Social Justice and School Leadership Preparation: Can We Shift Beliefs, Values, and Commitments?

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The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between a social justice curriculum and the dispositions of graduate students enrolled in an online pre-service school principal preparation program. Data Collection: Students were asked to write reflective essays before the course began and again after the course was over discussing their understanding of social justice and the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders to make social justice a priority. Students' essays were coded to identify themes and patterns and to see if their beliefs, values, and commitments to leadership for social justice changed over time. Findings: Findings indicated that a social justice curriculum can clearly influence the development of positive dispositions.

Keywords: School principal preparation; leadership; dispositions; social justice; leadership standards

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between a social justice curriculum and the dispositions of graduate students enrolled in an online pre-service school principal preparation program. Among the many aims of our program, we hope that our students will believe in, value, and become committed to:

- the inclusion of all members of the school community;
- a willingness to continuously examine one's own assumptions, beliefs, and practices;
- the benefits that diversity brings to the school community;
- a safe and supportive learning environment;
- the proposition that diversity enriches the school;
- and the development of a caring school community.

Such values, beliefs, and commitments are often referred to as dispositions. Although not comprehensive in scope, these examples are the kinds of traits we expect of teachers and principals as they carry out their important work in our classrooms and schools on a daily basis. Principals who believe in, value, and are committed to the inclusion of all members of the school community and develop safe, supportive, and caring schools are likely to positively impact the culture of those schools and the students and teachers they serve. According to Diez and Murrell (2010), dispositions are:

> habits of professional action or moral commitments that spur such actions. In effect, dispositions refer to a teaching stance, a way of orienting oneself to the work and responsibilities of teachers. Those responsibilities are ultimately about moral practice, in which the teacher mobilizes her knowledge and skills in behalf of the learners entrusted to her care. (p. 9)

School principal preparation programs are designed to help pre-service principal candidates develop their content knowledge, skills, *and* such dispositions. Traditionally, programs require that candidates take course work in areas such as school law, finance, and curriculum to develop content knowledge expertise. They help candidates develop skills relative to supervising teachers, developing school improvement plans, and analyzing large data sets through fieldwork and internship experiences. However, they are also charged with paying attention to and assessing the dispositions of these future principals -- the beliefs, values, and commitments that are sometimes difficult to discover, examine, and impact in a positive way. Are dispositions fixed behaviors and traits or can they be developed through education, reflection, and action? How best can dispositions be assessed? Some argue that there are challenges to this process and that "dispositions can only be assessed indirectly, as they 'leak out' in action or as they are described in reflection" (Diez, 2006, p. 68). Such challenges can lead preparation programs to become superficial in their approach to assessment through the exclusive use of candidate dispositional self-assessment instruments at a prescribed point in their programs. Such a superficial attempt at assessing dispositions will likely uncover much to examine and change. Others assess dispositions of candidates "across the program, over time, using multiple methods, both structured instruments and ongoing observation of the candidate in action" (Diez, 2006, p. 70). This kind of work would likely uncover beliefs, values, and commitments of candidates in a much deeper and thoughtful manner.

Our commitment to assessing dispositions led us to our current study in an online graduate course for future school principals. We understood this was to be a challenging and complex task, but "failure to prepare administrators to engage in difficult work that requires a shift in values, attitudes, and behaviors within the school community severely limits their ability

to address fundamental social justice issues" (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005, p. 204) once they become principals.

For most educators, it would be easy to agree with a belief that "all students can learn" or that they could be committed to "a safe and supportive learning environment" once they become principals. However, principal candidates really need to be engaged in a process of examining their core beliefs, values, and commitments to the surface level assumption that "all students can learn" if they discover, for example, an overassignment of students of color (or students living in poverty, students who are English language learners, etc.) to special education programs in their schools. They must also come to terms with their commitment to implementing a "vision of high and challenging standards" if there are issues in providing equitable access to learning for *all* groups of students who are not college bound. Additionally, they will need to confront their personal values and beliefs in maintaining a "safe and supportive learning environment" for *all* students when deciding whether or not they would allow gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender students to form Gay/Straight Alliances in their schools. It is imperative, therefore, that principal candidates examine such beliefs, values, and commitments before they consider becoming principals and it is our role in principal preparation programs to ensure that they develop the knowledge, skills, *and* dispositions necessary to be leaders for social justice.

