Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP: ADVOCATING EQUITY, ACCESS AND

OPPORTUNITY FOR BLACK STUDENTS ATTENDING URBAN HIGH-POVERTY

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

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by

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of the little Black boys and girls who begin their educational journeys with excitement about the prospect of learning. I see you enter the school building each year with expectation in your eyes. I salute you for continuing to strive toward excellence while battling the barriers that come with living in poverty. You are an inspiration and I am propelled forward to advocate for equity, access, and opportunity, each day, because of you.

I also dedicate this work to my three children, Kary II, Mahalia, and Mariah. The three of you have led me on this quest of seeking equity, opportunity, and access for all students. Each of you has your own unique style of learning and I appreciate you for your love of life and learning.

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A final thank you is extended to each of the principals and instructional leaders who agreed to sit with me to discuss the strategies used to advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students throughout the school district. You are true social justice leaders and I applaud you for the difficult work you are doing on behalf of some of our neediest students. You are amazing! Thank you for taking part in this project.

VITA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of 4 elementary school principals and 4 instructional leaders committed to social justice practices who have improved and sustained grade level performance in reading with Black students for the duration of 3 consecutive years.

Four research questions guided this study and included: What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to advance equity, access, and opportunity, to improve core teaching and curriculum, address barriers faced, and develop resilience when leading the work of social justice? Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the intention of learning specific leadership strategies used to create, promote, and sustain equitable learning environments where Black students meet and exceed proficiency rates in reading.

Key findings suggest that leaders who accomplish and sustain high academic achievement at their schools hold high expectations for their students, immerse themselves in culturally responsive professional development trainings, seek community supports to enhance curricular programs, and invest in professional study and self-care practices to sustain themselves both professionally and personally. Recommendations for future policy demonstrate the need for principal preparation programs dedicated to addressing social justice leadership practices as a means to advocate equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized and oppressed students everywhere.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Throughout the nation, formative and summative assessment data demonstrate that, as early as kindergarten, Black students are struggling to meet grade level standards at the same rate as their Caucasian and Asian American peers. For this study, the term Black will be used as a reference for the term African-American. Black is a synonym for the term African-American and further defines African-American as that which pertains to or characterizes Americans of African Ancestry. In fact, "many Black people prefer to be called African-American or Afro-American" (Learner's Dictionary, n.d., para. 1).

"The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas" (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.a, p.1). The 2015 NAEP Report demonstrates that, overall, students' average scores in reading are not better than the average 2013 reading scores, and a review of NEAP reports over time indicate that changing reading scores have not seen any significant advancement since 1992. When referencing California's students, the same 2015 report indicates that Black students had an average score that was 33 points lower than the average score for White students. This performance gap was not significantly different from the gap reported in 1998 (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.).

Improving academic achievement for Black students and closing the achievement gap has been a topic of educational discussion as early as the presidency of United States President Thomas Jefferson who declared literacy the key to citizenship (Wagner, 2008).

> The mantra of education as the proverbial "equalizer" is promoted more in the United
> States than perhaps in any other nation in the world; it is seen as the commodity that
> helps to transform life's chances, improve economic prospects, change direct outlooks to

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promising possibilities, and reduce the gap between the haves and the have-nots. (Howard, 2010, p. 9)

Improving educational practices—especially for students who continually demonstrate low proficiency rates in reading, writing, and arithmetic—addresses two specific achievement gaps: the gap between students who are identified as middle class students and those students living in poverty, and the global achievement gap (Wagner, 2008).

Educating all. The first gap, which divides students by class, is one that educators have been trying to change for decades. Today's students are preparing to enter a world where college and career preparedness are critical to living above the poverty line (Thompson, 2007). Students living below the poverty line face a unique set of challenges when seeking to attain reading, writing, and mathematic proficiencies. "According to official poverty statistics, 14.3% of Californians lacked enough resources – about $24,000 per year for a family of four – to meet basic needs in 2014" (Bohn, Danielson, & Bandy, 2013, p.1).

According to the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation (Duckett & Artiga, 2013), Black families have the highest rate of poverty out of all racial groups represented. With poverty comes a multitude of barriers that may hinder academic progress. Students who live in poverty are often affected by multiple risk factors, including emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues (Jensen, 2009). While all students are not necessarily affected by each of the risk factors related to poverty, educators must be cognizant of these factors to ensure that they are not overlooked when seeking to provide interventions and best practices for students.

The second achievement gap, the global achievement gap, speaks specifically to the gap in skills needed for college and career preparedness. Preparing students for global achievement in the 21st century includes strategies to help students learn to think critically, collaborate with

others, be flexible and adaptive, and express themselves both orally and through written communication. They must also be curious and imaginative and possess the ability to take initiative (Wagner, 2008). The current workforce is one where employees often work together in teams to find solutions to organizational inquiry. Today's 21st century students must be able to adhere to the high demands for a workforce requiring highly skilled workers and limiting the need for those who are less educated and relatively unskilled (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Naturally, this gap in the level of skills needed for the workforce widens the gap for those living below the poverty line.

As noted previously, Black families have the highest rate of poverty, which may contribute to the proficiency rates affecting their ability to be college and career ready. Improving academic rates for Black students would not only help to improve the poverty rates for these students, but also help decrease the dropout rate as well as the global achievement gap. As noted by Trilling and Fadel (2009), "Improving a country's literacy rate by a small amount can have huge positive economic impacts. Education also increases the earning potential of workers – an additional year of schooling can improve a person's lifetime wages by 10 percent or more" (p. 8).

"Students who don't make it through high school earn substantially less in wages and may have far greater rates of incarceration and drug abuse than their peers" (Blankstein, 2013, p.4). The U.S. Census Bureau noted that the average high-school student who drops out of high school can expect to earn an annual income of $20,241, which is $10,386 less than the typical student who graduates from high school, and $36,424 less than someone who completes college with a bachelor's degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2015). The Education Trust (2014) suggests that only one in six Black 12th graders scored at the proficient level in reading in 2015, as compared with

closer to half of White and higher income students, respectively. Furthermore, fewer than one in

10 Black students scored proficient in math, as compared with 30% of White students. Data

further show that Blacks, second only to Latino students, have the highest rate of high school

dropouts, as well as the highest number of students entering college but never attaining their

college degrees; nationwide, the college graduation rate for Black students is 42%.

When seeking to educate all students with the intention of closing the achievement gap,

many obstacles may hinder this process.

> Obstacles to higher achievement for all students are related to what is called the politics
> of equity – the tendency of schools to prioritize the needs of the most privileged and
> affluent students, which often comes at the expense of other, more disadvantaged
> students. (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 171)

Often, when the topic of *equity* is raised, the perception of doing more for some then for others

seems to surface. When educators look to provide extra resources for disadvantaged students, it

does not mean that less educational resources are provided for those who are more advantaged

(Blankstein & Noguera, 2016). Courageous leaders are needed to transform our educational

system if equity and opportunity are a focus. Principals and their instructional leaders, including

assistant principals, Title I Coordinators, and culturally responsive coaches, must be intentional

about tools and supports needed to build teacher and stakeholder instructional capacity as a

catalyst to closing the achievement and global achievement gap for all students and ensuring

Black students, one of the most recognized disadvantaged groups, have the opportunity to

acquire the skills needed for college and career readiness, and contribute as literate citizens in the

same manner as their Caucasian and Asian American peers. DuFour and Marzano (2011)

suggested that instructional leaders include school site personnel who possess influence with

their colleagues, are willing to champion of the school's vision and goals, have a sense of self

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efficacy and willingness to persist, and have an ability to think systematically. For this study, instructional leaders include assistant principals and Title I Coordinators.

Academic achievement and the Black child. Many Black students face multiple barriers to acquiring the educational fortitude needed to close the achievement gap. Low expectations and poor instructional practices are a few of the barriers worth mentioning that often stand in the way of academic achievement for Black students. "In nearly every category associated with positive academic outcomes students of color are typically underrepresented, and in categories associated with negative outcomes, they are overrepresented" (Noguera & Wing, 2006, p. 3). Naturally, there are Black students throughout the country who are making significant gains toward academic achievement; however, the number of students who are not demonstrating positive outcomes on national and state assessments is still higher overall for Black students as compared to other student groups.

According to the 2015 NAEP's analysis of the relationship between schools with a high density (proportion of a school's enrollment) of Black students and schools with lower densities of Black students, achievement for both Black and White students was lower where the density of Black students was highest; however, the achievement gap did not show any difference. Regarding school composition and the Black-White achievement gap, "some researchers have considered whether teachers may also have lower expectations for student performance in schools with high populations of Black students" (The Nation's Report Card, n.d., p. 5). Research has also found that "teacher expectations, teacher instructional practices, and aspects of student motivation are even more important to the school success of students who have been historically discriminated against and who have historically experienced fewer opportunities to learn" (Woolley, Strutchens, Gilbert, & Martin, 2010, p. 42). Creating a school climate that is

supportive of high expectations for students as well as one where teachers are provided with the instructional resources needed for student motivation and educational engagement can be encouraged by the principal and instructional leaders who seek to transform schools for those students who have been historically discriminated against and who have had fewer opportunities to learn instructional content.

