

**Understanding Social Justice in Education:
Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis**

by

Danielle Fullan Kolton

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Abstract

Using a critically oriented qualitative interpretivist approach, this research describes how principals conceptualize social justice and social justice dilemmas and how these understandings influence their practices. Focusing on the context of social justice from the perspective of two participant groups of five principals each from public and Catholic schools in a large urban centre in Western Canada, reflective discussions of professional practice occurred through two semi-structured qualitative interviews with each participant and a series of three group dialogue sessions. This research is framed within the theories of social constructivism and situated learning as well as the concepts of educational leadership theory, social justice in education, identity and agency of school leaders, and reflective practice. As a contribution to a growing research base, this study offers a process for principals to explore social justice within the complexities and tensions of the dilemmas and decision-making of their practice.

Discourse and dilemma analysis were used to render the findings from this study, which highlight normative practices of school leaders as manifested in individual actions focused on relationships and positional agency. However, this conceptualization obscures the power of historical, cultural, and ideological authority that is unconsciously replicated in the norms of schooling. Furthermore, principals see social justice within their own actions but do not connect it with activist aspirations to challenge social inequities.

There are theory, practice, professional development, and research implications of this study which emphasize the need for a hybrid model of individual and collective leadership for social justice, hinged on collective curiosity, knowledge building, equity

discourses, open cultures, and change visions to challenge the norms and politicization of schools as status-quo enhancing institutions.

Keywords: dilemma, interpretivist research, reflective practice, social justice

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family ...

... to my *husband*, David, who resuscitated my spirit, listened to me talk my way to understanding, and made me martinis: Your enduring patience inspired me to carry on in this voyage of discovery, mindful that it was a marathon and not a race.

... to my *children*: Mackenzie, Tate, and Nathalie whose song “Even a Possibility” was an inspiring theme song in the final stretch of my writing. Thanks for your hugs and reassurance that it would all come together ... Thanks for being my baristas for this highly caffeinated project ... Thanks for your unconditional love even when I was distracted, grumpy, and discouraged ... Thanks for celebrating all the milestones along the way. I could not have done this without you.

I love you all as big as my heart!

For Dad –

Thank you for teaching me about passion and instilling within me a propensity to “go for it”. I miss you, and I know that you would have enjoyed reading and discussing my dissertation in progress. I know that you are celebrating the end of this journey with us.

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Prologue: Unpacking My Positionality

The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.
(Proust, n.d.)

Introduction

Interpretive inquiry recognizes the subjectivity of the researcher and the impact that background, history, context, and prior understandings have on the researcher's interpretation. In fact, Bogdan and Biklen (2003) acknowledge that it is "impossible to separate your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value" (p. 38). Creswell (2007) maintains that researchers position themselves in the qualitative study by recognizing how they have influenced all aspects of the research. Discussing their role, interweaving themselves into the text, and reflecting continually throughout the study are strategies for articulating this positionality. Marshall and Rossman (2011) also insist that the researcher's disclosure about her own identity, voice, perspectives, experiences, assumptions, and sensitivities is significant in the transparency of positionality. This acceptance of the subjectivity in research plays a role in understanding how bias impacts technique, methodology, and epistemology (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Willis, 2007). It is with this desire for transparency that I begin the story of how I came to this place in my research. This prologue is written in the first person and interspersed with italicized reflective, personal narratives that outline my personal and professional context for this inquiry.

Outlining My Personal Positionality

I cannot detach either my social and cultural memberships or my cradle-Catholic (born and raised Catholic) upbringing from the discourse of this dissertation because it shaped, socialized, and anchored me to specific ways of seeing and understanding the

world. I speak of my socialization not to denigrate my religious affiliation or the child-rearing style of my parents. Rather, it speaks to the how and why of my interest in understanding social justice by challenging my worldviews. While my family was a pivotal influence on my socialization, I also understand that institutions and social forces have conditioned ideals and assumptions that have been housed in my unconscious filter for 40 years. Attempting to disentangle myself from that lens in an analytical way has been an important part of this research, and my foray into the world of ideologies, theory, research, and philosophy has provided the platform upon which to examine my worldview both personally and professionally.

I grew up in a predominantly White, middle-class suburb of a large Canadian city, and I attended thirteen years of Catholic school, the last two of which were in an all-girls setting. Neither of my parents graduated from university, yet education was very important to them, and from an early age I knew that I would pursue a post-secondary degree. At the age of five, I made it my goal to become a teacher, a gendered profession, in which I could use my nurturing and bossy tendencies along with all of the other White, middle-class females in the profession. As a natural “organizer”, I was groomed from an early age with a leadership designation. My parents, teachers, and principals put me in charge, delegated, and reinforced the notion that I was a “natural” teacher and leader. By the age of 13, I had been supported in my efforts as a community volunteer, served as the student council president, organized countless school events, and won a provincial award for youth leadership. I recount these details of my adolescence to illustrate the type of support, encouragement, advantages, and protections that I received in my formative years and to acknowledge the impact that this type of privilege has had on me, including

the access to opportunities to develop skills and the emotional and psychological encouragement to try new things and take risks.

As a member of the “dominant group”—the group at the top of the social hierarchy which is valued more highly, sets the norms, and has greater access to resources (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 25), I was raised by parents who worked hard to provide a good life for their family. My mom and dad worked outside of the home in careers that they advanced in until retirement. One of the influences of my parents’ professions was that I grew up hearing a discourse of customer service, consumer choice, and continuous improvement within a Conservative orientation to high standards, accountability measures, and evidence-based productivity. A strong work ethic was modelled by both of my parents, and they were actively engaged in community leadership. Most notably, my dad served as the Chairperson of the school board when I was in high school; consequently, I was privy to his opinions about the business of schooling since he saw it as his role to use his corporate skill set in his leadership. I was raised with the ideals of individualism and meritocracy, that is, the notion that I could achieve anything I wanted with hard work and perseverance with limited acknowledgement of the structural and attitudinal dimensions that have made it easier for me to reach my goals as a member of the dominant group in society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

To say that my family is racist is not meant for dramatic shock value, but rather in an earnest attempt to recognize that our “normal” was considered “right” and that “those people” and “other people” were considered different and foreign. My formative years in the 1970s and 1980s contained an unconscious acceptance of broad racial, gender, and sexual orientation stereotypes that were communicated by the media and society and

perpetuated within our social circles. While I grew up with the Golden Rule to treat others as I wished to be treated and with the Christian imperative to tolerate all people because they were created in God's image, this was accepted without evaluation of how this denies the significance of race, reality, and the advantages of being White (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). There was nothing consciously sinister in this upbringing, but it was the result of generational illiteracy about race and difference. Our family demonstrated passive racism, which Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) define as "silence, ignoring incidents and dynamics, lack of interest in learning more about racism, having few if any cross-racial relationships, and not getting involved in any antiracist efforts" (p. 161). We would never have considered ourselves to be racist because of the racist/not racist binary that has been socially constructed in the images of "bad" racist people who are "ignorant, prejudiced, mean-spirited, and most likely old, southern, and working class" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 102). Nevertheless, these experiences impact the maps I use in my practice as a principal and require a continual awareness of thought patterns, assumptions, and judgments that may need to and, in fact, were challenged:

"You are racist!" The stinging words are hard and cold and offensive to me, and they stop me midsentence. As I sit across from the parent who angrily hurled this accusation, I realize that she is right: I reacted to the alarm of her child's teacher, made assumptions and judgments, and acted before trying to understand all of the dynamics. In one phone call to her, I hurt the fragile relationship that we had established, and I reinforced the stereotypes and assumptions that the teacher made. Now we are sitting across a table with a bottle of mouthwash and a canyon of resentment between us. I feel shame which is contrasted with a feeling of righteousness that creeps into my posture. With my positional power, I have a responsibility to "protect" her child. Can't I just explain my actions by talking about the "optics" of hers? Is this to blame the minoritized and assert dominance or is it educative? Are we negotiating, agreeing to disagree, reconciling? I apologize but this doesn't mend our relationship. I vow to remember this as an important lesson.

As a Catholic school-educated student, there were a number of unquestioned practices and ideologies that were infused into both my schooling and my upbringing. In my early adult years, I chose to ignore those aspects that were, at least, discomforting and at most, offensive, such as the role of women, the patriarchal nature of the institution, the absolutism of rules, and the church's propensity towards colonization and oppression. Rather, I embraced aspects of the faith that appealed to me including the sense of community, rituals aimed at examining our egocentric tendencies, regularly scheduled guidance about how to interact with one another, and a call to action to help those in need. However, this choice from the "religion buffet" was more visceral and not necessarily well-informed. Since I was socialized within a religious framework of fixed truths intended to guide me, I had limited exposure to alternate ideologies or secular sources of explanation and inspiration. Within the conformity of my religious upbringing, I learned not to question knowledge; that is the way that I perceive and interpret my reality. Combined with a fairly autocratic style of being parented, I did not become well versed in the practice of looking outside of my bubble to question and analyze. While I had the opportunity to learn more about religions in the Catholic college of the secular university I attended, I was not curious about understanding dogma and theology.

My husband, on the other hand is, by nature, more questioning and analytical. Better-informed about world religions and various philosophical viewpoints, he challenged me to probe my truths, and this was, at times, conflict laden. Such exposure to alternate assumptions, viewpoints, and practices began to expand my perspective. Life experience, parenthood, and maturity has also increased my drive to learn more with an open mind and to reconcile contradictions and tensions from my younger years of not

questioning. Accordingly, I have engaged (somewhat) critically to explore these dimensions for their complexity and nuances in both my journey to understand social justice and in order to raise my awareness of how I might interpret the data in my research and inform my own practice as a leader.

Despite my propensity to follow rules, I have an equally established pattern of expressing my outrage at perceived injustices. This ranged from challenging people in positions of power about how they used that power, to questioning gender roles, to peaceful resistance of school practices with which I did not agree, to imposing harsh consequences for students who demonstrated racist actions against minority members of the community. When I reflect back on critical incidents throughout my adult and professional life, I see examples of resistance that I had not previously been able to articulate in terms of social justice principles because I did not have the analytical skills or social justice literacy to do so. I have been called a “scrapper”, “challenging”, and “outspoken”, and these labels have sometimes generated feelings of pride within me and other times manifested in a retreat to status quo and conformity for fear of not being liked or respected. I recognize that the people from whom I seek acceptance share my place in the dominant group, and the courage to act in the name of justice may separate me from my position in this group. Herein lies one of the challenges of this critical journey for me, which is the fact that until very recently when I became a consultant working in schools with highly diverse populations, I had spent 15 years working in emotionally comfortable schools of mostly middle- and upper-class families, surrounded by like-minded and like-socialized dominant group members. In these comfortable places, I have experienced a push-pull, resist-conform pattern that has marked my struggle to discover my identity as a

leader and a person with social justice ideals within the contradictions in which I am living and working. There have also been times where I have used guilt to excuse inaction and been a bystander myself. I am not proud of this inaction, but I take (temporary) solace in my feelings of dissonance by deliberately becoming better informed about socio-political and socio-historical influences, more conscious of my socialization, more articulate about my values, and more outright in my actions. This is hinged on what Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) refer to as “intellectual humility” (p. 167) which comes from the realization that the more I know, the *less* I know, rendering me ever more attracted to new knowledge and diverse perspectives in my voyage of self discovery and the development of my professional identity.

A discussion of positionality must also address intersectionality, which is defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) as the reality that “we simultaneously occupy both oppressed and privileged positions and that these positions intersect in complex ways” (p. 115). As an upper-class White woman, I am privileged in my class and Whiteness and, at times, oppressed as a woman. Without getting into an analysis of my childhood love of Barbie, it is safe to say that, like most women, I have been the recipient of norms, values, definitions, language, and ideologies that have socialized my gender (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). I have experienced oppression as a female principal on a few occasions when White male parents made discriminatory comments to me that were not publically disputed by my male supervisors. While I did not challenge the people who made the comments to me directly because I saw them as a ploy to distract from the issue at hand, I was outraged at the passivity of the male bystanders, and this has shaped how I view gender and strengthened my resolve to think critically about my identity as a woman,

speak more openly about my views, and to discern and model my ideals about gender to my daughters and son and to students with whom I work.

This discussion about my socialization is significant to understanding what has influenced me in my leadership learning journey. It is also an important part of how I conceptualize social justice, especially considering my lack of experience as an oppressed or marginalized person. The next section offers an explanation of my professional positionality and my emergent interest in social justice.

In Search of Purpose: Outlining My Professional Positionality

I wanted to be a school principal from very early in my teaching career; however, finding my way as a leader has been disturbing and enlightening, confusing and liberating. I found myself at a crossroads in my fifth year of administration, frustrated by the unrelenting contradictions and demands to which I invested time and attention. I experienced an increasingly persistent feeling that there *must* be more to my leadership purpose: what am I supposed to be doing as an educational leader, and how do I accomplish that in my role as a principal? At the time, I was working in Catholic schools having spent the first six years of my teaching career in public education. While I recognize that some of my frustrations stemmed from challenges specific to parochial schools, I have learned that my journey in educational leadership was aligned with the experiences of many new administrators and fraught with the typical management/leadership tensions and learning curve of working with people. Combs, Miser, and Whitaker (1999) define this development of a leader as “a problem of being and becoming, the continual refinement of a leader’s beliefs about self, the world, and the job” (p. 24). In search of a process for this quest, I sought out a Ph.D. program.

Situating the Crucible: Knowing, Being, Becoming

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists three definitions of a crucible: (a) a vessel of a very refractory material (as porcelain) used for melting a substance that requires a high degree of heat, (b) a severe test, and (c) a place or situation in which concentrated forces interact to cause or influence change or development. Metaphorically, all three designations of the word signify my search for identity and agency as a leader: (a) my crucible is the melting pot of bioecosystems—historical, social, cultural, political, and intellectual—that interact and influence my development as a leader; (b) the emotions and discomfort of this process liken it to a test or trial; and (c) the meaning-making of the factors of influence will enable me to renegotiate my understanding of what it means to be a leader consequently leading to change and development in my practice. In search of purposeful leadership became a journey in meaning-making, value clarification, and role definition intended to shape a foundation for future agency.

Once upon a time, I was armed with a Master of Arts in Education degree, the highest level of School Administration Certification, a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma, and a Bachelor of Education; I knew exactly what kind of leader I wanted to be. I also thought that being a school principal was synonymous with being a leader. I imagined that the knowledge gleaned from my coursework and internship experiences gave me a toolbox from which to do great things and forge ahead as an agent of change, all in the name of student learning. Little did I know the difference between knowledge and knowing, between being and becoming. My philosophy of educational leadership communicated vision, optimism, and complete naiveté. While I may have thought I knew what type of leader I wanted to be, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998)

articulate that

... forming an identity ... takes time, certainly months, often years. It takes personal experience to organize a self around the discourses and practices, with the aid of cultural resources and the behavioural prompting and verbal feedback of others ... conceiving oneself as an agent cannot happen overnight. (p. 285)

In this way, my development as a leader has been the result of ongoing events and experiences which have shaped my negotiation and renegotiation of identity. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) distinguish between events and experience as follows: “experience is ambiguous, multifaceted, and open to contradictory readings and interpretations. Events are what happen to us. Experiences are what we construct out of those events” (p. 105). Accordingly, the skill of analyzing experiences must be situated in the “social and political function” that it plays (p. 110).

I take a deep breath, smile patiently, and begin the same agonizing conversation that I've had countless times over the past three years. Parents want a list of their grade seven and eight child's marks every two weeks. This practice, formerly known as "cūme grades" (a.k.a. cumulative list of assignments and current percentage achievement in the course), was discontinued when I came to the school and supported teachers' expressed desire to discourage this focus on summative assessment. We have listened to parents insist upon their need to know if their child is "slipping" so that they can respond in a timely manner; I have heard their fears that their child won't get into private schools-of-choice with a poor report card that could have been prevented by knowing there was an achievement problem; We have attended to their need for communication by increasing from two to three parent conferences per year and encouraging a culture of collaborative partnerships between students, teachers, and parents. We have hosted parent meetings to educate parents about evolving assessment philosophy and practice and written letters about our school assessment goals. Yet, the resistance continues. I persist in having conversations, but parents remain skeptical and fearful, and I remain committed to our resolve.

Change theory enlightens me about the long road ahead; but, I can't help but think that there is a lot we know about assessment: we know that cume grades do nothing to increase achievement other than to instil fear that a "0" will lower a mark which has zero effect on the students who are disengaged anyways; we know that assigning a "0" isn't assessment of what a student knows, but rather a consequence for non-compliance; we know that marks automatically set up a power differential; and we know that summative assessment is a final destination whereas formative assessment more accurately engages learners in an ongoing and interactive process. Furthermore, we know that no matter how often we communicate with parents about their child's achievement, they always think we should have informed them about a problem earlier. This is only one of many critical viewpoints that meets with strong resistance. And it doesn't all come from parents.

"Why do you write "A" or "B+" or another letter grade on your tests?" I asked the teacher. This practice baffled me, especially considering how much dialogue had occurred among our staff about assessment for, of, and as learning. Her reply: "to prepare them for getting marks in upper middle years." Prepare them for what? I wondered: for elation or dejection? "Haven't we learned anything, people?" my frustrated "inside" voice screamed. Besides, who cares if that child actually could regurgitate the history dates required – could he or she construct some sort of personal meaning from that exercise?

All of this is complicated by the fact that high schools and universities are holding onto status quo for dear life. If we go fully critical with assessment, how can we prepare our students for the shift in higher education? It is even MORE complicated by the fact that a lot of this assessment is based on useless knowledge which is socially and culturally deemed to be important in the first place.

Frustrations and obstacles aside, Preskill and Brookfield (2009) remind me that "leaders have a responsibility to help create settings where ... a sense of possibility is conveyed in conversation and in practice" (p. 177). So, I will carry on in conversation to educate, challenge, and provide a critical perspective in our practice.

Into the Fire: Historical and Social Construction of Educational Leadership

The management versus leadership conflict that I experienced generally manifested in my focus on problem solving versus problem creating. After several years in administration, it had reached a pinnacle of angst on three levels: the *desire* to envision authentic learning opportunities versus the *demands* of being an enforcer, system builder,

cultural and equity promoter (Brill, 2008); the *ideal* of creating spaces for meaningful communities of learners versus the *reality* of standardization, accountability, and resistance; and the philosophical ideas about society, learning, and education versus the *lived* experiences of what Maxine Greene (1978) calls “patterned behaviour and assigned roles” (p. 42).

These concerns resulted from my engagement in a variety of dilemmas and decision points that increased consciousness about my beliefs and prompted a desire to more closely analyze my day-to-day practices through a critical lens of how I came to be socialized as a leader. Posner (2009) describes this aspiration as authentic leadership which manifests itself in the ability to communicate “beliefs through ... words and actions that uniquely represent who [I] am” (p. 4). Authentic leadership is a concept that acknowledges the connection between values and behaviours which is evident in the ability to resist contextual pressures (Branson, 2007). Leaders who lead with this type of clarity and congruence have been empirically shown to be “confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character” (Branson, 2007, p. 226). Furthermore, authentic leaders have a defined cognitive awareness which “acknowledges their physical and cognitive limitations, to be aware of the propensity for their thoughts to be influenced by personal desires and inaccurate information and to account for the interdependency of their actions with the lives of others” (Branson, 2007, p. 226).

For these reasons, I came to the conclusion that in order to be deliberate and to act with a confident determination, I needed a defined sense of identity and an articulated vision for what decisions I make and why. Combs, Miser, and Whitaker (1999) recognize that “in the midst of this chaotic and diverse climate, effective school leaders search

within themselves to find the ‘why’ of their own and others’ work. Without a broad purpose to guide this work, they find themselves grinding out responses to daily encounters without any sense of integration or meaning” (p. 148). However, I have learned that articulating values without regard for the socialization that underpins them may render only a superficial picture of an otherwise complex system of beliefs, dispositions, perspectives, and skills that inform my practice:

I keep checking my watch – one more thing, I promise, and then I will escape into classrooms to connect with students and staff and see what exciting learning moments are happening. If I time it right, I will get to join circle-time in kindergarten or play a game of checkers with a first-grade student who needs to see me as someone other than a behavioural “enforcer”. I might have an opportunity to see a math lesson in grade eight in which students will explain to me how and why they are using manipulatives to understand Pythagoras’s Theorem, prompting me to have a mathematical “aha” moment after 38 years of not understanding the why behind $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. Perhaps, I will have a chance to see a teaching lesson that will prompt an inviting question and professional discussion with a teacher. I know that I always return from classrooms feeling refreshed and hopeful. I love the eager greetings I get from primary students and the banter I have with middle years’ students. I really feel like I am actually leading when I can have a rich dialogue with a teacher about something that I’ve seen or a challenging question that I can pose.

I check my watch again and prioritize the tasks oozing from file folders, message pads, and various correspondence littered across my desk. I review the budget in preparation for this evening’s Board meeting, revise the school marketing plan in hopes of increasing enrolment and funding, and return a call to the department of Education about our fire inspection code. Then the toilet in the boys’ bathroom overflows, there is a fight on the playground at recess, and a teacher needs to talk to me about her instructional supply order. My afternoon is booked with interviews for new applicants to our school, so all hopes of showing my face in a classroom is lost for yet another day. I sprint up to the staffroom to say a quick, “hello” to staff at lunch and to touch base with a few teachers about disciplinary situations and housekeeping items, and I walk and talk to the vice principal about the agenda items for the upcoming staff meeting. I can’t help but feel like I’ve let people down by not getting into classrooms and I ask myself why I feel compelled to get sucked back into the vortex that is paperwork – do I feel more “effective”? “efficient”? I don’t have long to reflect about how I’ve been socialized to rationalize, strategize, and problem-solve instead of to problem-create, imagine, and

challenge because there is an angry parent on the phone and a lengthy process ahead of me to get to the bottom of it.

Turning up the Heat: Social Justice Leadership as the Catalyst

At the time that I began my Ph.D., social justice had become very topical in public education: A local social justice conference, a flurry of scholarly work and publications, coalitions devoted to social justice, and a general discourse on the topic began to become commonplace in educational circles. What I heard confused me, because there seemed to be varying interpretations of what the concept meant and how it is practiced in education. While I was familiar with social justice in the context of the Catholic social teachings, I was interested in expanding my understanding in a more secular sense. My curiosity about this provided a focus for my own professional questions about identity and agency and subsequently my questions for this research study.

My own concept of social justice stemmed from my recent eight years of work in Catholic schools, and it is situated in my understanding of the Catholic social teachings. Rooted in the notion of solidarity among humans built on the promotion of human dignity, healthy relationships and community, and peace through moral, cultural, and spiritual respect, the Catholic social teachings house a broader social commitment to contribute to the good of the whole society with attention to stewardship of the environment, political and economic organization, regard for the importance of inclusion and participation, and attention to how public policy decisions support or encumber access to basic human rights to food, shelter and clothing, employment, health care, and education. Catholic education sees as its purpose the development of the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—based on a philosophy that we are one human family within which our responsibilities supersede all differences: racial, economic, ideological. As both a

cradle Catholic and a new administrator, I focussed more on the rituals and theory of Catholicism rather than the transformative practice of leading with social justice in mind. Furthermore, the overwhelming financial and management pressures of being an administrator in a parochial school distracted me from moral purposes aligned with my faith background. In my work as a principal, I took comfort in the structure of the Catholic social teachings, however I quickly realized that the complexity of the role demanded an examination about how the Catholic social teachings could be exercised in my day-to-day decision making. Coupled with the other tensions in the role, my resolve to be more reflective and deliberate about my practice was deepened.

My coursework and research in the Ph.D. in Education cohort led me to critical theory and its focus on power, structures, inequity of systems, and a social change vision. These theoretical ideas about the role of the educational leader in impacting society, specifically by working in solidarity with and advocating for democratic principles, has been a catalyst in my crucible because it challenged my role and practices. Naming, discussing, and analyzing “the facts, the emotions, the values, [and] the implications” (Leithwood & Levin, 2008, p. 165) of my actions became pivotal in forming new knowledge and perceptions about my identity as an educational leader and aligning this with the Catholic social teachings. This process has helped me to learn about and understand some of the influences on my socialization as a person and as a leader and the impact that has had on some of my values and normative practices. Most importantly, looking *outside* my own socialization to seek out and understand alternate worldviews has been significant. My leadership challenge also became about how to bring this practice and knowledge to others by both modeling transformative leadership and

intentionally introducing the theory and practice of social justice as a foundation for reflective practice. Combs et al. (1999) affirm this practice in their assertion that “leaders who seek self-improvement will need to spend less time on the search for the “right” methods and more on the exploration and refinement of their belief systems” (p. 13).

Conclusion

The purpose of the prologue was to situate myself in the context of this study in order to articulate how my positionality has impacted the agenda, process, and interpretation of the research. Several conclusions can be drawn from my personal and professional experiences as outlined in this prologue. First, critical theory is a new understanding that helped me to address some of the tensions I was experiencing in my role as a principal. This new knowledge needed to be accommodated into my existing conceptualization of social justice and my identity as a school leader. Since this is a newly-developed worldview for me, I am still in the process of incorporating it into my leadership identity, and this may be reflected in an awareness or lack thereof to thoughts about the role of leadership and educational practices in general. Second, my own perceptions, experiences, and challenges as a principal were, in part, due to my developmental stage of leadership as a novice. I was searching for a medium to process my learning curve, and I have had to be aware of bracketing my own professional challenges in my interpretation of the research. Third, while I cannot separate my religious affiliation from this work since my experiences as a principal were in a Catholic school, it is not my intention to compare Catholic and public education. Essentially, I believe that they share a common concern for students and learning though they differ in the discourse of doing so. My motivation for having both public and Catholic participants

stemmed from my need to hear new and different perspectives as a way of challenging myself. Since I recognize that not all Catholic principals share my cradle-Catholic upbringing and not all public principals have a secular worldview, it was interesting to hear a broad range of viewpoints. There was a self-serving professional development purpose in this research such that it enabled me to learn from ten experienced principals. This learning opportunity was an invaluable and privileged part of being the researcher.

Bates (2006) declares that “social justice is central to the pursuit of education and therefore should also be central to the practice of educational administration” (p. 153). Moreover, he insists that neither administration nor education can be properly practiced through a technical orientation to principles and procedure”. Heifetz (1994) also says that leaders need to problematize their values and practices under the lens of critical theory and to work with others to design a community that collectively addresses its problems. He asserts that “we are facing an unprecedented crisis of leadership” in which “precious values—liberty, equality, human welfare, justice, and community” (p. 27) must be addressed. Beatty (2009) describes this new mental model of leadership where “deliberately disturbing status quo” (p. 155) is accomplished through emotional meaning making and “bold self-critique” (p. 154).

Throughout my journey leading up to this research, I have come to see that I must examine the deculturalized, monopoly-driven, capitalistic society upon which our focus as a human community has shifted in order to ask questions and act critically with a “powerful vision of what supports human development, human agency, and human happiness” (Preskill & Brookfield, 2009, p. 112). Within a network of interdependent relationships, the critical leader as a change agent shifts from heroine to host in order to

bring diversity together in personal inquiry, community conversation, and local action (Wheatley, 2009). Leadership in this sense is not an individualistic endeavour; rather, it is a systemic imperative and a social responsibility aimed at the common good as prescribed by Burns's (1978) account of a transformational leader. This is a journey for me that has only just begun:

“Fire, when burning, is in a state of agitation, dependence, attachment, & entrapment -- both clinging and being stuck to its sustenance” (Bhikkhu, 1999). This quotation articulates the struggle which ensues from the study of critical theory. In the effort to define my identity as a leader and to understand my role as a principal, I am fueled by knowledge that is safe and predictable – curriculum, instruction, assessment, management techniques, discipline, policy, etc... I “cling” to these sources of technical, rationale knowledge with a false sense that they are the nourishment for successful practice. I am “stuck” to them because entertaining the alternative; such as if the curriculum is actually what should be being taught in order to provide equitable educational experiences, seems an overwhelming and lonely endeavour to contemplate. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) maintain that “...the longer one learns about leadership practice the more one becomes aware of just how deep and strong are the structural forces that oppose attempts to change the status quo. The development of radical pessimism is a danger facing all those who think and act critically” (p. 17).

I have come to the conclusion that I must turn off autopilot long enough to analyze achievement data, scrutinize disciplinary procedures, and explore curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices that marginalize our students. In short, I must ask: “what practices, values, viewpoints, language, and actions limit learning in our school and obstruct the capacity to grow?” Perhaps principals are not in the habit of asking these questions for fear of opening Pandora's Box of problems that are beyond the reach of the institution of schooling as we know it. But, Fullan (1993) offers an alternative perspective:

It seems perverse to say that problems are our friends, but we cannot develop effective responses to complex situations unless we actively seek and confront the real problems which are in fact difficult to solve. Problems are our friends because it is only through immersing ourselves in problems that we can come up with creative solutions. (p. 26)

With a global view of the need to address such crucial issues, I often feel helpless and overwhelmed, causing me to retreat to status quo; yet, I

recognize the need to be curious in order to be nourished by inquiry instead of answers and new ways of knowing instead of the knowledge and comfort of status quo. I reflect on what this says about my value for conflict and comfort. I am a pleaser – what impact does that have on my ability to lead critically? How can I change that?

This prologue was written to set the stage for my research. It outlines the history, attitudes, experiences, and influences that have framed the agenda for this study and my positionality as the researcher both personally and professionally. The following chapters outline the purpose, relevant literature, methodology, methods, findings, and conclusions of this research.

Chapter One: Background to the Study

Introduction

Social justice has become an educational buzz word, often spoken of in utopian terms with increasing interest in how it should be enacted by leaders and through school policies and procedures (Bogotch, 2002; Gerwitz, 1998; North, 2006). However, as a concept that encompasses a wide range of orientations, claims, debates, and dialogue, it has been criticized as a “highly political, fluid, and slippery” (Griffiths, 2003, p. 41) discourse that is used by “educators, educational researchers, and educational policymakers [who] frequently employ this catchphrase without offering an explanation of its social, cultural, economic, and political significance” (North, 2006, p. 507). Trend (1992) also raises concerns that social justice has been “accused of romanticizing political struggle while doing little to alter power imbalances within school itself” (p. 25). Apple (2006) calls this “romantic possibilitarianism” (p. 53) because discussion stops at the rhetoric of dreamy alternatives and focuses too little on analysis and action. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) expose this rhetoric in the disconnect between loose social justice ideals of fairness, equity, and human rights and intentional and critical practices to challenge societal patterns perpetuated within education.

Interest and research pertaining to social justice within educational leadership has emerged in the poststructural era of educational administration, a time marked by recognition of the tenuous nature of meaning and characterized by a focus on values, human agency, social construction, documentation of lived experience, and the moral exercise of power in leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Maxcy, 1994; Miron & Elliott, 1994). Poststructuralism challenges essentialist thinking and positions the economic,

social, cultural, and political aspects of any particular context under scrutiny.

Concurrently, globalization has required school leaders to provide meaning, purpose, and community to increasingly diverse school populations with “pressures of accountability, the reality of fiscal constraint, [and] the persistence of political interference” (Shields, 2004, p. 110). These influences on school leadership render its practice complex and rife with contradictions that make it difficult to operationalize against hierarchical constraints (Brill, 2008; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009; Theoharis, 2007). A growing awareness of injustices such as achievement gaps, academic streaming, unequal allocation of resources, cultural chasms, and a disproportionate focus on the behavioural challenges of minority students has required educational leaders to interrogate the underlying causes and imagine leadership that successfully influences equitable, inclusive, and democratic educational experiences for all children (Apple, 2006; Brown, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Shields, 2004). Accordingly, Heck and Hallinger (2005) maintain that “an increasing number of scholars are approaching educational leadership as a humanistic and moral endeavour rather than a scientific one” (p. 229). While the work of many scholars is constructed on a theoretical framework based on “the application of moral, transformative, and socially just leadership conceptualizations and practices” (Dantley & Tillman, 2010, p. 20), not all of them assign “social justice” as the qualifier; for example, moral leadership (Fullan, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 2007), transformative leadership (Bates, 2006; Blackmore, 2006; Brown, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; McKenzie & Locke, 2010; Peters, 2010; Shields, 2010); progressive leadership (McKenzie et al., 2008), inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2012), and critical leadership (Bates, 2006; Foster,

1989; Freire, 1970; Gunter, 2001). These leadership theories embrace the tension that is an inevitable by-product of examining “the dis-junction between ideal and reality, privilege and oppression, surface change and the dismantling of structural barriers” (Taylor, 2003, p. 4).

Conceptualizations of educational leadership have evolved from an emphasis on patriarchal, authoritative, and functional understandings of management to instruction, communities of practice, and justice (Brien & Williams, 2009; Bush, 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2005). This shift has occurred through paradigm changes in leadership theory that have more recently focused on critical practices and visions rooted in the concepts of relational pedagogy and social justice. Regard for hierarchies of power has also shifted to distributed models of leading. These shifts, however, conflict with the value that is placed on post-welfarism accountability through achievement outcomes, standardization, the cultural emphasis on individualism, and an ethic of production (Apple, 2006; Blackmore, 2006; Gerwitz, 1998; Leithwood, 2007; Stevenson, 2007). Consequently, “administrators work in hierarchical systems that make them legally responsible for enforcing policies and practices that may be unfair” (Ryan, 2010, p. 357). Heck and Hallinger (2005) note that any change will require a different set of intellectual tools that aptly reflect a shift in the purpose of educational leadership, and Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) advocate for educators to engage in complex, critical ways of understanding the dominant discourses and strong social conditioning forces in order to create new and informed paradigms of knowledge. Since these paradigms are evidenced in the dilemmas principals perceive in their practice, it follows that an examination of dominant discourses and social

conditioning may provide insight into how principals therefore conceptualize social justice.

Purpose of the Study

Using a critically oriented qualitative interpretivist approach, this research sought to understand how principals conceptualize social justice and how their understandings influence the decisions they make when confronting a dilemma. Focusing on the context of social justice from the perspective of two participant groups of five principals each—one group from public schools and one group from Catholic schools—reflective discussions of professional practice enabled principals to think reflexively about the tensions inherent in leadership decision making. This research occurred in a large urban centre in Western Canada.

Research Questions

The research questions were designed to engage participants in dialoguing about how they understand social justice and how this understanding is manifested in their leadership practices, specifically as they relate to dilemmas. These questions guided the literature review and are supported by the theoretical and conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2.

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|----------------------|--|
| Research Question 1: | What constitutes a “social justice leadership dilemma” for school leaders? |
| Research Question 2: | What influences impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice leadership dilemma? |
| Research Question 3: | What are school leaders’ understandings of the concept of social justice? |
| Research Question 4: | How do school leaders’ understandings of the concept of social justice influence their practice? |

Significance of the Study

Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) asserts that “shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will.” This is echoed in the work of educational scholar, Theoharis (2007) who says that decades of “good” leaders have perpetuated injustices in schools. Marshall (2004) argues that misunderstandings of what constitutes social justice may be attributed to a lack of self-awareness and skills that hinder well-meaning administrators to move beyond “simplistic management or quick fixes to address complex educational dilemmas steeped in an array of social, political, and cultural contexts” (p. 7); Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) refer to this as social justice illiteracy. Cooper (2009) acknowledges that school administrators know enough to identify what the injustices are and to engage in the discourse of trying to solve them. The challenge, he explains, lies in a lack of self-awareness that can “devalue and unwittingly denigrate students’ culturally-relevant knowledge, home culture, and language” (p. 699). Griffiths (2003) describes this as the DKDK zone: “don’t know what you don’t know” (p. 142), and she cites “a lack of recognition of one’s own privilege” (p. 142) as the largest obstruction to authentic awareness. Further, Griffiths (2003) questions whether the discourse of social justice can “survive an encounter with real people” (p. 25). This study intended to provide a platform for principals seeking this clarity through the vehicle of articulating their understanding about the concept of social justice and identifying the practices that support this understanding in dilemmas.

Interest in the concept of social justice leadership has prompted researchers to ask what socially-just schools look like (Bogotch, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1997), what

constitutes just educational practices (Alemán, 2009; Apple, 2006; Gerwitz, 1998; North, 2006; Ryan & Katz, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Taysum & Gunter, 2008), how leaders are leading with a social justice agenda (Hoffman & Burrello, 2004; Kose, 2009; Ryan, 2006/2010; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; White & Copper, 2012), and how leadership development programs should reflect social justice values (Brown, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Empirical studies that highlight how societal inequities are reproduced in schooling have also been broadly examined in the literature (Apple, 2006, 2008; Basu, 2004; Buras & Apple, 2005; Gerwitz, 1998; Manteaw, 2008). While most studies delineate attributes, philosophies, and theory about social justice leadership, none of them outline a field work process for principals to examine and analyze the dilemma-embedded decision points rooted in social justice leadership. Most of the research on social justice leadership has also focused on effective schools and their practices as the unit of analysis as opposed to the dilemmas of leaders who examine their own and others' knowledge and understanding of justice as it relates to the decisions that they make. This research provided time and space for school principals to individually and collectively debrief their own and others' dilemmas to interrogate their beliefs, question institutional routines, and more consciously examine what factors influence decisions they make when facing a social justice dilemma.

Dissemination of the results of this study in the form of publications and conference presentations will contribute to the growing knowledge base on socially-just leadership practice and how differing conceptualizations of social justice influence the decision making of principals, potentially leading to improved and critiqued practice.

Assumptions

This critically oriented interpretivist inquiry was guided by an epistemology that recognizes the subjectivity, social construction, and situatedness of knowledge whereby meaning is negotiated and renegotiated through interaction and dialogue. Accordingly, the research process accounted for: (a) the nature of differences among people in attributes, abilities, aptitudes, aims, needs, and values (Griffiths, 1998); and, (b) the importance of dialectical processes for sense-making. Premised on social constructivism and situated learning theories, participants scaffolded and co-constructed meaning out of experiences through reflection and dialogue. Accordingly, the methods of this research included discourse and dilemma analysis embedded in semi-structured interviews and group dialogue sessions as detailed in Chapter Three.

Grounded in an interpretation which Fay (1987) describes as the capacity of humans to “create themselves on the basis of their own self-interpretations” (p. 47), this research was hinged on a belief that humans are active beings who have the capacity for intelligence, curiosity, reflectiveness, and willfulness, but who sometimes exercise these dispositions unconsciously within internal and external constraints (Robinson, 1994) as depicted in Figure 1 as follows:

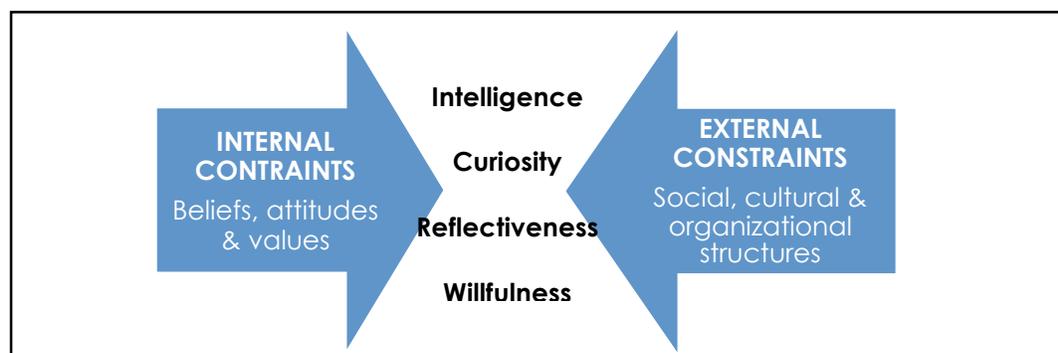


Figure 1. Internal and external constraints on the human capacity for intelligence, curiosity, reflectiveness, and willfulness.

Fay (1987) defines these characteristics as follows: intelligence—the ability to alter beliefs and behaviour based on new information about the world; curiosity—the disposition to seek out information about one’s environment in order to provide a fuller basis for one’s assessments; reflectiveness—the disposition to evaluate one’s own beliefs and desires on the basis of some criteria; and willfulness—the disposition to be and to act on the basis of one’s own reflections (p. 48). Further, Robinson (1994) outlines how humans are limited externally by social, cultural, and organizational structures and forces, and internally limited by beliefs, attitudes, and values. Research within this epistemological stance sees “individuals [as] knowledgeable and creative agents who, in forging relationships and constructing various selves, significantly shape the societies and organizations they inhabit” (Collinson, 2003, p. 542).

Delimitations of the Study

This study focused on the context of social justice from the perspective of two groups of five principals—one group from public schools and one group from Catholic schools—in a large urban centre in Western Canada. The main criteria for selection of participants included a motivation and willingness to engage critically about their leadership practices, specifically as they relate to: (a) dilemmas that cause tension and angst and for which there are no clear-cut answers; and, (b) conceptualizations of social justice dilemmas. The group dialogue consisted of three sessions of two hours each. One-hour, semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each participant before the group dialogue sessions began and again at the conclusion of the three group dialogue sessions.