Purpose

Within the field of educational leadership, many scholars have contributed to an ever growing knowledge-base regarding the knowledge and skills needed to prepare leaders for social justice (e.g., Brown, 2004, 2006; Furman, 2012; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007, 2008). However, the literature is less clear on the necessary dispositions required of those same leaders. While some researchers have focused on the study of teacher dispositions in recent years (Diez & Murrell, 2010; Harrison, Smithey, McAffee, & Weiner, 2006; Phelps, 2006; Wasicsko, 2002; Wasicsko, Callahan, & Wirtz, 2004), and others have narrowed in on better understanding dispositions of principals (Lindahl, 2008; McKerrow, Crawford, & Cornell, 2006; Melton, Mallory, & Green, 2010; Rea, Carter, Wilkerson, Valesky, & Lang, 2011; Schulte & Kowal, 2005), the research is still somewhat limited on the dispositions required of leaders for social justice (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008; Wasonga, 2009, 2010). In the field of educational leadership, some contend that "too often leadership programs shy away from dealing with issues such as attitudes and beliefs because of their potential social, political, and/or religious connotations, due to the nebulous nature of their definition and measurement" (Allen, Wasicsko, & Chirichello, 2014, p. 136). This can be particularly problematic for those interested in better understanding dispositions within the context of leadership for social justice.

Because we were concerned about assessing candidate dispositions regarding issues of social justice, the purpose of our basic qualitative study was to explore the relationship between a social justice curriculum and the dispositions of graduate students in an advanced level Foundations of Educational Leadership online course. The course was part of the curriculum in an educational leadership principal preparation graduate program that focused on leadership for social justice. The following research question guided our study: What are the effects of a social justice curriculum on pre-service principals' beliefs, values, and commitments (dispositions) to issues of leadership for social justice?

Perspective

Because the purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a social justice curriculum on the development of attitudes and dispositions of students in our leadership preparation program, our perspective comes from Marshall and Oliva's (2010) work on leadership for social justice. This framework is both theoretical and practical in terms of understanding how to support our students if they decide to embrace social justice leadership and build capacity to become "astute activists, ready with strategies and the sense of responsibility to intervene to make schools equitable" (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 1). It was our hope that this framework would serve as the scaffolding to our research as we supported the ongoing development of our students as they engaged in understanding what it means to be leaders for social justice. We believed this work would be helpful for these future principals in order to "better understand inequity and the lack of social justice for certain students in our schools at the intellectual level, but also to more fully understand it the way such students do—at the experiential level" (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 1).

Review of Literature

Research on defining and assessing dispositions has been well documented in the literature related to the preparation of pre-service teachers in the United States for many years (Diez & Murrell, 2010; Harrison et al., 2006; Phelps, 2006; Wasicsko, 2002; Wasicsko et al., 2004; Wasicsko, Wirtz, & Resor, 2009). This review focused on how principal preparation programs have attempted to define and assess dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates. Specifically, the literature was probed to document relevant research studies in three specific areas related to: defining which dispositions principal preparation programs use when assessing pre-service principal candidates in their programs; assessing the dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates in general; and assessing the dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates related to issues of social justice.

Defining Dispositions

In order for principal preparation programs to be able to assess dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates, there needs to be a common understanding of which dispositions are being assessed by institutions offering principal preparation programs. Lindahl (2008) conducted a qualitative study to determine the degree to which principal preparation programs introduced and assessed dispositions. Interviews were conducted with faculty members from institutions of higher education from across the United States. He found that "almost all respondents indicated that they considered dispositions to be a key element of principal preparation…[and] in almost all cases, the respondents referred specifically to the [Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium] ISLLC standards" (Lindahl, 2008, p. 20).

Melton, Mallory, and Green (2010) conducted a quantitative study to determine how educational leadership programs identified and assessed dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates. They first validated the challenge of defining the term "disposition." They found that "how institutions defined 'dispositions,' responses varied; but a majority indicated that they drew upon NCATE (44.4%, N=16) or Interstate School Leaders Licensing Consortium (ISLLC) (27.8%, N = 10)" (Melton et al., 2010, p. 55).

These findings are consistent with the challenges Rea et al. (2011) discovered in their study when determining how to define dispositions for pre-service school principal candidates and how they could be assessed. They echoed that indeed multiple definitions of dispositions

have been problematic for those working to assess dispositions (Rea et al., 2011). As a result of this challenge, they adopted the ISLLC standards as the method to determine dispositions because "the standards are organized into six Performance Expectations (PEs), each of which contains a list of dispositions" (Rea et al., 2011, p. 4). The research studies highlighted in this section explored the inherent challenges of defining which dispositions principal preparation programs use for the assessment of pre-service school principal candidates and provided evidence that most use the ISLLC standards.

Assessing Dispositions

Another area of interest in the literature is the broad notion of how principal preparation programs assess the dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates. The literature suggests pre-service school principal candidates are assessed using survey instruments, through modeling, embedded coursework, capstone projects, and reflection.

As a part of one study, Schulte and Kowal (2005) sought to determine the validity of the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI) instrument used to measure the dispositions of "effective school leaders" (Schulte & Kowal, 2005, p. 75). As such, the ADI was aligned with the National Policy Board for Educational Administration Standards and the researchers concluded the ADI was a reliable and valid instrument for assessing the dispositions of effective school leaders. Schulte and Kowal (2005) concluded by emphasizing "because dispositions involve human behavior, teaching and assessing dispositions bring about new challenges. In the area of dispositions, awareness and self-reflection are essential to the learning process and to determining one's own growth" (p. 86).