Many may argue that the phenomenon of the academic achievement gap is more about class than it is about race (Anyon, 2005; Hochschild, 2003; Howard, 2010). However, if Black families are identified as having the highest percentage of families living below the poverty line, being the most likely to drop-out of school, and being the most likely to be incarcerated, then it is imperative that instructional leaders and all educators do what is necessary to transform public schools and instructional practices to address and eradicate the educational trajectory that currently exists for Black students.

Effects of poverty. "Poverty limits the chances of educational attainment, and at the same time, educational attainment is one of the prime mechanisms for escaping poverty" (Engle & Black, 2008 p. 243). According to the Education Testing Center for Research on Human Capital and Education (Coley & Baker, 2013), 22% of all children in the United States live in poverty. Of the identified 22%, 28% of America's Black children and 25% of American Hispanic children live in poverty (representing a family of four living below the threshold of $24,000 per year). In an effort to help diminish the relationship between students' educational outcomes and their economic status, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 provides public schools with funding resources to aid both areas. Jensen (2013) suggested that middle class and poor class families have overlapping values of education and perseverance when it comes to hard work. However, Jensen (2013) further suggested that if poor students

were exactly the same as middle class students with reference to cognitive lags, emotional stability, and behavioral discourse, then similar instructional practices provided to both groups would yield the same results.

Cognitive lags for students living in poverty have been documented, beginning as early as the second year of life and extending through elementary and high school (Engle & Black, 2008). Engle and Black (2008) further suggested that children in chronically impoverished situations perform at significantly lower cognitive and academic levels and tend to demonstrate more behavior problems than children who are not exposed to poverty. Research illustrates Black students, particularly Black boys, as being disciplined and having more out-of-school suspensions than other minority groups and White students (Cochran, Cochran, Gibbons, & Spurgeon, 2014; Lewin, 2012).

This study on social justice leadership focused solely on best practices used with principals and instructional leaders of urban high-poverty elementary schools within one of the largest school districts within the United States. Urban poverty occurs in metropolitan areas with populations of at least 50,000 people. The urban poor deal with complex aggregates of chronic and acute stressors (including crowding, violence, and noise) and are dependent on often-inadequate large city services (Jensen, 2009). Furthermore, more than half of the students who attend these highly populated urban schools tend to qualify for free or reduced lunch (Cochran et al., 2014). Schools selected for this study include students who are enrolled in Superior Unified School District (SUSD, the subject of this study, a pseudonym) and qualify for free or reduced lunch based on their household income and whether or not they participate in one of the government assistance programs such as CalWORKS/CalFresh, KIN-GAP, or FDPIR[1].

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[1] The source from which this information was derived would break the confidentiality of the participating institutions. Therefore, it has been omitted intentionally.

"Because students from low-income families, Black students in particular, and students in low-quality classrooms are more at-risk for demonstrating behavior problems, students from these large school districts may be more at-risk of demonstrating highly disruptive behavior" (Cochran et al., 2014, p. 2). Duncan (2002) suggested that radical interventions and adjustments in educational policy and practice should be implemented for oppressed and marginalized students.

Educational reforms. On April 9, 1965, U.S. Congress enacted the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signed into law by U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson. "At his signing, Johnson spoke of the bill as the key that would unlock the door to education for millions of Americans." (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p.1). According to records from the U.S. Department of Education, President Johnson also believed that poverty was perhaps the greatest obstacle to educational progress and felt that the money spent to support schools with large numbers of students living in poverty would come back to society tenfold as school dropout rates decreased and graduation rated increased. Title I is designed to help students served by the program to achieve proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards. "Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. " (US Department of Education, 2015, p.1).

Almost 20 years later, in April 1983, President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of Education Terrell Bell revealed the Nation at Risk (NAR) report, a report put together by members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This report examined the quality of education in the United States and revealed immediate changes had to be made with respect to educating *all* students or the nation would fall far behind other countries both

economically and socially (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The NAR report spoke to the heart of the American people because it suggested that those who did not possess adequate levels of competence in skills, literacy, and training would be disenfranchised from the chance to fully participated in a national life. NAR further suggested that all students be provided with excellence in education, setting high expectations and goals for all learners, and expecting schools to do everything possible to assist students with meeting established goals. ESEA and NAR both set the stage for educational improvements and transformation.

In December 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) with the intention of maintaining an expectation that accountability measures would remain in place to support positive change in the nation's lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making adequate academic progress and where high numbers of students are not graduating with the skills needed to be college and career ready. To ensure opportunities for all of America's students to obtain the skills needed for academic proficiency, provisions of ESSA include: advancement of equity for all students by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students, ensuring that all schools are led by qualified leaders and teachers, and the promotion of local innovation and investments in strategies that work (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Each of the U.S. presidents mentioned previously sought to improve the trajectory of educational excellence for those students who continually demonstrate low levels of proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science, and yet, with over 30 years of educational reform, the academic gap remains essentially the same as it was in 1963 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.a). Educational leadership that upholds critical protections for disadvantaged students and creates school climates where high expectations and improvements in core teaching

and learning are required may be the next reform effort needed to close the achievement gap for all marginalized students, including Black students who attend high-poverty, urban elementary schools in Southern California.

Impact of school leadership on student learning. Schools today are faced with preparing children for participation in a society that is culturally diverse, multi-religious, as well as multinational (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). School leaders must ensure that their stakeholders are trained to provide equity, access, and opportunity to all of their students regardless of race, economics, and/or gender.

The school site principal and other instructional leaders play a vital role in creating school climates that are supportive of all students regardless of academic and cultural differences.

> Principals have an effect estimated to be second only to teachers with their biggest impact found in elementary schools and in high-poverty, high-minority schools. In general, schools that have highly effective principals perform 5 to 10 percentage points higher than if they were led by an average principal. (Hull, 2012, p 2-3).

DuFour and Marzano (2011) suggested that powerful school leadership has an indirect effect on academic achievement. This indirect effect happens because principals do not provide instruction to students directly. Principals have a direct influence on teachers' practices and as a result the teacher impacts student learning. The realization of the effects the principals have on teachers' abilities to provide students with the necessary skills to increase academic proficiency rates confirms the need to provide principals and other instructional leaders with the tools and strategies to ensure equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all students as a key to transforming urban high-poverty, elementary schools.

Social justice leadership.

> As public school students are becoming increasingly more diverse and poor, the 21st
> century realities of the changing demographics of public schools in the U.S. will demand
> school leaders who embrace and are committed to the tenets of school leadership for
> social justice to ensure that all students are provided with equal access to a high quality
> education. (Kemp-Graham, 2015, p. 100)

Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership as "principals mak[ing] issues of race, class,

gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized

conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice and vision"

(p. 223). Leaders for social justice may be considered those who intentionally seek strategies

and resources to eliminate and dismantle marginalized and oppressive behaviors in schools.

Theoharis (2007) suggested that inclusion is the key to social justice leadership that will

ultimately support the educational and social needs of all students. "Inclusion is not about

disability...Inclusion is about social justice...By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice,

we can create a world fit for all of us" (p. 223).

Social justice theory. Social justice theory addresses what is needed to educate all of

America's students by ensuring that all students have the opportunity to be included in

educational practices that are accessible and equitable. "Social justice is a deliberate intervention

that challenges fundamental inequities that arise, in large part, due to the inappropriate use of

power by one group over another" (Angelle, Arlestig, & Norberg, 2015, p. 21). Angelle et al.

(2015) further articulated that leaders who work toward social justice tend to approach the task

from a wider, more holistic view that endorses equitable practices for all students from all races,

backgrounds, and ability levels.

Furthermore, theorists from other countries, including South Africa, have noted social

justice practices as an extremely important factor needed to assist with developing their countries

human resources. The Constitution of South Africa inserted a provision connected to social justice education at the center of change after 1994. The theory of social justice in South Africa suggests that equitable provisions must be provided for those who are the most needy, and when this act of ensuring educational social justice occurs, wealth and tangible goods will be available to all (Turnbull, 2014).

America's ESSA also inserts provisions connected to social justice education into the framework of their reauthorized ESEA. On December 10, 2015, U.S. President Barack Obama, declared, "With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamentally American ideal—that every child, regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where they live, deserves the chance to make of their lives what they will" (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, p.1). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) further suggested that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was also seen as a tool to ensure that all students were provided with quality instruction with the sole purpose of closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers.

