Social Justice Leadership as Inclusion: Promoting Inclusive Practices to Ensure Equity for All

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Historically, the inclusive education movement has primarily focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, along with their participation in school activities and interaction with other peer groups. Gradually, scholars have begun to look at inclusion as more than just a focus on students with disabilities, but involving other marginalized groups, such as linguistically diverse students, students of color, and LGBTQ youth. With this focus in mind, and in order to develop and sustain inclusive schools and spaces, school leaders need to consider social justice leadership as a means by which to promote a broader and more inclusive approach capable of addressing the social inequities and disparities of marginalized populations. This means engaging in a leadership stance that puts issues of race, class, gender, disabilities, and other marginalized conditions at the core of their practice. As empirical research in social justice as inclusion gains traction, faculty in leadership preparation programs must begin to rethink and redesign their programs to better prepare candidates to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to be social justice leaders for inclusion and equity.

Keywords: leadership preparation programs, inclusive leadership practices, social justice, inclusion, equity and access

As initially discussed in the literature, the inclusive education movement was primarily concerned with the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, along with their participation in all school activities. Katzman (2007, as cited in DeMatthews and Mawhinney, 2014) has defined inclusion as "an educational philosophy that calls for schools to educate all learners - including students with disabilities and other special needs - together in high quality, age-appropriate general education classrooms…" (p. 129). This view is further supported by McLeskey, Waldron, et al. (2014) who define inclusive schools as "places where students with disabilities are valued and active participants… are provided supports needed to succeed in the academic, social, and extra-curricular activities of the school" (p. 4).

Although early discussions on inclusive leadership practices looked primarily at the needs of special needs students, Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) have added another marginalized group of students to the discussion, advocating for the rights of English Language Learner (ELL) students. In this model, "Inclusive service delivery for (ELL students) involves valuing students learning English and positioning them and their families… as central, integral aspects of the school community" (p. 648). As it pertains to ELL students, inclusive education should "provid(e) each student the right to an authentic sense of belonging to a school classroom community where difference is expected and valued" (2011, p. 649).

The addition of ELL students to the discussion on inclusive leadership practices is definitely warranted; however, the current literature widens the net even further. In defining inclusive leadership practices, Lalas and Valle (2007) state that "…a social justice perspective…is essential in evaluating the impact of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, poverty, and disability on the educational outcomes of students in urban schools" (p. 75). Likewise, Theoharis (2007), in discussing social justice leadership and inclusive schooling practices, believes that principals must "…advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions..." (p. 223).

Purpose

The central purpose of this article is to encourage discourse among faculty members in educational leadership preparation programs to adopt a more broadened and comprehensive framework of social justice leadership, and to further develop the capacity of emerging school leaders to engage in social justice work at their schools. The application and practice of social justice leadership cannot remain detached from inclusive leadership practices; this is necessitated by efforts to arrive at a more equitable, just, and inclusive educational and societal environment (Shyman, 2015). As it pertains to educational leadership preparation programs, a broader and comprehensive understanding of social justice leadership would serve to develop the capacity of future school leaders to more effectively support all marginalized students, and also strengthen individual educational leadership preparation programs.

Aligning to CAPEA Articles Discussion

The issue of equity-driven leadership in education has recently shaped the broader dialogue and debate among higher education faculty. Increasingly, faculty responsible for leadership preparation programs are reassessing the effectiveness of their programs in preparing candidates to assume leadership positions as advocates of social justice work to create equitable and inclusive

spaces in schools (Lopez et al., 2006; Mirci, 2008; Woods & Hauser, 2013). Past thinking about universal approaches to educational leadership are quickly giving way to preparing future school leaders who directly tackle issues of inclusion, equity, diversity, and marginalization. As discussed by Celoria (2016), "…there is a need for principal and leadership preparation programs to support candidates in developing the disposition, knowledge, and skills necessary to address inequities and marginalization related to class, language, gender, race, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, and economic status" (p. 208). Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of social justice education on leadership preparation programs. Scholarly thinking and research has shifted from a place of theoretical discussion to identifying leadership practices that ameliorate the structural and systemic barriers to equity and inclusion for historically underserved and marginalized student populations (Lalas & Morgan, 2006; Mirci, 2008).

