

A Developmental Lens on Social Justice Leadership: Exploring the Connection Between Meaning Making and Practice

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Abstract

This article draws from the first phase of a larger, qualitative and developmental study with educational leaders (n=50), as well as nearly three decades of research and teaching, to explore how constructive-developmental theory offers new insights about enacting and supporting social justice leadership in our schools and districts. Specifically, we argue that developing deeper understanding of leaders' developmental diversity can help expand and support social justice leadership throughout the educational system. Findings suggest that educational leaders' qualitatively different developmental orientations (i.e., ways of knowing or making sense of the world) influence their thinking about, and practice of, school leadership for social justice. The article describes the overarching orientations of—and effective developmental supports for—educational leaders who make meaning with four different ways of knowing.

Keywords: Social Justice Leadership; Developmental Lens, Meaning Making and Practice

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A Developmental Lens on Social Justice Leadership: Exploring the Connection Between Meaning Making and Practice

As both a goal and process, social justice has become an increasingly vital and essential imperative of teaching, leading, and education reform (Adams & Bell, 2016; Dover, 2013; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Nieto, 2010). Indeed, as technology and social media bring systemic injustices further into mainstream consciousness and conversation, courageous educators at all levels seek to more effectively address the trauma inflicted by racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, religious persecution, ableism, gun violence, and more (AERA, 2015, 2016). At the same time, it seems clear that educational leaders, like adults across sectors, bring different understandings—and levels of confidence and agency—to their work supporting social justice in classrooms, schools, districts, and beyond (Cherng & Halpin, 2016; Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shalaby, 2010). While research is beginning to surface some factors that may influence leaders' orientations to social justice practice such as race, experience, positionality and training (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Brooks, 2016; Rubie-Davies, 2008; Sleeter, 2017), less is known about the role that leaders' *internal, developmental capacities* may play in this dimension of their leadership.

To address this gap, this article draws from the first phase of our larger developmental, qualitative study, and nearly three decades of research and teaching, to explore how constructive-developmental theory (Baxter-Magolda, 2011, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Helsing & Howell, 2014; Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2016; Lippard, 2014) offers new insights about enacting and supporting social justice leadership in our schools and districts. Specifically, we examine how developing a deeper understanding of leaders' developmental diversity holds promise for expanding and supporting social justice leadership throughout the system. As we will discuss, research suggests that adults have different meaning-making education systems, which we call *ways of knowing*. In this writing, we use the terms *way of knowing*, *meaning making system*, *order of mind*, and *developmental level* interchangeably. We recognize that Mary Belenky and her colleagues also use the term "ways of knowing" in their seminal work, especially *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), and that their work has achieved prominence in adult education and education leadership. In our research, however, it is important to emphasize that we use the term "way of knowing" in a more literal sense. In other words, we are not referring to its taxonomy, but rather to a structure of mind or meaning making system. A meaning making system is comprised of what is referred to as the subject-object balance (Kegan, 1982). "Subject," according to this theoretical framework, refers to what an individual with a particular way of knowing cannot reflect upon, cannot take a perspective on, and cannot see about oneself or others. It literally *runs* a person's thinking and feelings. "Object," according to this framework, refers to what a person with a particular way of knowing *can* see, examine, reflect on, take perspective on, and manage. Different meaning systems, stages, orders of consciousness, or ways of knowing are *qualitatively* different ways of organizing reality and making sense of life experiences and relationships. Thus, they are literally different "ways of knowing" and making sense of reality (Drago-Severson, 2004a; Kegan et al., 2001a; Kegan et al., 2001b).

According to constructive-developmental theory, these ways of knowing (i.e., ways of seeing, understanding, and making sense of the world) reflect cumulative stages of growth in cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities (Baxter-Magolda, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Helsing & Howell, 2014; Lippard, 2014; Lynch, 2013). We have also found in our research that these cumulative stages of growth hold implications for how leaders and adults across all level of our educational systems orient to and understand diversity of every kind, and what it means (from their perspectives) to lead for social justice (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017, 2018a, 2018b). It is important to note that this—constructive-developmental theory—is one lens, and like all theoretical frameworks it has both strengths and limitations. This lens focuses on meaning making

and the different kinds of supports and challenges that can be offered to individuals who make meaning in different ways in order to help them grow and we find it a hopeful framework for understanding how leaders with different ways of knowing understand and implement practices on behalf of social justice, equity, and diversity. In addition, this lens offers guidance for helping leaders grow internal capacities in both educational preparation programs and in-service professional development.

While our research focuses on educational leaders, a developmental lens transcends contexts and can explicitly contribute to larger conversations about equity, diversity, race, and social justice so vitally needed in today's world. In other words, a developmental lens sheds light on the active, evolving, sense-making human beings bring to every dimension of their experience as well as the different supports and stretches (i.e., challenges) that can facilitate internal capacity building in individuals and groups. This is important in general. And, it is especially important when working to understand a continuum of ways that leaders conceptualize social justice and act upon it in their practices. While, as we will share more about later, we position ourselves as students of—rather than experts on—issues of race, intersectionality, and oppression in education and beyond, we hope that this new study and developmental approach to social justice leadership can bring something novel and useful to the table and the field.

Accordingly, this article addresses the following questions: *How might constructive-developmental theory shed light on how educational leaders—with qualitatively different developmental orientations (i.e., ways of knowing)—understand and support social justice in their schools and districts? How might understanding more about the developmental dimensions of social justice leadership help us better support leaders working to grow their practice?*

Theoretical Framing

The article builds upon and draws from (a) the rich literature about critical, social justice pedagogy and leadership, and, (b) constructive-developmental theory.

Social Justice in Education and Educational Leadership

While there is no *one* definition of social justice in education, after a careful review, we conceptualize it broadly here as teaching and/or leading driven by a commitment to highlighting, exploring, and addressing systemic prejudices and inequities through individual and collective action (Ayers, 2008; Dover, 2013; Grant, 2012). Drawing from many different traditions—such as critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2016; hooks, 1994), critical race theory (Howard & Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), culturally relevant teaching (Aronson, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014), culturally responsive teaching and leadership (Gay, 2010, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), identity studies (Cass, 1984; Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Crowley, 2016; Helms, 1994; Jupp, Berry, & Lensmire, 2016; Sleeter, 2017), racial literacy (Horsford, 2014; Twine, 2004), and restorative practices (Amstutz & Mullet, 2014; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012)—we recognize that social justice calls upon educators to both *do* and *be* more, inside and out (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017). In other words, it is through actions and behaviors *as well as* internal mindsets, beliefs, and understandings that teachers and leaders can better serve and align with diverse communities, interrupt systemic inequities, confront biases and prejudices, and work toward more inclusive and just outcomes (Aronson, 2016; Ayers, 2008; Crowley, 2016; Dover, 2013; Gay, 2010, 2013; Grant, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The growing literature about educational leadership and social justice is likewise gaining an important foothold, and points to the key role that school leaders play in shaping cultures and contexts that are authentically diversity-affirming and equity-oriented. For example, leaders must

thoughtfully, intentionally, and holistically attend to matters of school governance, structure, pedagogy, and curriculum in ways that affirm the experiences, cultures, perspectives, and dignity of all in the community (Apple, 2018). This includes approaching hiring, scheduling, staffing, resource allocation, professional learning, community outreach, and all dimensions of leadership through an equity lens (Blackmore, 2002; Gassaway, 2016; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Gassaway, 2016; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). While, of course, there are essential technical aspects of this work, it is also becoming clear that leaders' *internal orientations*, which stem from their prior learning, supports, challenges, and lived experiences will influence their capacity and effectiveness in practice (DiAngelo, 2010, 2018; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Kumashiro, 2015; Rubie-Davies, 2008; Spanierman & Cabrera, 2015; Sue, 2010; Zembylas, 2010). Importantly, just as individuals can continue to increase their intellectual understandings of race, gender, linguistic diversity, sexual orientation, and other critical dimensions of identity and difference as they develop their leadership, so too can they continue to expand their internal, developmental capacities, which, as we say more about in the next section, can influence how leaders see, understand, and connect within and beyond the schools walls.