Barriers faced by school leaders who implement social justice practices. Leaders for social justice often face myriad barriers that may adversely affect the implementation of social justice practices. Boykin and Noguera (2011) proposed that the politics of equity appear to be the factor that hinders progress toward providing all students with higher achievement. Barriers hindering the progress toward social justice that were addressed in this study included the effects of poverty along with stakeholders' beliefs regarding poverty-stricken students of color.

American public schools with large percentages of students identified as high-poverty are offered financial supports through a program called Title I Funding. According to the United States Department of Education's (2015) Title I, Part A report, regarding the 2009-2010 school

year, more than 56,000 public schools throughout the country were recipients of Title I funding. Of the 56,000 public schools 59% of the students served were in kindergarten through fifth grade, 21% were in grades six through eight, and 17% were student in grades nine through 12. Title I funds are intended to provide financial assistance to districts and schools with high percentages of students who come from low-income families. The ultimate goal of Title I funding is to ensure that all students have the supports needed to meet the challenging demands of state academic standards. These extra supports are deemed necessary due to the fact that students who come from high-poverty schools typically face multiple challenges and inequities in both their home and community environments that may not be as prevalent in more affluent homes and communities (Arvin, 2009).

Another barrier needing attention when seeking social justice leadership is centered on the biases and mindsets of all stakeholders within the school. "The school has become a place where students, families, educators, and administrators have thrived, not regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, and other social differences, but because of them" (Irving, 2016, p. 50). Bondy and Hambacher (2016), Irving (2016), and Gutshall (2013) suggested that students, regardless of ethnic background, religion, and other social differences, should be viewed through an asset-based thinking lens. Bondy and Hambacher (2016) further stated, "research has demonstrated that when educators focus on assets, rather than deficits, students' success increases" (p. 51). Researcher Carol Dweck (2006) offered the argument that mindsets can be seen from two different ends of a spectrum: fixed mindset and growth mindset. The fixed mindset is stable and tends to be steadfast regarding a belief and avoids moving outside of specific parameters for fear of making a mistake. The growth mindset is seen as malleable: a mindset that believes improvements can be made and rebounds can be formed from mistakes.

Jensen (2016) also suggested, "Brains can change and you can reverse the academic effects of poverty and help students graduate college or career ready" (p. 6). When seeking to address the effects of poverty, including cognitive lags, increased disruptive behaviors, and teacher beliefs and mindsets attached to deficit thinking, the leader for social justice must not only have the disposition, knowledge, and skills needed to transform school instructional practices that help to improve academic achievement for marginalized Black students, but also put into practice strategies that support leadership resiliency for the work of social justice leadership (Theoharis, 2009).

Leadership resiliency. Leaders who are committed to the work of providing students with equity, access, and opportunity identify the challenges that must be faced and come to an understanding of how challenging the work can be due to the varied barriers one must face when leading for social justice. Social justice leadership often leads to the establishment of professional and personal strategies needed for individual sustainability. Professional strategies include communicating with purpose and authenticity, development of supportive administrative networks, and prioritizing one's work. Strategies for personal sustainability include: prioritizing life outside of work and engaging in regular physical activity (Theoharis, 2009). Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie, and Ackerman (2009) asserted that principals work in a complex world of relationships where the need for honest and supportive relationships is critical to leadership sustainability. These researchers further noted that effective principals must cultivate their own relational skills by learning from other collegial relationships.

Problem Statement

In the year of 2000, SUSD entered into a resolution agreement that called for an action plan to address the academic needs of Black students within the district. Performance goals

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suggested that the number and percentage of African American students meeting and/or exceeding the state standards in Reading and Math would increase while the number and percentage of Black students referred and enrolled in special education classes and/or suspended from school would decrease. In 2000, the district's Academic English program recognized that approximately 80% of its 92,000 Black students were limited Academic English language proficient learners. The main goal of the program was to empower students to learn to use Academic English proficiently for the purpose of increasing academic achievement and decreasing students identified with special education needs and/or suspensions. The adopted plan outlined five keys to improving educational outcomes for Black students: providing students with opportunities to learn, embedding Academic English strategies into the district's core curriculum, professional development for teachers and administrators, engaging parents and community members in the education of Black students, and ongoing planning, systemic monitoring, and reporting.

On June 10, 2014 SUSD entered into another resolution agreement, this time with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR), to resolve existing practices meant to address the academic needs of Black students. This resolution was adopted, communicating that the district would ensure every student has equitable opportunities to learn as both a human right and a civil right and the school district would also ensure every student has complete and equitable access to a linguistically and culturally responsive curriculum. Currently there are approximately 50,000 Black students in SUSD identified as limited Academic English language proficient learners. Academic reading proficiencies for fourth grade students in SUSD show 18% of the Black population performed at or above proficient, when compared to, 21% of the Hispanic population, 46% of the White population, and 57% of the Asian population.

California's 2015 NAEP results suggest that little to no progress has been made for Black students between the year 2013 and the year 2015, with scores in 2015 being slightly higher than those from the earliest reading assessments in 1992. Overall, data results indicated that Black students scored the lowest in reading when compared to all other racial groups in both the school district as well as the nation. According to the 2015 Smarter Balanced Assessment report (a customized test using a computer adaptive format to assess student proficiencies in reading and math), 27% of all Black students who took the reading assessment in grades three through five at the elementary school level met and exceeded reading proficiency rates (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.b.).

In an effort to increase proficiency rates for Black students in SUSD, a plan has been developed and implemented to assist with improving reading/literacy for Black students with the anticipation of closing the achievement gap for this group of students. SUSD has put into practice a culturally responsive program; a study is yet to be conducted to learn more about the practices of site administrators and leadership teams who promote and sustain the successful performance of Black students in schools. A need exists to find out what is working in these schools in order to replicate practices in other schools to help close the achievement gap for Black students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of elementary school principals and instructional leaders who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance of Black students in reading for the duration of 3 consecutive years or more as

measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment and the California Standards Test in four urban high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California.

One school principal along with one school site instructional leader was recruited to participate from each of the identified schools. Instructional leaders may have different titles such as assistant principal or Title I Coordinator, but each participant is seen as an advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for Black students attending high-poverty urban elementary schools. Each school was selected based on enrollments indicating that 30% or more of the students are Black, poverty indicators that are 70% or higher for free or reduced lunches, and principal and instructional leader participation in the culturally responsive program for 3 years or more. Selected participates were invited to participate in individual interviews. Each interview session was expected to last for no longer than 60 minutes with no more than 17 questions asked.

Research Questions

The following central question guided this phenomenological study: What social justice leadership practices are implemented by elementary school site principals and leadership teams to promote and sustain grade level performance of Black students in high poverty urban elementary schools in Southern California? The following four sub-questions further guided this study:

1. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools?

2. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders to improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools, when leading the work of social justice?

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3. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders to address barriers faced when leading for social justice?

4. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders to develop resilience when addressing the barriers faced for leading the work of social justice?

Importance of the Study

Potential benefits of this study included the identification of strategies and practices that might be replicated by other principals and instructional leaders to improve academic achievement for Black students in high-poverty schools. This study may also benefit leadership preparation programs to provide leaders with strategies needed to support teachers, families, and communities of students attending urban high-poverty schools. Lastly, results from this study might support administrators and instructional leaders with establishing educational policies and practices that provide access, support, and empowerment to Black students (Turner & Ives, 2013).

Furthermore, this phenomenological study was intended to extend the work of Theoharis (2009), who identified seven social justice principals who were leading the way with respect to beating the educational odds for Black children. This phenomenological study sought to advance and move beyond the work of Theoharis (2009) and Ladson-Billings (2009) by exploring and investigating socially just leadership strategies that have yielded consistent successes for Black students in one of the largest urban high-poverty school districts in Southern California.

The knowledge gained from this study may benefit leadership preparation programs by providing leaders with strategies needed to support teachers, families, and communities of

students attending urban high-poverty schools. This study may also be of benefit to current administrators and instructional leaders when establishing educational policies and practices that "protect diverse students from cultural domination, absorption, and social marginalization" (Turner & Ives, 2013, p. 291). Empowering all students for college and career readiness is the goal of the U.S. educational system, and to provide students with less than this would not meet their civil right to a free and appropriate education provided to all U.S. citizens.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were used for the purpose of this dissertation.

Achievement gap. A difference in scores between two groups of students (for instance, male and female, Black and White, or Hispanic and White) can only be considered an achievement gap if the difference is statistically significant, meaning larger than the margin of error (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.a.).

College and career readiness. Students are identified as college and career ready when they display the knowledge, skills, and behaviors to complete a college course of study successfully, without remediation (Conley, 2010).

