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Exploring the Leadership Practices of Social Justice Leaders at Urban Charter Schools

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EXPLORING THE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS AT

URBAN CHARTER SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Presented

to

The Faculty of the School of Education
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Kandle Fraser
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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
Dissertation Abstract

Exploring The Leadership Practices of Social Justice Leaders at Urban Charter Schools

While by and large urban public schools continue to not serve the needs of all of the students in their communities, there are some school principals who are creating educational equity for all of their students and deserve to be called social justice leaders. This study aimed to expand the field of school leadership studies and focus on social justice leaders in charter schools using a phenomenological interview methodology. Each of four participants was interviewed in three 90-minute sessions. The first interview focused on the person's life history before becoming school leaders, the second was on their leadership practices, and the third was on their own reflections on leadership. The study revealed that leaders felt they needed to spend most of their time developing relationships with their staff and students. The ability to share decision-making and the ability to communicate the school's vision with teachers were important skills for these leaders. Their work with students entailed creating opportunities for authentic student input into the running of the school and creating empowering curriculums. Using a three part conceptual framework to analyze the work of social justice leaders, not all of the leaders in the study were found to met the criteria for a social justice leader, although they all had fairly strong social justice practices in their work. Future studies on social justice leadership need to include additional areas of school leadership such as educational programming, parent involvement and budgeting.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education. The content of research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

Urban public schools, both charter and traditional, continue to struggle with meeting the needs of the diverse populations of students they serve. These schools often fail to meet the needs of students and families as evidenced by the high dropout rates, especially among Black and Latino students. While the standards movement and legislation like No Child Left Behind (2001) have attempted to identify what students are learning and push schools to ensure that all students achieve academic success, these efforts have largely had little effect on the educational experience of students in traditionally underserved schools.

Individual school leaders often hinder or enhance their school's effectiveness in its ability to deliver educational programs and meet the needs of their students ("UCEA || University Council for Educational Administration - Research Utilization Briefs," 2012). The literature documents leadership practices by school leaders who have been successful in raising the academic achievement for all their students as well as democratizing the educational environment in public schools (Theoharis, 2008a). Being able to create academic successes for all students as well as creating environments where all stakeholders can participate authentically in the school community is the work of social justice leadership.

This study defines social justice leadership as a leadership style that promotes activism in a school leader's practice to transform environments into spaces where all

students thrive even when it appears that conditions are hopeless. Although the literature

does not agree on a single definition of social justice leadership, most scholars suggest

that it has to do with leaders using their power to create equity. Bogotch asserts, "Social

justice, just like education, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of

power (Bogotch, 2000a, p. 2) Theoharis (2007) defines school social justice leaders as:

> …these 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 and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States.
> Addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools is a critical component of
> this definition. Thus inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities,
> English language learners (ELLs), and other students traditionally separated in
> schools are also necessitated by this definition.

Social justice orientated leaders in schools are actively trying to right wrongs that have

been inflicted on groups in the past by the dominant society and they focus on equity.

An equity centered leadership practice means that the leaders understand the lack

of opportunity different groups have continually experienced and based on that

understanding they focus on creating opportunity for all. Leaders with an equity-centered

practice operate and view their work through a justice lens. Leaders who create equity,

which is different from equality, move beyond making sure that all children are treated

the same, to ensuring that all students are succeeding academically the same (Dantley &

Tillman, 2006; Larson & Murtadha, 2002a). They specifically set out to change the way

the schools respond to the needs of students. These leaders are results-driven and work to

create environments where everyone is accountable for student learning and care.

School principals with this orientation are activist leaders who work to create

justice in schools for all students (Bogotch, 2000a; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Gaetane,

2008; Jean-Marie, 2008; Marshall & Oliva, 2006a; Shields, 2004). An activist-leader sees

his or her job not only as being an administrator, but also an activist working towards achieving student empowerment. These leaders advocate for increased educational opportunity for all of their students. In their work with teachers, parents and other staff, they are creating democratic environments aimed at bringing all stakeholders into school programmatic discussions.

Scholars have declared the need for studies that focus on the practice of social justice leadership in order to avoid the topic being marginalized (Beachum & McCray, 2010; Bogotch, 2000a; Kose, 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002a; Theoharis, 2008a). Although the majority of social justice leadership literature focuses on theory, there are a few studies that focus on the *practice* of social justice leadership. Currently, in studies that focus on principal practice as the unit of study, the researchers have only sampled from traditional public schools. The practice of social justice leadership in traditional urban public schools is emerging as a thread in the discourse on educational administration (Theoharis, 2007, 2008a, 2008b); however the literature has yet to address social justice leadership within the context of urban charter schools.

The number of charter schools is expanding every year, making it important that there have been are missed research opportunities on the practices of school leaders. Just as in traditional public schools, there are some charter school leaders who successfully create equity within the schools that they lead. For example they are able to at the same time democratize instructional planning with the teachers and facilitate parent involvement in the decision-making processes of the school (Rourke & Mero, 2008; P. Wohlstetter, Malloy, Smith, & Hentschke, 2004). Social justice leaders in charter schools are becoming more the norm around the United States, especially in large

metropolitan areas where charters are growing. For education researchers aiming to make schools better for children, it is necessary to learn from these leaders. The few studies focused on charter school leadership, leadership obstacles and professional experience have included documenting the reasons why these school leaders choose to work at charter schools. For example, some leaders feel the lure to charters because of the greater autonomy they will have from district bureaucracies or they want more curricular control (Carpenter II & Kafer, 2010; Dressler, 2001). These studies add to our knowledge about their motivation in seeking out charter school positions, but we continue to lack insight about the practices of urban charter school leaders once they get there. Furthermore, the leadership experience of urban social justice school leaders at charters is currently unexamined as well. The meaning they make of their life events may resonate with others and help a current or future leader to figure out how to establish and sustain their own social justice leadership practice.

In recent years, the number of charter schools serving urban students has grown tremendously. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, during 2009-2010 there were 4,419 charter schools in the United States. Charter schools are located in all types of living environments, including rural and suburban charters, charters on Native American reservations, privatized charters and urban charter schools. Depending on the school district, significant portions of some large cities' students are attending charter schools. For example, 61.5% of public school students in New Orleans attend a charter school, 38% in Washington DC, and 26% in St. Louis attend charter schools ("National Alliance for Public Charter Schools," 2011). The current reality is that

charter schools in some major metropolitan areas are educating a large percentage of traditionally underserved urban students.

This study uses narrative and story to understand the principal practices of these school leaders. As humans, we often understand the world through stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and we have always communicated important life lessons through stories about human experiences. Stories are often the first vehicles used to explain human relations to children. Social justice leaders sharing their life experiences about their professional practice will provide data about social justice leaders' perceptions, orientations and motivations, all of which emerge when they share their experience in the form of stories.

Narrative can be a vehicle to understand a principal's practice, and such understanding in turn can improve our ability to create public schools where all students can thrive. Through narrative we might learn about the feelings principal's have or their own struggles making leadership decisions. With this purpose in mind it is necessary to gather examples of distinctly different varieties of social justice leaders for others to replicate and examine. Urban charter school leaders who apply social justice theory in their environment will provide additional examples for others to follow and their stories are particularly relevant to those who serve urban students. In conclusion understanding what social justice leaders are requires us to create research that tackles how they relate to the world in a way that creates social justice in education.

All of the present social justice leadership studies involving public school leadership investigate principals from *traditional* public schools. The literature has overlooked the experiences of charter school leaders who work with traditionally

underserved urban students and, similar to traditional public school leaders, attempt to address the inequities in the public school system. This gap in the literature is important to remedy because in order to improve educational opportunities for all children we need to learn from all successful social justice leaders. If we want more social justice leaders, then we need to fill in the missing pieces of the narrative on social justice leadership (Shoho, 2005).

Background and Need for the Study

Local public schools have historically underserved inner-city students and families (Anyon, 2005; Noguera, 2003). Addressing this issue, some educational reformers wanted to bring the promise of educational opportunity to these communities through the creation of charter schools (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000; Payne & Knowles, 2009). The creation of charter schools was part of the greater school reform efforts of the 1980s. Charter school founders can be a group of parents, teachers, or a non-profit organization. The founders take out a "charter" to create a public school within the local school district, county or state for a specified amount of time. These school reformers wanted the charter schools to address the gaps they witnessed in public schools.

More than a few of the leaders of Bay Area charter schools match the definition of social justice leadership. These leaders promote activism in their leadership practices to transform their school environments into spaces where all students thrive. Exploring and analyzing their principal practices can help to learn from them and eventually teach new and current school leaders. Conversely, a lack of understanding of those who develop educational policies in schools may result in more failed school policies.

Including all public school leaders in educational leadership research we can hope to create a more complete picture of the practices educational leaders need to develop in order to bring about equity in schools.

Thus far there has not been any significant research on the leadership practices of social justice leadership in charter schools. The small number of empirical studies focusing on the charter school leadership primarily examines the professional experiences and the challenges faced by these school leaders (Campbell, Gross, & Lake, 2008; Dressler, 2001; Luekens, 2004). The studies focused on the practice of social justice leadership by traditional school principals examine the areas of professional development, resistance experienced by leaders and perceptions of social justice leaders (Kose, 2007; Theoharis, 2007; Wasonga, 2009). There are quite a number of areas where there needs to be more investigation into the actual practice of social justice leadership, including: human resources, program development, school partnerships, and rural schools.

Readers also need to understand social justice leadership in the context of the real world. Like laboratory schools at various universities, that study students while they are in school, observations and research in these settings provided insight into how social justice principles are applied in real life scenarios.

In addition to the need to study leadership practices, the previous research has addressed the professional but not the life experiences of traditional or charter school social justice leaders who serve in urban schools located in traditionally underserved communities. Taking into account their the life experiences allows for a deeper understanding of their practice and a way to do it through story is by allowing the leader

to reflect and share about the events that make up their practice (Seidman, 2006). During the course of interviews participants can share their thoughts and perceptions about events in their life and as readers we can empathize with their experiences to come closer to understanding how their practice reflects their principles (Clandinin & Caine, 2008; Seidman, 2006). We need to learn from social justice charter public school leaders who work in schools that serve our most vulnerable populations. The field of social justice can also benefit from their stories about their life experiences as an urban school leader. Social justice leadership can take place in any environment, but more research is required about school leaders who can apply social justice ideas.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices of social justice leaders through the narratives of current and former urban charter school leaders' professional practices. Specifically, this study focused on the urban social justice charter school leaders working in the San Francisco Bay Area. These leaders were identified as social justice leaders because of their success in creating supportive student environments, instructional programs that focus on academic achievement for all students, shared decision making and prioritizing family involvement. The inquiry into the school leaders' leadership practices focused on three areas:

1. The dynamics of the power relationships in schools that led the urban charter school leader to practice a social justice leadership style (active inquiry)

2. The charter school leader's activist leadership practices (practical optimism)

3. The urban charter school leader's reflections on their leadership practice through the lens of justice (equitable insight)

The intent of the study is to understand the urban charter school principal' life experiences as social justice leaders. Additionally, by understanding their life experiences, then explore their leadership practices and create a context for considering how these leaders developed.

Conceptual Framework

Social justice leaders promote activism in their leadership practices to transform environments into spaces where all stakeholders can thrive even when it appears that a condition is hopeless. Social justice leaders believe that schools do not have to operate in the same manner as they have in the past. The intent of the following framework is to encourage action from leaders based on critical reflection.

The conceptual framework basis for this study is the Tripartite Framework of Social Justice in Educational Leadership proposed by Beachum and McCray (2010). Beachum and McCray created this framework in reaction to a fear that social justice leadership was turning into a discourse that was no longer taken seriously. They were concerned that although many educators were aware of social justice leadership there was still little action on the part of leaders.

The Beachum and McCray (2010) framework consists of three tenets: Active Inquiry, Equitable Insight, and Pragmatic Optimism. Heavily influenced by the works of Cornell West and Robert Starratt, its purpose is to support leaders in creating school environments where there is mutual respect and operations on the highest level. The following is a brief outline of the three-part framework.

In order for the country to economically and socially progress, Beachum and McCray argued that we must embrace diversity more than we ever have in the past. The

United States is increasingly more multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious than in the past, and the expectation is that all of these various groups in schools have the same access to opportunity. Beachum and McCray noted that, "The rationale is that when all members of the organization feel wanted, appreciated, comfortable, and their contributions and thoughts affirmed, then the organization can operate at optimum levels" (p.207). The charge for social justice leaders is to embrace diversity in order to create optimum environments.

Beachum and McCray are ultimately concerned with the gap between what leaders say and what leaders do. They label this as the difference between *lip service* and *life service*. An illustration of *lip service* is school leaders being able to communicate social justice ideas such as "we treat all students the same." Although there are always school administrative standards that espouse social justice ideologies, the neglect of populations of students in the schools of these same administrators happens on a daily basis. To combat the *lip service* found in the American educational system, Beachum and McCray propose a new framework for social justice leadership that supports *life service* of social justice by school administrators. Life service examines what leaders actually do in a social justice practice.

Their study explored urban charter school leaders' life experiences practicing social justice leadership. To contextualize these life experiences it was important to explore the beliefs and experiences that led them to school leadership and the type of school leader they became. The reflections provided by the participants on their life experiences provided further insight into the reality of a social justice leadership practice.

The first part of the framework is *active inquiry*. Active inquiry is an inquiry practice based on leaders asking questions about power relationships. Beachum and McCray explain that, "Active inquiry investigates and interrogates these situations with the understanding that reality is a social construction and things are not the way that they are by destiny, but rather design" (p.214). Leaders engage in active inquiry by questioning the socially constructed systems that schools and districts have in place and deliberating about the equity of these designs.

After active inquiry, leaders try to gather *equitable insight*. Equitable insight is about examining the past, present and future through a justice lens. During this process, leaders are encouraged to "recognize [all] responsibility…personal, social, moral and intellectual. " (p.214). Social justice is the responsibility of all individuals and this exercise in equitable insight can illustrate one person's perception of how they are accountable to contributing to a just world.

The last tenet, *practical optimism*, is a challenge to produce discourse and conduct leadership practices based on activism and action. In the words of Beachum and McCray, practical optimism "encourages hope in the midst of hopelessness, action and advocacy in the face of hegemony, and a sense of spirit (and even humor), which replenishes the soul and revives the will for change." (p.215). School leaders are advocates for change even when it seems that conditions cannot evolve. Practical optimism is about action based on a hope and resiliency to create schools that support all students.

By constructing a social justice leadership narrative about urban charter school leaders based on the Tripartite Framework of Social Justice in Educational Leadership,

this study hoped to add additional support to leaders working for school equity. The tenets of active inquiry, practical optimism and equitable insight provided a structure for the narrative that kept justice as its focus throughout the conversation with the participants.

The Tripartite Framework for Social Justice in Educational Leadership was used as a structure for posing interview questions, in an attempt to understand social justice leaders experiences, beliefs and perceptions about issues of equity and power, and how they attempted to create environments where there was educational opportunity for all students at their schools. The purpose of the interview questions was to capture the participant's reflections about issues that fall within the domains labeled here as active inquiry, practical optimism and equitable insight within their own life experiences.

Social justice leadership is a vast topic and the Tripartite Framework is a way to focus the research to look at an individual's leadership practice with regard to the areas of power, meaningful reflection and activism. I asked the leaders to make meaning of their life experiences as it pertained to their leadership and the framework guided the focus for the interview as well as the analysis. As I analyzed the data from the interviews, I used the framework to aid in the decision of which data to include. The framework puts limits on my ability to add meaning or add other topics that diverge from the central ideas of questions the study sought to explore.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

1. What are the leadership practices of social justice leaders at urban charter schools in the San Francisco Bay Area?

a. How did the participant come to be a social justice leader at an urban charter school?

b. What activist practices did the urban charter school principal engage in?

c. What reflections, perceptions and meaning can they share about their own leadership practice?

Significance

This study aims to begin to remedy the absence of urban charter school leadership from the discourse about leadership for school equity. With the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, the data that have been collected from the increased student testing it required adds further support to the conclusion bolsters the fact that students from low socio-economic backgrounds and students of color, mainly Black and Latino, are performing at a lower level academically compared to their white and/or middle class counterparts. Responding to these deficiencies in student learning, scholars, activists, parents and educators have continued to call for equity in public education, especially in poor inner-city neighborhoods. The field of social justice leadership strives to support, create and advocate for an activist type of public school leader. The published research that concentrates on the practice of social justice leaders is scarce and the topic of leadership requires more investigation by educational researchers.

Definition of Terms

Active Inquiry-

An investigation and questioning of existing power relationships with an understanding of how these relationships shape our world and the intentional construction of our

relationships. One of the three tenets of the Beachum and McCray (2010) Tripartite Framework.

Equitable Insight-

A reflection of the actions of the past, present and future through the lens of justice, especially a person's own personal responsibility. One of the three tenets of the Beachum and McCray (2010) Tripartite Framework.

Practical Optimism-

The practice of social justice leadership through actions and conversations. One of the three tenets of the Beachum and McCray (2010) Tripartite Framework.

Social Justice-

The belief and orientation that starts with the understanding that all humans posses dignity, are equal and deserve equal access to opportunity.

Social Justice Leadership-

A leadership style that promotes activism in a person's leadership practice to transform environments into spaces where all thrive even when it appears that a condition is hopeless.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study has explored the leadership experiences of social justice leaders at urban charter schools in the San Francisco Bay Area by seeking to understand their professional experiences and perceptions of leading for social justice at an urban school serving traditionally underserved communities.

A literature review of social justice leadership in educational administration provides a context for social justice leadership theory and the leadership experiences of charter school leaders. The collected literature will create a foundation to understand where this study fits in as part of the discourse on leadership and school reform. It covers three areas: (1) social justice leadership, (2) the charter school movement as a social justice response, and (3) charter school leadership.

A careful review of the literature is important in order to understand the subtleties of leading for social justice and a social justice leadership practice. Within the social justice leadership section, I discuss the current theories about how to define social justice leadership. The review of current studies focused on social justice leadership practice will show the thread of inquiry this study follows, and also highlight areas where a study on the life experiences of social justice leaders can add to the existing discourse. The present study is also about specifically charter school leadership, and requires a review of the history of the charter school movement and how the charter movement fits into a discussion on social justice leadership. The third section is an exploration of the literature written specifically about charter school leaders, focusing on what is unique to charter schools and different from traditional schools.

Social Justice Leadership

Understanding the leadership experiences of social justice leaders requires us both to identify how scholars have defined it and to explore the current social justice leadership studies focused on school leadership practice. The past decade fostered and produced an array of literature on the subject of social justice leadership comprised primarily of theoretical works; however more recently a few studies focused on the practice of social justice leadership at schools have begun to emerge (Kose, 2007; Larson & Murtadha, 2002a; Theoharis, 2007).

Shoho, Merchant and Lugg (2005) proposed that the term social justice, based on the Latin roots of the words, means being fair to one's companion. Advocating for some kind of common language when talking about social justice leadership, they propose that social justice leadership is concerned about the group over the individual and social justice leaders have compassion for all. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) offer an alternate perspective on social justice leadership, saying that "social justice … [actively engages] in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions, among other forms of relationships." (p. 162). In yet another formulation, Dantley and Tillman (2006) wrote, "Leadership for social justice investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities." (p. 17). All of these definitions center around leaders who make critical inquiries about society, focus on issues of equity, and are activists for school reform.