In a similar quantitative study, Rea et al. (2011) developed an instrument to assess their pre-service school principal candidates' dispositions. Using the ISLLC standards, they developed the Educational Leader Candidate Belief Scale (ELCBS) and determined it to be a valid and reliable instrument for assessing candidate dispositions including that, "the instrument, then, provides an operational definition of the NCATE requirements as well as the ISLLC standards" (Rea et al., 2011, p. 12). Their summary recommendations "recognize that one instrument is insufficient to measure well, so we will continue developing this and other assessments" (Rea et al., 2011, p. 12).

In order to determine the degree to which principal preparation programs introduced and assessed dispositions, Lindahl (2008) interviewed principal preparation program faculty members from across the United States. He discovered that a significant number of respondents used modeling to teach the dispositions; however, internships and field-work were experiences where dispositions were readily assessed. Culminating coursework projects were additional areas dispositions were assessed. In summary, "most, if not all, respondents concurred that their programs have identified key dispositions related to school administration and make at least some attempt to teach and evaluate student acquisition of these dispositions…[most of which] occurred until the internship or capstone portfolio" (Lindahl, 2008, p. 24).

In a related quantitative study focused on in-service principals, McKerrow, Crawford, and Cornell (2006) set out to "determine the importance of the six ISLLC standards generally and the 42 dispositions specifically. In addition, the study examined the extent to which the ISLLC standards and dispositions were emphasized in preparation programs" (McKerrow et al., 2006, p. 33). Data were collected though a randomly selected sample of K-12 administrators in Illinois. Participants completed a two-part Likert scale survey. Findings indicated that:

administrators felt that the ISLLC standards were very important or important to their current practice. Similarly these administrators agreed that the disposition categories of social justice, democracy, school improvement, and courage-risk taking were also important to their profession and their practice. (McKerrow et al., 2006, p. 37)

Additionally, "the standards and dispositions were important to administrative practice and that all of them were emphasized in their preparation programs" (McKerrow et al., 2006, p. 40). The literature explored for assessing the dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates suggests that principal preparation programs assess the dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates using survey instruments, through modeling, embedded coursework, capstone projects, and reflection.

Assessing Dispositions Related to Social Justice

Recent studies exploring the assessment of dispositions specifically related to issues of social justice were also probed in the literature. These studies provide research-based recommendations for assessing dispositions of pre-service school principal candidates related to issues of social justice.

Surface, Smith, Kaiser, and Hayes (2012) investigated how educational leadership candidates' perceptions evidenced alignment with their skills and identified dispositions needed to lead diverse schools. Participants in this quantitative study were students who successfully completed a Masters in Educational Administration program with endorsement or the endorsement only. Participants completed the ISLLC Standards survey and the Administrator Dispositions Index (ADI). Study findings indicated posttest means were significantly higher than pretest means on both the ISLLC Standards survey and the ADI. The researchers identified ISLLC Standards 2 and 5 of particular interest as they "focus on positive school culture and acting fairly ethically" (Surface et al., 2012, p. 121). Further analysis on these two standards was conducted. Additionally, the researchers were interested in "the growth in diversity dispositions" (Surface et al., 2012, p. 124). In conclusion, "educational administration candidates espoused more positive diversity dispositions after completing the program" (Surface et al., 2012, p. 124).

In a qualitative study, Wasonga (2009), researched "leadership practices that integrate social justice and democratic community for student learning" (p. 200). Participants in this study were practicing principals and superintendents who participated in focus groups centered on issues of "social justice, democratic community, and school improvement" (Wasonga, 2009, p. 204). The findings focused on four themes:

Shared decision-making was the most frequently used practice for integrating democratic community and social justice (31%), as followed by advocacy (29%), dispositions and relationships (25%), and social control (15%). The first three practices are indicative of the concept of empowering others. (Wasonga, 2009, p. 218)

In conclusion, "the challenge for educational administration training programs is to prepare leaders who can develop processes and values that lead to practices that integrate democratic community and social justice for the greater good of children and their communities" (Wasonga, 2009, p. 221).

Koschoreck and Allen (2012) conducted a quantitative study to determine how pre-service principal preparation candidates would report their dispositions related to social justice during their time in a masters level course on social justice. Specifically, participants in the study completed a Likert-scale survey based on the ISLLC dispositions once at the beginning of

the course and once at the end. Results of the study evidenced "that at the end of the course the composite score (M = 93.19, SD = 5.14) was significantly higher than the composite score at the beginning of the course (M = 91.67, SD = 5.21), t(110) = 3.63, p < .01" (Koschoreck & Allen, 2012, p. 56). In conclusion, this study indicates that a social justice curriculum can positively affect dispositions related to social justice.