As the literature about social justice leadership helps illuminate, increased attention is being paid to leaders' diverse mindsets and understandings (as well as their biases and blind spots). Yet, a developmental lens remains largely missing from these explorations, as well as the broader social justice literature. While a few, smaller-scale studies of in- or pre-service teachers' dispositions to diversity include developmental elements (e.g., Eberly, Rand, & O'Connor, 2007; Gosselin & Meixner, 2013; Puchner & Markowitz, 2016), to our knowledge, no prior empirical study has directly applied constructive-developmental theory to understand how it can assist in understanding leaders' approaches to social justice leadership in education, nor have any studies coupled subject-object interviews (a reliable assessment instrument) with in-depth qualitative interviews to explore leaders' knowledge, beliefs, and efforts on behalf of equity and diversity. Given this gap, our research offers a new and close-up look at how educational leaders' developmental orientations (ways of knowing) influence their social justice thinking and leadership, which contributes to an emerging body of literature. As such, this research holds the potential to add a new dimension to the literatures focused on both social justice leadership and adult developmental theory. In addition, as we discuss in this article, this research explores the relationship *between* these—i.e., how educators' internal and often unconscious orientations to difference and diversity may influence their educational practice and how understanding these qualitative differences might matter immensely for professional preparation, in-service professional learning, leadership, and policy.

Constructive-Developmental Theory

A neo-Piagetian theory of human development across the lifespan, constructive-developmental theory draws from more than forty-five years of research and posits that growth in adulthood occurs in qualitatively different stages, or *ways of knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016; Kohlberg, 1969, 1984; Perry, 1970; Piaget, 1952). Importantly, research that employs constructive-developmental theory as an analytic lens suggests that our ways of knowing—or meaning making systems—develop in a particular, cumulative order. In other words, the capacities associated with an earlier way of knowing serve as prerequisites (of sorts) for the next, which then builds upon and extends this prior way of knowing into a more complex meaning making system.

As such, the prior meaning making system becomes part of a larger one as growth occurs and enables an individual to be able to take more and deeper perspective on one's self, others, and the relationships between the two. Growth, according to constructive-developmental theory, is connected to increases in an individual's cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal

capacities that enable a person to better manage the complexities of leading, teaching, learning, and living (Kegan, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016).

To help visualize the process of growth, we often liken development to the continual layering of rings in a tree where the outermost ring includes and encompasses those inside. Moreover, just as a tree's growth can speed up and slow down depending upon the season, context, or environment—as evinced by the physical rings in the trunk—development in adulthood can occur at different rates and paces depending upon the supports and challenges we experience in our lives. While we tend to spend a period of time in one way of knowing (i.e., ring or stage) before moving toward and into the next (when we benefit from appropriate supports and challenges), a meta-view of adult development suggests a gradual upslope of capacities over time (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016). Research also indicates that we spend much of our lives in transition or between two ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012, 2016; Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008; Kegan, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016).

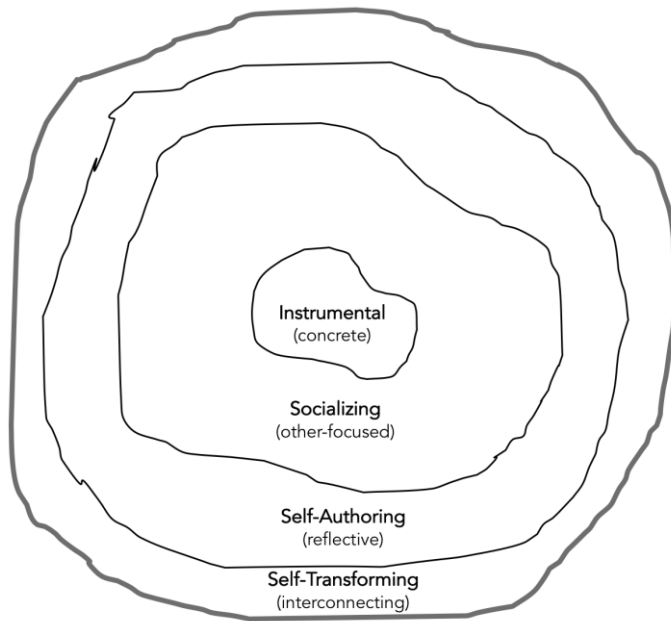
This is significant as adults often live and make meaning *between* two stages, or with elements of two adjacent ways of knowing present, in shifting degrees. Still, and importantly, adults at any age—and of any gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, or demographic marker—can make meaning with any way of knowing. The only sure bet when it comes to predicting a person's way of knowing, is to assume that you will encounter what we call *developmental diversity* in nearly any group, team, or context (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Kegan, 1994, 2000; Kegan et al., 2001a, 2001b; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016).

Ways of knowing. So, what are the characteristics of the different ways of knowing? According to constructive-developmental theory, there are four ways of knowing in adulthood—the instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming—which reflect qualitatively different orientations to teaching, leading, learning, and life.

The first three are more prevalent in adulthood and the fourth, self-transforming, is becoming more prevalent because of the complexities and demands of the contemporary world (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2018a; Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008; Kegan, 1994, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016).

We offer a visualization of these ways of knowing as tree rings in Figure 1, with the thickness of each band loosely corresponding to their frequency in the U.S. population (Helsing, Howell, 2014; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016). As we will share in this article, each of these ways of knowing has both strengths and limitations and these may be especially important to understand when working to differentiate supports and challenges for educators seeking to grow their social justice practices. For more detailed discussions of ways of knowing and why they matter when teaming, offering leadership roles, growing leadership, and giving and receiving feedback, please see Drago-Severson (2004, 2009, 2012, 2016) and Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2016, 2017, 2018a).

Figure 1: Ways of Knowing as Tree Rings



Source: Adapted from Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2018c)

Instrumental knowers. As suggested by Figure 1, adults with an instrumental way of knowing have a concrete, right/wrong orientation to their leadership and the world. They tend to appreciate clear action steps, technical “to dos,” and informational supports. While leaders with an instrumental way of knowing can be very committed to social justice as an ideal—and very kind, caring, and intelligent—they have not yet developed the capacity to authentically take others’ perspectives. In other words, while they may be able to imagine how *they* would feel in another’s shoes or situation, genuinely understanding someone else’s feelings (especially when they feel differently) remains a growing edge in the psychological sense.