Limitations of the Study

Since the purpose of interpretivist research is to reflect subjective understanding (Willis, 2007) attained through self-reported data of lived experience, the first limitation of this research is that participants may have avoided truthfulness due to the emotional risks of problematizing their practice and interrogating their positionality. However, since the small size of the groups lent itself to relational processes and the time commitment was achievable for busy principals, this study enabled participants to engage in purposeful and focused reflective practice in which they learned about and processed their understanding of and practices in social justice leadership. Accordingly, data collection and analysis focused on the methodology of increasing understanding rather than developing universal theory. This study did not intend to examine the subsequent changes in social justice leadership practices following the research, nor did it aim to study the impact that said leadership practices have on improving the justice within the participants' schools. Though the scope of the study did not include directly influencing change in principal practice, the design of the study and its findings facilitated possibilities for professional development which is discussed further in Chapter Ten.

A second limitation of this study is that the findings are not generalizable because of the limited sample of participants selected from only one geographic context. Since data saturation is compromised with a sample size of ten participants whose meetings were limited by their inability to commit to a lengthy data collection period, there are limits on the findings. However, the small scale and intimate nature of this work was designed to generate rich and varied descriptions that would contribute to a knowledge base about social justice conceptualizations which influence principal decision making

when confronted by a dilemma. Therefore, the process of collecting this data is transferable and may resonate with other school leaders in similar contexts who face the complexities of decision making and grapple with like dilemmas.

My experience as a Catholic school principal is recognized as both a third limitation and an asset such that my own preconceived notions of social justice and experience with decision making in leadership dilemmas may have shaped the analysis of the research. My theoretical sensitivity, which has been gained through the review of the literature, my experience as a school principal, and my encounters with social justice dilemmas enhanced my insight and ability to dialogue with participants, probe for data, and interpret the findings.

Finally, the methodology of this study is centered on the conceptualization and agency of the school principal. This could be interpreted as contrary to the view that social justice leadership must rely on ideological and organizational influence through more inclusive models of leadership which resist focusing on the role of the formal leader as the unit of analysis or the “leader” of social justice. However, I argue that the current organizational structure of school leadership relies on principals as “organizationally positioned agent[s]” (Rottmann, 2007, p. 54). Accordingly, it is important to assess the extent to which principals understand and act within a social justice orientation before any efforts at a shift are attempted so that strategies can be contextually relevant.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following terms were used:

Dilemma

This study utilized Marshall and Rossman’s (2011) understanding of a dilemma as a “situation wherein the participant has had to make ‘difficult or heart-wrenching

choices” (p. 191). Each principal considered his/her own dilemmas of leadership practice as they relate to conceptualizations of social justice. Group dialogue sessions also focused on dilemmas that were raised spontaneously in discussion as well as exploration of social justice practices.

Critically Oriented Interpretivist Research

Creswell (2007) defines interpretivist research as a qualitative research paradigm that “recognizes the self-reflective nature of qualitative research and emphasizes the role of the researcher as an interpreter. . . . It also acknowledges the importance of language and discourse . . . as well as issues of power, authority, and domination in all facets of the inquiry” (p. 248). Interpretivist research employs an inductive, emergent approach, enabling the researcher—possibly in collaboration with participants—to provide interpretations from various perspectives detailed in the data collection (Willis, 2007). Interpretive inquiry recognizes the subjectivity of the researcher and the subsequent impact that background, history, context, and prior understandings have on the researcher’s interpretation. This interpretivist research adopted a critical orientation such that it incorporated methods and ideology of critical theory and a recognition of the social and cultural structures that impact knowledge (Willis, 2007).

Principals

This term refers to the participants of this study who are responsible for the leadership and management in K-12 schools.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is a conscious and deliberate vehicle through which learners process experience in order to learn from it and change their practice (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2006, p. 27). Robinson (1994) adds that interrogating the

beliefs, attitudes, and values that constrain and conflict practitioners is a critical aspect of framing and reframing experiences. This study included partnerships of reflective practice (researcher/participant) and small-group reflective practice (group dialogue sessions) in order to create rich and informed avenues for understanding perspectives and actions (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Social Justice Leadership

There are several descriptors that underpinned the concept of social justice practices for the purposes of the focus of inquiry and reflection in this research. Gerwitz (1998), Griffiths (1998, 2003), and Shields (2004) view social justice as a concept that is embedded in democratic action and relational pedagogy, supported in an environment of respect, care, recognition, and empathy. This democratic action includes challenging and destabilising arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes (Gerwitz, 1998). Griffiths (1998) also classifies social justice as a verb that encompasses “anything that is done in partnership with others in the spirit of equality, democracy, and solidarity ... in the sense that in its conduct and outcomes, it should lead to a fairness both for individuals and for society as a whole” (p. 99). Broadly described as a “disposition” (Cooper, 2009; North, 2006), social justice leadership employs a “discourse of interdependence, an ethic of otherness, and a politics of recognition” (Gerwitz, 1998, p. 477) which is realized through decision points, allocation of resources, and concern for the achievement potential of all students (Cooper, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; North, 2006).

Summary

Since just before the turn of the century, scholars have been trying to define the *actions* of social justice leadership. This is fitting, particularly because the criticism of

social justice leadership is that it is mostly rhetorical. Yet, Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) assert:

there is no ready-made answer to the 'how' question. Singular recipes for success grabbed from gurus, 'bells and whistles' workshops, or the latest management texts create dependency. Even when you know what research and published advice tells you, no one can prescribe exactly what you have learned and all the unique problems, opportunities and peculiarities [your school] contains. You have to beat the path by walking in. (p. 83)

This is consistent with Bogotch's (2002) insistence that "there can be no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices" (p. 153). Articulating an understanding of this nebulous concept through the vehicle of lived experiences is an important step that must precede misinformed action that reduces solutions to fix-it strategies which underestimate the complexity of equity dilemmas.

This study offered a unique approach to examining the understandings of school principals through reflective practices embedded in the analysis of: a) how principals conceptualize social justice and socially-just leadership practice; and, b) their understandings of the influences on decision-making when they are faced with leadership dilemmas. While there is a theoretical consensus that transformative leadership has the potential to address injustices perpetuated in schools, wide-spread changes in practice that bridge the gap between theory and effective responses to injustices are sparse (Griffiths, 2003; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Public intellectualism and intellectual humility in the form of increased scholarship, research, and teaching; professional

development aimed at analysis and critical skills; collaboration between researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners; and initiatives in the field will be necessary elements for the praxis of leadership for social justice to be realized (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; McKenzie & Locke, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Apple (2008) echoes this sentiment in his assertion that leadership to promote educational policy and practice that bears witness to contradictions, inequity, and exploitation in schools will not lie in the hands of the “unattached intelligentsia” (p. 259).

This chapter outlined the purpose, questions, and significance of this research study as well as the assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and definition of terms. Chapter Two includes a review of the relevant literature as well as the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. Chapter Three specifies the research methodology, including the research design, data collection strategies and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four outlines the research literature on dilemmas and describes seven of the dilemmas from this study. Chapters Five to Nine outline the findings and conclusions for each of the research questions. Chapter Ten presents implications for theory, practice, professional development, and research. Finally, the Prologue and Epilogue bookend this dissertation with a description of my positionality and personal reflections regarding my learning journey.

Chapter Two: A Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Chapter Two includes an overview of the relevant literature that shaped the conceptual and theoretical foundations of this research. This overview includes a theoretical framework related to social constructivism and situated learning. These theories help to explain how principals conceptualize social justice and what influences impact this understanding. The conceptual framework focuses on external constraints on school principals: contextualizing the role of the principal, the evolution of leadership theory, and situating social justice within educational leadership. These external constraints influence how principals define and approach dilemmas and how the capacity for intelligence, curiosity, reflectiveness, and willfulness can be intentionally supported through reflective practice.

Theoretical Framework

The inquiry related to the research questions was guided by the epistemology of social constructivism which impacts the internal and external constraints of the school leader and subsequently the decisions that he/she makes when confronted by a dilemma. These theoretical underpinnings suggest an unpredictable and nonlinear process of learning that requires an awareness of the internal and external influences on relationships and experiences as well as a shift in the “principles and practices that inform relationships, curricula, pedagogy, organization of schools and their connections with and recognition of the communities they serve” (Armstrong, 2011, p. 9).

Vygotsky (1978) defines social constructivism as learning that values interaction shared with a more knowledgeable other (MKO): teacher, coach, facilitator, or mentor.

Learners develop by interacting socially and using language to scaffold between prior knowledge and new knowledge. Dubbed the zone of proximal development (ZPD), this space where learning occurs is located between what a learner can do independently and that which becomes possible with the guidance of a MKO and/or with peer collaborator. The culturally-specific tools that learners use to mediate their social environments, such as speech and writing, should be used to elicit higher-level thinking skills. These constructs were significant in the context of this research because participants were more knowledgeable others to one another, where dialogue and dilemma analysis was used as the vehicle for scaffolding by constructing the meaning of social justice out of experiences.

Banks (1993) is another scholar who has contributed to the theory of social constructivism by outlining typologies of knowledge that “reflect values, ideologies, political positions, and human interests” (p. 5). The five types of knowledge (facts, concepts, theories, explanations, and interpretations) he describes include:

- personal/cultural knowledge – which come from family and cultural influences.
- popular knowledge – which comes from mass media and popular culture.
- mainstream academic knowledge – which comes from traditional Westerncentric understandings of history and the behavioural and social sciences.
- transformative academic knowledge - which comes from challenging and revising mainstream academic knowledge.
- school knowledge – which comes from textbooks, media forms, and lectures. (p. 7)

Understanding how knowledge is formed is central to this study's examination of how principals conceptualize social justice, because their knowledge is influenced by many factors that are socially mediated. An acknowledgement of this social construction is a fundamental part of the theoretical framework.

Building on the theory of social constructivism, Lave and Wenger (1991) define situated learning as a theory that acknowledges the learning that occurs within the networks and groups beyond the individual, thereby positioning learning in the context of knowledge structures; instrumental artifacts; activity structures; and political, social, and historical influences. As a learning theory that rejects universal learning mechanisms and isolated knowledge domains, learners instead negotiate and renegotiate meaning about their practice through interaction and discourse. The professional growth of principals is therefore the result of ongoing interactions, events, and experiences which continuously shape their understanding of identity and agency. Specifically as it relates to the capacity building of principals, situated learning enables them to be engaged in their practice, supported by having collegial conversations about problematic and difficult cases, followed by opportunities for improvisational development of new practices. Through the sharing of personal stories and exposure to diverse perspectives, identity is fashioned:

... to propose otherwise would be like expecting someone to learn to swim on a sidewalk. Reading situations, the moves, the decisions—each of these is contextualized and shaded with subtleties of time, tone, person, topic—and it is in the unique combinations of these that the professional knowledge ... can be created. (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 12)

This is consistent with how Keating (2005) describes learning as “the meaning-making mechanisms that individuals use in the course of their engagement in activities, in continuous, cyclic and dynamic acts of repetition, recognition, reflection upon and recombination of the resources as they emerge in activity and in the semiotic moment of practice” (p. 127). This participation is socially produced, culturally constructed, and textually mediated through language, structures, symbols, power, and history (Barton & Tusting, 2005). By deconstructing common notions of mastery and pedagogy, knowledge becomes useful through lived experience and analysis rather than formal instruction. Internalization is in the knowing versus the knowledge which occurs through evolving membership and interaction of social activity.

Since leadership is a social endeavour that is learned “in a group context and within the dynamic reciprocity of the individual engaging in groups” (Komives et al., 2009, p. 15), “identity is formed and transformed through our interactions [and] our relationships with others” (Leonard, 2008, p. 247). This becomes a central focus of leadership development in situated learning because it is through these relationships that meaning is reconstructed and ways of knowing, perceiving, interpreting, and acting upon are altered.

Conceptual Framework

Contextualizing the Role of the Principal

Within a global framework of neoliberalism, the role of the principal has shifted, impacting both the identity and agency of school leaders amidst shifting foci in education. A trend favouring evidenced-based management and transactional practices and emphasizing tasks and goals over values and relationships, has influenced norms that

accentuate functionalist, individualistic, leader-centric views of the leadership role (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008; Hargreaves, 2009; Rottmann, 2007; Tourish & Barge, 2010). Ford, Harding, and Learmonth (2008) assert that leadership identity is influenced by everything that is read, written, and discussed about leadership, and they refer to these dominant discourses as “codes of culture which allow for the ordering of things and disallow other possible orderings” (p. 13). In this way, mainstream notions of leadership have a performative effect on how identity is developed, and it is here that socio-political and socio-historical factors cause role and agency confusion that may influence the discourse, knowledge, membership, meaning-making, and actions when confronting a dilemma.

The history of neoliberalism in education. Kachur (2008) maintains “there is no doubt that neoliberalism has, broadly speaking, been responsible for a shift in perceptions of education as a basic right and a collective benefit to society as something individualised, privatised, and economically utilitarian” (p. 398). Understanding the history of the neoliberal impact on education helps to contextualize the role of the principal. This story begins with the introduction of education as a free and compulsory public service that was designed in the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment and the economic conditions of the Industrial Revolution (Robinson, 2011). Structured according to factory production-line principles that valued standardization and conformity, education focussed on individual merits of performance based on the ability to inductively reason and to demonstrate knowledge of the Classics (Robinson, 2011). Linear, concrete expectations about academic progress and capacity were based on social and cultural status, and students were regarded as “academic” or “non-academic” as

compared to regulated and privileged notions of what it meant to be educated. This mechanistic view of education is rooted in a Newtonian interpretation of reality in which all processes and functions are viewed as a sum of the total parts that can be compartmentalized in the form of hierarchies (Caine & Caine, 1997; Wheatley, 2006). This machine metaphor presumes a cause and effect that “can be clearly identified, separated, measured, and related to each other” (Caine & Caine, 1997, p. 37). These Newtonian discourses in education enlisted the support of structures and strategies to anchor the social machine of schooling.

In the 1960s when desegregation and other social movements exposed cultural bias in the education system, progressive movements in education proposed alternative theories about learning and engagement through instruction and assessment; for example, the work of John Dewey and other theorists who regarded lived experience over rote learning. However, these ideas were criticized for touting “anti-intellectualism” (Trend, 1992, p. 42), and the economic crises in the 1970s and 1980s indicted this pedagogy as the source of the decline in achievement, discipline and productivity in schools, rendering students incapable of competing in the globalized economy (Apple, 2006; Trend, 1992) and even going so far as to charge education for the economic decline (Ryan, 2012). Since the onset of neoliberalism in the post-welfarist economy, a movement called *conservative modernization* has dominated the discourses of educational policy and practice, specifically a demand for reform rooted in a desire to return to high standards (Apple, 2006; Blackmore, 2006; Robinson, 2011). This coalition is comprised of an alliance between: (a) neoliberal advocates who support the effort and merit that is demanded by choice in market systems; (b) neoconservative proponents seeking

increased standards and back-to-basics; (c) religious fundamentalists interested in preserving non-secular traditions in school; and (d) middle-class professionals who prioritize accountability and management as necessary conditions to be competitive in world markets (Apple, 2006).

The impacts of neoliberalism on education. There are three main impacts of neoliberalism in education. First, choice benefits middle and upper-class citizens and polarizes classes and races between schools, further benefiting those who are already advantaged and excluding those who are already marginalized (Apple, 2004; Buras & Apple, 2005; Hill, 2006; Klees, 2008; Ryan, 2012). Specifically, Apple (2006) maintains that the higher the socioeconomic status (SES), the more likely a family will exercise choice in education. Their first choice is to *exit* public and culturally-diverse schools and to opt into private institutions. This phenomenon is referred to as “White flight” (p. 66), and it produces a “spiral of decline in which schools populated by poorer students and students of colour are systematically disadvantaged and schools with higher SES and higher white populations are able to insulate themselves from the effects of market competition” (p. 66). The resulting hierarchy of haves and have-nots polarizes financial and intellectual resources which are allocated to the dominant class, and this reinforces cycles of disadvantage and marginalization.

Second, misperceptions of quality and student performance exist within neoliberal education. Proponents of education-for-sale insist that choice prompts responsiveness and better quality schooling that is motivated and disciplined by the competition of the market. School programs, they say, can be both innovative and effective because they are unrestricted by centralized mandates which constrain creativity; however, Buras and

Apple (2005) report that private schools are actually less accountable to parents because of boundary structures which need to be established to thwart the meddling tendencies of high-income parents. Furthermore, innovations in private schools are still limited by priorities of the school district and external restrictions. As a result of various influences, choice schools are actually “seeking greater uniformity and conformity” (p. 559) in order to generate comparative data to be competitive in the market. Standardized curriculum and assessments are employed to offer programs that are attractively packaged and sold to consumers who have disposable income. Apple (2006) and Klees (2008) note that there is little evidence to suggest that performance is better in private schools. This is due, in part, to the fact that organizational features do not generally account for increased test scores despite the fact that they have been commercialized to sell effective education. In the marketplace, schools seek to attract motivated parents with capable children in order to positively impact the examination league tables (UK) and publicized state and national testing scores (USA) (Apple, 2006). Scores from vastly different school demographic compositions are compared publicly at face value, without regard for the impact that poverty and power inequities have on assessment outcomes. Kachur (2008) argues that this spreads misinformation about the public school system in an attempt to destabilise it and stimulate market alternatives.

Finally, privileged notions about curriculum and pedagogy result from neoliberal frameworks. Despite the fact that innovation is meant to be at the heart of neoliberalism, this ideology has held strong to the status quo of educational curriculum and pedagogy. Competition, markets, and choice mutually reinforce accountability, performance objectives, and standardization (Apple 2004, 2006; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hill, 2006;

Kincheloe, 2008). This strengthens traditional pedagogy and inhibits critical approaches, reducing learning to “performative processing and delivery of pre-digested points” (Hill, 2006, p. 15). Education by these means, according to Kincheloe (2008), has become a series of insignificant processes that hold knowledge transference as a primary goal; this type of instruction values depositing of information into the minds of passive students, termed “banking education”, and it serves to reproduce the dominant socioeconomic order (Apple, 2004; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Freire, 1970; Manteaw, 2008). Additionally, the neoliberal principle that one-size fits all breaches the local context and specificities of any given school, including socio-demographic structure, history, and culture (Basu, 2004). Manteaw (2008) also notes that privileged notions of curriculum prioritize subjects that are considered to be essential to the work force, and this is “shaped by economic considerations that are steeped in competition and ... financial gains” (p. 122).

One notable consequence of these privileged notions of curriculum is the widening chasm between the regard for sciences versus the arts (Robinson, 2011; Trend, 1992). The arts, considered as leisure subjects because of their value for divergent thinking and creativity as opposed to positivist epistemology, have been systematically cut from school programs. Kincheloe (2008) agrees that “scientific capital is supported by epistemological prostitutes who serve the forces of the market” (p. 38), and he argues that knowledge is embedded in the interests and actions of Western elites. Disregard for the lived experience of students or engagement in learning by focusing on the educational practices that support corporations, government, globalized capitalism, and free-market ideologies provides few opportunities for students to understand the underlying forces of consumerism or to “search for new and better ways to function by continually examining

assumptions” (Trend, 1992, p. 3). Education of oppressed populations suffers within this pedagogical stance because hegemonic values and knowledge are in direct contradiction to the lived experiences and culture of marginalized people. Furthermore, many educators would argue that education of *all* students suffers within this pedagogical stance because students learn to regurgitate facts in a culture of competition and individualism rather than to love learning in a culture of collaboration (Apple, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Littky & Grabelle, 2004; Robinson, 2011; Trend, 1992). Instead, Banks (1993) argues that “students should examine different types of knowledge in a democratic classroom where they feel free to examine their perspectives ... [and] to create their own interpretations of the past and present, as well as how to identify their own positions, interests, ideologies, and assumptions” (p. 5). Unfortunately, Littky and Grabelle (2004) note that the structure of schools has remained the same:

today, as yesterday, a traditional school is a building that isolates large groups of young people from adults and the resources and experiences of the real world, then expects them to emerge at age 18 knowing how to be adult, how to work, and how to live in the real world. Society is asking our graduates for skills and fast-paced communication, and schools are still giving them facts and one-way lectures. (p. 31)

Consequently, students, who are being raised in an era of intense media stimulation in an age of rapid communication and technological development, are penalized for getting distracted and not engaging in traditionally designed learning experiences (Littky & Grabelle, 2004; Robinson, 2011). The pressures of standardized curriculum and high-stakes testing exacerbate this problem, and this has caused an entire generation of

students to be diagnosed as troublesome and attention deficit in what Robinson (2011) terms a “fictitious epidemic”.

The impacts of neoliberalism on the role of the principal. Neoliberalism has affected the agency of leaders since the late 1980s through the privatization of educational services whereby the needs of developing human capital and labour power have dictated the goals of education (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hill, 2006). Since neoliberal frameworks have enabled status quo in schooling behind the smoke and mirrors of reform rhetoric, what is relevant in education and what is expected of administrators very quickly becomes complicated by economics, politics, and interest groups. Furthermore, government mandates, divisional directives, and reform efforts either support or encumber the school leader who is attempting to be cognizant of social justice principles.

Despite the fact that the last few decades have seen a shift from hierarchies of power to distributed models of leading in education, there is still confusion, ambiguity, and tension about the agency and role of the principal because of the value that is placed on accountability through achievement outcomes, standardization, the cultural emphasis on individualism, and an ethic of production (Apple, 2006; Gerwitz, 1998; Stevenson, 2007). Goldring and Greenfield (2005) agree that “divergent perspectives within the academy, among policy makers and constituents at the local, state, and federal levels, and among school and district administrators add to a growing swirl of competing and often conflicting role images and expectations” (p. 1). Ryan and Rottmann (2009) also insist that despite an administrator’s earnest desire to lead in democratic ways, they are

anchored to the hierarchy and bureaucracy within a system that structurally imposes control and power upon the role of the principal.

The agency of the school leader is framed by the prescribed job expectations and responsibilities as defined by a regulating body and based on the aims of public education. The adjective, *effective*, is often used to describe school leaders who: are strong educators, anchoring their work on central issues of learning and teaching and school improvement. They are moral agents and social advocates for the children and the communities they serve. Finally, they make strong connections with other people, valuing and caring for others as individuals and as members of the educational community. (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium [ISLLC], 2007, p. 251)

Other scholars describe “the central role that the principal plays as one which orchestrates school reform and improvement [by] managing complex systems and leading instructional improvement” (Kelley & Peterson, 2008, p. 351). Additional sources insist that the most important condition for school success are the quality of relationships and the leader’s ability to build a culture of cooperation, trust, openness, and continuous improvement (Beatty, 2009); “in sum, [principals] must both maintain the routine functioning of the school and provide vision and motivation; they must both manage and lead” (Kelley & Peterson, 2008, p. 358). This paints an idyllic image of schooling that is about teaching, learning, and social relationships. However, Brill (2008) notes that “the role of the school leader can be particularly amorphous, regardless of the specificity of the job description” (p. 137); he surmises that the costume of the school principal consists of:

- Holding students, teachers, parents, and support staff accountable for adhering to the rules, norms, and expectations of the school community (enforcer);
- Addressing all of the operational needs of the school while challenging and building systems to improve efficiency and coherence (system builder);
- Fulfilling one's moral imperative by promoting equity and advocating for the children in the school community (equity promoter);
- Driving student achievement through the improvement of teaching and learning;
- Remaining mindful of one's personal values, stakeholder needs, and expectations of the various institutional influences and expectations;
- Making good decisions and taking bold actions with thoughtful stakeholder engagement and clear decision-making processes; and
- Navigating intense emotion; anticipating and responding to the emotional responses that accompany school leadership. (p. 138)

Yet, the semantics of neoliberalism are detected in Brill's (2008) overview of the agency of the school administrator by the use of words such as *accountability*, *improvement*, *achievement*, *stakeholder needs*, and *stakeholder engagement*. Kachur (2008) argues that this discourse prompts citizens to act like customers: "This situation undermines citizenship and education as basics of democratic life, because the market's logic gives preference to individualistic behaviour instead of promoting altruistic and democratic actions from people" (p. 392). This contradiction can be especially confusing to the identity and agency of the school administrator when consumer behaviour clashes with philosophical notions of what education could and should be. For instance, an administrator who values relationship building in the name of cultivating rich and authentic communities of learning, but who is otherwise preoccupied by the economic

management of the building and the policy demands of high-stakes testing becomes compromised by the need to maintain enrolment and funding and continually innovate to attract customers. This type of competing demand detracts time and energy away from their ideals about the purposes of education and/or their ability to foster social justice. Apple (2004) supports this argument in his recognition that “more time and energy is spent on maintaining or enhancing a public image of a good school and less time and energy is spent on pedagogic and curricular substance” (p. 23). This leaves the critical or discerning school administrator to decide how to “influence, mediate, transform, or reject a policy or regulatory process” (Apple, 2004, p. 32) rather than to focus on teaching and learning. In addition to all of the prescribed job expectations and standards, school administrators must also demonstrate business acumen and confidence with policy in order to be deemed effective.

In the decentralized reality of neoliberalism in education, Basu (2004) notes that school leaders are faced with interpreting policy while at the same time supporting teachers on the front lines. Administrators must engage in continuous problem solving in order to “buffer the technical core of the organization (the classroom) from the immediate and pressing demands of students, parents, and other short-term sources of perturbation in the system” (Kelley & Peterson, 2008, p. 357). Therefore, each day is fragmented by short interactions, unscheduled activities, and a wide variety of unique, unpredictable and unexpected problems requiring “cognitive and affective diversity” (Kelly & Peterson, 2008, p. 357). In fact, “on average, a principal engages in 50 tasks per hour, with each task lasting an average of one to two minutes (Peterson, 1981, as cited in Combs et al., 1999, p. 26). Social and legal issues, policy implementation, disgruntled parents, on-site

injuries, discipline matters, facility concerns, and staff needs—all of which are embroiled in emotion—obstruct eager leader-wanna-bees from realizing actual leadership and, instead, relegate them to the role of a Complaints Department Manager. In Ontario, for example, the politics of neoliberal education reforms prompted the elimination of teacher's right to strike, a decrease in preparation time, the mandated requirement of assuming extra-curricular responsibilities, and strict re-certification processes (Basu, 2004). School closures, capital plans, standardized curriculum and assessment, and regulated class sizes positioned school administrators as the ones to both support teachers at the same time as demanding more accountability. This paints a very different picture from the utopian ISLCC (2007) definition of principals who “are strong educators, anchoring their work on central issues of learning and teaching” (p. 261). These contradictions create tensions in the principalship that require “dexterity, courage, and commitment ... Poise and balance [are] part of the artistry of serving as a school leader” (Brill, 2008, p. 141).

Evolution of Leadership Theory in Education

The work of school leaders has long been shaped by the orientation of the study and practice of leadership which has historically aligned itself with the characteristics of Western society; namely, principles based on economic leverage, patriarchy, and behaviourism (Hodgson, 1994; Marshall, 1995; Stevenson, 2007). Most interpretations of leadership, which are borrowed from management theories, disregard the unique context of education and result in “ideas that separate the process of leadership from the substance of schooling leadership principles [need to] emerge from teaching and learning, and from the unique social and political contexts of schools” (Sergiovanni,

1995, para 10). Furthermore, these industry and commerce models are firmly rooted in Western organizational perspectives (Shields, 2010). Bush (2008) identifies that “there is no single all-embracing theory of educational leadership” (p. 9) because each one focuses on a feature of leadership without providing a complete conceptualization of it. This has resulted in a multiplicity of paradigms that represent different ways of interpreting events and behaviours in schools. Recently, educational leadership has carved out its own body of research, knowledge, and practice specific to the context of schooling, yet Heck and Hallinger (2005) challenge the notion that a grand theory of administration can and should be constructed given what we now know about the complexity of leadership. Indeed, McKenzie and Locke (2010) insist that “there is no single ‘right’ way for leaders to improve schools ... to improve schools, particularly in an era of high-stakes accountability and increased student diversity, takes well-prepared, smart, hard-working, reflective teachers and leaders” (p. 47). Rather, they advise that the conceptualizations of the past, though influential in helping us to understand how schools and leaders of today have been acculturated, require arduous intellectual challenge and inquiry that can successfully inform effective solutions to a range of persistent problems rooted in injustice.

Unpacking the interpretations of leadership is an exercise in understanding its history and evolution that has been highly influenced by economic, social, political, and cultural factors. Competing priorities in the purposes and practices of education also complicate both the theory and practice of the educational leader. Decades of research have been dedicated to outlining leadership paradigms and identifying the competencies, behaviours, and traits of a leader. The term leadership refers to the “capacity of someone

to direct and energize people to achieve goals” (Rainey, 2003, p. 290), and business management models of leadership have been transposed onto the context of school leadership. An emphasis on tasks, goals, and performance as opposed to vision, values, and relationships has also dominated the research of leaders (DePree, 1989; Foster, 1989; Marshall, 1995; Rainey, 2003). However, Ryan (2006) notes that practitioners in educational leadership “alarmed by glaring and persistent disparities and dissatisfied with traditional management approaches that do little to acknowledge or address injustices ... have begun to search out and develop other models” (p. 4). The history and evolution of leadership in education can be characterized according to well-known leadership theories briefly described and delineated in bold below.

Great man theory. The traditional great man theory maintained that leaders are leaders because they possess admirable characteristics or traits (Patterson, 1996). Similarly, trait theory claimed that people are born with innate skills and traits with which to lead. According to these theories, which were prevalent in the 1920s-1940s, leadership could be emulated but it lacked a curriculum that could be taught (Brien & Williams, 2009). The industrialist and military influence of those decades suggested that strong hierarchical authority wielded success and production. Principals in this time were hired based on a perception of natural leadership capability as it related to their successful ability to control and influence stakeholders through positional power, and they were responsible for promoting the moral and spiritual values of society (Brooks & Miles, 2008).

Behavioural theory. As a result of behavioural science research in the 1950s, the behavioural theory of leadership was articulated (Brien & Williams, 2009). In contrast to

trait theory, this research maintained that leaders are made, not born. By focussing on behaviours rather than traits, the central tenant of this theory is that learnable behaviours contribute to the success of leaders. Accordingly, a business leadership curriculum was created to focus on organizational management, but research efforts to study the behaviour of leaders disregarded the competencies and experiences of the leader, competencies and experiences of the followers, and situational dynamics and constraints (Doyle & Smith, 1999).

Contingency theory. Also known as situational theory, contingency was added to acknowledge the variability of factors that influence the actions of the leader. According to these theories, leadership should be contextual. The relationship between the leaders and followers, the task, and positional power were also considered to be important considerations (Doyle & Smith, 1999). Prevalent in the post-war baby boom enrolment increases, school principals were trained via business models that ascribed to this theory to run efficient schools (Brien & Williams, 2009).

Transactional theory. The transactional theory of leadership focuses on the bureaucratic-managerial transactions between leaders and subordinates centered on the tenet of production (Rainey, 2003). Transactional descriptions of leaders and the act of leading are rooted in the assumption that leadership is proportionately connected to organizational position (Bush, 2008; Foster, 1989); specifically, the degree of influence increases as one ascends the organizational ladder. Reams of literature have examined this hierarchy as it pertains to the authority, control, and the power it has to influence motivation and change. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, most school principals used transactional leadership to perform their day-to-day responsibilities and manage smoothly

operating schools with the intention of promoting institutional and social equilibrium by protecting hierarchical authority and power structures (Brien & Williams, 2009; Brooks & Miles, 2008). By the 1980s, school leadership became strongly influenced by the Effective Schools Movement that focused on and dissected instruction and performance outcomes of students. Feeling unable to influence change for school improvement, educational leaders followed the lead of management in its recognition that “motivated and passionate employees dramatically outperformed their less motivated counterparts and that transactional management practices were insufficient to provide this motivation” (Brien & Williams, 2009, p. 10).

Instructional leadership. Concurrently, instructional leadership emerged as a method that placed the principal as the appointed leader of instruction; however, due to a lack of training and the alienating effect it had on teachers, it was a short-lived theory in practice (McKenzie & Locke, 2010). Instructional leadership re-emerged, after transformational leadership developed as a theory in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when attention in education became more dedicated to examining the achievement gaps between various student populations and making a difference in the outcomes for students. With its focus on teaching and learning, instructional leadership is primarily concerned with the reflective dialogue among teachers and between teachers and principals in order to influence the “motivation, commitment, and capability of teachers” (Bush, 2011, p. 39). Furthermore, an “effective instructional leader works collaboratively, adopts an inquiry stance, learns from unintended outcomes, and continually moves forward with new information and learnings” (Brill, 2008, p. 77). Supervising staff and providing curriculum professional development are the central tenants of improving

student learning and teacher effectiveness; however, building relationships with those who are on the front lines is integral to the success of supporting excellence in teaching (Robbins & Alvy, 2004, p. xi). However, Brill (2008) acknowledges that principals become easily distracted from instructional leadership because, “they are equally responsible for the maintenance of facilities, budgets, personnel requirements, and federal compliance mandates” (p. 37).

Transformational theory. Transformational theories of leadership began to focus on the relationship between the leader and the follower in pursuit of common goals and personal fulfillment. James MacGregor Burns (1978), a political scientist, was the first to distinguish between transactional leadership and transformational leadership in his book, *Leadership*. He contrasted transactional leadership with transformational leadership in his assertion that transactional leadership consists of the exchange relationship between a leader and a follower, whereby the leader identifies and fulfills the needs of followers who are, in turn, rewarded for their performance and support of the leader. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, transcends this exchange system to an approach which “raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” (p. 20). This theory was further developed by Bass (1985) who disputed that the two theories are opposing; rather, he argued that successful endeavours require skills in the art, science, and craftsmanship of both transactional *and* transformational leadership. Leithwood (1994) also specifies eight dimensions of transformational leadership as applied to education as follows: building school vision; establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values;

demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions. Transformational leadership was one of the first theories to propose that leadership could be used as a vehicle for moral and ethical purposes; consequently, management and leadership were no longer seen to be synonymous. Since then, scholars have continued to delineate between leading and managing by categorizing leadership as “defining mission and direction and providing inspiration”, and management as “designing and carrying out plans, getting things done, and working effectively with people” (Fullan, 1998, p. 8). This proved to be a challenge for leaders who are “expected to balance the tension between a respect for difference while developing and nurturing shared organizational goals” (Blackmore, 2006, p. 183).

However, Foster (1989) cautions that transformational leadership has been designated to meet the needs of bureaucracy because “transformational leaders are now those who can lead a company to greater profits, who can satisfy the material cravings of employees, who can achieve better performance through providing the illusion of power to subordinates” (p. 45). He insists that managerial tasks should not be confused with the nobler, socially-oriented, more altruistic aims about which leadership should actually be. Gunter (2001) also emphasizes that transformational leadership has been co-opted by education for all the wrong reasons because “... tasks such as development planning, appraisal, target setting, and action planning increase workload and takes the teacher away from teaching Empowerment is sold to teachers as being emancipatory, but it is in reality a control mechanism” (pp. 98-100). Finally, this view is supported by Hargreaves (2009) who asserts that “relationship-driven cultures of collaboration have

been converted into formula technologies of specifying clear goals and conducting regular meetings to analyze performance data and develop intervention plans so as to meet the targets connected to those goals” (p. 31). Accordingly, the research prescribes the retranslation of transformational leadership to that which is socially critical and oriented toward social vision and change, not simply based on organizational goals which fall strictly under the umbrella of management. Furthermore, it should be noted that garnering motivation, buy-in, personal fulfillment, and inspiration do not parallel the influence of working closely with teachers to promote learning and development which is based on a clearly defined purpose developed with a variety of community stakeholders (Hargreaves, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Transformative theory. Transformative leadership has been further distinguished from transformational leadership by several scholars (Blackmore, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; McKenzie & Locke, 2010; Peters, 2010; Shields, 2010). It is identified as “leadership that begins with questions of justice and democracy related to the wider social context, that critiques inequitable practices, and that offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others” (Shields, 2010, p. 128). This concept, influenced by critical theory, is situated at a moral and societal level rooted in a vision of the leader who is focused on relationships between individuals oriented towards a social vision. This model of leadership is aimed at ethical social change (Bates, 2006; Brown, 2004; Foster, 1989) and espouses some of the transformational qualities described by Burns (1978) including capacity building, collaboration, professional cultures, and personal fulfillment. With a vision for how humans can relate to each other in pursuit of democracy and justice, the

motivation of the transformative leader is to serve the common good based on higher levels of ethical responsibility. Emancipation from economic problems, racial oppression, ethnic domination, and oppression of women are the areas of focus through which the transformative leader examines ideas, policies, and practices that “serve the interests of the dominant class while simultaneously silencing and dehumanizing others” (Brown, 2004, p. 78). The tension that exists within this leadership style is “between valuing diversity (based on racial, linguistic and ethnic difference) and the desire for social cohesion; between diversity of ideas/values and consensus building” (Blackmore, 2006, p. 186).

Lacking the usual discourse of power, influence, and control in pursuit of goals, the literature on transformative leadership focuses on relationships rather than behaviours and functions: the relationship between the politics of education and the politics of oppression; the relationship between race, class, gender, and achievement; the relationship between cultural context and opportunity; the relationship between the purpose of education and the inequity of unitary systems of belief and action; and the relationship between epistemology and the demand for accountability (Gunter, 2001). Beyond conceptual relationships, the relationships among the people working for social justice is an important feature of transformative leadership because it speaks to an entirely different dynamic between leader and follower, one in which there is an inclusionary and reciprocal relationship in pursuit of collaborative inquiry and informed practice (Blackmore, 2006). Peters (2010) also outlines that the transformative leader must have a “deep understanding of how these elements of people, place, and process” (p. 29) impact what happens in the school.

Situating Social Justice within Educational Leadership

The concept of justice has been topical for thousands of years, and interpretations date back to the time of Socrates' assertion that justice was "helping one's friends and harming one's enemies" (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009, p. 30). Plato contributed from another perspective with his cave allegory, stating that social consciousness makes society internally harmonious. He was the first theorist to loosely link the concept of justice to education. Aristotle coined the term "distributive justice" referring to the equal distribution of property, which continues to be debated because of the difficulty of quantifying immaterial things for the purposes of distributing them equally. This term is also problematic because that which is equal can also be unjust, which is exemplified in the values and traditions espoused in the power-laden nature of schooling. For example, "common schools" were created to provide equal access to both the rich and the poor, yet it was the values and traditions of the Puritans that were imposed within these schools (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). Another example is seen in the phrase "separate but equal", referring to the rhetorical access that African Americans had to education in the 1960s within oppressive, hegemonic structures that perpetuated separation (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). Finally, Thomas Aquinas distinguished the concepts of justice and charity.

It wasn't until 1840 that "social" was added to the word justice, thereby creating a more formal connection between private interests and public good (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009). In the mid-20th century, progressivist educator, John Dewey, was the first to propose that social justice lies in the power of education to create critical social beings, as change agents who can counter school order and reconstruct knowledge claims.

Changes that occurred in education as a result of the various interpretations of Dewey's work, created a backlash of reform movements beginning in the 1970s when it was deemed that progressivist education was not only anti-intellectual, but also the source of the decline in achievement, discipline, and productivity in schools, rendering students incapable of competing in the globalized economy. These reform movements, intent on perpetuating status quo norms of power and privilege, also occurred, and continue to occur, in the name of social justice.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the term broadened to include gender and race and the introduction of equality as an "organizing concept" (Griffiths, 2003, p. 41). The terms anti-discrimination and affirmative action were introduced in the 1980s, particularly as they related to increasing activism in social movements (Blackmore, 2006; Griffiths, 2003), and by the 1990s, the qualifier social justice was reinvented to include wide-ranging categories of injustice; for example, Young's (1990) depiction of the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Delineating between distributional justice and relational justice also dominated much of the literature (Fraser, 1997; Gerwitz, 1998; North, 2006), and these concepts were allocated as different spheres of justice that incorporate cultural, participative, and economic elements. Other scholars have also explored the notion of pluralistic versus individualistic justice as it pertains to "socially constructed agreements to emerge around specific problems, solutions, and courses of action" (Bogotch, 2002, p. 154). Griffiths (2003) concludes that there is a lack of an agreed terminology that muddles both the theory and the practice of social justice, and she advises that since critical ideas about social justice are transient, "it is necessary to keep casting about in a critical and

thoughtful way ... to [prevent] theory from ossifying and becoming permanently embedded in an out-dated set of examples and contexts” (p. 45).

Defining social justice leadership in education is an equally elusive endeavour, because it is a temporal concept that is dependent on the circumstances, opportunities, and resources of any given context (Bogotch, 2002; Gerwitz, 1998; McKenzie et al., 2008). Maxcy (1994) agrees that this concept is difficult to define because essentializing it—applying one meaning that can be commonly applied to all contexts and persons—implies a concrete, structural-functionalist paradigm that may fall prey to “adjustment philosophies marked by ‘fix-it’ literature” (p. 159). Accordingly, Brooks and Miles (2008) insist that social justice leadership “rejects the rationale-technical and efficiency-focussed conceptions of leadership that form the balance of the field’s traditional knowledge base” (p. 106). Social justice leadership, therefore, resists the temptation to “materialize and concretize in measurable products what is essentially a relational state of affairs” (Maxcy, 1994 p. 159). Rottmann (2007) adds that individualistic notions of leadership; that is, heroic social justice actions by a leader, are not aligned with the process and outcomes of social justice in education.