Method

Throughout the duration of a five-week online course, students engaged in several required readings such as Marshall and Oliva's (2010) book titled *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education*. Additionally, students engaged in weekly online discussions, completed two surveys, and wrote essays at the beginning and at the end of the course. The instructions for the first essay were:

> One scholar has said that "making social justice concerns a priority in schools requires leaders not only to understand and name unjust practices that deprive individuals of their rights and dignity, but also necessitates that they take action to change the structures that perpetuate the injustices" (Cambron-McCabe, 2010, p. 48). Discuss your understanding of social justice as it relates to the rights and dignity of individuals, and elaborate on the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders to make social justice concerns a priority.

At the end of the course, students were asked to write an essay on the following:

> Early in the course, you wrote an essay about your understanding of social justice and the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders to make social justice concerns a priority. How has your thinking developed through this course? What are the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders as they relate to racial issues? To class issues? To issues of sexuality? Be sure to express your ideas concerning all these questions thoroughly and thoughtfully.

In the second writing prompt, we included race, class, and sexuality because the course was designed to help students develop more complex thinking about these issues as related to the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders. Additionally, we wanted to uncover instances from students' essays where we noticed a significant shift in their beliefs, values, and commitments to issues of social justice. In order to examine these data, we compared students' essays at the start of the course to those written at the end of the course.

Participants, Process, and Ethics

Of the 188 students enrolled in the course, 117 granted consent to participate in the study, 9 opted not to participate, and 62 failed to respond to our request. Of the 117 students who agreed to participate in the study, 5 did not complete one or both of the essays, thereby leaving a total of 112 students who provided complete data for both essays.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved four stages. During the first stage, all transcripts (Essay 1 and Essay 2) from participants were downloaded from Blackboard, our course management system. All transcripts were then paired so that each student's essays were together (Student 1-Essay 1, Student 1-Essay 2, etc.). Next, all three authors independently read and re-read all of the

transcripts. During this process, we began open coding (Merriam, 2009) by writing down notes, comments, and observations in the margins. After working our way through all of the transcripts, all three authors met and discussed our observations. We then reviewed all 28 of the dispositional elements of the preparation standards of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) as described in the *Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leaders: An ISLLC-Based Guide to Implementing Leader Standards and a Companion Guide to the Educational Leadership Policy Standards-ISLLC 2008* (Sanders & Kearney, 2008)[1]. For the purpose of coding, we then reduced the original list to include only those dispositions that we believed related to issues of social justice. This process resulted in identifying 10 dispositions that were used as the preassigned coding scheme (Creswell, 2009) for our analysis (See Appendix).

During the next phase of data analysis, we used conventional methods of qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) in order to identify any of the key themes from the preassigned coding scheme and to see if there was a shift in their beliefs, values, and commitments (dispositions) to issues of leadership for social justice as a result of the course. All three researchers re-read the manuscripts and coded each paragraph using the preassigned coding scheme. We then met to compare our codes in order to establish intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2013) and reliability. We discussed our different interpretations of the data and resolved disagreements.

In order to generate meaning and identify a possible shift in their beliefs, values, and commitments (dispositions), we then compared the codes from each student's written essays about their understanding of social justice issues from the beginning of the course (Essay 1) to those from the end of the course (Essay 2). It was clear to us that because students had yet to engage in course content, most students discussed issues of social justice in Essay 1 in very basic terms. Our analysis of the essay from the end of the course (Essay 2) showed that students had addressed not only how their beliefs about social justice leadership had evolved, but they also wrote about the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders related to issues of race, class, and sexuality. In the Essay 2, students had developed very clear definitions of leadership for social justice and most were able to articulate a positive shift in their values, beliefs, and commitments to these issues as future principals.

Findings

As a result of analyzing the essays, we were able to uncover students' beliefs, values, and commitments to leadership for social justice and how they had changed as a result of the course. We found that indeed there was a positive shift in the development of our students' dispositions in five specific areas: (1) the common good over personal interests, (2) diversity as an asset, (3)

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[1] In 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) approved the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Formerly known as the ISLLC standards, PSEL will be adopted/adapted by many states or leadership preparation programs "as they identify and develop the specific knowledge, skills, dispositions, and other characteristics required of educational leaders to achieve real student success in school" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 5).

a safe and supportive learning environment, (4) every student learning, and (5) build on diverse social and cultural assets[2].

The Common Good Over Personal Interests

The disposition "The Common Good Over Personal Interests" is exemplified in the ISLLC Performance Expectation 5: Ethics and Integrity (Sanders & Kearney, 2008). The narrative that underscores this performance expectation suggests that education leaders are "responsible for distributing the unique benefits of education more equitably, expanding future opportunities of less-advantaged students and families, and increasing social justice across a highly diverse population" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 25). Further, it indicates that education leaders "are responsible for positive and negative consequences of their interpretations and implementation of policies as they affect students, educators, communities, and their own positions" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 25). Additionally, education leaders should work to avoid "potential harm to students, educators, or communities that result from ineffective or insufficient approaches" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 25).