As demonstrated above, there is no singular, agreed-on definition of social justice leadership in educational administration. This study defines social justice leaders as

leaders who believe that the world is the way it is by design and that in order to create educational opportunity for all students they must be activists in their leadership practice. But it should be noted that the terminology can be a point of contention. Several scholars argue against a particular definition of social justice because they see it as limiting to other traits that a social justice leader may possess (Bogotch, 2000a; McKenzie et al., 2008; Mullen, Harris, Pryor, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2008; Radd, 2008). Radd (2008) views singular definitions of social justice leadership as limiting, and she believes that a definition will create challenging scholarly predicaments that will need sorting out. McKenzie et al., (2008) writes that a leader cannot posses all characteristics of a definition and therefore creating a social justice leadership definition would exclude the wrong people. Lastly, Bogotch (2000) asserts that multiple perspectives on leadership allow for a vision that is fitting for our pluralistic society. Although there are differences in the exact definitions of social justice leadership, each of the aforementioned definitions has to do with the common theme of creating educational opportunity for all students.

Larson and Murtadha (2002) refer to both researchers and practitioners when they explain that. "…researchers in educational administration who believe that injustice in our schools and communities is neither natural nor inevitable loosely coalesce under an umbrella of inquiry called leadership for social justice." (p.135). A social justice leader and/or social justice leadership advocate needs to believe that the injustice people experience is a purposeful phenomenon. As humans, we choose how we treat each other. This definition addresses the power of choice over specific actions in relationships as well as the power inherent in our social structures. The social structures, like the education and justice systems that systematically oppress certain groups and give more

privilege and opportunity to other groups (Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2004). Larson and Murtadha touch on ideas about hope by using the word inevitable. More specifically, unjust practices are not inevitable; humans and society can create just practices and systems and the future can be the way we imagine it to be. Continuing with this line of logic, social justice leaders believe that unjust systems and institutions currently in place can and should be changed.

Often when defining social justice leadership, scholars begin with defining social justice or contextualizing what perspective they are taking on social justice; be it race, class, or in the case of this literature review, the context of school administration. Within scholarly social justice leadership discourses, the definitions of social justice leadership focus on incorporating social justice beliefs with leadership expectations. This study defines social justice leadership as an activist leadership *practice* aimed at creating environments where all stakeholders thrive.

The literature also describes social justice leadership as a leadership style that is concerned with creating positive school relationships (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bogotch, 2000a; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; MacKinnon, 2000). Social justice leaders create change in the ways that people interact in schools by carving out spaces where differences of opinion, discussion and exploration can take place (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bogotch, 2000a; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). Astin and Astin (2000) describe a leadership style that includes "principles of a transformative leadership." (p.7). These principles include the acceptance of plurality of values, group and individual qualities.

Social justice leadership in schools requires leaders who are authentic in their work. One of the individual qualities a leader should posses, as asserted by Astin and

Astin, is authenticity. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) conducted a case study where they wanted to know how a leader created spaces for authentic participation in schools.   They described authentic participation as when a leader "engages in collaborative, team-based effort to create alternative discourses, carry on the responsibilities derived from new proposals, and support meaningful and scrutinized efforts initiated by others." (p.162). Creating positive relationships requires trust, and leaders help create trust in their desire to be authentic and transparent. The practice of facilitative leadership where all feel empowered to propose change and meaningfully participate in making change in the school can lead to a more positive learning and working environment. Social justice leaders are transparent about their policies and expectations and are genuine in their relationships with all stakeholders.

The selection of social justice leaders for the study involved finding individuals who meet the above characteristics and fortunately charter school social justice leaders that I have met have often displayed several of the characteristics the literature describes. The teachers at their individual schools are empowered to bring new proposals to staff meetings and school administrators about ways to increase student learning or improve student experience. These leaders transformed their school environments into places where students felt comfortable in expressing themselves and did not feel that they had to hide their diversity because the school was a safe place to be themselves. Walking into these schools, there was a sense of group purpose among students as well as faculty. Often, for example, these leaders set up collaborative policies throughout the school engaging parents and teachers in issues of governance by creating boards that always had a member of the faculty and one parent present.

This study seeks to understand the meaning that social justice leaders at urban charter schools place on their relationships with teachers, staff and other stakeholders. Social justice leaders foster authentic participation in their schools. They facilitate and support teachers, students and parents actively participating in the administration of the school. They are transformative in their leadership practices. Many of the leaders I sought to interview created new learning environments within schools and districts where formerly the culture had not supported all students. Lastly, due to the social justice leaders' desire to create change, they focused on school relationships and the quality of these relationships in order to create healthy environments for students to learn and staff to work.

Practice

Social justice scholars have repeatedly called for research on social justice leadership that focuses on practice (Bogotch, 2000a; Brown, 2004; Kose, 2009; Larson & Murtadha, 2002a; Theoharis, 2007, 2008b). The consensus among scholars is that social justice leadership scholarship is comprised mostly of theory and not enough practice (Larson & Murtadha, 2002a). Beachum and McCray (2010) warn that if researchers do not investigate actual social justice leadership practices, then social justice leadership will become another leadership theory impracticality and social justice leadership will be considered a theory that has little application to the real world and real practices of urban school leaders.

Only recently have scholars begun to conduct research around the practice of social justice leadership (Kose, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). Studies about the practice of social justice leadership are often reflective and focused on providing tangible examples

of practice in the field. These studies range in orientation from examining the resistance

faced by social justice principals to inquiry surrounding how a principal practices social

justice leadership through professional development activities. Bogotch (2000) called for

a "laboratory practice: [that can afford] a possibility of understanding of the whys and

hows behind doing the activities and consequently, for improving performance and

making real changes." (p.4). The studies on the practice of school leaders are attempts to

create what Bogotch refers to as "laboratory practice" space within social justice

leadership literature, allowing the reader to examine the ins and outs of social justice

leadership in a real world context.

Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) conducted one of the first social justice leadership

studies focused on leadership practice, a case study in Venezuela on a leader of an urban

community center. Goldfarb and Grinberg were interested in how leaders created

environments that fostered authentic participation. Using a critical framework, they

sought to understand power arrangements and how traditionally marginalized

communities might use democratic practices learned in schools and community centers to

then advocate for the needs of the broader community

The community center leader in Venezuela was able to create democratic spaces,

be authentic in her work and transform the community center's environment of how

people worked together. When she began, she observed a disconnect between the center

and the community. She sought to mitigate this disconnect by inviting local community

leaders into the community center to make consensus-driven decisions on the types of

services offered by the center. The participation of the community in decision-making

processes about the community center is an example of this social justice leaders' ability to create authenticity in her leadership practice.

In their case study Goldfarb and Grinberg discovered that the community consequently developed a sense of ownership about the center when it was involved in the decision making process. Before the director arrived the center's walls were regularly vandalized by members of the community, but she was able to foster active participation in the center's decisions, the community felt that the center was theirs, and the vandalism stopped. Goldfarb and Grinberg wrote:

> Empowerment is not provided by a social agency of an institution, but by the social agency of the participants who appropriate space and resources for their own needs. The role of leadership is, therefore, that of facilitating the opportunity for empowerment rather than "delivering" it (p. 167).

A key finding of Goldfarb and Grinberg's study is that real power occurs when leaders shape environments where people can empower themselves. Through her consensus work, the leader of the community center was able to aid in the empowerment of a community because she created a space where community members were invited to practice leadership in an authentic way.

Wasonga constructed a framework that integrated the ideas of a democratic community, social justice, student achievement and leadership practices. Wasonga (2009) conducted a qualitative study focused on the practice of specific principals and superintendents who integrated social justice and the creation of democratic communities into their leadership practice. Wasonga maintained that "To integrate deep democratic community and social justice for student progress, leaders must develop processes that promote fairness, equity, care, and a focus on cultural impacts on educational outcomes

for all students." (p.202-203). This was part of a larger national study that examined some of these same issues including democratic communities.

In Wasonga's study, the participants' responses revealed four themes: advocacy, shared decision-making, dispositions and relations, and social control with purpose. The most common leadership practice was shared decision-making, where various groups of stakeholders worked together for a length of time. Wasonga found that "dispositions cited in the study included respect for students, being honest with people and having honest conversations, having the courage to stand for kids' integrity, caring about children un-conditionally, being a good listener, confidentiality, respectful conflict, and respect." (p.214). The leadership styles of the leaders interviewed were parallel to what the literature attributes to social justice leaders; they were individuals concerned with quality relationships, they used their position to help other stakeholders empower themselves, and they advocated for students.

Like Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), Wasonga (2009) agreed that social justice leaders create environments their leadership practices where all feel empowered to participate in the leadership of the institution. Additionally, one of the conclusions of both studies is that leaders must examine current policies and procedures for equity. Under the rubric of implications, Wasonga asserted that principals believe that in a democratic society doing what is best for children requires a social justice intervention by school leaders. Such intervention is often complicated with local and federal mandates such as No Child Left Behind. Wasonga concluded that social justice as apart of school leadership practice cannot take place without a critical inquiry into society's institutional norms.

Kose (2009) offered another empirically based study of principal practice looking at social justice leadership through the lens of professional development. According to Kose, "principals for social justice influence professional development toward socially just teaching and socially just student learning." (p.630-631). The way in which principals did this was by using financial resources to pay for consultants, books and materials that brought social justice ideas and programs to the teachers. They also created professional development practices such as one-on-one coaching, mentoring and co-planning in order to differentiate the types of learning experiences needed for teachers. Kose argued that most of the literature about the principal's role in professional development does not touch on the social justice aspects of the work.

Kose (2009) informed his findings through a framework that created five roles for social justice leadership: transformative visionary, transformative learning leader, transformative structural leader, transformative cultural leader, and transformative political leader. Kose developed this framework based on a literature review of the principal's role in professional development. The first role is visionary, being able to guide the staff through consensus on what the school stands for and the school direction. The second role is learning leader, principals being able to help teachers improve their pedagogy. The fulfillment of the role of cultural leader is dependent on a leader's ability to create thriving professional learning communities. Political leadership refers to the political nature of the principalship and a leader's ability to get various stakeholders to be in agreement. The last role is structural leader; to fulfill this role, leaders must be able to create the infrastructure for learning communities, such as common planning time and resources.

Kose explored the question of how principals for social justice influence professional learning in their schools. Using a qualitative, multi-case study design, Kose chose three participants. Each principal was interviewed three times and 36 staff members from the various schools were also included to help in the triangulation of the data. Aside from interviews, Kose conducted five months of fieldwork observing the principals and their schools.

Kose described the way the principals in his study in terms of their acting as "transformative visionaries." Kose explained that, "Each principal communicated (often through their dispositions) the importance of serving, affirming, and maintaining high expectations for all students, particularly those who had been traditionally marginalized." Transformative structural leadership as defined by Kose included principals using resources to hire consultants that promoted social justice or setting guidelines about the types of conferences teachers could attend.

Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), Wasonga (2009), and Kose (2009) all found that the social justice leaders reported some form of shared decision-making. Each of the above studies explored different research questions but the findings were similar with regard to how social justice leaders go about moving their institutions toward a shared vision. Another common theme among the three studies is that the ability to create social justice environments is crucial. In Kose's study, all of the principals were also able to create effective professional learning communities. The community center leader highlighted in Goldfarb and Grinberg's study was able to transform the environment of the community center to develop a sense of ownership among the community members.

In addition to focusing on the practice of social justice leadership, some other studies introduce other themes as well, including the resistance to social justice leadership. George Theoharis (2007, 2008a and 2008b) wrote a series of articles highlighting the school principal as the object of study. In his auto ethnographic research Theoharis (2007, 2008a, 2008b) examined key traits in social justice leaders, developed a social justice leadership theory, and examined the resistance that the principals reported feeling as they attempted to create equitable schools.

Theoharis (2007, 2008a and 2008b) searched for leaders who embodied his definition of social justice leadership; specifically "that these principals advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States." (p.5, 2008b). Employing an auto-ethnographic methodology, Theoharis interviewed seven urban principals. Theoharis' (2008b) findings section is of particular interest to this study because one of the research questions he asks is: "What motivates them to do this work?" (p.6) While exploring the life experiences of charter school principals, my study, similar to that of Theoharis, is about what motivates urban social justice principals.

One of his findings was that four of the principals came from families who instilled social justice values into their upbringings, while the other principals believed that the eras of the 1960's and 70's influenced their commitment to social justice. Concerning the principals' dispositions, Theoharis found a blend of "arrogant humility":

> The arrogance means that these principals have a headstrong belief that they are right; they know what is best, and they feel they are the ones needed to lead toward that vision. The humility comes from their continual self-doubt of their

abilities and knowledge, their willingness to admit mistakes both publicly and privately, and their questioning whether they are doing any good in their positions (p.13).

Theoharis described the principals as passionate visionary leaders, which he regarded as a dispositional trait. This is similar to what Kose (2009) and Wasonga (2009) called the ability to be effective school visionaries.

All of the above studies, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), Wasonga (2009), Kose (2009) and Theoharis (2007, 2008a and 2008b) begin to paint a picture of the practice of social justice leadership. Theoharis (2008b) maintained that,

> These real-life models help create a sense that social justice in schools is not just educational theory or rhetoric but actually practiced by leaders and indeed possible. To begin to understand the principals committed to social justice, it is necessary to investigate who social justice leaders are and why they do this work (p.4).

Although each author examined different aspects of the social justice leadership practice, there are some commonalities, including that all of the leaders in their research used shared decision-making as part of their leadership practice and had strong visions of what they wanted to accomplish. The present study has explored the question of whether social justice leaders at urban charter schools share the same commonalities.

This study has sought to add to the body of work done by previous researchers by conducting research on the practice of social justice leadership through the life experiences of urban charter school leaders. Wasonga, Kose and Theoharis all conducted studies where the principal was the unit of study. They created a sketch of social justice leader's practices and experiences, but did not indicate that any of the urban principals came from charter schools. Because scholarly discourse about urban social justice principals should include the experiences of traditional and charter public schools, this

study sought to address these omissions in the literature by using life experience studies that provide insights into the meaning participants place on their experiences as school leaders in charter schools.

<div align="center">Charter Schools</div>

The following section is a discussion of the literature about charter school leadership. This literature review seeks to better understand social justice leadership experiences at urban charter schools by discussing discourse about charter schools, charter school leadership and the history of charter schools. Reviewing the history of the charter school movement, it's place in greater school reforms, and reviewing the effects of founder type on charter school leaders I was able to create a narrative of what we currently know about these charter school leaders' experiences.

There are various definitions of charter schools due to the fact that each state defines charter schools with their own language (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). For the purposes of this study, the definition of a charter school is a public school that is free from operating within the bureaucratic limitations that most traditional public schools experience (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). This definition is purposely broad because of the various types of charter schools and their administrative structures. Some for-profit, corporate operated charter schools may have their own bureaucratic structures and limitations, while other charter schools are quite independent and are accountable to only their stakeholders and the state educational code. Local community members, organizations, teachers and families in the community often establish community based charter public schools (Griffin & Wohlstetter, 2001). "Charter schools are populated by those who have chosen to be there and who believe in the mission of their chosen

school." (Finn, Manno, Bierlein Palmer, & Vanourek, 1997). Students are not forced to attend their local charter school, nor can they be denied acceptance into a charter school unless the school is at capacity. Leaders who choose to work at charter schools want to work at these public schools because of their own beliefs in the missions of the schools (Finn et al., 2000).

Understanding the experiences of social justice charter school leaders requires a discussion about the place of charter schools in the broader school reform movement. Murphy and Shiffman (2002) wrote about the difficulty of constructing charter school narratives because of the lack of attention they have received by scholars. Charter schools are part of the larger school reform movements of the 1980s and 1990s (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002). Responding to the publics' dissatisfaction with public education for most students, charter schools were one possible solution. During the 1980s and 1990s, there was the push for more parental and teacher involvement in the decision making practices of schools, charter schools were one way to achieve these goals (Nathan, 1996).

The name "charter" for these schools, coined by Ray Budde and popularized by American Federation President Al Shanker, was a belief that teachers should have more control over instruction. The general idea was that schools would take out a charter, almost like the 11th century English Magna Carta, where the state, and in this case, the district would grant certain authority or rights to a group for a period of time. Resulting from this idea was the push by a wide range of groups, both politically and socially, for states to create laws that would enable the creation of public schools that had more localized control (Murphy & Shiffman, 2002).

Charter schools began as a response by the community for educational experiences not currently fulfilled by local traditional public schools (Priscilla Wohlstetter, Malloy, Smith, & Hentschke, 2004).   Finn et al., (1997) report:

> They [charter schools] respond to frustrations, demands, and dreams that the regular system - for whatever reason - is not satisfying. In that sense, they are consumer oriented, and their consumers include parents, voters, taxpayers, elected officials, employers, and other community representatives (p.488)

Charter schools must respond to the demands of the community, the demands of the "customer" or else, due to their inability to meet the demands of the community and local authorities, face shutting down (Hassel, 1999).

Nathan (2006) asserted that, "The charter school concept is about an opportunity, not blueprint." (p.1). Nathan views charter schools as institutions seeking to create opportunity, speaks to the various social justice values and beliefs discussed earlier in the literature review. In order for charters to bring the promise of accountability and improved educational experiences to communities they will need to be as diverse as the needs of various communities.   Nathan continues, "The charter school concept springs largely from the desire of many people for higher student achievement and greater, more positive educational results in public schools" (p.12). The desire for greater student achievement especially in the lives of students traditionally underserved by their local public schools is where the charter narratives begin to interweave with the social justice leadership narratives. As previously discussed in the section on social justice leadership literature, public education is not equal for all students. Families who live in low-income, urban communities for decades have attended schools that often did not meet the educational needs of most of the students. For many of these families, charter schools appear to be an educational solution that some families seek for their children. These

families want schools that are responsive and accountable to them, and prepare their children for the future.

Advocates for charter schools in the broader movement for school reform argued that charter schools would change the landscape of public education. The twenty years since the birth of charters have brought change, but have been enough time to realize that some of the assertions made about the benefits of charter schools are overstated. Charter schools were supposed to spur local districts into change, but there is little to no evidence that this has happened (Payne & Knowles, 2009). Often, charter school founders see themselves as groups "saving" those who are in disenfranchised communities instead of seeking partnerships with these groups; they are not accountable to these families because they are not working together (Payne & Knowles, 2009). Because charters are free from most government regulations, they are seen to have an unfair advantage on traditional public schools, however in a report conducted for the U.S. Department of Education, charters on the whole are not making academic gains on traditional public schools (Finnegan et al., 2005). Charter schools are accused of often "counseling out" students with emotional, physical or learning disabilities (Estes, 2009). Other criticisms against charters is that they often get the most active parents, they "cream"(take only the high achieving students), they do not partner with local districts, and they have high attrition rates, which results in the low-performing students dropping out and still not being serviced (Hassel, 1999; Hill & Lake, 2001; Payne & Knowles, 2009). Students are also often more segregated by demographics in charter schools than in their local public schools (Miron, Urschel, Mathis, & Tornquist, 2010).

Charter schools are often a highly debatable topic in terms of their purpose and effectiveness, but the purpose of this study was not to add to the debate about the positives and negatives of charter schools or pick a side. This study sought to understand the life experiences of social justice leaders at charter schools working in traditionally underserved communities because they could share experiences that could bring new knowledge to the field. In the next section, I explored the typology of charter schools that provided a context for charter school leadership. These are just some of the many arguments against charter schools.

Typology of Charter Schools

Charter schools are usually lumped under the same umbrella; the literature often makes claims about the schools without paying attention to important differences of founder type. Some authors have noted these important differences in their studies and have divided charters into several different categories. In a mixed methods study by Zimmer, Buddin and Chau (2003) on California charters, the authors separate charters into the categories based on size, start-ups or conversions, classroom centered or non-classroom centered and dependent or independent charters. For example, start-up charters tend to be smaller in size compared to conversion charter schools that often are the same size of the traditional public school before it converted. Conversion charters are public schools that were district public schools and then converted into charter schools.