Rooted in the epistemology of social constructivism and pedagogy of relationships, social justice leadership demonstrates a value for human capital which prompts interrogation about and action against the contradictions, inequity, exclusion, oppression, and marginalization in schools in order to challenge hegemonic structures that are institutionalized in the norms and practices of schooling (Bogotch, 2002; Brown, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Gerwitz, 1998; Ryan & Rottman, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Taylor, 2003; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990).

More akin to a “disposition” (Cooper, 2009; North, 2006) or a “process” (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007), social justice leaders champion a “discourse of interdependence, an ethic of otherness, and a politics of recognition” (Gerwitz, 1998, p. 477). In their examination of academic achievement and inclusive practices, social justice-oriented leaders underpin their practice with a regard for diversity, relationships, democracy, and empowerment which is realized through their decision points, allocation of resources, and concern for the achievement potential of all students (Cooper, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; North, 2006; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). Dantley and Tillman (2010) identify five common themes among the literature on social justice-oriented educational leadership, namely:

- A consciousness of the broader social, cultural, and political contexts of schools;
- The critique of the marginalizing behaviours and predispositions of schools and their leadership;
- A commitment to the more genuine enactment of democratic principles in schools;
- A moral obligation to articulate a counterhegemonic vision or narrative of hope regarding education; and
- A determination to move from rhetoric to civil rights activism. (p. 23)

Shields’ (2010) describes the disposition of social justice leaders as people who demonstrate “an awakening of global curiosity; the ability to establish strong dialogic relationships; a transformative approach to leadership; and a willingness to take a stance as a public intellectual (p. 138-139). This is supported by the literature that highlights the need for school principals to build strong relationships through which to practice critical reflection and collaborative inquiry in order to hone the capacity to cope within a complex system of competing demands. Starkly demarcated from anything managerial,

these descriptions of social justice leadership are intended to generate a democratic community through reflection and action that is embedded in both political change efforts and day-to-day critical practices. Although the specifics about what social justice actually looks like are context-specific—which is in keeping with the constructivist framework of the theory—there are several pragmatic offerings among the literature that include guiding principles, descriptions, and prompts to support the social justice leader as outlined in the paragraphs following.

Brill (2008) explains that social justice leadership is enacted in the principal's role as an "equity promoter" (p. 51), as it relates to being an advocate to address power imbalances and inequity regarding data on student achievement, discipline, teacher hiring practices, allocation of resources, and the engagement of different parent communities. In his study of 246 narratives of principals, he noted that equity dilemmas about racism, sexism, homophobia, and discrimination based on religion, language, socioeconomics, or age were frequently experienced. Poignant narratives about the risk-taking and courageous conversations are documented as examples of what social justice leadership looks like in practice.

Theoharis (2007) and Kose (2009) also acknowledge how important the principal's role is in the cultivation of equitable cultures, structures, processes, curricula, and assessments. Building an ethos of social justice is an important consideration of the social justice leader who resists the temptation to engage in individualistic, heroic, and martyred leadership (Bogotch, 2002) in order to raise student achievement, re-center and enhance staff capacity, and strengthen culture and community (Theoharis, 2007). As delineated in Table 1, Theoharis advocates for deliberate practices that take "good"

leadership to a new level because “decades of good leadership have created and sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools” (p. 253).

Table 1

Characteristics of a Good Leader versus a Social Justice Leader

Good Leader	Social Justice Leader
Works with subpublics to connect with community	Places significant value on diversity, deeply learns about and understands that diversity, and extends cultural respect
Speaks of success for all children	Ends segregated and pull-out programs that prohibit both emotional and academic success for marginalized children
Supports variety of programs for diverse learners	Strengthens core teaching and curriculum and ensures that diverse students have access to that core
Facilitates professional development in best practices	Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, and disability
Builds collective vision of a great school	Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich opportunities both academically and socially as their more privileged peers
Empowers staff and works collaboratively	Demands that every child will be successful and collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success
Networks and builds coalitions	Seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her or him
Uses data to understand the realities of the school	Sees all data through a lens of equity
Understands that children have individual needs	Knows that building community and differentiation are tools to ensure that all students achieve success together
Works long and hard to make a great school	Becomes intertwined with the life, community, and soul of the school

(Theoharis, 2007, p. 252)

McKenzie and Locke (2010) marry instructional leadership with the aims of transformative leadership in a more specific model called instructional leadership for

social justice. Supported by research which indicates increased teacher effectiveness when principals are involved daily in teaching and learning with teachers by promoting and participating in teacher learning and development (Robinson et al., 2008), this paradigm supports equity consciousness and high quality, equity-oriented teaching skills through direct involvement and inquiry with teachers which is built on a belief that: (a) all children—regardless of a child’s race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, learning differences, culture, language, religion, and so on—are capable of high levels of academic success; (b) the adults in schools are primarily responsible for student learning; and (c) traditional school practises may work for some students but are not working for all children (Skrla, McKenzie & Scheurich, 2009, pp. 82-83). In practice, Skrla, McKenzie, and Scheurich (2009) identify these specific teaching skills as:

- Using consistent and reliable classroom procedures and routines;
- Clearly communicating expectations for learning;
- Stimulating students with high-level and complex tasks;
- Ensuring students are actively and cognitively engaged;
- Extending student learning through teacher-to-student and student-to-student discussion;
- Frequently assessing individual student learning;
- Differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs and capitalize on individual assets;
- Using an asset model to respond to students’ varying cultures;
- Demonstrating respect and care in all interactions with all students and students’ families. (pp. 90-96)

Kose (2009) describes social justice leadership as the “recultivating of individual and institutionalized practices rooted in low expectations, deficit thinking, marginalization, and cultural imperialism of diverse students” (p. 630). In order to

support complex structures such as schools, leaders must embrace the mental models of a transformative vision and acquire the skills to identify, analyze, and respond to injustices. Beatty (2009) describes this new mental model of leadership where “deliberately disturbing status quo” (p. 155) is accomplished through emotional meaning making and bold self-critique” (p. 154).

Finally, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) distinguish between social justice which is generally characterized as pertaining to “‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ for all people and respect for their basic human rights (p. xvii) and *critical* social justice which they define as a recognition of the action required to change the inequality and injustice that are “embedded in the fabric of society” (p. xviii). The reason they cite this distinction is because of the disconnect between the ideals and actions of critical social justice. The practice of critical social justice, they insist, includes: (a) recognizing how relations of unequal social power are constantly being negotiated at both the micro (individual) and macro (structural) levels; (b) understanding our own positions within these relations of unequal power; (c) thinking critically about knowledge; and, (d) acting on the above in service of a more just society (p. 145).

Overall, the practice of social justice leadership is based on building relationships that enable leaders to facilitate meaningful conversations that challenge educators to be reflective and responsive in their teaching practices in order to promote equal learning opportunities for all students. This includes interrogating institutional injustices that are perpetuated within policy and practice. Simultaneously, leaders must be highly self-reflective about their own biases, positionality, and lived experiences in order to challenge themselves about how their actions impact the cultivation of just cultures,

structures, processes, curricula, and assessments. The political nature of such a leadership agenda is necessitated by the complexity of the social system within education; therefore, advocates of social justice must employ wisdom, awareness, and skills within their own micropolitical contexts (Ryan, 2010). Gaining leverage in such pursuits includes the development of positive relationships, use of language that promotes questioning, and networking at different levels of the system to persuade and influence others within the constraints of relative power (Ryan, 2010). Acting in a more political way in the name of social justice must be predicated on an understanding of self, social power structures, and the ideals of justice in which principals “combine their intellectual and strategic abilities with personal and social qualities like courage, boldness and care to move their social justice agendas along” (Ryan 2010, p. 373).

The challenges of social justice leadership. Leadership for social justice challenges the social order, conflicts with management tasks that prompt leaders to carry on business as usual, and frankly, costs money. Kohl (1998) asserts that the enemy of teaching for social justice is “‘the Real World,’ which is characterized as hard, competitive, and unrelenting in its pursuit of personal gain and perpetuation of bias and institutional and economic inequities” (p. 285).

Theoharis’ (2007) research also indicated that many principals faced resistance “coming directly from the demands of the principalship, the momentum of status quo, obstructive staff attitudes and beliefs, and insular and privileged parental expectations” (p. 238). To deal with the subsequent feeling of “persistent discouragement” (p. 243), principals in Theoharis’ study worked hard to prioritize administrative tasks and maintain self-care to combat the overwhelming sense that there was so much to do and so little

time. Additionally, they focused on providing “purposeful and authentic communication” (p. 244) to continually reaffirm the values and direction of the school. Above all, principals reported that “building relationships was a key strategy they used as a way to enact justice in the face of resistance” (p. 245). Kohl (1998) echoes these survival suggestions for those who work for social justice in his assertion that they mustn’t “turn teaching for social justice into a grim responsibility but take it for the moral and social necessity it is” (p. 287). Finally, Ryan (2010) found that administrators in his study “spoke of how persistence, planning, experimentation, honesty, patience, aggression, play acting and quiet advocacy served them as they promoted their equity agendas” (p. 368).

The most commonly cited challenge of social justice leadership is the lack of preparation and support that leaders have to lead with these principles (Brown, 2004; Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; Gunter, 2001; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). However, Brown (2004) cautions that knowledge acquisition about ethics, diversity, justice, and liberation in the critical position, in and of itself, will not necessarily prompt participants to “challenge their own assumptions, clarify and strengthen their own values, and work on aligning their own behaviours and practice with these beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies” (p. 81). Rather, non-traditional, experiential approaches are the suggested methods by which to enhance the vocabulary, skills, and attitudes necessary to both reflect and act effectively in pursuit of justice. McKenzie et al. (2008) agree that changing how the identity and agency of school leaders are socialized is an important aspect of developing social justice leaders.

Reflective Practice

Understanding the socio-historical and socio-political factors that have socialized the role of school leaders is an important part of examining social justice practices and

analyzing the dilemmas that principals perceive and experience in their practice. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) maintain that leaders must be courageous in “unpacking platitudes and deconstructing conventional wisdom” (p. 130) in order to find their purpose and to take positive action in the name of these principles. Increasing consciousness about these factors was accomplished through the reflective practice embedded in this interpretivist research.

Although not new, the discourse about principals and teachers as reflective practitioners has re-emerged as the panacea for how to manage dilemmas and improve teaching and learning within a more collaborative school culture. Yet, principals remain “strongly oriented to action and seldom give reflective activities priority” (Møller, 1996, p. 211). Additionally, principals grapple with ambiguity in the role within continuous management of conflict “on an ad hoc basis” (p. 212) wherein “decisions are made spontaneously and intuitively” (p. 212). However, Griffiths (2003) believes that “... reflective action is well suited to improving social justice [because] ... it is a way of responding to situations taking into account *both* the particular and the personal *and* the social, political, and economic order” (p. 115).

Reflective practice can be unpredictable, threatening, and personally and professionally enriching. Rooted in the philosophies of Buddha, Socrates, Dewey, van Manen, Schön, and Shulman, it is a way for professionals to “stay challenged, effective, and alive in their work” (York-Barr et al., 2006, p. 27). York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006) present a model called “The Reflective Practice Spiral: Learning from the Inside Out” (p. 20) wherein they detail individual reflective practice, partnerships of reflective practice, and small-group reflective practice which creates rich, informed, and

cooperative avenues for enhancing learning. York-Barr et al. articulate that “reflective practice requires a *pause*” (p. 9) which sometimes occurs unpredictably in response to a dilemma; nevertheless, *intentional* reflection-in-practice occurs when those pauses are built into the agency of professionals in order to interrogate the beliefs, attitudes, and values that Robinson (1994) refers to as “internal constraints”.

Palmer (1998) insists that “new leadership ... will come as we who lead find the courage to take an inner journey toward both our shadows and our light, a journey that faithfully pursued, will take us beyond ourselves” (p. 208). However, Leonard (2008) asserts that such a journey cannot be an individualistic process that is relegated to the inner consciousness of a person’s learning journey; rather, it should be one that is dynamic and informed by communal processes. This encapsulates the driving force behind unpacking the socio-political and socio-historical forces that impact the practices of school principals, some of which may or may not harbour injustices because “grounded in and reinforced by experience, our thoughts are not readily disposed to questioning” (York-Barr et al., 2006, p. 41). Accordingly, renewal and growth can not occur under the guidance of a leader who is unaware and disconnected, without an identity or a formed sense of agency. Sergiovanni (1992) calls “mindscapes” the “bundles of beliefs and assumptions about how schools and school systems should work, authority, leadership, the purposes of schooling, the role of competition, and the nature of human nature” (p. 10). These mindscapes, or internal states, are the key to how leader’s perceive their agency and “the meaning-making ‘tools’ through which all other potential influences must pass” (Beatty, 2009, p. 164). Naming, discussing, and analyzing “the facts, the emotions, the values, [and] the implications” (p. 165) of actions within the role

of school principal can therefore be pivotal in forming new knowledge and perceptions about his/her identity as an educational leader, and the identity, in turn, will impact the decision points that manifest in dilemma-laden moments. Combs et al. (1999) also focus on the belief system of the leader: “leaders who seek self-improvement will need to spend less time on the search for the ‘right’ methods and more on the exploration and refinement of their belief systems” (p. 13). Accordingly, reflective practice supports this process of growth, embedded in an understanding of the evolution of leadership and the place that social justice practices have in that.

Summary

Much of the current literature on school leadership pertains to “what principals need to know and be able to do” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, p. 14) rather than the practices that add criticality to their multifarious position. This highlights the difference between *problem solving* within a rational model of social justice and *problem creating* in a critical and political model of social justice. The relevant literature reinforces the need for school principals to practice critical reflection in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands that are further complicated by injustices that they may unconsciously be reinforcing with a global neoliberal framework. Chapter Three outlines the methodology of this project, including descriptions of interpretivist research and research for social justice and the data collection and analysis techniques for this qualitative research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter includes an overview of the paradigms and methodological components of this qualitative research project, including a summary of the interpretivist research principles that underpin it. The data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations reviewed in this chapter pertain to the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: What constitutes a “social justice leadership dilemma” for school leaders?
- Research Question 2: What influences impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice leadership dilemma?
- Research Question 3: What are school leaders’ understandings of the concept of social justice?
- Research Question 4: How do school leaders’ understandings of the concept of social justice influence their practice?

In keeping with the organic nature of qualitative research, it should be noted that the wording of the original research questions were refined and edited in the course of the study for several reasons:

1. Questions three and four were initially combined in a compound question, and these were separated for ease of analysis.
2. Question two was originally phrased as “what concept, tensions, and understandings influence the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice dilemma”, and this was collapsed into “what influences impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice dilemma”. The decision to change this occurred after a member-check exercise in Stage 2 when participants discussed the data as it pertained to their understandings of concepts,

tensions, and understandings. They decided that understandings and concepts could be collapsed into one category and that understandings are formed from the experience of tensions; however, it was agreed that the wording of the questions was loaded and distracted from the data collection about influences.

Qualitative Interpretivist Research

Qualitative interpretivist research focuses on “the self-reflective nature of research” (Creswell, 2007, p. 3); accordingly, it accepts the notion of multiple, subjective, contextual realities that are socially constructed by way of experiential knowledge, professional knowledge, feelings, collegial context, and personal attributes (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1993; Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007). The intention of this genre of research is to describe the different perspectives revealed by participants in order to reflect their context-specific understanding(s) (Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007). It relies on the researcher’s interpretation of what she sees, hears, and understands and cannot be separated from her own background, history, context, and prior understandings (Creswell, 2007). Emergent and reflexive data collection in interpretivist research occurs in natural contexts and through a variety of sources intended to develop a holistic understanding through dialogic and social constructed means (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; and Willis, 2007). These characteristics of qualitative interpretivist research are outlined in Table 2 as synthesized in the topics of purpose, epistemology, research design, data collection, data analysis, and role of the researcher.

Table 2

Characteristics of Qualitative Interpretivist Research

QUALITATIVE INTERPRETIVIST RESEARCH	
Purpose	Situated, contextual understanding Learning the meaning that participants hold about the questions Tentative acceptance of explanations
Epistemology	Constructivist/Social constructivist
Research Design	Flexible – design decisions made in progress as the researcher begins to understand the context better Cognizant of social, political and/or historical context
Data Collection	Work in natural contexts Emergent; reflexive Seeks multiple perspectives and varied sources of data to develop a holistic understanding Values social interaction and co-construction of ideas through an open approach Dialogue/Reflective processes
Data Analysis	Reflexive Inductive and deductive Interactive
Role of the Researcher	Primary research tool Varying forms of openness and participation with the participants Demonstrated ability to understand her subjectivity in interpretation

This framework had implications for both the data collection and data analysis of this interpretivist research; namely, strategies of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) such as dialogue, reflection, and reflexivity, and an awareness of researcher positionality as described in the following sections:

Dialogue

The dialogic nature of interpretivist research is consistent with its constructivist epistemology which recognizes that knowledge creation is dependent on language and

interaction. Fairhurst and Grant (2010) agree that “language does not mirror reality; rather it constitutes it. Seen in this light, communication becomes more than a simple transmission; it is a medium by which the negotiation and construction of meaning takes place” (p. 174). This condition of discovery and insight through dialogue is also specified by Senge (1990) as conversation void of assumptions and power differentials. Rather, dialogue becomes the sharing of new knowledge within a mutual, safe, and inclusive learning journey whereby “dialogue is not simply talk, but relationships and understanding that lead to ethical action—action that is essential, communal, and collaborative” (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 161). Finally, Wheatley (2009) affirms that to be collectively curious, confused, and open to discovery through conversation will restore hope in a future that is open, generous, and respectful. She insists that connecting with people increases their mutual understanding of experiences, knowledge, assumptions, and behaviour.

From a critical perspective, Cannella and Lincoln (2009) highlight the role that discourses play in perpetuating inequitable power relations and preventing transformative action. They maintain that “language gives form to ideologies and prompts action, and consequently, is deeply complicit in power relations and class struggles” (p. 55). This was pertinent to the role of dialogue in the context of this interpretivist research because of the need to eradicate the rhetoric of social justice and engage in truthful examination of values and practices. In other words, to talk ‘about’ social justice and critical concepts on the surface without delving into the complexity of the concept maintains the cycle of the rhetoric that social justice endeavours are accused of espousing. Cannella and Lincoln also caution that the language of critical perspectives is often veiled and alienating:

“When dominant understandings are so thoroughly embedded within truth orientations, critical language and abstract terminologies ensure that ideas will not be received by a patient audience that has learned to expect answers to generalizable solutions” (p. 59). This has significant implications for the type of accessible dialogue that is facilitated in order to be a motivating and empowering source of conscientization as opposed to one that is alienating and causes participants to disengage by defaulting to what is known, knowable, and concrete. For example, in this study, the risk of dialogue drifting to complaint sessions was carefully monitored and steered back in the direction of dilemma analysis and conceptualizing. The power complications that can also arise from group dialogue risk hindering the life-enhancing, energizing, and productive intent, so I attempted to create a safe, dialogical space for this research by acknowledging the value and contribution of all participants, communicating openly, balancing discomforting questions with humour and humility, and seeking input from participants throughout all stages. Finally, since the results of qualitative research are intended to resonate with other practitioners, the creation of accessible means of communicating the research becomes an ethical consideration.

Reflection

Reflection is regarded as a strategy for inquiry in the interpretivist realm of research. According to Donald Schön (1987), reflective practice is described as an “art” such that it is an ambiguous, uncertain, and complex process that occurs in context and develops from construction and reconstruction of “swamp experiences” or trials. This is contrasted to post-positivist, rationale-technical approaches in research. Interpretivists rely on two components of reflection: reflection-*in*-action (monitoring) and reflection-*on*-

action (evaluation) both of which were targeted in this research through the questioning techniques in the group dialogue sessions, semi-structured interviewing, and exit slips. Since the intended outcome of reflective practice is to reformulate and align understandings, beliefs, and practice within the professional context, always cognizant of the wider, relevant theory (Griffiths, 2003), I provided ongoing opportunities to use reflection as a “catalyst for insights” (Willis, 2007, p. 205). These opportunities included open-ended discussion questions, exit slips, and interviews.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity pertains to the relationship between researcher and data/theory, researcher and self, and researcher and researched. It is described as mutually beneficial, dialectical theory building by participants with an awareness of their positionality and knowledge. Qualitative research is emergent in the way that it “work[s] back and forth between the practice and explanatory theories or understanding, which means that the influence can be in either direction” (Willis, 2009, p. 213). Accordingly, the researcher must be open to what Lather (1991) defines as the self-reflective processes that facilitate reciprocity between data and theory that “keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which all data is poured” (p. 62). While a neo-Marxist worldview supports the research process with a priori theory, Lather cautions that circular logic risks conceptual overdeterminism whereby theory reinforced by experience is conditioned by theory without openness to collaboration, resulting in theory imposition. In other words, the researcher who sets out to find field examples to support his/her already existing theory is, in fact, not contributing to the explanation about the phenomenon that is being examined. In such cases, the synthesis between thesis (a priori theory) and antithesis

(data) does not result in emergent theory because of the lack of dialectical process where researcher and researched bring different perspectives together in the pursuit of higher understandings. In the same way, Griffiths (1998) maintains that “reflexivity provides a way of acting on the knowledge, that knowledge is perspectival, and on the possibility that there may be a complete change of mind in the middle” (p. 141). Furthermore, she recounts that the researcher’s awareness of his or her positionality as well as the participants’ positionality and worldviews are a fundamental aspect of this reflexivity.

Reflexivity is dependent on the dialectical interchange among the researcher’s constructs, the research data, and the researcher’s ideological biases, and it involves an acknowledgement of the impact of personal history, power, status, interactions, and discourses with the participants throughout the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This process is embedded in openness to multiple perspectives and the reciprocity of learning whereby transformation is mutual because of the researcher’s openness to be influenced in the development of a shared understanding of the problem and the solution (Anderson, 1989; Lather, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Lather (1991) outlines strategies for increasing reflexive and dialogic reciprocity that include:

- Conducting interviews in an interactive dialogic manner that requires self-disclosure on the part of the researcher;
- Sequential interviews to probe research issues deeply;
- Negotiating meaning by recycling description, emerging analysis and conclusions to a subset of participants; and
- Discussing false consciousness ... to test the usefulness, the resonance, or conceptual and theoretical formulations. (pp. 60-61)

The power of reflexivity was evident throughout this research in the consistent and detailed communication between myself and participants. My goal was to get an

overview to participants while the memory of our discussion was still fresh and as a means of continuously engaging them with the topic. Although I had not considered more persistent communication with participants in between dialogue groups when I planned the study, I felt that it was important to establishing relationship and member checking. While I didn't expect a reply, it was important to honour participants' need for "think time" because there was an element of "warming up" to the complex or difficult conversations that I discovered could not be rushed in the two-hour dialogue groups.

Participants expressed appreciation for the ongoing contact, data summaries, and opportunity to comment on the evolution of the analysis. They also articulated how powerful it was to network with other principals and dialogue about their understanding of social justice. The professional learning that I received from the opportunity to spend over 35 hours with principals and over 80 hours working with the data from those meetings exemplifies the reciprocity of the learning experience attained through this research.

Positionality of the Researcher

In stark contrast to the objective and distanced stance of the researcher in positivist research, the qualitative researcher is open to multiple perspectives; this was an important aspect of the reflexive and interactive processes of my research. While the research agenda in this study was predetermined by me and the topical agenda of the group dialogue sessions was aligned with the aims of the study, collaborative analysis was used at each group dialogue meeting in stage two of the research to ensure that there was a shared understanding of the data collected. Not only did this serve to member

check and validate the findings, it also maintained transparency so that the emerging inquiry took into account a collective knowledge of the data.

My role in this research was as a facilitator of the process, and I participated in group dialogue sessions with this positionality, though not as a research participant myself. To that end, my positionality was distanced from those of the participants while, at the same time, I was an integral part of facilitating the dialogue group. Ascertaining the awareness level of participants of the internal and external factors that influence decision making through effective questioning techniques occurred spontaneously throughout the course of the data collection. This questioning protocol is consistent with the personal and humanistic approach of interpretivist research that focuses on factors such as emotions and unconscious influences in an effort to seek understanding “holistically and within the larger context in which it resides” (Willis, 2007, p. 211).

An ongoing consideration in the timing, content, and language that I used throughout the course of the data collection pertained to the academic (privilege of higher education), linguistic (inaccessible language), and professional armour (clothing and demeanor) that can position the researcher as the ‘knower’ and alienate the participants by diminishing rapport and trust (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Reflexive questions were used to elicit reflective practice and awareness. These questions included: (a) why did you choose a particular dilemma over other dilemmas that you have experienced? (b) what are the equity issues in the dilemma? (c) what factors influence the decision making? (d) who was marginalized by the decision(s)? (e) who was empowered by the decision(s)? (f) what is the source(s) of the angst and tension? (g) what are alternate

possible courses of action? (h) how has your conceptualization of social justice evolved?
i) how have your own experiences impacted how you see this?

As outlined in the prologue, my experience as a school principal in independent Catholic schools framed the research agenda, and this was also shared with participants as a means of contextualizing the research. Professional encounters with social justice dilemmas enhanced my insight and ability to dialogue with participants, probe for data, and interpret the findings; however theoretical sensitivity, which has been developed through my personal and professional experiences and evolving knowledge in this topic, was acknowledged. Necessarily, I had to attempt to bracket my values and perspectives in the interpretation of the findings. Denzin (2002) describes bracketing as an important process of isolating or “suspending” (p. 358) experience, preconceptions, and theoretical sensitivity from the analysis process such that “the researcher does not interpret the phenomenon in terms of the standard meanings given to it by the existing literature” by “confront[ing] the subject matter, as much as possible, on its own terms” (p. 359). While this is impossible in a pure sense, the recognition of my own positioning and the use of strategies to co-construct meaning with participants helped to ensure that the analysis was trustworthy and reflective of participants’ meaning making.

Critical Orientation: Research for Social Justice

This interpretivist research adopted a critical orientation such that it incorporated methods and ideology of critical theory and a recognition of the social and cultural structures that impact knowledge (Willis, 2007). Griffiths (1998), distinguishes between social justice *in* educational research which occurs by way of the purposes and processes of conducting the research, and social justice *from* educational research, or praxis, which

manifests changes that benefit individuals and society. She outlines the purposes of social justice research as gaining knowledge *about/for/with* people; searching for truth; empowering others; empowering ourselves; giving/getting voice; influencing policy change; and influencing political processes. She also differentiates four categories of social justice research as follows:

1. Research that is focused directly on particular injustices for categories of people: perspectives of particular groups, organized by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, and also of groups such as children, teachers or others which seem to be at a relative disadvantage in the production of theory.
2. Research with a framework that depends on the researcher's orientation to justice issues, but which is 'about' something else.
3. Research with implications for social justice, in its implicit or explicit approach to educational improvement, but where this is ignored as an issue.
4. Research which has an approach to epistemology and methodology that is consistent with working for social justice. (p. 92)

However, Griffiths (2003) maintains that "trying to pin down social justice is always unfinished business" (p. 60). Using Griffiths' (1998) categories of social justice research, this dissertation consisted of research: (a) with a framework that depends on the researcher's orientation to justice issues, but which is 'about' something else; (b) research with implications for social justice, in its implicit or explicit approach to educational improvement, but where this is ignored as an issue (ie: effectiveness of changes to decision making will not be measured); and (c) research which has an approach to epistemology and methodology that is consistent with working for social justice (p. 92), namely emergent, context-specific, and value for the subjectivity of the participants.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe the element of flexibility in qualitative research as the capacity of the researcher to make design decisions in process as the data collection and analysis emerges. Similarly, Willis (2007) argues that “change is encouraged because qualitative researchers assume you will change as you come to know and understand the research context better” (p. 197). Accordingly, I had only a tentative hold on the design throughout this research, and changes, as noted throughout this chapter, were made in response to the evolution of the study and the emergent relationship that was established with and among the participants.

Participants

Rapley (2007) notes that recruitment of participants can be one of the most challenging aspects of the research process, because finding knowledgeable participants with a range of views who are willing to participate can be difficult. Since work-related information would comprise the data, the first step in the recruitment of participants for public schools involved a request to school superintendents for permission to recruit principals by open invitation. This request occurred via email correspondence to superintendents which included the consent form as detailed in Appendix A. Out of the four school divisions that were approached, three granted permission and one denied permission. Once permission was received from the superintendents, recruitment of participants occurred through purposive sampling by open recruitment invitation that was emailed individually to each principal (Appendix B). The five participants from the public divisions came from two of the three school divisions that granted approval to recruit. The structure of Catholic schools is different than the public schools because each school operates independently without a central, governing Board office; therefore the

principal is the highest level of authority and permission to participate came from the principals themselves through informed consent. This also suggests, however, that each principal works independently and does not have access to the same kinds of professional administrative networks that might occur in public schools. All principals from Catholic schools received an recruitment invitation (Appendix B). The five participants from the Catholic division came from schools located in different parts of the city.

Purposive sampling is defined as “a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria which may include specialist knowledge of the research issue or capacity and willingness to participate in the research” (Oliver, 2006, p. 245). This sampling procedure included a non-representative subset (principals interested in social justice dilemmas) of a larger population (principals), who participated in order to study conceptualizations of social justice in the context of dilemmas. Recruitment communication consisted of sharing all aspects of the research, including the purpose of the study, a clear description of the time commitment and requirements of participation, and the foreseeable risks and potential benefits. Although each school division varied in its response time to the invitation to participate, total recruitment of participants occurred over a one-month period. An informed letter of consent was obtained from each participant before proceeding with the research (Appendix C).

As in Griffiths’ (1998) work, some participants included school principals “who are already personally known to me in a professional context, so that time would not be spent negotiating social relationships” (p. 24). Professional relationships with these

principals had occurred through collegial networks, mutual conference participation, or committee work. Other participants were known to each other because they came from the same school division. Oliver (2006) maintains that this type of limitation is mitigated by ensuring there is “consistency between the aims and epistemological basis of the research, and the criteria used for selecting the sample” (p. 245). Accordingly, the criteria of entry for participants was specified as a motivation and willingness to engage critically about leadership practices as they relate to: (a) dilemmas that cause tension and angst and for which there are no clear-cut answers; and, (b) conceptualizations of social justice dilemmas. Diversity in years of experience, gender, and level of school (early/middle/senior) were considered optimal in the participant sample; however, this did not limit the research design. Recruitment efforts generated ten participants who offered to participate in the study as listed with pseudonyms in Table 3 below. In order to protect the identity of the participants, they have not been identified as belonging to the Catholic or public participant sets.

Table 3

Research Participants

	Name	Gender	School Level	Years of Administrative Experience
1.	Carol	Female	Junior/Senior	10 years
2.	Earl	Male	Senior	4 years
3.	Rebecca	Female	Early/Middle	4 years
4.	Gerry	Male	Early/Middle	9 years
5.	Richard	Male	Early/Middle	10 years
6.	Lisa	Female	Early/Middle	11 years

(table continues)

7.	Vivian	Female	Early/Middle	13 years
8.	George	Male	Early/Middle	13 years
9.	Garth	Male	Early/Middle	14 years
10.	Sean	Male	Middle	11 years

A limitation in this participant set was the lack of ethnic representation, since all participants were part of the dominant group as Caucasians. Further, there were only two principals who were from the senior high level. Both of these factors are recognized as having an influence on how participants perceived dilemmas and engaged in the research. Participants averaged ten years of administrative experience, and this may speak to the motivation for professional development at this particular career stage which is discussed further in the conclusions of the study. Finally, there were four female and six male participants. In the initial recruitment stage, there were six female and six male participants, however two female participants withdrew early in the study due to work-related commitments. It should be noted that the schools in which participants worked varied greatly in demographics, ranging from affluent to low socio-economic status, culturally homogeneous to culturally heterogeneous, and location in the city: north, south, and central.

Another recruitment consideration of this study was the time commitment required from participants which was a minimum of nine hours. This is consistent with a challenge outlined in Griffiths' (1998) description of her project: "a central feature of the method was the intention of developing sustained dialogue in spite of having chosen to work with some of the busiest people I know ... sustained dialogue is particularly difficult if it has to be fitted into already overcrowded professional lives" (p. 23). Several participants noted concern about this commitment, especially the difficulty of being out

of their buildings during school hours. One superintendent also expressed apprehension about the time requirements for principals, and this caused a delay in the approval process that she ultimately granted for the principals in her division after I explained the safeguards I would establish to respect principals' time. Consequently, it was important for me to honour these worries in the scheduling of all stages of the research. Participants were assured that interviews and meetings would be concise, focused, and limited in number in order to maintain their engagement and commitment. The timeframe of the data collection was limited to a three-month period as arranged according to mutually convenient and agreed-upon times by the participants. Stages 1 and 3 interviews were conducted during school hours at each participant's school site. Stage 2 group dialogue sessions took place at a central and accessible city location with free parking, as agreed upon by participants. Participants were surveyed about their group dialogue meeting preferences, and the majority of participants indicated that it was easiest to meet from 3:00 – 5:00 pm, and each of these sessions began and concluded on time. However, I underestimated the amount of time needed to activate and orient principals towards the topic in order to reach beyond surface ideas, especially because the meeting time was at 3:00 p.m. after participants had put in a full day at school. Sometimes, participants admitted that they were distracted by a situation with which they had been dealing right before the focus group. Some participants also had to return to their schools after the focus group for meetings and commitments with which they said they were also preoccupied.

Attendance for the Stage 2 group dialogue sessions was high considering the unpredictability of a school principal's schedule. All of the principals attended Stage 2

session #1, and eight out of ten of principals attended Stage 2 sessions #2 and #3.

Principals who were absent from these sessions reported unanticipated work-related events or situations that conflicted with the date after we had set our research schedule.

Methodological Influences

The methodology of this study was informed by a number of research studies and scholarship in the area of social justice, school leadership, and dilemmas. An explanation of how each study shaped and influenced my research design is included in the paragraphs below.

Griffiths (1998) embarked on a funded action research study with school principals wherein she facilitated the development of a set of twelve social justice principles based on the participants' professional experiences and focus group discussions on social justice concepts. This document is entitled, *Fair Schools*. The framework that emerged from this research was intended to be used to make changes in their respective schools. Griffiths also used the *Fair Schools* document to theorize about social justice, however, the extent to which subsequent change initiatives were successful as a result of the research was not studied. My research design parallels the use of individual interviews coupled with dialogue group discussions methods, but more specifically narrows the social justice conversations to the examination and analysis of what influences impact the decisions that principals make when facing a dilemma.

Lawson (2008) reinforced the influence of dialogue on knowledge construction: "oftentimes, one participant would bring a challenging issue to the group and, together, through dialogue, the group would attempt to solve the problem, by examining alternatives, weighing pros and cons, exploring each other's views, and articulating

potential solutions” (p. 134). Her study was informed by Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism and the concept of scaffolding within the zone of proximal development whereby “people’s independent learning capacity can be enhanced with support from a more knowledgeable other” (Griffiths, 2003, p. 110). The influence that this dialogue had on Lawson’s participants became an important aspect of my research design because it demonstrated the importance of fostering opportunities for reflection *in* and *on* action within a context of varying perspectives and experiences. Accordingly, my research design grew to include a multi-stage design including a Stage 1 pre-interview, a Stage 2 series of three dialogue group sessions, and a Stage 3 post-interview. Lawson’s use of exit slips was built into this study.

Windschitl (2002) presents a theoretical analysis of dilemmas teachers face in teaching from a constructivism standpoint. Although the subject of study was not social justice leadership, nor the participants school principals, this article confirmed a parallel notion of research as applied to my topics. For example, Windschitl noted that “constructivism in practice is a concept situated in the ambiguities, tensions, and compromises” (p. 131) which was consistent with my a priori theory that social justice leadership is situated in the ambiguities, contradictions, and dilemmas that arise within the identity and agency of the school principal. Windschitl’s framework is a tool for teachers, “providing critical questions that allow them to interrogate their own beliefs, question institutional routines, and understand more deeply the forces that influence their classroom practice” (p.131). My research was a heuristic for principals, providing time and opportunity to both individually and collaboratively debrief their own and others’ dilemmas and to allow them to interrogate their own beliefs, question institutional

routines, and more consciously examine what influences decisions they make when facing a dilemma.

Alemán (2009) completed a case narrative study on a school principal who was confronted to help resolve a web of conflicts including a classroom incident involving racist and bigoted language, a parent's frustration with her child's schooling experience, and a district official's concern over diversity and equal educational opportunity. Through her understanding and use of conflict, the principal recognized the micropolitical implications and considered how social justice leadership could permeate the situation. The purpose of Alemán's study was to "reconsider how questions or events often deemed as controversial or inflammable can lead to transformation of practice and school culture" (p. 2). Post-study, he concluded that "conflict may also serve as a catalyst for larger discussions of deficit thinking or shifts in the educational practice of a school. Capitalizing on these instances of conflict as 'leadable' moments, school leaders are situated to leverage conflict for social justice aims" (p. 1). This study was influential in my research design because it most closely resembles the purpose of my study. Although I used the term 'dilemma' and Alemán used the word 'conflict', using the analysis of a specific situation to understand it, its origins, and its context as well as to use it in a professional development sense to examine how social justice leadership practices can be leveraged through it, was one of the purposes of my research. Building on Alemán's notion that conflict creates teachable moments, my study intended to use a reflective practice approach to analysis by discussing Alemán's case study and the concluding questions for discussion.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a four-month period in three distinct stages of research as described in this section. Willis (2007) asserts that “thoughtful reflections of experienced practitioners are a prized source of knowledge and understanding for interpretivists” (p. 110); accordingly, the data collection in this study aimed at gathering multiple perspectives from both public and Catholic school principals in the field who became engaged in reflective practice. Denzin (1994) emphasizes that data collection in interpretivist research focuses on “socially constructed realities, local generalizations, interpretive resources, stocks of knowledge, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and ordinary talk” (p. 502). However, it is important to be aware that reflection can validate ineffective and harmful practices that are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny (Gee, 2004), and this was a limitation in the self-reported nature of this research. Rorty (1991) recommends open discussion and the sharing of multiple perspectives in order to understand the truths of others and to challenge thinking so that reflectivity does not remain rooted in an unconscious interiority. While I probed in the Stages 1 and 3 interviews to mitigate this limitation of self-reported and reflective practice, participants in Stage 2 were also encouraged to challenge one another. As participants became more comfortable, this began to occur in the course of the dialogue.

According to Wolcott (1994), there are three primary fieldwork strategies used to gather triangulated data: experiencing, enquiring, and examining. For the purposes of this study the first two strategies were used; namely, experiencing which included observation and field notes throughout all stages of the research, and enquiring in the Stages 1 and 3 interviews and Stage 2 group dialogue sessions, as well as the exit slips and the sensory

exercise completed in Stage 2. Table 4 outlines the data collection matrix for this study as it relates to the sources of data for each of the research questions.

Table 4

Data Collection Matrix

Research Questions	Data Collection
What constitutes a social justice dilemma for school leaders?	Stage 1 interview transcripts Stage 2 dialogue group transcripts Stage 2 exit slip #2 Stage 2 sensory activity
What influences impact the decisions that principals make when facing a social justice leadership dilemma?	Stage 1 interview transcripts Stage 2 dialogue group transcripts Stage 2 exit slip #2 Stage 3 interview transcripts
What are school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice?	Stage 1 interview transcripts Stage 2 dialogue group transcript Stage 2 exit slip #2 Stage 3 interview transcripts
How do school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice influence their practice?	Stage 1 interview transcripts Stage 2 dialogue group transcript Stage 2 exit slip #2 Stage 2 sensory activity Stage 3 interview transcript Stage 3 exit slip

Stage 1

Preskill and Brookfield (2009) propose that interrogating oneself about purposes, actions, and achievements is the means through which analysis and therefore learning occurs. This is supported by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) who describe humans as “storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 1). As such, Stage 1 initiated the knowledge-generation process about how principals define a social justice dilemma and what influences impact the decisions that principals make when

facing a dilemma. In Stage 1, inquiry occurred through semi-structured interviews with each participant. The purpose of this interview was to gather a detailed narrative about a real-life, respondent-generated dilemma (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 191); therefore, participants chose what to focus upon in a naturalistic fashion. Demonstrating respect for the way that the participant “frames and structures the response” is consistent with the interpretivist nature of this research, and Marshall and Rossman (2011) insist that “the participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (p. 144). For this reason, each participant was prepared ahead of time regarding the nature of the first interview so that he/she had sufficient time to contemplate a dilemma that had been experienced in a professional capacity. This preparation was communicated to participants in written form on the Stage 1 Interview Instruction Sheet (Appendix D) that was provided after consent to participate in the study was received. An important aspect of preparing participants for Stage 1 was defining what is meant by a dilemma by articulating that it is a situation wherein the participant has had to make “difficult or heart-wrenching choices” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 191). Efforts were made to prevent researcher influence by not providing examples of dilemmas as this would too narrowly focus the dilemmas to be identified by participants. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) advise that since this type of inquiry in Stage 1 frames the beginnings of “a process of collaboration involving storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds” (p. 4), the participant should be given the opportunity to share his/her story first. Accordingly, my own positionality was not shared until Stage 2.