Socializing knowers. Adults who make meaning with a socializing way of knowing have developed the capacity to look beyond the bounds of their own experiences, and to more fully take on others’ perspectives. As such, they often bring strong relational qualities to their leadership. However, because socializing knowers orient strongly to valued others’ and society’s assessments of them, taking a strong and principled stand (especially in relation to ideas that may diverge from others’)—and engaging in conflict—remains a pain point and growing edge. As Figure 1 suggests, a large portion of adults in the US make meaning with a dominant socializing way of knowing, or a socializing way of knowing, with either remaining aspects of an instrumental way of knowing or emerging qualities of a self-authoring way of knowing (Kegan & Lahey, 2016).

Self-authoring knowers. Making the developmental shift to a self-authoring way of knowing involves growing the capacity to take a reflective perspective on the ideas and opinions of others and to author one’s own values, beliefs, and actions in relation to these and the broader system. While making meaning with a self-authoring way of knowing does not necessarily predispose a leader to prioritize social justice or a particular worldview, the capacities associated with this stage of development—including engaging in conflict without feeling torn apart, thinking systemically,

and enacting a clear vision—do align with many traditional understandings of effective leadership (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012). These capacities may also be key to social justice advocacy (Adams & Bell, 2016; Ayers, 2008; Dover, 2013; Grant, 2012; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). In terms of a growing edge, however, self-authoring leaders will likely have trouble critiquing or looking beyond their personal philosophies and ideologies. Because of this, self-authoring adults can appear less open to new ideas, especially to ideologies and perspectives that diametrically oppose their own.

Self-transforming knowers. Like self-authoring adults, self-transforming knowers have developed their own philosophies and value systems; yet, they seek to continually open their thinking and identities to further reflection and evolution as they recognize that no one person alone can understand or impact the system in its entirety. To continually grow themselves and effect change, self-transforming knowers orient to interconnection, collaboration, and mutuality as essential ingredients of progress and transformation at both the individual and systemic levels. While, according to recent meta-analyses, self-transforming knowers remain in the minority (e.g., current estimates place them at about 8-11% of the population in the United States [Kegan, 2013]), the complex challenges and possibilities of contemporary leadership—especially those related to diversity and social justice—may call for increases in self-transforming capacities across the system (Bell, 2016; Drago-Severson, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2017).

As this brief overview suggests, constructive-developmental theory holds possibilities for understanding *how* educational leaders relate to and understand diversity, social justice, equity, and leadership since it offers insight how a person's way of knowing—or structure of mind—influences how he/she/they make(s) sense of all aspects of reality and identity. It also helps us to understand the developmentally different supports and challenges leaders may need (and can offer to others) when examining assumptions, working within and across lines of difference, and collaboratively shaping more equitable educational contexts.

Methodology

This article draws from and extends our collective decades of research and teaching (Drago-Severson, 2004b, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2017, 2018a; Drago-Severson et al., 2013, 2015) to highlight key strengths and growing edges of different ways of knowing in relation to social justice leadership.

This article also presents learnings from the first phase of our larger, qualitative and developmental research study, which explores how a large sample (n=50) of aspiring and practicing leaders (e.g., principals, APs, teacher-leaders, district-level leaders) describe and understand their leadership supportive of social justice and how, if at all, these leaders' qualitatively different ways of knowing influence their understandings of, and efforts to support, social justice in their relationships, schools, and districts. For our full sample, we purposefully invited leaders from our professional networks (i.e., leaders in the field who have attended programs/institutes/workshops that we have designed and facilitated, former graduate students who are school or district leaders who have graduated from programs in which we teach) to maximize variation. These leaders were invited because of their explicit, espoused commitment to social justice and were diverse in terms of role, organization/school type, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, geographic location with the United States—and way of knowing. Data stem from (a) reliable, 90-minute, developmental assessment interviews (i.e., Subject-Object Interviews, or SOIs) with each participant conducted and scored by an independent, expert administrator (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1988, 2011); and (b) in-depth, 90- to 120-minute qualitative interviews exploring each leader's social justice leadership thinking and practice.

For this article, we focus our analyses on learnings from the first seven educational leaders who completed both the Subject-Object Interview and the in-depth qualitative interview. While we

issued invitations to 10-12 participants at a time in multiple waves to maximize diversity, scheduling logistics allowed these seven to participate first. While we share more about these seven participants later in this paper, we wanted to share upfront that they self-identified as three women of color, one man of color, and three white men—who all currently live and work in the Northeastern region of the United States.

Data Collection

As mentioned, data collection involved two in-depth interviews with each participant—(a) a developmental assessment called the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), which was conducted and scored by an independent, expert administrator (90 minutes), and (b) a 90 to 120-minute qualitative interview, conducted over the phone by the principal investigators, that focused on understanding participants' descriptions and understandings of leadership supportive of social justice. For both types of interviews, we (i.e., the authors of this article who conducted the qualitative interviews) and the developmental expert (who conducted the SOIs) sought to deeply explore the practices leaders engaged in, as well as their thinking, feeling, and meaning making about those practices. We discuss each type of interview below.

Subject-object interviews (SOIs). In all cases, each participant first engaged in a 90-minute developmental SOI (Lahey et al., 2011). We hired a nationally-certified expert in the administration and scoring of this interview who is also a trained developmental psychologist to conduct these interviews. While this interviewer's contributions were and are critical to our project, her role was a bounded one, outside the broader analytic work of the research team.

In terms of the interview itself, the SOI is a highly reliable protocol tested since 1988 (Lahey et al., 1988, 2011). The purpose of the SOI is to pinpoint, with a high degree of certainty, a participant's meaning making system or way of knowing (i.e., the current balance between what a participant is "subject" to, and what he/she/they can hold out as "object"). For instance, at the start of the SOI, the interviewee is invited to consider a time within the past 3 to 4 months when the person felt torn, angry, anxious, nervous, sad, or moved about something, or when something felt like a success or was important to the person, and/or when the person had a conflict. After having a chance to select three or four experiences (e.g., a time when the person was torn, a time when the person was moved, a time when something was important to the person, and a time when the person had a conflict) and to write down important points on an index card to remind the person of what he/she/they would like to discuss with the interviewer, the interviewer asks questions to learn more about how the interviewee made meaning of each of the experiences in order to better understand the structure of the person's thinking. The SOI interviewer might ask questions like: Why was that important to you? What was *most* important to you about that experience? What was the *hardest* part of that decision for you? What do you think was at risk for you in not doing what you said you wished you had done? The purpose of these kinds of probing questions is to understand *how the interviewee is constructing his/her/their experiences* in order to assess "an individual's meaning making structure" (Lahey et al., 2011, p. 330). For more information on this method, please see Lahey et al. (2011).

Upon completion, the recordings of all SOIs were then transcribed verbatim. Next, the developmental interviewer carefully analyzed each transcript so that she could determine the structure of each person's thinking (i.e., way of knowing or meaning making system). More specifically, each person's transcript was developmentally assessed and given a score. The score indicates *how* a person is making meaning. For example, a participant—based on the person's SOI—may be assessed to have a socializing way of knowing and a self-authoring way of knowing operating simultaneously.