While their distinctions are useful, when attempting to look specifically at leadership, the charter school typologies developed by Henig et al. (2005) and Huerta and Zuckerman (2009) become more helpful. Depending on the founders of the school, the responsibilities of their school leaders look different (Henig, Holyoke, Brown, &

Lacireno Paquet, 2005). Charter school founders are quite different, "a charter operator may be a group of parents, a team of teachers, an existing community organization such as a hospital, Boys and Girls Club, university or day-care center, even (in several states) a private firm (Finn et al., 2000)". A charter school founder is the organization or group, non-profit, for profit, or social service agency, which establishes the charter with the state or municipality.

Henig et al. (2005) divided charters into two groups: market driven schools and mission driven schools. Education Management Organizations (EMOs) are a type of charter founder that typically set up market driven schools, or schools that tend to be for-profit organizations. The characteristics of these schools can include but are not limited to larger class sizes and including more than one school in order to share resources and to attract a certain types of students. With regards to market-driven charters, Henig et al. (2005) wrote, "we argue that the former are more likely to alter internal organizational forms and marketing strategies to attract ever greater numbers of students in order to receive the benefits of economies of scale and to turn a profit. " (p.495). Mission driven schools, according to Henig et al., form when a non-profit organization or a group of educators come together to open a school based on a specific mission. These schools are usually smaller in size and focus more on the quality of their educational product (Henig et al., 2005). While mission driven schools strive to stick to the site plans to achieving the mission and vision while trying to balance the needs of the students, market-driven schools focus on their power to be flexible and ability to be flexible for maximum capital gain.

The leadership responsibilities for principals or leaders at these charter schools could look drastically different. EMOs tend to be multistate firms that act in some ways like districts (Henig et al., 2005) and can provide school leaders with support for issues such as facilities and human resources. Depending on the founders of a mission-driven school, the school leader may need to handle all of the operations, administrative and instructional leadership of their site. There are several varieties of mission-driven school founders therefore making each school scenario unique. Henig et al., (2005) gives the example of, " [charter schools] launched by teachers and administrators who are tired of fighting school district bureaucracy and wish to implement new programs or curricula they believe would work for particular types of students." (p.493). Another example is schools created by a group of parents that want a neighborhood school that empowers Latino youth through its curriculum and programs.

This study examined the life experiences of social justice leaders at urban charter schools. The participants in the study came from a variety of types of charter schools including community-based charter schools as well as schools founded by a non-profit organization that has several charter schools under it's name; though none of the school leaders were leaders of schools founded by EMOs. The typology of a leader's school may or may not have bearing on their decisions and actions, but it does provide important contextual information.

Instead of looking at charter schools in terms of profit and non-profit schools, Huerta and Zuckerman (2009) divide charter schools in three categories: Educational Management Organizations (EMOs), Charter Management Organizations (CMOs) and community-based schools. Schools run by EMOs and CMOs usually relate to their main

office in the same manner that traditional public schools interact with their district office (Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). Leaders are often relieved of certain administrative responsibilities such as human resources or the procurement of facilities and instead EMO staff members handle those issues for the school.

CMOs are organizations that founders of an already successful charter school usually create. These leaders often seek to replicate the successes of the original charter schools by opening other charters in new locations (Bennett, 2008; Huerta & Zuckerman, 2009). CMOs function much like a district office and depending on the details of how they interact with individual charters, the CMO relieves certain responsibilities from charter school leaders. Non-CMO or EMO charter schools, where there is no "main office" have the most autonomy as well as the most individual responsibility. The staff and principal must shoulder all of the responsibilities of running a school.

Whether the leader works for a charter that operates independently, like a community based charter, or is part of a CMO or EMO, are important clarifications to make when examining charter leaders. The hiring of all charter school leaders, as well as traditional public school principals, is to advance the school towards fulfilling its mission and the experiences of these leaders will widely vary depending on the founder type of their individual schools. This background information is important to understanding the context in which these leaders practiced social justice leadership.

The participants in the study have varying views on charter schools. Some leaders see their school as "the answer" to a problem in the community that they serve, while others view their work at a charter school as part of a larger reform effort. The debate about charter schools and what some view as charters aiding in the privatization of

education influenced the lived experiences of these social justice leaders (Cooper & Randall, 2008). To help give more contexts about what is presented in the findings, another issue concerning charter schools is the perceived privatization of education that some charters seem to place on the public schools system. Cooper and Randall (2008) explain that charter schools created a "third sector" in American education the other two traditional sectors "public schools" and "private schools" see charters as a threat to resources and students. Since some charters are operated by for profit groups, there is a concern that the outsourcing to EMOs like Edison, will remove the control of public education to corporations. The participants selected in this study were not leaders of EMO charter schools. The leaders in this study shared their life experiences as leaders of urban charter schools that are community based or part of CMO network.

Urban Charter Schools

Before turning the discussion towards charter school leaders, it is important to address the literature regarding urban charter schools themselves. A large majority of research done about urban charter schools are almost anecdotal in nature and usually are very focused on praise about how these charters schools have transformed neighborhoods and communities (Massey, Szente, & Stewart, 2005; Merseth et al., 2009; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; Woodfin, 2009). There are studies to see if a particular charter school is outperforming the district schools, or research to understand if charter schools that serve disadvantaged students increase school segregation (Barr, Sadovnik, & Visconti, 2006; Hill & Lake, 2010). Charter schools are not yet incorporated into discussions about urban education without first discussing the fact that

the school is a charter. Because of this, charters are discussed in isolation from other urban public schools.

<div align="center">Charter School Leaders</div>

The following section covers the research regarding the life experiences, characteristics and responsibilities of charter school (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Carpenter II & Kafer, 2010; Dressler, 2001; Merseth et al., 2009). Exploring the research on charter school leaders will provide a foundation to understanding the proposed study on the life experiences of urban charter school leaders.

<div align="center">*Characteristics and Responsibilities of Charter Leaders*</div>

As with traditional school leaders, there is no standard nomenclature in charter schools to define the title or job description of charter school leaders, so this study will use Dressler's (2001) description of a charter school leader:

> Those individuals who hold promise to provide the kind of leadership and day-to-day support that will ensure that the charter school is complying with its intended charter serve in the same capacity as principals in traditional public schools (Dressler, 2001, p. 174).

Since the individual acting in the job role of principal may be known by multiple titles: principal, site administrator, site director or lead teacher, this study will use the term: charter school leader to signify this person.

The characteristics of charter school leaders will help to provide some context about the life experiences of these leaders. Griffin and Wohlstetter (2001) found that charter school leaders tended to have an entrepreneurial spirit and what they term as an "outlaw" mentality, implying that they may be risk-takers; there is almost no bigger risk in education than leading a brand new school. In addition, entrepreneurs are good "sales" people who are often driven. Often, charter school leaders are "deeply committed" to the

missions of the schools in which they serve (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Campbell et al., 2008). Although a character sketch of these leaders is incomplete with the current research, what has been learned about charter school leaders is that they tend to be entrepreneurially minded individuals, working towards a school mission that is close to their heart.

Research conducted shows that the responsibilities of charter school leaders are often the same as traditional public school leaders (Gross & Pochop, 2007; Portin et al., 2003). Some of the unique challenges faced by charter school leaders are often issues having to do with facilities (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Facilities can often be a challenging situation for the leaders because either the schools outgrow their initial facilities or the current facility is not appropriate for a school. Many charter school leaders report struggling also with issues concerning finances, human resources and strategic planning time, but these are issues that most public school principals wrestle with as well (Cumings & Coryn, 2009; Klinker, 2006; Sullins & Miron, 2005).

<div align="center">Experiences of Charter School Leaders</div>

Currently, there are no studies that focus on the life experiences of charter school leaders. The following studies that focus on charter school leadership examine the perceptions of charter school leaders (Dressler 2001) and the characteristics, experience and training (Luekens, 2004) of charter leaders. Dressler's (2001) study on charter school leadership looks at charter school leaders' perceptions of leadership and the obstacles that they face; specifically, Colorado charter school leaders responded to questionnaires about their day-to-day roles and the challenges they faced. Dressler found that charter school leaders have many of the same challenges as their traditional public

school counterparts. The difference Dressler found is that charter school leaders do not tend to come to leadership from traditional leadership preparation programs.

Luekens' (2004) study examined the professional experience of charter school leaders, including their demographic backgrounds compared to their traditional public school principal counterparts. Luekens used the data from U.S. Department of Education national survey administered in 1999-2000 for this study. The findings of the study suggest that charter school leaders are more likely to be women who are more racially diverse than their public school counterparts. Other findings of the study included that traditional public school principals tended to have more training, leadership, and teaching experience than their charter school counterparts. Like Dressler's study, Luekens' research begins to outline the narrative on charter school leadership, but we do not learn about the leadership styles of the leaders and how they work towards their school's missions.

The Luekens and Dressler studies discussed the backgrounds of charter school leaders. From their research we learned about charter school leader's professional backgrounds, their perceptions on leadership and the obstacles they face. This study addresses the gap in information about charter school leadership by exploring urban charter school leaders' life experiences, their perceptions and reflections on their practices. Previous researchers have yet to explore these topics regarding charter leaders; by researching these successful leaders professional practices we might be able to learn from them and duplicate their practices in order to improve schools and improve the quality of leadership in public schools,

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Social justice leadership literature is a growing field of research that is developing case examples of social justice leadership in practice. Although there is no standard definition of social justice leadership, this study uses the definition that social justice leadership is a style that promotes activism in one's leadership practice to transform environments into spaces where all thrive even when it appears that a condition is hopeless. Social justice researchers believe that there should not be any one definition of social justice leadership because then it may leave out someone who does not completely fit into the defined "box."

Few in number, researchers have begun to conduct studies on the practice of social justice leadership. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) conducted one of the earliest studies on the practices of a social justice leadership in Caracas, Venezuela. From their study, Goldfarb and Grinberg learned that this leader created an empowering environment for her community through her ability to include members of the community in shared decision-making opportunities concerning the running of a community center. Focusing on social justice leadership in school administration, Wasonga (2009), Kose (2009), and Theoharis (2007, 2008a and 2008b) all studied the principal as the unit of study. Although they studied different aspects of principal's practices, professional development, perceptions, and resistance, there were some commonalities in the findings including all of the leaders placing equity at the center of their practices. Whatever area these principals were looking in to create more equity for students, they focused on making sure all of their work somehow touched on social justice. For example, in Theoharis' (2007) study, principals reviewed special education programs through a social justice lens and mainstreamed their students. In Kose's (2009) study the principal found

ways to make sure that his professional development plans tied into facilitating learning that led teachers to inquire about the justice of their instructional practices. This study will add to the work that has previously been published by providing insights into the decisions social justice leaders make and what influenced them to make these decisions.

The charter school movement was a response to greater discourse on school reform in the 1980s. All types of communities wanted schools that were more responsive to their children's needs. Most research on charter schools focuses on issues of accountability; few studies examine the leadership of charter schools. Because of the dearth of literature about charter school leaders, there is a need for charter school leadership empirical studies. Charter school leadership and the life experience of charter school leaders have been neglected by the literature and questions regarding why charter school leaders chose to work at social justice schools and their leadership styles have yet to be answered. We do know that charter school leader's roles and responsibilities are similar to their traditional public school counterparts (Portin et al., 2003). The works by Dressler (2001) and Luekens (2004) address issues of training and professional experience. The discourse is in need of further research that addresses the life experiences of these school leaders and the social justice practices they use to bring about equity in their schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices of social justice leaders of current and former urban charter schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. This study investigated the principal leadership practices of these leaders through one on one interviews. By investigating a social justice leader's life experience before they assumed a school leadership position, we can begin to learn more about his or her principal practice. Seidman (2006) observed "Recognizing the limits on our understanding of others, we can still strive to comprehend them [participants] by understanding their actions" (p.9). This study focused on the actions of the school leaders; beginning with understanding the choices they made leading up to being a school leader, next looking at what work they did as a school leader and then finally the participants reflections on their lived experience. The research questions addressed are:

1. What are the leadership practices of social justice leaders at urban charter schools in the San Francisco Bay Area?

   a. How did the participant come to be a social justice leader at an urban charter school?

   b. What activist practices did the urban charter school principal engage in?

   c. What reflections, perceptions and meaning can they share about their own leadership practice?

Research Design

I used a qualitative research methodology, in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 2006), to explore the leadership practices of social justice leaders in urban

charter schools. Specifically the methodology required three in-depth phenomenological interviews to collect the data regarding the life experiences of social justice leaders of urban charter schools. I selected this method because according to Seidman the purpose of this method of phenomenological interviewing is to elicit the life histories of individuals, focus on the choices they made, and seeks to explore how the outer world shaped their experiences as school leaders. This method designed by Irving Seidman (2006), is a combination of life history interviewing within a series of three in-depth interviews. The life history interviewing came from the first interview where we focused on the events leading up to their leadership position. The second and third interviews concentrated on the practices of the school leader. Although both interviews focused on the practices of the school leader the second interview was specifically regarding their tenure as a charter school leader, while the third interview was a reflection on leadership practices in general. The life history questions were used to provide a context for what was shared in later interviews. The interview questions were semi-structured, mostly open-ended questions. The goal of the interviews was to have the participant reconstruct their experiences as a social justice leader at an urban charter school during the interview.

The in-depth phenomenological interviewing method sought to have the participants make their own meaning of their life experiences (Seidman, 2006). Through a series of three interviews, I asked the participant to reconstruct their life leading up to the what Seidman calls "the phenomenon," provide details about the actual experience and lastly share his or her own reflections regarding the event. The purpose for three interviews was to create a context for understanding the leader, their choices, and perceptions about their work.

This study was about the practices of social justice leaders. To create meaningful context for the findings it was important to only interview the school leaders because they are the only ones who can speak to their own life experiences. The purpose of the interviews was to understand another person's experience, their perceptions concerning their work, and their beliefs on why they made the decisions they made. Gaining insight about their leadership practices from their point of view provided insight into the choices social justice leaders make while working in urban charter schools.

Length of Interviews

Seidman suggested that each of the three interviews be 90 minutes in length since 60-minutes might be too short and risk having the participant "watching the clock" (p.20). In addition, interviews shorter than 60-minutes can run the risk of not getting enough data and resulting in too little data to analyze. Seidman opined that interviewing longer than 90-minutes could risk burnout and "diminishing returns" on the responses from the participant. The predetermined length of the interview was also important for the participants to know. Since they volunteered their time, out of respect it was important to let them know exactly how much time the interview was going to take. Seidman warned not to go beyond the 90-minute interview time because as he maintained, "a situation of diminishing returns sets in" (p.21). Besides, it was important to keep the confidence of the participant. Even though the dialogue might be "going well", I needed to do as promised and end the interview after 90 minutes.

I conducted the interviews during three different meetings and not back to back on the same day, and the spacing gave time for both the participant and myself to reflect over the previous interview. As the interviewer, I reflected about the process of the

interview, the questions I asked and if I needed to clarify my understanding of some of

the situations that they shared. Seidman's observation based on experience was that with

the interviews, and also phone calls to set up meeting times during an approximate three-

week period, a closer collaborative working relationship could be established between the

participant and the interviewer.

After the interviews, I managed data is several ways. As a first step, I stored the

participant information forms in a secure place. Most of the time I communicated with

the participants via email and sometimes through texting on the phone to set up and

confirm interview dates. After each of the interviews I would save the data from the

recorder on my computer. Each of the participants' interviews was labeled with the

pseudonym chosen for each participant. The interviews were archived by the name of the

participant and the number of the interview, along with the email and text messages.

Since there were only four participants it was relatively simple to keep track of the data

by grouping the interviews by participant and interview number, each in a separate file.

Participants

For the purposes of this study the participants were identified as social justice

leaders because they demonstrated several social justice leadership characteristics as

defined by the literature, such as accomplishing high academic achievement for their

entire school while also maintaining a strong school culture. In addition, prominent Bay

Area educational leaders in the field described the participants as social justice leaders

through their work with them over the years. Some of the characteristics are that they

advocated and sought to empower their students as well as create leadership among their

teachers and families. Lastly, they believed that change was possible in schools and they

utilized their resources towards creating equity within their schools. I purposefully

selected the participants for the study (Creswell, 2008). I wanted leaders who exhibited

social justice leadership characteristics in their practices. Some of the participants were

intentionally selected due to previous professional relationships we shared. Other

participants were selected due their reputations and recommendations from others in the

field that believed they met the criteria for social justice leaders. Particularly, I used

extreme case sampling to identify urban charter school leaders who practice social justice

leadership (Cresswell, 2008). According to Creswell, extreme case sampling is used

when a researcher wants to learn about particular successes or failures of a case. I

wanted to learn more about the successes of social justice leaders at urban charter

schools. Within this study I wanted to explore the principal practices of leaders who had

social justice achievements within their leadership practices.   Participants in this study

needed to be charter school leaders who met the criteria for being a social justice leader.

The criteria involved high academic achievement for the entire student body and strong

leadership among students, teachers and parents. Social justice leaders are not alike and

as discussed earlier there is no one definition for social justice leadership.

The process of finding participants was somewhat long and drawn out. My past

position as a Dean in a charter school had allowed me to work with many charter school

leaders directly or indirectly by taking part in the same Critical Friends Groups for a

school year. Due to these experiences through work or other professional activities, I

witnessed their work and its impact on their students.   In addition, I was able to

informally speak with many of their staff members to learn about their perceptions of the

participants' leadership. Initially, I began to cultivate a list of potential participants; there

were about nine ideal possible participants. I wanted others who knew these leaders to confirm that in their opinion the participants indeed met the criteria for social justice leadership. In addition, I asked school professionals including current school superintendents, professors of school administration, charter school leaders and principals to confirm my identifications.

From this process I narrowed the list down to four participants that met the criteria for social justice leadership. The first participant was "Gil Jimenez" (a pseudonym), who is a 33 year-old Mexican-American male from San Jose, California. The second participant was "Jason Metzger," who is a 51 year-old Jewish male from San Francisco, California. The third participant was "Frances Lang," a 43 year-old Jewish female from New York City. The final participant was "Susana Lira," who is 52 year-old Mexican and Puerto Rican female from San Francisco, California. Three of the participants are currently still working in a leadership capacity in education at charter schools; Gil is the only participant who is currently serving as a principal of a traditional public school.

Participant's School Settings

The study's participants were current or previous school leaders of San Francisco Bay Area charter schools. The participant pool was comprised of two men and two women. Varying in age the youngest participant is 33 years old and the oldest 52 years old. Currently none of the participants are still the school leaders of the same charter schools where they worked during this study but two out of the four participants still have formal roles within the schools. Three out of four of the participants still work in education in other administrative positions, one participant is currently the principal of a

traditional public school. The participants' professional experience in school leadership ranges from four to 15 years. I used pseudonyms for the names of all of the participants, schools and locations for the protection of students and participants.

The participants' schools featured in the study are in various San Francisco Bay Area cities and counties (See Table 1). The schools are still ethnically diverse, serving primarily Black, Latino, South East Asian, and Pacific Islander students. All of these schools are small, serving between 100 and 500 students, and co-ed.

The first participant in Gil Jimenez, who was the principal of Santa Clarista Charter School (SCCS). Santa Clarista Charter School served primarily students whose families came from Central America. The school has a large ELL student population; many of the students speak Spanish at home with a few students speaking Central American indigenous languages. The majority of the students live in the East Side of San Jose.

The study's second participant, Jason Metzger, served as the principal of the Forward School of San Francisco. The Forward School is a charter school that serves grades 9-12, with a student population of about 300. The school is ethnically and economically diverse, with students from all across the city of San Francisco. The school has moved locations a few times and now it is located in the southern part of the city.

Frances Lang is the third participant and was the co-principal of Developmental High in the San Francisco Bay Area. The school is small, with a student population of 220, and it is located in a primarily immigrant neighborhood. The students mostly live in the school neighborhood, a working-class immigrant neighborhood which battles with gangs and drug violence. The students often arrive at Developmental High one to three

grade levels behind in reading and math. The student body is mostly Latino, with some Pacific Islander and a couple of Black students.