While Marshall and Rossman (2011) maintain that dilemma analysis “can be useful for focusing and standardizing data collection ... [because] ... people like to recount poignant, heroic, and angst-provoking situations” (p. 191), they also indicate that “dilemma analysis can be dilemma laden” (p. 191). There are several risks inherent in dilemma analysis which were important considerations for the researcher: difficulty interpreting personalized reflections because of the possibility of the participant fixating on details; difficulty analyzing and interpreting different dilemmas; dependency on participant motivation to take the exercise seriously and be open and trusting of the researcher; and selective recall of the dilemma with too much focus on subset of experience, inferences, and reinterpretation (p. 191). Many of these factors were addressed through my attention to perceptive listening and questioning skills.

Capitalizing on opportunities to probe carefully and critically were also used to address these challenges. However, Marshall and Rossman caution that the recollection of dilemmas are often entrenched in “thorny circumstances” (p. 192) that can elicit strong emotional responses, particularly when the dilemma is respondent-generated.

Demonstrating sensitivity through active listening was an important role for me. While none of the participants were emotional when recounting the details of their dilemmas, the topic of stress and emotions in leadership was raised by some participants in Stage 2.

Interviews were audio-recorded using a hand-held digital audio recorder, and transcriptions for Stage 1 were completed by a transcriptionist in order to expedite the process for the collaborative analysis that occurred in Stage 2. A confidentiality agreement was signed by the transcriber.

During the Stage 1 interviews, the researcher probed, as necessary, with the use of follow-up elaborating questions. Depending on the detail provided in the participant's responses, these probes ranged from open-ended elaborations, open-ended clarifications, or detailed elaborations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 145). Participants also had the opportunity to review the transcripts from the Stage 1 semi-structured interviews in order to add, delete, or change responses and to ensure that all identifying information had been anonymized. All transcript reviews were sent via password-protected email, and a confirmation of receipt was requested. Participants had two weeks to review their transcripts, after which the researcher continued with the analysis. The Stage 1 Interview Protocol is included in Appendix E.

Stage 2

Stage 2 consisted of two, two-hour group dialogue sessions held separately for each of the two participant sub-groups and one two-hour group dialogue session held with the total participant group. The purpose of these sessions was to provide participants with the opportunity to engage in collective reflective practice regarding their conceptualization of social justice, its influence on their practice, and the decisions they make when confronting a dilemma. Data collection in this stage included video and audio-taped group dialogue discussions that took place approximately every second week over a two-month period.

Although the initial research design did not include a plan to combine the two groups, a desire to meet the other participant sub-group was expressed by some participants in each group through the exit slips. I also noticed after the second dialogue group that each of the participant sub-groups had started cycling around the same themes, and I felt that it might be enriching for them to hear additional perspectives, potentially

allowing us to increase the breadth and depth of our discussions. Finally, a change in format would permit us to work with the data in new and different ways: the first two dialogue groups occurred in a whole-group sharing arrangement, but joining the two participant sub-groups allowed us to engage in mixed groupings and to do carousel activities. The anticipated risk of combining the groups was that the trust-building processes that had occurred within the separate groups would not transfer to the whole group, but the expected benefits of introducing diverse perspectives, the requests by participants themselves, and the energy that could be generated by changing the format outweighed this risk. When scheduling the final combined group proved not to be a challenge, it was confirmed with all participants. In fact, eight out of ten of the participants indicated that the combined group dialogue session was a highlight of the whole research process for them. Many participants also noted that it was a more structured and focussed group because of my need to address gaps in the data in this final dialogue group. This change in format required the need for three hand-held digital audio recorders to capture the simultaneous small-group discussions and activities. The video recorder was used for the times in that session that we met as a large group at the beginning and the end.

A flexible topical agenda (Appendix F) in Stage 2 was used to respond to the needs of the group while respecting the parameters of dilemmas and social justice in the research. Time constraints were an ongoing challenge because in addition to the topical agenda, principals wanted to discuss current dilemmas that they were experiencing. In fact, 19 new dilemmas were raised in the course of Stage 2, and this was articulated repeatedly as a need that principals have to process and network with other school leaders

regularly as a means of professional development and collegial support. Time constraints affected my ability to facilitate in-depth analysis of each of these dilemmas; however, I did pay particular attention to “loaded” words and concepts within concepts that were used without elaboration in order to get past dense language choices such as “values”, “fair”, and “do the right thing” while discussing these dilemmas. This language often distracted the group from going deeper, and it veiled the articulation of their understandings. Part of my task was to determine if the organic conversation was relevant to the research questions; and if so, I had to determine how. If it was not relevant, I had to formulate questions to redirect participants.

Another change that occurred in this second stage of the research was to omit the originally planned analysis of an archetype dilemma. This decision was made after session 2 when participants seemed less engaged in the task of the case study narrative (Appendix G). While they went through the motions of answering the structured questions, the conversation did not gain momentum until principals started to add examples from their own practice and dilemmas as a means of qualifying their answers. When asked about this, participants noted that there were so many unknowns about the case study that it became a conversation based on hypothetical responses. Rather, participants were motivated, animated, and engaged to discuss current dilemmas, and they were eager to hear one another’s perspectives. In the Stage 3 interviews, many participants noted that the case study narrative was too contrived as a “catch-all” dilemma; rather, there was a need for organic conversations to unpack dilemmas. While the original intent of the research was to respect participants’ privacy in their reported dilemmas, the comfort level and trust established and maintained within the group

created the spaces to share their own dilemmas. This need for reflection and dialogue has influenced the recommendations made in Chapter Ten.

Exit slips (Appendix H) were completed at the conclusion of each group dialogue session in order to collect very open-ended responses. While the exit slips were an important data collection source, they were also used to frame the agendas for each meeting to fulfill the reciprocal needs of the participants. Participants were provided with a copy of their exit slips to keep as a record of their reflections after each group dialogue session, and they were also encouraged to add any ongoing, reflective comments to them to share in the activation strategy at the beginning of each group dialogue session when they were asked “What thoughts/reflections have you had about social justice since we last met?”

Using a participative model of interpretivist research, each group dialogue session in Stage 2 included collaborative analysis of the data as a means of member checking and validating the data. This collaborative analysis occurred in two ways: one, through carousel activities in the dialogue groups in which participants were given the opportunity to see, discuss, and suggest changes on the data analysis in progress; and two, through email correspondence of a synopsis of the discussions which was sent to participants within a week of each dialogue group. This synopsis was a draft structural analysis of the discussion topics organized around the research questions. Participants were asked the following questions about each synopsis: (1) Is this how you remember the conversation? Is there anything you would add, delete, change, reorganize, rename?; (2) Were there parts of this conversation in which you felt uncomfortable? What was the

source of the discomfort?; (3) What thoughts/reflections have you had about social justice in the interim?

Stage 3

Stage 3 focussed on reflection about the impact that dilemma analysis and reflective practice had on the participants' conceptualization of social justice. Semi-structured interviews with each participant included a review of the original dilemma that participants described in Stage 1 and a debriefing of the group dialogue discussions. These one-hour interviews were digitally audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. The Stage 3 Interview Instructions and Stage 3 Interview Protocol are located in Appendices I and J.

Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis in interpretivist research is to distil and summarize the data into identifiable themes in order to uncover meaning and create insights that resonate with others (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Willis, 2007). By cyclically coding data and developing a system of categories, the researcher begins to inductively identify "patterns of actions and consistencies" (Saldaña, 2009) from which to theorize about each of the research questions.

Manual cycles of coding on hard-copy transcripts, including a colour-coded system of symbols to signify data sources, was used to attain a literal and tactile experience of handling and concretizing the data. Once the final cycle of coding was complete, I affixed the coded and cut-up pieces of transcripts to large pieces of chart paper and posted them in my office for easy visual access. At this point, codes and emerging themes were transferred to electronic format which made it easier to

manipulate. Attention was paid to the themes of each question as well as to how the themes related to one another. My analysis was intended to help me understand overarching concepts as I searched for emergent, inductive similarities, and nuances for how the participants conceptualize social justice and social justice dilemmas. In this way, the theory was grounded in the data (Bogdan & Biklan, 2003; Creswell, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Deductive examination of the data, in light of what the literature describes as social justice and leadership dilemmas, was a standard practice. In order to assess the relevance of the incoming data with the aims of the research and to make informed data collection choices throughout the process, multiple cycles of structural coding were used to aggregate the data. This process enabled me to efficiently label and index the volume of data attained through 20 hours of semi-structured, individual interviews and 10 hours of group dialogue sessions.

First cycle coding of the data was meant to capture the primary content in order to member check with the participants. This cycle included the identification of descriptive codes to summarize the primary topics and organize the data; in vivo codes to honour the terms used repeatedly by the participants themselves, to increase accessibility for member checking, and to avoid academic jargon; and process codes to assign phrases that depicted social justice practices and the actions of social justice decision making. Versus codes were also used in the initial coding to highlight the tensions and issues particular to research question four that asked participants to describe the influences that impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice dilemma. These tensions were used to contrast the influences with the data from question two about social justice practices. However, versus coding was changed in the subsequent cycle of coding

because it implied binary relationships that did not necessarily account for the complex dynamics among the tensions and influences. Second and third cycle coding enabled me to mine the data further to filter and focus on its prominent features, collapse the quantity of codes into axial coding, and to conceptualize the data more accurately. Ultimately, the goal was to codeweave as a “heuristic to explore the possible and plausible interaction and interplay of [my] major codes” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 187).

Given the collaborative nature of the research, ongoing member checks “which invite participants to confirm one’s findings” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 42) played an important role in the Stage 2 data analysis. Analysis endeavoured to be a form of mutual critical enlightenment, particularly as it related to the “social identity characteristics [that] shape communicative behaviours” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 20) and influence participants’ conceptualization of and decision making for social justice. Structural coding helped me to create member-check summaries within the short timeframes between group dialogue sessions. However, as Møller (1996) cautions, this arrangement can become “assymmetrical, where [participants] accepted the analysis because they did not have time to look at it critically” (p. 211). Only two participants replied with minor changes to their transcripts, the rest acknowledged receipt of the transcripts and summaries without making any changes. Instead of assuming that participants were in agreement, I made sure that more time was allotted in the dialogue group session to re-examine the analysis-in-progress, and it was only during these group dialogue sessions that changes to the analysis were made. Deeper analysis after the data collection was completed was done independently.

Since language is the foundation for communicating the participants' conceptualizations of social justice, the dilemmas that they have experienced, and the concepts and tensions that influence decision making, it follows that the analysis of that language-in-use was a part of the research analysis. Rogers (2004) asserts that "discourse is never just a product, but a set of consumptive, productive, distributive, and reproductive processes that is in relation to the social world" (p. 5). This distinction aligns with the social constructivist theoretical framework of the research, and it proceeds on the recognition that language is socially situated within a framework of cultural constraints in which there are spoken and unspoken words with both conscious and unconscious meanings. This form of meaning making was evident in the school and school division culturally-specific language and the normative practices that leaders discussed.

Willis (2007) notes that the analysis stage of the research is subjective since the "description is selective, [and] it is the interpretation of the describer" (p. 292). Therefore, Marshall and Rossman (2011) prescribe the use of reflective field notes as a means of staying connected to the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher throughout the analysis so that feelings, responses, and biases [were] used as research tools (p. 97). These field notes became a narrative of how I was processing the incoming data from the study. Particular attention was paid to decisions that I made in the process of the data collection and analysis, the rationale for those decisions, and the subsequent reflection about those decisions. Articulating new questions and documenting my own thought processes became an important part of the emergent analysis process.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) also outline several considerations for the researcher in the analysis and interpretation stages. Since “the transcription process is not passive” (p. 345), researchers must recognize that the data, researcher’s positionality, and interpretive viewpoint have an influence on the what and how of analysis. Accordingly, the examination of multiple levels of meaning plays an important role in “unearth[ing] hidden meanings of interviewees whose lives and language are often overshadowed by the dominant discourse” (p. 346). These levels became evident in the normative practice discourse and dense language, terms, and value statements that participants used which is discussed in the findings. Since I wore two hats—a principal and a researcher—I needed to be cautious about not resorting to deduction of the data to make it fit within my own conceptualizations of social justice based on both my experiences as a principal and my research in the area.

Particularly with narrative accounts and discourse analysis, transcription can also fall short of capturing the essence and affect of an account. Rapley (2007) agrees that transcripts alone provide a “flat reproduction” (p. 59) of interactions that can cause the researcher to “miss the nuances that [are gained] from hearing a specific tone or voice or pace of speech” (p. 59). Accordingly, video and audio tape were selected to capture nonverbal data. My field notes were also critical to interpreting the language of the participants as well as shaping the probes to get at deeper levels of understanding of how participants conceptualize social justice. Listening to the audio tapes and rewatching the video tapes were an important part of the analysis process to mine the data for nuances. At the second dialogue group of the Catholic participants, the video did not record; I realized that it was not recording at the 90-minute mark, so I fixed the issue and recorded

the final 30 minutes. Luckily, I had a backup digital audio recording that recorded a good-quality account of the dialogue which I used to create the transcript. With only five participants, it was easy to distinguish the voices. In subsequent groups, I tested and retested the recording to ensure that it was working, and I did not experience any other technical mishaps.

In addition to discourse analysis to ascertain what influences impact the decisions that principals make when facing a dilemma, Stage 1 consisted of analyzing the dilemmas themselves. Marshall and Rossman (2011) report that “dilemma analysis focuses on research participants’ reactions to situations that have no right answers, that is dilemmas ... to get at the core of the interview partner’s processes of thinking, assessing, valuing, and judging” (p. 190). Accordingly, data analysis consisted of several processes: dilemma analysis and discourse analysis to assess the units of meaning in the open-ended questions in order to formulate “themes identifying patterns, connections, commonalities, or regularities within the data” (Stringer, 2008, p. 119).

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify different ways to examine themes such as: (a) consensus themes (when the majority of the participants state the same theme); (b) supported themes (when approximately half the participants state a theme); and (c) individual themes (when only one or two participants state a theme). Although, it should be noted that many scholars in the area of research methods caution researchers about the dangers of relying too heavily on frequency of response as the indicator of its importance or relevance (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Willis, 2007). Table 5 quantifies how themes were represented in each stage of the research among the

participants, and this provided a visual synopsis of the data between the two participant sets. These themes are fully discussed in Chapters Five to Eight of this dissertation.

Table 5

Data Analysis Matrix

C = consensus

S = supported

I = individual

		CODES						
		CATHOLIC			PUBLIC			
		Stages			Stages			
		1	2	3	1	2	3	
QUESTION 1 What constitutes a social justice leadership dilemma?	Inclusion: Students	S	S	S	S	S	S	
	Inclusion: Staff	S	S	S	-	-	-	
	Support	C	C	C	C	C	C	
	Safety	I	S	S	I	S	S	
QUESTION 2 What influences the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice leadership dilemma?	External Constraints Social, Cultural, Organizational Structures	Adhering to a Consistent Process	C	C	C	C	C	C
		Individual Versus Collective Needs	C	C	C	C	C	C
		External Controls (law, policy, structures)	S	S	I	S	-	-
		School/Divisional Culture	S	S	-	S	C	-
		Parental Pressure/Expectations	C	C	-	C	C	I
		Leadership Identity/Role of Principal	C	C	-	C	C	I
	Internal Constraints Beliefs, Attitudes, Values, Dispositions	Emotions	I	C	S	-	-	-
		Values	C	C	I	-	S	C
		Perception of Fairness/Equality	C	C	I	C	C	-
		Perception of Dignity	S	-	-	I	I	-
		Perception of the “Right” Thing	S	C	I	C	C	I
		Approach to Relationships	S	I	I	S	I	-
QUESTION 3 What are school leaders’ understandings of the concept of social justice?	Social Justice IN education	-	S	C	C	C	C	
	Social Justice FROM education	C	S	S	C	S	C	

(table continues)

C = consensus

S = supported

I = individual

		CODES	CATHOLIC			PUBLIC		
			Stages			Stages		
			1	2	3	1	2	3
QUESTION 4 How do school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice influence their practice?	Reflect	Withholding Assumptions	S	S	S	S	C	I
		Examining Personal Lens	-	S	C	-	S	C
	Seek to Understand	Culture	-	-	S	S	S	S
		Power	I	I	-	I	C	I
		Marginalization	I	I	C	I	C	I
	Consistently Engage In	Open communication	C	C	C	C	C	C
		Challenge Deficit Thinking	-	I	I	I	S	I
		Open Mindedness	-	C	I	I	C	S
		Create Places of Belonging	-	-	-	S	S	S
		Restore Healing and Restitution	S	S	-	S	I	-
		Engage in Professional Dialogue	-	-	C	-	I	C

Quality of Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the constructs of and procedures for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to assess the degree to which research is trustworthy and rigorous.

Credibility

Credibility denotes the researcher’s recognition of the complex nature of the research as demonstrated in methodology that plausibly measures understanding, ensuring to move beyond superficial snapshots of what is being studied and reporting with integrity. In this dissertation, methods such as participant debriefing, member checks, and opportunities for validation ensured referential adequacy by providing opportunities for participants to “elaborate, correct, extend or argue about” (Rosman & Rallis, 2003, p. 69) during the data collection. Data collection focused on gathering relevant data to answer the research questions (two interviews, group dialogue, exit slips)

and the Stage 2 analysis-in-progress enabled me to see the gaps in the data and devise probes and alternate methods of ensuring that the questions were addressed in multiple ways.

Transferability

While the intent of qualitative research is to study a specific context in depth, transferability to comparable settings can be possible as a result of detailed contextual information or thick descriptions that may “enable others to assess the likely applicability of the research to their own situation” (Stringer, 2008, p. 50). As Stringer (2008) notes, “thickly detailed descriptions therefore contribute to the trustworthiness of a study by enabling other audiences to clearly understand the nature of the context and the people participating in the study” (p. 50). It is recognized that this study was context-bound which limits the transferability of the findings, yet transferability was achieved through the process of collecting detailed descriptions of the dilemmas and social justice practices that may enable audience members to identify with the practice of reflection and analysis of dilemmas as a means of understanding knowledge.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the congruence between the purpose of the study and the design of the study such that both are defended in a review process. Demonstrating dependability includes the articulation of how I accounted for changing circumstances, responses, and outcomes in the process of the study in order to maintain the alignment between my purpose and methods. Consultation about the data collection and analysis changes in the course of the study occurred with the participants as I came to understand the context, and these decisions have been outlined in this chapter. My advisory

committee members also acted as reviewers to ensure the research process and procedures aligned well with the intended purpose of the study as well helped to “modify design decisions, develop possible analytic categories, and build an explanation for the phenomenon of interest” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 69).

Confirmability

Confirmability augments the trustworthiness of research by ensuring that “research accurately and adequately represents the perspectives presented in the study” (Stringer, 2008, p. 51). In this study, the methods of the research were clearly articulated and the findings and interpretations have been contextualized with detailed descriptions. The provision of an audit trail that includes dated and organized raw data, documents, analysis and interpretation products, field notes, and reports of the study (Mills, 2007; Stringer, 2008). Data collection and data analysis process materials will be kept in a locked file for three years in order to support future research or publications, and this was communicated to participants in the letter of informed consent.

Ethical Considerations

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), respect for persons, beneficence, and justice are the moral principles upon which research should be structured. The central dictum to “do no harm” should be rooted in a respect for privacy, confidentiality, and consensual participation with consideration for who benefits from the research. Accordingly, I ensured informed consent, accurate representation and ownership, and I was consistently cognizant of power and issues of reciprocity. Following the protocol of The Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) at the University of Manitoba, I

submitted the necessary application form, procedures description, and informed consent forms. Written permission to conduct this research is included in Appendix K.

Risks and Benefits

Carroll and Levy (2010) argue that reflective work can be hindered by the fact that it is easier to focus on “what to do” and not “what kind of person to be” (p. 228). Rather, the skills and behaviours that are delineated in functionalist leadership studies are intellectually more accessible, concisely prescriptive, and ego-satisfying. The ambiguity, time commitment, emotional investment, and associated angst of identity work requires a significant motivating factor in order to appeal to participants who may ask, “what’s in it for me?”, particularly as it pertains to how reconsidering the landscapes of leadership discourse will assist leaders in making decisions when confronted by a dilemma. Tourish and Barge (2010) insist that this research should be “generative ... [it] should make a positive difference for the participants ... by building their capacity for learning, meaning making, and action” (p. 343). This research was a tool meant to assist participants in the interrogation of their beliefs and institutional routines. It also demanded a more conscious examination of the influences that impact decisions they make when facing a dilemma. The potential for collegial networks and support were also inherent in the nature of the design, and it had the potential to be powerfully enriching in the professional development of school principals.

The emotional investment and motivation needed to interrogate practice is a factor that may have also inhibited action. Waters-Adams (1994) cautions that “the act of making practice problematic can be very demoralising and it can raise so many issues of concern that confidence is severely damaged” (p. 205). This was the case in Robertson’s (2000) action research project where two principals resigned in the course of the research

because their confidence and morale was affected by the rigorous process of examining their practice. However, the benefit of participating in this research was the provision of time and the opportunity to both individually and collectively debrief individual and others' dilemmas. There was a potential for participants to feel uncomfortable or emotionally affected by the process of debriefing dilemmas. In order to address this, the name and contact information for the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) in the respective school divisions was made available to participants if emotional impacts present themselves during the course of the research. I was attentive to reading the tone of the participants and the group as a whole, stopping and starting based on participant needs for emotional safety.

Anonymity

The identity of all participants in the research was protected through the use of pseudonyms, and the location of the research has been masked; neither names nor school divisions appear in the results. However, I was unable to guarantee the anonymity of the participants given the group nature of Stage 2 of the study. While all participants signed group dialogue confidentiality slips (Appendix C) that confirmed that they would not discuss each other's responses outside the group, I was limited in my ability to assure this since not all participants may have kept their views confidential. This limitation was communicated to all participants; however, I continually stressed the importance of trust and confidentiality to the success of the project. Permission for the use of digital audio recording and video recording was included as part of the informed consent. Interview responses and the content of group dialogue sessions was also anonymized from the outset of the study through the use of pseudonyms. Once pseudonyms were assigned to

participants, consent forms were stored in a separate location so that at no point in the study the data could be associated with specific participants. Participants were encouraged to answer only those questions with which they felt comfortable, and they were invited to participate in the group dialogue to the extent that they were at ease. Two participants withdrew from the study before the end of Stage 1, and their data were destroyed promptly.

Given the collaborative nature of the research, ongoing member checks and validation were provided in all stages through transcript reviews and collaborative analysis. All email correspondence containing data was password protected.

Final results of the research were reported in the form of general themes generated from the complete data set, and supporting quotations that were non-identifiable were used to emphasize and/or support the findings. Reference to third-party people not involved in the study had identifiers removed to ensure anonymity.

All research materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and password-protected computer in my residence for three years following the conclusion of the research, after which paper data will be shredded and electronic data will be deleted. Paper data collection includes interview notes, transcriptions, journals, and exit slips. Electronic data includes digital audiotape of Stage 1 and Stage 3 interviews and digital audio tape and video tape of Stage 2 group dialogue sessions. Analysis coding, memoing, and researcher journaling was stored in a locked cabinet at my residence. During the research, access to the materials was limited to myself and my advisor.

Compensation

There was no compensation provided to participants for their participation in this study. A personalized thank-you card and the gift of a book was presented to the participants at the last dialogue session.

Dissemination

Summaries, findings, and preliminary analyses were shared with participants throughout all stages of the research. Following the defense, a summary report of the research was distributed to the participants, superintendents of the participating school divisions, and the Director of Catholic Education. The final report was shared in the form of this dissertation and may also take the form of scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations which will contribute to the growing knowledge base on socially-just leadership practice and how differing conceptualizations of social justice influence the decision making of principals, potentially leading to improved and critiqued practice.

Summary

Creswell (2007) notes that qualitative research targets topics that are “emotion laden, close to people, and practical” (p. 43). Accordingly, this research was designed to understand participants’ perspectives while being respectful of the emergent nature of this sort of inquiry. This chapter provided an overview of the research design of this study, including a detailed summary of the qualities of qualitative interpretivist research, the critical orientation of the study to align with research for social justice, a review of the research that influenced the design, and a description of the data collection and data analysis procedures. Descriptors of the criteria for quality of research and ethical

considerations were reviewed. Chapter Four provides an overview of the discourse of dilemmas in educational administration and a brief description of seven of the dilemmas from this research.

Chapter Four: The Discourse of Dilemmas

This chapter begins with a brief overview of how a dilemma is defined, followed by a discussion about the discourses of dilemmas in school administration and how they intersect with the concept of social justice. A summary of seven of the original twelve dilemmas from Stage 1 of this study is provided to contextualize the findings and conclusions of the research described in Chapters Five through Eight. Given that there were thirty-one dilemmas detailed in the course of the research, dilemmas featured in this chapter were selected based on the amount of detail provided by the participants in the first interview and the degree to which they were representative of other similar dilemmas shared by participants. Following each italicized dilemma, a short analysis is provided which distinguishes what factors the principal identified in addition to my own observations about tensions and conflict that I perceived and how these align with the literature.

Defining a Dilemma

Winter (1982) insists that dilemmas are entrenched in all levels of social organizations because of mixed motives, contradictory purposes, and ambiguous relationships that exist within interactions between people. Complex personalities, power differentials, and discrepancies in perspectives create what Goldring and Greenfield (2005) insist are “contradictory stances that present a paradox of competing positions” (p. 12). Consequently, Marshall and Rossman (2011) define a dilemma as a “situation wherein the participant has had to make ‘difficult or heart-wrenching choices’” (p. 191). Mandzuk and Hasinoff (2010) also describe how difficult it is to find an ideal solution to a dilemma, and Cuban (1996) explains that this leads to uncertainty and struggle for

school leaders. However, Berlak and Berlak (1981) insist that dilemmas are “linguistic constructions that, like lenses, may be used to focus upon the continuous process of persons acting in the social world” (p. 111). These descriptions of a dilemma highlight the importance of considering dilemmas holistically in this research as opposed to seeing them as separate entities that exist outside of the external forces which affect schools.

Many scholars use the word “management” to refer to the decisions that are made in response to dilemmas (Berlak & Berlak, 1981; Campbell, 1996; Cuban, 1996; Goldring & Greenfield, 2005; Mandzuk & Hasinoff, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Management is an intentional word choice that is meant to suggest that resolution is not possible because dilemmas, and their accompanying compromises, are individually constructed, contextually relevant, and one-time strategies that need to be “rebuilt to meet new conditions” (Cuban, 1996, p. 4). However, Campbell (1996) challenges this discussion on the grounds that many dilemmas in school administration are persistent, meaning that they “endure as the overarching dilemma that frames and enables all other dilemmas” (p. 62). Accordingly, this literature acts as a reminder to analyze dilemmas, mindful of the patterns and connections that exist. It is this critical awareness that links administrative dilemmas to the concept of social justice.

Types of Dilemmas

The research on dilemmas in education is dense. It includes qualitative studies that specify tensions in teaching and/or administration, prompting educators to detail and reflect on challenges within their diverse roles. Consistently, the literature reveals a pattern of dilemmas nested in two broader themes: (a) how to manage competing

micro/macro surface-level expectations; and, (b) identifying issues pertaining to how to challenge, support, and steer within the positional power of the role.

Mandzuk and Hasinoff (2010) suggest that dilemmas in education can be categorized according to the tensions that are inherent in them. For example, philosophical dilemmas include conflict between ideology and practice; political dilemmas pertain to managing groups of people with differing opinions, especially within hierarchical power structures and differing levels of influence; and pedagogical dilemmas include struggles over best practice. Finally, they detail moral dilemmas as situations that are entrenched in issues of fairness and justice. These categories align closely with how Windschitl (2002) describes conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political dilemmas experienced by educators.

The research of Berlak and Berlak (1981) focused on dilemmas of schooling as identified through the practices of teachers. They define a dilemma of schooling as “a contradiction that resides in the situation, in the individual, and in the larger society—as they are played out in one form of institutional life, schooling” (p. 125). This definition comes from a critical theory stance, which connects micro events situated in school to macro issues of complex social inequities. They cite three types of dilemmas in schooling, including “control dilemmas about the locus and extent of control over students.... curriculum dilemmas about the transmission of knowledge and ways of knowing and learning [and] ... societal dilemmas about equality, justice and social relations between ages, sexes, and ethnic and racial groups” (pp. 135-136).

Research that more specifically focuses on dilemmas in school administration includes the work of Goldring and Greenfield (2005) who describe three types of

recurring dilemmas in school administration. The first type of dilemma pertains to the tension that administrators experience between leading instruction and managing an efficient and stable school site. This enduring dilemma has become more complex in neoliberal times which are rife with increasing expectations, conflicting values about achievement, and a recognition of diverse students' needs. The second type of dilemma refers to the pressure that administrators experience with competing foci between internal stakeholders and external agendas, policy, partnerships, and community initiatives. The final type of dilemma refers to how administrators approach decisional processes through the use of either distributed participation or directive, individual authority vested in their positional power. Generally, these sorts of dilemmas emerge in situations where there is an "imperative to assume the responsibility to make and implement difficult decisions that may not be endorsed by the collective [yet] acting without consultation may be interpreted as a failure to lead properly" (pp. 14-15).

Møller (1996) also studied administrative dilemmas, and his results revealed three dichotomies in practice with recognition that there may be overlap between two or more of the dichotomies within any one dilemma. The first type of dilemma is control versus professional autonomy, and this refers to the degree that administrators intervene, challenge, and support the pedagogy used by teachers. The tension that exists in this dynamic is about support of and respect for individual style and professional judgments while at the same time creating a collective vision and a collaborative culture. This is muddied by professional norms that have socialized teachers to work independently behind closed doors. Despite an increasing imperative to develop a "collective knowledge base and to reflect on teaching among peers" (p. 217), teachers continue to expect that the

autonomy granted to the profession as a whole to uphold high standards of teaching translates into their right to make independent judgments. Accordingly, administrators struggle with balancing vision, direction, and voice in this type of professional culture dilemma. The second type of dilemma is change versus stability and this often coincides with the first type of dilemma. This type of dilemma refers to both micro- and macro-level change efforts and how to proceed when change is resisted. Finally, the third type of dilemma identified by Møller is loyalty to students and parents versus loyalty to teachers, and this refers to compromises that administrators make between competing interests. This type of dilemma also overlaps with challenge and support depending on where the perceived loyalty is.

Consistent with like research in this area, Cuban (1996) outlines the conflicting expectations within the instructional, managerial, and political roles of school administrators. He calls these plagues “surface” demands, because they are visible and obvious, and he roots them in the bigger issue of identity conflict that is “embedded in the genetic code of the occupation” (p. 11). However, he contrasts surface dilemmas to “underlying” dilemmas that house conflicting values about the purpose, change strategies, and outcomes of schooling that are compounded by continuous reform efforts. These underlying dilemmas require a degree of critical consciousness to aid administrators in interrogating how their “personal values, the nature of school organizations, and the larger society are connected to the dilemmas” (p. 15).

Finally, Heifetz (1994) distinguishes between technical and adaptive problems, and he challenges leaders to reconceive problems as adaptive in order to get to the root of complex gaps between values and circumstances. This perspective requires a process-

oriented type of leadership aimed beyond technical, management strategies. Instead, it requires diagnostic abilities that focus on inquiry into context-specific social and cultural patterns, values, beliefs, and habits.

Dilemmas in This Research

My research created a heuristic to examine dilemmas that principals self-identified as “social justice dilemmas”. However, Berlak and Berlak (1981) explain that the language of dilemmas can be troubling because it “distorts and obscures as well as illuminates” (p. 164). Although dilemmas can act as a lens into understanding, this is a fragmented approach to understanding the nuances of leadership as a social act, including all matters preceding and following the dilemma. Furthermore, consciousness about internal and external factors influences both the perception and the resolution of any given dilemma by any given principal. Despite this complexity, there is much to be learned from dilemma analysis and the language of dilemmas. In their research about dilemmas in schooling, Berlak and Berlak (1981) also found that “some dilemmas are more salient than others for some persons and groups, and their resolutions to these more salient dilemmas appear to influence their patterns of resolution to the others” (p. 165). Accordingly, there is value in the act of intellectualizing and reflecting on dilemmas in practice because it has the potential to impact the social justice practices of school leaders by identifying patterns of injustice.

The next section of this chapter details the three categories of dilemmas depicted in this study. For each category, an italicized scenario is followed by an analysis of the dilemma, and this is intended to help the reader interpret the findings and conclusions detailed in Chapters Five through Eight.

Supporting Students

Supporting the behavioural needs of students is one of the many roles of the principal, referred to by Brill (2008) as the “enforcer hat”. He describes the rule making, accountability, and enforcement aspects of this role as problematic and conflict-ridden because “rules and expectations often are not clear, understood or embraced by all members of the school community....therefore school leaders will be expected to place the role of enforcer and uphold the rules, norms, and expectations of the school community” (p. 34). Since disciplinary decisions consume much of the principal’s time and have become a prescribed part of their role, contradictions and conflicts in this responsibility comprised the majority of reported dilemmas in this study; specifically, the principals’ desire to employ appropriate and fair consequences aimed at restorative justice, healthy relationships, safe learning environments, and learning outcomes. Yet, their consequences often were perceived as unreasonable by students, parents, or staff, and this cacophony of social influences was at the root of why participants identified these situations as dilemmas. Brill (2008) also speaks of this inevitable opposition resulting from what is “misunderstood or misrepresented” (p. 31) by different members of the community. Winter (1982) agrees that such dilemmas result when there is a hierarchy of power in which “different parties who ... have different aims, priorities, and definitions of reality ... [fail] to appreciate the point of view of the other parties involved” (p. 167). Cuban (1996) also refers to this as a dilemma about surface demands; that is, the identity struggle inherent in what type of equity-seeking enforcer principals desire to be versus what they are pressured to be.

One of the underlying dilemmas entrenched in being an enforcer lies in the “hidden curriculum of compliance and docility” (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 225). This agenda is based on culturally constructed ideals of orderliness, responsible behaviour, and self-regulation, which is enacted through normative practices that “objectify, organize, classify, exclude, evaluate, and subjugate individuals” (Brill, 2008, p. 28). Accordingly, the pressure to discipline students exists under the guise that administrators are responsible for “organizing large groups of people to produce designated outcomes or products [through] entrenched hierarchies, divisions of space and time, pervasive observation and sets of impersonal rules and regulations” (Ryan & Rottmann, 2009, p. 491). Brill (2008) notes “how easily school leaders can be drawn into the archetypal power struggle ... embody[ing] the voice and body of authority, which may not necessarily create optimal conditions for growth and development of young people” (p. 34). Ryan and Rottmann (2009) agree that administrators “fall prey to the pressure that impels them to draw on their hierarchical privileges to enforce a particular order in the school” (p. 489), and this conflicts with the desire to promote democratic structures and inclusive practices that many principals deeply aspire to.

McCready and Soloway (2010) insist that “challenging student behaviours, like most social problems, are not common sense. Rather, they reflect complex social and cultural dynamics related to teachers’ and students’ social identities, classroom context, socialization, and the organizational structure of schools” (p. 120-121). Mindfulness of the broader social and cultural issues in supporting students is the point where these types of dilemmas intersect with social justice and critical consciousness.

Supporting students dilemma #1. *There was a lunchtime physical altercation between two grade eight boys. The dilemma was about what the consequence would be that demonstrated a sense of fairness in terms of how you deal with the victim, how you deal with the perpetrator, and how the parents view that each of those children are dealt with. It spills into the question: what is the source of honest contention? You want to do what's right and sadly, there isn't always one right way, and so you do your best given the information that you have in the circumstance and you want to be as close to right as possible, if there is such a thing. The tensions were about being consistent with the culture of the school and managing parent disagreement with my decision because I was new to the school and hadn't established a trust relationship with the community where they knew I had their child's best interests at heart. Justice is about choosing a consequence that is fair and contributes to mending the relationship between the students, teaching them skills to deal with future situations.*

The principal identifies that the source of conflict in this dilemma centers around discord about the chosen consequences. As the new administrator in the building, she feels that parents have not developed deep levels of trust that she has the student's best interests at heart. She feels let down when parents don't validate that she cares about their child, especially because of her value for honouring and respecting students as individuals. Yet, she isn't swayed by social pressures as evidenced by her resolve to stay focused on the bigger picture, "what do we really want to accomplish and are we effectively doing so?" In this case, her focus for the resolution of the conflict was to help the boys mend their relationship socially. However, the conflict within complex social

dynamics, including the misuse of social media by one of the students during the process, is frustrating:

I can deal with parents not necessarily being happy. It's primarily important for me that the students feel happy. Having said that, I know that parents greatly influence children, and children can be perfectly happy about the way something is resolved or dealt with at the school, they go home and their parents stir them up and they come back and they're not happy.

Responding in a just way included deliberate actions rooted in her value for relationships among students, principles of attachment and belonging, and learning about one's self and others. At the same time, she needed to respond to a violent act, so the tension was about how long to suspend the student and, more importantly, how to restore relationships upon his return to school by teaching social and emotional self-regulation skills. This dilemma focuses on surface demands and identity conflict (Cuban, 1996) as well as political and pedagogical factors wherein there is a difference of opinion about what is considered the "right" and "fair" thing to do (Mandzuk & Hasinoff, 2010), which are conceptually ambiguous values.

Supporting students dilemma #2. *Two girls attacked another girl. The attack was filmed by the brother of one of the attackers and posted on Facebook. Bystanders watched the incident and commented on Facebook. The dilemma was whether or not to allow the brother and sister to return to the school, and it was complicated by the fact that these kids have had struggles within their own lives, and within their own academics. They've been in seven or eight different schools but have been at our school the longest*

and made connections with teachers. Letting them stay would be the best thing for them, but we want to send a message; we have to create a safe place for people to be. The sister participated in restitution with the victim and reintegrated into the school, but the brother exhibited a lot of resistance and a second dilemma arose about if we needed to split them up (sending the brother to another school) for the rest of the year.

The principal identifies that there is conflict in acting on what is best for the perpetrators as opposed to what is best for the student body as a whole. Staff feel strongly about all students feeling safe in the school, and this creates further pressure to expel the students. Yet, the principal sees the value of the sense of belonging that has been established with a girl who has had a transient history in a variety of schools. The principal is also worried about the mother of the siblings who has become uncooperative with the school about meetings and assessments that are required. The principal wonders, “How do we support this family that was already struggling and in a crisis? How do you continue to build that relationship and build that trust [with the mother] but at the same time knowing that it has to be more than just ‘I talked to my kids.’”

This highlights a dilemma that captures individualism versus collectivism but also includes the angst that the principal experienced within interpersonal relationships as evidenced by her use of the words “support” and “trust”. There are also loyalty issues between supporting the staff with their position about what conditions create a safe school versus a desire to help the family.

Inclusion: Students

The word “inclusion” has become commonplace in educational circles. Initially, it was relegated to special education, referring to the integration of students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms (White & Cooper, 2012). Increasingly, the term has become

an expected ideal that “supports and welcomes diversity among all learners” (White & Cooper, 2012, p. 524), meaning the inclusion of students who experience a variety of marginalizing circumstances (Theoharis, 2008). Specifically, this includes practices intended to “expose, contest, and overturn ... disadvantages” (Ryan, 2010, p. 374) associated with ableism, race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Accordingly, inclusion has joined the discourses on equity and social justice, because it shares foundational ideals, values, and actions (Ryan, 2010). In this research, principals expressed discomfort with the complex factors and positional power of making decisions about inclusion.

Inclusion dilemma #1. *A child is really enjoying an extra-curricular program, and we know it's good for her not only to be a part of that program, but also because we've seen a change with her at school. However, the program is funded by a grant that stipulates participation requirements of the parents to take some initiative in also supporting the program. When the parents do not become involved as expected, the dilemma becomes about whether or not to allow the child to continue in it, balancing what's best for kids and what works in a system within the rules that bind us with grant money. It becomes a question about who decides what is acceptable in terms of participation and how do we get around those barriers, whatever they are, so that every child is able to participate no matter what situation they're in. Justice is about supporting this family while at the same time doing what is best for the child.*

The principal has acknowledged that the program is good for the child, and she is challenging the constraints of the policy that govern the grant money by asking, is there only one way to define what participation means? She recognizes that if she follows the

policy by the “letter of the law”, the child would not have access to the benefits of the program. At the same time, she does not want to disregard the stipulations of the grant because she appreciates that they exist to place a measure of accountability on the parents whose children have access to the program. They are also intended to help foster healthy family relationships where parents are involved at school with their children.