This means that both meaning making systems are present. Another person may have only a self-authoring way of knowing operating, and so on. While, as you might imagine, the scoring process

is very detailed, for our purposes here, we want to help readers understand the larger process of how each participant's way of knowing was determined. For a fuller explication of scoring the SOI and the reliability of such scoring, please see Lahey and colleagues (1988, 2011).

Importantly, the research team did not know participants' developmental assessment scores until after we had completed qualitative interviews (please see below) and until after completing the preliminary analyses on the qualitative interviews. In other words, we purposefully remained *blind* to participants' ways of knowing—as indicated by their scores on the SOI—during data collection and preliminary analyses. Put more simply, the principal investigators (authors of this article) did not conduct SOIs or review the developmental transcripts or have knowledge of the developmental scores from the developmental assessments before conducting the in-depth interviews and initial analyses.

Qualitative interviews. We conducted semi-structured, 90 to 120-minute qualitative interviews with each of the participants *shortly after* he/she/they engaged in the SOI with the expert we hired and compensated for each interview administration and scoring. These interviews took place shortly after the SOI so that we could eventually be able to analyze participants' experiences that stemmed from a similar period in time. Some of the questions we asked in the qualitative interview are as follows:

How do you define social justice? What, if anything, is most important to you about social justice leadership? What is most satisfying? What is hardest about it? What are the kinds of practices/initiatives you are engaging in your efforts to lead on behalf of social justice in your leadership? How do you go about supporting others' social justice-oriented work? What is working well? What is challenging? What kinds of challenges are you currently facing in this work? What practices, if any, are you intentionally employing to lead with social justice and to work across lines of difference?

Examining both the qualitative interviews and the developmental interviews has helped us understand a fuller context of the participants' experiences and enabled us to create a detailed portrait of each participant's understandings, as well as how these connect to a person's way of knowing. We present our learnings from the first phase of our research below. Eventually, we will be able to explore these emerging patterns and findings within and across our larger sample (n=50) in order to understand how, if at all, leaders' developmental orientations influence their understandings of and practices on behalf of social justice.

Participants. As mentioned, our ongoing research involves a diverse sample of aspiring and practicing leaders with an explicit commitment to social justice (n=50). This research, to the best of our knowledge, is one of the first to explicitly examine how—and the ways in which—a diverse sample of educational leaders' developmental capacities (i.e., ways of knowing) influence how they orient to (i.e., *make sense of*) social justice, race, identity, privilege, equity, change, and questions related to all of these. In our analyses, we also sought to understand how these participants are (or are not yet) able to talk about and address such burning and sensitive issues and to explore any patterns we might identify related to similarities and differences among adults with qualitatively different ways of knowing.

For this article, we highlight learnings from seven participants from our first wave of data collection. Self-identified demographics about these participants, as well as their SOI scores, can be found in Table 1. Unless specifically requested otherwise by participants, the names listed are pseudonyms.

Table 1: Self-Identified Demographics of Featured Participants, and SOI Scores

Name	Self-Reported Dimensions of Identity	Position	Way of Knowing (SOI Score)*
Adam	44-year-old, white male	Suburban Assistant Superintendent	Self-Authoring
Amaia	Mexican American woman in her 30s	Urban Charter Middle School Teacher Leader/ Coach	Socializing (Self-Authoring)
Bernard	57-year-old, Black/African American male	Former Principal and Superintendent in Public Urban District / University Professor	Self-Authoring
Carter	31-year-old, white male	Urban Charter High School Principal	Self-Authoring/ Socializing
Joyce	Caribbean African American woman in her early 30s	International Consultant	Self-Authoring (Socializing)
Lee	39-year-old, white, gay male	National-Level Leader in Educational Organization	Self-Authoring (Self-Transforming)
Serena	31-year-old, Caribbean American woman	Central Office Leader in Public Urban District	Instrumental/ Socializing

* When more than one way of knowing appears, the first is the most dominant. When the second way of knowing appears in parentheses, it means that there is some emerging or residual evidence of this way of knowing in the participants' meaning making. When two ways of knowing are separated by a slash (/), the second way of knowing—while less dominant than the first—nonetheless plays a significant role in the person's meaning making system.

Data Analysis

As a first step, analytic memos were written after each of the qualitative interviews in order to capture key themes in each interview, emic concepts, connections to theory and the literature, and cross-case similarities and differences that seemed to be emerging (Maxwell, 2013). All qualitative and developmental interviews (SOIs) were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber and checked for accuracy (descriptive validity) by a member of our research team. As mentioned earlier, before reviewing participants' SOI scores (i.e., assessed way of knowing), we analyzed qualitative data from the in-depth interviews conducted by the principal investigators in order to build and test grounded theory (Geertz, 1974) about the developmental dimensions of social justice leadership.

We employed a constant comparative approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2014) while incorporating various literatures into analyses (i.e., by exploring how, if at all, constructs and prior empirical findings from research about social justice leadership and adult developmental theory might inform/be informed by our emerging learnings). To accomplish this, in our analysis we employed both in vivo and theoretical codes (Maxwell, 2013). During our analytic phases, we worked independently and collectively to identify the practices participants employ to support social justice in their contexts and how they *make sense of and conceptualize* their leadership initiatives. For example, we paid close attention to how they defined social justice, why it was important to them, what it meant to them, the projects and initiatives they felt embodied their work, as well as what was going well and what remained challenging.

After completing the initial analyses of this sub-set of qualitative interviews, we then learned participants' SOI scores (i.e., their ways of knowing) and layered these learnings with preliminary findings to explore—across cases—patterns that may exist among participants who demonstrate similar and different ways of knowing.

In all cases, we attended to descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity (Maxwell, 2013). As mentioned earlier, to attend to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013), all qualitative and developmental interviews were transcribed verbatim and the audio recordings were then double checked for consistency against the actual transcript we received from the transcriptionist we hired. To care for threats associated with interpretive validity, we—members of our research team—discussed our individual interpretations as well as connections between data from the qualitative interviews and the developmental interviews. We worked thoughtfully throughout data analysis to incorporate plausible *alternative* interpretations and to offer *multiple* interpretations when they presented themselves. Both the qualitative and the developmental interview data were examined for confirming and disconfirming instances of themes and emergent patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in order to attend to theoretical validity.

Researcher positionality. We think it is important to emphasize that—as two cisgender, white women—we do not position ourselves as experts on race, gender, sexuality, or diversity more broadly. Nevertheless, as former K-12 teachers and program directors, and current faculty in leadership preparation programs who teach and research about adult development, we are grateful to even more explicitly join these rich and vital conversations.

Likewise, we recognize the challenges inherent in learning from participants with whom we have a prior relationship (i.e., graduates from our different university programs, educators we have worked with in our consulting and/or leadership institutes). At the same time, we felt that the opportunity to purposefully recruit a diverse sample of leaders from across the country would outweigh these limitations and we hoped that participants' prior knowledge of *us*, as teachers concerned about supporting internal capacity building and as facilitators who work to support adult learning in authentic ways, would also help participants feel safe discussing potentially sensitive topics like race, identity, and social justice. In all cases, we made it very clear at multiple points during the recruitment process that invitees were under no obligation to be a part of the study and that our hope and big interest was in learning from them about *their practice, sense making, and commitments to social justice—and how they work on behalf of these*. In addition, it is important to note that we waited until the formal dimensions of our professional relationships with potential participants had concluded before issuing any invitations (i.e., they had graduated from or completed their coursework or training with us).