The final participant is Susana Lira, who was the principal of Yerba Buena Charter Academy located in the San Francisco East Bay. Yerba Buena is located in a working class neighborhood in a city that has experienced an economic downturn due to the closing of a few factories in the area. The ethnic makeup of the school was primarily Black, with a few Filipino students and a rising Latino population.   The school is connected to a junior high that serves the 6th through 8th grades.

Table 1

Names of the participants, their schools, school locations and school sizes

Participant	Name of School	Location of School	Number of Students
Gil Jimenez	Santa Clarista Charter School (SCCS)	San Jose, CA	500
Jason Metzger	Forward School of San Francisco	San Francisco, CA	300
Frances Lang	Developmental High School	East Bay, CA	220
Susana Lira	Yerba Buena Charter Academy	East Bay, CA	700

Data Collection

I wanted to learn about a specific experience and so purposeful sampling was used. As Seidman explained, "The purpose of an in-depth interview study is to understand the experience of those who are interviewed, not to control or to predict that experience" (p.51). The purpose of the interviews is to uncover and encapsulate a person's experience; this extraction then replaces the idea of generalizability. Instead of trying to generalize, the reason for purposeful sampling is to create connections between the individual people who were interviewed. The connections that emerge from the interviews will create a narrative about social justice leadership that I will use for analysis.

I contacted the school leaders through email to request their consent to participate in the study. The email outlined the contents of the study and what the needs were from each participant. After the initial email contact, I then scheduled a second meeting were we could review the details of the study and I could provide them with the participant informed consent form. Once the participants reviewed the informed consent form they either signed the form either during the second contact meeting or at the beginning of the first interview. Additionally, I created a participant information form for each participant. This form was simple: it asked for the participants work and home addresses, email, telephone numbers, the best time(s) and preferred methods to contact the participant. During the second contact meeting, we established a schedule of interview meeting dates, locations and times.   With all of the necessary forms completed by the participant and myself we were ready to begin the first interview.

Once the school leaders' granted permission, I set up a convenient time to conduct each interview at a location and time of their choosing. Some participants felt more comfortable meeting at cafes and other participants asked me to meet them at their homes or offices.

During the time between the first and the second interview and the second and the third interview, I reviewed the data from each interview, reflected on the participant responses, and analyzed their stories. As stated earlier the purpose of reviewing the data in between interviews was to reflect on the questions that I asked and think about if there was a need to ask clarification questions during future interviews. Additionally, in between interviews, I reminded the participant about the upcoming subsequent interviews.

The design of the interview questions, beginning with a participants' life experiences before they were school leaders, allowed me to construct a narrative life experiences profile on each leader. The intention of phenomenological interviews is to arrive at the essence of a person's life experience (Moustakas, 1994) from their point of view. This study's participants controlled what incidents they wanted to share. From these offerings provided by the participants it became my job as the researcher to get as much detail as possible about that particular experience (Pollio, 2006).

The conceptual framework used in this study was helpful in creating structure in each interview. Utilizing the Beachum and McCray (2010) framework focused the interview questions around how each participant viewed their life experiences and how they related to issues of equity. All interview questions were designed to engage the leader in reflections about their life experiences based on active inquiry, equitable insight,

and practical optimism. I wanted the participants to share the meaning behind their work; why they chose their pathways to action.

The first interview was to provide a "focused life-history" to create a context for the social justice leadership experience. During this interview, I asked the participants to share as much as they could about their own life experiences that led up to the present time of their charter school principalship. During this 90-minute session, the participant provided information about his or her professional past up until the time they became a charter school leader. The structured interview questions (see Table 1) hinged around what Beachum and McCray (2010) called active inquiry. The purpose of active inquiry is to discover the participant's beliefs about issues of institutional power, specifically in schools. I wanted to explore their views on which groups of people schools privilege or which groups are disenfranchised based on their own experience and how these understandings and conclusions they made about society brought them to educational leadership.

The purpose of the second interview was to gather details about their leadership experiences, by asking them to share what they actually do/did at work, including their activist school leadership practices. This was a time for the participants to share stories about being a charter school leaders, and if possible to reconstruct some of their days. This was a way to focus on practical optimism, that is the leaders' ability transform schools in spite of political environments that make social justice difficult (Beachum & McCray, 2010). The second meeting was in a more semi-structured interview style in comparison to the first meeting, which was more open-ended (see Table 2).

The third and last interview was an opportunity for the school leaders to reflect on the meaning of their social justice leadership experience. The design of the last meeting was that through the structure of interview questions, I would be able to gather the participant's "equitable insight" (Beachum & McCray, 2010). Participants were asked to make meaning of their lived experiences, past, present and future. Participants were encouraged to examine their lives and think about how their lives influenced the work they do/did in schools. During this interview, I asked participants to share their perceptions of their work and what they think it means to be a school leader (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interview questions asked to the participants

Interview	Questions asked to participant

Interview #1	1) Tell me about your background…
	
	     a. Where did you grow up?
	
	     b. What sort of schools did you attend?
	
	     c. How would you identify yourself?
	
	     d. What are you beliefs about public education?
	
	     e. What was your attitude that led you to want to work in a charter school?
	
	     f. Please tell me about specific experiences (if any) where you experienced injustice in school?
	
	     g. How did you come to be a school leader?
	
	     h. What kinds of schools did you previously work in?
	
	 2) In the previous schools you worked in, who benefited from the curriculum?

Interview #2	Possible question stems for the second interview:
	a. Why did you choose…
	b. Please describe an instance…
	c. Describe an emotions associated with the event
	d. What do you like about _____? What do you dislike?
	e. Why did you choose X vs. Y?
	f. Other questions to ask:
	g. Please tell me of a story about how you were able to make social justice connections in your principal practice.
	h. What social justice decisions did you make?
	i. What areas of progress were you able to make in moving your school in an equitable position?
	j. What strategies did you develop as a principal to combat any resistance you experienced to your social justice agendas?
Interview #3	Possible third meeting questions:
	1) What experiences best prepared you for leadership?
	2) What do you consider the biggest difficulty in school leadership?
	3) What are the values that inform your leadership?

Besides interviews I also asked the participants for other data sources such as newsletters, photos, rules, policies, journals that could provide further testament to what they have shared (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These data sources aided in the creation of the narrative profiles and perhaps made the relationship between the participant and myself more collaborative.

Data Analysis

Following the Beachum and McCray (2010) conceptual framework, I conducted the data analysis at the conclusion of the third interview. The reason for this was to avoid placing any meaning ascribed by me onto each interview. I listened, between interviews, to the sessions only to help prepare questions for the next sessions. The next step was to transcribe all of the recordings of the interviews. The data analysis process began by reducing the data as suggested by Seidman (2006); I read the text of the transcriptions and coded the passages that seemed important. What I mean by important is that while analyzing data from the first interviews I looked for data that they shared about their beliefs and attitudes towards schools, their schooling, privilege and other justice issues. Similarly, during the second interview, the focus was the concept of practical optimism. The questions focused on the work actually done by the principal that created equity. While initially sorting through the data I pulled out large passages that explained the actual practices they utilized as principals and why they chose these methods. I used the same method for the third interviews, looking for reflections that focused primarily on principal practice and their perceptions about leadership. After the initial sorting of the data, I highlighted data that illuminated how they were able to accomplish creating equity

in their schools. During this process, I began to make some judgments about what was

important and what was not. In addition, I checked in with the participants about the

judgments I made about the transcripts to confirm that we mutually agreed on what they

meant to say.

<div align="center">Profiles</div>

The narrative profile of a charter school leader creates a story about a leader's

experiences and how they developed into a social justice leader. Placing the data in

context required the creation of profiles for each of the participants. Seidman (2006)

explained, "[profiles] allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her

intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of

qualitative analysis" (p.119). Telling and listening to stories as ways to understand the

world around them is an experience most humans have from birth. Seidman wrote:

> …telling stories is a compelling way to make sense of interview data. The story
> is both the participant's and the interviewer's. It is in the participant's words, but
> it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said (p.120).

I hoped to bring out the essence of the human experience in the research process for both

the researcher and the audience by creating a profile.

The life experience profiles are based on the data from the first interviews, where

the participants share information about their life experiences before they became a

leader. I used a data analysis process described by Seidman (2006) that starts with

reading, marking and coding the transcript.   For the first interviews, the next step was to

look for responses to the questions that illustrate the participant's reflections, perceptions

and meaning making on issues of power in schools (active inquiry), their equitable

practices as a leader, and final reflections. Parts of the data were omitted from the initial

sort because the participants were sharing stories or reflections that did not fit inside of the conceptual framework or were off topic. Next, I sorted, filed and labeled the marked passages according to themes. After more careful readings, sometimes the initial themes changed or larger themes became more apparent and so new labels were made for the group of data. The next step was to compile all of the passages marked as important together into a single transcript. Lastly, I re-read the transcript and underlined the data that conveyed relevant and enlightening information and this was used to create the leadership profiles in the findings section.

The remainder of the data from the interviews, are grouped by the tenets that are described in the Beachum and McCray framework. Within the section of practical optimism, the data is further arranged into the themes of relationships with staff, relationships with students and curriculum.

After analyzing the sections of interest from the transcription, I made connections among various threads and themes that emerge from the threads. The leaders shared several examples of their principal practices that led to greater equity in the schools, and generally the three areas that they touched upon were students, staff and curriculum. Lastly, the third interview was meant to be a reflection on their leadership practice as a whole and school leadership that leads to equitable schools.

During the early stages of the coding process, I used flexible labels and markings. Initially I might mark a passage as a section that belonged with a particular theme and then after reviewing the data more realize that it belonged in a different category and would mark it differently. Sometimes data that shared similar markings became themes or were incorporated into broader themes. I did not know in the beginning which themes

were accurate and which themes were not as important as I once thought. The coding

process also involved noting the initial location of a particular passage in the transcript.

This allowed me to go back and review the comments in the original context if it was

needed.

After filing all the excerpted comments made by the participants into themes, I

reviewed them file-by-file. This was similar to the initial process but the focus was more

on verifying that the comments addressed the themes within the conceptual framework.

This second review was also to ensure that the final themes that I settled on were indeed

accurate and made sense according what the participant was trying to share with me. As

Seidman (2006) explained, "The participants have spoken, and now the interviewer is

responding to their words…What emerges is a synthesis of what the participant has said

and how the researcher has responded (p.127)". Here the researcher's response has been

the creation of the leadership profiles, where I attempted to create a narrative based on

each interview. In other words the categories and themes that emerged from the

transcripts were not pre-determined.

The last piece of the data analysis process was my interpretation of the data. This

was the last step in the methodology set forth by Seidman (2006), where the research

reflects on the entire process and what meaning they are making out of the material. . At

this stage the research constructs a leadership profile and themes to present the

perceptions, thoughts and meaning the participants made during the interviews. While I

explored the data in search of overall themes, I was reflecting on it. I was careful not to

ascribe a different meaning than the participant intended by placing their comments

within a theme that did not correspond precisely to what they were saying. I asked myself

questions about why I placed a particular comment within a certain theme. I would

return to the original transcript where the entire context of the original interview was still

there to make sure that I was not taking the participants comments out of context and

therefore putting a different interpretation on their words and changing the meaning they

intended.

Reliability and Validity

Given the methodology of the present study, it is important to be precise about

verisimilitude and adequacy and how they relate to reliability and validity. Connelly and

Clandinin (1990) asserted that narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability,

and generalizability. These authors suggested other criteria, such as verisimilitude and

adequacy. In the following section, I explain in detail the meanings of the above terms

and their use within the methodology.

Verisimilitude

Arriving at verisimilitude meant that I worked with the participants as co-

collaborators in unearthing their perceptions and truths. After transcribing and creating

initial drafts of participants' experiences, I sent the back for their review. My job as a

researcher constructing a narrative about the experience of someone else, means that I do

not want to create a fictional narrative. A level of trust had to be established between the

charter school leaders and myself. They needed to feel that they could honestly give their

insights without fear that I would change or misinterpret what they said. By continuing

to work with the participants in constructing their narratives, I hoped to overcome

obstacles and not create non-truths (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Adequacy

Adequacy is a concern in any narrative about a person's own experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Creating the narrative entails asking questions about the participants' background and other experiences before embarking on the social justice and school leadership that make up the topic of the study. The primary reflection question I asked when thinking about the development of research questions was: in order to understand the participants' response to the interview questions, what do I need to know about them? What do they believe is important to understanding how they arrived at their own understanding of their work? Working with leaders and specifically school principals was challenging because of the strain I would be imposing on their time. Time was an issue with most participants, and as these participants are busy people who were willingly donating their time for the study, there had to be a balance ensuring that I received an adequate amount of data without asking too much of my participants.

A criticism of narrative as a methodology is that pretense can be used in place of narrative truth. Authors may be at risk to take too much liberty and inadvertently create a fictional narrative. This can happen when authors give "…significance, value and intention" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10) to what may be a pretense on the part of the person telling his or her own story. Authors can be drawn into making up data to fill in gaps and end up creating a story based on a pretense. Working with the participants and examining documents about their schools I attempted to move beyond verisimilitude and bring truth to the work. The burden is not on the researcher to be true to the story and not create fiction within the narrative. When I checked-in with participants I asked them about their transcripts and what they believed was significant about their experiences

instead of creating my own interpretations. Narrative requires that authors navigate fine lines.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. I only interviewed four charter school leaders. The life experiences of this small number of participants cannot be used to generalize the experiences of all urban charter school principals or social justice leaders. Another limitation is this study's narrative methodology. It allows for deep understanding of a participant's life experiences and the meaning they make of it, however their view of reality may or may not be close to accurate. The purpose of this methodology is for the leaders to make meaning of their experiences so that readers are to learn from them. The richness in terms of what we can learn from looking in depth at a small sample of leaders comes with a risk that the information we take from the interviews may not be accurate.

Background of the Researcher

For the past ten years, I have been a high school social studies teacher in New York City and then in Oakland, California. For the last three years, I have worked in the capacity of Dean of College Admissions at an inner-city charter high school. When I first started teaching in the East New York neighborhood in Brooklyn, I felt as though I was living a page out of Kozol's (Kozol, 1992) *Savage Inequalities.* My classroom had a leaking roof, there were rodents and insects throughout the school, and my students were several grades behind in reading and math. Although I had never attended a public elementary or secondary school, I knew that my private school experience and resources available to me were far superior to that in which my students were receiving.

After a year in that school, I transferred to another school in the same area that was still plagued with many of the same challenges as my first teaching assignment. During my fourth year of teaching, I moved across the country to the San Francisco Bay Area, and I noticed that the school resources were no better there for students living in inner city, low-income neighborhoods. When I decided to return to California where I had gone to school myself, I wanted to work at a school that served students from the inner-city. I wanted to work at a school whose mission was that that all students in the school were capable of learning at the highest levels and everyone in the building worked for that goal. I saw an opening at a new charter school that served traditionally underserved students, whose mission was to graduate all of its students and for all of those students to be the first in their families to go on to college. This is right away when you got back, you were teaching there and then saw a need to work on the approach to education? Rewrite.

When I decided to return to school to get a school administration credential, I often felt frustrated in classes because almost all of my reading focused on school administration topics like budgets, unions, and human resources and not issues of social justice. When I was a teacher I tried to create equity within my classroom. Within my leadership studies I wanted more understanding about how a school leader might incorporate social activism within their practice. I knew that school teams both teachers and school leaders needed to work together to transform schools for all students.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The study sought to explore three research questions that attempted to provide a

context for how an individual becomes a social justice leader and what a social justice

leadership practice looks like in schools. The study explored three questions over the

course of three interviews:

    a. How did the participant come to be a social justice leader at an urban

        charter school?

    b. What activist practices did the urban charter school principal engage in?

    c. What reflections, perceptions and meaning can they share about their own

        leadership practice?

The overall structure of the three interviews matched the structure of the

conceptual framework, which was provided by Beachum & McCray, 2010. The three

tenets of their Tripartite Framework are active inquiry, practical optimism and equitable

insight. The active inquiry interview, leaders shared their life histories prior to becoming

leaders of a charter school, as well as their thoughts on questions regarding the social

construction of schools and beliefs about education. The second interview focuses on the

tenets of practical optimism where leaders share the social justice actions they took as

school leaders. This interview focused on the themes: relationships with staff,

relationships with students and curriculum. The last interview is equitable insight where

the participants examine the past, present and future and shared their beliefs about

leadership through the lens of social justice.

Table 3

The Focus of Each Interview and the Corresponding Tenet of the Conceptual Framework

	First Interview	Second Interview	Third Interview
Tenets of Tripartite Framework:	Active Inquiry	Practical Optimism	Equitable Insight
Focus of each interview:	Life experiences prior to become a charter school leader	Leadership practices as charter school leader	Reflections on the past, present and future about leadership

I have used pseudonyms for both participants and schools, and have omitted but not altered identifying details within the narratives.

Life Experience Profiles

This section is on the life experiences of the school leaders before they became school leaders. Its purpose is to provide context. Each of the participants was asked to provide information about where they grew up, socioeconomic information about their families, and their own description of the kinds of schools they attended.

Gil Jimenez is a 33 year-old Mexican-American man from San Jose, California. Gil was less than one year old when his family returned to their native Tijuana, Mexico and he lived there until he was approximately nine years old. While in Mexico Gil attended grade school and when his family returned to the United States he continued the rest of his formal education in San Jose public schools. Gil recounted his experience in returning to the United States:

> I felt impressed with the school. Like they had a carpet, you know, the school had carpets and student work and the building—and I went back to that school actually just a few months ago, and it's an ugly school I saw it you know, with a new perspective.

Compared to the school he attended in Tijuana, Gil believed that his school in the United States was quite nice. Although Gil attended under-resourced schools in San Jose, compared to his experiences in Mexico the schools in the United States impressed him. The school in Tijuana had cement walls and dirt floors. When he returned to the school as an adult and school leader he discovered that his elementary school in San Jose was not an "impressive" school compared to other public schools. Gil as a child did not

understand the inequality in the school systems and thought he went to a nice looking school.

Gil attended a large comprehensive high school on the east side of San Jose. The school was ethnically diverse, had gang problems, and achievement was low among certain ethnic groups. It was not until his sophomore year, that he learned that he had the highest GPA in the school. After becoming aware of his academic record he then strove to continue to maintain his grades. During the summer of his junior year he attended an environmental science program at Stanford University where he began to think and learn about college.

Gil attended a local Catholic university majoring in Spanish literature. The experience was a bit shocking for him because at the time there was a small Latino population at the university, he was used to attending ethnically diverse schools. Gil soon became interested in Spanish literature where he was exposed to ideas about social justice. Gil explained that a fair amount of Spanish literature was written during the Spanish Civil War and colonization. When Gil graduated from college he wanted to become a professor of Spanish literature. He was waitlisted for a graduate program but decided to wait because he had already begun teaching high school.

Professionally Gil began his teaching career at an all girls' Catholic school, where he taught Spanish for two years. Not feeling challenged, Gil looked for another teaching assignment. "I was feeling like I wasn't accomplishing what I thought I was supposed to be doing, from all those talks in college about giving back." After leaving the Catholic school, he taught the comprehensive high school in San Jose where his father still worked as a janitor. After a couple of years, Gil received a layoff notice from the school district.

During his job search he ran across an opening at a charter school that needed a Spanish teacher. The school was entirely comprised of Latino students and as a Spanish teacher he was able to teach Spanish literature; he still had thoughts of becoming a professor. "So I mean the experience was awesome in terms of what I was teaching and in the kids and how I was able to relate to them, and getting to think about college and moving forward." Besides teaching Spanish, Gil and another teacher began a wrestling team. Coincidentally, the incoming principal was a famous wrestling coach who helped Gil with the team. After practices and games Gil and the principal had conversations about leadership and he learned about the concept "…of being a student of leadership." Gil said that this was the first time he had ever heard of someone studying to be a leader and what a leadership practice entails. Consequently, as their relationship matured, his mentor approached him about becoming the Vice Principal for the school. Gil served as the Vice Principal for about a year, at the time he was 26 year old. Due to politics at the charter school involving Gil's mentor, who was also the principal, and the school's board, the mentor stepped down from the principal position and Gil became the principal of the school.