Furthermore, she wonders what message is sent to parents who participate, as required, if she permits other children into the program whose parents do not participate. She recognizes that this causes other problems in the community between parents, and she sees the cultivation of a healthy school culture as part of her responsibility.

This dilemma is described in the literature as a moral dilemma, because it pertains to issues of fairness, right and wrong while at the same time expressing duties and obligations (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 1988). The principal is torn between doing what she believes is right for the child by including her in the program and honouring the policy, yet she recognizes the bigger issue of the need to help a family that is struggling. The desire to include her aligns with the principal’s philosophical perspective that healthy families equal healthy children, supporting her view that schools and leaders must be involved in community development work that promotes inclusion. This situation highlights the tensions in managing micro and macro level demands; that is, the needs of the child versus the needs of the policy. The principal is also grappling with what Cuban (1996) refers to as an “underlying” demand of the purpose of schooling: if the purpose is to build a community of healthy families because contextually this is necessary, then how does she reconcile that within the constraints of the policy and the other surface demands

of managing the extracurricular program? In the language of Møller (1996), she is also struggling with loyalty issues between bureaucratic needs and community needs.

Inclusion dilemma #2. *We felt that we could not meet the needs of a nursery student with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, because there is not equal opportunity of care and service within the funding structure of Manitoba Catholic schools. There is no school division, per se, from which to draw support. The dilemma was whether or not to let him return to the school for kindergarten after experiencing a lot of struggles supporting him in the nursery program. We ask ourselves: What is best for the child? He had needs that were beyond what we could provide, and he would probably be better served in another school, a public school, that had more resources (FASD programming support, access to consultants, space, lower teacher: student ratio). There were tensions about being in a position to decide that the family wouldn't have equal opportunity to choose a Catholic education for their child. Justice is about doing what is best for the child.*

On one level, the principal is struggling with his philosophical desire to support parental choice in education which has become a normative expectation in neoliberal times. Concurrently, he recognizes the professional imperative to provide programming to support the student while feeling pedagogically limited by what supports can be offered in his school, necessitating, in his view, some level of exclusivity. However, parent choice in education manifests a host of institutionalized injustices, including social and cultural stratification, misperceptions about quality and student performance, and privileged notions of curriculum and pedagogy. This causes further tensions for the principal because of the religious imperative to work for social justice and to provide access to Catholic education.

Catholic schools receive fifty percent provincial funding plus an average of \$1800 tuition paid by the family or a bursary per student each year. Schools operate their own student support services with modest help from outside professionals such as psychologists, speech and language clinicians, and social workers. Catholic schools function autonomously without a central school board or divisional office, and therefore each school allocates student services within site-based budgets without access to support consultants. While it may appear that this is an issue of a budget allocation choice that, made differently, could alleviate this institutionalized injustice, there are a host of teacher and facility support deficits that fall on the shoulders of principals in Catholic schools, and this highlights another tension which is choosing what is best for the child versus what is best for the whole in which political influences, loyalty issues, and contradictions between individualism and collectivism arise. This dilemma centres on Goldring and Greenfield's (2005) dilemma about competing foci between internal factors at the micro level (what is best for this particular child, accessibility of Catholic education) versus external factors (funding realities, available supports). It also speaks to Cuban's (1996) underlying dilemmas pertaining to purpose: what is the purpose of the exclusivity in independent schools?

Inclusion dilemma #3. *We have seasoned teachers who are resistant to change and who use their muscle to intimidate the new-to-the school and the fresh-out-of-the-faculty teachers who have a more contemporary way of doing things and who (in many cases) are more attuned with learning and assessment for our learners, who are very different learners from those of 15-20 years ago. The dilemma is how do we allow for individual creativity and give teachers license to shine in areas that they could shine in*

... but there [also has to be] a common ground with teaching and learning within the school where teachers play in the same sandbox by working as teams with a wealth of knowledge and engagement. There are tensions here about interdependence and imbalances of power among staff. Justice is about building trusting and interdependent relationships in order to provide optimal learning experiences for our students.

The principal identifies two tensions in this dilemma: the first being the collegial and collaborative culture she envisions for the school in which teachers would work interdependently and build positive relationships that benefit teaching and learning. The second is the struggle between individual and collective autonomy over pedagogy (Mandzuk & Hasinoff, 2010; Møller, 1996). She sees this as a justice issue because of the pedagogy required to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students. The principal questions to what extent she can infringe on the individual style of teachers, yet she recognizes the need for collaboration to improve responsive teaching and student learning. She has a vision for the culture of teaching in her school and sees the importance of using her authority to steer teachers in this direction. At the same time, she is cognizant of the power hierarchy that exists between seasoned and novice teachers, and she feels that this relationship is unjust and unproductive.

This dilemma intersects at what Mandzuk and Hasinoff (2010) call a pedagogical dilemma, what Goldring and Greenfield (2005) identify as an authority dilemma, and what Møller (1996) terms a challenge and support dilemma. There is also an underlying dilemma about resistance to change (Cuban, 1996) as it relates to instructional leadership for social justice (McKenzie & Locke, 2010).

Safety

Establishing and maintaining a safe learning environment has become a focus for educators, resulting in an increased awareness of how to nurture students' need to belong and to feel connected, to feel autonomous with a sense of self-determination, and to feel competent (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2010; Manitoba Education, 2010). To this end, attention to bullying, mental health, substance abuse, violence, resiliency, and ethical use of social media is intended to create caring and responsive communities that enhance student engagement and agency. In fact, Edmunds and Edmunds (2010) assert that in addition to a focus on academic skills, consideration of the emotional well-being of students is grounded in research evidence that supports the notion that "a student's sense of belonging and security supports the educational basis for motivation, learning, and self-discipline" (p. 73).

Safety dilemma #1. *There was an underground fight club organized around a draw by the popular kids who were trying to entice the marginalized kids to fight by saying "we'll respect you more; this is how you get your street credit." The dilemma was about the role of the school in activities that occur off-site and outside of school hours. That was a tough sell with the community. We had parents challenge our decisions right to the school board level. The dilemma was also about how to empower marginalized kids so that they don't feel as though this was their only avenue to increase social status. The tensions were about parent response to the school. Emotional and physical safety became the bottom line. Justice is about making things better for the whole community by helping to shift the culture that was hurting marginalized students; this meant imposing harsh consequences on those students instigating this fight club.*

The principal identifies four competing needs in this situation including: (a) how to support resiliency in the disempowered student who thought this was his only way to gain some control in his life; (b) how to support the students instigating the fight club, including consequences for their actions as well as instructive, restorative measures to teach empathy, compassion, and social skills; (c) how to address social media as a factor and source of contention because of how it is used to marginalize some students; and, (d) how to elicit parent support for the consequences. The expulsion of five students was contested by parents all the way to the level of the school board. Despite personal attacks through email and telephone, the principal felt a commitment to changing the tone and safety level in the school. He was confident that, although controversial, the conflict-ridden response to this dilemma made the lives of the majority of his students better. At the same time, he expressed concern about the psyche of the students who were expelled, worried that they would be banished and branded as “bad kids.”

These sources of tension highlight competing needs: How can the principal help both the marginalized and the marginalizers while enforcing a safe learning environment? His value for a safe environment seems to trump all other goals and needs. A theme of individualism versus collectivism is also evident in his focus on how expulsion of the students changed the culture and was ultimately “good for the whole”. These remain surface-level demands (Cuban, 1996) that are visible in the day-to-day work and decisions of the principal.

Safety dilemma #2. *We had a culturally-sensitive situation where we wanted to make sure that a child felt safe, and we wanted to do all of the right things so we were not perceived as being racist. The decision to contact CFS was not optional because of the*

law, but the dilemma was in the perception that the school was culturally insensitive and the impact that had on the relationship with the family. Justice is about listening to children's concerns and taking them seriously even when that means we have to have difficult or awkward interactions with parents.

The principal identifies that the bottom line is what is best for the child, especially in a situation where she has shared concerns about personal safety. Since he believes that social justice is rooted in having a voice, he sees this as a dilemma wherein a child should be given the chance to speak up for herself. This is conflict ridden because the law, as an external factor, necessitates a report to Family Services. Yet, he also recognizes that the family has some cultural beliefs that are different than the mainstream, and so the father's words may have been interpreted out of context. If that is the case, the principal wants to respect the family's beliefs and values and not be perceived as culturally insensitive. He challenges himself repeatedly about the idea of cultural differences and personal paradigms but stays connected to his principles about voice and safety.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was twofold: one, to describe the literature base on educational and administrative dilemmas, and two, to outline a sampling of the dilemmas in this research in order to contextualize the findings for each of the research questions detailed in the next four chapters. All of the dilemmas presented in this research fall within the descriptions of administrative leadership dilemmas outlined in the literature. However, while there exists a variety of labels for what ails teachers and principals, none are named "social justice dilemmas", per say, so that leaves it up to individual participants to extrapolate from dilemmas the details or tensions that make it specifically

a “social justice dilemma”. This requires a high degree of critical knowledge and social justice background as well as the time to unpack and interrogate deeply so as not to focus on superficial details which mask the more complex issues of hierarchical structures.

This chapter has included a description and brief analysis of seven dilemmas described by participants in this research, categorized into three themes: support, inclusion, and safety. Chapter Five includes the findings and conclusions for the first research question, “What constitutes a social justice leadership dilemma for school leaders?”

Chapter Five: Social Justice Dilemmas

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of research question one: What constitutes a “social justice leadership dilemma” for school leaders? While there was consistency among most of the data between the public and Catholic participants, subtle differences that were noted have also been cited for each question. Conclusions related to social justice dilemmas are reported at the end of this chapter.

The first research question focussed on naming and defining social justice dilemmas, and this was done in two stages: first by having participants detail social justice dilemmas and group them into categories; and second, to assign descriptive language to outline the characteristics of those dilemmas. Several sources of data collection helped the participants to name and define dilemmas, including Stage 1 interview transcripts, Stage 2 dialogue group transcripts, Stage 2 exit slip #2, and Stage 2 sensory activity. Throughout the research, there were a total of thirty-one dilemmas detailed. Fifty-five percent (17/31) of those dilemmas pertained to decisions about how to support students with behavioural issues, specifically with decisions about consequences including suspension. Thirty-two percent (10/31) of the dilemmas were about matters of inclusion with students (80%; 8/10) or staff (20%; 2/10). Concerns about safety comprised thirteen percent (4/31) of the dilemmas that were discussed.

Findings

Table 6 outlines the coding cycles for research question 1, and it is included to illustrate the increasing detail and complexity of how participants defined and described a social justice dilemma.

Table 6

Coding Cycles and Themes for Research Question 1

	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3
QUESTION 1 What constitutes a “social justice dilemma” for school leaders?	CATEGORY 1. Inclusion/Participation a. Students b. Parents 2. Discipline 3. Safety	CATEGORY 1. Inclusion/Participation a. Students b. Parents 2. Consequences 3. Safety DESCRIPTORS 1. Complexity 2. Devaluing Humans 3. Power 4. Examination of Values 5. Requires Action Beyond Individual Justice	CATEGORY 1. Inclusion/Participation a. Students b. Parents 2. Support for Behaviour 3. Safety DESCRIPTORS 1. Looks Like 2. Sounds Like 3. Feels Like

Stage 1

Data collection intended to define and describe social justice dilemmas began in Stage 1 with the individual interviews. This stage focussed on the detailing of a specific dilemma experienced by principals in their practice. Inclusion, support, and safety were the categories that the initial 12 dilemmas represented. It should be noted that the interview questions introduced a specific discourse into the research including words such as equity, empowerment, and marginalization, which may have influenced subsequent conversations in Stage 2.

Chapter Four includes a description of seven of the original twelve dilemmas detailed in Stage 1 of the research. These particular dilemmas were selected based on the amount of detail provided by the participants in the first interview and the degree to which they were representative of other similar dilemmas shared by participants.

Stage 2

Additional dilemmas were raised in the course of the group dialogue discussions. In consultation with participants, it was agreed that these dilemmas also fit into the categories of inclusion, support for behaviour, and safety.

Dialogue group #2. The case narrative study provided a starting point for identifying concepts within social justice dilemmas such as racism, socioeconomic divisions, perceptions of others, sexual orientation, bullying, and the marginalizing effect of stereotypes. The second exit slip asked a focussing question to help participants to distinguish between a dilemma in general and a social justice dilemma, “A dilemma is a *social justice* dilemma when ...”. Three participants reported difficulty with this question because of the challenge of defining social justice itself. Two participants described social justice dilemmas to be about fairness, respect, and value for people. These descriptions highlight the dominant discourse of social justice that employs loaded concepts *within* the concept of social justice such as fairness and respect. Finally, two participants talked about the potential for a social justice dilemma to make things better for many (outside of the immediate situation) by challenging the status quo for which an example about questioning and resisting normative practices for school suspensions was cited.

Dialogue group #3. After thirty-one dilemmas were categorized and named throughout the course of Stages 1 and 2, participants were asked to describe what a social justice dilemma looks like, sounds like, and feels like, and this sensory exercise was completed in small groups in the combined dialogue group session. The analysis of this exercise revealed two main codes: anger and sadness emotions as indicated in words such as “offensive”, “frustration”, “misunderstanding”, and “isolated”, and impacts of social

justice dilemmas as highlighted in words such as “polarity”, “struggle”, “push-pull”, and “inequity”. This exercise revealed the emotional aspects of social justice dilemmas; however the outcomes were inconsistent with other research data in which discussions about emotion were decidedly brief and raised only by the participants from Catholic schools. For instance in Stage 1, the Catholic participant group remarked that their Wordles did not capture the angst and emotions that they had experienced in their dilemmas. Two Catholic participants referred to coordinating emotional and rational responses by “aligning the head, heart, and gut.” Another Catholic participant described how it is important to “acknowledge both parent and self emotions” within any dilemma and the degree to which they influence decision making. Berlak and Berlak (1981) confirm that the “intensities of feelings, pain and joy, anger and frustration, are part of life’s daily dramas at school”; accordingly, the lack of conversation about emotions should be noted as incongruent, especially considering the emotional nature of injustice. While Catholic participants discussed emotions, one principal noted that emotions had to be separated from the situation because “they come from a place of self. Ego has to be deleted, removed. In a dilemma, you have to deal with the facts.” This response illuminates a rational approach to problem solving which is also consistent with principals’ articulation of the need to first define any dilemma before attempting to resolve it. However, Rottmann (2007) notes that “rational, technical thinking is a central barrier to socially just practice. If neutrality is deemed possible, then the values of those in a position to define the problems to be solved will dominate” (p. 74). This propensity to discuss how to manage and tame emotions for the purposes of making rational decisions may be linked to the concept of vulnerability and uncertainty outlined in the

discussion about reflection under research question one. Further, inconsistent data on emotions in this research may be related to mainstream leadership discourses that focus on objective analysis of data, rational decision making, and prescriptive, problem-solving measures. Rottmann (2007) argues that this tradition of unbiased, rational decision making is perpetuated when “bias remains undetected by those who construct rational decision-makers as neutral agents of the common good” (p. 59).

Stage 3

By Stage 3 of the research, there was a clear connection between the concept of social justice *in* education and the categories of social justice dilemmas. There were no dilemmas reported for Social Justice *from* education. One participant remarked that “social justice issues in schools are interpersonal conflicts that we have to educate our students and ourselves and our staff about navigating... These are learning opportunities about knowing yourself and being together.” This notion is consistent with how many participants viewed social justice as a relational concept about how people live and work together and relate to one another, rendering social justice about interpersonal conflict rather than social conflict perpetuated within the institution.

Conclusions

Overwhelmingly, data from this research aligned with the literature on persistent dilemmas in school administration; specifically, tensions with micro and macro demands, loyalty issues, and surface demands. However, a perceived dichotomy between choosing between what is best for the child versus what is best for the whole school community was cited repeatedly, and this divide was not specifically addressed in the literature on dilemmas. Additionally, dilemmas experienced in managing behavioural incidents

dominated the conversations, and this theme was not overwhelmingly supported by the literature, with the exception of Brill's (2008) work on the principal as enforcer and Ryan and Rottmann's (2009) work on the impact of hierarchy on compliance and control mechanisms. Further, conversations about supporting the behavioural needs of students were generally not focused on the analysis of the inequities evident in practice; rather, they centered on the conflict-ridden nature of these interactions entrenched in discordant aims, priorities, and perception of impact between the student, parents, and principal.

Participants did not connect how their difficult choices were nested within broader social and cultural tensions pertaining to equitable expectations for student achievement, enhancement of staff capacity, and strengthening culture and community. Instead, most of the thirty-one dilemmas focused on how to make meaningful connections with and among people in their learning communities in the context of conflict-ridden situations where there was disagreement or potential controversy about a course of action. This finding highlights what Berlak and Berlak (1981) refer to as a habituated response or recipe knowledge that comprises the default attitudes, dispositions, and actions in response to problematic situations. The fact that principals did not generally have social commentary on their radar is indicative of the perpetuation of the role of the school administrator as an individual leader in a closed system, and this has long been shaped by the evolution of leadership theory in education.

As it relates to the focus of this study on social justice dilemmas, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) assert that "we can't address issues of critical social justice without first examining the maps we are using to identify the problem and conceptualize the solutions" (p. 7). This notion was also suggested by one of the participants when he

stated that “you have to make sure you know what the dilemma is because if you don’t identify the dilemma correctly at the beginning, the other processes will be flawed.”

Since principals find themselves with the positional power to define the dilemma and the solution, there is an opportunity to remain focussed on the immediacy of the interpersonal problems instead of looking more broadly at the complexity of intersecting issues and overarching patterns of oppression within dominant structures and normative practices in the institution of schooling. Furthermore, the “values of those in a position to define problems to be solved will dominate” (Rottmann, 2007, p. 74).

A propensity to hyper-focus on the relational details of specific dilemmas may have been a design flaw of the research that inhibited participants from zooming out to look at the bigger social picture. For example, the majority of the research dilemmas pertained to the support required for student behaviour. While the behaviours ranged from violent physical acts to drug use, to harassment to dress code, the bigger issues of teacher versus student control, student regulation, conformity, and social constructions of “normal” and “acceptable” behaviours were generally not raised. The exception was the fight club example that was a power issue between dominant culture students and marginalized students, and this was identified as the social justice aspect of the dilemma by the participant. Another principal spoke more philosophically about the purpose of discipline and the impact of being in a power position to impose consequences.

It is also important to note that when a dilemma is conceptualized as an immediate and contained “problem”, this impacts the mindset and actions that ensue, possibly decreasing the focus on justice and reinforcing the expectation that principals put out fires and fix problems. Limerik and Crowther (1996) link this mindset to a

rational approach to problem solving wherein identification is the initial step that is followed by successive strategies to “overcome the problem.” This approach also roots the focus on what is happening in the immediate behaviours between individuals rather than what exists within the larger social structure and the complex social interactions, privileging a discourse of individualism over collectivism. Heifetz (1994) refers to this tendency as technical problem solving that can be addressed by an expert, but he challenges leaders to focus instead on adaptive behaviours and processes that are context specific and precipitated by deep inquiry. It may be that participants also unconsciously feel a greater sense of control over a situation if it is contained between themselves and another person/people in their community as opposed to a broader social issue in which they feel powerless to impact change. Fullan (2001) agrees that isolation and competing priorities in education render it difficult for principals to influence sustainable change. The potential for this dynamic to become overwhelming for principals highlights the vulnerability inherent in leadership, which will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

All categories of dilemmas were cited almost equally by both the public and Catholic principals with the exception that Catholic principals included two dilemmas about staff in their data. This is not to say that public principals did not discuss staff-related issues, but they were not included in their conceptualization of social justice dilemmas. The dilemmas outlined by Catholic principals related to interpersonal conflict: one about seasoned teachers who are resistant to change and who use their seniority clout to intimidate the new-to-the school and the fresh-out-of-the-faculty teachers who have a more contemporary way of doing things and who (in many cases) are more in tuned with learning and assessing very different learners from those of 15-20 years ago. The

dilemma was about how to allow for individual creativity and give teachers individual license to shine while also finding common ground for the teaching and learning culture of the school. This idea highlights conflict about collegial culture and teacher collaboration as well as more progressive ways of teaching which conflict with stand-and-deliver pedagogy that is focused on the individual teacher who controls the classroom behind closed doors. This type of dilemma may have been cited by Catholic principals for a few reasons: often the schools are smaller with only single classes of each grade rendering cross-grade collaboration difficult, especially if the principal is not well-versed in creative ways to establish professional learning communities. Additionally, Catholic schools tend to be sought out by parents for high standards that are perceived to be housed in back-to-basics, traditional instruction; therefore the pedagogical pressure to teach in this way is common. Finally, since each Catholic school operates as a silo independent of belonging to a broader division, there is an ad hoc approach to culture, mandate, and teacher collaboration that is entirely dependent on the leadership style of the principal and not necessarily influenced by professional development and divisional philosophy.

Summary

This chapter described how principals define a social justice dilemma. Thirty-one dilemmas categorized within the topics of behavioural support, inclusion, and safety were cited in the course of this research. Findings suggest that these dilemmas are generally consistent with the literature on administrative dilemmas because they relate to: (a) managing micro/macro surface demands; and, (b) identifying issues pertaining to challenging, supporting, and steering within the positional power of the role. Not all of

the findings were in keeping with the literature on social justice, which cites examination of achievement gaps, academic streaming, unequal allocation of resources, cultural chasms, a disproportionate focus on the discipline of minority students, culturally representative teacher hiring practices, and the engagement of different parent communities as the targets of social justice leadership in education. Since “social justice dilemmas”, per say, aren’t identified and defined in the literature on administrative dilemmas, this required individual participants to extrapolate from typical administrative dilemmas the details or tensions that made it specifically a “social justice dilemma”. This requires a high degree of critical knowledge and social justice background as well as the time to unpack and interrogate deeply so as not to focus on superficial details which mask the more complex issues embedded in hierarchical structures and socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-historical impacts. This challenge of defining a social justice dilemma has tremendous implications for future research as detailed in Chapter Ten.

Participants’ propensity to identify a dichotomous choice between what is best for the child versus what is best for the whole school community was not noted in the literature, and this raises questions about liberalized notions of individualism. A high incidence of dilemmas pertaining to supporting the behavioural needs of students was noteworthy as a persistent challenge for principals but there was no recognition of the larger discourses of social control and compliance that may underpin those dilemmas. Generally, dilemmas in this research consisted of conflict-ridden situations where there was disagreement or potential controversy about a course of action in which there are competing demands. Chapter Six describes the findings and conclusions for the second

research question, “What influences impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice leadership dilemma?”

Chapter Six: Influences that Impact Decisions in a Social Justice Dilemma

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of research question two: What influences impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a social justice leadership dilemma? While there was consistency among most of the data between the public and Catholic participants, subtle differences that were noted have also been cited for each question. Conclusions related to the influences that impact decisions in a social justice dilemma are reported at the end of this chapter.

The volume of data generated for the second research question suggests that principals expend much time and energy on the processes and influences in the resolution or management of a dilemma. Principals provided lengthy descriptions of how they arrived at decisions, and there were multiple categories of influences.

Findings

Stage 1

In the Stage 1 individual interviews, participants were asked to recount the factors influencing the decisions made in a dilemma and the sources of angst and tension. Overwhelmingly, tensions about supporting individual needs (what is best for the child) versus collective needs (what is best for the class or community) were raised. Parental pressure was also repeatedly cited equally between both participant groups as a significant factor, and participants recognized that this was due to a disconnect in how the dilemma was perceived, value differences, and lack of information on the part of the parent because of confidential information to which the principal may be privy but unable to share. Consistently, participants discussed their *process* for solving the dilemma, and this included the conversations, procedures, and due diligence that they employ to

uncover the whole picture, get the facts, and make an informed decision. The notion of being consistent in this process was raised especially with the Catholic participants. Frequently, the phrase “fair isn’t equal and equal isn’t fair” was used to make the point that contextual information and the ability to differentiate decisions was paramount to justice; therefore, consistency in outcome can actually be *unjust* in some situations. One participant stated, “with social justice, we aim for balance; equitable but not necessarily sameness.”

External controls such as law, funding, policy, and dominant practices in their school culture were also discussed as potential factors that can limit relationship building and flexibility in decision making. For example, one Catholic participant discussed how the 50% provincial funding structure in independent schools limited access to divisional student support services, significantly restricting the supports that can be available to students in his school. Accordingly, the power to exclude students through the application process is especially dilemma-ridden because it contradicts a philosophy of equal access to Catholic education. Catholic principals also recognize the professional responsibility that they have to provide necessary supports to the students in their schools, which is limited and therefore necessitates, in their view, some level of exclusivity. Alternatively, some principals appreciated the structure that laws and policy provide because it decreases the messiness of resolving dilemmas. For example, if a principal perceives that a child may be in danger, he or she is bound by law to contact the authorities. This reduces the need to make decisions about what to do and shifts their locus of responsibility to managing the situation and relationships after the call to authorities has been made.

Pressure to support school culture was exemplified in another principal's assertion that there hadn't been any suspensions in her school for the last five years, and she was sensitive to the culture of the school and the community because suspension "was not the way it has typically been done."

Principals noted that how they perceived themselves as a leader influenced how they might respond to a dilemma. One participant commented that a personalized interpretation of what it means to lead is pivotal to her leadership style. Accordingly, values-based language about leadership philosophy also grounded some of the influences that participants cited; for example: communication, compassion, honesty, integrity, humility, and transparency. Finally, many of the participants' responses pertained to tensions in their perceived role as the principal. For one participant, this was about a desire to be perceived as being "democratic, willing and open to work with others." For several other participants, it was about struggling through the discomfort of having the positional power to be the figurehead "judge, jury, and executioner." Yet another principal expressed frustration at filling the (untrained) role of "social worker, police officer, and therapist." These comments suggest that principals are idealistically committed to the work of social justice; in the case of Catholic principals, I would even argue that they are bound by their faith to work for social justice as defined by the Catholic social teachings. Yet in the messy fieldwork, principals find themselves putting out fires while on the hamster wheel of managing the system and implementing policy directives. However, surface demands dominate much of the principals' time and this disconnect between surface issues and the role of the social justice leader as someone who examines underlying issues within broader contexts indicates an identity gap

between wanting to be a social justice leader and actually being able to practice in that way.

Stage 2

Dialogue group #1. Dialogue in the beginning of Stage 2 of the research predominantly consisted of the influence that both personal and contextual positionality has on decision-making. This included a recognition of the impact of school demographic factors, the experiences with and tolerance for discomforting situations for the principal, and the philosophy of the school divisions.

Dialogue group #2. The notion of subjectivity dominated much of the second dialogue group discussions, and participants made a number of assertions including how important it is to hone communication skills to ascertain how people are receiving their messages. To assume that there is congruency between what a principal considers fair, dignified, or “right” and what a student, parent, or staff member considers fair, dignified, or “right” is naïve. Participants felt that the craft of eliciting information from people while being attentive to the nuances and subtleties of conversation is important for two reasons: (a) to ensure that the message that is communicated by the principal is the same message that is received by the student or parent; and, (b) to build and preserve relationships. Participants identified that they needed to ask the question, “what is this really about?” although this question still seemed to be in reference to interpersonal conflict as opposed to social conflict, and this way of thinking reinforced the formal role of the principal as being “in the driver’s seat” of managing the relationship.

Stage 3

The question “how does the conceptualization you have of social justice influence the decisions you make when confronted by a dilemma” elicited a variety of responses from participants including: “my non-negotiable is to preserve human dignity”; “getting in touch with a range of perspectives on an issue [by] sensitively listening to others’ perspectives”; “considering the bigger picture” “trying to find common ground” “using a common language in the building (values based)”; and, “acknowledge parents’ perspectives/positions”. These responses continue to highlight interpersonal skills that participants see as important in the role of the principal.

Table 7 outlines the coding cycles for research question 2. This demonstrates an increasingly synthesized list of the influences on decision-making. For the first two cycles, the codes “concepts”, “tensions”, and “understandings” elicited lively debate about the subjectivity of and overlap among those terms; therefore, the codes were changed in the third cycle of coding to align with the literature on internal and external constraints (Robinson, 1994), as discussed in Chapter One.

Table 7

Coding Cycles and Themes for Research Question 2

	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3
QUESTION 2 What influences impact the decisions that school leaders make when facing a dilemma?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concepts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fairness b. Dignity c. Equality d. “Right” Thing e. Power f. Learning g. Belonging 2. Tensions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Individual v. Collective b. School Division Culture c. Collaboration/Resistance d. External Controls e. Parental Pressure/Expectations f. Leadership Identity g. Role of the Principal 3. Understandings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Relationship Building b. Emotions c. Values d. Cultural Sensitivity e. Safety f. Contextual Information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concepts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Fairness b. Dignity c. Equality d. “Right” Thing e. Learning f. Belonging 2. Tensions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Individual v. Collective b. Collaboration v. Resistance c. External Controls v. Relationship Building d. School culture v. Professional Judgments e. Parental Pressure v. Professional Judgments f. Leadership Identity v. Role of the Principal 3. Understandings <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Relationship Building b. Emotions c. Values d. Cultural Sensitivity e. Safety f. Contextual Information 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Internal Constraints <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Emotions b. Values c. Perception of Fairness/Equity d. Perception of Dignity e. Perception of “Right Thing” f. Approach to Relationships 2. External Constraints <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adhering to a Consistent Process b. Individual v. Collective Needs c. External Controls (law, policy) d. School/Divisional Culture e. Parental Pressure/Expectations f. Leadership Identity/Role of the Principal

Examining dilemmas and influences helps us to gain a window into what is on the radar of principals. While data for this research question includes a range of internal and external influences, they do not necessarily align with practices of social justice leaders as noted in Chapter Two. This finding is consistent with those of other researchers which suggests that principals aspire to the ideals of social justice but may not have the skills, knowledge, or time to transfer it to all aspects of their practice. Given the attractiveness of social justice discourse, it is not surprising that words such as fairness, culture, and equity are a part of the data, yet a deep understanding of what these words mean in

relation to socialization, discrimination, power, privilege, and the isms: racism, sexism, ableism is still unclear. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) explain this problem of praxis in their assertion that “dealing with social justice takes away from the real work we have to do” (p. 141), and this was evident in the very nature of this research which created the opportunity for principals to think about everyday dilemmas in novel ways and with different lenses.

Conclusions

Participants had a propensity to discuss influences on their decision making as dualisms of opposing concepts such as “right/wrong”, “fair/unfair”, “just/unjust”, and “individual/collective”. This tendency may be due to what Brill (2008) discovered as the contradictions of the principalship, noted in Table 8. Brill’s description of the tensions within the role demonstrates the complexity that exists, rendering the leader’s skill to judge and evidence of critical consciousness of paramount importance for the dilemmas experienced in the role.

Table 8

Contradictions of the Role of the Principal

Remain mindful of educational and learning theory.	Focus on practice that works in the field.
Build intimacy and cultivate a caring and nurturing school community (offer support).	Push, challenge, question, and confront (apply pressure).
Create informal, open, flexible, participant-driven learning communities.	Create institutionalizes structures, protocols, and processes within a professional learning community.
Focus on the art of teaching, learning, and leading.	Focus on the science of teaching, learning, and leading.
Promote collaborative inquiry.	Engage in passionate advocacy.

(table continues)

Focus on process.	Focus on outcomes.
Listen.	Communicate.
Engage in theory acquisition.	Engage in theory development.
Work as an actor in an unfolding drama.	Focus on practice and action.
Work as Clark Kent	Serve as a critic and fight like Superman.

(Brill, 2008, p. 142)

While participants understood that issues of social justice are “not black and white”, they still tried to identify neat and tidy dichotomies. This may be due to a need to compartmentalize in order to make decisions regarding how to “manage” a dilemma. Categories allow us to classify ideas and thus make decisions more efficiently. However, since social justice concepts exist on a continuum that can be perceived as vague and not pragmatic, this leads to tensions in the principalship requiring “dexterity, courage, and commitment” (Brill, 2008, p. 141).

In order to understand if specific influences were correlated with types of dilemmas, Table 9 was constructed. Participants were assigned a number (1-5) and coded according to Catholic (C) and public (P). This table demonstrates that almost all influences were cited across each type of dilemma. This is significant because it highlights the range and complexity of internal and external constraints that impact decision making. With the exception that Catholic principals brought up the issue of emotions and dignity as discussed earlier in this chapter, there was evidence that influences were common over each of the dilemma types. As noted in the summary for question one, the topic of emotions was brought up by the Catholic participants, one of whom commented that “sometimes emotions make it difficult to understand and listen. It can cloud rational thinking.” This brings into question the relationship between rational

thinking and emotions and the extent to which principals consciously and unconsciously identify what parts of a dilemma, including emotions, they believe they can “control.”

Table 9

Influences and Dilemma Types

		INFLUENCES	DILEMMA TYPES		
			Support	Inclusion	Safety
What influences the decisions that leaders make in a SJ dilemma?	External Constraints Social, Cultural, Organizational Structures	Adhering to a Consistent Process	P ₂ C ₅	C ₂	P ₄
		Individual Versus Collective Needs	P ₂ P ₃ P ₅	P ₁ C ₁ C ₂ C ₄	C ₃ P ₂
		External Controls (law, policy, struc)	C ₅	P ₁ C ₁	P ₄
		School/Divisional Culture	P ₂ P ₅	C ₁ C ₂	C ₃
		Parental Pressure/Expectations	P ₂ P ₃ P ₅ C ₅	P ₁ C ₁	P ₄
		Leadership Identity/Role of Principal	P ₂ P ₅	C ₂ C ₄	
	Internal Constraints Beliefs, Attitudes, Values, Dispositions	Emotions	C ₅	C ₁ C ₂ C ₄	C ₃
		Values	P ₅	C ₂ C ₄	C ₃
		Perception of Fairness/Equality	P ₂ C ₅	C ₁ C ₄	
		Perception of Dignity		C ₂	C ₃
		Perception of the “Right” Thing	P ₂ P ₅	P ₁ C ₄	C ₃
		Approach to Relationships	P ₂ P ₃ P ₅ C ₅	C ₂ C ₄	P ₄ C ₃

Summary

This chapter focused on the decision-making influences for principals when facing a dilemma. Findings suggest that principals identify dichotomous concepts as the underlying influences that propel their decisions: “right/wrong”, “fair/unfair”, “just/unjust”, and “individual/collective.” However, they realized that each of these concepts is subjectively defined. Principals focused on rational problem-solving strategies to identify and manage dilemmas in their practice, perhaps because this reduces the ambiguity and helplessness of addressing larger social patterns evident in the dilemma. Their rational, technical approach to problem solving includes a focus on the

process of management and coping strategies for surface demands, which enables principals to compartmentalize ambiguous and contentious situations in which there are competing needs and values. Accordingly, participants persistently searched for ways to make meaningful connections with and among people in their learning communities, reinforcing the conclusion that, as individual agents, principals focus on their role in cultivating interpersonal relationships as a strategy for navigating the conflicts inherent in the dilemmas they experience. Chapter Seven includes the findings and conclusions for the third research question, “What are school leaders’ understandings of the concept of social justice?”

Chapter Seven: Conceptualizing Social Justice

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of research question three: What are school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice? While there was consistency among most of the data between the public and Catholic participants, subtle differences that were noted have also been cited for each question. Conclusions related to the how principals conceptualize social justice are reported at the end of this chapter.

Determining how school leaders conceptualize social justice came from a number of data sources including Stage 1 interview transcripts, Stage 2 dialogue group transcripts, Stage 2 exit slip #2, and Stage 3 interview transcripts.

Findings

Stage 1

In Stage 1, the topic of social justice was activated by asking participants to describe their interest in and experience with social justice. This prompt generated a wide range of responses, and participants noted their personal schooling, faith-based, family, or professional influences that had shaped their conceptualization. This idea was summarized by Earl who noted that social justice is an “internalized concept [because] your own life experiences and values are incorporated into what you consider to be just.”

Participants expressed broad ideals about the topic, often explaining it in the context of how they practice social justice in their roles. For example, George said that social justice is about people being able to speak up for themselves; therefore, social justice in his role is about giving people an opportunity to express themselves. He cited restitution as a process that enhanced this voice and agency for students based on a respect for the uniqueness of each situation and how outcomes can be differentiated. He

also talked about globally uniting people to increase cross-cultural understanding and to work for peace as another understanding of what social justice is, outlining trips that he has organized throughout his career that were aimed at building a sense of interdependence and solidarity with others. These were not service trips but rather cultural exchange and sharing trips.

Garth aligned social justice as a role that humans play in contributing to a better world. In his description, he was the only participant who aligned social justice with a political agenda, stating that the orientation of social justice shouldn't be the "domain of the left." He explained that social justice in education is about working with students and families:

creating spaces for their voice and their experience and their contributions to have real meaning ... stopping every now and again to make sure that we are inclusive, that we are mindful, that we are thoughtful of the needs and feelings of others.

While most principals outlined a single example, Carol explored many of her thoughts pertaining to social justice, the most important one heavily weighted and delineated with her use of the term "*pure social justice*":

What is social justice? I got stuck on that [when I saw this question] and didn't know if you were talking about the narrow definition of social justice which means extending a hand for other people to assist the marginalized of the world. And/or on a bigger, a wider scope: social justice in the school as it pertains to approving different groups in the school and how that process works and not to marginalize students who

have certain needs and desires. Talking about social justice as it pertains to mental illness and the complications and layers around that. Social media, which is huge these days and I'm going to be calling it social injustice when it's used improperly or illegally; so, social media is another area of social justice. Students with learning or behavioural difficulties, where is there a place for those students. How do we make sure that the seed is planted in them to also be the best that they can be? One of the other topics that I thought about was professionally where I am seeing seasoned teachers exercise or exert authority or power or fear with our younger or newer teachers, and how does social justice spin into that? For me there are many areas here, and then of course the one that I'm so involved in right now is an actual social justice program where a group of students go and do some work in Central America. And that to me is pure social justice that they walk with the people.

Some participants were verbose about social justice as a general concept; however, others referred to more general ideas such as "social justice is about the solidarity of walking with others through charity *and* justice", "what it means to be human", "meeting the needs of others by connecting with them", "making change in a positive way", and "righting the wrongs of an unjust world". Three participants also talked about social justice projects and fundraising efforts to raise awareness of and take action for global issues such as lack of educational structures and resources in developing countries. Rebecca asserted that "ultimately, any global social justice has to start at a level that the students understand, which is in the realm of their own lives and their own

world in terms of developing a greater social consciousness.” Vivian also described social justice as a means of listening to and understanding the strengths and challenges within a diverse community: “the way they feel about themselves and how they want to be seen differently and that they want a better life for themselves and their kids.” For Vivian, social justice in education cannot be separated from the community as a whole, adults *and* children, and she cited community development and involvement in community leadership as a way she enacts social justice beyond the walls of her school.

In order to connect the concept of social justice with the dilemma that principals described in this stage of the research, I asked them to describe, “how do you conceptualize social justice in this dilemma?” All ten participant responses to this question fell into one or both of the following themes: (a) consideration of individualism and collectivism: what is best for the child versus what is best for the whole; and, (b) the importance of building relationships. For example, in the case of both safety dilemmas, principals identified justice as how they preserved relationships while acting in what they considered to be the best interests of the child. In the dilemmas pertaining to supporting behavioural needs of students, principals felt that justice included seeing the whole child and fostering relationships and supports that met their needs and enabled them to move beyond the incident. These responses became the beginning of an ongoing list of social justice practices as data for research question four.

These kinds of responses reinforce the overall finding in this research that social justice is conceptualized as a relational imperative upon which the principal’s individual role is hinged. It follows that principals would experience tension in relationships when they perceive that they must make a choice between what is the “right thing” for an

individual and what is best for the whole community, particularly when there are both internal and external factors influencing what is considered the “right” decision. Parental pressure was cited as the most contentious source of disagreement about what is perceived as the “right” decision, and this highlighted the importance of principals connecting their values to their practice amidst pressure and complex factors within the dilemmas that they experience.

Stage 2

Dialogue group #1. Stage 2 of the research provided a less structured means of answering research question one. The first dialogue group began with a discussion about the Wordles that were provided to each participant. These Wordles contained a computer-generated, pictorial representation of their entire Stage 1 transcript. In a Wordle, the most frequently used words are displayed larger than the less-frequently used words. One participant commented that she liked the Wordle: “whether that’s what I wanted it to say, it is what I said. Did I mean to emphasize what I did? There is good reflection from that.” The Wordles reflected more about influences and tensions than about social justice conceptualizations in the dilemmas. A Wordle was also created with the transcript sections from each participant pertaining to how they conceptualize social justice. The most cited words that were highlighted in this Wordle were “students”, “relationship”, “people”, and “society”, and these words became foundational to subsequent conversations about how participants think people *should* live and work together and relate to one another.