Findings

Our ongoing research—and close analysis of the first wave of our interviews—suggests that educational leaders' qualitatively different ways of knowing *do* influence their thinking about, and practice of, school leadership for social justice. In this section, we present our initial findings about the overarching orientations of—and effective developmental supports for—the educational leaders in our study who make meaning with each of the four ways of knowing found in adulthood. Findings include representative learnings from the seven first-phase educational leaders, who we learned make meaning with different ways of knowing, based upon their developmental assessment scores (please see Table 1). The findings, which follow, stem from the SOI reports as well as our in-depth qualitative interviews.

By way of introduction to these findings, we have organized this section by the four qualitatively different ways of knowing illuminated by the seven participants in our first set of interviews.

Importantly, we are not making generalizations to a larger population based on these initial findings.

Growing Beyond Instrumental Leadership: Sharing Ideas, Broadening Perspectives

One leader in our focal sample, Serena, made meaning primarily with an instrumental way of knowing with a socializing way of knowing also operating in her meaning making. In other words, as noted in Table 1, the SOI results from her developmental assessment interview suggested that she was also moving into the socializing stage (Instrumental/Socializing). Here we focus on the instrumental part of her meaning making, since it was more dominant (i.e., it leads her meaning making).

A central office leader in a large, urban district, who identified as a 31-year-old Caribbean American woman, Serena expressed her commitment to social justice and the promise of education when she explained,

I figured education because I believe that a lot of our societal problems are because people are not aware or they lack a decent education. So, I felt that by working in education, I can help create a more egalitarian society...or a more worldly society.

This statement helps illustrate the strengths and limitations of the instrumental dimensions of Serena's approach to social justice leadership (as she described it to us in her interviews), as it highlights both her deep desire for a better world, and her emphasis on increasing awareness and "decent" information as key to society's problems and inequity. While, of course, access to information is paramount to social justice leadership and a free society, the more concrete, input-output framing of her current approach does not yet fully acknowledge the larger, systemic forces that shape and delimit this access in the first place. As we mentioned earlier, adults who make meaning primarily with an instrumental way of knowing tend to look toward concrete or technical action steps when working to improve their practice or address a challenge, so changing informational, educational inputs in this way—in hopes of changing the outputs toward equity—makes great sense as a first step. Interestingly, it also aligns with understandings about how individuals *wake up* to liberatory action and advocacy (e.g., Harro, 2013). In keeping with this idea, when we asked Serena about *how* she worked to support social justice, she primarily mentioned sharing resources with others (i.e., changing the inputs), although she intuited the limits of that approach. For example, describing her former work as a teacher, she said,

I show[ed] them [the students] different news clips or show[ed] them different articles about the same topic, and they would be like, "Oh, that's interesting." But I think a lot of my students just felt powerless and they felt like—no matter what they did—things were never going to change, so they just went, I felt like they went more about their daily lives.

Serena shared a similar reflection about her work with her colleagues at the central office:

I think in terms of my colleagues [in the central office], I mean, I share what I know with them regarding the special education field, like if there's anything new going on. I try to—we do talk about current events and politics in my office. But I think, in terms of my current role, it's very limited. Like I'm not able to really work for social justice in the way that I want.

Perhaps driven by the challenges she faced when enacting a more concrete approach to change (i.e., changing the inputs), as well as her developmental transition, Serena also described the importance of taking a greater perspective on herself and others and of looking beyond the limits of one's own

experiences and worldviews in general (a common challenge for instrumental knowers). For example, in her qualitative interview she emphasized the fundamental importance of “understanding that your reality isn’t everybody else’s reality, right? Like your political views, your religious views, just your views in general don’t have to be everybody else’s. And there are different needs in society.” This, Serena shared, was one of her most powerful takeaways and insights about her social justice practice and the message she tried to convey to others in her work. It is also a shift that suggests her growth beyond the instrumental way of knowing.

Growth and growing edges for Serena. While some of what Serena named about her hopes for growth and next steps focused on concrete objectives like *gaining more information and professional experience*, her reflections on the value of travel—and of truly engaging with others to learn about their stories and lives—seem especially important and in keeping with her developmental journey and burgeoning social justice leadership. An avid traveler, Serena shared her goal of visiting all the continents “besides Antarctica” by the time she turns thirty-three. While she enjoys traveling for its own sake, she also understood its connection to her own developmental growth as a leader and the contributions she could make. As she explained,

The more experience and viewpoints and education you have, the better you’re able to guide people once your time comes to be a leader, you know? ... I think traveling just gives you a viewpoint. ... I mean traveling where you’re actually interacting with people from that country. I don’t mean visiting a military base or going on a mission trip necessarily, or going on a cruise. I mean like actually going there to learn about the culture and interact with people, not going there to serve them or not going there to just try their food and see a monument and go home.... Yeah, I think that I wouldn’t have the viewpoints that I have if I didn’t travel. I think that it’s easy to be in a bubble and to have limited viewpoints if you haven’t experienced life outside.

As Serena’s example suggests (again illuminating her emerging socializing capacity), engaging authentically with others—and building relationships with colleagues, students, families, and stakeholders who may think differently—can be a powerful support for instrumental knowers. Specifically, it can help them stretch to stand more fully in another’s shoes, and to build their capacities for connection and abstract thinking.

A Socializing Approach to Social Justice Leadership: Relating and Connecting

While three of the participants in our initial, first-wave sample made meaning with at least some form of socializing knowing, this was the most dominant way of knowing for Amaia, a teacher leader and coach in an urban, charter middle school, who identified as a Mexican American woman in her thirties. More specifically, and as shown in Table 1, her developmental assessment was scored as “Socializing(Self-Authoring);” indicating a dominant socializing way of knowing with emerging hints of a self-authoring way of knowing.

In keeping with a socializing knower’s focus on others’ feelings and experiences, Amaia approached social justice as a relational endeavor and worked to build deep, authentic, and culturally relevant relationships with her students. She did this by sharing her own experiences—about her family, her writing, and her life—and by foregrounding her students’ gifts, funds of knowledge, interests, and experiences in her classroom. As she explained,

I’m very vulnerable with my kids. I’m very open.... [And] I think you have got to know who your kids are, where they’re from, where they want to go. That’s just so important. Like, why do we expect them to be invested in the work if we’re not willing to get to know them?

Strongly committed to her students and a more just and equitable approach to education, Amaia also recognized how important it was for her—as a Mexican American woman—to foreground people of color in her classroom and curriculum. Driven by her care for students, as well as her own experiences in school as a youth, she explained,

I think it's important to have kids read and listen to people who look like them and sound like them and to kind of make them feel like they matter, they exist, they're represented. Because there's nothing worse than—I mean, my experience growing up was—I told them I had never ever read anything about Mexican Americans or Mexicans in general until I was in college, I think. And that's hard because...that makes you feel like you don't belong.