Jason Metzger, 51 years old, originally did not think he would be a lifelong educator. He went to law school and practiced law for several years.

Jason grew up in San Francisco in a Jewish upper middle class family of four children. He attended San Francisco private schools for the entire duration of his formal education. His parents were both well educated and from the San Francisco Bay Area. His father was a pediatrician and his mother a lawyer.

Jason's parents believed in providing their children with excellent educations and used their financial means as professionals to pay for elite private schools in San Francisco. Jason attended The Shetland School (a pseudonym) in San Francisco, a small elite private school where his classmates were of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Jason recalls, "My parents really valued education. It wasn't a white flight or racism or anything else, my parents both went to public schools in Oakland and San Francisco themselves. They just really felt like the public schools weren't good enough." Most of the graduates of the school went to elitist boarding schools like Exeter and St. Paul.

The Shetland school at the time was not ethnically diverse, but Jason felt like he did not know the socioeconomic background of most the students because everyone wore a uniform and at the time most people drove the same type of cars. This was before there were lots of European imports. Jason thought about his own opinion of his classmates in grammar school and reflected, "But actually I know from experience from college that I wasn't very sophisticated on it [differences of race]… I wanted everybody to be the same." While he was in high school his view of the world was that no matter what kind of background people had, they were all the same. At the time he did not feel that race or socioeconomics mattered.

After college Jason moved abroad and attended university in England, and then worked with low-income skinheads in Liverpool where he taught English. The experience in Liverpool exposed Jason to people who were on the dole (the British welfare system) and he began to think about systems in a different way. Jason explained:

> I was in Oxford with money and wealth and then I was up north [in a low-income area of Liverpool]. If I had been a British person they wouldn't have talked to me. Because I was a Yank, they would talk to me. And I just started to see patterns of where wealth is. Growing up I had no idea, I never thought about it, how

segregated San Francisco was. You know, that club right across the street, they
didn't take Jews.

Jason at this time looked at his surroundings in a new way and was developing a critical

eye for the world and the city that he was raised.

Upon returning to the United States he decided to go to law school and practiced

law for five years. Besides practicing law during the day he worked with Street Academy

where he taught law in the evenings Street Academy once again exposed Jason to the

inequities in the educational system and the differences in societal privilege. He decided

that he missed working in education and applied to Maxwell University (pseudonym)

where he would have the freedom to create his own program of study. Jason

remembered, "I could design my own program -100%. I ended up taking courses on

administration, on pedagogy, and got very involved with the leadership program and

started designing –I decided that I was going to do."

While at Maxwell, he drafted his plans for opening up a charter school.

Moreover, at this time the first charter school in Boston, City on a Hill, had been created.

He wanted to create a similar school, but one with a theme that would resonate to

students in the San Francisco Bay Area. After graduating from Maxwell, he returned to

the San Francisco Bay Area and began to work to open a charter school that was modeled

after his high school, but the new school would be public so that students from all

socioeconomic backgrounds could attend.

Frances Lang, who became the co-principal of a new charter school, recalled that

she had always felt a sense of justice and wanted to work to create a better world. For

instance, as a young teacher she worked in one of the most under-resourced schools in

Brooklyn, New York; deeply affected by the differences in access between her students

and what she herself had received, she began to look for alternative solutions in education besides large, traditional comprehensive high schools for urban students. Frances wanted to create a school for students who did not have access to private schools and were traditionally excluded from excellent educational opportunities in the public school system. Subsequently, as a leader she felt that she was always trying to get staff, students and parents to reach outside of their box and own experiences and imagine something different for their futures and what they might try to accomplish together. In her first interview she describes her life growing up on the East Coast and how she became interested in leadership.

Frances Lang is a 43 year-old female who grew up in New York City. She described her family as low-income and headed by her mother. She came from a liberal Jewish family that wasn't religious. Her parents were college educated. She recalled the house being full of her mother's friends who were writers and artists. She attended New York City public schools, starting with a grammar school that was liberal in philosophy, where students were in mixed grades and the curriculum was quite broad. She remembered studying African history and reading about the struggles of oppressed groups. Reflecting about growing up in New York, she said, "…there's sort of a worldliness" about living in New York as a young girl she felt as though she was always learning about various groups of people. From an early age she started to learn about the differences in how others experienced life, and that people were not treated the same and did not have the same opportunities.

After high school, she attended a small liberal arts college on the East Coast where she felt like she was able to truly study what interested her and be around like-

minded students. College was a time where she began to pay particular attention to those who were privileged and those who were not. While in college she studied abroad in the Cote d'Ivoire, and she believed the experience was life changing in the sense that it again opened her eyes to greater injustice in the world between people. Frances reflected:

> I went to an entire continent where I didn't know anybody so there was such a like, so doing that was such an empowering experience…And like sort of facing my fears that way…that whole like thing like just really freed me.

Frances remembered initially going to Cote d'Ivoire as a distraction from her life in the United States, but she believed that experience shaped the way she began to view the world and think about systems and empowering communities. To people living in Cote d'Ivoire the difference between the lives of those who have wealth and those who do not is quite apparent. The people lacking in wealth were living in extreme poverty and many lacked access to clean water and education.

After college Frances started to work in an outdoor education program that focused on bringing low-income students from the city on outdoor wilderness excursions. During this time she became more interested in teaching and working with youth from under-resourced communities. She decided to get her master's degree in English and work on a teaching credential. Upon completing her teaching credential, she decided to work at one of the most notorious high schools in Brooklyn as her first teaching assignment as a Special Education teacher. She recalled thinking about the poverty she encountered at the school:

> I mean so even my own family's poverty was just different… at Lincoln (the high school were she worked) it was that, that's the real underclass. Yeah, and just like that intense poverty, intense violence. And so it just opened my eyes to what the need really is.

This experience was tough on her emotionally, interacting daily with the reality her students faced and trying to help them overcome their own often abusive home lives and motivate them to learn and finish school. After teaching for four years she decided to apply to an educational graduate program. During graduate school she learned about charter schools and worked on her plans to open a charter in the San Francisco Bay Area.

After completing her graduate program in Educational Leadership, she worked as an Assistant Principal in a large comprehensive high school in the San Francisco East Bay. Working as an Assistant Principal in a large urban district Frances felt as though she was not able to help her students and she felt that she was just another person who was part of the system. She said "I'm not interested in sort of just going and trying to tinker at the edges of, what's a dysfunctional setup and tradition, approach, because that traditional approach just doesn't work. It doesn't work. It doesn't work." Looking back, it seemed to her that working at the comprehensive high school as an Assistant Principal was her stepping-stone to opening her first charter high school. During that time she met a colleague who worked at a non-profit and who would become her co-principal and together they made plans for the charter high school they would open together.

Susana Lira's shared some of the training that she received that prepared her for leadership. She often reiterated that in some ways she thought her leadership training was unique, since most of it came from her various mentors who taught her skills in youth leadership development work.

Susana is a 52 year-old woman from San Francisco. She was raised in the Mission district in San Francisco. She has three sisters and an older brother; her mother is

Puerto Rican and her father is Mexican. Her mother grew up in the Bay Area and her father came to the United States as a teenage immigrant. He was skeptical of public schools and enrolled all of his children in Catholic schools. He worked long hours as a longshoreman to create this educational opportunity for his kids.

Susana recalled, "I went to St. Bridget. (pseudonym) When I was there I think it was a really great time, especially in the Catholic Church because so many things were changing. Vatican II, which suddenly just changed the face of the Church experience." Susana went to an ungraded grammar school that she described as run by an "avant-garde" order of nuns. They believed that the students would work at what ever level they were on, and it was not until about fourth grade that the school became "more regimented." Susana remembered, "Every year they just sort of moved kids through in this kind of amorphous way where you sort of really didn't know what grade you were in." She graduated from St. Bridget's and then attended one of the local girls' Catholic high schools.

After graduating from "University of California," she went to work with her mentor, a Catholic priest. "I worked with him …he was running all the youth retreats in this area, so we were like cranking out like, each one of us was doing like 40-some retreats a year." Her mentor worked for schools and other Catholic organizations to create youth leadership retreats for their students. She worked with him for about three years, then got married, had kids. Then she and her husband decided to move to a small city in the East Bay, where she got a job leading a campus ministry for a Catholic high school.

Initially, her duties at the high school were to program the retreats. However the principal noticed her work and leadership potential and he added her to the school administrative team. Susana recalled:

> We built the program to the point where campus ministry now runs leadership training for all sports team captains, all student government. This was more about, let's teach people real leadership skills that they could actually effect change and run the campus, you know, get have the voice and—because that was just of who I was always. So I was always focused on giving students voice.

Prior to her arrival at the school the campus ministry had provided retreats for the students but student leadership was not developed. Susana created a change in how they developed the students.

She taught math at the charter school her children attended for about a year and a half, and then once the charter was approved to expand it to include grades 10-12 she moved up and worked in the high school. The school needed to expand since the students who attended the middle school charter were graduating and the parents were not pleased with the other local options. Susana worked with a team to develop a charter to open a high school, which would be supported by the middle school. Her way of describing it was to say that gaining the charter for the high school was like her baby; it was a project that she worked on full-time for over a year and she felt quite close to it. As a consequence of her heavy involvement with the school parent group she led, the parent board made her the site administrator.

<div align="center">Active Inquiry</div>

The purpose of active inquiry is to ask questions about power relationships and systems and in the first interview where the participants were asked to reflect about their life experiences before they became school leaders the purpose was to have them

examine the power relationships in their own lives and how they believe these relationships changed their own thinking about issues of equality and opportunity in education. The findings as they relate to the tenet of active inquiry include examples from the interviews with Gil and Jason.   Although Frances and Susana provided a few examples of active inquiry, for the purposes of this study I have chosen to highlight just two examples. Gil and Jason both shared their beliefs where their educational opportunities were affected by the power and influence of their communities and their families. Gil's family as low-income immigrants had little access to schools to that supported their children, as opposed to Jason who went to schools that he believed always supported him as a student with high expectations.

Gil's experience as an English Language Learner shaped his future work as a school leader. As a leader he wanted to ensure that all English Language Learners had the same academic opportunities as other students. As a child, when he arrived in the San Jose public school system, he was designated as an English Language Learner and placed into an English as a Second Language (ESL) class, and he was kept in ESL classes he was in seventh grade. He describes how students were tracked and how some students were never re-designated:

> I remember a lot of other friends who didn't get re-designated. But I didn't think anything of it and I do remember that they kept taking those ESL classes even in high school. And so they were basically, stayed in that track and then they never went to any regular or honors courses to go to college

He doesn't know why he was re-designated and why many of his friends were not. He mentioned that he had a good teacher in sixth grade that helped him a lot.

Gil's experience in school being segregated due to his English language skills also had social ramifications. Other students and teachers treated him and his friends

differently because of their race. They were stereotyped as being low academic achievers and troubled kids. He attended two middle schools, and at the first one he and other students from his neighborhood were bused across San Jose to a more affluent neighborhood. He remembered being labeled as one of the "bad kids". "Somehow we saw ourselves as bad kids and acted as bad kids, as fifth graders. And it was a group of us, Mexican kids who were like in the ESL classes and just misbehaved." Gil remembered that the Caucasian students would call them names like "dirty Mexicans." Learning in that school environment, Gil and his friends behaved badly because they believed it was expected of them. At that middle school he also remembered being mistreated by his teachers, who he felt were indifferent to his needs.

Jason was academically successful throughout all of his schooling and he felt that he was expected to work hard and achieve. When I asked him how he was treated in high school he said the teachers did not patronize the students. "It was like 'You are smart, you will learn this, and you can do it.' So it was like they demanded utmost in excellence." Jason felt that he was always supported to do his best and that he could match anyone in the country with regards to athletics or academics. Going to school in Jason's world, the expectation was that he and his classmates were going to do great things in their lives. Looking back, he labeled this as a "privilege" that his private school and upbringing provided him.

As explained earlier, Active inquiry in the context of social justice leadership asks leaders to relate their own lived experiences to issues of power. These two interviews clearly indicated how the participants' socioeconomic status dictated the quality of their educational experiences. For example, Gil was raised in a lower socioeconomic

immigrant family and attended inner city schools, where teachers did not have high expectations of ELL students. The assumption by many of the teachers at his schools was that they did not need to have academic expectations for students coming from that community. Gil's life experiences taught him that the only way to gain social capital was through education and the accumulation of wealth. His experience was very different from Jason, who was raised in an affluent family and attended high quality private schools where all of his teachers expected him and his classmates to succeed. Due to Jason's background he was surrounded by educators who believed in him and supported his academic achievement. Jason eventually learned, particularly through his experiences after college, that access to power and wealth were different for everyone, not everyone was treated the same.

Practical Optimism

Practical optimism, the second tenet described by Beachum and McCray (2010), is as defined earlier the practice of social justice leadership through actions and conversations. This was the focus of the second interview where the participants shared their experiences as school leaders.   All of the participants were asked questions about the policies, cultures and visions that they created and the reasons behind their decisions. During the course of the interviews all kinds of topics were raised by each of the participants and as stated earlier the themes that emerged were relationships with staff, relationships with students, and curriculum. The findings in this section are grouped by these themes. Since not all four of the participants provided findings about all three of these themes, it is noted which themes each participant addressed.

Relationships with the School Staff

One of the themes that emerged was relationship with the staff. Participants made several mentions of how they developed and maintained their relationships with the school staff. These relationships were developed over time with special attention paid to detail in areas such as hiring, professional development, vision setting and collaboration. The school leaders felt that these areas were important in helping them to create supportive student environments. They knew that the students their school served needed to have a staff that worked for the benefit of the students, and worked as if they were one unit towards the school vision. Gil mentioned that he had good relationships with all of his staff members but he did not specifically talk about in the interviews any practices that he developed that created social justice outcomes with his staff, and so the focus here will be on how the other three participants in this study created highly effective and constructive relationships with their teacher and fellow school staff members.

Susana, Frances and Jason spent a good portion of their second interview discussing conversations they had with their staff members and the actions they took to create collaborative environments for their staff. The first actions they took as leaders to create supportive, equitable environments for their students was ensuring that they hired the right teachers and support staff for their schools.

Hiring was an area that Jason spent several minutes talking about. In the beginning of his principalship he developed four criteria for hiring teachers: content, collegiality, good with the kids and start-up spirit. Subject area content was important because ideally he wanted teachers who had majored in the subject that they were going to teach, and being good with kids was important because he wanted a supportive environment for the students at the school. He would often bring students with him to

interviews and have them interact with the candidate to get their opinions. Jason did not list his criteria in any particular order, what he called start-up spirit became the most important quality to look for in an applicant. Start-up spirit for Jason meant an applicant's ability to prove that he or she was comfortable with ambiguity and would be resilient. Jason said, "There wasn't really an answer I was looking for, but trying to test them to see, were they someone that was gonna quit?" Jason believed that because of the charter environment and the population that the school was serving, he needed teachers who were not going to quit under pressure from within and outside the school.

Frances was more methodical in her hiring processes than Jason. She focused on the racial make-up of her staff and wanted the staff to reflect the ethnic backgrounds of the students they taught. She believed that the students needed role models who were from similar ethnic backgrounds and that it was her job to make sure that her staff would be staff of color who would be mentors the students. It angered her when she visited schools serving students of color with predominantly white faculty and when she heard excuses about there not being enough qualified applicants of color from the leader. She said:

> To me that's the same like ridiculous excuse that like the colleges are making about, our kids. It's like that's your job. Right? I mean I don't know. Or it should be your job if you're committed to equity; it's your job. So that's big.

Frances worked hard to have a staff that consisted of approximately 70 percent teachers of color.

Her approach to hiring meant that she asked direct questions about applicants' experience working with similar populations and she asked what she termed visioning questions. In her assessment it was a waste of time to work with teachers who did not

share the educational vision of the school, and teachers who blamed students for their

lack of success or were not willing to get know their students on deeper, more meaningful

levels than often asked of teachers. She gave this example of how she questioned

potential teachers:

> It's like, so we have a student who's been kicked out of class for like the 15th time, and then you can gauge responses from there when you give people scenarios and the best responses are, well, why did they get kicked out 15 times? I mean why doesn't somebody do something? It's like, okay. Now we're on the right track, and really just lining up philosophies around kids.

Susana wanted teachers who were going to ask questions about how they were supporting

students. Teachers who did not question why a student was continuously being removed

from class and try to think about interventions were not the type of educators she was

looking to recruit. She used the hiring process to try to find the right people for the

students, people who shared the educational philosophy of the school.

Part of social justice leadership is having the ability to ask the tough questions and

look past the convenient answers about why certain students are succeeding and why

others are not. Through hiring the above leaders wanted to create a staff that was strong

enough to conduct this type of inquiry about their students and problem solve together

about achieving student academic success for their entire student body. As leaders who

worked to create equitable environments in their schools Frances, Jason and Susana each

said that most of the time their leadership practice entailed creating environments where

all staff members felt that they were empowered to contribute to the school. In addition

the principals wanted the dialogue between the staff to remain open so that they could

effectively problem solve for the benefit of the students.

Creating environments where problem solving could take place meant the school staff needed to be included on all aspects of the running of the school. Frances wanted to create a school where the entire school community felt empowered to create change. Frances also wanted to model for students how to create a community where every member felt like they could make a difference. She new that this model would come from the adults in the building and so she worked tirelessly on her relationships with teachers and teacher relationships with each other.

From the beginning, Frances engaged her staff in what she called visioning retreats, where they all worked to develop an educational vision for the school. She believed it was important to "create spaces" during the day and school year for the staff to spend time talking and lining up their visions for student success. Frances felt that because the staff was small and they depended on each other in their work it was important to continue to foster dialogue amongst her staff as much as she could. On an annual basis staff were included in budget retreats where they would decide collaboratively with parents and students where resources should be spent and talk about what should be their priorities in the coming school year. She believed that in order to empower students it was her job to make sure she empowered staff. Although collaborative decision-making often took up a lot of her time as a principal, she believed that the constant conversations strengthened the school community.

Susana Lang also discussed her relationships with her staff and the power of conversation and discourse as one of her primary leadership practices. During afterschool staff meetings she developed a professional learning community where the expectation was that airing of disagreements was the norm and the community would solve them.

> We cultivated a community where it was like okay, like we can't have, we don't want have space to have like egos and baggage and all that, and it's like you got an issue? Let's put it on the table, deal with that issue, find out what's the deal. Let's smooth this over so we can keep functioning because there is just a lot of work and we don't have time.

Susana called these discourses "staff interventions," and they were meant to bring about a collective understanding on an issue that was getting in the way of the school culture.

Getting her staff able to have open conversations ("interventions") meant that she had to train them in how to talk about disagreement. She reflected, "It was really more about, we want to get on the same page kind of thing and we feel like there's this little dispute thing that's hurting us because it sort of keeps coming from all these angles." With this kind of discussion in mind she trained her staff in using language that began begins with "I", for instance "I feel like… when this happens…" instead of language that feels more like an attack. She also noticed that once her staff developed these positive discourse techniques they began to teach the skills to students. This resulted in a more positive school environment because the students were also learning how to communicate in a less attacking way.

Another way that Susana created space for meaningful dialogue was through consensus at staff meetings. Staff meetings were only supposed to be used to problem-solve school issues, and were not supposed to be a place for announcements. In order to problem-solve, staff needed opportunities to discuss at length issues that were effecting the community and arrive at possible solutions. Susana believes that this can only happen if the meetings are not weighed down by announcements. She expected her teachers to come to meetings ready to fully engage in addressing the obstacles the school

was facing, and this meant creating structures where dialogue could take place and discussion could happen.