Dialogue group #2. The second exit slip prompted individual participants to respond to the segment, “words/phrases/expressions that fall within my conceptualization

of social justice are ...” and it was designed to collect data for research questions one and two. The responses included broad understandings of social justice expressed as nouns and adjectives such as “community”; “humanity”; “fairness”; “respect”; and “equitable” and more specific practices of the leader which were better suited to research question two, such as “being heard”; “being valued”; “belonging”; “listening”; and “recognizing cultural beliefs”. These words continue to suggest that participants conceptualize social justice as a relational practice which includes inclusivity, belonging, and a respect of diverse perspectives, hinged on the ability to be a good listener who seeks understanding. However, participants also recognized that each of these nouns and adjectives are “loaded” words that are subjectively interpreted in any given situation by each of the people involved.

Dialogue group #3. In the third dialogue group, the two participant groups were combined. For one of the activities, participants were asked to design a visual to represent how they understand social justice and then to debrief their visuals in pairs. Pairs were then combined into groups of four and asked to amalgamate their visuals to represent a collaborative understanding of the concept of social justice. Participants reported that they were challenged by this timed task, and it would have been advantageous for them to have had more time to consider it prior to actually constructing their images. One participant wrote a poem to express her concept of social justice, which is included in the Epilogue, and two participants began to work with the idea of a patchwork quilt to illustrate their ideas of social justice. Five of the images were circular, created to depict the theme of interconnectedness that humans share and the factors that influence this interconnectedness (culture, upbringing, external controls). Coupled with the

participants' propensity to discuss how their micro- and macro-level socio-cultural experiences impacted how they approached their role as leaders, their images suggest that they understand the complexity of the concept and interplay of internal and external factors that impact how they perceive and practice it in their role as principals. Figure 2 includes examples of the visuals produced for this activity.

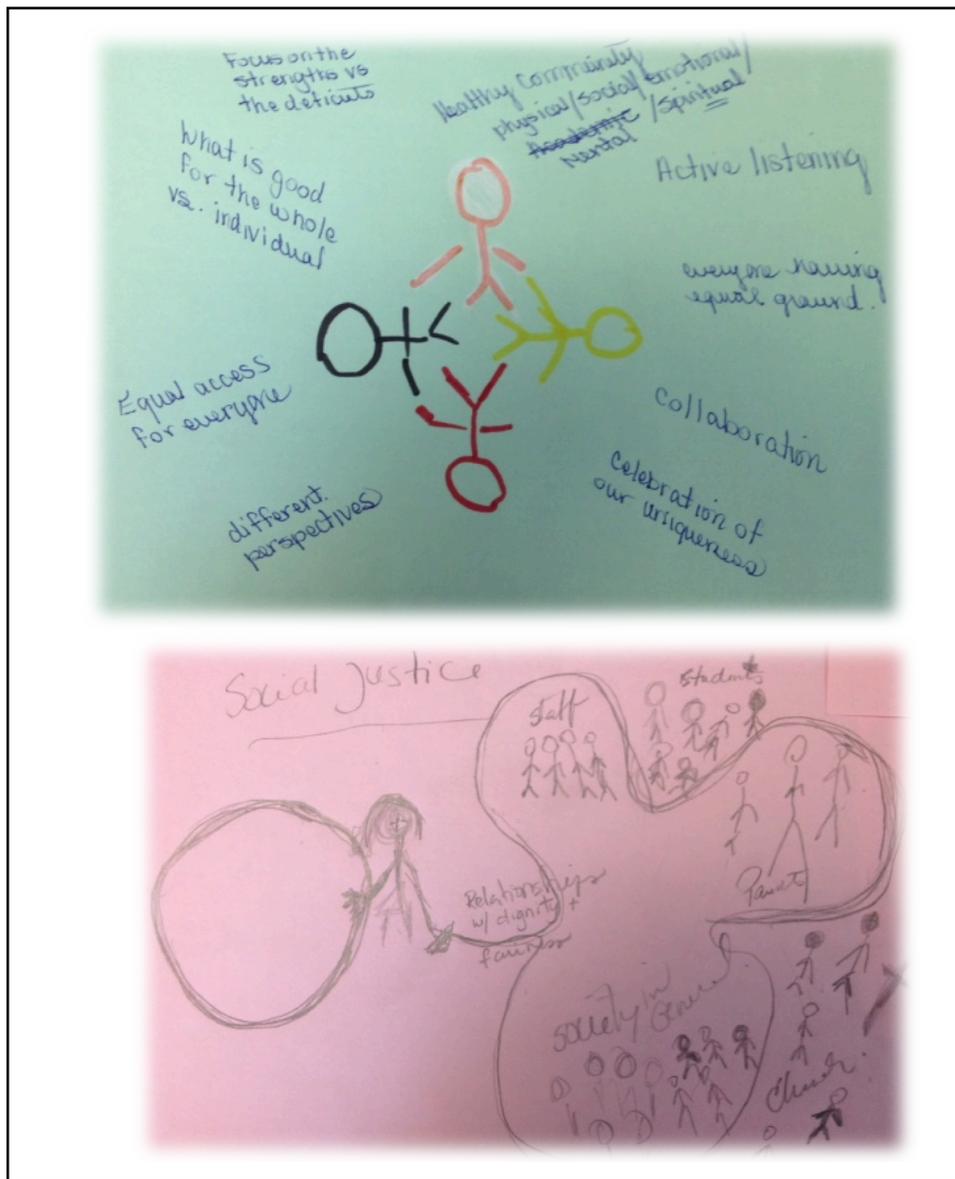


Figure 2a. Images of Social Justice

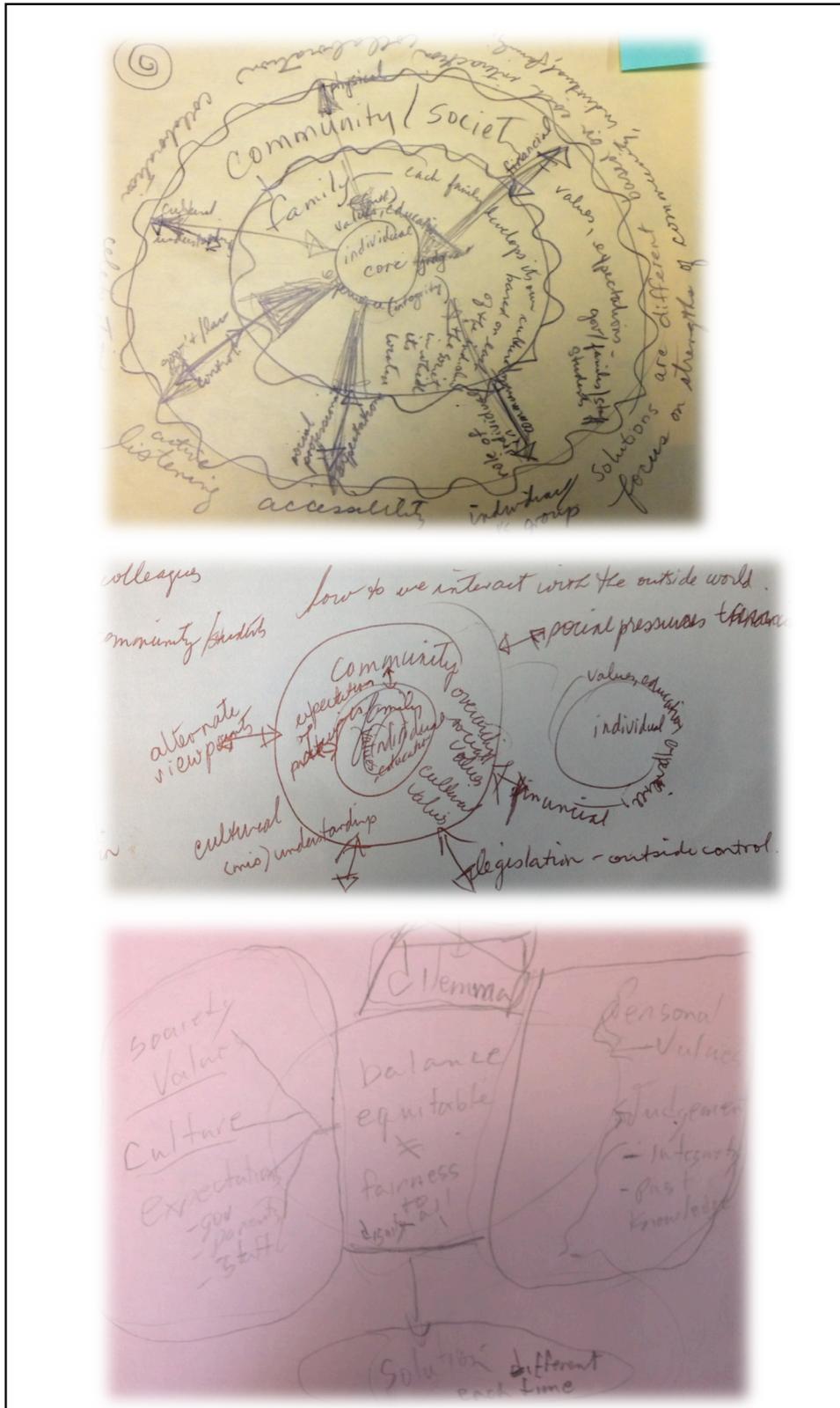


Figure 2b. Images of Social Justice

Stage 3

The Stage 3 transcripts indicated that participants' conceptualization of social justice narrowed from a focus on social consciousness and global issues to a concentration on a more local context that included a sense of responsibility for their own practices as school leaders. For example, Rebecca stated that "my social justice notions evolved from something that is 'out there' to try to right the wrongs of an unjust world to trying to create more equity in my own building ... it is everything that I do – interactions, choices, human contact, and it stems from my beliefs and values about people and myself." Richard said that he had initially conceptualized social justice as working with the less fortunate kids in his school neighbourhood. In this stage of the research, he noted how his focus on social justice became a more personal articulation about what guides him in his role. The expression "fair isn't equal and equal isn't fair" resonated deeply with him. Garth explained that "one of the things that I probably knew but never had heard is that social justice is everywhere and in everything. What it got me to think about is that culture is that which I know to be normal ... I think this is important to consider as a human being in all the different roles that we wear."

Several participants felt that, prior to the research, they may not have considered many dilemmas to be within the realm of social justice such as personnel issues or safety matters. Carol explained that as her concept of social justice was activated through focussed interviews and discussions, she began to see "issues at a different level because of inequalities caused by power and control which makes them about justice."

Additionally, most participants in Stage 3 articulated the impact that positionality has on their conceptual understanding. For example, Gerry said, "I understand that my history has influenced my perspectives, understandings, and judgments. I have built-in

biases, and a socio-economic status of privilege shapes my lens. I don't have to worry much about things because my basic needs are met.”

Table 10 outlines the coding cycles and themes for question three, and this illustrates how the themes broadened to include both social justice *in* the relationships within learning communities as well as the role that schools play in teaching students about how to contribute to a better society.

Table 10

Coding Cycles and Themes for Research Question 3

	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3
<p>QUESTION 3 What are school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice?</p>	<p>1. Understandings of SJ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Social Consciousness b. Right the Wrongs c. Honour Humanity d. Interdependence e. Challenge Dominant Practices f. Understand Marginalization g. Understand Power 	<p>1. Understandings of SJ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Social Action to contribute to a better world b. Honour Humanity c. Interdependence d. In-School Practices 	<p>1. Understandings of SJ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Social Justice IN education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationships within learning communities - Social, emotional, and behavioural supports to students and families - Educating whole child (social and academic engagement, safety, health) b. Social Justice FROM education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory citizens who understand global issues and engage in collective, community-based efforts

Conclusions

The findings suggest that principals understand social justice as a relational way of seeing how people live and work together and relate to one another in both school environments and the broader society. The main theme for this question was that social justice is a professional imperative *in* education; this was the focus of the majority of data collection processes, spilling over into question two about social justice practices. The overlap suggests that most participants view social justice not only as a concept, but as a

relational agentic action that occurs within and across interpersonal interactions. One of the reasons that the focus remained on in-school understandings of social justice may be that the research questions prompted participants to consider their conceptualization in the context of their own leadership practices within specific situations that they had navigated, and this understanding was evidenced in their proclivity to speak in a relational discourse about the interactions between and connectivity among people in the context of schools and leadership. Griffiths (1998) classifies social justice as an action, a verb, that encompasses “anything that is done in partnership with others in the spirit of equality, democracy, and solidarity ... in the sense that in its conduct and outcomes, it should lead to a fairness both for individuals and for society as a whole” (p. 99). Brown (2012) also notes that “we are hard-wired to connect with others, it’s what gives purpose and meaning to our lives” (p. 8); therefore, it is not unexpected that principals made a connection between justice and relationships because their roles are entrenched in the connections that they make with a wide variety of stakeholders: students, staff, parents, and the broader community. Goldring and Greenfield (2005) explain this in their description of educational leadership as a people-intensive activity that is dependent on face-to-face talking and listening in order to cultivate shared meaning about purpose and practice. Yet, this people work is entirely shaped by norms which “reflect shared understandings, beliefs, values, and attitudes about teaching and learning, and about children parents, and the broader goals, purposes, and activities of schooling generally” (p. 7). However, this research demonstrates that within this people work, there are liberalized notions of social justice which focus on interpersonal incidents, exchanges,

and individual characteristics and skills at the exclusion of reflective practice about broad social inequities as highlighted in the themes detailed in the paragraphs following.

Another theme for research question three was principals' exploration of the role of education in the transformation of society, which I coded as social justice *from* education meaning the justice that is enacted as a result of education about *injustice* and learning how to contribute to a better society. Gerry wondered about the direction of influence between education and justice when he wrote on one of his exit slips, "is education the remedy or the conversion?" In other words, can education transform society or does society socialize education? Other participants did not discuss the social continuity that is perpetuated within schools whereby education is the agent of shaping individual behaviour through normative practices. This omission suggests that awareness of and debates about the purposes of education and the role of the principal were not on their radar or connected to their conceptualization of social justice. Berlak and Berlak (1981) outline how important it is for educators to consider the "relationship of school to society while avoiding the oversimplified, but surely not wholly incorrect, position that schooling merely reproduces the ideas, values and beliefs of those who are the most powerful and influential in society" (p. 134). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) also assert that consideration of school in society comprises the 'critical' in critical social justice; that is the consciousness of the "historical, cultural, and ideological lines of authority that underlie social conditions" (p. 1). Yet, this continues to be an ambiguous debate that manifests in contradictions of practice as summarized by Berlak and Berlak: "We can neither decide in advance that teachers are willing or obvious henchmen of the social

system or creators of social change nor how important are their activities relative to activities of those within other social institutions” (p. 134).

Participants did not talk about social justice as a vehicle for examining deep-rooted patterns of oppression in the larger society despite the fact that this critical consciousness comprises much of the literature and research on social justice. One possible explanation about why this idea was omitted from the discourse could be due to liberalized notions of humanism which emphasize rationalized and independent decision making, freedom, and peace (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 5). The implication is that leaders think they have more influence and control than they actually do, because when larger structural systems of inequality are obscured, it fools “people into believing that they have more freedom and choice than social structures actually allow” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 5). Berlak and Berlak (1981) describe this notion as “the act”, which is an epistemological concept based on social behaviourism. The concept situates people as conscious beings who are “simultaneously an object, acted upon, and a subject, an initiator of action... Thus past, present, future intersect in the moment – as persons act in situations” (p. 117). Therefore, conceptualizing social justice without acknowledging the social structures that create and perpetuate injustice and prohibit leaders from acting in more just ways relegates their understanding to a surface level that continues to be influenced by mainstream liberal rhetoric. This phenomenon can be explained by the neoliberal influences on media and education that have reduced discussions of social inequality to anecdotal levels and perpetuated beliefs in individual meritocracy at the expense of deeper understandings of structural inequity. Since opinion and anecdote must be distinguished from informed knowledge of broader societal patterns, this finding

highlights a knowledge gap and critical reflective skill that must be developed in school leaders and supported through ongoing practice.

Of particular note was how the concept of hope held a recurring part of the discussions about social justice. George remarked that it was challenging to discuss dilemmas which are often framed as “problems” because they are negative paradigms, whereas the notion of social justice for him implies an opportunity to embrace challenge, which is more appealing to him. Another participant noted that describing a social justice dilemma was the opposite of describing social justice and social justice practices, because a dilemma challenged those practices. Two other participants named their collaborative social justice visual a “hope quilt” because of the potential for education to teach about people working in solidarity and interdependence with others. The fact that participants raised the issue of hope implies that they understand the messiness of both the agency of principal and the task of working for justice amidst resistance. Ryan and Rottmann (2007) echo this need for hope in their assertion that “advocates of critical social justice believe in a better future. At the heart of this optimism is the knowledge that the institutions in which humanity work and lives can be changed for the better” (p. 15). While it is an encouraging sentiment, hope is not a strategy. Social justice leaders may have the expectation and desire for their schools to be just places; however, critically reflective knowledge, dialogue, and justice-oriented action must accompany a hopeful outlook to ensure that the discourse of hopefulness isn’t a smoke screen for inaction and/or the perpetuation of institutionalized injustices.

Finally, the normative language that distinguished participants from different school divisions was evident throughout the research process, and it was important to

identify it and discuss the impact of it. For example the word “dignity” was used exclusively by Catholic participants, and this comes from the Catholic social teachings; the word “belonging” was used more often by participants from another school division, and this was identified as central to the mission of its schools; finally, the word “learning” was used more often by participants from the third school division, and participants from the division noted that this was connected to the philosophical orientation of the divisional leadership. Participants were fascinated by how they used this discourse unconsciously and began to contemplate how it impacts their practice in both language patterns and practices. However, this observation also demonstrates how bias finds its way into how dilemmas may be perceived and/or acted upon. Throughout the course of the dialogue groups, this language began to be used interchangeably by participants from all divisions which highlights the impact of language and social constructivism in the conceptualization of this topic.

Summary

This chapter described how principals conceptualize social justice, and findings suggest that they understand it as individual actions focused on relationships and positional agency. However, this conceptualization obscures the power of historical, cultural, and ideological authority that is unconsciously replicated in the norms of schooling. Yet, under the auspices of leadership socialization, principals have been positioned as powerful figureheads who have been tasked to control and manage schools under the pretence that they have more freedom than social structures permit. Furthermore, principals see social justice within their own actions but generally do not connect it with political aspirations to challenge broader social inequities. Chapter Eight

describes the findings and conclusions for the final research question, “How do school leaders’ understandings of social justice influence their practice when facing a social justice dilemma?”

Chapter Eight: Social Justice Practices

The final research question focussed on how leaders' understandings of social justice influenced their practice, and it is summarized through the findings and conclusions noted in this chapter. Since participants' conceptualization of social justice was heavily rooted in relational understandings of how people live and work together and relate to one another, the practices that they cited focused on reflections about their positionality, understanding of culture, power, and marginalization within their individual contexts, and processes for enhancing relationships in their learning communities; in other words, social justice *in* education.

Findings

Process coding throughout all stages of the research revealed an increasingly detailed and specific list of dispositions, knowledge, and actions of a social justice leader as illustrated in Table 11. Several sources of data collection helped the participants to articulate this list of practices, including Stage 2 dialogue group transcripts, Stage 2 exit slip #2, Stage 2 sensory activity, Stage 3 interview transcripts, and Stage 3 exit slip.

Table 11

Coding Cycles and Themes for Research Question 4

	CYCLE 1	CYCLE 2	CYCLE 3
<p>QUESTION 4 How do school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice influence their practice?</p>	<p>Influence on Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Focus on Learning b. Cultural Sensitivity c. Provide Support d. Promote & Include Community e. Listen f. Challenge Deficit Thinking 	<p>Influence on Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Dispositions b. Knowledge c. Actions d. Other 	<p>Influence on Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Reflection about <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Withholding Judgments and Assumptions ii. Examining Personal Lens b. Seek to Understand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Culture ii. Power iii. Marginalization c. Consistently Engage in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Open Communication ii. Challenging Deficit Thinking iii. Flexibility/Open-Mindedness iv. Creating Places of Belonging v. Healing and Restitution vi. Professional Dialogue

Stage 2

Dialogue group #1. Reflection about their positionality was an important topic of discussion in dialogue group #1, and principals reported that a point of interest was the impact of school and divisional culture and expectations on the lens through which they understand and enact their roles as social justice leaders. When I pointed out specific words that principals from each division had commonly used in Stage 1 of the research (“belonging” or “learning” or “dignity”), one public school participant commented that those were divisional mission statement words, and this led to a conversation about how principals are directly or indirectly socialized to lead according to the distinct philosophy of the different school divisions. With the exception of one participant, all participants had worked for their entire career in the same school division, so this was an intriguing

discovery about which all participants wrote in their exit slips. One participant indicated that “we make assumptions that everyone else is ‘just like us’ ... when we get together and talk, we can learn so much from each other and our differences in how we approach social justice.” The extent to which school divisions acculturate their leaders varied among school divisions as reported by participants, but each public division has divisional priorities that are infused into school goals and reinforced to varying degrees through professional conversations. Catholic schools are independent, so the culture and purpose comes more broadly from the aims of Catholic education and the church itself but are differentiated by the charisma of the individual congregations that founded and operates each of the schools.

Dialogue group #2. Since much of the time in the first group dialogue session was focused on open dialogue, more focused questioning was required in the second dialogue group session to ascertain how understandings of social justice influence the practices of school leaders. Participants were asked to consider how they might complete the following sentence: If I understand social justice as _____, then a strategy that I use in my practice is _____. One participant, for example, said, “If I understand social justice as something that is a complex construct that is neither black or white, then I must be flexible and open-minded when confronting a dilemma. In reference to a safety dilemma, this participant noted how important it is to look at both the big picture and the micro details, considering cultural norms and normative practices. Another participant noted, “If I understand social justice as valuing humans and humans in community together, then I need to be perceptive to really hearing and understanding peoples’ perspectives and being inclusive in my decision making.”

This comment was hedged in one principal's commentary about how difficult it is to balance the different value systems between parents, normative practices, and personal values, particularly when it comes to disciplinary matters. Finally, another participant outlined, "If I understand social justice as something that happens in education, then we need to talk about beliefs instead of rules so that a community can work, play, sing, and dance within a public-private space." This idea was contextualized within conversations about the power issues inherent in enforcing rules and imposing consequences for behavioural infractions, which comprised the majority of dilemmas that principals shared. It was difficult to get participants to combine what they believe and then to quantify it with a specific practice, and it took several attempts at posing this task to get deeper responses. One reason for this may be that, outside of the university, principals are not generally tasked with articulating their beliefs and linking them to specific practices. Another explanation is that the beliefs that practices are hinged on are continually evolving with experience and the immediacy of everyday situations, rendering it difficult for leaders to be reflective-in-action.

There are two schools of thought about the directionality of beliefs and practice. For example, Fullan (2010) cautions that too much emphasis on values results in disengagement, because people change their behaviours before they gain insight into new beliefs. Accordingly, Fullan (2011) insists that practice drives theory, meaning that "deliberative doing" (p. 5) results in learning and revision of beliefs and/or theory in progress. In the context of social justice leadership, it follows that leaders could continuously learn from engaging in and reflecting about these practices, thereby revising and refining how they conceptualize social justice. Fullan (2011) argues that taking

action, sharing ideas, and influencing and being influenced by other diverse practitioners leads to better thinking, which impacts practice (and so on and so forth). When this practice is tested and reinforced in the field, it begins to drive theory. On the other hand, Hargreaves (2012) puts more emphasis on the importance of articulating beliefs and values that create a platform for action. He insists that leaders need to strengthen their narratives for who they are and what they do in the role and ensure that this aligns with their practice: “An inspiring and inclusive moral purpose steers a system, binds it together, and draws the best people to work in it” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 23). This principle provides leaders with indicators upon which to measure their actions and progress as compared to what they value. However, in a culture where school leaders are socialized to “do” amidst competing interests and various roles, it is no wonder that the blueprints for practice may be neglected and therefore need frequent revisitation. This point forms the basis of many of the recommendations in Chapter Ten.

Dialogue group #3. An overwhelming theme in this last session was about the mindfulness needed to view all interactions through a justice lens that bridges the gaps and barriers that create injustices within how people live and work together and relate to one another. The combined public and Catholic participant groups worked on a sensory activity to define how social justice practice looks, sounds, and feels, and the responses from this exercise were coded using the third cycle of codes for question two.

Overwhelmingly, responses from this exercise were about the need to consistently engage in open communication, open-mindedness, creating places of belonging, and restoring healing and restitution. Some participants contextualized their responses in examples of dealing with behavioural issues by sharing aspects of their own dilemmas in

the small group exercises. Despite the fact that the Catholic and public groups were new to each other, the dialogue was earnest and difficult to keep within the timeframes of our agenda, and this, again, highlights a need for principals to engage in professional dialogue and seek other perspectives. Other participants spoke more in generalities of philosophy rather than practices, and this also highlights a need to help leaders to articulate how their values align with practice.

In articulating her understanding of social justice practices, one participant indicated, “you carry your values with you about social justice from context to context. Our effectiveness at enacting social justice is dependent on the knowledge of the context that we work in, especially when it is unfamiliar or different from our own worldview and biases.” This reinforces the notion that beliefs and practice is neither an either/or *or* both/and imperative. Rather, it is cyclical based on the context, prior experiences, and career stage of each principal. For instance, the demographics of the school will create specific opportunities that present varying degrees of challenge to the principals’ existing beliefs, and this disequilibrium, combined with positionality and experience levels will impact beliefs and practices. It is crucial in this process to provide opportunities for leaders to think and talk about how this impacts their practice.

Stage 3

In Stage 3 of the research, participants were asked to articulate specific strategies or practices they use to support social justice *in* and *from* education. Again, this generated a wide range of responses that did not necessarily align with the previous data from this question. Two categories of responses were noted on the analysis of this exit slip: seeking guidance through professional dialogue and walking the talk. This is suggestive of the

fact that participants identify gaps between their ideals and practice and therefore are seeking an avenue to explore and develop this further.

Conclusions

Participants primarily related their social justice practices to their work and relationships *in* education, which includes the dynamics of working, living, and relating to one another in the context of schooling. For the purposes of this research, this has been distinguished from social justice *from* education, which I have defined as the impact that schooling has on how our students contribute to a better society. Participants see social justice in education as the practices that promote reflection about one's positionality, a desire to learn about diversity, power dynamics, and marginalization, and leadership behaviours aimed at building democratic and inclusive relationships in school communities. One reason that this remained in the forefront of the conceptualization of social justice is likely the immediacy of their day-to-day practice. Coupled with the principals' articulated desire to discuss ongoing dilemmas with colleagues, it follows that they would link any topic of conversation to the issues with which they are grappling on any given day.

Reflection

Principals discussed the importance of self-awareness about their positionality, defined as the lenses, filters, biases and judgments that are "programmed by our values, beliefs, desires, expectations, fears, and evaluations" (Albrecht, 2006, p. 15). One participant talked about how important it is to understand our own biases and notions of children, family, and culture and wondered, "how does this impact the way that we listen to, value, and interpret the voices of others?" Much of the literature on social justice also

emphasizes the importance of this reflection about positionality and privilege (Bates, 2006; Brown, 2004; Foster, 1989; Gunter, 2001; Ryan & Katz, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Another participant commented that “we all have our blind spots and must be courageous in recognizing them”. However, Albrecht (2006) notes that “the fact that we frequently refer to these blind spots in ordinary conversation does not guarantee that we actually understand them or that we consciously act to see through them or see past them” (p. 15). Furthermore, leaders that consider themselves champions of social justice may not even realize the extent to which they are socialized and conditioned to the normative language and cultures of their organizations. This possibility has huge implications for the extent to which principals actually are capable of being critical of their own biases.

The use of the word “courageous” was the only suggestion of the difficulty or resistance inbuilt in self scrutiny; otherwise, the notion of the vulnerability inherent in self reflection was absent from the discussions, which may be because principals spoke from a place of positional power in which they believe they are in control of themselves and the dilemma. This tendency may be a result of the fact that our society has privileged certainty and rationalism over reflection, and strength over vulnerability (Cain, 2012). Brown (2012) says that “vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences” (p. 12), and given that participants see social justice as a relational agentic role, it is curious that they did not necessarily name how much their practices expose them, generating vulnerability. While principals used the term interdependence, which alludes to reciprocity, their quotations do not suggest that they give themselves

permission to not be “leading” but rather learning from others, in which there is also vulnerability.

Learning About Diversity, Power, and Marginalization

An interest in understanding diversity was expressed repeatedly throughout the research, and this manifested in several conversations about enhancing culturally-sensitive understandings of student, parent, and community needs. One participant said, “we have to question if there are right or wrong or just different ways of looking at things,” and this statement was made in reference to a safety dilemma in which cultural norms may have been at play. Participants also connected this perspective to how value-laden their own personal norms are. Many participants expressed a need to increase their cultural competency, and this was linked to discussions about challenging culturally-deficit ways of thinking which refers to the belief that “minoritized groups do not achieve in society because they lack the appropriate values or because their culture is deficient in some other way “ (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 59). This is an important consideration in many dilemmas, because looking at children and families through a deficit lens obscures a recognition of their capacities and uniqueness, impacting expectations, strategies, and decisions. An example of this concern was the dilemma where a child was enjoying and exhibiting observable benefits from being involved in an extra-curricular program, but her parents did not meet the participation requirements stipulated by the funding for the program. It would be easy to make assumptions about why the parents were not meeting the requirements. In recounting this dilemma, the principal remained focused on how important it is to not only look at the child, but also the needs of the family, saying “healthy families equal healthy children.” This was a dilemma for the principal because it wasn’t as simple as disqualifying the child for the perceived

shortcomings of her parents, but rather “balancing what’s best for the child and what’s best and works in a system.” The principal identified that it was a question about who decides what is acceptable in terms of participation and how she could get around those barriers so that the child could participate and the parents were both supported as well as informed about different ways of participating.

As it pertains to power, Garth indicated that the research process had prompted him to reconsider how his power is perceived in his role as principal, especially when it comes to disciplinary situations which he prefers to reframe as learning and community collaboration opportunities: “Instead of wielding power, how can I share how power works so that others can participate as equal partners versus subordinates? If we let kids see how power works and experience it, will they then come to an understanding of how that might work? Apprenticeship of power includes questions like what makes sense to you (structures and processes that are new for newcomers)? What is your normal?” Consequently, he said “I will make a particular effort to talk about that in the process; although I have the power to suspend a child, I need to explain about where I am coming from in this decision process.” Noticing power dynamics was touched on by a few of the participants as they began to see how positional power impacted their relationships with community members particularly in the context of choosing consequences for behaviour as well as the ability to approve and deny access to programs. Though the conversations about power were minimal, participants identified that it was connected to the concept of marginalization, and they saw it as a concept that they needed to be mindful of and understand more deeply.

Inclusive Practice

Communication, flexibility, and restitution were cited as practices to support just actions in schools, and a lot of detail and engagement was noted in this portion of the data collection, especially when participants discussed the interpersonal skills required to address dilemmas. For instance, face-to-face encounters with parents and students that required keen communication skills, the ability to ask effective questions, and an aptitude for listening were discussed. Having an open mind about possible outcomes amidst the various external pressures and internal assumptions was also cited as a potential barrier, particularly when the dilemma intersected with different cultural norms and communication styles as in the safety dilemma and one of the inclusion dilemmas. Restitution, the notion of making amends, was also noted repeatedly as a strategy for creating places of belonging and supporting students. This is consistent with the focus on relationships that participants identified in research question one as a key part of their role within learning communities.

One practice that was omitted from the dialogue for this research question was instructionally leading teachers to be oriented towards social justice. While one group in the sensory exercise talked about “helping teachers to make decisions/consequences that are differentiated” and another group discussed “modeling inclusivity in decision making”, the data suggest that principals shouldered the responsibility for social justice with limited acknowledgement for how or if they teach and share this practice. The exception was one principal who, in her Stage 3 interview, explained that “we need to learn from situations [about social justice] with staff by questioning and challenging their thinking by asking “what do you mean? We also need to provide time for staff dialogue to ask, can we see this in a different way? Always working as a school team to bring

social justice to the forefront, we need to ask what is best for our families and community.” It is difficult to ascertain whether this disposition and leadership style is personal to this principal or whether it is acculturated in the school division in which she works. With only one other principal from the same division as a participant in the study, there was not sufficient data to elaborate on this. There are several explanations for the omission of this topic in the data as detailed below.

McKenzie et al. (2008) identify that one role of the social justice leader is to ensure that teachers have the skills to demonstrate equity consciousness and equity-oriented teaching skills and to provide ongoing opportunities for collaboration, discussion, and inquiry among teachers. However, McKenzie and Locke (2010) identify that few leaders are effective at transformative instructional leadership because they either get derailed by management diversions or get caught up in being an inspirational and charismatic leader. The mistaken assumption that an inspired or fulfilled teacher is a better teacher is often the tipping point for transformational-wanna-be leaders to feel frustrated about their inability to influence the teaching practices of teachers who do not demonstrate equity-conscious teaching skills. Oftentimes, this stems from an avoidance of conflict that comes from asking difficult questions and challenging long-standing inequitable teacher practices. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) insist that “to pose a good question [is] the ultimate act of pedagogy and leadership” (p. 132). Questions, which interrupt business as usual and shake up the taken-for-granted practices in education, are the “engine of knowledge creation” (p. 130): “Asking the right question at the right time can lead to a revolution of thought and action” (p. 128). Although this practice can be uncomfortable and contentious, Preskill and Brookfield maintain that difficult questions

create a platform for imagining new landscapes, analyzing current practice, and uncovering the hegemony that is disguised in common knowledge and unquestioned action, both of which perpetuate educational injustices. However, insecurity about how to promote equity consciousness, and/or ignorance about personal biases and limitations in this area also inhibits leaders from approaching difficult conversations (McKenzie & Locke, 2010). Brown (2012) uses the term “disruptive engagement” to describe the practice of humanizing education and work by cultivating networks of people who have honest conversations “that shine light in the dark corners” (p. 188). While she notes that many leaders are not comfortable with hard conversations and don’t know how to give and receive feedback in a way that moves people and processes forward, she insists that “normalizing discomfort” (p. 198) is a cultural imperative for critical and transformative work that protects “what matters most: human beings” (p. 196). Like Preskill and Brookfield, she says this will enhance the collective ability to tackle complex issues with creativity, innovation, and engaged learning. This necessary cultural shift highlights another area for potential leadership development as outlined in Chapter Ten.

The sense of responsibility that was inherent in participants’ responses coupled with their propensity to focus on the justness of their own practices also raises questions about individualistic leadership. Rottmann (2007) describes how school administrators have been socialized by mainstream notions of “leadership as a property of individuals...with a single organizationally positioned agent” (p. 54). This has resulted in a misconception that these leaders “have the power to bring about change” (p. 55) despite the structures that constrain their actions. Rottmann contrasts this leadership notion to organizational leadership or ideological leadership in which “big ideas [are]

entrenched in a particular culture at a particular time and place, legitimized by those who acknowledge their presence” (p. 57). In this way the ideation becomes the agent, and “leadership is understood as a relational form of influence” (p. 57). She argues that ideological influence creates sustainable practices over time because they are not reliant on the “heroic work of one visible leader” (p. 67). This idea will be addressed further in Chapter Ten.

Participants did not raise the issue of problem posing, and this finding may be connected with the pressure they feel to provide evidence that they are meeting school and divisional goals and the expectations of parents. This contradicted with how some participants conceptualized social justice as challenging status quo, and this incongruity speaks to their conflicting roles as policy implementers versus internal factors that comprise them as individuals, and/or to external factors such as their own socialization into leadership roles whereby they have been conditioned to “fix problems” but not to focus on what isn’t “broken”.

Consideration of the bigger picture of how positionality, policy, and attitudes create injustices was considered to a much lesser degree, and it was noted more on individual exit slips than in group dialogue sessions. Vivian commented that “it is easier to think about a problem being elsewhere than in your own building,” and this generated a conversation about role expectations and socialization of principals to “have that right answer all the time” and to be “predisposed to see the positive and to view our buildings through rose-coloured glasses.” This propensity to reframe issues in the positive may be a result of norms of the strong, individual, and able leader who is required to demonstrate and evidence effectiveness rather than to problematize practices.

Summary

This chapter outlined how school leaders' understandings of the concept of social justice influence their practice. Participants identified three themes of social justice practices including: (a) *reflecting critically* about withholding assumptions and examining their personal lenses; (b) *consistently endeavouring to* create democratic and inclusive relationships and communities by communicating, challenging deficit thinking, having an open mind, creating places of belonging, restoring healing and restitution, and engaging in professional dialogue; and (c) *seeking to understand* cultural diversity, power, and marginalization. These practices overlap with some of the literature on social justice; however, they do not include instructional leadership for social justice or activist actions as a public intellectual. Rather, these practices are aimed at cultivating and enhancing the relationships in their school communities as opposed to advocacy for justice in the broader society. The sense of responsibility that principals feel for their communities is strong, and this is consistent with ownership notions of the principal as an individual agent. Chapter Nine outlines the impacts of this research experience for participants.

Chapter Nine: Impact of the Research Experience

One of the noteworthy findings of this research was the value that participants articulated about the process of collegially focussing on the topic of social justice ideals and practices. While I did not set out to measure or qualify this in the data collection, it was a repeated topic of conversation throughout all stages of the project. This warrants mention because of the significance it has for professional learning experiences that support school leaders, which is discussed in the conclusions section of this chapter. The importance of being metacognitive about their practice as well as the powerful nature of professional dialogue and learning were cited as important aspects of the research as expressed by Rebecca:

I've always made decisions from the basis to communicate values, provide dignity, honour and create a situation where people don't feel disempowered or disengaged but where they feel they can move forward in a positive way. My self-awareness is greater now. There is a feeling of validation and empowerment in naming it. Unpacking and naming these things happen in community with others – my own thoughts were refined and I could reflect that by hearing and listening to what others felt and believe. It helped me to more critically reflect on what I, myself, believe.

Early in the research process, participants began to pose questions about social justice, spontaneously as well as within the structure of the exit slips. These questions highlight the wonderings and tensions inherent in their roles:

- How do we arrive at a common understanding or goal of social justice in education? Is this possible? Is it important?
- How do we lead teachers, teach students, and educate parents when

there is a gap between how they and we define complex concepts such as equality, equity, fairness, just, consistent, and "right"?

- How do we bring peace when there are so many different lenses on any given issue?
- What does marginalization mean? What are some of the oppressive structures and systems that limit our decisions?
- What societal values and parent expectations create tensions for us in making just decisions? How do these values and expectations clash with our own moral compasses and the purposes of our schools?
- What institutional injustices am I a part of?
- How will all of our ideas about social justice come together?
- How does social justice affect my role as a leader within my school?
- Where should our attention be? – Instructional leadership, relationship building, grant writing, non-profit partnerships in community boards, etc...

Both the nature and quantity of these questions is suggestive of the need participants expressed to discuss complex issues, concepts, and practices within a collegial setting.

This was evident in one participant's exit slip #1 question: "how can we facilitate more of these type of sessions?" However, these questions also focus on individual manifestations of leadership as indicated in the use of "I" and "we" which highlights the need to examine the socialization of school principals as individual agents.

The opportunity to meet administrators from other public school divisions and independent schools was also an unanticipated element of the research, but it was both requested by participants and received very enthusiastically. There was a curiosity about what "other" divisions are like, and many participants noted that "regardless of each situation, there are many similarities among us... school is school." Ultimately, principals took comfort in the fact that they were not alone in their struggles to unpack and respond

to dilemmas. Many participants noted that there was a comfort level quickly established among the separate participant groups and also within the combined group. They appreciated the sense of humour and collegiality in the midst of serious discussions and philosophical musings.

Refining the values that underpin their practice and reconciling ideals with actual practice was both a challenging and affirming part of the research process. One participant indicated:

I had to accept that my cultural/educational/socioeconomic (etc) bias affects my beliefs about social justice and ultimately my decisions. This was hard to swallow because I try and see myself as open minded and accepting when, in our dialogues, I felt very challenged.

Another participant commented that it was “both hard but good to have to find words to communicate why I think about [social justice] the way I do”.

Conclusions

It was not surprising that participants expressed the need to examine and dialogue about their practice, and this is supported by research literature that has evolved over the last two decades. For example, the research of Komives et al. (2009) indicates that identity development is influenced by reflective learning which should be supported by opportunities to “*reflect* on leadership experiences and [the] future journey, *retreat* from the stress of multitasking, plugged-in, over-committed schedule to take stock of fears, hopes, goals, lessons learning; *connect* to a source of strength; and *wrestle* with the big questions and purpose of [the] leadership journey” (p. 31). Further Brill (2008) notes that creating dialogical spaces for school administrators to “reveal the more authentic hand-

wringing that takes place beneath the costume of the professional” (p. 2) assists school principals to better frame the dilemmas they confront; clarify their underlying values; determine an effective decision-making process; develop new theories and conceptions about their problem-solving; and increase metacognitive thinking about their practice (p. 3). As it pertains to working with a social justice agenda, Ryan and Rottmann (2007) detail the importance of forming “coalitions of like-minded people” (p. 16) in this quest, and participants noted that they were all drawn into the research by a self-identified interest in the topic and a desire to dialogue with others about it.