Educational equity. Access to a world-class education that helps to ensure all children with dreams and determination can reach their potential and succeed (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Instructional leaders. School site personnel who possess influence with their colleagues, have a willingness to be a champion of the vision and goals, those with a sense of self efficacy and willingness to persist, and those who have an ability to think systematically (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Instructional leaders may have different titles such as assistant

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principal or Title I Coordinator, but each participant is seen as an advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students.

Literacy. The skills and knowledge captured in the ELA/literacy standards are designed to prepare students for life outside the classroom. They include critical-thinking skills and the ability to closely and attentively read texts in a way that will help them understand and enjoy complex works of literature. (Common Core State Standards, 2013)

Marginalization. The ability to segregate students and impeded their learning (Theoharis, 2009)

Prolong. To make (something) last or continue for a longer time ("Prolong," n.d.).

School climate. *"*School climate is the quality of institutional life promoted by student learning through the emotional, physical, and social safeties of the school" (Ross & Cozzensm 2016, p. 163).

Urban poverty. Occurs in metropolitan areas with populations of at least 50,000 people. The urban poor deal with complex aggregate of chronic and acute stressors (including crowding, violence, and noise) and are dependent on often-inadequate large city services (Jensen, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study was social justice theory (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006). The social justice agenda is meant to:

> Increase access and inclusion to the core teaching and curriculum in schools for each and every student in heterogeneous settings, improve that core teaching and curriculum, and fundamentally create a climate of belonging for all in the school community and in the face of resistance. (Capper, et al., 2006. p. 16)

The number of U.S. Black, Hispanic, and Asian students who are enrolled in public school institutions has reached a majority-minority milestone. The numbers for each of these groups

exceeds that of non-Hispanic White students who are enrolled in Pre-K-12 schools (Kemp-Graham, 2015). These changes increase the demand for school leaders who have the knowledge and skills needed to support diverse school populations. Social justice theory (SJT) suggests,

> school leaders have yet to realize that to make systemic change for marginalized students, they must first understand their own biases, acknowledge their own deficit thinking, engage in ongoing critical reflection of their beliefs of oppression and social justice, thus becoming aware of the cultural influences in school settings and their own biases that perpetuate the inequitable practices within schools. (Kemp-Graham, 2015, p. 102)

For this study, a conceptual framework used to support SJT was evidenced through a framework for social justice leadership. "The goal of Social Justice educational approaches is to understand structural and local educational practices that reproduce inequality, and to establish educational policies and practices that provide access, support, and empowerment to students" (Turner & Ives, 2013, p. 291). Principal preparation programs generally provide leaders with the skills needed to assist teachers with improving teaching and learning; however, there is a greater need to support principal preparation toward creating school climates that are supportive of addressing equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students. It is the socially just leader who seeks to reform systems that produce and reproduce oppression and create schools, systems, and individuals that resist and liberate them (Theoharis, 2009). Together, research regarding SJT and social justice leadership may provide the necessary outcomes to address and assist with obtaining systemic academic advancements for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to school site principals and leadership teams who work in high-poverty urban elementary schools in Southern California and who have promoted and sustained grade level academic performance of Black students as measured by Smarter Balanced

Assessments and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. This study used the 2010 United States Census Bureau's definition of *urban* to mean: Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people.

Another delimitation exists with respect to the identification of high-poverty schools. This study referred to high-poverty schools as those schools with student populations of 70% or more that receive free and reduced lunch. According to the 2013 Education Testing Service Center for Research on Human Capital and Education report on Poverty and Education, "If a family's total money income is below the applicable threshold, then the family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty" (Coley & Baker, 2013, p. 12). Schools within SUSD were identified as high-poverty families based on parent income reports that are used to determine students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Furthermore, instructional leaders were recognized as those including the principal and either an assistant principal, Title I Coordinator, or Instructional Coach. One or both of the leadership team positions, outside of the principal, provide school site leadership and instructional supports at the elementary level with a direct focus on improving the academic trajectory of Title I families. The Title I Coordinator is a site-based position responsible for providing teachers with direct instructional support to assist students with meeting grade level standards based on the Common Core State Standards (2013) in English and Math. Title I Coordinators also facilitate the analysis of assessment data as a means to support teachers with reviewing student work, discussion of best practices, identification of student needs, and planning differentiated instructional practices. In most instances the assistant principal adheres to the same duties and responsibilities of the Title I Coordinator. Instructional coaches are intended to support the instructional program by providing teachers and other stakeholders with

opportunities to collaborate, plan, and implement best practices for improved academic achievement.

Lastly, this study was delimited to schools that have met and sustained academic achievement for Black students in grades three through five as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English for 3 years or more. SUSD has only used the Smarter Balanced Assessment to measure grade level proficiency rates during the 2014-2015 and the 2015-2016 school years. Schools were also be identified as showing high levels of proficiencies for Black students using the 2011-2012 California Standards Test. There is a gap between the 2013-2014 and the 2014-2015 school year because the SUSD did not offer any standardized testing during those years.

Limitations

This study had the following limitations:

1. The sample of schools was drawn from a single state, California, and a region within California. Therefore, results may not be generalizable to other regions within California or to other states.

2. The sample was drawn from schools that were high poverty, urban, and elementary; therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other settings or levels of schooling.

3. The sample size was limited to schools in which the academic performance of Black students met or exceeded grade level standards. The sample size for this phenomenological study was eight, representing four principals and four instructional leaders.

4. This study only focused on leadership, yet there are other variables that impact the performance of students that were not addressed in this study.

Assumptions

The first assumption made by the researcher was that of social justice leadership being a key component to addressing equity, access, and opportunity for Black students. The second assumption includes the fact that all of the selected principals and instructional leaders would have in-depth knowledge of SJT and would be willing to share their experiences with fidelity. Lastly, it was assumed that socially just leadership provides a catalyst to improving academic achievement for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools.

Organization of the Study

The chapters within this study were organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 was intended to provide the reader with an introduction and background to the topic of the study. Chapter 1 further provided the reader with the problem and purpose statement along with the importance of the study. The theoretical framework provided critical information for generating research questions, which helped to guide the research design. This study also called for a hypothesis because of the nature of being a mixed methods study. Lastly, Chapter I provided the reader with the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions for the study.

Chapter 2 of this study focuses on the literature that provided dialogue based on an exemplary selection of authors and types of sources (historical, theoretical, empirical, and peer-reviewed). Chapter 2 also addresses identified variables equally and in depth.

Chapter 3 provides the reader with a clear introductory description of the research design followed by a thorough description of each design component. Chapter 3 describes and justifies the research design approaches and methodology while succinctly describing context, location, and circumstances of the study. The chapter also offers a clear description of population, sample, and sampling procedures including recruitment and process for sample selection. Also

included in Chapter 3 are details regarding human subject considerations including: nature of involvement, potential risks, how risks were minimized, informed consent, and anonymity. Lastly, Chapter 3 will provide the reader with the researcher's relationship to the study and explains how the relationship may contribute to the quality and credibility of the study and the plan for addressing researcher bias. Chapter 4 was intended to provide the reader with a presentation of the findings while Chapter 5 provides a discussion of these findings, along with considerations and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides a review of the literature that supported the need to study principal and leadership team practices that address social justice leadership as a catalyst for sustained improved academic achievement in reading and mathematics for Black students attending urban high-poverty elementary schools. Limited research has been completed regarding principals and leadership teams who have assisted Black students in meeting and exceeding reading and/or mathematic proficiency rates for more than 3 consecutive years. To meet the varied challenges that public schools face when seeking to address the needs of highly diverse school populations, principals and their leadership teams must develop the skills and strategies critical to creating school climates that are positive, engaging, and productive for improved student achievement (Miller & Martin, 2014).

The current literature regarding social justice leadership indicated varied barriers that hinder progress toward social justice leadership intended to provide equity, access, and opportunity to marginalized groups of students. Research suggested that teacher, staff, and other stakeholder biases and beliefs needed to be acknowledged and the process of building teacher capacity toward social justice practices was critical to supporting marginalized students (Theoharis, 2007). Addressing the issues of poverty is another barrier facing principals when seeking to address closing the achievement gap for marginalized students (Anyon, 2005; Hochschild, 2003; Jensen, 2013).

This literature review began with an examination of historical facts related to educational reform aimed at closing the achievement gap and creating pathways of equity and opportunity for all students. Educational reforms such as the 1965 ESEA, the 2002 NCLB, and the 2015 ESSA speak to the rights of all students, including those who are marginalized and educationally

oppressed, to have provisions needed for equity, access, and opportunity toward a quality education intended to prepare them for college and career readiness. The second section of this study focused on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, SJT and social justice leadership, used as a reference and a guide for this study. The third section addresses the myriad barriers instructional leaders face when seeking to eliminate injustices for marginalized and oppressed Black students. The final section addresses strategies used to ensure resilience when working for social justice.