In developing social justice leaders, preparation programs must be grounded in principles that strive to create equitable learning opportunities for all children (Woods & Hauser, 2013). As such, "Professors of education administration preparation programs should ensure that their graduates develop the competence and commitment to lead schools with equity (Woods & Hauser, 2013, p. 16). Leadership for equity, as discussed by Lopez et al (2006), "…refers to bold, courageous actions and behavior on the part of school leaders to ensure that inequities are addressed openly and directly (p. 14). So as to ensure that our school site leaders are equipped to respond to issues of inequity that manifest themselves on their campuses, it is of utmost urgency that our leadership preparation programs develop their candidates' abilities and skills necessary to support all students. As further stated by Lopez et al (2006), "…our graduates must provide bold, socially responsible leadership in schools and districts that ensure successful results for the students that have been historically failed by leaders of schools prepared by our state's universities" (p. 17).

Aside from developing and enhancing the skill set to respond to issues of inequity, leadership preparation programs must look at cultivating positive diversity dispositions in their candidates in an effort to support student success. By addressing socio-cultural consciousness, cultural proficiency, and community connections in an intentional and developmental manner, leadership faculty are able to promote growth in knowledge, skills, and dispositions of diversity in their candidates (Keiser, 2009). Solely discussing these concepts in an open forum, though, does not yield a greater understanding of positive diversity dispositions and their impact on students and the school community. It is also necessary to provide candidates with opportunities to engage with the community; this would serve to enhance their understanding of these dispositions in the context of their school community.

Developing a commitment to lead schools with equity, and cultivating positive dispositions of diversity would serve in preparing school site leaders to create equitable and inclusive spaces in schools. This aligns directly with the principal's ability to develop collaborative structures that fully support effective instruction, and that result in improved educational outcomes for all students. With the implementation of response to intervention (RTI) and, most recently, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), it is even more critical that school site administrators possess the ability and skill set to work collaboratively with teachers in developing effective instructional practices driven and informed by data. As noted by Garrison-Wade, Sobel, and Fulmer, "Facilitating such collaborative problem-solving situations must be modeled, nurtured, and fostered by principals." It behooves faculty, then, in principal preparation programs to provide the training required to implement structures that promote communities of practice focusing on collaboration in the interest and support of student needs.

In the additional articles reviewed for this special edition, the authors have presented a broad and brief summary of social justice in education and its place in educational leadership preparation programs. Faculty undertaking preparation program redesign efforts must be informed on current frameworks, competencies, and practices to better prepare today's school leaders to be equity driven and inclusive in their practice.

The Inclusion Education Movement

The inclusion education movement has shaped the contemporary landscape of special education from its direct impact upon legislative policy, research, and educational practice to influencing the philosophical and programmatic approaches of educational supports and services for marginalized student populations (Artiles, 2006). Historically, special education students have been excluded from opportunities to participate in all aspects of education alongside their general education peers. Additionally, special education students have been educated in schools and districts with no regard to accountability for programs and support services that would provide them with equal opportunities and access afforded to general education students (Skiba et al., 2008).

As noted by Garrison-Wade et al. (2007), "One of the most important challenges in education is to create and nurture inclusive environments that support learning for all students" (p. 117). This means not only providing highly-qualified teachers to all students, including those with special needs or disabilities, but also providing future school site leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively implement inclusive structures that seek to support all students. What is required, then, as discussed by Artiles et al. (2006) is "...the transformation of the philosophy, values, and practices of entire educational systems" (p. 260). Over the last few years, though, the literature on inclusive leadership practices has widened considerably to include all historically marginalized students, not only those with special needs or learning disabilities.

Scholars have long argued that special education students have been marginalized, stigmatized in schools, and denied equal access to curriculum, teachers, programs (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). As can be seen, the challenge regarding special education students involves the continued persistence of inequities, discrimination, over-identification, lack of proper support services, and disproportionate identification of students of color for special education in schools and, more so, in urban districts (Skiba et al., 2008; Torres & Barber, 2017).