As Amaia's powerful and poignant reflections suggest, she—like many socializing knowers—brought a deep relational strength to her work with students and social justice, and recognized how important student-teacher relationships are to learning, growth, and educational change.

Likewise in keeping with her more socializing way of making meaning, Amaia also expressed how hard it was for her, at times, to engage in difficult conversations with adults. For example, when she reflected about her relationship with one colleague—who did not seem to share her gift for connecting with students—Amaia shared the following:

I started to avoid this teacher because she was driving me crazy. I couldn't stand the way that she talked about this [one] student. I [could] sense her discomfort around the student. And, I think there's a lot of different factors that make her uncomfortable. This other girl is in a shelter, she's a very tall, African American girl. This teacher is very young. She is white. She lives [in a wealthy neighborhood]. You know, all these different things. And, like, I can literally sometimes see her physically just tense up, and children are so intuitive and perceptive and I know that that child senses that.

As this example suggests, despite Amaia's strong value for student-teacher relationships and her distress about her colleague's actions, she did not yet feel comfortable engaging in direct conversation with this teacher about her perceived challenges—a common growing edge for socializing knowers.

Similarly, Amaia explained that she struggled with her new role as a coach at the school—in large part because of the unpopularity of the program she would be supporting. As she confided during our interview, “I was kind of worried about the fact that I know that teachers don't like it [the program], and I was trying really hard not to be negative.” This worry—and more socializing frame—translated into Amaia's attempts to offer feedback and guidance to colleagues in a way that would not be offensive or off-putting. As she shared about her work with another challenging colleague,

I was kind of worried about working with this one teacher.... He's really, really, really struggling. He's new to teaching; he's new to kids, which is really challenging in a lot of different ways.... I told him, “Look, thank you so much for welcoming [me], for allowing me to come into your classroom and using this experience as an opportunity to develop myself.”

As this example suggests, Amaia did her best to frame her coaching interactions as an opportunity for her *own* growth rather than an assessment of her colleague's. She was also careful to acknowledge some of her own prior struggles in the classroom as a way to level the playing field, and to make her colleague feel more comfortable. For instance, she shared with him that, in her experience, teaching frustrations could really “damage your confidence” and make one wonder,

“Wait, do I know what I’m doing?” However, Amaia’s more socializing approach of prioritizing her colleague’s feelings and comfort over her own coaching concerns about his practice did not prevent him from pushing back on her. It was especially hard when, instead of buying into Amaia’s coaching and reciprocating her honest sharing about the trials of teaching, her colleague dismissively said, “Well, I don’t feel like that.” This left Amaia to say, uncomfortably, “Oh, okay! Alright. Whoa, my bad. Maybe that’s just me!” Ultimately, these kinds of interpersonal challenges left Amaia struggling “not to take things personally” and with a sense that “it’s so hard working with adults. It’s so hard.”

Growth and growing edges for Amaia. Amaia’s experiences with both children and adults help to illuminate some of the strengths and growing edges of a socializing knower’s social justice practice. For example, while Amaia brought a very important capacity to more fully understand and consider others’ perspectives and experiences to her work, the interpersonal leadership challenges that Amaia named (in terms of avoiding conflict and difficult conversations) underscore the complications that can occur when leaders are “run” or “made up” by relationships in the psychological sense (as is the case for socializing knowers).

Nevertheless, as indicated by her SOI score and also by her reflections in her qualitative interview, Amaia was also growing to demonstrate some emerging self-authoring capacities. For example, Amaia described making a very difficult, values-based decision (a self-authoring capacity) to leave her former school when the institutional focus began to change. In fact, as she explained, she was able to take this strong, more self-authoring stand at least in part because of the deep connections she had built with her students as a socializing knower:

I was just really disappointed and I just felt like there were a lot of choices being made [at the school] that were not in the best interest of students, and I can’t be a part of that. I didn’t want to be there anymore if I felt like we were not doing right by kids. That just didn’t seem right. I won’t be complicit in that.

In addition to the strength Amaia drew from her relationships with students to step forward in this way, she felt supported and inspired to take on more self-authoring risks and challenges because of the encouragement of trusted friends, who helped her to see herself as a leader and as someone with many gifts to give, especially around equity and social justice. As she explained, “I have a lot of people who believe in me and I think that also kind of gives me the wind in my sails.” Having the chance, too, to feel validated in her work emerged as an important support and stretch for growth. Capturing this idea, she shared, “It’s really great to kind of always be reminded of the really good work I’ve done, because I am very hard on myself.” For Amaia, like many adults who make meaning primarily with a socializing way of knowing, authentic affirmation can serve as an important assurance that, “Wow! You are good! And not in a way that’s like, you know, bragging.” As her reflections suggest, these external supports also helped her *try on* more self-authoring capacities as she began the process of transitioning beyond a purely socializing way of making meaning.

Self-Authoring Social Justice Leaders: Systems-Level Architects and Actors

For five of the seven participants in our first wave of interviews, the self-authoring way of knowing was assessed as their most dominant by the SOI interviewer/scorer. While two participants demonstrated some remaining or residual socializing tendencies (Carter and Joyce), and one was beginning to move beyond the self-authoring way of knowing toward a more self-transforming way of making meaning (Lee, who we will discuss in the next section), two participants scored firmly in the self-authoring stage on their SOIs (Adam and Bernard). Given the aforementioned connection between self-authorship and effective leadership qualities, the frequency of this way of knowing was not particularly surprising, especially given these leaders’ important roles and levels

of experience. Moreover, it afforded us a unique opportunity to begin to look closely at the developmental patterns *across* participants' sense making, particularly in relation to social justice leadership. While, as you might suspect, each of the self-authoring leaders took different approaches to leading on behalf of social justice, one common link and thread that accorded with their self-authoring meaning making was *their ability to take a larger, systems-level perspective on their work, and then engage in specific, purposeful actions to effect change*. As mentioned earlier, self-authoring knowers have developed the reflective capacity to think critically about their work and the world, and to author their own values and paths in relation to leadership and change. Below, we describe the different ways this capacity took shape in participants' leadership.

Consistent with his self-authorship, for instance, Adam—an assistant superintendent in a diverse, suburban district who identified as a 44-year-old, white, cisgender male—described himself as “a systems architect” and “a cultural engineer” when it comes to his social justice leadership. “Very much a systems thinker,” Adam (who, according to his SOI, makes meaning with a fully self-authoring way of knowing) strives to take a broad, critical view on the district routines and structures in order to make technical changes that nonetheless have adaptive implications. For example, he described being very purposeful about disproportionate hiring to increase the number of teachers of color on staff, planning the schedule to try to create more opportunities for extended engagement, and adjusting seemingly simple things—like lighting and stairwell gratings—that shifted the feel and experience of physical spaces in schools. In fact, his self-authoring ability to take a larger view on things was valued highly by his superintendent, who frequently asked him during the first months of his tenure, “What do you see? What do you see? What do you see?”