However, metacognitive engagement does not necessarily manifest in a change of practice, and Young (2011) noted this discrepancy between knowledge and practice. Inconsistencies within the data of this research also indicated a potential disconnect between ideals and practice, which aligns with the social justice work of Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012). Many scholars have offered explanations for this disconnect including experience level, a disproportionate number of management and personnel issues, the neoliberal pressures of accountability, the isolation and market ideology of schools, and a focus on mastery of management skills termed “easy wins” before getting into the complexity of leadership and visionary change processes (Kelly & Peterson, 2008; Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Rottmann, 2009; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Young, 2011). These factors render it nearly impossible for a single leader to impact just practices, reinforcing the need for organizational leadership to be paramount. This has implications for theory, practice, professional development, and research as detailed in Chapter Ten.

Summary

This chapter described the impact of the research on participants and the connection between their learning and the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter Ten outlines the implications of this study for theory, practice, professional development, and research.

Chapter Ten:

Implications for Theory, Practice, Professional Development, and Research

The purpose of this research was to understand how principals conceptualize social justice and social justice dilemmas and to decipher how these understandings influence their practices. Since social justice has become a topical focus in education, it is important to consider how principals interpret it, because this understanding can inform contextually relevant processes for organizational leadership. Using a critically oriented, qualitative interpretivist approach, the perspectives of two participant groups of five principals each were analyzed. Reflective discussions of professional practice occurred through two semi-structured qualitative interviews with each participant and a series of three dialogue group sessions. This research was framed within the theories of social constructivism and situated learning as well as the concepts of educational leadership theory, social justice in education, identity and agency of school leaders, and reflective practice.

There are theory, practice, professional development, and research implications of this study which emphasize the need for a hybrid model of individual and collective leadership for social justice, hinged on collective curiosity, knowledge building, equity discourses, collective, open cultures, and change visions to challenge the norms and politicization of schools as status-quo enhancing institutions.

Implications for Theory

Leadership Theory

Discourses in educational leadership have shifted to ethical, moral, and relational goals; accordingly, principals in this study found themselves focused on relationships

within learning communities as manifested in their day-to-day practices and decision points. Participants' use of words such as "fair", "just", "dignity", and "right" supports this shift away from management towards justice-oriented aims in learning communities. However, tensions that exist within transformational leadership styles "between valuing diversity (based on racial, linguistic and ethnic difference) and the desire for social cohesion; between diversity of ideas/values and consensus building" (Blackmore, 2006, p. 186) are also supported by the findings from this research. For example, dilemmas consisted of conflict-ridden situations where there was disagreement or potential controversy about a course of action, and this positioned school principals as peace builders and problem solvers who have to "own the issues", "have the right answer all the time", and "see the positive by viewing their buildings through rose-coloured glasses." Ryan (2012) also notes this propensity in his research about administrators as mediators who are positioned to manage meaning in conflicts to ensure that "everyday experiences of the members of the school community are consistent with the common beliefs about what schools should be doing" (p. 64). This inclination to reframe issues in the positive may be a result of socialized norms of the strong, individual, and able leader who is required to demonstrate and evidence effectiveness rather than to problematize practices about the social issues of the institution.

Social Justice Leadership

While the literature acknowledges that social justice leadership is focused on a pedagogy of relationships which was evident in the findings of this research, it is also underpinned with a regard for diversity, democracy, and empowerment which is realized through decision points, allocation of resources, and concern for the achievement potential of all

students (Cooper, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; North, 2006; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). In this research study, participants focused almost exclusively on relationships and identified that they needed to know more about diversity, power, and marginalization to inform their social justice practices. This exclusive focus on individual relationships is incompatible with social justice leadership for three reasons: (a) it focuses on the leader as an individual agent; (b) it focuses on interpersonal conflict rather than broader social contradictions; and, (c) it doesn't prompt interrogation about and action against the inequity, exclusion, oppression, and marginalization in order to challenge hegemonic structures that are institutionalized in the norms and practices of schooling (Bogotch, 2002; Brown, 2004; Cooper, 2009; Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Gerwitz, 1998; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Rottman, 2007; Taylor, 2003; Theoharis, 2007; Young, 1990). Furthermore, the dilemmas themselves, pertained to management and identity issues as opposed to circumstances when the hierarchical structure, role expectations, or cultural pressures interfered with the leader's ability to ensure just outcomes for students; such as: achievement gaps, academic streaming, unequal allocation of resources, cultural chasms, a disproportionate focus on the discipline of minority students, culturally representative teacher hiring practices, and the engagement of different parent communities. This challenges theories about social justice leadership: is social justice leadership, as it is defined, a realistic expectation for principals? Karpinski and Lugg (2006) go so far as to question if social justice and educational administration are mutually exclusive due to the tensions that exist between the daily policies and practices of administrators and their intentions for just student outcomes.

Rottmann (2007) also questions the feasibility and sustainability of this model of leadership alongside the current structures and expectations for leaders:

principals with a dedication to educational equity, a caring personality, and an ability to facilitate change are hired on the basis of these qualities, then placed in unsustainable work conditions where they are encouraged to live up to their ideals without sufficient resources or autonomy to do so. Any failure to meet these ideals is then attributed to a flaw in the principal. Market-based efficiency paired with expectations of superhuman individual leadership cannot possibly support social justice. (p. 65)

Additionally, Hargreaves (2009) points out that schools, families, and communities must play a role in education, because it takes investment beyond the schools to really make a difference. Accordingly, he insists that it is unfair that “moral issues of inequality and social justice that are a shared responsibility [have been converted into] technical calculations of achievement gaps for which teachers and schools are solely responsible” (p. 18).

I would be hard-pressed to argue against the assumption that leaders in school should work for justice, yet I think it is an audacious and lofty goal to be tackled through the sheer determination of the principal him/herself. The literature reinforces this normative expectation of self-reliance and personal choice of leadership style by studying how principals undertake social justice in their schools and deal personally with the resistance. Consequently, there are theory and research implications for where to locate the bright spots of organizational social justice leadership. Furthermore, since those people in school leadership positions reside as members of the dominant class, the

interpretation of social justice from their positionality risks oversimplification.

Accordingly, the development of critical consciousness must be coupled with a model of organizational leadership, which is discussed in the section on implications for practice.

In this way, it would be more fitting that communities and school divisions hold a *collective* and bold dream for justice that is co-constructed with all community members through a common language and supported by collaborative relationships of reflective practice. In this vein, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) articulate that, “If you want to accelerate learning in any endeavor, you concentrate on *the group*. This is *social capital*” (p. 89).

Identity and Agency

The findings of this research also support theory about the identity and agency of school principals. Despite the fact that the last few decades have seen a shift from hierarchies of power to distributed models of leading in education, there is still confusion, ambiguity, and tension because of the neoliberal value that is placed on accountability through achievement outcomes, standardization, the cultural emphasis on individualism, and an ethic of production (Gerwitz, 1998; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Ryan, 2012; Stevenson, 2007). This creates a functionalist, leader-centric view of the leadership role regardless of the rhetoric (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008; Rottmann, 2007; Tourish & Barge, 2010). Although the idyllic philosophy of education promotes teaching, learning, and social relationships, administrators are bombarded by continuous problem solving in order to “buffer the technical core of the organization (the classroom) from the immediate and pressing demands of students, parents, and other short-term sources of perturbation in the system” (Kelley & Peterson, 2008, p. 357). Therefore, each day is fragmented by short interactions, unscheduled activities, and a wide variety of unique,

unpredictable and unexpected problems requiring “cognitive and affective diversity” (p. 357). Since the majority of the dilemmas in this research pertained to managing surface demands and identity issues related to challenging, supporting, and steering within the positional power of the role, it is safe to conclude that school principals are still managers in many aspects of their role, despite their earnest expectations and desires to be otherwise. This supports the disconnect between ideals and practice that is noted in the social justice literature.

Social Constructivism and Situated Learning

According to Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory, learning occurs through social interactions and activities in which people build and rebuild cognitive structures. Language plays an important role in knowledge building according to this theory because it is used for important executive mental functions such as forming concepts (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2010). The findings of this research support this theory because knowledge of social justice was communicated and constructed within a social context wherein dialogue and dilemma analysis was used as the vehicle for scaffolding and constructing the meaning of social justice out of experiences. Participants became more knowledgeable others to one another within discussions of the culture of education, school division emphases, and specific school contexts as well as the enculturation of school leaders.

Supported by the findings of this research, situated learning also enabled participants to be engaged in discussions about their practice, supported by having collegial conversations about problematic and difficult cases. Through the sharing of personal stories and exposure to diverse perspectives, identity and agency was articulated

within focussed dialogue about social justice. Accordingly, participation and knowledge construction in this research was supported by situated learning theory that relied on the analysis of lived experiences. When situated learning and social constructivist theory are employed, collaboration and dialogue become the “chief vehicle for analysis, criticism, and communication of ideas, practices, and values” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 13) in which principals experience the opportunity and resources “to examine their own work with care and some detachment, to challenge their own thinking, and to draw reasonable conclusions from their inquiries, including generalizations that could help them to navigate future situations” (p. 11). The literature also reinforces the need for school principals to practice critical reflection in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands that are further complicated by injustices that they may unconsciously be reinforcing.

While it is recognized that social constructivism and situated learning were pivotal to the epistemology in this study, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory provides an additional framework for the positionality of the participants and the subjective lens through which they interpreted dilemmas and understandings of social justice. Edmunds and Edmunds (2011) articulate that “we are inherently born into a society of people, and we spend the rest of our lives learning *about* people, and learning *from* people, so we can effectively interact *with* people” (p. 63). Accordingly, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory helps to explain how environmental impacts and societal pressures influence individuals to evolve and adapt in social relationships. Since much of social justice is based on relational pedagogy founded on the principles of freedom, dignity, and potential through intentional, supportive, and constructivist

learning of the whole person, it follows that Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory may offer insight into the values and ideals that informed principals' knowledge, ideals, and reported practices.

This is echoed in the work of Bourdieu (1977) who presents the notion of *habitus* which refers to the worldviews, dispositions, and ideas that, over time, comprise our social and cultural perspective. This habitus forms a filter for how we understand or are prejudiced, and Gadamer (2002) calls such biases "conditions for understanding" (p. 277). Shields and Edwards (2005) reiterate that "our understanding is influenced by our own mental constructs, experiences, and modes of thought, no matter how valid or invalid those constructs may be" (p. 72), and they insist that it is these constructs that influence both how we hear and process our experiences and social interactions. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) refer to this as positionality or the ways in which "our social group memberships shape our perspectives" (p. 173) which is related to Vygotsky's emphasis on the social environment and social activities that influence knowledge development and learning.

As applied to the results of this research, it is evident that principals are impacted by various systems that have shaped their values, beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions. These systems include the: (a) misosystem—family, peers, school, and neighbourhood and the manner in which these systems exert influence; (b) mesosystem—influences between different microsystems; (c) exosystem—distant social settings that the individual does not have an active role; (d) macrosystem—cultural values and beliefs; and, (e) chronosystem—socio-historical circumstances (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2010, p. 64). While the complexity of interaction within these systems is dizzying, the common thread among them is the

expected behaviours and relationships that are entrenched in the socialization of school leaders. This was a factor in this research because of the impact of socialization on participants' perspectives, understandings, and judgments as they relate to social justice as well as the external constraints that impact their social justice practices and decision making.

Implications for Practice

Gerwitz (1998) wonders what conceptualizations of social justice will “usefully inform the direction and content of collective action” (p. 477). The themes and conclusions from this research have implications for social justice leadership, identity and agency, and reflective practice.

Social Justice Leadership

Findings from this research support the need for sustainable and interdependent models of leadership to challenge how principals have been socialized to lead according to market ideologies. Rebuilding a leadership culture that empowers critical friends among schools, cross-divisional networks, and leadership teams must become commonplace. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) agree that increasing justice in education involves a shift from the individual to the collective emphasizing relationships, diversity, quality, universal rights, and interdependence, provoking us to “think beyond our own schools and ourselves” (p. 158). Starratt (2004) also insists that justice work has to reach beyond school walls to all those whom their actions affect. Hargreaves and Fink suggest that sustainable justice leadership includes partnerships between successful and struggling schools, networking among school divisions, community consultation, and collective accountability. Finally, Katz and Earl (2010) concur that, “networks of schools

may have the potential to disturb the status quo, create the conditions for knowledge creation, and stimulate change in the daily work of people in schools, in the service of learning for all pupils” (p. 49).

Enhancing an interdependent and collective culture can be accomplished through organizational leadership, also termed ideological leadership, which replaces the principal as the individual agent. This modification enables cultural shifts to occur through the use of common language, shared leadership, and relational forms of influence (Rottmann, 2007). These organizational dynamics have a profound influence over the people in the system, and this was noted by the participants’ unconscious use of normative language from their school divisions in the findings of this research.

Without ideational leadership that becomes entrenched at the divisional level, no amount of personal determination or professional development will sustain efforts for social justice in education. Furthermore, despite the fact that school divisions are employing a discourse of equity and inclusion, they may be perpetuating social injustice through mixed messaging about priorities. This means that senior administrators must interrogate the culture of their divisions and hierarchical nature of their leadership paradigms, and they must consistently focus on contextual strategies to address achievement gaps, issues of academic streaming, unequal allocation of resources, cultural chasms, a disproportionate focus on the discipline of minority students, culturally representative teacher hiring practices, and the engagement of different parent communities.

To ignore the current structure of schooling in which principals *do* act as agents in the day-to-day operations, positions individual leadership *against* organizational

leadership as either/or options. Rather, I argue that it should be a both/and approach in which individual dispositions and practices are nested in newly formed collective and organizational norms for social justice. According to this model, values-in-action would manifest in:

Collective curiosity supported by intellectual humility, a lifelong learning lens, collaborative inquiry culture, and a willingness to tolerate discomfort and conflict (Lipton & Wellman, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Knowledge-building supported by intentional and repeated professional development in critical theory, socialization, prejudice and discrimination, oppression and power, privilege, racism, and the politics of schooling build on meritocracy (Bates, 2006; Brown, 2004; Foster, 1989; Gunter, 2001; MacKinnon, 2007; Ryan & Katz, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Equity discourses that create a cultural and unrelenting language of social justice (MacKinnon, 2007; Rottmann, 2007).

Collective culture wherein informal and formal structures help educators to reflect in and on action to challenge status quo (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Rottmann, 2007).

Change that occurs structurally, shifting decision making towards shared, local responsibility and away from neoliberal reforms (Rottmann, 2007).

This implication for leadership is supported both by the practices that principals identified about social justice in this research and the practices that they omitted. For example, principals acknowledged the need for *reflecting critically* about withholding assumptions and examining their personal lenses and *seeking to understand* culture,

power, and marginalization. These practices are aligned with knowledge building noted above. While principals also identified that they need to *consistently endeavour to* communicate, challenge deficit thinking, have an open mind, create places of belonging, restore healing and restitution, and engage in professional dialogue, these practices detail individual skills and traits, necessitating a shift to a more collective curiosity, discourse, and culture which must be newly socialized into the identity and agency of school leaders.

Identity and Agency

Participants in this study expressed an interest in or affinity to lead according to the principles of social justice. They used value-based language to describe how they perceive themselves as leaders, and one principal noted that this perception influenced how he might respond to a dilemma. Another participant commented that a personalized interpretation of what it means to lead is pivotal to her leadership style. These comments speak to the notion of identity which influences the lens, priorities, and management of dilemmas. However, while some principals have a curiosity about or passion for equity in education, many do not have the knowledge base or discursive background to enable them to move beyond rhetoric. This is compounded by divisional or provincial leadership views that relegate social justice to add-on programs or global charity projects.

Principals in this research identified a strong sense of responsibility for owning problems in their buildings, and they understand social justice as an individual, relational, agentic action that is embedded in all aspects of their practice. Yet, there is a disconnect between this understanding and the literature on social justice. Therefore, supporting the work of principals as hosts rather than heroes (Wheatley & Frieze, 2011) is imperative to engendering an ethos of collaboration among community members, and especially with

teachers. Accordingly, principals must become mentors and models, speaking and acting in the language of social justice. This recommendation is consistent with instructional leadership for social justice as derived by the work of McKenzie and Locke (2010).

Fullan (2010) says that “to get anywhere, you have to *do* something” (p. 32), so leaders who find themselves aligned with the principles of social justice must not become paralyzed by the seemingly insurmountable obstacle that is neoliberalism. Rather, orienting practice towards justice is an ongoing journey that begins with local, collective action *and* personal reflection about positionality and values. In working towards authentic social justice practice, Kohl (1998) reminds educators that they need to hone their own craft, beyond the passion and effort, to “get it right for your own students before presuming to take on larger systems....As educators we need to root our struggles for social justice in the work we do on an everyday level in a particular community with a particular group of students” (p. 286). The importance of working collaboratively to support teachers in this work should also not be underestimated, because the dilemmas that administrators often experience cannot be disconnected from their personal and professional positionality; instructional and achievement outcomes; and the complexities of classroom, school, and community culture. Since “the classroom door is the gateway to implementation or the drawbridge that holds it at bay” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 28), the focus on enlisting teachers in the discourse and actions of social justice in education cannot be understated.

Griffiths (1998) cautions that “improvements always come as a patchwork or ragbag. There can never be a tidy overarching rationale or master plan for improving fairness [because] events move too fast” (p. 148), so realistic expectations must always

be considered in the work of social justice, mindful that each person's experience, knowledge base, awareness level, and tolerance for personal interrogation is different. Ryan and Rottmann (2007) also recognize that change for social justice need not only be focused on official policy, laws, and conventions but rather on "those more potent informal, taken-for-granted, and invisible codes of conduct" (p. 16).

Reflective Practice

Since the most significant findings of this research pertain to the fact that: (a) principals see social justice in *all* aspects of their work; and, (b) the fieldwork technique of collectively analyzing dilemmas of professional practice were of most value, the first recommendation is that principals consider how the practice of reflecting about social justice-in-action can become habitual. In her 2011 study, Young also discovered that principals value "professional development that causes them to reflect on their practice and dialogue further within their professional learning communities" (p. 170). As a principal myself, I recognize that while the intention to do this is well-meaning, the demands of the school day are a constant distraction. Young (2011) also found that school administrators are "living in the immediacy of an environment that forces them to engage in management and personnel" (p. 149) issues, and this precludes them from metacognitive processes in the moment. Accordingly, principals need to be realistic and flexible about how this practice might look, and they should work closely with senior administration to ensure that they are afforded such opportunities and provided with supportive structures to interrogate philosophy, purpose, and practices among stratified groups consisting of teachers, principals, senior administrators, and community members.

Implications for Professional Development

Research confirms that reflective practice and purposeful dialogue is imperative to help leaders to dissect decisions, understand the inherent complexity of the role, and articulate the factors and tensions that influence decisions. Senior administrators play a supportive role in ensuring that school principals have access to and time provided to engage in ongoing reflective practice about social justice, ergo all aspects of their practice. Professional learning communities *within* schools are one potential model for this. One advantage to containing support within a division is that understanding the complexity of the role of the school leader is context-specific, and this impacts the transferability of skills (Lawson, 2008; Young, 2011). However, all participants in this research commented positively on the importance of the different perspectives offered by the principals from three different school divisions, so consideration of the potential impact of networked learning communities (Katz, Dack, & Earl, 2009; Katz & Earl, 2010) is also an important implication of this research for professional development.

The findings in Young's (2011) study suggest that school leaders seek professional development more for their own benefit than for the achievement of their students. This is related to Posner's (2009) assertion that "leadership is driven more by internal forces than by external forces, and thus the development of leaders is fundamentally the development of the inner self." (p. 6). However, the process of articulating mindscapes and achieving personal clarity is not a fixed endeavour; rather, leaders "must keep only a tentative hold on beliefs, realizing that what they know and believe today may not be what they will know and believe tomorrow" (Combs et al., 1999, p. 41). This is consistent with Fay's (1987) construct of intelligence, the ability to

alter beliefs and behaviour based on new information about the world. Such reflexivity demands personal honesty and authenticity which is gained through both reflection and a “wakefulness to the dialogue, actions, and values of diverse others” (Leonard, 2008, p. 255). Since justice literacy is really about examining and acting on the underlying causes of injustice and inequities, principals also need avenues for building new knowledge, skills, and dispositions to help them to recognize, assess and respond to causal sources of injustice in their schools and in education in general. This was supported by the findings about the positive impact of the research experience.

Young’s (2011) data also suggest that opportunities to work with a mentor either individually or within a group situation was perceived as one of the most effective forms of professional development for school principals; consequently, a potential model for professional development would be for an outside organization to facilitate group mentoring, and this would create an opportunity for diverse and interdependent cross-divisional perspectives. This could be combined with an in-house mentor coordinator from each school division who would bridge the gap between broad perspectives and contextually-specific circumstances. This divisional mentor could also meet individually with groups of school leaders. Developmental mentoring is an imperative to this model of professional development because developmental induction is not supported by one-size fits all, topic-oriented training.

Lambert (2003) advocates for “reciporical processes of constructivist learning” to frame professional learning that may take the form of “learning opportunities that can be found in collegial conversations, coaching episodes, shared decision-making groups, [and] reflective journals...” (p. 22). This leads to professional development that is more

likely to have an impact because school leaders are: (a) engaged in a concrete task which is grounded in inquiry; (b) professionally developing from their own experiences which makes it relevant and purposeful; and, (c) support is provided (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 326). Specifically it is designed to:

- Surface issues and conditions without knowing the answer; raise questions without easy answers;
- Design and implement multiple participation patterns;
- Facilitate conversations and dialogue leading to shared purpose and actions;
- Invite others into leadership roles and actions;
- Pose questions that focus attention on what is most important (teaching for diversity);
- Ask probing questions, use reflective strategies ... and invite a high level of risk-taking;
- Continually create, interpret, and deepen indicators of progress toward the vision;
- Create and facilitate reciprocal learning;
- Encourage individual and group initiative by providing multiple resources; and
- Continually indicate that time is available for shared work. (Lambert, 2003, p. 37)

While the benefits of effective and purposeful collaboration could potentially lead to more local equity in education, Surowiecki (2004) argues that the shared wisdom of groups is beneficial only if they consist of diverse, independent thinkers with a variety of specialized knowledge. In addition to intentionally combining experience with research, learning communities must create norms to avoid groupthink, self-referencing, complacency, complaining, and other hazards that diminish their value and impact on just

practices. Hargreaves (1994) also cautions that collaboration can degrade to contrived collegiality wherein mandated teams convene in inauthentic ways to focus on mechanistic aspects of teaching. Rather, he suggests that curriculum and pedagogical decisions can be made with “clear and broad guidelines that steer them in a common direction” (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 32).

Some of the miseducation about social justice is a result of professional development that focuses on “dos” and “don’ts” of practice for a single agent who has the positional power to seemingly impact change. Examination of broad patterns rooted to “the historical, ideological, and cultural lines of authority that underlie social conditions” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 1) seems to be relegated to philosophy courses in higher education but is deemed irrelevant to the day-to-day practices of leaders. Well-intentioned teachers and principals, interested in social justice, who have been socialized to independently control their immediate environments focus on “traits, characteristics, roles, and actions” (Rottmann, 2007, p. 54) rather than looking outwards in a more collaborative approach of how to impact change. Therefore, professional development also needs to focus leaders on learning how to be collectively critical if they are to be authentic reflective practitioners working towards social justice. Principals in this research identified their own knowledge gaps pertaining to culture, diversity, power, and marginalization that should be featured in professional development opportunities.

Young (2011) outlines that university courses were ranked among the most valuable professional development experiences by the principals that she surveyed and interviewed. She suggests that “courses provide psychologically ‘safe’ places in which to wrestle with ambiguity and uncertainty among a group of peers with no reputations or

funding on the line” (p. 149). However, Marshall (2004) reports that most graduate level leadership courses do not incorporate the study of injustices toward race, gender, ethnicity, social class, and other areas of difference; rather, it is within the context of select courses whose faculty has a background and passion for justice that such dispositions and competencies are addressed. Furthermore, “we are not taught in schools and mainstream culture about the experiences of minoritized groups. This makes it difficult for dominant group members to see oppression.” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 65). Reference to diversity remains relegated to isolated courses about how to address diverse school populations, the language of critique, reflection and discussion, and action projects (Marshall, 2004, p. 6). Such interests on the part of faculty seem to be merely tolerated by institutions as publications, research, advocacy and policy change efforts in this regard are not always acknowledged on the tenure track (Marshall, 2004, p. 5). Institutional consideration of issues pertaining to social justice is broadly lacking, and the knowledge base towards which administration coursework focuses on is management theory and behaviourism which leaves no time for building a conceptual understanding of social injustices reproduced in education and the ideological framework from which to inform practices that challenge them. Brown (2004) also notes that professors, themselves, are not equipped with the knowledge base and experience to design learning opportunities for students to become oriented, equipped, and inspired to address oppressive social structures. White and Cooper (2012) explain that this is because “researchers write from a first world perspective while issues exist, to varying degrees, on a world stage” (p. 520).

The literature on the development of critical leadership reveals a number of common pedagogical recommendations, three of which are particularly pertinent to the findings of this research: First, due to the influence that positionality and personal beliefs have on professional beliefs and behaviour, examination of assumptions; values; and beliefs-also termed consciousness raising-is central to the inquiry of the critical social justice leader (Bates, 2006; Brown, 2004; Foster, 1989; Gunter, 2001; Ryan & Katz, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Brown (2004) suggests that this can be accomplished through cultural autobiographies, historical overviews of injustice, current analysis of systemic inequities, reflective self-analysis and dialogue journals, prejudice reduction workshops, cross-cultural interviews, diversity panels, and educational plunges. However, any work that involves challenging mainstream opinions should also include processes for professional identity work, because in the process of reconstructing how they see the world, their reality, and their positionality, principals must also reintegrate this new knowledge into how they see themselves and their agency.

Second, the development of the critical leader should also include knowledge building about “evidence-based practices that can create an equitable school” (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006, p. 213). Through the examination of critical theory perspectives as they relate to purposes and realities of education, leaders need to interrogate:

- What is the purpose of school?
- Who is served by the educational system?
- How have the themes of control and cultural domination played out throughout the history of education?
- Are the themes of institutional, cultural, and personal oppression still relevant today?

- What are the roles and issues facing educational leaders in our schools? (Brown, 2004, p. 89)

Finally, critical leadership initiatives need to support social justice-in-action.

Brown (2004) outlines activist action plans as a method of teaching leaders how to take social action and to implement transformative policies and practices in their schools. The use of dilemma analysis and cycles of action research are other options to enhance this action. However, Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) insist that prerequisite skills are required to support the 'how to' of social justice practice; for example, how to engage community members in change processes to dismantle inequitable practices, how to create critically-oriented cultures, and how to build alliances.

Implications for Research

There are several implications for research; specifically, in the areas of social justice leadership, administrative dilemmas, identity and agency of leaders, and reflective practice for social justice.

Social Justice Leadership

Since the findings of this research reinforce theories about socialized norms of the strong, individual, and able leader, social justice leadership can fall prey to aspirations of heroic agency which is inconsistent with the aims of social justice. Accordingly, future research should endeavor to understand how the existing structures and hierarchies within the system, such as school divisions, school boards, and ministries of education, conceptualize social justice. This understanding could potentially contribute to the development of organizational leadership and collective, co-constructed visions that are enhanced by a discourse of justice.

Dilemmas in Administration

The literature on dilemmas in educational administration does not include a “social justice dilemma” per say. While elements of Mandzuk and Hasinoff’s (2010) moral or political dilemma and Berlak and Berlak’s (1981) societal dilemma overlap with the critical concepts housed in social justice, these dilemmas refer to teaching or schooling. Given the increasingly topical nature of social justice, this omission highlights an opportunity for future research. The dilemmas shared in this research study did not all necessarily align with social justice principles; therefore, this finding implies that additional research could contribute to theory development on social justice dilemmas in educational administration. For example, more direction on what a social justice dilemma is could be offered when eliciting narratives of dilemmas. Accordingly, a social justice dilemma could be defined as “a situation wherein the hierarchical structure, role expectations, or social/cultural pressures have interfered with the leader’s ability to ensure equitable outcomes for students.” Alternatively, in a more participatory style of research, participants could define and detail this this type of dilemma for themselves.

Identity and Agency

The recruitment of participants for this study was voluntary, and it is interesting that the majority of participants had between nine and 14 years of experience as a school administrator, with two outliers who had four years of experience. This prompts me to wonder about what motivates a principal to seek this type of experience at this point in his or her career. Teachers hit their stride in mid-career (between eight and twenty years of experience) with high levels of capability and commitment (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). But, is the same true for principals? Once they get over the shock of the quantity

and intensity of day-to-day interactions, do they then seek processes for intellectualizing their practice in search of better alignment between their ideals and their practice? Future research in this area could build on this research to compare conceptualizations of social justice leadership at different career stages.

Reflective Practice for Social Justice

In order for reflective practice not to be anchored in rhetoric, there needs to be evaluative processes to determine its connection to just outcomes. Principals need to be coached and supported in how to evaluate and report on collaborative reflective practices, perhaps as part of their professional growth models and/or evaluative processes. Action research cycles intended to generate new theory is one way of approaching professional development that is contextual and personalized. A possible starting point for action research questions is Griffiths' (2003) QAF (Questions to Ask Frequently) which are included in her framework for social justice:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is being learnt (including factual knowledge, attitudes, and skills)? ▪ Is it meeting needs, desires and wants? ▪ Does learning include fun, love, laughter, tears, and obsessions? ▪ Is there an opportunity to learn how to do 'transversal politics'? |
| Personal Identity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there a chance for everyone to explore and discover their identities? ▪ Can they do this as individuals? Members of different communities? Of the whole community? |
| Difference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is attention paid to all the axes of difference (including race, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, sexuality, (dis)abilities)? ▪ Are material resources allocated fairly to all sectors? ▪ Is there a chance to explore shifting possibilities of different identities? ▪ Is space given to explore ways of dealing with being positioned by others? ▪ Is complexity acknowledged, or are some groups being |

- stereotyped?
 - Can everyone have a say and are they being heard?
 - Is there an opportunity to have a say, using different modes of expression?
- Self**
- What privilege as yet remains unacknowledged?
 - What personal experiences have been over-generalized?
 - Are the expressions and perspectives heard? Have steps been taken to find out?
- Evidence**
- What steps have been taken to ensure that the questions have been answered well: monitoring; checking; consultation exercises?
 - What else could be used to provide evidence? (pp. 142-143)

Beyond administrative dilemmas, identity development and reflective practice, scholars must ask the question, does it actually make a difference? Gale and Densmore (2003) argue that even when purposeful dialogue about social justice occurs and modest social changes are noted, there is little evidence of change to deeper sociocultural patterns. Scrutinizing if development efforts translate into the collapse of class, gender, and race hierarchies in order to enable equal participation of all students in a community that is shaped to meet their needs is imperative. If it is deemed possible, under what conditions? As assessed by whom? As measured by what? Are there hybrid leadership models that could meet the same ends?

Conclusion

Griffiths (2003) defines social justice as:

a dynamic state of affairs that is good for the common interest, where that is taken to include both the good of each and the good of all, in an acknowledgement that one depends on the other. The good depends on mutual recognition and respect and also on a right distribution of benefits

and responsibilities. It includes paying attention to individual perspectives at the same time as dealing with issues of discrimination, exclusions, and recognition, especially on the grounds of race, gender, sexuality, special needs, and social class. (Griffiths, 2003, p. 54)

However, Marshall (1995) insists that conventional leadership theory and practice cannot support social justice because it conflicts with the ethic of care “by reifying traditional bureaucratic structures in schools, where the goals are control, standardization, and bureaucratic maintenance—the antithesis of situation-specific, holistic, relationship-building caring” (p. 490). Other scholars have wondered if the role of the principal, which has been socially conditioned to be leader-centric, individual, and functionalistic, can feasibly shift to a social justice disposition and agenda (Hargreaves, 2009; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Rottmann, 2007). Yet, social justice discourses are increasingly topical in education, and post-structural theories of leadership are shifting paradigms to more relational pedagogies. Practitioners are therefore suspended between two paradoxical concepts of leadership which creates tensions and dilemmas in practice.

The purpose of this research was to understand how principals conceptualize social justice and how this understanding impacts their practice when responding to a dilemma. The findings highlight normative practices of school leaders as manifested in individual, relational, agentic actions that are embedded in their practice. However, this conceptualization obscures the power of historical, cultural, and ideological authority that is unconsciously replicated in the norms of schooling. Furthermore, principals see social justice within their own actions but do not connect it with more political aspirations to challenge broader social inequities.

These findings are not entirely aligned with the literature on social justice leadership. Furthermore, a focus on the dichotomy between individualism and collectivism and conversations that concentrated on behavioural needs of students are noteworthy as prevailing concerns for principals. Accordingly, there are a number of implications for theory, practice, professional development and further research. Additional efforts, both scholarly and practical, need to focus on how to expand efforts beyond insular school structures to more collective ways of envisioning democratic and equitable schools by networking stakeholders in education, united in a common discourse of justice.

Epilogue

Identity in Flames

Lather (1991) talks about the empowering potential of research “where both researcher and researched become, in the words of feminist singer-poet, Cris Williamson, ‘the changer and the changed’ ” (p. 56). This experience of becoming more literate about social justice myself as well as understanding how other principals understand social justice was reciprocally beneficial. Wheatley and Frieze (2011) insist:

a learning journey can be judged successful by how much it destabilizes and challenges our worldview. If we take the risk to step into a world very different from our own, we discover that our particular way of seeing is incomplete, that there are many more ways to see and interpret what's going on in life. We discover that judgments and assumptions often limit our ability to see new possibilities. (p. 13)

At the risk of making the school principalship sound like a form of persecution that only martyrdom could withstand, the perils and pitfalls of the role have prompted much angst and many wonderings for me over the last seven years:

Some days, I question my choice to be a school principal. To be sure, this role takes its toll: from feeling like I need to be everything to all people; from a long list of spoken (and unspoken) expectations, some of which I find out about in the moment or after-the-fact; from self-neglect; from self-criticism; from exposure to and absorption of the hurt and pain of my community members; from public commentary and criticism of what I do and how I handle every situation; from letting people down when I don't even know it; from letting people down and hearing about it loudly; from screwing up; from all the tears that I counsel people through and from all the tears that I cause; from the anger that comes to me from people whose problems I can't solve; from being helpless; from waking up some days and wondering what the hell I am doing because I have completely lost sight of why I got into education in the first place; from conflict, conflict, conflict all the time, interspersed by hugs and limp dandelions delivered

by the hands of beaming, toothless students, and aha moments where I celebrate that I did something right and made a difference and remained completely aligned with my values. But, I realize that this is only a pinhole view of the bigger picture, and it is focussed on me. While I need to look inward at my personal belief systems, I also need to look outward at systems, structures, and relationships that are unjust. But I cannot do this alone. I must join with others who share this vision on a learning journey.

I wonder if my privileged, White, upper-class life, void of deep struggle has conditioned me to live with relative ease. I wonder if this is why I have struggled so much with the tensions of the job, especially in light of everything I have now learned.

I now recognize that there are no easy answers or a simple formula for how to get the job done “right” or “effectively”; but, there is an element of peace that comes from naming the tensions and reflecting on how my values help or hinder my practice; perhaps it is peace that comes from a broader understanding of the enormous responsibility that I have committed to. Perhaps it is peace that comes from unpacking and reorganizing the hats I wear. In the process of doing that, clarity illuminates the comfort I seek in daily “demands” and in what direction I would like to focus future energy. This reflective work should never be done – I recognize that it has to continue, and I wonder how I will ensure this happens after my Ph.D?

Finding purpose is not a neat and tidy endeavour and “the climate of school leadership does not lend itself easily to an examination of purpose” (Combs et al., 1999, p. 166). I understand that there will be no immediate gratification or “end date” for discovering purpose; more clarity, perhaps, but not a sense of “fait accompli”. In fact, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) insist:

developing critical social justice literacy requires a lifelong commitment to an ongoing process. This process challenges our worldview and our relationships to others. It asks us to connect ourselves to uncomfortable concepts such as prejudice, privilege, and oppression. It challenges simplistic dos-and-donts approaches. (p. 162)

That said, there is a temporary sense of liberation that comes from this crucible thusfar, and it is the freedom that generates hope and sparks energy for re-approaching the role of educational administration with new eyes and renewed vigour. Beatty (2009) verifies this self-reflective process and the feelings that are associated with it in her assertion that “the deliberate reintegration of personal/emotional dimensions of lived experiences with public dimensions of one’s organizational and professional identity, can be powerfully transformational, engendering healing, renewal, and even an increased sense of the potential for flow at work” (p. 169). The professional development impact of working with 10 school principals cannot be understated. However, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) pose the question, “if I accept this information as valid, what might be ethically required of me?” (p. 172), so it is with this question in mind that my next learning journey begins, and that brings me back to situated learning and the ongoing need for professional dialogue, networking as a school leader, risk taking, and informed action.

I recently came across six central tenants of social justice written by MacKinnon (2007) for a professional development module. These are helpful for grounding me in the overwhelming amount of literature on the topic:

- A central and difficult component of social justice work is interrogating one’s own position of privilege.
- Schools are not a route to freedom and self-fulfillment for many students.
- Equity is not the same as equality. Our work involves equity.
- A central leadership goal is the development of each individual’s critical consciousness and an increase in critical capacity of staff.
- Social justice work is not about blaming. Guilt is useless and counter-productive. We cannot change the past, but we can influence the future.

- Social justice work is very difficult. It is fraught with resistance, rebellion, and bitterness. A useful working maxim is: Stop harm, validate good work, and paddle upstream. (pp. 232-233)

Closing Reflections

Although my leadership development began with the acquisition of specific knowledge domains such as leadership theory, finance, personnel, management, policy, and law, the most powerful learning has taken place in the lived experiences and relationships that have molded my identity as a leader and shaped my understanding of what I am doing, what it means in my life, and how it is all integrated with “the residue of past experiences and identities” (Ryan, 2012, p. 63). Through these experiences and relationships, I have come to experience leadership, not as a fixed role or a positional imperative but as situated decision points, interactions, and viewpoints that are critically dependent on both my belief and value system and an increasing ability to understand the viewpoints of others relative to broader social, cultural, and political contexts:

My learning journey as a principal occurred on a slow-motion rollercoaster. It consisted of a collection of “notes-to-self” that I recorded after the “highs” and “lows” which were interspersed amidst short-lived plateaus. Note-to-self: Don’t wait so long to have a difficult conversation with a teacher about her assessment techniques or teaching practice; Note-to-self: start a difficult conversation with a question about learning; Note-to-self: do not feel apologetic about doing what is right for students, even when it makes adults feel uncomfortable; Note-to-self: Be brave when being controversial and celebrate the energy of people talking, even if those conversations are fraught with tension; Note-to-self: Be strong when people call you names and instead focus on what value you are fighting for; and Note-to-self: leadership is not about picking every battle; it is about knowing when to engage and when to file something away for another day.

There are the highs, the feelings when a conversation impacts someone’s perspective, which impacts teaching or learning or a relationship or the spirit of people in the community. These are short lived, and I have trouble remembering them because of the lows—times, when public opinion

scorched my confidence and I entered into an internal battle where knowledge, experience, and relationships became jumbled in a smoky haze that rendered me confused about what I value and if I have the courage to take a stand in the name of that value. Sometimes I thought I was being a leader until someone called me “arrogant” or “a coward” or an “arrogant coward” and I had to go back to the drawing board of who I am, what I believe, why I make decisions, and what processes inform my practice.

Each learning experience, I renegotiate the identity of who I am as a principal, as a leader. I yearn for the plateaus where I can tend the garden and coast for a few weeks; yet, in those times, I have a vaguely uncomfortable feeling because I “should” be doing something—examining a practice, challenging status quo, coaching someone, solving one of a seemingly endless list of problems ... But, who says I am a problem-solver? How do I keep myself from being a heroic leader? When will I stop fixing?

To be sure, empowering people, building culture, and cultivating teams—those grandiose and elusive promises that philosophies are made of—are imperatives of both a manager and a leader; but, real leading—as I have come to see it—happens in those moments when you are face-to-face with another human being—a student, a teacher, a parent—in celebration, in conflict, in teamwork, in thought, in conversation ...