Researchers and practitioners in the field of education are constantly examining ways to address student learning outcomes in an effort to close the opportunity and equity gaps at the school, district, and even state levels. This is especially critical since the achievement disparities between different student groups, including students with special needs, continues to be challenging. For many students with special needs, full inclusion has not been achieved; as such, these students continue to be under-served in schools and school districts (Berryman, Ford et al., 2015). As students with special needs continue to be marginalized and under-served, the opportunity and equity gap widens and is further amplified. These students continue to be part of an education system that is increasingly more culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse. Consequently, students with disabilities find themselves in educational settings that are not improving but exacerbating their marginalization as inclusion remains a distant reality (Berryman, Nevin et al., 2015). Whether classrooms, schools, or districts take up the call to embrace inclusion as an extension of social justice depends on multiple factors, such as site-level leadership, a vision for inclusion as social justice, or even the political will to allocate equitable and sustainable

resources for these students (Naraian et al., 2020).

This line of inquiry and examination has impacted the field of educational leadership as faculty take a more introspective approach in assessing the presuppositions and assumptions of their current educational leadership preparation programs. Faculty are redesigning their programs to be more relevant and responsive to the challenges aspiring school leaders face as they assume leadership positions where they are expected to navigate and lead in more diverse, equitable, and inclusive spaces (Dantley, 2010). Additionally, the work of educational leadership and social justice requires that scholars and practitioners not only move beyond embracing a specific view of social justice, but challenge others to examine educational leadership and leadership practice from different social justice perspectives (Dantley et al., 2008). By uncovering and exploring educational leadership from these different perspectives, scholars and practitioners will expand their understanding of what social justice leadership can mean in its broadest sense.

Capper and Young (2014) argue that, unfortunately, the concept of inclusion is not at the forefront of the current, broader discourse on social justice leadership, but continues to remain on the periphery as researchers and practitioners fail to look beyond inclusion or inclusive practices as applicable to a wider range of students than only those identified as students with disabilities. The current discourse needs to be broadened so as to include students of color, linguistically diverse students, homeless and foster youth, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer/Questioning (LGBTQ) students in the inclusion discussion.

Attempting to define the concept of inclusion in the educational setting presents challenges on two levels: *identifying* core principles of inclusion, and *implementing* inclusive practices aligned to core principles (Shyman, 2015). As such, the implementation of the practice of social justice must be linked to the practice of inclusion and what it means to promote and advocate from a social justice perspective to benefit the whole of society. Schools and individual classrooms reflect communities of practice where individual teacher and administrator practice communicates consistent and powerful messages about existing norms and principles. If the system of schooling is about social justice practices that build and support inclusive education, then belief systems, values, and practices must be carefully examined (Shyman, 2013). Furthermore, Frattura and Capper (2007) explain that in order to develop and sustain inclusive schools, school personnel and the school community itself must engage in continuous reflection to determine whether students with disabilities are addressed through a social justice and equity lens.

The following sections situate educational leadership practice for social justice in three key areas: social justice in education; social justice leadership, and the impact of educational policy on inclusive leadership practices. This framework is a result of the analysis of prior scholarly work conducted through a narrower focus on social justice leadership.

Social Justice in Education

The debate regarding how best to define social justice in education has spanned the decades, and continues well into the present day as educational leadership preparation programs continue to reinvent their programs to include references to social justice in their mission and vision statement, and courses are revised and developed to include a social justice perspective (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). What started out as debate and discourse aimed at diversifying the educational system in America, and continuing to the multicultural and bilingual education movements, evolved to a movement where monocultural assumptions were challenged in order to understand the lived experiences and histories of traditionally marginalized populations in society

(Landreman & MacDonald-Denis, 2013). Fast forward to today where social justice as a concept is grounded in specifically identifying and addressing institutionalized privilege in society, not only in the higher education arenas of teacher and educational leadership preparation programs, but also in the realm of elementary and secondary education. Despite the discourse across the nation, social justice education and educational leadership continues to be misunderstood as the term social justice is used interchangeably with other terms such as inclusion and diversity.

The phrase "social justice" warrants closer examination by those working in education. Increasingly, this term is featured in conferences, scholarly writings, textbooks, and teacher and administrator preparation programs (North, 2016). In the area of educational leadership, scholarly research seeks to investigate the application of social justice principles and philosophies in the work of school leaders, which has potential long-term implications for universities offering leadership preparation programs (Furman, 2012). As awareness and increased accountability builds for school leaders to address the social inequalities and disparities of marginalized populations in schools and districts, additional empirical research is needed to move beyond advocacy and position papers. What is needed is a focus on the conceptual exploration and development of descriptive social justice practices that school leaders can adopt and initiate, in order to sustain the equity-driven leadership needed for social justice work that will lead to systemic cultural change in schools (Brown, 2004; Theoharis, 2008).