Statement of the Problem

National assessments of high school student performance between 1992 and 2015 reflect a continued achievement gap for Black students as compared to the other student groups. The 2015 NAEP data demonstrates no significant difference in 12th-grade student reading proficiency rates when compared to the year 2013. The report also states that the 2015 proficiency rates are lower in comparison to the earliest assessments in 1992. When comparing 12th-grade ethnic groups, the same report shows 46% of White students as being proficient, 49% of Asian students, 25% of Hispanic students, and 17% of Black students being proficient in reading. After reviewing proficiency rates in mathematics NAEP reports that 32% of White students scored proficient, 47% of Asian students, 12% of Hispanic students, and 7% of Black students score proficient. For Black students, reading and math scores such as these represent decades of concern regarding academic achievement for Black students and has given rise to educational reform efforts intended to help close the achievement gap (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.).

In an effort to better understand the educational plight of Black students, one may find that the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case was one among many that added to the marginalization of

Black students. Homer A. Plessey was a citizen in the state of Louisiana and John H. Ferguson was the presiding judge in charge of the case. Plessey was a man of mixed-race who claimed that his mixed race was seven-eighths White and one-eighth Black, and because of this ratio he deserved to sit at the front of the railcar that would take him from one section of the city to the next. Plessy was arrested and charged for not following Louisiana Law. In 1896, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling dictated that the federal government could and would tolerate the *separate but equal* mandates and used this ruling to justify segregating all public facilities, including public schools. In this case, Plessy and others like him, Blacks, were marginalized: relegated to a lower or outer edge as a specific group of people (Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute, n.d.).

Fifty-eight years later, after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case denounced the separate but equal mantra by ruling it unconstitutional. Chief Justice Earl Warren demonstrated through his ruling that education was a right that should be granted to anyone. This case also provided a pathway to equity for all students. Warren attempted to level the educational playing field for Black students and other marginalized students by providing access and opportunity for educational and institutional equity; a catalyst to success in life for all students.

Educational Reforms

Eleven years after the ruling on the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the ESEA. ESEA was considered to be a civil rights law from its inception. "This law brought education into the forefront of the national assault on poverty and represented a landmark commitment to equal access to quality education" (Social Welfare History Project, 2016, p. 1).

Due to the expectations of this act, new grants were offered to school districts that served low-income students and federal grant were given to state educational agencies to improve the quality of education for students at both the elementary and secondary levels (National Center for Education Statistics, (n.d.b.). Although grants and other resources were available to assist schools with high levels of poverty, Black students continued to demonstrate low levels of academic achievement. The civil rights mandates established through ESEA sought to improve educational excellence and close the achievement gap for many years; however, 2015 academic data from the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.a.) yields similar proficiency rates in reading and math for Black students as those represented during the establishment of ESEA under President Johnson's administration.

Nation at risk report. Under the leadership of U.S. President Ronald Reagan, the 1983 NAR report revealed that the nation had reason to be concerned about the educational progress of its U.S. public school students. The NAR report stated,

> For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence. Education helps form these common understandings. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.2)

This report suggested that the future of the United States was dependent on improving academic achievement for all students in America. The report further stated,

> Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension, about 13% of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functionally illiterate among minority youth may run as high as 40% (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.2).

These statistics were some of the many that provided significant information to launch reform efforts intended to support all students, regardless of race, class, or economic status, with unwavering opportunities to develop each student's mind and soul to the highest degree possible.

The NAR report enlightened the American people of the need to immediately address both equity and achievement gaps and suggested that essentials needed to reform the U.S. educational system could be mobilized through the establishment of high-expectations and high quality schools. Since NAR was published, multiple educational reforms efforts and initiatives have emerged, including 2002's NCLB, the 2009 Common Core State Initiative, and 2015's ESSA. Each has it own unique contribution to educating today's students with an eye toward ensuring equity, access, and opportunity for all students, but especially for those students who continue to demonstrate low proficiency rates in reading and mathematics.

No Child Left Behind Act. NCLB was a collaboration between civil rights and business groups, as well as both Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill and the G. W. Bush administration, which sought to advance American competitiveness and close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers (Klein, 2015). NCLB was passed by congress in 2001 and signed into law in January of 2002. This act served as an update to the 1965 ESEA and identified measures to be taken with the purpose of strengthening academic achievement for low performing subgroups of students including special education, English Learners, racial minorities and students from low-income families. "The term achievement gap refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different groups of students, such as white students and minorities, for example, or students from higher-income and lower-income households." (Hidden Curriculum, 2014, p.1).

Under NCLB students were required to be annually assessed in reading and mathematics from grades third through eighth and once in high school where disaggregation of data addressed growth for students as a whole as well as by cultural subgroups. NCLB also required that teachers be highly qualified as a means to assist with meeting the goal of 100% student proficiency by the year 2013-2014. NCLB mandated high stakes students testing, accountabilities for student achievement levels, and penalties for schools that did not make their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. The 2013-2014 culminating data demonstrated that NCLB did not produce outcomes as expected with closing the achievement gap and indicated that continued educational reform efforts were needed (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.a.).

Every Student Succeeds Act. The ESSA reauthorized the ESEA and was signed by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015. ESSA is considered to be the nation's education law committed to providing equal educational opportunities for all students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d). ESSA has provisions that will assist with ensuring success for both students and schools. ESSA established a variety of provisions to ensure educational opportunities for all of America's students. This study addressed two of these provisions: advancing equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students and providing students with high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers.

The NAR report, NCLB, and the ESSA are a few of the most notable large scale educational reform efforts put into place to address the perceived ineffective instructional methods used to close the achievement gap for Black students and other minority groups.

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However, as described earlier, these reforms have not served to close the achievement gap for

Black students.

> One of the biggest blocks to change is that people do no know what to do or do not know
> how to do it. They need, in other words, capacity-the competencies and skills to deal
> with the problems at hand. (Blankstein & Noguera, 2016, p. 47)

SJT speaks to the idea of acquiring the competencies, knowledge, and skills to deal with

problems at hand. When one looks for a *magic key* or a *silver bullet* to eliminate inequities and

address academic achievement, one will find that this approach does not exist or provide

expected outcomes; in retrospect, creating systemic change involves leadership that is

courageous and bold: social justice advocates (Theoharis, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Theoharis's (2009) model of a social justice framework is a conceptual framework used

to prepare leaders for social justice. The social justice model (see Figure 1) illustrates seven

keys for understanding the highly complex implications of SJT. Social justice education seeks to

ensure that all students are provided with educational equity, access, and opportunity. Black

students have struggled to meet and exceed academic standards in literacy for far too long. The

Children's Defense Fund (2017) stated that multiple indicators of school success unveil

significant gaps between student performance and where students should be. The gaps are far

more critical for students of color, those with disabilities, and those who are poor. "Education

should be the great equalizer, leveling the playing field for all children. Too often, however, our

system of education reinforces instead of removes barriers created by poverty and racism."

(Children's Defense Fund, 2017, p.1).

When seeking to remove barriers that stand in the way of student achievement, especially

for Black students (those who continue to rank as the lowest group of students who meet and

exceed proficiency rates) the instructional leader is the one to lead this charge. The framework

for social justice leadership positions the principal at the center. The leader operates from this

central place and interacts with other key components of the framework to assist with eliminating

educational injustices to increase access, improve teaching and curriculum, and create a climate

of belonging (Theoharis, 2009). These injustices are flanked by strategies of resilience needed to

face continuous barriers and difficulties that hinder academic excellence for marginalized

students.

       The social justice leader. This section of the social justice leadership model addresses

the school leader. The leader is positioned at the center because leadership is often seen as a

personal undertaking and the leader who takes on social justice leadership is critical to the

quality of the work (Theoharis, 2009). Hull (2012) indicated that principals have an effect on

academic achievement that is second only to teachers and the largest impact is typically seen at

the elementary school level where high poverty is a factor. Principals set the tone for the way in

which schools operate. Principals are expected to run a school that is free from distraction;

manage the health and safety of all stakeholders; create a school climate that supports innovation

and is free of disappointments; connect with students, teachers, parents and community

members; and deliver academic results for all students (Fullan, 2014).

       The principal for social justice must embody a certain level of critical consciousness,

knowledge, and skills to lead socially just schools (Capper et al., 2006). Capper et al. (2006)

also suggested that critical consciousness is often seen within the belief systems or values of the

principal or instructional leader. Instructional leaders who are critically conscious seek research

and data to increase the level of knowledge and skills needed to ensure instructional settings

intended to benefit all students.

Mthethwa-Sommers (2014) suggested that social justice education is derived from

theories regarding social transmission. Mthethwa-Sommers (2014) also postulated that society

can only be at its best and survive if maintenance and replication of the present socio-economic

and political structures exist. This form of transmission would be based on maintaining the

status quo through the transmission of and passing down from one generation to the next with

regard to the cultural traditions, values, and core beliefs of the identified dominant group.