In Essay 1, students wrote in a very cursory manner about issues of being "fair" and "equal" when considering issues of social justice. These words were the most frequently coded in Essay 1, as one student noted: "With education, teachers should teach fairness and equality. No one wants to be chastised because of their differences" (Student 40-Essay 1). Most definitions were very rudimentary and reflected the kind of thinking that one might expect at the outset of a course on social justice, a new topic to many of our students. The definitions were also very personal and the examples they gave related either to students in their classrooms or American society in general. A shift occurred, however, between Essay 1 and Essay 2 as many students noted at the end of the course a need to *teach* their students about issues of social justice and many were able to articulate how these beliefs might be carried out over time, particularly as future school leaders. For example, one student noted the following in Essay 1: "On a broad scale, social justice implies equality. In this democracy we call America, all citizens have the right to equal access to things such as due process, government services, and personal liberty of religion, press, and self-expression" (Student 20-Essay 1). This same student noted the following in Essay 2:

> Educators themselves may not have the power to change the currently existing biases and prejudices in American society. However, they do have a unique position of power in influencing the thoughts and actions of their students. I've learned that it's not enough make an effort to treat all students equally; rather I am charged with developing instruction that helps THEM make this effort in their own lives, thus creating a societal ripple effect of increased awareness and tolerance. (Student 20-Essay 2)

It is clear to us that as we continue to prepare future principals, we must constantly strive for this kind of deep reflection that leads to a belief in this kind of work. Our teaching must continue to include "consistent self-reflection in relationship to issues of privilege and oppression, access and outcomes, resistance and hope. It is essential that we remember that

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[2] As noted in the introduction, our perspective for this study comes from Marshall and Oliva's (2010) work on leadership for social justice. At the end of each of these next five sections, we connect our understanding of these findings to edited chapters from Marshall and Oliva's (2010) book titled *Leadership for Social Justice: Making Revolutions in Education*.

teaching for social justice is not only about *what we teach* but also about *how we teach* and *who we are* as individual school leaders" (Hafner, 2010, p. 212).

Diversity as an Asset

The disposition "Diversity as an Asset" is exemplified in the ISLLC Performance Expectation 2: Teaching and Learning (Sanders & Kearney, 2008). The narrative that underscores this performance expectation suggests that education leaders are responsible for "a professional culture in which learning opportunities are targeted to the vision and goals and differentiated appropriately to meet the needs of every student" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, 16). Additionally, education leaders need "knowledge, skills, and beliefs that provide equitable differentiation of instruction and curriculum materials to be effective with a range of student characteristics, needs, and achievement" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 16).

This disposition was the second most coded theme from the essays. The most notable shift was from teachers who are complacent about racial issues in Essay 1 to a belief that teachers need to face prejudices and promote a more positive school culture by promoting a sense of community. One student noted that the school principal must pay attention to the culture of the school to ensure that is it supportive for diverse students. He emphasized that "after many years of very few racial issues, a school can become complacent and not devote as much effort towards the unity of its climate which can have a devastating effect" (Student 136-Essay 1). The student described a situation where one student who is Caucasian caused serious unrest at school when he refused to refrain from making derogatory and racially insensitive slurs towards African American students and others. Teachers and administrators were slow to react and "thought the White student was goofing around" (Student 136-Essay 1). In closing Essay 1, this student noted that "the climate of the school must recognize the differences and embrace them…as complacency can lead to slow reactions and inflaming actions" (Student 136-Essay 1). In Essay 2, this same student noted that school leaders must not only pay attention to the climate of the school but they also must help others face their prejudices. Additionally, he espoused a belief that school leaders need to learn how to be effective with a range of diversity in schools:

> As diversity increases within a school, the teachers and administrators need to educate themselves on the culture and needs of the students. Students will not respond the same way to teaching methods or reprimands if they are different from the majority group. To help alleviate this problem, teachers and administrators need to face their prejudice. Most of the time this will be a long process and will require intense self evaluation and reflection because some of the prejudices may not be overt or some educators may be in denial about the overlying opinions they have regarding race. Since most educators, including administrators, have not been exposed to the deeper issues of racism and how to effectively handle it among students and faculty, it is up to the administration to figure out how to teach students and staff to be sensitive to racial issues and needs. (Student 136-Essay 2)

The belief that schools should be teaching about issues of social justice and ensuring that *all* students are experiencing high levels of success was a very prevalent theme in students' responses to Essay 2. In this area, we saw the most prominent shift from a more passive belief about diversity to one that is more proactive concerning understanding and appreciating all of the students within the school. Our hope for these future principals is that they "move from passive discourse and involvement to conscious, deliberate, and proactive practice in educational

leadership that will produce socially just outcomes for all children" (Dantley & Tillman, 2010, p. 31).

