalized students in your school?

5. What conflicts do you feel you encounter, both internally and externally, when you do justice work? How do you deal with this conflict?

6. How do you communicate your intentions to do justice work with your staff, students, parents and district supervisors?

7. Tell me of a time when you initiated justice work in your school. How did you communicate your effort and intentions? To whom? What was the outcome of your efforts? What would you change if you had the opportunity to do it again?

Third Interview-

1. Is there anything you would like to add or delete from our past conversations?

2. Were there questions you wished I had asked? Were there questions you wished I did not ask?
References


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http://www.ncjustice.org/media/library/703_ncachievementgapreport.pdf


Fink, S. (March 5, 2004). Beyond the Rhetoric of the Achievement Gap

New Horizons for Learning: Transforming Education

http://www/newhorizons.org/trans/fink.htm

http://www.newhorizons.org/trans/fink_2.htm


*Hoke County Board of Education v. State*, 358 N.C. at 29, 599 S.E.2d at 379.


Rusch, E. A. (1999). The principal as a piñata. In F. Kochen, B. Jackson, & D. Duke (Eds.), *A thousand voices from the firing line: A study of educational leaders, their jobs, their preparation, and the problems they face* (pp. 29-43). Columbia, MO: UCEA.