> School leaders for social justice recognize that there are situations, especially in
> institutions such as public schools where the application of the same rules to unequal
> groups or marginalized groups such as can be found in 21st century schools can generate
> unequal results as evidence by the omnipresent achievement gap, disproportionate
> suspension rates, high school drop out rates and lack of work or college readiness.
> (Kemp-Graham, 2015, p. 101)

> School leaders who seek to advocate equity, access, and opportunity may find effective

strategies within the Framework for social justice leadership depicted in Figure 1.
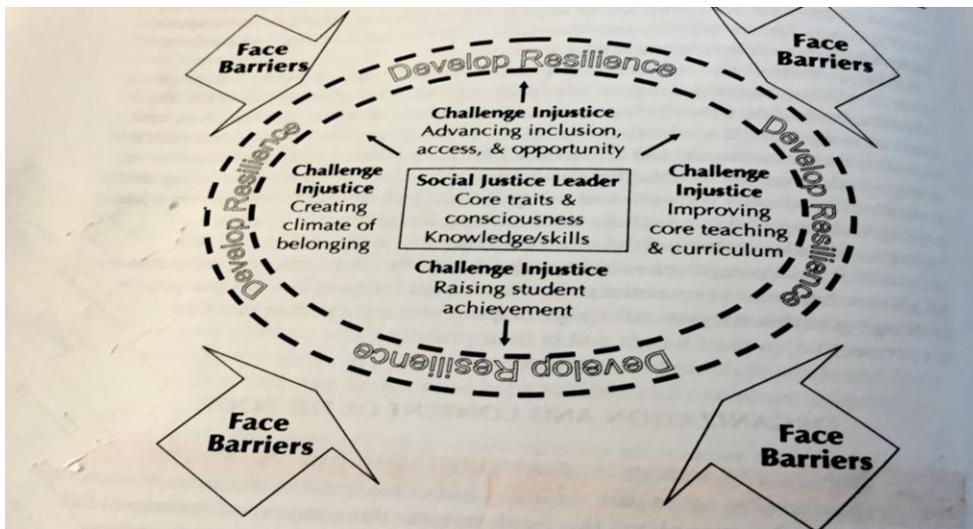
Figure 1. Social Justice Leadership Framework. *From The School Leaders Our Children
Deserve: Seven Keys to Equity, Social Justice, and School Reform,* by G. Theoharis, 2009, New
York, NY: Teachers College. Copyright 2009 by the author. Reprinted with permission.

Developing consciousness, knowledge and skills. Key #1 of the Social Justice

Leadership Framework implies that leaders for social justice must embody critical consciousness

and knowledge/skills required to adequately assists with ensuring equity, access, and opportunity for all students (Theoharis, 2007). Theoharis (2007), Santamaría and Jean-Marie (2014), and Turnbull (2014) each discuss the importance for social justice leaders to possess a bold vision that supports the inclusion of all students, regardless of race or culture, with core curriculum standards. These researchers further suggest that the elimination of tracking students by ability and embracing heterogeneous groupings is a tremendous benefit to all. The development of critical consciousness (that which the leader believes in and is committed to) and knowledge/skills (theory and information) is seen as a key contribution to the work of social justice leadership.

Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, and Hodgins (2008) identify the myriad challenges that school leaders face when trying to close the achievement gap, hire and retain quality teachers, ensure safety for all stakeholders, and equitably distribute funds to assist with the operational needs of the institution. These researchers further imply that while varied challenges exist, the social justice agenda goes beyond these challenges and includes achieving equity and excellence in education for all students from diverse racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The leader for social justice must be knowledgeable about evidence-based practices that create equitable schools (Capper et al., 2006).

Theoharis (2007) conducted researched whereby seven principals were selected to participate because of their ability to embody a commitment to enacting justice and equity. Each of the selected principals worked in urban schools in the Midwest and demonstrated a true commitment to seeking fairness and goodness for everyone, being a part of something bigger than themselves, and using activist strategies to assist with the elimination of discrimination practices. When enacting the work of social justice, each of the principals met resistance toward

the work and used various strategies to sustain their social justice work with an ultimate goal of improving academic achievement for the students within their institutions.

Researchers such as Diem and Carpenter (2012) and Miller and Martin (2014) agreed with findings from Theoharis's (2007) previous contributions to social justice leadership. Principal preparation programs re critical to the work of social justice leadership. Each researcher agreed that principals must have the training to increase the knowledge/skills and practices needed for the complex work of social justice leadership. "A consciousness about the impact of race and class on schools and students' learning is at the forefront of social justice" (Miller & Martin, 2014, p. 129).

Core leadership traits. Principal preparation programs intended to prepare leaders for the work of social justice are highly needed. Kemp-Graham (2015) stated, "Although pubic school students in the US have become more diverse and poor, the principalship has remained fairly homogeneous and middle class" (p. 100). Kemp-Graham (2015) went on to say that many of the principals who are leading schools today have little connection to the culture and history of the students they serve. Furthermore, extant empirical research studies suggest that principals have not been trained appropriately for challenges that are often faced in schools with more culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

Theoharis (2007) suggested that there is a difference between a *good leader* and a *social justice leader*. Theoharis made this distinction because of the many questions he has encountered about what makes a social justice leader. Many that were interviewed believe that *social justice leadership* is just *good leadership*. Theoharis (2007) suggest that social justice leaders provide pathways for educational diversity and cultural respect for everyone and also "knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the

same rich opportunities both academically and socially as their more privileged peers"
(Theoharis, 2007, p.252).

Researchers such as Johnson (2008); Ibarra, Santamaría, Lindsey, and Daly (2010); and Balkar (2015) have suggested that good principals exhibit characteristics that support distributive leadership, data driven professional development, and the ability to network with administrators specific to topics of interest at the school site. The good principal is often seen as one who is able to adequately manage and serve as a program director, a parent communicator, disciplinarian, colleague, and facility operations manager (Thomas, Grigsby, Miller, & Scully, 2003). Core traits of the social justice leader are often driven by the belief that the work as a leader should profit marginalized students and that the typical way in which society is ordered is unjust (Theoharis, 2007).

Theoharis (2009) shared three distinct characteristics found during his study with the seven selected principals from the Midwest area of the United States. Findings determine arrogant humility, passionate vision, and tenacious commitment to justice as the overarching characteristics found in leaders who work toward social justice. Theoharis (2009) defined arrogance as a headstrong belief that the leader is right and that the leader knows what is best for the organization. The term humility is seen as the ability for leaders to be reflective in nature and provides a pathway for admission of mistakes both publically and privately. Tenacious commitment is exemplified when the leader demonstrates a passionate vision to eradicate unjust practices and a commitment to ensuring social justice. Each of these characteristics, coupled with broad consciousness and knowledge/skills, is central to the temperament of social justice leaders.

Multiple researchers believe that principal preparation programs are needed to help aspiring and newly appointed principals understand the differences between the characteristics that differentiate between a good principal and one who seeks to be an advocate for socially just education (Diem & Carpenter, 2012; Kemp-Graham, 2014; Miller & Martin, 2014). According to Miller and Martin (2014),

> Schools in a racially diverse society will require leaders and models of leadership that will address the racial, cultural, and ethnic makeup of the school community… [Therefore,] leadership preparation programs must change in a way which provides increased knowledge to improve equity and equal opportunities for all racial and ethnic groups. (p. 129)

Advancing inclusion, access, and opportunity. Advancing inclusion, access, and opportunity are key components of ensuring equity and upholding educational rights for all students (Theoharis, 2009). Theoharis (2007) further stated, "Inclusion is not a disability…Inclusion is about social justice…By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us" (p. 223).

Instructional strategies such as tracking students based on labels like Special Education, Title I, and/or English Language Learners are multiple ways in which students may find themselves segregated from the typical, mainstream classroom. Student pullout programs remove students from the general education program where significant engagement with the general education core curriculum is provided and thus contributes to the continued achievement gap for marginalized groups of students (Donelan, Neal, & Jones, 1994; Petrilli, 2011; Theoharis, 2009).

Research suggests that the idea of eliminating pullout programs or de-tracking students has not provided the academic outcomes sought after for groups of students who continue to perform at the lower percentiles according to the NAEP (Petrilli, 2011). Petrilli (2011) used the

research to demonstrate the 1970s and 1980s' attacks on tracking students whereby these

practices were assumed to ultimately hurt the self-esteem and life chances of students who

performed at the lower academic percentiles. It is further suggested that,

> The conventional wisdom on which de-tracking policy is often based – that students in
> low-track classes (who are drawn disproportionately from poor families and from
> minority groups) are hurt by tracking while others are largely unaffected – is simply not
> supported by very strong evidence (Petrilli, 2011, p. 50).