Social Justice Leadership

Increasingly, school leaders are challenged to address significant issues in urban schools and districts that serve diverse and marginalized students from varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Brown, 2004). School leaders with a social justice perspective who are focused on improving educational outcomes for marginalized students can start with two essential beliefs that frame teaching for social justice (Hawkins, 2014). First, there is injustice where certain students are consistently marginalized and others are consistently privileged (Kendal, 2006). Second, educators, including school leaders, can be forces for change and challenge the structures and systems that marginalize and oppress student populations based on ethnicity, social class, or gender (Adams, 2007).

Leading and teaching for social justice involves exposing the inequities that exist in schools and districts, and taking action to transform and reframe perceptions and attitudes relating to social justice. Additionally, Theoharis (2007) posits how social justice leaders put issues of race, class, gender, disabilities, and other marginalized conditions at the core of their equity leadership practice, vision, and advocacy. This work of advocacy is focused on addressing and eliminating the marginalization of people in schools and dismantling the systems and structures that continue to marginalize and compound inequities for certain student populations (Lewis & Kern, 2018).

In defining social justice, McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, et al. (2008) "...specifically link social justice with academic achievement, critical consciousness, and inclusive practices" (Grant & Sleeter, 2007, as cited in McKenzie, et al., 2008). Additionally, social justice, when applied to educational leadership, means that school leaders must become activist leaders whose focus is equity for all students (McKenzie, et al., 2008). Theoharis (2007), in his definition of social justice leadership, refers to the manner in which "principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions...central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (p. 223). His definition takes into account inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities, which include English

language learners and other students traditionally segregated in schools (Theoharis, 2007).

The Impact of Educational Policy on Inclusive Leadership Practices

Billingsley, McLeskey, and Crockett (2019) noted that "changes in federal laws (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, 2004; Every Student Succeeds Act, ESSA, 2015) set a high bar for principals and teachers as they strive to help *all* students meet state standards, including students who speak a language other than English, those who have disabilities, as well as those living in poverty" (p. 306).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 is the crucial piece of legislation for special education. This federal legislation sought to provide a free and appropriate education for all students and protected the rights of special education students (Florian, 2007). Furthermore, this law mandated Individualized Education Programs and Least Restrictive Environments to ensure due process procedural rights for children (Torres & Barber, 2017). Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2014 sought to provide a free and appropriate education for students with disabilities. This significant legislation addressed the two-prong challenge of referrals, evaluations, and identification of English learners and recognizing the overidentification of marginalized students of color in the areas of emotionally disturbed and developmentally delayed (Skiba et al., 2008). These pieces of legislation attempted to address the pervasive inequalities that had existed for marginalized populations and students of color especially. We cannot lose sight of the connection between historically marginalized populations in schools and special education students, many of whom are students of color and have also been marginalized by educational systems. The time for social justice leadership for inclusion is timely and clear.

Implications for Preparation Programs

Educational leadership is both challenging and complex. For many aspiring school leaders, the pathway to certification is through university preparation programs specifically designed by faculty to train candidates to assume leadership positions in schools. Historically, though, these educational leadership preparation programs have fallen short in two ways. First, the inadequate focus on incorporating pedagogical practices that create opportunities for candidates to investigate their own values, assumptions, and biases as a precursor to crafting a leadership agenda for social justice advocacy is lacking (Celoria, 2016). And second, when addressing the preparation of aspiring school leaders for equity and diversity work, faculty have focused on situating candidates in a "universal-one-size fits all" approach to understanding the role they play to ensure equitable outcomes for all students (Lopez et al., 2006). Because of this inadequacy, faculty in preparation programs must move beyond the umbrella of multicultural education or a "one-size-fits-all" approach. This would require programs to move towards specifically teaching social justice leadership as inclusion by developing sociocultural consciousness and cultural proficiency as entry points for candidates to address issues of diversity, equity, and cultural beliefs as they work with school communities (Keiser, 2009; Rosine, 2013).

As further discussed by Celoria (2016) and Woods and Hauser (2013), leadership preparation programs must provide candidates with a curriculum linked to pedagogical approaches that foster debate and action on a societal and political level to address equity, access, and advocacy. The call to action, then, is for faculty to rethink their program frameworks, standards,

and course offerings to better prepare aspiring school leaders to advocate for the underrepresented and marginalized in their role as leaders for social justice inclusion.