This crucible, although uncomfortable, has been a gift of time and opportunity to reconsider my purpose and see myself, my role, and education with new eyes. Becoming a leader has included, and will continue to include, an ongoing examination and analysis of my positionality, dilemmas that prompt me to think deeply about complexities and my intersectionality with them, contradictions to interpret and respond to, questions to ask, and opportunities to learn by meaning-making, problem-posing, and emotional processing. Some of these tasks will be purely managerial; others will be moments, snapshots, images, or opportunities to influence in socially just ways.

The findings of this research have impacted me deeply, because I realized that I can be an individualistic, rational-technical leader with profound discomfort for conflict. The more I researched, the more I realized how greatly I was blinded by my socialization.

Pre-PhD, some of my dilemmas would have aligned with the participants' dilemmas, and social justice issues such as achievement gaps, academic streaming, unequal allocation of resources, culture chasms, a disproportionate focus on the discipline of minority students, culturally representative teacher hiring practices, and the engagement of parent communities, were not on my radar to the extent that they would be now. I emerge from my crucible with intellectual humility and renewed ideas about myself as a leader, mindful that leadership is a complex and dynamic social process. I have learned that:

- A social justice dilemma occurs when the hierarchical structure, role expectations, or cultural pressures impacts my ability as a leader (self-imposed or otherwise) to ensure just outcomes for students.
- Social justice leadership is more than a personal interpretation of how to “help others”. Rather, it is an knowledgable, intentional, and focused lens through which to view micro- and macro-level influences.
- Social justice leadership develops into an identity through risk taking, reflection, and continual action in community and coalition with others; it is not something that I can do by myself, and it is not about me.
- Social justice leadership occurs in snapshots beginning in my own context: teachable moments, rich conversations, and mutual learning opportunities. Only then can it expand outside of my immediate practice to be more activist oriented.
- Social justice leadership is not a method; it is a belief system and a mindscape from which to approach the agency of the school principal. It demands an understanding of how structures, decision points, policies, and practices support and hinder equity, democracy, and relationships. There is prerequisite knowledge to be able to dig deep for social justice.

- Critical theory has challenged me to reconsider my purpose as a school principal. It has given me a different lens through which to be a leader. It has generated *why* and *how* questions about education but not answers.
- The role of the school principal is complex. It takes discipline to set priorities above and beyond the rigours of the daily management crisis.
- It is equally as important to model social justice leadership *and* coach social justice leadership by engaging in conversations with all members of the community.

Founded in my own processes of trying to reconcile how social justice principles are embedded in my leadership practice through my coursework, I was prompted to seek an understanding of how other principals conceptualize this nebulous concept and what their perceptions are of how it influences their practice, specifically through decision making in delimmas. Overwhelmingly, I felt affirmed about the inconclusiveness of the practice of school leadership; that is, the fact that we will not discover cast-iron rules of social justice conduct that are universally applicable. However, a lack of consensus on this practice and the obstacles of Westernized ideals embedded in neoliberalism should not discourage principals, teachers, and senior administrators from trying by interrogating and promoting the theory and action of such leadership; it is by the very nature of engaging in this discourse that the seeds of transformative practice are planted.

A fitting way to conclude this dissertation is with a poem that was written by Rebecca, one of the research participants during the final Stage 2 session. The spontaneity, vulnerability, and genuine qualities of this writing are a humbling reminder to all of us as administrators about what we must remain connected to as we embark on

the complexity of our roles, underpinning the imperative that we must journey first inward in order to lead with a moral purpose:

More than Me

Me:
At the heart
of every
thought
word
hesitation
smile
affirmation
deliberation
action ...

But I am so much more than me.

I am
every person
who has crossed my path,
touched my life,
caused me to ponder,
wonder and delight.

And so I seek
to do
for others.
To honour,
validate and value,
to celebrate,
share with and
to explore what might be, together.

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Appendix A: Correspondence to Public School Superintendents

Institutional Letterhead

Correspondence to Public School Superintendents

Dear SUPERINTENDENT:

My name is Danielle Fullan Kolton, and I am a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to ask your permission to invite principals within your school division (as one of four divisions being invited) to participate in a dissertation research study. **My study focuses on how school leaders understand the concept of social justice and how they make decisions when confronted with a social justice dilemma in their practice.**

Participating in this study means that school leaders (principals and/or vice principals) will:

1. Participate in two 60-minute digitally audiotaped interviews at a time and place convenient to the participant;
2. Spend approximately 60 minutes reviewing the interview transcripts; and
3. Participate in three 120-minute audio and video-taped small group dialogue sessions with 5-7 other school leaders outside of school hours.

Research Project Title: Understanding Social Justice in Education: Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis

Researcher: Danielle Fullan Kolton, University of Manitoba

Advisor: Dr. Dawn Wallin

I hope you will grant permission for principals to participate in this study, because the relevant literature reinforces the need for school leaders to engage in reflective practice in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands in which injustices may be unconsciously reinforced.

Risks and Benefits

The benefit of participating in this research is the provision of time and space to both individually and collaboratively debrief individual and others' dilemmas. This research process is a tool meant to assist participants in the understanding of their beliefs and institutional routines. It also demands a more conscious examination of the factors that shape, limit, and determine decisions they make when facing a dilemma. The potential for collegial networks and support are also inherent in the nature of the design. There is a potential for participants to feel uncomfortable or emotionally affected by the process of debriefing dilemmas. In order to address this, the name and contact information for the Employee Assistance Program will be made available to participants at the outset of the research. I will be attentive to reading the tone of the participants and the group as a whole, stopping and starting based on participant needs for emotional safety.

Anonymity

The identity of all participants in the research will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, and the location of the research will be masked; neither names nor school divisions will appear in the results. However, I am unable to guarantee the anonymity of the participants given the group nature of Stage 2 of the study. While all participants will sign group dialogue confidentiality slips that confirm that they will not discuss each other's responses outside the group, I am limited in my ability to assure this since not all participants may keep their views confidential. Participants may answer only those questions with which they feel comfortable, and they may participate in the group dialogue to the extent that they are at ease. During the research, access to the materials will be limited to the researcher and potentially the researcher's advisor. If I elect to use a transcription service, a confidentiality agreement will be signed by the transcriber. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting me, at which time the corresponding data will be destroyed.

Dissemination

Within three months of the conclusion of data collection, a summary report of the research will be distributed to both you and the participants via paper or electronic means as specified by your preference. The final report will also be shared in the form of a dissertation and possibly scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations which are intended to contribute to a knowledge base about the social justice conceptualizations that influence the decision making of principals.

Should you provide me with permission to speak with these principals, please sign the consent that is attached to this letter and return it to me at the contact address provided. If you do not wish the principals within your school division to participate, please discard this information.

Sincerely,

Danielle Fullan Kolton
University of Manitoba

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Institutional Letterhead
SUPERINTENDENT CONSENT LETTER

Dear Danielle Fullan Kolton:

I hereby give permission for the research study entitled, *Understanding Social Justice in Education: Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis* to be conducted with principals of (SCHOOL DIVISION) during the months of February 2012 to June 2012.

By signing this permission form, I consent that I understand the following:

- The researcher will be individually interviewing and digitally audio taping school leaders at a time and place convenient to the participant as a means of data collection;
- School leaders will be participating in audio and video-taped group dialogue sessions with 5-7 other school leaders outside of school hours as a means of data collection;
- A summary of findings will be distributed to me and the participants once the study is complete;
- I am free to withdraw my consent from the study at any time by contacting the researcher; and
- I am free to ask for clarification or new information throughout the study.

In no way does this letter or my signature waive my legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Superintendent's Signature

Date

- I would like to receive a paper summary copy of the results of this study. **OR**
- I would like to receive an electronic summary copy of the results of this study, forwarded to the following address:

Appendix B: Recruitment Invite to Potential Participants

Institutional Letterhead**RECRUITMENT INVITE TO POTENTIAL PUBLIC SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS**

Dear SCHOOL LEADER:

My name is Danielle Fullan Kolton, and I am a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to invite you to participate in a dissertation research study, and this invitation has been approved by your superintendent. **My study focuses on how school leaders understand the concept of social justice and how they make decisions when confronted with a social justice dilemma in their practice.**

I am looking for school leaders who are motivated and willing to dialogue about leadership practices, specifically as they relate to (a) dilemmas that cause tension and angst and for which there are no clear-cut answers and (b) understandings of social justice dilemmas. The relevant literature reinforces the need for school principals to engage in reflective practice in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands in which injustices may be unconsciously reinforced. Participating in this study means that you and/or your vice principal will:

- Participate in two 60-minute digitally audiotaped interviews at a time and place convenient to you; and
- Participate in three 120-minute audio and video-taped small group dialogue sessions with 5-7 other school leaders at a time mutually agreed upon by all group members

I understand that the time commitment may seem onerous, however, I want to reassure you that the two individual interviews can be done at a site and time that is convenient to you. We can also be creative with the three group dialogue meetings by rotating the site, spreading them over a longer period of time, or doing them in quick succession. As an administrator myself, I really do understand how difficult it is to carve this kind of time out of your day, but I am committed to understanding how principals understand social justice and approach decision making with it in mind. I see this as an opportunity for you to engage reflectively with four or five fellow school principals, and it affords you professional development time to process the complex system of competing demands in which justice issues emerge.

Research Project Title: Understanding Social Justice in Education: Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis

Researcher: Danielle Fullan Kolton, University of Manitoba

Advisor: Dr. Dawn Wallin

Research Timeline: March 2012 – June 2012

A summary report will be shared with both you and your superintendent, and it will also be presented in the form of a dissertation and possibly scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations, which are intended to contribute to a knowledge

base about the social justice conceptualizations that influence the decision making of principals.

Once again, your participation is voluntary. **If you wish to participate, please reply to this email** and I will forward the consent form which details the parameters of the study, your right to withdraw at any time, and issues pertaining to the anonymity of your participation.

Sincerely,

Danielle Fullan Kolton
University of Manitoba

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Institutional Letterhead**RECRUITMENT INVITE TO POTENTIAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS**

Dear SCHOOL LEADER:

My name is Danielle Fullan Kolton, and I am a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to invite you to participate in a dissertation research study. **My study focuses on how school leaders understand the concept of social justice and how they make decisions when confronted with a social justice dilemma in their practice.**

I am looking for school leaders who are motivated and willing to dialogue about leadership practices, specifically as they relate to (a) dilemmas that cause tension and angst and for which there are no clear-cut answers and (b) understandings of social justice dilemmas. The relevant literature reinforces the need for school principals to engage in reflective practice in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands in which injustices may be unconsciously reinforced. Participating in this study means that you and/or your vice principal will:

- Participate in two 60-minute digitally audiotaped interviews at a time and place convenient to you; and
- Participate in three 120-minute audio and video-taped small group dialogue sessions with 5-7 other school leaders at a time mutually agreed upon by all group members

I understand that the time commitment may seem onerous, however, I want to reassure you that the two individual interviews can be done at a site and time that is convenient to you. We can also be creative with the three group dialogue meetings by rotating the site, spreading them over a longer period of time, or doing them in quick succession. As an administrator myself, I really do understand how difficult it is to carve this kind of time out of your day, but I am committed to understanding how principals understand social justice and approach decision making with it in mind. I see this as an opportunity for you to engage reflectively with four or five fellow school principals, and it affords you professional development time to process the complex system of competing demands in which justice issues emerge.

Research Project Title: Understanding Social Justice in Education: Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis

Researcher: Danielle Fullan Kolton, University of Manitoba

Advisor: Dr. Dawn Wallin

Research Timeline: March 2012 – June 2012

A summary report will be shared with you, and it will also be presented in the form of a dissertation and possibly scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations, which are intended to contribute to a knowledge base about the social justice conceptualizations that influence the decision making of principals.

Once again, your participation is voluntary. **If you wish to participate, please reply to this email** and I will forward the consent form which details the parameters of the study, your right to withdraw at any time, and issues pertaining to the anonymity of your participation.

Sincerely,

Danielle Fullan Kolton
University of Manitoba

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Letters (Public & Catholic)

Institutional Letterhead
INFORMED CONSENT (PUBLIC)

Research Project Title: Understanding Social Justice in Education: Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis

Principal Investigator and contact information: Danielle Fullan Kolton

Research Supervisor and contact information: Dr. Dawn Wallin

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose and Focus of the Research

The relevant literature reinforces the need for school principals to engage in reflective practice in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands in which injustices may be unconsciously reinforced. **This study focuses on how school leaders understand the concept of social justice and how they make decisions when confronted with a social justice dilemma in their practice.**

Concentrated on the context of social justice from the perspective of two participant groups of five principals each from public and Catholic schools, reflective discussions of professional practice will occur through individual interviews with each participant and a series of three group dialogue sessions with each participant set.

Participating in this study means that you consent to the following:

Commitment

1. Participation in two 60-minute digitally audiotaped interviews at a time and place convenient to you;
2. 60 minutes to be spent reviewing the interview transcripts; and
3. Participation in three 120-minute audio and video-taped small group dialogue sessions with 5-7 other school leaders outside of school hours.

Feedback/Debriefing

Interviews will be digitally audiotaped and transcribed and group dialogue sessions will be digitally audiotaped and videotaped with a handheld camcorder. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts from the Stages 1 and 3 semi-structured interviews in order to add, delete, or change responses and to ensure that all identifying information has been anonymized. A “read receipt” will be requested to ensure that you have received the transcript, and you will be contacted personally within 24 hours if you do not confirm

receipt. It is anticipated that it will take you approximately 30 minutes to review the transcript. You will have two weeks to review the transcripts, and a non-response from you will be assumed to be approval of the transcript.

Given the collaborative nature of the research, opportunities to validate the data will be provided at the beginning of each group dialogue session in the form of collaborative analysis. All email correspondence containing data will be password protected.

Risks and Benefits

The benefit of participating in this research is the provision of time and space to both individually and collaboratively debrief individual and others' dilemmas. This research process is a tool meant to assist you in the understanding of your beliefs and institutional routines. It also facilitates a more conscious examination of the factors that shape, limit, and determine decisions you make when facing a dilemma. The potential for collegial networks and support are also inherent in the nature of the design.

There is a potential for you to feel uncomfortable or emotionally affected by the process of debriefing dilemmas. Accordingly, I will be attentive to reading the tone of the participants and the group as a whole, stopping and starting based on participant needs for emotional safety. Please note that your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) covers you, should you feel the need to receive counselling services.

Anonymity

The identity of all participants in the dissemination of research will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, and the location of the research will be masked; neither names of participants, schools nor school divisions will appear in the results. However, the researcher is unable to guarantee the anonymity of the participants given the group nature of Stage 2 of the study. While all participants will sign group dialogue confidentiality slips that confirm that they will not reveal the identity of the participants and/or discuss each other's responses outside the group, the researcher is limited in her ability to assure this since not all participants may keep their views confidential. Participants may answer only those questions with which they feel comfortable, and they may participate in the group dialogue to the extent that they are at ease. During the research, access to the materials will be limited to me, potentially my advisor, and a transcriber for the Stages 1 and 3 audiotape transcriptions. Please note that the transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher at the contact information on this form, at which time the individual interview transcripts would be destroyed, and any information in the focus groups provided by the individual will not be used as supporting quotations, even though the themes from within the group process may still be discussed because they were created by the group.

Dissemination

Within three months of the conclusion of data collection, a summary report of the research will be distributed to both you and your Superintendent via paper or electronic means as specified by your preference. The final report will also be shared in the form of

a dissertation and possibly scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations which are intended to contribute to a knowledge base about the social justice conceptualizations that influence the decision making of principals.

Deception

No forms of deception will be used in this study.

Compensation

No forms of compensation will be used in this study.

*** At any point you may withdraw from this study by contacting the principal researcher at which time your data will be destroyed. ***

Informed Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

-
- I would like to receive a paper summary copy of the results of this study. **OR**
- I would like to receive an electronic summary copy of the results of this study, forwarded to the following address:
- _____

Group Dialogue Confidentiality Agreement

The success of this study is dependent on the trust and confidentiality that supports professional reflection. This means that participants must not discuss the particulars of the conversations that occur within the confines of our group dialogue sessions with people who are not involved in the study.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to:

- NOT reveal the identity of the other participants; and
- NOT discuss the responses of the other participants outside the group.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Participant Self-Declaration Form

NAME	
GENDER	
CURRENT POSITION	
GRADE RANGE OF SCHOOL	
SCHOOL DIVISION	
PHONE NUMBER	
EMAIL	
GRADE RANGE OF SCHOOL	
WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?	

Please return this Self-Declaration form to the researcher with a signed copy of the INFORMED CONSENT and a signed copy of the GROUP DIALOGUE CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Institutional Letterhead
INFORMED CONSENT (CATHOLIC)

Research Project Title: Understanding Social Justice in Education: Exploring the Concept with Principals through Dilemma Analysis

Principal Investigator and contact information: Danielle Fullan Kolton

Research Supervisor and contact information: Dr. Dawn Wallin

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Purpose and Focus of the Research

The relevant literature reinforces the need for school principals to engage in reflective practice in order to cope within a complex system of competing demands in which injustices may be unconsciously reinforced. **This study focuses on how school leaders understand the concept of social justice and how they make decisions when confronted with a social justice dilemma in their practice.**

Concentrated on the context of social justice from the perspective of two participant groups of five principals each from public and Catholic schools, reflective discussions of professional practice will occur through individual interviews with each participant and a series of three group dialogue sessions with each participant set.

Participating in this study means that you consent to the following:

Commitment

1. Participation in two 60-minute digitally audiotaped interviews at a time and place convenient to you;
2. 60 minutes to be spent reviewing the interview transcripts; and
3. Participation in three 120-minute audio and video-taped small group dialogue sessions with 5-7 other school leaders outside of school hours.

Feedback/Debriefing

Interviews will be digitally audiotaped and transcribed and group dialogue sessions will be digitally audiotaped and videotaped with a handheld camcorder. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts from the Stages 1 and 3 semi-structured interviews in order to add, delete, or change responses and to ensure that all identifying information has been anonymized. A “read receipt” will be requested to ensure that you have received the transcript, and you will be contacted personally within 24 hours if you do not confirm

receipt. It is anticipated that it will take you approximately 30 minutes to review the transcript. You will have two weeks to review the transcripts, and a non-response from you will be assumed to be approval of the transcript.

Given the collaborative nature of the research, opportunities to validate the data will be provided at the beginning of each group dialogue session in the form of collaborative analysis. All email correspondence containing data will be password protected.

Risks and Benefits

The benefit of participating in this research is the provision of time and space to both individually and collaboratively debrief individual and others' dilemmas. This research process is a tool meant to assist you in the understanding of your beliefs and institutional routines. It also facilitates a more conscious examination of the factors that shape, limit, and determine decisions you make when facing a dilemma. The potential for collegial networks and support are also inherent in the nature of the design.

There is a potential for you to feel uncomfortable or emotionally affected by the process of debriefing dilemmas. Accordingly, I will be attentive to reading the tone of the participants and the group as a whole, stopping and starting based on participant needs for emotional safety. Please note that your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) covers you, should you feel the need to receive counseling services.

Anonymity

The identity of all participants in the dissemination of research will be protected through the use of pseudonyms, and the location of the research will be masked; neither names of participants, schools nor school divisions will appear in the results. However, the researcher is unable to guarantee the anonymity of the participants given the group nature of Stage 2 of the study. While all participants will sign group dialogue confidentiality slips that confirm that they will not reveal the identity of the participants and/or discuss each other's responses outside the group, the researcher is limited in her ability to assure this since not all participants may keep their views confidential. Participants may answer only those questions with which they feel comfortable, and they may participate in the group dialogue to the extent that they are at ease. During the research, access to the materials will be limited to me, potentially my advisor, and a transcriber for the Stages 1 and 3 audiotape transcriptions. Please note that the transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher at the contact information on this form, at which time the individual interview transcripts would be destroyed, and any information in the focus groups provided by the individual will not be used as supporting quotations, even though the themes from within the group process may still be discussed because they were created by the group.

Dissemination

Within three months of the conclusion of data collection, a summary report of the research will be distributed to you via paper or electronic means as specified by your preference. The final report will also be shared in the form of a dissertation and possibly scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations, which are intended to contribute to a knowledge base about the social justice conceptualizations that influence the decision making of principals.

Deception

No forms of deception will be used in this study.

Compensation

No forms of compensation will be used in this study.

*** At any point you may withdraw from this study by contacting the principal researcher at which time your data will be destroyed. ***

Informed Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

-
- I would like to receive a paper summary copy of the results of this study. **OR**
- I would like to receive an electronic summary copy of the results of this study, forwarded to the following address:

Group Dialogue Confidentiality Agreement

The success of this study is dependent on the trust and confidentiality that supports professional reflection. This means that participants must not discuss the particulars of the conversations that occur within the confines of our group dialogue sessions with people who are not involved in the study.

By signing this form, you are agreeing to:

- NOT reveal the identity of the other participants; and
- NOT discuss the responses of the other participants outside the group.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Participant Self-Declaration Form

NAME	
GENDER	
CURRENT POSITION	
GRADE RANGE OF SCHOOL	
SCHOOL DIVISION	
PHONE NUMBER	
EMAIL	
GRADE RANGE OF SCHOOL	
WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?	

Please return this Self-Declaration form to the researcher with a signed copy of the INFORMED CONSENT and a signed copy of the GROUP DIALOGUE CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Appendix D: Stage 1 Interview Instruction Sheet

Institutional Letterhead
STAGE 1 INTERVIEW INSTRUCTION SHEET

Dear Participant,

Thank you for participating in this study. As per our previous conversation, the first interview has been scheduled for (date)_____. This will take place at (location) _____. The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour. Subsequent to the interview, you will have the opportunity to review the transcript in order to add, delete, or change responses and to ensure that all identifying information has been anonymized. It is anticipated that it will take you approximately 30 minutes to review the transcript.

We will begin the interview by spending some time dialoguing about your positionality as an administrator and your interest and experience with social justice. I am also interested in learning what you would like to glean from this research experience. Finally, **please be prepared to share the story of a dilemma that has arisen in your practice as a school principal, specifically as it relates to your understanding of social justice.** For the purposes of this study, a dilemma is defined as a situation wherein the participant has had to make difficult or heart-wrenching choices. Possible questions for you to consider in preparation for this interview include:

- Why did you choose this dilemma over other dilemmas that you have experienced?
- Where are the equity issues in the dilemma?
- Who was marginalized by the decision(s)?
- Who was empowered by the decision(s)?
- What factors influenced your decision-making in relation to that dilemma and how important were they to the final decision?
- What is the source(s) of the angst and tension?
- How do you conceptualize social justice within this dilemma?
- What were the consequences of your decision(s)?
- In hindsight, what would you do similarly/differently if you were faced with a similar dilemma in the future?

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions before we meet. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Danielle Fullan Kolton

Appendix E: Stage 1 Interview Protocol

Stage 1 Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Part 1: Positionality of the Participant. Possible questions may include:

What is your story?

Describe your interest in and experience with social justice.

Describe your school, including its student, staff, parent, and cultural variables.

Part 2: Description of a dilemma

Using Marshall's and Rossman's description of a dilemma as a "situation wherein the participant has had to make 'difficult or heart-wrenching choices'", please describe a dilemma that has arisen in your practice as a school principal, specifically as it relates to your conceptualization of social justice.

Part 3: Dilemma Analysis. Possible probes may include:

- Why did you choose this dilemma over other dilemmas that you have experienced?
- Where are the equity issues in the dilemma?
- Who was marginalized by the decision(s)?
- Who was empowered by the decision(s)?
- What factors influenced your decision-making in relation to that dilemma and how important were they to the final decision?
- What is the source(s) of the angst and tension?
- How do you conceptualize social justice within this dilemma?
- What were the consequences of your decision(s)?
- In hindsight, what would you do similarly/differently if you were faced with a similar dilemma in the future?

Part 4: Articulating reciprocal benefits of the research

What would you like to learn through this research process?

What method of correspondence do you prefer: telephone or email?

I would like to combine the main features of each of the participants' dilemmas in order to construct an archetype dilemma that we will use as part of our second group dialogue session. Participants will have an opportunity to preview, edit, and approve the archetype before it is used. Do I have your permission to use your dilemma, without identifying features, for this archetype?

Circle one: YES NO

Participant's Initials _____

Part 5: Distribution of Case Narrative Study (Alemán, 2009)

Please read this Case Narrative Study in preparation for our first group dialogue session.

We will be working through the discussion questions and revisiting some of the same questions that we have discussed about the dilemma that you presented.

Appendix F: Stage 2 Dialogue Group Topical Agendas

Dialogue Group Session #1

INTRODUCTION

- Thank you!
- How did I come to this place in my research?
- Why dialogue groups? Social constructivism, unconscious influences, insight, diverse perspectives
- Presentation of the research questions and my positionality as it relates to this inquiry
- My role is to listen, ask questions, and make sure everyone has a chance to share.
- You don't need to respond to every question, and you can follow up on, agree, disagree, or provide examples from your own practice.
- Precision in your answers is important especially as it pertains to the connections between your words and actions ("rhetoric"), so I may ask probing questions like: say more about that, keep talking, describe what you mean, please give us an example. You are encouraged to probe each other, too.
- Pauses and think time is really important. Don't feel uncomfortable by this; it is part of the process.
- No right or wrong answers – different points of view are encouraged
- Recording session – video and audio to capture all comments
- Comments are confidential – please honour the group confidentiality agreement
- Help yourself to food and refreshments throughout our time.

ACTIVATION

- Distribute Wordles from Interview #1 – what do you notice? Does anything surprise you?
- Overview of themes in the research to date – Where do you see yourself in these themes?

SUMMARY/HOUSEKEEPING

- Summary of the main points and big ideas
- Questions for next time
- Please read case study excerpt for our next dialogue group session
- Dates for next two dialogue groups, confirmation of location

CLOSING REFLECTION

- Written Exit Slip #1

Dialogue Group Session #2

ACTIVATION – Round Table

- What thought/reflections have you had about social justice since we last met?

CASE STUDY

- Discussion questions

SUMMARY & MEMBER CHECK

- Sorting activity - Overview of emerging themes in Stage 1 analysis:
 - What does this say about how you understand social justice? What is missing?
 - What does this say about what influences your decision-making? What is missing?
 - Does this capture our previous interview/conversation from your perspective?
 - Any additions/deletions?

CLOSING REFLECTION - Written Exit Slip #2

Dialogue Group Session #3 (Combined Public & Catholic)

INTRODUCTION – Round Table

- Name/School Level
- What thought/reflections have you had about social justice since we last met?

ACTIVATION

- Social Justice Senses (groups of three)

MEMBER CHECK GALLERY WALK

- Stages 1 and 2 emerging themes per question – add to, comment on, question

BRINGING THE THEMES TOGETHER

- 15 minutes – Individual Images (create a visual for how you understand social justice)
- 15 minutes – Images in Pairs (share your image with one another and create a combined image)
- 15 minutes – Images in Small Groups (debrief images in smaller groups)

THANK YOU

- Presentation of a thank you card and book to each participant: Walk Out, Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now (Wheatley & Frieze, 2011)

Appendix G: Stage 2 Dialogue Group #2: Case Narrative Study

“Student Incident” excerpt from Alemán, E. (2009). Leveraging conflict for social justice: How “leadable” moments can transform school culture. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 12(4), 1-16.

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Dante Diaz moved from Texas in the 4th grade. His parents, both working professionals with postgraduate degrees, have quickly become involved with several community action groups, especially those serving immigrant communities. Prior to purchasing a home in the Rose Glen neighborhood, they were—similar to Dr. Johnson—concerned about moving from a very diverse community in Texas to a state with an overwhelmingly White general and student population. However, they quickly realized that the schools in their neighborhood do not meet their expectations. Although the school was more diverse, they wanted Dante in a more challenging environment so they applied for ELP admission through the district transfer process. Now in the 6th grade, Dante has adjusted fairly well to his new school and to having to get up extra early to make the trek across town given that the school district does not provide any academic enrichment programs on their side of town.

Dante is a laid-back kid, easy to get along with, and very eloquent for an 11 year old. Although Dante’s long hair and easygoing manner sometimes made him a target of a group of boys in his class, he found the work challenging and enjoyed the access to more advanced reading that the program provided. One of the hardest challenges faced by Dante when starting ELP was the fact that most of the students had started the program together. They already had their set way of doing things and had formed relationships and cliques since kindergarten. Being the only Latino student in a class 30, he felt out of place many days. It had gotten to the point that some of the bigger kids who had been making comments were starting to gnaw at his patience. Dean, known to be the leader of the group of boys that hogged the basketball at recess and the student that was often tapped as the lead character in the class plays, often bullied Dante. On this particular day, he had been “messing with” Dante during the morning recess and was continuing with his “ribbing” before the teacher started her afternoon History lesson.

“You are a cross-dressing, homo,” Dean told Dante.

Dante responded, “No I’m not. Stop calling me names.”

Dean, knowing that he struck a nerve with Dante as he witnessed him getting irate stated again, “Yes, you are. You have long hair. You’re a homo.”

Not having the appropriate words, Dante responded with the first thing that came to his mind, “Shut the hell up. Get the hell away from me. You’re a jackass.”

By this time, some of the other boys that Dean was close to were thoroughly enjoying the exchange. One of them, Martin, egged both of them on, “Oh, you were just dissed Dean!” His laugh becoming ever so forced, Dean retorted, “I’m a jackass? At least I don’t live in the hood, you illegal alien.”

This was the last straw. Most of the ELP students did not live in the surrounding community. Because Dante lived in what some of the students perceived as the “crime ridden part of town, where all the illegals live,” he had already been faced with comments similar to the one Dean had just spewed.

Not knowing what else to verbally attack Dean with, Dante voiced his frustration and anger by stating, “Are you going to shut up? You’re such a stupid ass jerk!” Not hearing the full extent of the exchange, Ms. Graza, immediately quit writing on the board and approached the boys at the back of the room. The other students scurried back to their desks as to avoid any implication. “What did you just say? I heard that. It’s inappropriate Dante. Why did you say that?” Ms. Graza asked.

Dante explained, “He’s calling me names and won’t leave me alone.”

“What did he say?” Ms. Graza asked again.

Knowing this explanation was falling on deaf ears Dante once again tried to contextualize what had happened, “He called me a ‘homo’ several times. He’s making fun of where I live again. I told him to stop. I told him to get away from me and he wouldn’t stop so I told him off.”

A self-identified Italian American, Ms. Graza is a gruff, to-the-point teacher. She’s been at Whitman for 18 years and was one of the first teachers to be appointed to ELP. In the meeting with Dr. Johnson, she had led the argument for keeping the ELP program unchanged. In subsequent meetings, she insisted that union representatives be present at any meetings with district officials, characterizing the meetings as insulting and as taking away time from teacher preparation. Students also recognized her as a “no-nonsense” person who didn’t like disruptions in her class. Ready to move on, she stated, “Both of you stop. Dante you shouldn’t use words like that. Dean move away from him. You boys just need to learn how to get along.”

When Dante arrived home, he was visibly upset. His mother, Sofia, stopped what she was doing and asked how his day went. Since starting the school year, he had numerous days like this. Several of the boys in his grade often picked on him. Being one of the “shortest” kids in class and the only Latino, he had accepted the hazing that occurred. However, recently the boys’ hazing—led by the “tallest” kid in class, Dean—had escalated to personal verbal attacks including, “faggot,” “lesbian,” “gay,” and “homo.” When some of the students found out that Dante did not live “up the hill,” in an exclusive part of the city but rather on the “west side of town,” comments about “illegal aliens” and “dirty, gang-infested neighborhoods” soon followed.

Sofia had on three other occasions called Ms. Graza to talk about the bullying that had occurred and the hurtful language used by some of the students. She had also contacted Mrs. Pitt in November over her concern with the curriculum. She noticed that although an “advanced” program for students, much of the readings and lessons regarding the history

of the southwest U.S. were taught from a Eurocentric perspective and wanted to discuss why Dante had been “randomly” assigned the character of “Indian” in the class’ historical reenactment. In the wide-ranging discussion with the principal, she began to inquire as to the student makeup in ELP and to ask for contacts at the district office where she could ask for student demographic data on students with access to ELP across the district. Now, Sofia had had enough. She did not agree with the manner by which the teacher addressed—or failed to address in her mind—the latest form of hazing. After speaking with her son, she picked up the phone and called the school. After several messages and two emails, she was finally able to connect with Ms. Graza later that week. However, in her usual manner she dismissed much of Sofia’s concern as “just what boys at this age do.” She promised to address the issue with the whole class the following morning. Not wanting to single out any student specifically and needing to attend to some work before leaving for the day, she stated, “I need to get off the phone now.” Prior to doing so, however, Sofia asked for an appointment. Ms. Graza reluctantly agreed to meet the next day immediately after school.

Sofia and her partner, Julian, had struggled with the decision to transfer Dante to Whitman. Yes, he would have access to a stronger academic program but he would also potentially be confronted with issues of isolation. Both parents had grown up and attended schools in Latina/o-majority settings and struggled to adapt at predominantly-White universities, so they wrestled with the complexities of wanting the “best” academic program for their children. Strong believers in community and neighborhood schools, they reluctantly agreed to send him to the school across town. However, they also mutually decided to advocate for change in the program at both the district and school levels. Thus far they had made contact with district officials and volunteered to serve on the school’s community board. In both cases, they worked to work within the system. Yet with each passing week, they could both see the negative effect that the school experience was having on their son.

Arriving at Whitman Sofia and Julian wondered how the meeting would transpire. More than anything, Sofia wanted Ms. Graza to more proactively address the increasingly hostile climate her son was subjected to. As they walked into her classroom they noticed Ms. Graza sitting at a table with another person. “This is Ms. Davis, the 3rd grade ELP teacher,” she stated without first saying hello.

“Oh, I thought this was a meeting between parents and their son’s teacher,” Julian said sarcastically.

“Well, I feel more comfortable having her here and its well within my union rights to do so,” Ms. Graza answered.

“That’s fine. We just need Mrs. Pitt here also. We’d like for her to be part of this discussion so that she can hear our side of the story,” Sofia interjected. Being on the same page without having to talk, Julian rose from his chair and walked down the hall to the principal’s office. Sofia, Ms. Graza, and Ms. Davis sat in silence as he left the room.

Mrs. Pitt heard the administrative assistant speaking with a parent as she got off the phone. As she walked to the front desk, she greeted Julián, a parent who she knew from his participation in the School Community Council. “Hi, Mrs. Pitt. Sofia and I would like for you to be part of a meeting with Ms. Graza if you have time,” he stated.

“Sure, when is it?” Mrs. Pitt replied.

“Right now. Sofia is upstairs in the room with Ms. Graza and Ms. Davis,” Julián informed her.

“No problem, let’s go,” she said. Mrs. Pitt picked up her notepad and walked with Julián out of the office. She could sense a tension as they walked down the hallway and tried to gather her composure for the discussion that was about to occur.

Questions for discussion

- What are the underlying concepts embedded in this conflict?
- What are the sources of conflict emerging at Whitman Elementary?
- What dilemmas/decisions may arise from this conflict?
- What are the equity issues in this conflict?
- How would you go about addressing these sources of conflict?
- Who might be marginalized by your actions/decision(s)?
- Who might be empowered by your actions/decision(s)?
- What would the sources of angst and tension be for you as the principal in this situation?
- What are your personal understandings/experiences/positionality that would influence how you would approach this conflict?
- Is this a social justice dilemma, why or why not?
- How is this case study similar/dissimilar to the dilemma that you shared in Interview #1?

Appendix H: Stage 2 Dialogue Group Exit Slips/Activities

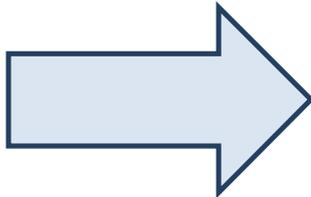
STAGE 2 DIALOGUE GROUP #1

CLOSING REFLECTIONS EXIT SLIP

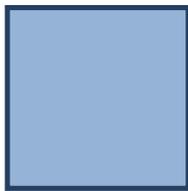


A question running around in my head is ...

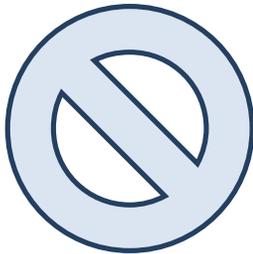
A point of particular interest was ... because ...



This squares with my beliefs about ...



I feel challenged by ...

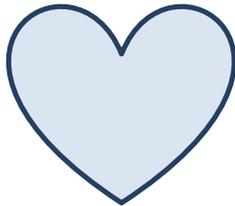


An idea I have for next time is ...

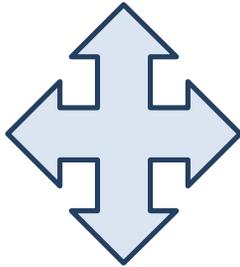


STAGE 2 DIALOGUE GROUP #2**CLOSING REFLECTIONS EXIT SLIP**

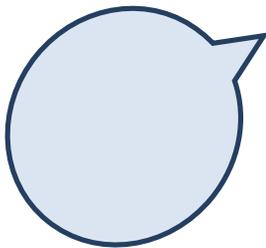
At the conclusion of this second dialogue group, I am feeling ...



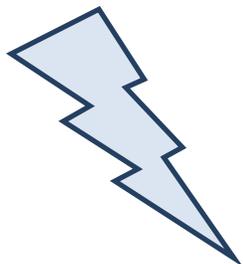
In my experience, a dilemma is a *social justice* dilemma when ...



Words/phrases/expressions that fall within my conceptualization of social justice are ...



Concepts, tensions and/or understandings that influence my decisions when facing a social justice dilemma are ...



STAGE 2 DIALOGUE GROUP #3 ACTIVITY

SOCIAL JUSTICE



	SOCIAL JUSTICE DILEMMA	SOCIAL JUSTICE PRACTICE
LOOKS LIKE		
SOUNDS LIKE		
FEELS LIKE		

Appendix I: Stage 3 Interview Instruction Sheet

Institutional Letterhead
STAGE 3 INTERVIEW INSTRUCTION SHEET

Dear Participant,

As per our previous conversation, the final interview has been scheduled for (date) _____ . This will take place at (location) _____ . The duration of the interview will be approximately one hour.

We will begin by spending some time dialoguing about the impact of the research process on your conceptualizations of social justice before we move into revisiting the original dilemma that you shared with me at our initial interview. Possible questions for you to consider in preparation for this interview include:

1. What is your conceptualization of social justice? Has it changed throughout the course of the interviews and group dialogue sessions?
2. How does this conceptualization influence the decisions you make when confronted by a dilemma?
3. What discussions/topics were the most valuable/the least valuable in our group dialogue sessions?
4. Thinking back to the original dilemma that you described in our Stage 1 interview, how has your understanding and analysis of this dilemma changed or been affirmed?

It may be helpful for you to refer to your dilemma transcript summary, so I have attached it to this letter. I will also bring in a printed copy with me.

We will end the interview with a written exit slip that I will wait for you to complete. Ideally, I would like to provide you with a minimum 15 minutes to complete it so that we fall within our one-hour time limit.

I am looking forward to our last discussion.

Sincerely,

Danielle Fullan Kolton

Appendix J: Stage 3 Interview Protocol

Stage 3 Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Part 1: Impact of the research

1. What is your conceptualization of social justice? Has it changed throughout the course of the interviews and group dialogue sessions?
2. How does this conceptualization influence the decisions you make when confronted by a dilemma?
3. What discussions/topics were the most valuable/the least valuable in our group dialogue sessions?

Part 2: Revisitation of the original dilemma

1. Thinking back to the original dilemma that you described in our Stage 1 interview, how has your understanding and analysis of this dilemma/SJ evolved?

Part 3: Conclusion

1. What do you need for closure at the end of our sessions together?
2. **Participant completes FINAL EXIT SLIP**

STAGE 3 FINAL INTERVIEW

FINAL EXIT SLIP

<p>1 thing I felt challenged by in this research:</p>	<p>2 things that I felt affirmed about during this research:</p>
<p>3 things I will take away from the research experience, personally or professionally:</p>	<p>If I understand social justice as honouring humanity and interdependence, then a strategy that I use in my decision-making practice is _____.</p> <p>If I understand social justice as something that is IN education (learning, support, communities, relationships, empowerment, community), then a strategy that I use in my decision-making practice is _____.</p> <p>If I understand social justice as something that comes FROM education – advocacy (seeing and acting on marginalizing practices) and solidarity action (charity efforts) to build a better world, then a strategy that I use in my decision-making practice is _____.</p>

Appendix K: ENREB Ethics Approval



Office of the Vice-President
(Research and International)
Research Ethics and Compliance

Human Ethics
208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Fax 204-269-7173

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

February 2, 2012

TO: Danielle Kolton (Advisor D. Wallin)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Stan Straw, Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2012:007
"Beyond the Rhetoric of Social Justice: Exploring the Concept of Social Justice with Principals through Dilemma Analysis"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to the Office of Research Services, fax 261-0325 - please include the name of the funding agency and your UM Project number. This must be faxed before your account can be accessed.
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba Ethics of Research Involving Humans.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/orec/ethics/human_ethics_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.