Donelan et al. (1994) and Guyon, Maurin, and McNally (2012) suggested that the early 20th

century in the United States, the educational system along with society subscribed to the belief

that those who represented the lower class were inherently inferior and thus fortified the habit of

separating students by ability and academic performance. Although the *Brown v. Board of

Education* case ultimately eliminated segregated schools, the practice of tracking students based

on academic performance remained and continues to be seen.

Improving core teaching and curriculum. Studies regarding both inclusion and

tracking suggest that there is merit in both practices (Petrilli, 2011; Theoharis, 2009) and this

merit can be found when teachers differentiate instruction. Petrilli's (2011) research defined

differentiation as a process by which students are assigned to specific reading groups, during the

90-minute block of instruction based on academic need, but students have the ability to move up

or down to other ability groups when periodic assessments deem it necessary to do so. This

method of differentiation is thought to be more fluid based on students need and eliminates

permanent instructional groupings.

As the social justice leader seeks to improve core learning and curriculum for

marginalized students the implementation of intentional professional development is necessary to

address the daily teaching and curriculum practices that happen in the classroom for all teachers,

including general education teachers, special education teachers, ELL teachers, etc. (Jensen,

2009). Improving core teaching and curriculum with respect to social justice leadership often requires professional development that is designed to address equity, access, and opportunity for students of color. School leaders can also help build teacher capacity for improving core teaching by supporting structures that allow for consistent collaboration and reflection regarding current instructional practices and student-teacher relationships that are crucial to student success (Jaquith, 2013). When seeking to provide equity, access, and opportunity with respect to the day-to-day curriculum for Black students and other marginalized groups, multiple studies suggest culturally responsive instruction as a catalyst for improving and closing the academic achievement gap (Cramer, Pellegrini-Lafont, & Gonzalez, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; D. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014; Polleck & Shabdin, 2013; Toppel, 2015).

Culturally responsive instruction. R. Lindsey, Roberts, and CampbellJones (2013) suggested, "Cultural Responsiveness is an interrelated set of tools to guide one in making changes in school policies and practices intended to narrow and close access and achievement gaps" (p. 25). Scanlan and Lopez (2015) stated that SJT, when added to culturally responsive pedagogy, provides students the social and educational supports needed to achieve academically. Studies further suggest that principals and other instructional leaders must ensure a school climate that breeds trust and respect for one another and other cultural groups (Thiers, 2016). This is an important factor to have in place when seeking to change mindsets and beliefs. One of the most important barriers to cultural responsiveness is the lack of awareness of one's own biases and beliefs about the capabilities of students to academically achieve (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Cramer et al. (2014) attested that schools should "implement change in specific practices such as teachers confronting their own biases as related to language, culture, socioeconomic

status, or disability label(s) of students. These biases must also be explored among the students toward each other" (p. 119).

Leaders for social justice incorporate and provide extended opportunities for stakeholders to collaborate about the role that bias plays toward deficit thinking and student achievement. "One of the more troubling explanations for disparate educational outcomes that the culturally responsive teacher attempts to disrupt is deficit-based explanations of low-income students and students of color" (Howard, 2010, p. 68). Howard (2010) further suggested that these deficit-based explanations are typically focused on students of high-poverty and include thoughts of these students as devoid of the culture and skills needed for academic achievement, lacking the stamina to achieve at high academic levels, or lacking parents that are interested and/or supportive of the educational program. Teachers and other stakeholders must acknowledge the significance that cultural responsiveness plays in addressing students' social, personal, and academic needs (Polleck & Shabdin, 2013).

Gay (2010) suggested that culturally responsive instruction is the ability to "use cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective or them" (p. 31). Culturally responsive instruction is far more than highlighting cultural events during specific holidays throughout the school year. Cultural responsive instruction supports an embedded approach by which students' cultures are affirmed and validated and used as a bridge to make cultural connections between home and school: the ability to use assets that students bring to school with them as a means to access the core curriculum and achieve academically (Hollie, 2015).

Researchers such as Gay (2010), Cramer et al. (2014), and Toppel (2015) have stressed culturally responsive instructional strategies as being useful for meeting the literacy needs of

Black students and propose various practices as meaningful to student academic success. Research affirms that when students are given the opportunity to collaborate and share their thinking, student achievement improves greatly (Toppel, 2015). Toppel (2015) further stated, "Culture strongly influences communication styles and how people convey understanding to others. It is important that we do not dismiss students as being uneducated, illiterate, or undignified simply because the way they communicate is not standard" (p. 556). Allowing students to share with one another through collaborative processes often diminishes the fear of being seen as one who is inferior or unable to communicate adequately. Cooperative learning helps build a community of learners within the classroom: a community where all cultures can be shared and affirmed.

Creating a climate of belonging. Families and communities that feel positive about their school experiences transfer that positive energy to their children and in turn increase students' self esteem. "Students with higher levels of self-esteem attain higher levels of academic achievement, establishing a need for school programs that increase self-esteem" (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009, p. 440). Key 5 of the social justice leadership framework facilitates the task of creating a sense of belonging for all stakeholders and uses pedagogical approaches such as cultural responsiveness to support Black students and the communities with which they reside. Research suggests that "leadership for social justice is, or should be, shared or distributed across the school setting" (Capper & Young, 2014, p. 162). The leader for social justice is inclusive in his/her leadership and creates school cultures where students, families, and the community feel welcome. "Social justice theory creates a warm and welcoming school climate, fosters classroom community building, reaches out intentionally to the community and marginalized families, and incorporates social responsibility into the school curriculum" (Theoharis, 2009,

p. 15). In essence, creating a climate of caring for students is a catalyst for justice for historically underserved students (Bondy & Hambacher, 2016). Schools with climates that support care and a sense of belonging become institutions where students and their families along with educators and administrative teams thrive because of the differences in race, ethnicity, and other social factors (Irving, 2016).

Raising student achievement. The social justice leadership framework suggests that leaders of social justice connect one's desire to assist marginalized students with raising academic achievement to the desire to eradicate the social inequities for these students (Theoharis, 2009). The social justice leader is considered to be one who addresses all areas of the social justice leadership framework with the intention of accomplishing the overarching goal of raising student achievement for students who have continually struggled to meet academic proficiency rates. Theoharis's research involving seven selected principals indicated that multiple measures were used throughout the school year to keep staff and students cognizant of individual instructional progress. Formative assessments provided continued insight as to the movement of students into fluid reading and math groups while helping teachers adjust their instructional practices. Many of the identified principals recognized that while they appeared to be making academic gains in some areas there were still areas of growth needed for distinct groups such as their students with disabilities. Each agreed that there was no one way of making and creating academic change, but rather, there were many strategies tried to support student achievement.

Effects of poverty. Creating schools that are socially just can be met with many barriers, obstacles, or tensions for the socially just leader (Theoharis, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the word *barriers* was used as a reference to the many tensions or resistances principals face

when seeking to create schools that are equitable and just. This study addressed one barrier that clearly affects high-poverty urban elementary schools: the issue of poverty. Addressing this barrier requires resilience and courage on behalf of the principal and their leadership teams. The remainder of this study will focus on these barriers as well as the research regarding resilience needed to move the work of social justice leadership forward.

U.S. President Barack Obama emphasized that all students deserved a *world-class education* supported by teachers and administrators that were highly trained and qualified to provide students with instructional skills needed to not only close the achievement gap, but to also be afforded the right to the possibility of minimally being a contributing citizen of the American middle class (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.b), in 1990 urban children were more than twice as likely to be living in poverty than those in suburban locations (30% compared with 13% in 1990), while 22% of rural children were poor (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). "Our nation has higher levels of child poverty than most other wealthy nations, with 23%, or almost one in four children, coming from households in poverty" (Blankstein & Noguera, 2016, p. 4).

In 2000, the United Nations Millennium Summit adopted eight Millennium Development Goals with the anticipation that these goals would be achieved by 2015. The first goals were to eradicate hunger and poverty and achieve primary education (Engle & Black, 2008). Interestingly enough, poverty and educational achievement go hand in hand. Factors associated with families that live in poverty include both emotional and social challenges and cognitive lags (Jensen, 2009). According to Jensen (2009), "Students who have social and emotional challenges often display 'acting-out' behaviors, impulsivity, and gaps in politeness and social

graces while students who demonstrate cognitive lags often enter school behind that of their well-off peers" (p. 36).

Children who are raised in low-income households have risk associated with academic and social problems that can result in low academic achievement (Engle & Black, 2008). Educational risk associated with families that live in poverty include parents who may have limited academic successes which in turn lessens the ability to provide a responsive environment in the home, including being read to at home.