Frances and Susana both also mentioned policies and leadership practices that led to social justice outcomes with staff, particularly conversations that took place during staff meetings and during retreats. They each said that discourse around the school's vision is an activity that continually needs to happen all of the time in order to keep everyone focused and united on school goals.

Relationships with The Students

The participants provided several examples of the types of relationships they developed with their students along with the methods that they used to empower their students to become leaders. One way they honored their students and created trust was to authentically value their relationships and conversations they had with them above all else. In Jason's case he constantly wanted to ensure that the students felt ownership over the school. Frances wanted her students to understand the importance of their voice and that their input into the running of the school community was just as important as any adult's. She wanted to create a community based on respect; she wanted the young adults in the building to respect each other and to know that the adults in the building respected them completely. The following are some examples of conversations these leaders said they had with students and other staff members about creating positive and nurturing relationships with their students.

Jason said student voice was the most important quality he wanted to develop into the culture of the school. From the hiring of teachers to input on curriculum, he always asked students what they wanted and how they felt about the school. He recalled, "I gave

a lot of faith to the student opinions…And so I wasn't afraid, even though I retained the decision I was very comfortable getting recommendations that would help me see more and be broader." In the first few years of the school he recalled how the staff constantly polled the students about what curricular activities they wanted to engage in, and how every year they filled out teacher evaluations.

Frances intentionally trained her students in aspects of running the school and leadership. For example, she sent her students to Coalition of Essential Small Schools trainings to learn how to design curriculum. The students then returned and worked with teachers to develop performance assessments. In addition to weekly community meetings that were run by students and provided an official space for students to share their own opinions, students were expected to participate in the annual budget retreats.

One example of how Susana demonstrated to students that she respected them as equals was that every year she would meet with the juniors right before summer break and discuss senior year with them. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss possible senior year activities and explain what she was able to support and not able to support as principal. Susana recalled being in a room with the rising seniors and writing on the whiteboard the various activities they might want to do. She would start the list by adding a senior cut day, which would prove to the students that she understood the types of experiences they wanted to have. The students as a group continued to add to the list and then she discussed the activities with them. For example, when they discussed the senior cut day she said:

> I wasn't bullshitting 'em…I would go okay, so you know I have a job. I have these particular laws I have to follow, I have your parents… these are my parameters. If you want to take a cut day, you can't do it until after April 15th. Why, because the state counts your attendance up until April 15th…if you could

do me a favor and take your cut day after the 15th, we can just get along famously… If not, I'll just be real with you, I'm gonna say all the kids are blah blah blah and have, I said I don't want to do that. That's not who I am. I think you know that.

This practice became a yearly tradition with the students, the teachers who were class advisors would also all be a part of the meetings, and the students felt empowered because she came to them like adults and talk to them about the potential problem with the date.

When there were community problems to be dealt with she often called an assembly where they would discuss the issues. Instead of lecturing the kids about the problem or the trouble they had caused and what she was going to do about it, she would arrive with a PowerPoint presentation. She would outline the problem in PowerPoint slides, sometimes illustrated with pictures, and then she would break the entire school into small groups and give them time to talk about the issue. She would stipulate that each group had to come up with one solution. During the "share out" portion of the assembly each group would present their solution, and someone would be at a computer that was connected to the projector so that each group's solution would go up from all to see. She said it was her experience that most of the time as a community they would get at least one, and sometimes a couple of reasonable solutions to the problem. Instead of creating a negative atmosphere, she elected to create an atmosphere where the student community thought about the problem and came up with student solutions for how it should be addressed.

Leading to empower the student body and having meaningful student relationships were important topics to discuss for all of the participants. Jason spent a great deal of his time as a leader developing policies and thinking of ways to enhance the

student experience. Gil has not been mentioned in this section because although later in

the equitable insight section he talks about the importance of loving students in order to

bring about academic success, in the interviews he did not provide any examples about

how his leadership practices empowered students.

Curriculum

The participants shared the various ways they believed they used the curriculum

to serve the needs of the students. In some cases they wanted to provide them with a

more meaningful curriculum then was offered to them in the past. Other participants

wanted to provide greater educational opportunity to their students. The following are

examples of practical optimism demonstrated by the participants in the study. Part of

social justice leadership in schools is to create equity for those groups that are

traditionally underserved. Gil Jimenez provides an example with the curriculum

decisions he made for ELL students in a story he tells about the changes he made to let

them Spanish AP (Advanced Placement) where previously native English speakers had

been preferred. As another example, Frances wanted to ensure that the curriculum was

always meaningful for students, which led her to implement Intercession and

Performance Assessments. Jason Metzger and Susana Lira did not specifically share any

examples of how they used the curriculum to create greater equity within their schools.

Gil believed that the school system made it more difficult for English Language

Learners to gain access to honors course and ultimately to college. An example he gave

was the school's policy of making students take several levels of Spanish before they

could sit for the Spanish Advance Placement Test. Gil knew that the students could be

prepared within one year and be ready to take the exam as 10th graders, which would free

them up to take other advanced courses the junior and senior years. He used his leadership role to create greater academic opportunity in the school even when it meant having to go against the beliefs of a teacher. It seemed to him that the teacher who insisted on the traditional sequencing of Spanish language courses did not understand the potential of the students.

School social justice leaders work to create meaningful, student-centered and engaging curriculum for students through their practices as principals. Frances knew that engaging curriculum was important if she expected her students to begin to understand the importance of school and develop joy of learning. To supplement the college preparatory curriculum, she with the help of her academic team created an intercession program that took place between semesters for three weeks. During intercessions teachers would devise out-of-school academic experiences based on the interests of both teachers and students. After intersession, she then pushed teachers to use the energy and knowledge gained from this experience to better connect the curriculum and engage the students. She believed that teachers needed to see their students in a new light or learn about a student's interest in order to support student learning. The inter-sessions Frances instituted provided teachers with these opportunities.

Frances believed that because the creation of performance assessments was personal by nature, they actually empower the student to demonstrate what they have learned and how they have applied their learning to their world. Performance Assessments are the end of course assessments at "Development High." Beginning in the 10th grade students are expected to show proficiencies in literary analysis, scientific investigation, mathematical inquiry, and artistic expression. Students demonstrated these

proficiencies in all of their course work with a written component and a lengthy presentation to faculty and community members. In college these skills would be valuable because in high school the students were able to practice forming and argument and presenting their arguments in an academic setting. In addition, the performance assessments were a demonstration of what the students learned and thought was important about the ideas they encountered. These assessments valued student experience and students ideas about the ideas and concepts they grappled with during the school year. Development high students graduated feeling confident that they could learn about new ideas and have the skills to share it in the form of a paper or presentation. Frances shared that students are better prepared for college because they have engaged in this type of work for three years in high school.

The two examples described above illustrate how leaders can use the curriculum to create equity and empowerment for their student bodies. In Gil's case the system for determining when students took the Advanced Placement test needed to be changed because ELL students were not given the same opportunity as other students to have access to other AP courses. As the school leader, he used his position to change a policy that held back a population of students. Frances used the curriculum to empower students by allowing students to have voice in how they were assessed and respecting the knowledge students bring with them to school.

<div align="center">Equitable Insight</div>

Equitable insight as defined earlier in this study is a reflection of the actions of the past, present and future through lens of justice, especially one's own personal responsibility. For purposes of this study, it has to do with the personal actions and

thoughts participants believe brought social justice to their schools and/or to their principal practice. The key observations here are from Gil, Frances and Susana; Jason did not share any findings that could be categorized in the equitable insight section during his interviews.

The quintessential idea of social justice leadership as defined here is that leaders need to create environments where all students can thrive and succeed. Gil said he now believes that "All children can be successful regardless of background. Not seeing the students with deficits." He did not always believe that all children could be successful but as he matured as an educator he saw proof that this is true as long as children are provided with the right support. He recalled in high school, he did not understand why he was placed on the honors track and why his friends were joining gangs and not coming to school, and he attributed it to them being lazy. While in college he continued to have this belief until he became a teacher and began to learn from dialogue with other colleagues and mentors about the psychology of learning. Gil stressed that a belief in students' abilities is a conviction that leaders must have if they expect to have academic growth in their schools.

Gil has encountered teachers who did not believe that their children were capable of learning. He remembered a math teacher who believed they were incapable and often gave exams in which the students performed poorly. Gil stated, "It was like a self-fulfilling prophecy for him." Gil observed that in order to follow your convictions you have to change behaviors based on observations and data and when you can provide a teacher with evidence of groups of kids having success, especially with other teachers, then it makes it hard for the teacher to argue the contrary. This was the method that he

used with the math teacher. He brought the teacher evidence of his students performing

well in other classes, proof that they could succeed academically. Through

conversations, observations and feedback he was able to coach the teacher about how to

have high expectations and also how to scaffold his curriculum so that the students were

able to meet the expectations.

During this portion of the interview Gil discussed his values and how they

informed his leadership practices. He said that leaders must love the entire student body.

He shared that in order to believe in all students leaders need to love them as a group. He

remarked that this is true

> Especially when you have long days, because you're not doing things out of duty
> or out of commitment or because you're getting paid to do it. You do it because
> you love the students and so you're doing that because you know that you're
> gonna make a positive change with them.

The love Gil talks about begins with students learning to trust adults. He explained that

you have to get your students to trust you and that often starts in the morning shaking

hands and that physical contact that helps to make a personal connection.

Gil elaborated on how to demonstrate your love of students. One way is to ensure

that you are creating curriculum that addresses their cultural needs. Gil opined that

creating a context where conversations of race and culture can take place amongst the

staff begins with intentionally creating professional development in these areas. He

believed that professional development is a continuous process especially when you are

dealing with matters of race. In his opinion, it is not enough to just pass out an article or

have one staff conversation per year.

Gil remarked that in order to serve urban students of color it is important for

leaders to build a team that shares their convictions but also to understand that "the

toughest thing to change in people is their attitudes." He talked about having to change the attitudes of parents, teachers and other district administrators about student achievement. Often principals in Gil's opinion are busy dealing with the other stakeholders and the last group they think of are the students, who are the most important group. If a leader can negotiate between the stakeholders successfully, then they should have more time to deal with student issues instead of adult issues. He believed that it is a leader's convictions and knowledge about their students that will enable them to be successful with students.

Frances believed that they are many obstacles to overcome in leadership on all levels, from the personal to the systematic. She believed these obstacles are a result of subconsciously being resistant to change. She said:

> It's so hard to get outside of all of our boxes that we're just in. Just because, and it's almost like a lack of imagination is connected to that? Like just because it's so hard for people to envision something that doesn't exist or that wasn't, that they've never experienced or wasn't part of their own experience.

She realized that as a leader she needed to work to get outside of her box and gain new perspective on her leadership practice.

Another obstacle she faced as a leader of a charter school was to navigate the larger public school system that governed over the school's charter. Although Developmental High was a charter school outside of the local school system, she was still responsible for adhering to the policies of the larger system, including annual state testing and testing results. Frances said:

> We have a lot more [freedom] than district schools but there's still so many obstacles. So like for example, I don't know, there's value to the A to G [All school courses must be approved by the University of California] and everything but, it's just all part of that thing that keeps you in this box.

The box Frances is referring to is that sometimes courses that are A-G approved have to teach a certain type of curriculum or use pedagogical methods that may or may not be beneficial for her students academic success.

Frances felt that politicians promise standards that create obstacles for public education.   She remarked that many of the politicians do not send their students to public schools and so their own children actually get to spend more time learning the arts and not learning to the test. She has tried to make Development High as close to a private school as she can within a public context. The difference is that at her charter her students are forced to sit for annual exams that do not focus on their analytical skills, the test are more of a demonstration of the actual facts students are supposed to know. In private schools, where the same testing is not required, teachers are free to focus on developing students' analytical skills. At Developmental High Frances also wants to focus on her students ability to think critically about subjects, but this has also resulted in low state testing scores for some students. She describes some of the challenges she has faced:

> It's huge and I have guilt right now… it still continues to be a little bit of my belief that if you do set the bar high and if we were doing, continuing to do a better and better job teaching, which I think we are, the kids' skills will get better and that you will see some of that, show up on tests. Think I had more of the belief in how easy that would be before than I do now. But I still do believe it.

For example, Frances believed her students were being prepared to succeed in college. An example she gave was that all of the students who were enrolled in a Berkeley City College Shakespeare were able to successfully complete the course. They were able to write college level papers, but some of these some of those same students were scoring below basic on the California standardized exams. As a leader she felt that it was more

important that her students know how to write and do well in college than to do well on standardized exams.

We then discussed her leadership practice and how she worked to get people to move outside of their box. Frances engaged in a lot of visioning activities with the staff and the students. As often as possible she assembled parents, teachers and students in a room to participate in reflection activities, and have dialogue where they could hear the feedback that others provided. With the help of the student design team in the beginning of the school year, she input reflection days and meetings regularly into the school year schedule. During the third interview Frances spent a fair amount of time discussing her values and how they informed her leadership practice. She believed strongly that everyone has potential. All of the students in her eyes have potential and she believed it is the entire staff's job to support student potential. This way of thinking came under scrutiny by some teachers who did share the same opinions of student success. Often teachers who did not believe in the potential of the students would lower their expectations of what the students could accomplish. As a leader she worked with teachers to make that they were doing all that they could to support the students instead of lowering their expectations.

A second value Frances expressed was that before one can see the potential in everyone, educators need to possess the ability to love their students. Frances shared:

> I don't know is it's a real value but I'm definitely, I mean I guess it's something people don't really talk about but I definitely believe that they key to education and being an educator is really the ability to love, your students, and that's such a huge, that's such a powerful force and it's such a mover and it's so important? And like that's sort of the basis for people, students believing, putting that faith in the educators that work with them, because that's kind of I guess a precondition to the, seeing someone's potential, is really embracing who they are and you know,

> seeing them for who they are and having that love and care for them…And then moving them from that place.

She said that this value came into practice especially when she worked with new staff on issues of restorative justice. She worked to get some teachers to understand why she just didn't kick that kid out of school. As a leader she tried to hire teachers who were like-minded, but she also believed that some people operated on a different value system and were fundamentally not going to change. She worked to practice equity driven leadership due to her conviction that everyone has the potential to achieve, which is based on truly loving all of her students.

Susana Lira's educational philosophy demonstrated the equitable insight she gained as a leader. She remarked that her philosophy could be summed up in a church's philosophy she once heard. Susana did not remember the denomination of the church, but she said that the church's philosophy was that everyone in the world is good at something and that it is our job to find it and match that person with it. Applying this belief to education, Susana proposed that in education if we could support students in finding a path and help them explore the various threads that they are interested in, we would produce well-rounded happy students. She called herself a "Pollyanna" for this type of thinking but she also says that she believes in it wholeheartedly.

Another practice she believes needs to be modeled by leaders is respect for youth. She strongly believed in treating everyone with respect. This way of believing and living aided her over and over in her leadership practice, but also was a practice that she worked to teach the adults in the school. She shared an experience where a gang member who did not go to the school came on campus and three men cornered the boy on the field. Later after she defused the situation and explained to the youth that she realized he had

been disrespected by the men, and although he did not belong on campus she wanted him to know that he had been treated unfairly and it would not happen again. Susana then talked to the male staff separately and got them to realize that they had ganged up on a young boy, that because he was an outsider and because of his apparent affiliations they stopped treating him with respect and as a community that was not what the school believed in. Susana believed that when leaders model how to treat their youth and stop adults from mistreating students the respect the students have for them and the other adults will become stronger. Students need to know that you will always support them and they look to see how you treat other students as an indicator of how you might treat them.

The above leaders demonstrated equitable insight primarily through the stances they took on how they treated their students. Their values of respect and love became guiding actions and beliefs the leaders reflected where necessary in a principal practice. Bringing about social justice in a school for leaders meant that their schools needed to places where students felt a sense of support, love, and equality.

Conclusion of the Participant Findings

This chapter presented the findings from the interviews with four participants who were identified as social justice leaders. Each participant engaged in three 90-minute interviews, pseudonyms for each participant were used to protect the leader and their schools. The findings were structured into three sections: the life experience profiles (active inquiry), practical optimism and equitable insight. These three sections correlate to the conceptual framework set forth in the study "Tripartite Framework."

Active inquiry is an investigation of power relationships and how these relationships shape and effect an individual's world. The profiles created on each participant looked through the active inquiry lens at the life experiences of the leaders before they became school principals. The participants spoke about their own positioning within society and how their worldview was shaped by their educational experiences and family backgrounds. Frances Lang and Jason Metzger felt "called" to action by virtue of the privilege they had growing up and having access to excellent schools and socioeconomic advantages. Susana always felt that the adults in her life trusted and respected her. Susana as an educator could not imagine any other way to educate students but in the same vein as her own educational experiences. Gil grew up with the least amount of socioeconomic privilege and did not develop a critical consciousness until college, where he began to apply ideas from the social justice movements in Latin America to his work with students in East San Jose. All four of the leaders thought about their own life experiences and tried to share moments in their lives that they believed shaped their worldviews.

The practical optimism section focused on the experiences and practices employed by the participants to bring about greater equity in their schools. This section was further divided into three sections based on the themes of relationships with the staff, relationships with the students, and curriculum. The actions and conversations with staff began with Susana, Frances and Jason sharing how they went about hiring the right staff for their schools and student population. These three participants intentionally hired staff based on ethnic backgrounds and understanding of the school's vision. Besides hiring, Susana, Frances and Jason talked about the numerous conversations they had with the

teaching and non-teaching staff that created supportive student environments. Susana felt

she needed to set up structures in meetings to teach staff how to have constructive

dialogue with each other. Frances believed that she needed to incorporate teachers fully

into the decision-making processes of the school for the strength of her academic

community. Practical optimism in social justice leadership as evidenced by these leaders

is a combination of conversations that create actions that lead to a united teaching

community.

The participants demonstrated practical optimism with regards to their

relationship with students by a sharing of practices and conversations that created an

empowered student body and increased students' support of the school. Jason wanted to

ensure that the student voice was at the center of the school and that the students had

input into various areas of the running of the school. Susana set up annual meetings with

students to demonstrate to them that it was her belief that the principal and the students

could work together to support events like "Senior Ditch Day" through open and honest

dialogue. Frances wanted to build an empowered student body through her work, which

meant for her that she would send her students to outside organizations for trainings and

then have students apply their new knowledge into designing the school.

Examining the final theme of curriculum, participants shared what

practices/actions they took to support students and provide equity where needed. Gil

provided the example of how ELL students are typically underserved in traditional public

school systems. To create more educational opportunity for this population of students,

Gil changed the course sequencing structure for AP Spanish courses at his school against

the recommendation of the Spanish teacher. Frances created academic programs as well as an assessment program that was student centered.

The final tenet the study explored was equitable insight. This provided an opportunity for participants to share their thoughts and experiences about their leadership practices that they believe created social justice in their schools. Gil and Frances both talked about love as a value that they incorporate into their leadership practices. Gil believed that if leaders are going to expect student academic gains then they need to believe in all students wholeheartedly.   Similarly, Susana shared her belief about deeply respecting students and demonstrating to them that at all times the staff will always support them and as she says, "honor" them.

In summary, the findings demonstrated that there are several ways leaders can be advocates for their students and create greater educational opportunity in order for all of their students to thrive academically as well as emotionally. Consequently, as I discussed above not all of the leaders demonstrated social justice leadership in all of the tenets of the conceptual framework. Either they did not recall moments within their principal practices where they were able to create social justice or their principal practices had not evolved enough to be truly labeled as social justice leaders within the context of the framework. In the next chapter I will further discuss the findings as they relate to the current literature on social justice leadership as well as implications for the future.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

This chapter presents a summary of the study and conclusions derived from the

data that was presented in Chapter 4 on the leadership practices of social justice leaders at

urban charter schools. In addition, I also include a discussion about the topics that should

be explored in future studies on social justice leadership. The organization of the chapter

begins with a summary of the study, providing a discussion about the problem the study

seeks to address. Followed by a discussion on how the findings are related to the

literature, especially literature concerned with the practice of social justice leadership.