Carter, the principal of an urban, charter high school—who identified as a 31-year-old, white male (whose way of knowing was assessed as dominantly self-authoring with strong elements of socializing)—also pointed to his self-authoring qualities when describing his strengths as a social justice leader. Specifically, he felt that one of his biggest strengths was his ability to “look at a big complicated picture and I can say, okay, I wish all of this were better, but I’m going to do this one, this one, and this one.” In fact, he explicitly valued “balancing design and implementation.” As he explained, “I can’t be happy just implementing. I really love dreaming and building and testing, and I guess it’s important for me that both of those things exist in the work.” For Carter, the opportunity to think, reflect, and create—to serve as a *designer of systems*—aligned well with the self-authoring elements of his meaning making.

In a similar way, Joyce—an international consultant who identified as a Caribbean African American woman in her early thirties (SOI score=Self-Authoring[Socializing])—felt that her work and leadership were informed by her developmental capacity to view things on a macro level and to tap into and identify educators' *broader* motivations as levers for change. As she explained, in her work with teachers, she's “not only suggesting what they need to change, but also trying to tap into their pedagogy.” She also recognized that this self-authoring capacity for reflection and perspective taking was one she had to hone over time with experience and support including the learning she did in her graduate leadership training. For example, when she first began her work supporting adults as a literacy coach (one of her prior roles), she found that “changing practices without tapping into who the teacher was as a person” really limited the effectiveness and “stickiness” of her work. As she further explained:

My literacy coach years were my pivotal years in as far as what do leaders and what do teachers need to move forward. That was the year where I really figured out what it takes to create change in a school. And there were some trial and error years, right? My first two years I felt like I was just putting out flames everywhere I was going, and kind of felt like a chicken with no head. Just like every time something came up, I would just run and fix it, run and fix it, run and fix it, without thinking about the macro. So as a teacher, I was very micro. As a literacy coach, the first two years, I was very micro as

well. And I want to say [my leadership program] helped me think about things on a macro level. And once I started thinking about things on a macro level, that kind of gave me the tools as far as how can I help teachers change, whether they're burned out, whether they're new, whether they're just here and not sure they want to be in education? How can I help them to identify who they are in education? Get them to be on board with this pedagogy of moving education, and then how can I support leaders, right? How can I support leaders in a way where they're still aligned to the reason why they got into education, and then they're being strategic about the moves they're making?

Developmentally, this example helps illustrate the how the internal capacity to take a wider perspective on one's own practice and others' can help self-authoring knowers more effectively and proactively lead change. It also provides us with a close-up look at the transition from a more reactionary stance, where immediate and pressing needs can understandably crowd out or cloud longer-term goals and effectiveness.

Joyce's self-authoring capacity to make and support strategic, *aligned* leadership moves from a macro perspective also helped her navigate and make sense of the microaggressions she frequently and painfully experienced as a Caribbean African American woman:

As an African American woman, things happen to me a lot. And I'm not—I can't sit home every day and just like unpack all these things, but life has this wonderful way, because I'm a reflective person, of always making the pieces connect to me.... I'm just very cognizant of the things that happen to me and very thoughtful about processing things that happen to me and then transferring it to why is it happening to me, like what does this mean?

Ultimately, Joyce's self-authoring capacity to reflect on and process the systemic nature of inequity and racism—in both schools and the world—empowered her to take strong stands for educational ideas and practices she felt could make a difference with and for others (another characteristic of self-authoring knowers). In fact, one very important leadership capacity she had honed was the ability to say, “Okay, you're going to throw out this radical idea and you need to stand on it because you've done enough work to know that this is important.”

This self-authoring capacity to take a clear and firm stand for one's beliefs and values was likewise evident throughout Bernard's interviews. A retired urban principal and superintendent who currently works as a university professor, Bernard—who identified as a 57-year-old Black/African American man, and whose SOI results reported a firmly self-authoring way of knowing at the time of our study—described his rich and nuanced understanding of educational systems (similar to the other self-authoring leaders in our sample) and approached systemic reform by asking, “What can I change *today*?” For example, when faced with inequities during his superintendency—such as inadequate building facilities, rushed reforms, and substandard food service for underserved students—he would immediately ask the hard questions and make the difficult calls needed to begin the process of change. Because of this, Bernard gained a reputation as a strong, principled leader who was unsusceptible to influence or political games. “I cannot be corrupted,” he explained, adding that this was something all of his colleagues came to know about him as well. In keeping with his fully self-authoring way of knowing, Bernard was unafraid to engage in conflict when he felt he needed to and, like the other leaders we learned from who were predominantly self-authoring in their meaning making, he also worked strategically to prioritize and align specific leadership moves that could nonetheless leverage larger-scale change.

Growth and growing edges for the self-authoring leaders in our study. While, like Bernard, the self-authoring leaders in our sample had grown more comfortable advocating for students, colleagues, themselves, and what they believed in, they also intuited the importance of reaching

beyond their own ideas and expertise as a next step in their leadership journey, especially on behalf of social justice. Joyce, for instance, recognized, “I’ve developed this theory that I can’t do it alone. That in order for me to do something, I need a team.... Not this idea that *I’m* doing this work.” Carter, too, described the potentially limiting effects of his burgeoning self-authorship when he shared,

I don’t necessarily invite many other people into [my] vision, or that envisioning with me. Like, they’ll be a part of sketching it out at the smaller scale, but not necessarily—like, my vision of equity and excellence, or my vision of justice, has really been my own. It’s like for as long as I can recall. And so I’m not really having a lot of input or push from the people that are engaged in the work with me, and I think that feels like a growing edge.

Indeed, opening one’s own thinking, ideologies, and practice can be a growing edge for many self-authoring knowers. For this reason, a powerful support (and challenge) for self-authoring knowers is working with others to explore—not just the things they fundamentally agree upon or the things they’re most proud of about their social justice practice—but also the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and limitations of their work and collaborations.

Towards a Self-Transforming Approach: Building Coalitions

One participant in our first-round sample, Lee, a national-level leader in a prominent educational organization who identified as a 39-year-old, white, gay, Jewish male, demonstrated a self-authoring with an emerging self-transforming way of knowing (SOI score=Self-Authoring[Self-Transforming]). Here, we focus on the self-transforming dimensions of Lee’s social justice practice to further illuminate the qualitative shift in meaning making that characterizes this developmental transition. As described earlier, leaders who make meaning in a self-transforming way have come to see that their identities and self-systems are by definition limited and that they need others, not to be complete (like socializing knowers who co-construct reality with valued others and/or supervisors), but to feel *more complete* and to effect change. In other words, self-transforming knowers recognize that they have more than one self-system and that some internal systems may be more developed than others. Given this, they seek to be in relationships *with* other in ways that help them to feel “more complete” and to grow parts of themselves that they may not have known about earlier in their life. For example, and in keeping with this shift, Lee felt strongly that “leadership ultimately requires collective energy” and he worked to embody that philosophy in his approach to leadership. In his work designing a leadership vision for his educational organization, for instance, Lee purposefully involved stakeholders from up and down the system and solicited multiple rounds of feedback to collaboratively refine the language and focus of the framework. While, like the other self-authoring leaders in our sample, he certainly brought expertise, insight, and guidance to the process, the framework was ultimately something he strove to create with—not for—others as a living tool. This collaborative, more self-transforming approach likewise aligned with Lee’s larger emphasis on “listening to people who are most affected” by initiatives or injustice as essential to social justice leadership.