A Safe and Supportive Learning Environment

The disposition "A Safe and Supportive Learning Environment" is exemplified in the ISLLC Performance Expectation 3: Managing Organizational Systems and Safety (Sanders & Kearney, 2008). The narrative that underscores this performance expectation suggests that education leaders "identify and allocate resources equitably to address the unique academic, physical, and mental health needs of all students" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 19). Further, they "address any conditions that might impede student and staff learning, and they implement laws and policies that protect safety of students and staff (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 19).

Within this disposition, we noticed a shift in our students' attitudes about what it means to develop relationships with students in order to create a school culture that is safe and supportive for all. In Essay 1, students described this socially just practice as "teaching the whole child" (Student 141-Essay 1) and where leaders for social justice "imagine a world and a classroom where every child comes to school fed and creates such a school culture in which the success of these children can become a reality" (Student 114-Essay 1). In Essay 2, these ideas were best captured in their reflections about what they thought the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders are as they relate to issues of sexuality. Student 141 (Essay 2) noted that this particular issue would be the most difficult social injustice that she would face. In discussing the bullying and harassment of gay students that she has witnessed, she noted that "the bottom line for me is that as a building administrator, I must provide a safe environment for all students" (Student 141-Essay 2). In addition to stating this belief, she discussed some concrete actions that teachers can take to address this issue including: 1) acquiring knowledge about anti-LGBT bias; 2) intervening when direct harassment occurs; 3) adopting gender neutral language; and 4) creating Safe Space/Zone Programs" (Student 141-Essay 2).

Discussing issues of sexuality was difficult for some because it caused them to confront their personal and religious biases. It is clear that students' beliefs about what constitutes a "safe and supportive learning environment" had grown to encompass *all* students and that many had acquired a set of strategies to consider as future school principals. It is our hope that their reflection and growth in this area has helped them better understand what it means to provide a safe and supportive environment for all students in their schools. We also hope that they will become committed to a vision of social justice in which "it is incumbent upon all school leaders to eliminate the homophobia and heterosexism within our educational systems" (Koschoreck & Slattery, 2010, p. 171)

Every Student Learning

The disposition "Every Student Learning" is exemplified in the ISLLC Performance Expectation 1: Vision, Mission, and Goals (Sanders & Kearney, 2008). While the disposition is not defined specifically, the narrative suggests that education leaders are responsible for creating goals that are "high and achievable for every student when provided with appropriate, effective learning opportunities" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 13). Further, they suggest "it is undeniably their responsibility to advocate for and act to increase equity and social justice" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 13).

In reflecting on this topic in Essay 1, students wrote about the belief that "all students can learn"—a statement that has been so integral to the mission and vision statements of schools across the United States. In this instance, students paired this belief with their definitions of social justice. For example, one student noted the importance of building relationships between students and staff so that "all children [have] the opportunity to learn in school communities that are socially just" (Student 16-Essay 1). Another noted that educational leaders are faced with pressure "to demonstrate that every child for whom they have responsibility is achieving success" (Student 83-Essay 1).

The biggest shift that occurred was from an awareness of social justice issues related to all students learning (Essay 1) to developing a critical consciousness to what it should mean for them as future school leaders. One student noted that he believed "very few educators would probably be willing to admit outright that they treat certain students with lower expectations or in a derogatory manner" and that for most educators, "these practices are non-existent" (Student 20-Essay 1). He explained that working for social justice means "stopping the train of thought that leads to comments like 'What do you expect, look at that child's home life?' or 'Our kids' parents don't speak any English, how can they possibly give their children adequate help with schoolwork' and on, and on!" (Student 20-Essay1).

In Essay 2, this same student noted:

Educators do not have the luxury of merely *considering* issues of social justice. Because of the nature of their position in society, they are called to be active change agents in creating a republic where social justice for all is a practiced reality. Our first priority is to examine and change our own thinking regarding minorities of class, gender, race, religion, and sexuality. After a realistic examination of these attitudes, we must work to create programs of professional development that address the barriers created by such attitudes. We must strive to develop curricula and policy that are inclusive of ALL students' cultures, sexuality, religion, and racial identity. Further, we must attempt to reach out beyond our own group affiliation and make a legitimate, genuine effort to understand the cultural identities of others. It is not enough to dismiss lack of exposure to groups different from ourselves by geographic location; rather, educators must find ways to interact with those in different circumstances and communities. This class has helped me realize that pursuing social justice is not an option for me as an educational leader; rather it is a very real part of the job description! (Student 20-Essay 2).