The dialogue around social justice as inclusion continues to accelerate in importance as the demographic profile of the United States quickly changes and becomes increasingly diverse. The U.S. Department of Education projects that the number of White students enrolled in public schools will continue to decrease, and will constitute 46 percent of total enrollment in 2025 (Kena et al., 2016). Consequently, as students of color and marginalized student groups increasingly constitute the majority of students enrolled in public schools, social justice as inclusion is critical. The shift in student demographics also exposes a need to address the challenges that many students of color and marginalized populations experience with poverty and growing up in households below the national income norms (Barakat et al., 2019).

As empirical research in the area of social justice as inclusion expands, scholars continue to develop theoretical and conceptual understandings of social justice leadership that can inform and guide faculty teaching in educational leadership programs. Additionally, scholars and faculty are calling for an examination of the manner in which educational leadership programs are preparing future school leaders to possess the capacity, dispositions, and skills to engage in the work of inclusive social justice leaders (Furman, 2012; Hernandez & Marshall, 2017). Consequently, conversations continue to center on to what degree preparation programs are actually developing more robust approaches and establishing measured outcomes for preparing future school leaders as inclusive social justice leaders (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). As a result, the gradual shifts taking place in educational leadership programs are centered on developing a broader understanding of the various roles and responsibilities future school leaders can play as inclusive social justice leaders (Berkovich, 2017).

Amidst the current throes of the Anti-Racist movement in America, it is critical that inclusive leadership practices focus on the broader definition and understanding of what constitutes inclusive social justice leadership. As faculty are challenged to engage in focused discussions on the pedagogical shifts and programmatic implications needed to evaluate and redesign educational leadership programs at their respective institutions, they must consider the divide that currently exists between the theoretical understanding of inclusive, social justice leadership and what leadership practice looks like when enacted by school leaders (Trujillo & Cooper, 2014). The implications for these pedagogical and programmatic discussions are critical. Preparing and mentoring current and future school leaders in building inclusive leadership practices that ensure all students, including those with special needs and disabilities, benefit from equitable and accessible school structures and systems is needed and long overdue (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). The time for social justice leadership for inclusion is timely and clear.

Conclusion

The challenges of closing the opportunity gap for students of color in urban public schools have been exacerbated by issues associated with racism, poverty, and inequitable access to resources. In response to addressing how these broader social community issues affect students and their success in schools, researchers have turned to examining social justice leadership in schools as a way to recognize and address the causes of structural and systemic inequity and lack of inclusion and opportunity for students (Lalas & Morgan, 2006; Woods & Hauser, 2013). Additionally, as the equity and inclusion agenda begins to be advanced by educators, discussions center on how best to distinguish between what is equitable as opposed to what is equal. The need

to understand the equitable versus equal construct of deep-seated systemic inequities of White privilege and racism that have historically contributed to disenfranchising students of color, and the manner in which they contribute to a greater degree of inequity and lack of opportunity for these students, is of paramount importance. School leaders need to be equipped with the skills necessary to initiate difficult conversations within the context of the school community so as to better address equity issues of race, privilege, and inclusion that are reflected by the opportunity gap that exists for students of color (Barbara & Krovetz, 2005).

If the current education system is to be transformed, future school leaders must exercise their leadership to tackle issues such as racism, class, diversity, inclusion, marginalization, and disabilities (Mirci, 2008). Toward this end, preparation programs will be called upon to develop authentic educational justice leaders whose core identity is aligned to social justice for equity and inclusion (Lalas & Morgan, 2006). Given the current issues impacting our Nation, today's school leaders must do more than simply gain an understanding on how our most vulnerable students experience marginalization in its varied forms. School leaders are now charged with ending all forms of discrimination, oppression, and marginalization by understanding that educational justice is situated in the context of a broader social justice discussion (Dailey, 2015). This discussion centers on how marginalization and discriminatory practices are directly impacted by school and classroom culture, curriculum and pedagogy, human and budgetary resources allocation, and district politics and policies (Mirci, 2008). Leading for social justice to end marginalization and discriminatory practice will require faculty in preparation programs to take a serious introspective look at how they can begin creating opportunities for candidates to develop the dispositions and skills necessary to engage in social justice work for equity and inclusion as leadership practice (Barbara & Krovetz, 2005).

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