Interestingly, the framework Lee helped to develop is comprised of four domains—relational leadership, vision, strategic action, and learning—that include and synthesize key leadership strengths described by other first-wave participants. Serena (Instrumental/Socialing), for instance, focused largely on learning and information sharing as key to perspective transformation; Amaia (Socializing[Self-Authoring]) highlighted the relational dimensions of education in her reflections; and Adam, Bernard, Carter, and Joyce (who demonstrated different degrees of self-authorship) all emphasized the importance of seeing, vision, and purposeful action in social justice leadership. By bringing together these different developmental foci and strengths, Lee’s work took a more integrated, interconnected approach and helps to capture the possibilities for leadership *across* ways of knowing (as well as some potential areas of growth).

Moreover, Lee emphasized that the dimensions of the leadership framework were relevant at multiple levels. As he explained, “So, you can do all that work by yourself. There’s a lot of work to do in just learning about yourself... But all that work can also happen at the group level...and then at the systems level.” Just as compellingly, Lee prioritized the importance of *transforming the system*—of “making changes to entrenched practices and policies that perpetuate inequity in society”—by “building coalitions.” Whereas the leaders in our study with more self-authoring orientations were working to look beyond their own visions and actions on behalf of social justice, Lee—as an emerging self-transforming leader—actively prioritized collective agency as essential to lasting change. As he explained,

Building connections between various groups who may have a lot of differences between them, but may have some common interest—that can form the basis of a really bold vision for what you’re trying to accomplish that may cut across many different groups of people.

In addition to reflecting the self-transforming aspects of his meaning making, Lee’s emphasis on coalition-building also echoes a sentiment found in the larger social justice literature. Recently, for instance, Bell (2016) argued that “since all forms of oppression are interactional and co-constitutive with each other, alliances among people from diverse social locations and perspectives may perhaps be the only way to develop interventions muscular enough to challenge systemic oppression” (p. 20). While certainly a sophisticated approach to social justice leadership and advocacy, effective coalition building had not, to our knowledge, been linked empirically to self-transforming capacities prior to our research. As such, this emerging finding points toward a new and previously hidden developmental dimension of social justice leadership, as well as the developmental supports leaders may need to build coalitions more effectively. In other words, it speaks to the internal development and scope of vision that may help people orient more fully to the inter- and intra-group coalition-building needed for sustainable social justice action and advocacy.

Growth and growing edges for Lee. As indicated by his SOI score, at the time of our study Lee was in the earlier stages of developing a more self-transforming way of knowing. When reflecting on his growing edges, then, it makes sense that one big area of focus for Lee was navigating the challenge of “knowing when to step forward and when to step back” as an individual and a leader. In particular, he recognized the complicated role his own identity markers—specifically, his identification as a white, Jewish, gay male—played in the “attention, access, and opportunities to make change” that he had been afforded. While he realized that “one of the most powerful ways you can think about your leadership is by thinking of the specific identity markers you carry and how you might leverage those to contribute to change,” he also realized that this identity work—like social justice leadership—is full of paradoxes, possibilities, and blind spots. At the time of our interview, he remained committed to continued exploration of these complexities, and also shared that he planned to pursue Rabbinical training as a new way to motivate and collaborate with a wider, more encompassing group of people beyond the education sector “to take a leap and care about others in a different way.” As he explained,

I think the place I have reached is being metacognitive about these dynamics, recognizing that I do have something valuable to add AND that people of color who typically are not afforded self-determination deserve the space and support to use and amplify their voice.

Ultimately, for Lee, social justice leadership involves ally-ship. And, this, for Lee, remains an evolving and ongoing process. As he explained, it’s “a really, really long road that we’re travelling.” Yet, at the same time, as he grows beyond a self-authoring approach into a more self-transforming one, it is the learning and “the discovery of it all” that remains most satisfying and fueling for him.

Like Lee, we recognize the complexity of showcasing his experience as the first participant in our study making meaning beyond the self-authoring way of knowing, who also happens to be a white man. To this point, we refer back to the logistics of scheduling which informed the order of our first seven participants, and also affirm, like Lee, our commitment to further exploring and foregrounding the stories and experiences of more leaders of color and non-male-identifying leaders as this research continues.

Summary, Discussion, and Conclusions

By exploring the connection between leaders' different developmental orientations (their ways of knowing) and their leadership for social justice, this article contributes to a nascent body of literature that adds an important dimension to the literatures and conversations about both social justice leadership and adult developmental theory. As such, it offers important, timely implications for educational leaders (and those who prepare them) seeking to more fully imagine and effectively promote equitable outcomes and experiences in their schools, districts, and systems. For example, our research highlights a number of emerging findings about the strengths leaders with different ways of knowing can bring to their social justice practice, as well as the developmental supports that have helped them continue to grow and make a difference. In Table 2, we summarize these findings.

Table 2: Emerging Findings: Social Justice Strengths and Developmental Supports for Growth, by Way of Knowing

Way of Knowing	Strengths Leaders Can Bring to Social Justice Practice	Developmental Supports for Leadership Growth
Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding and sharing resources • Recognizing and committing to the importance of social justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning about others' stories, ideas, and experiences • Taking greater perspective on self and worldview
Socializing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making and sustaining deep connections • Recognizing and valuing others' diverse backgrounds and experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling affirmed and validated in progress • Receiving encouragement and support from valued others
Self-Authoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking and seeing systemically • Taking strong, principled stands on behalf of values and beliefs • Acting on vision with purpose and alignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking beyond one's own actions and expertise • Working with others toward collective goals • Including others in the visioning and leadership work
Self-Transforming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building coalitions • Working collaboratively • Seeing the interconnected pieces and elements of a system • Seeking input and listening to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring paradoxes and contradictions in leadership and identity • Learning more about self, others, and social justice as an ongoing process

We are grateful to have this opportunity to share our emerging, first-wave findings. These represent, to our knowledge, one of the very first empirical explorations of the connection between leaders' developmental ways of knowing—according to constructive-developmental theory—and their

social justice practice. We also recognize that there is much work still to be done. As we continue to collect and analyze data from the leaders in our next rounds of interviews, we will certainly dive deeper—and with a much larger sample—into the potential intersectionalities of ways of knowing, social justice practice, and other markers like role, age, race, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religion, and more.

For now, though, we are heartened by the profound commitment to equity, diversity, and justice that *all* of the leaders in our study expressed, as well, as their commitment to continued growth, learning, and leadership. Just as Lee began to articulate, advocacy and equity-oriented leadership requires action and transformation that draw from the strengths of *all* ways of knowing—both to help differentiate supports for people entering into the work at different places, and to honor the fullness and complexity individuals and organizations. Ultimately, as educators at all levels struggle to navigate the political, economic, and social complexities of our current age, our research adds timely, important, and promising new implications for leading and learning in education and our everyday lives. Ultimately, we hope that bringing a constructive-developmental lens to the essential and vital conversations about social justice leadership will help more people tap into and embrace the gifts they can bring to this work today and that it will help all of us better meet each other where we are as we work to reimagine education and our world for tomorrow and beyond.

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