The proposition of "every student learning" must go beyond vision and mission statements that are written in documents in so many of our schools but not acted upon. It is critical that all of our students not only believe in this, but they must possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to act on creating effective and equitable learning opportunities for *all* of our students. In our preparation programs, we must continue to help our students "in recognizing that there are substantial and persistent patterns of inequity *internal* to schools, that is, embedded within the many assumptions, beliefs, practices, procedures, and policies of schools themselves" (Skrla, Scheurich, García, & Nolly, 2010, p. 265).

Build on Diverse Social and Cultural Assets

The disposition "Build on Diverse Social and Cultural Assets" is exemplified in the ISLLC Performance Expectation 6: The Education System (Sanders and Kearney, 2008). The narrative that underscores this performance expectation suggests that education leaders see schools as part

of a larger local, state, and federal systems that support success of every student, while increasing equity and social justice" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 28). Additionally, they "advocate for education and students in professional, social, political, economic, and other arenas" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 28).

This finding, the fifth and last to report, was the least coded from the essays. In fact, for the students who wrote about this disposition, it was most often found only in Essay 2. It is quite possible that the notion of being able to influence a system at the district, state, or federal levels seemed to be something that someone other than school principals should do or are even capable of influencing to any degree. What many students wrote about in Essay 2 was the idea that indeed they were capable and should be advocates for students beyond the schoolhouse walls. One student noted:

> For the past five weeks in this third foundational class we've studied social justice as it relates to education. My thinking about this subject has been challenged, and has also changed significantly regarding my role in perpetuating this ideal from my position as an educator. Up until now, I saw educators as occupying primarily a reactive role in dealing with social justice concerns. They deal with issues of racism, gender, class, and religion as they occur in the school environment—diffusing any potentially explosive situations as it were. This class has helped me see that educators, particularly those in leadership should instead pursue a more proactive role in working at rectifying the social imbalances seen within the sphere of education and beyond. Due to the influential nature of our profession, we have a special burden to not only teach social justice, but also to pursue it on a personal, local, and even political level. (Student 20-Essay 2)

For many students, it was difficult to imagine how principals would be able to have an impact beyond the schoolhouse walls. However, it is our responsibility in principal preparation programs to help candidates see that the role of the principal must be extended beyond traditional manager and leader of the school building to that as an advocate for social justice:

> No longer is the building-level administrator strictly concerned with administrative and organizational tasks of the school building, but shoulders a much broader responsibility. While building-level responsibilities should never be minimized, today's educational leaders must also work with the broader community in addressing their needs, provide them with the tools for self-sufficiency, and mobilize them politically for self-determination. Such a vision, however, requires principals to 'remove their blinders' and be particularly reflective in their practice—engaging their own emotions and negative attitudes about the community while critically examining their pedagogical and curricular practices (López, González, & Fierro, 2010, p. 111-112).

Discussion

Prior research has focused on how principal preparation programs have attempted to define and assess the dispositions of pre-service principal candidates (Lindahl, 2008; McKerrow et al., 2006; Rea et al., 2011; Schulte & Kowal, 2005) and others have documented how they have made connections to issues of social justice (Koschoreck & Allen, 2012; Surface et al., 2012; Wasonga, 2009).

Evidence clearly indicates that even in such a short time, our students' beliefs, values, and commitments to leadership for social justice had changed in a positive way. We found that indeed there was a positive shift in the development of our students' dispositions in five specific

areas: (1) the common good over personal interests, (2) diversity as an asset, (3) a safe and supportive learning environment, (4) every student learning, and (5) build on diverse social and cultural assets.

At the outset of the course, most students discussed issues of social justice in very basic terms based on their somewhat limited personal and professional experiences (Essay 1). Their written essays from the end of the course were much more in-depth, and for many, the assignment resulted in critical self-reflection about their roles and responsibilities as future principals if they choose to be leaders for social justice (Essay 2). While we recognize that the assignments for this class were based on students' written values, beliefs, and commitments, such critical self-reflection is paramount. For many social justice leaders, this type of reflection "is seen as a way for leaders to identify and come to grips with their prejudices and assumptions arising from their cultural backgrounds" (Furman, 2012, p. 197).

Implications

Our findings have helped us better understand the effects of a social justice curriculum on pre-service principals' beliefs, values, and commitments (dispositions) to issues of social justice. As a result, we offer three implications and discuss how they speak to theory, research, and practice. The first implication relates to future research. We believe that a longitudinal approach might better uncover the degree to which such attitudes and beliefs hold up over time, especially once these students become principals. We might also suggest developing additional tools and methodologies for measuring such a change. Such tools could include "behavior and characteristic checklists, ratings from observations of candidates in a variety of settings, inferences drawn from course assignments and classroom participation, evaluation of student journals and self-reflections, and letters of reference" (Wasicsko et al., 2004, p. 5).