Finally, I discuss implications for action and my recommendations for further research in

the area of social justice leadership.

Overview of the Problem

A large amount of public schools fail to meet the needs of students who come

from traditionally underserved neighborhoods in America's cities (Anyon, 2005). The

high number of dropouts from Latino and Black ethnic backgrounds proves this statement

(Anyon, 2005; Noguera, 2003). Often inner-city students experience violence, apathetic

or unskilled teachers, un-engaging curriculum and lack of resources in their schools

(Anyon, 2005; Kincheloe, 2008; Kozol, 1992; Rothstein, 2004). Supporting students in

overcoming academic achievement obstacles facing them requires supportive school

environments that focus on student academic achievement and empowerment. The

school leaders highlighted in this study strived to create academic successes in their

schools by attempting to create supportive environments for all of their students. Often

the leaders would talk about rigor as often as they would talk about students' emotional

development. All of the leaders wanted to break the cycles of disenfranchisement they observed in their students' communities by proving access to access to high achieving schools.

<div align="center">Summary and Discussion of the Findings</div>

Beginning with themselves the leaders needed to examine their own life experiences and how power and human relations affected their own work.   Jason Metzger through his experiences working in Liverpool, England and his educational leadership program at Maxwell, learned how to how to examine social systems in a critical fashion. Jason learned through education and work experience how educational structures differ based on class. Gil Jimenez through his study of Spanish literature explored social justice themes and began to understand the commonalities between his work and what Spanish writers shared in the literature. Particularly, as an educator teaching about social justice in his classes he eventually started to view his work through a social justice lens and figure out how to create equity for his students through school.

Social justice leaders are often described as activist leaders who view their work through an equity lens (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Larson & Murtadha, 2002a). Gil as a student who was placed in ESL courses wanted to ensure as a school leader that ELL students received the same academic opportunities as the non-ELL students. Gil created supports in the school program to ensure the success of this population. Frances wanted to ensure that the school creative a discipline system that was not punitive for the students. She wanted to help every child succeed. Frances deeply felt that if they could not help students then who else would be available to support the student. Frances worked with the students and their family to find solutions

the problems they encountered so that they could become contributing members to the school community again. All of the leaders profiles believed it was their role to change the academic trajectory of the students that they served.

This study sought to address this gap by presenting data on the actual practices of social justice leaders The findings suggest that within the practice of social justice leadership is varied and depending on the leader and their school context the types of practices they might employ are all quite different. Susana Lira employed collaborative decision-making as the foundation of her principal practice. Jason ensured that he created a board that included a seat for a parent and a student to ensure that their insights were part of the decisions the school board made. Gil used professional development activities as a tool to educate his teachers about students' home cultures. Frances created student school designed teams that were trained to develop curriculum that was meaningful to their lives. The literature often recommended that researchers focus on leadership practices to ensure that social justice leadership doesn't become another educational theoretical fad. While this is true, there is quite a lot of in-depth work to be continued on these varying practices.

Charter schools sprang up in our communities as a response to the community feeling that schools were not responsive to their needs. This was the case in Susana Lira's community where parents felt like the local public school was not responsive to the needs of their students. Charter schools are located in various types of communities; many charter schools were created to serve the students in traditionally underserved urban neighborhoods. The leaders in this study all worked in charters in underserved urban environments. Susana's school was located in a neighborhood where there were

three rival gangs who were constantly at war with each other; the school was caught in the crossroads of this battle. Besides the fact the school was physically located in such an explosive atmosphere, the YBCA team able to create successful and supportive learning environments and eventually the school became a Blue Ribbon School.

The life experiences of the leaders profiled in this study provided a context for the decisions they made in their principal practices. The differences in how the participants were raised and their life experiences did not necessarily create a difference in their approach to the work they did and the students they wanted to serve. Gil wanted to serve students that were similar to him when he was a student. Jason wanted to create a school that mimicked the private schools he attended as a student. Frances also wanted to create a public school that operated like a private school where students were developing their critical thinking skills and engaged in meaningful classes. Susana like the other participants wanted to create equality in education and provide students in the community that she served with educational opportunity. Although the backgrounds were different for each participant they all strove to improve the educational opportunities for students in disenfranchised communities.

Review of the Methodology

The methodology employed in this study consisted of in-depth phenomenological interviews. The purpose of phenomenological interviewing is to focus on the participants' choices and understand how the outer world shaped their lives (Seidman, 2006). All of the participants in this study developed into leaders who wanted to create meaningful change in the lives of their students. All of the participants through their

principal practices strove to create equity within their school environments, however within some leaders' practices this was more evident compared to others.

This methodology demonstrates the importance of understanding an individual's background and how their experiences come to play in the decisions made in the present. In the cases of Frances and Susana, from childhood they each always wanted to help others and create a world that was based on opportunity and equality. In Jason Metzger's case, he was born into privilege and as he experienced more of the world and individuals outside of his social circle he started to question systems, and he consequently attempted to create educational opportunity for all students regardless of background. Jason said that when he first opened his school he wanted to bring together students from all sorts of socioeconomic backgrounds together to learn from each other, and the idea of specifically addressing students from low-income backgrounds came later as he saw that there was a specific need and interest to support that population. Phenomenological interviews based on life experiences of individuals aided the researcher in connecting the threads of the findings from each participant.

Unlike methodologies that require less time spent interviewing the participant, this methodology brought out the nuances of the principal's practices and their understanding of their work. Each interview built on the previous interviews, which allowed the participants and myself to collaborate on the telling of their individual principal narratives. The first interview provided me with their backgrounds, which sometimes they brought up in subsequent interviews. The second interview which was focused on their principal practices allowed the participants to explain their visions and provide detailed reasons for the decisions that they made. Due to the length of the

interviews the participants had the opportunity during the interviews to reflect on what they had and said and sometimes go back and provide further information and correct information they had shared previously. The final interview provided the participants and myself a space to reflect on their work and their beliefs as leaders. During the final interviews principals shared what they believed were their obstacles and success they experienced as school leaders. Some of these reflections were similar, as in the case of Frances and Gil who strongly believe that love is a value that all leaders need to have to effectively support their students. The methodology supported my understanding of the meaning these leaders placed on loving their students. I knew their backgrounds and their journeys to becoming school leaders and the visions they wanted to achieve.

Summary of the Major Findings

In this section I discuss the themes and topics uncovered based on the interviews with the four participants in the study. The themes were derived from the findings from participants' responses to questions related to active inquiry, practical optimism, and equitable insight. The school leaders shared their principal practices on a whole array of subjects. I organized the findings into three sections: life experiences (active inquiry), practical optimism (the leadership practices) and equitable insight (the reflections of the leaders as it relates to their leadership practices).

Active Inquiry-Life Experiences Profiles

Active inquiry requires the participants to examine their life experiences through an equity lens. After examining their own lives, participants were then asked to apply an equity lens to their work as principals. Not all of the leaders developed a critical consciousness in the same way. Some leaders, as in the case of Frances, continue to look

at issues of power within all of the contexts of their school. Other leaders due to their

backgrounds believe that just providing their students with the same opportunities that

they had is the purpose of their work..

Based on the responses of the four participants, the leaders developed their critical

consciousnesses in different manners and in different stages in their lives, especially with

regards to how they treated students. Gil as a student often felt mistreated by certain

teachers and the system but at the same time did not believe that there were probably

systematic reasons why most of his friends from the neighborhood were not succeeding

in school. He associated his friends' failure in school to their own laziness, and as a

youngster he believed that they joined gangs because they could not find other activities

to keep them busy after school. He began to look at the system of schooling especially

for inner city youth as problematic after several years of teaching and as he was being

mentored and groomed as a school leader. With the help of his mentor he began to make

connections between the social justice literature he taught as a Spanish teacher and the

lives of his students, and ultimately his own upbringing. Although Gil came from the

most disenfranchised background compared to the other participants, his own active

inquiry into the educational system was a process that developed only after several years

of personal inquiry.   He changed from an educator who did not believe that all students

could succeed into an educator who worked to empower all of his students. This change

took several years and lots of experiences to create this change his leadership practice.

Jason Metzger's development into a leader social justice leader took place mostly

while he studied at Maxwell University and then later when he became a leader and was

challenged by his students and staff. On the scale of social justice leadership, like Gil,

Jason is not a clear example but he did develop some excellent social justice leadership practices. His background and his view of his own life experiences before he became a leader sees the world as something to be fixed because it is the right thing to do. As he developed his ideas about schooling and social systems he did not want to change society as much as wanted to create a society where everyone could participate. He wanted to "do good" and by doing good, he wanted to create a system of fairness through education.

Frances' development into a social justice leader was easy to see through her active inquiry into her background. She talked about knowing her educational privilege growing up because she attended the premier public schools in New York City, but at the same time she felt as though her teachers did not know who she was as a student or value her experiences. She constantly throughout her life spent time inquiring about the relationship of schools and access to schools and poverty. Working as a new teacher in East New York was an important experience in her development as a leader. She knew that the types of schools her students had access to were not meeting their needs and this was due to of the general disenfranchisement the East New York community faced. This experience created an activism in her, more than the other moments she faced in her development into a school leader.

Susana came from a progressive Catholic educational background. This philosophical orientation pushed her towards creating educational experiences for students grounded in the ideas of treating everyone the same, with respect and compassion. She did not so much have a transformation in her thinking and develop a

critical consciousness as she sought to take the social justice foundations of a lot of Catholic teachings and deliberately apply them to her work with students.

In summary, the participants all became different types of social justice leaders due to their varying backgrounds and their willingness to change systems that they believed work or do not work in schools. Jason and Susana were grateful for the types of schools that they attended. These two leaders did not believe that the schools they attended needed to be examined in terms of equity as much as they believed that they needed to mimic their educational experiences for other students to take advantage of. Gil wanted to change the school experience for Latino immigrant students. He, because of his own background, became focused on academic achievement for his students. Frances, although grateful for the quality of education she received, sought to create a school where power was distributed to the entire school community. She saw the entire school system as broken and wanted to create an empowering school community that students, teachers and parents felt involved in and that represented the values of the community.

Practical Optimism

Within the tenet of practical optimism the findings demonstrated that there are several methods within a principal's practice to employ social justice leadership in the areas of relationships with teachers and students and curriculum. These principal practices often led to greater educational opportunity for students, and collaborative environments for the teachers and parents. Not all of the participants demonstrated practical optimism within the three themes of relationships with staff, students and

curriculum. Frances is the only participant who shared leadership practices that fit into

all three of these thematic areas.

Relationships With the Staff

Leaders spent the majority of their time relationship building with staff by

creating structures based on trust and then pushing staff to become collaborators in the

running of the school. Frances and Susana provided concrete examples of how they

worked to align their school's vision with that of its faculty, and the steps they needed to

take to arrive at their goal of a united teaching faculty. All four participants agreed that

to move their schools in the direction of all of the students getting their needs met, as

leaders they needed to spend a lot of time on the staff and lining up how teachers would

support students inside and outside of the classroom. Frances Lang explained:

> I mean whether it's the visioning activities to, creating like a[n] experiential
> learning thing where you're kind of modeling what it is that you want to see, and
> then also really highlighting and sharing and leveraging whatever glimpses of it
> that you get from your practice, right.

She used retreats and professional development opportunities to move the conversations

with her staff.

To encourage collaboration and student leadership, the participants focused on

developing strategies to create protocols for group decision-making and making it a

regular practice in the running of their schools.   Jason recalled:

> But the closer it was to the classroom, the more the teachers decided it. The
> closer, the more it was to a policy, the board decided it. If it was somewhere in the
> middle—budgets were done with the board, with input from staff.

In Jason's case, he was clear and upfront with his teachers from the beginning that their

charter was not a teacher run school but a school board run school. He ended up creating

a decision-making grid where he outlined the types of decisions he would make, versus

the board or teachers. Developing a collaborative environment was a central piece to his leadership practices.

Lastly, Frances was the only leader who talked about the importance of hiring a staff that mirrored the ethnic diversity of the students the school served. The other leaders felt that it was important to have a teaching staff that met the school's vision and were supportive of students, but none went as far as Frances in terms of changing the actual ethnic makeup of the faculty. She said that often leaders pushed back on this idea because, they said, it was too hard to find enough qualified teachers of color, which she believes is a poor excuse. Social justice leadership requires leaders to examine every aspect of their leadership practice and to question the norms that they have created in their schools.

The participants repeatedly highlighted the importance of the relationship with their staff. To achieve the schools' missions and to support student learning the participants spent a great deal of time in discourse with their staff, lining up visions and creating spaces for their teachers to be active collaborators in the running of the schools. Hiring was an area that all participants believed was important, although Frances was the only leader who took steps to create a supportive student environment with her intentional choice of seeking out teachers of color. Like many of their traditional public school counterparts, they wanted teachers on their teams who were committed to the school's mission but also had the professional skills and strength to overcome the challenges the leaders knew were to come in the future.

Relationships With Students

The participants had varying degrees of feelings about their relationships with their student bodies, some more traditional than others. All of the participants identified trust and respect as the cornerstone of their relationships with students. Frances, Jason and Susana worked to various degrees to create student bodies where students felt respected and empowered to change and participate in their school communities. Susana had a background in youth leadership and created traditional spaces for her students to be involved in their school. All four participants felt strongly that they create a school community where student participation and voice is developed and utilized, although in reality only the practices of Jason and Frances demonstrate action towards this desire.

Jason's relationships with students were directed towards two primary goals: to create leadership skills within his students and to get their feedback on the running of the school. These two desired outcomes led Jason to setting up the school in a way where these two needs could be met. He sought to empower his students by designing a curriculum around leadership. Since he was a new leader at the time, he wanted student input into the running of all areas of the school in order to have improvement and therefore he had for example a student representative on the school's board. In some respects this action could be seen as empowering the students except that not all students benefited from it.

Frances through her work was able to change the traditional dynamics about student participation in school as well as relationships with adults in the building. She created systems where students were truly collaborators in their education. As a principal practice she included students in the annual budget retreats as well the creation and design of the annual performance assessments. She explained that when it came to

making decisions around goals and priorities she strongly felt that everyone needed to be part of the conversation. She did not want to give lip service to students by telling them that the school respected their input but not give the students legitimate ways to be part of the decision-making processes of the school.

Susana worked with her student body in a more traditional manner. Although she came from a student leadership background, she expected students to lead in traditional areas such as clubs, student government and sports. There was no evidence that the policies and systems created empowered the entire student body community. When she was asked about various subgroups such as LGBTQ students or students with special needs there were not any specific processes in place to support these students.

The literature describes social justice leadership as a practice that creates equity in schools and empowers students (Beauchum & McCray, 2010; Bogotch, 2000b; Larson & Murtadha, 2002b; Marshall & Oliva, 2006b). To create this environment Frances and Jason placed a lot of importance on the student experience. They wanted the students to take active roles in designing their schools and developing the leadership skills of their student bodies. Frances and Jason especially wanted students to feel that the school was theirs and that they had a voice how the school was run.

Curriculum

All of the participants said that they created curriculums that met the needs and backgrounds of the students. However curriculum is an area where Frances and Gil actively used their positions to create greater equity and empowerment for their students. Jason and Susana gave teachers the freedom to develop curriculum that met the needs of

the students, for example culturally relevant material; however, the findings do not show that these two leaders' work in this area was as extensive as that of Frances and Gil.

Frances used her position as principal and the curriculum as tools to create equity for students and to meet their needs. This began with a focus on creating an engaging student curriculum. She wanted to ensure that the student body felt connected to what they were learning and that as scholars they had input into the ways they could demonstrate what they learned. One way they ensured that the curriculum remained relevant and engaging for the students was creating intersession opportunities and weekly fieldtrips. Besides inter-sessions, performance assessments were used as learning tools that students developed in lieu of traditional final exams. Frances wanted students to feel in control and responsible for their learning, instead of teachers deciding what students would be tested on. Students were empowered by this system because the power of learning and demonstrations of learning were now more distributed between teachers and students.

Gil changed the system at his school to allow greater access to Advanced Placement (AP) testing for his students. ELL students are traditionally at a disadvantage compared to other students because their schedules are often filled with remedial English classes. Colleges and universities do not recognize these types of academic programs, which then ultimately makes these students less competitive. His change in policy created educational opportunity and college access to this subgroup. As a social justice practice, he was able to look at ways through the curriculum that could create greater educational opportunity for his student body.

Part of the work of social justice leadership in schools is to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to the lives of the students (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Jean-Marie, 2008; Tillman, Brown, Jones, & Gonzalez, 2006). To ensure that the curriculum was relevant to the lives of their students the leaders often created unique educational experiences like inter-sessions to make connections between what they were learning in the classroom and what was happening in the real world. All of the leaders were preparing their students to be the first in their families to go to college and so they constantly pushed their staff to create rigorous programs of study while ensuring that the content had connections to the lives of their students.

<div align="center">Findings Related to the Literature</div>

Some previous studies that are comparable to the present one are Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), Theoharis (2007, 2008a and 2008b), Wasonga (2009), Kose (2009). The primary difference is that the present study focused on the principal practices of charter school leaders and the other studies examined traditional public school leaders as well a community center leader. There are also several similarities between my findings and the findings of other researchers as revealed in their publications. The present study shares more similarities than differences in comparison to other studies in the literature, which may further provide evidence of the need for ongoing research of urban charter school leaders.

<div align="center">*Differences in the Findings Related to the Literature*</div>

There were no major differences in the findings between this study and previous studies about the practice of social justice leadership in schools. However, there are some slight differences due to the context the leaders worked in. Since all of the leaders

who participated in this study worked in the charter school context the differences are due to being leaders of charter schools versus leaders of traditional public schools. One example of this difference is being exempt from certain state regulations. Jason founded his charter in the late 1990s and therefore his school was exempt from testing and state standards during the early years of its existence. As principal he had more latitude in developing his curriculum because the student learning outcomes were not accountable to the state. Although he was allowed this flexibility it is not clear if the less regulated environment led to greater student educational opportunity. Teachers could tie the curriculum into themes like leadership and social justice, which corresponded to the greater theme of the school which was to create student leadership. Students were able to demonstrate the speaking and advocacy skills they learned in the classroom, for example when their school was threatened with closure and so student-created groups went to the school board and spoke on the entire student bodies behalf. Traditional school principals have more accountability issues so they are not as free for example, to allow the staff to develop curriculums of their choosing.

Another difference in the findings between this study and previous studies is that this study focused on the life experiences of the school leaders and the other studies did not. The findings in this study revealed more data on how the leaders developed into leaders. Not all of the participants in this study can be labeled as social justice leaders, although all of the participants have elements of social justice leadership in their leadership practices. The focus on life experiences prior to becoming school leaders is due to the methodology used in the study. Seidman's methodology calls for three interviews and inquiry around the participants' life experiences through an equity lens

before they were a leader. Although Theoharis (2008, 2009) briefly explained the life

histories of his participants, the difference is that his life history data provided a brief to

the findings he presented. The life experiences of the leaders in this study are also used

contextually but in addition they also provide a lens for how to interpret the data. Gil as

an educator wanted to change the educational experience for ELLs. As a former ELL

student he had experienced inequity in school and witnessed his classmates moving

through the school system but not able to break free of school labels. Frances, Susana

and Jason sought to create schools similar to the ones they experienced as students. The

first interview sought to have leaders make meaning of their own educational experiences

and how they connected to their own leadership practices. Due to making this connection,

this study adds more data about how social justice leaders individually develop, the types

of backgrounds they come from and schools they attended.

     The comparison to leaders of traditional schools is important for two reasons: one

is that it demonstrates that there are few differences between the work of charter school

leaders and traditional school leaders, and secondly life experiences studies help us to

understand why people choose to do the work that they do and the methods they choose.