The second implication relates to our understanding of how dispositions can change, even in a short period of time. When students are admitted to a pre-service principal preparation program, they bring with them a set of life experiences that has shaped their knowledge, skills, and dispositions up to that point in their lives. It is our responsibility as professors of educational leadership to help our students transform into professionals who are ready to take on new roles as leaders of schools with complex issues, typically in a short period of time. Unfortunately, we have found "that the element that is typically missing or underdeveloped in the education and development of most leaders is the intentional integration of the research and practices for assessing and developing the deeply held core beliefs, attitudes, and values (what we call leadership dispositions) that play a primary role in leadership effectiveness" (Allen, Wasicsko, & Chirichello, 2014, p. 136). As a result, we believe that our intentional inclusion and focus on leader dispositions within our preparation program is paramount and that even in a short period of time (within one class, experience, fieldwork, etc.), the use of critical reflection can indeed impact dispositions in a positive way.

The final implication relates to our roles as professors of educational leadership. As professors of educational leadership, we should consider expanding our work regarding social justice leadership beyond one course. Even though our program has social justice as a core value, we have the responsibility as faculty members to dig deeper into how our programs can best address such issues. Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) provide a framework for educational leadership programs to consider as they evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. The framework focuses on how professors should attend to critical consciousness (what the

literature refers to as dispositions), knowledge, and practical skills focused on social justice across curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. They suggest that "leadership development for social justice can only take place if professors intentionally create an atmosphere of emotional safety for social justice risk taking in their programs and in courses and other learning experiences in those programs" (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006, p. 220).

Limitations

Throughout the development and implementation of this study, we took precautions to minimize potential limitations. The first potential limitation was that the study took place within one five-week online course. Even though we understood this was a short period of time, we had anecdotal evidence from previous iterations of the course that by intensely focusing the curriculum and related experiences, we could make a difference. According to Diez (2010), dispositions can be cultivated and developed while candidates are engaged in preparation programs. In fact, dispositions are "commitments and habit of thought and action that grow as the [candidate] learns, acts, and reflects under the guidance of teachers and mentors in a preparation program and in the first years of practice" (Diez, 2010, p. 15). While we believe our study reflects candidates' development at one "point in time" within a principal preparation program, it is very difficult to know whether their beliefs, values, and commitments will hold up over time once they become principals. As suggested in the previous section, we would be interested in conducting a longitudinal study with this same group to assess their dispositions once they become school principals.

Second, as discussed in the method section, data were collected from students' essays as self-reported accounts of how their thinking had developed throughout the course as related to issues of race, class, and sexuality. We were aware that students might only reveal information that they believed we wanted to hear in order to get a better grade. To offset this potential problem, a graduate student collected all informed consent forms and it was clearly stated that participation was voluntary and agreement or refusal to participate would not affect their grade in the class in any way. Additionally, we did not know whether or not any individual members of the class had chosen to participate until after the grades had been submitted to the registrar's office at the end of the course. Indeed, we did not receive any data until after the class was over, and even then, the students were only identified by numbers as assigned by the graduate student.

The third limitation is that this study took place within one university in the United States. Although the online course had students representing different geographic regions within the United States, the majority of the students were concentrated within the Midwest. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study across multiple universities representing a stratified sample of participants from across the United States and internationally.

Conclusion

Given the scarcity of research on the impact principal preparation programs have on the development of positive dispositions related to social justice leadership, we hope that this study will contribute to that knowledge base so that throughout their careers, principals will continuously "analyze their assumptions, values, and beliefs as part of reflective practice" (Sanders & Kearney, 2008, p. 6). We are reminded of what one student noted about making this a reality once she becomes a principal:

I still believe that the main focuses of social justice are equality and respect, I just now believe that educational leaders must do more than simply believing in social justice; they must demonstrate it in their actions every day. Respect for all people, regardless of their race, class or sexuality must be complemented by equitable opportunities in all areas. Administrators and other educational leaders are in the unique position to make decisions that can greatly impact the extent to which social justice is a reality as opposed to a value. (Student 16-Essay 2)

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Appendix: ISLLC Dispositions (2008) Related to Social Justice Issues[3]

- Every student learning
- High expectations for all
- Examining assumptions and beliefs
- Diversity as an asset
- A safe and supportive learning environment
- Respect for the diversity of family composition
- The common good over personal interests
- Ethical principles in all relationships and decisions
- Advocate for children and education
- Build on diverse social and cultural assets

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[3] The dispositions listed here come from the *Performance Expectations and Indicators for Education Leaders: An ISLLC-Based Guide to Implementing Leader Standards and a Companion Guide to the Educational Leadership Policy Standards-ISLLC 2008* (Sanders & Kearney, 2008) and are not identified by the Council of Chief State School Officers as related to issues of social justice. All three authors of this journal article independently reviewed the set of 28 dispositional elements to determine this list of ten that we unanimously agreed related to social justice issues.