The practices of charter school leaders and traditional public school leaders differ in the

area of accountability. This will always be the case unless laws are changed on various

governing levels. With this in mind, it will be important to pay close attention to these

details when comparing the two types of leaders, especially since charter schools are

beginning to be more regulated then they were in the past. In time there will be more life

experience studies conducted on social justice leaders, and the findings of this study

highlight that there is more room for this kind of research that we can all benefit from.

Comparisons to the Literature

I have chosen four primary studies on the practice of social justice leadership to compare to the present study in detail: Goldfarb and Grinberg (1991), Kose (2009), Theoharis (2008 and 2008a) and Wasonga (2009). The comparisons do not always apply to all four participants in this study.

The Goldfarb and Grinberg article focused on a social justice leader in Venezuela who through her leadership practices was able to change the environment and transform a community center into a thriving fixture in the community. Goldfarb and Grinberg explained that the leader of the center was able to bring about this change by creating environments where the community members could authentically participate in the decision-making needs of the organization. This is comparable to my findings where Jason, Susana and Frances created environments where stakeholders could authentically participate in the running of the school. Jason ensured that there was always a parent and student who were part of the school government. Susana's school YBCA was established by a group of parents. Parents sat on the school board and were involved in the school in a variety of ways. She and her staff developed processes for communication and how they wanted to make decisions as a community. Frances included students and parents on annual budget retreats; she formed a student led school design committee to provide input and had weekly all school community meetings where students and teachers could voice issues concerning the community. Through these activities these leaders created opportunities for authentic participation, which then led to ownership of the school and community center by the stakeholders.

Social justice leadership facilitates the community feeling that they can take ownership of the organizations and institutions that serve them, meaning that they treat the building as if it where their own home, they feel like they have a voice in the running of the organization, and they feel that it is their organization. The sense of ownership felt by the community was largely due to leaders being able to create democratic spaces and collaborative environments where all could participate. An example of ownership in the Goldfarb and Grinberg study was when the community center was no longer vandalized with spray-painted messages on the outside. At YBCA, Susana provided the example of how local gang members came to the school and let her know that they liked what was happening at the school and that the school was protected. The gang members knew about her work from students and other community members and the pride she was able to create in the school. The gang members as members of the community knew that the school was a place that other members of the community valued and so they too felt the need to respect the space and the environment the school created.

Kose's (2009) study on the practice of social justice leadership examined the role the leader plays in developing a professional development program at their school. Kose identified various roles leaders social justice leaders must embody, including "transformative visionary," "transformative learning leader" and "transformative cultural leader." Susana, Gil and Frances provided examples in their reflections of how they intentionally used professional development to transform their schools and achieve student learning outcomes.

Kose explained that a transformative visionary is someone who maps the path for the school of how to achieve the vision. A transformative visionary is able to complete

this work through communication with the staff and other stakeholders. Susana and Frances both provided examples of how they accomplished this in their schools. Frances utilized retreats as a space for the staff, parents and students to come together and work to achieve various school goals. Susana utilized retreats as well to match up visions and explain the trajectory the school was on and how they needed to modify any part of the school that was taking them off course. Susana and Frances both agreed that in the beginning of opening their respective schools there were many conversations with the staff that took place daily, but as time went on the vision became a shared vision among everyone and so when new staff joined the team it was easier to bring them on board with the vision because it was widely believed and understood.

According to Kose, a transformative learning leader promotes organizational learning and is able to create an environment where teacher learning and development take place. All of the participants in the present study provided examples of how in their practices they were able to become transformative learning leaders. Jason worked tirelessly on process and creating meetings that empowered all who attended by being respectful with other's time, allowing all to participate, and creating processes that are clear and insisted upon by the group. He explained that he uses professional development to intentionally work on social justice issues with his staff. As a community they read together and discuss how the literature is associated with their work on a regular basis. All of the participants in this study used their positions as learning leader as opportunities to advance the creation of equitable and democratic environments in their schools.

Lastly, Kose provided examples of principal practices where a school leader becomes a "cultural leader." In creating a professional development program a transformative cultural leader has the ability to create collaborative environments and a sense of group ownership over their work. Here the work of Susana Lira can be epitomized as a comparison to what Kose called transformative cultural leadership. Several times in her narrative she explained the importance of collaboration, especially amongst the staff, and how she spent countless hours laying down the framework in meetings that taught the staff the skills to collaborate together in order to make school decisions. The focus on collaboration at YBCA led to a shared responsibility among the staff. YBCA became a community school that the group took ownership over the results and how it was run. Students, parents, teachers and administrators worked together in deliberately collaborative manner, engineered by Susana to create a Blue Ribbon school.

Theoharis (2008a) studied a group of principals where in his findings he was able to create categories of traits that all of the participants in his study embodied. Two specific traits were the ability to be a passionate visionary leader and what Theoharis labeled as a leader with "a tenacious commitment to justice." The participants in this study shared the traits described by Theoharis. A passionate visionary leader according to Theoharis is dedicated to their work; they do the work because they love it. As leaders the four principals I interviewed worked towards their visions by communicating their beliefs and working to change beliefs if need be to create a supportive environment for students. The passion and dedication of the leaders in this study surfaced again and again as they shared their love for the students and their tireless conversations with staff and community members in an effort to change beliefs.

A tenacious commitment to social justice as defined by Theoharis (2008a) meant that the leaders were dedicated to creating environments where equity was at the center of the school's work for the students and staff. All of the participants here worked at charters that were purposefully designed to create opportunity for underserved communities by offering college preparatory curriculums to all students regardless of academic backgrounds. But although all of the leaders were committed to social justice, not all of them were successful in creating equitable environments for all students. When I asked Jason, Susana and Gil questions about the academic success of LGBTQ students, they were not able to answer how these groups succeeded at their schools. They were aware of the success of groups by race, but for example at the time their teams did not look systematically at the success of groups according to gender, SPED or sexual orientation. Frances was the only leader who continually looked at different parts of her student population to ensure that all were succeeding academically and emotionally. She provided examples of how she worked with the student body to create forums where the entire school community would discuss LGBTQ issues and creating safe environments for all students. In another example, she talked about her dissatisfaction with the district SPED services the school utilized and how she still needed to create further supports to ensure academic success for this population.

Lastly, examining the work Wasonga (2009) completed on principal practices that create democratic communities, Susana, Gil, Jason and Frances also shared some of the same traits. Wasonga writes that social justice leaders believe that democratic communities can exist when all stakeholders are empowered to make school decisions together in a collaborative matter. Wasonga's findings produced several themes in the

principal's practices that brought about these environments such as advocacy, shared decision making and dispositions in relationships.

Advocacy is a theme shared by all of the school leaders in this study. Advocacy is described as supporting students to create academic achievement for all. The school leaders in this study advocated for the students in a variety of ways. All of the leaders looked for alternative solutions to traditional discipline problems. They intentionally did not want to mirror what they described as how discipline is treated on the "outside," meaning in traditional schools. Student behavior was treated as an opportunity to create dialogue among the staff, parents and students. Susana intentionally brought in a dean of students who was trained in youth development and knew a variety of tools to use to demonstrate to students how their behavior affected their ability to be successful in school and in life. Frances's persistence in advocating in advocating for her students at times put her at odds with teachers who did not share her beliefs about working to change the behavior of students. Gil shared an example of how he believed in the abilities of his students how he needed to work with a math teacher to convince him that all of the students were capable of learning. Advocacy for students meant that these leaders worked by policies, professional development, and creating structures that developed supporting, loving school environments.

The leaders in Wasonga's study shared anecdotes around the theme of shared decision making most often. Shared decision making is a principal practice that the leaders in this study used as a foundation of their principal practice. Jason created a decision making chart to ensure that the staff understood how decisions were made at the school and who had the responsibility to make them. Susana and her staff created

processes for how information was to be shared so that the staff could stay informed and able to participate in the running of the school. Decision making with the entire school community was at the center of the practices of all of the principals. As leaders of small schools they acknowledged that there was no way to achieve the school's vision without the help and knowledge of everyone involved in the school community.

Another similarity between the findings in Wasonga's study and this one has to do with the dispositions of the principals and relationships. As a principal practice certain dispositions were used to create equality in the school environment. Susana reflected about how respect for everyone has to be modeled and demonstrated in a principal practice. She modeled the respect she had for all when she dealt with potentially dangerous situations with local gang members when they came to campus. All of the principals believed that if they were going to teach students about respecting each other and teach them that everyone should be valued then they needed to make sure that they modeled this behavior in actions and also in the structures that they created.

Coupled with the few differences found in this study, the number of similarities between these leaders and traditional public school leaders demonstrates the importance of research that examines the work of all public school leaders. Social justice leaders are especially needed in urban low-income communities where many charter schools have chosen to serve. The amount of knowledge the different groups can share with each other can only benefit the students of these communities.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership practices of social justice leaders at urban charter schools. In order to develop this understanding I used the

Tripartite Conceptual Framework created by Beachum and McCray (2010) as a lens to view their work. The concepts of active inquiry, practical optimism and equitable insight helped to provide a structure and a lens to view their practices and personal experiences that led them to becoming social justice leaders. Not all of the participants are social justice leaders, but all of them do have elements of social justice leadership in their practices.

Before looking at the actual leadership practices of these school leaders it was important to explore their perceptions of their own educational experiences and how they related to power. To explore these power relationships, the school leaders shared their own life experiences and their experiences as students in school and how these experiences coupled with their families and professional experiences brought them to school leadership. The life experiences of all of the leaders in this study were different, although they all ended up sharing similar professional experiences and comparable leadership paths. Gil did not talk specifically about issues of power and disenfranchisement in his upbringing, although out of all of the participants he experienced the most as a student. He grew up experiencing the power imbalance in society, and his moment where he began to understand that the system could be changed and was indeed flawed came when he met his leadership mentor and began to become a student of leadership. Jason, Frances and Susana did not question power relationships in their own schools and upbringings and on the contrary they felt privileged by their educational experiences but as students did not question why others did not have the same educational opportunities. As educational leaders they sought to create educational experiences similar to what they experienced as students.

All of the leaders sought to create social justice through education. In their own lives either due to privilege in Jason's case or for Frances as a new teacher, witnessing injustice in schools propelled them to question their own experiences and how they might be agents of change for the good of others. At some point during their life experiences before they became leaders they realized that the ways students experience schools is changeable. All students can succeed regardless of background. Jason and Frances wanted to create college access for all students regardless of socioeconomic background. Frances spent much of her time as a leader examining the academic success of her students and what factors and experiences students needed to become successful scholars.

Beachum and McCray wrote that the priority in developing social justice leadership literature should be to make it about the practice of leadership and what leaders actual do, instead of "lip service" on the practice of leadership, meaning talking about the importance of social justice leadership. Using the tenet of practical optimism to examine the leadership practices of these leaders, a few deserve special attention. These findings are love, facilitating leadership and being architects for new school environments.

The love that Frances and Gil explicitly expressed for their students was a principal practice that was used to create a nurturing environment for the students. As a principal practice love cannot be taught to future leaders; it is something that they have to develop on their own. Frances and Gil treated the students as if they were their own children and loved them like they were their own. Their love as a principal practice was demonstrated by the countless hours they spent at school, and the battles they fought on the students' behalf with the community and the school district. Leadership and their

work moved beyond a job and they intentionally demonstrated their love as a leader with the resources they were able to marshal for the school and the commitments they made to the families of the students.

Frances, Jason and Susana focused on leadership development in their student populations. Susana developed leadership skills for her students to fill traditional student leadership roles within the student community. Frances and Jason developed their students to fulfill leadership roles within the school as well as outside of the school. Leadership skills and education became the central theme of his school. Jason at times found it difficult to contend with his empowered students but he committed to their leadership development even if they were at odds with decisions that he made.

Frances provided the most evidence of creating a supportive learning environment for her students. She did not believe in having traditional divisions of labor and roles that determine how the staff and administration should work together. She spent a lot of time visiting other schools and taking notes on their environments so that her staff could aim to replicate these rich learning environments for their students. She focused on the whole child, meaning that she ensured that all of the needs of her students were met so that the students could become masters of their own learning.

In the literature charter schools are often studied separately from traditional public schools. This study demonstrates that the experiences that leaders at charter schools experiences closely mirror the experiences of leaders of traditional public schools. The obstacles faced at traditional public schools, such as academic success among ELL student and state testing, are obstacles that face charter school leaders as well. How the leaders in this study met those challenges can be learned from and applied to traditional

public school settings. Often the students that are served at the local public school come from the same community and have similar backgrounds like the students served at a neighboring charter school.

The findings from this study demonstrate that the practice of social justice leadership in schools is complex in that there is not just a few practices a leader must embody to achieve equity. Social justice leaders in this study continually reflected on their own experiences, who they were as individuals, the needs of the students and finding a staff to collaborate with in order to achieve their school's visions. Their passions and visions for change and the beliefs that all students could achieve were the foundations for their principal practices.

<center>Implications for Action</center>

The implications for action based on the findings of this study affect several areas of leadership studies. This study will add to the areas of principal professional development, urban school leadership, and principal training as well as leadership training and development. The following outlines the importance of the knowledge gained from the study.

With regards to principal training this study may add more insights into what topics and skills need to be developed by new leaders, especially those working in urban populations. New leaders are often taught a lot of leadership theory and acquire knowledge about budgets and educational programming; however this study highlights the importance of relationships in a leadership practice. The findings in this study demonstrate the importance of relationships by social justice leaders in order to create supportive, thriving environments for their students. A leader's ability especially to

create strong relationships with staff and students is crucial, if leaders hope to create

schools where all groups thrive academically and students become empowered citizens.

Along the lines of new leadership training, this study can benefit the work being

done in the areas of school leadership professional development. Current leaders who are

working to refine their own practices can benefit from the knowledge of other leaders of

how they developed their faculty and supported their students. This study provides

leaders with insights into what is possible to create in urban public schools and ideally

will spark similar equity driven practices among other public school leaders. There are

several practices employed by the various participants and below I will discuss a few that

were shared by all.

One of the primary principal practices utilized by all of the participants was

collaborative decision making, a skill that is important for all school leaders to master.

The crucial and sometimes complicated goal of ensuring that all students succeed

requires that all stakeholders be able to work together and effectively use the knowledge

and skills of the group. Collaborative decision-making can create a dynamic where the

school community can come together to change the lives of students from traditionally

underserved communities. Frances Lang's accomplishment in her school is evidence that

all of the meetings and consensus building between teachers, students and parents work

to create an academically successful climate for her students. All of the students who

graduate from Developmental High will be the first in their families to attend college.

She has also been in touch with graduates while they are in college and the vast majority

of alumni are still in college and feel that high school prepared them to succeed at the

college level. To support students along the road of college access meant that everyone

needed to work together for the benefit of the students. Students needed to learn the skills of advocacy and have spaces where they can practice these skills and feel comfortable in demonstrating their newly gained knowledge. Parents at the school needed the opportunity to be included into the decision-making processes of the school in an authentic way to enable them to support their students. The power of collaborative decision-making can create the above outcomes, but it is a skill that must be learned and utilized over and over.

A second attribute that was shared by all of the school leaders was a deep respect for their students. This valuing of the knowledge and experiences the students brought with them from their community was used as an educational foundation at all of the schools. How the leaders demonstrated this respect differed according to the individual; Frances and Gil called it love. The leaders in the study showed their respect and sometimes love through their actions, policies and decisions. All of the leaders wanted to develop their youth into high school graduates who would then attend college and work to empower their communities, and they accomplished this work because of their passionate beliefs in the abilities of all of their students. Each leader demonstrated respect for their students in his or her own way but it was an attribute that they all fully embodied. Respect and love are traits that cannot be taught through professional development and leadership programs, but they are also traits that each current and future leader has the capacity to develop on their own, in their own way.

Lastly, the findings demonstrate that inquiry should be constant in leadership practices. The leaders in the study inquired about all aspects of their schools and looked for ways through inquiry to achieve academic success for their students. The leaders

wanted to improve the school buildings; the food served in the cafeteria, the curriculum, test scores, and student activities. Social justice leadership requires that leaders develop inquiry into their practice that questions systems and power and how they relate to the work at hand.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Further Research</div>

The primary recommendation for further research is that this study would benefit from a larger sample size. Although most principals in public schools and their practices are not models of social justice leaders there are certainly more principal experiences that can be added to the literature. The type of school leaders who would participate in such a study are typically quite busy, especially during certain times of the year. To be able to interview them three different times, for 90-minutes may prove challenging but is possible.

Further research is also needed on charter school leadership. In Chapter 1, I mentioned the growing number of charter schools, especially in urban environments, and this reality means that the research needs to keep up with this expansion. There are quite a few topics in the area of charter school leadership practice that could be examined such as professional development, creating academic environments, parent/community engagement, and approaches to student discipline. There are few studies that explore the practice of social justice leadership and even fewer that look at charter school leadership, and therefore most topics under this theme will add tremendous value to our understanding of the work.

<div align="center">Concluding Remarks</div>

The findings in this study suggests that social justice leaders at urban charter schools spend the majority of their time crafting a successful academic environment for their students. Creating an environment is often complex and nuanced. Frances did not necessarily go about her work in a drastically different way than some of the other leaders, but the primary difference is that that she had a strong vision and strong practice of equitable inquiry into her practices and school policies. All of the participants mentioned the importance of vision several times during the interviews. As leaders they were clear on their vision; they believed that their work lies in teaching the various stakeholders to understand and internalize the vision as well. However the practices of social justice leadership demonstrate that vision is not enough. The desire to have an empowered student body and the knowledge and skills to create one are two different things. Frances as a successful architect of a thriving learning environment was able to make her vision real through practices like collaborative-decision making, power sharing, love, inquiry and continual discourse with the teaching faculty.

Through careful creation of these environments teachers and other staff members are empowered to contribute to Developmental High School in a positive way. New teachers joining the various school communities are then mentored by veteran teachers about how to work towards the shared vision. The findings in this study show that discovering the "right" type of staff through hiring is one of the most important principal practices. Leaders need to be proactive in assembling their teams. Frances was not passive in her attempts to find qualified teachers of color. Her school vision was that she wanted a staff that represented the ethnic diversity of her students and she worked to create this reality in her recruitment attempts.

Educators so often work in silos. Often teachers are not aware of the work being done in the class next door to their classroom. The leaders in this study continually worked with their teams to strengthen their teamwork. The academic success found at these schools was due to strong teams that worked in concert with each other. Gil for example makes sure that there is always teacher representation at family events so that parents feel that teachers are always supportive of their school and their children. Social justice leadership is a leadership style where leaders have to be able to facilitate student success through their staff. Like a coach of a team, in order to win a game the team has to work together and be able to anticipate each other's moves as they set up game plays to overcome the obstacles that lie in the way of scoring.

Lastly the authentic love and respect the leaders had for their student bodies presented itself in a variety of ways throughout their work.   Love is a topic not often expressed in the literature on leadership. Love is an emotion that has to freely given by an individual, it cannot be taught. The leaders in this study all loved their students; they often said it was a precursor to believing in the potential of all students to succeed. To develop the love for their students the leaders in this study as part of their practices made meaningful relationships with their students, beginning with handshakes at the door every morning and in more personal ways by helping students learn about themselves and what they were capable of achieving.

In my own work developing teachers and teams, this study demonstrates the importance of teaching others how to develop visions for student success and then some of the tools they can employ to make their visions a reality. I believe that all students can succeed and that the world is what we imagine it can be, our futures can change. The

leaders in this study over time developed their own critical consciousness and strong visions for students who had been traditionally neglected by educational systems. One of the most powerful tools they used to create the change for the lives of their students was dialogue. As an educator of adults I see the importance of developing teacher and leaders skills in creating discourse that creates equitable systems for student success. The constant dialogue and equity based inquiry the leaders in the study employed created thriving environments that empowered the entire school community.

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