> Children from poor families are less likely to be read to than children from better off families. In the United States fewer than half of low income preschoolers are read to on a daily basis, compared with 61% in families above the poverty line. (Engle & Black, 2008, p. 3)

This lack of exposure may lead to lags in classroom engagement and disruptive behaviors that often impedes learning.

One study of 81,000 students throughout the United States suggested that students who were not participants in Title I programs reliably attained higher levels of student engagement than those who benefited from free and reduced-priced meals (Jensen, 2013). Studies also demonstrate that students of color, mainly Black students, attain higher levels of engagement when culturally responsive instruction is provided (Meier, 2015). When seeking to help Black students increase levels of engagement in reading/literacy, it is important to provide students with literature that is representative of the culture with which they identify. One of the barriers that socially just leaders face is acquiring enough titles to address literacy for Black students, especially Black male students. "According to a study released by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, only 93 of the 3200 children's books published in 2013 were about Black people, and only 67 of these were written by African Americans" (Meier, 2015, p. 1). Leaders for social

justice ensure the economic and community resources are established to provide varied

opportunities for student access to any and all tangible materials needed for academic success.

Building resilience. Leaders who are committed to the work of providing equity, access,

and opportunity for marginalized students must identify the varied challenges involved in

moving toward social justice leadership and further understand that "leaders for social justice

must act in ways that combine superhero/collaborative leadership" (Capper & Young, 2014,

p. 162). In an effort to sustain the level of leadership needed for social justice education,

Theoharis (2009) suggested that leaders and their leadership teams establish both professional

and personal strategies needed for individual well being. Professional strategies include

communicating with purpose and authenticity, development of a supportive administrative

network, and prioritizing one's work. Strategies for personal sustainability include: prioritizing

life outside of work and engaging in regular physical activity

Professional strategies. Communicating authentically and purposefully with all

stakeholders is critical to the work of social justice leadership. This level of communication

helps make and keep the organizational vision at the forefront of the work. Teachers often want

to have a clear vision articulated to them to ensure clarity about the nature of the work and what

the right work is to successfully educate children (Thiers, 2016). Communicating with

authenticity and purpose helps to build trusting relationships that are needed to move critical

agendas associated with equity and social justice. "To foster improved teaching and learning,

principals cannot simply direct teachers to use 'best practices.' They need to listen to staff,

students, and parents and help them translate their concerns about student learning into

actionable strategies" (Donaldson et al., 2009, p. 10). Principals and instructional leaders who

learn alongside their staff support a climate supportive of teamwork, thus providing a pathway

including others; the leader is not working in isolation.

Furthermore, the development of a supportive administrative network is critical to

building resilience for the work of social justice leadership. The work of the principal is often

daunting due to the responsibilities of being the instructional leader and the manager of

operations. Allowing time to meet with other administrators and form networks helps them

collaborate about practices that work and examine practices that are not working. Principals who

are especially mindful about providing students with equity, access, and opportunity would do

well to find other principals within their district who are *stars* in this work and use them as

examples (Tooms, 2003). Principals may also find that networking with universities and

associations is another support that could prove beneficial to the work of social justice

leadership. These partnerships could be "particularly effective ways to bridge academic content,

research, and pedagogy with application and practice. These partnerships often focus on pre-

service and in-service teacher development as well as leadership skills for principals" (Thomas et

al., 2003, p. 43). Developing a supportive administrative and community network is another way

to ensure that the principal is not working in isolation.

Finally, when seeking successful strategies for professional resilience when addressing

the ongoing barriers associated with the work of social justice leadership, prioritizing the work is

critical. Principals and other instructional leaders are often frustrated by the bulk of

responsibilities given to them outside of overseeing instruction. Many are discouraged by the

over abundance of time that could be spent on instruction swallowed up by time spent on

distractions that could be handled by clerical personnel or other administrators within the district

(Johnson, 2008). Setting priorities both inside and outside of the school must be held as sacred when seeking resilience for the bold work of social justice leadership.

        Personal strategies. Prioritizing one's personal life is also a key strategy for ensuring resilience for this extraordinary work. This may mean a decision is made to attend to work related issues when at work and only attend to home related issues when at home (Theoharis, 2009). Whatever one chooses, the choice must be intentional and set aside as sacred. Creating boundaries for the work will support a home and work climate that is focused and intentional (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003).

        Another strategy that may prove to be effective when addressing resilience to barriers of social justice leadership supports the prioritization of regular physical activity. Setting aside time for physical activity helps to keep the body in shape "to endure the hectic pace of the job and overcome immense pressures principals are faced with" (Theoharis, 2009, p.113). Physical activity may be found in many forms, but the idea of setting aside time to participate in activities that create mindful diversions from the day to day pressures of the job. The work of social justice leadership can be daunting, but using specific strategies to aide the process of ensuring equity, access, and opportunity will foster the resilience needed to transform schools and close the achievement gap for Black students attending high-poverty urban elementary schools

Summary

        Literature with regard to social justice leadership as a means to address the successful attainment of literacy for Black students is minimal. Although consistent data demonstrates low levels of achievement for Black students, certain schools paint a consistent positive picture for those living in high-poverty urban situations. The literature suggests that leaders for social justice have the critical consciousness, skills, and knowledge needed to address the challenges

identified when seeking to eliminate injustices as well as developing the resilience needed when facing varied barriers.

The literature serves as proof that there are specific strategies and skills used to address marginalized groups including Black students attending high-poverty urban schools in Southern California. When seeking to address the achievement gap for these students, the leader for social justice ensures that visions and goals are articulated authentically and purposefully with the intention of building relational trust among all stakeholders. This form of communication provides a pathway that leads to professional development that supports the needs of the both students and staff. In turn, the work of social justice education is shared and involves all stakeholders with increasing academic achievement.

Lastly, building resilience for the varied barriers that one faces when addressing the work of leading for social justice includes both professional and personal practices. Professional leaders should align themselves with others that are involved in the same work. Again, this practice ensures that leadership and best practices are shared. Furthermore, this approach helps leaders set priorities that make sense for each individual school. Setting priorities helps one to keep his/her focus on the established goals and targets. Principals are often bombarded with various district initiatives and policies that are important, but may not always need to be first on the list of action items. Leaders for social justice must also remind themselves to add their own names to the list of priorities. Finding time in the schedule for reflection and physical activity is a key component for acquiring balance both professionally and personally, which proves to be a catalyst for successful work of social justice leadership. Leading schools that provide equity, access, and opportunity for students who attend high-poverty urban elementary schools may be daunting, but based on the study, resilience is a key component to the work of social justice

leadership and appears to be the right work for improving academic achievement for Black students attending high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of four elementary school principals and four instructional leaders who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance of Black students in reading for the duration of three consecutive years or more as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment and the California Standards Test in four high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California.

One school principal along with one school site instructional leader was recruited to participate from each of the identified schools. Instructional leaders may have different titles such as assistant principal or Title I Coordinator, but each participant is seen as an advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for Black students attending high-poverty urban elementary schools. Each school was selected based on enrollments that indicate 30% or more of the students are Black, poverty indicators that are 70% or higher for free or reduced lunches, schools that have a student percentage rate of 51% or higher representing students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, and principal and instructional leadership participation in the culturally responsive program for 3 years or more. Selected participates were invited to participate in individual interviews. Each interview session was expected to last for no longer than 60 minutes with no more than 17 questions asked.

Knowledge gained from this study will benefit leadership preparation programs by providing potential leaders with strategies needed to support teachers, families, and communities of students attending urban high-poverty schools. This study may also be of benefit to current administrators and instructional leaders when establishing educational policies and practices that "protect diverse students from cultural domination, absorption, and social marginalization"

(Turner & Ives, 2013, p. 291). Empowering all students for college and career readiness is the goal of the U.S. educational system, and to provide students with less than this would not meet their civil right to a free and appropriate education provided to all U.S. citizens (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.a).

Research Questions

The following central question guided this phenomenological study: What social justice leadership practices are implemented by elementary school site principals and leadership teams to promote and sustain grade level performance of Black students in high poverty urban elementary schools in Southern California? The following four sub-questions further guided this study:

1. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools?

2. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, that improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools, when leading the work of social justice?

3. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to address barriers faced when leading for social justice?

4. What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to develop resilience when addressing the barriers faced for leading the work of social justice?

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative approach and a phenomenological methodology. Individual interviews were conducted with four purposefully selected principals and their

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instructional leadership teams. Each of the teams were committed to social justice and social justice leadership practices while working in urban high-poverty elementary schools. Each of the school demonstrated academic progress consistent with academic increases at 15 percentage points above that of the school district and/or state specific to Black students who are meeting and/or exceeding grade level standards in Reading. Creswell (2014) defined qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Researchers recognize that the issues involved in qualitative study have many factors and layers that demand a portrayal of information in a multifaceted form (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative research design was selected because of the complexity of emerging questions and procedures specific to the phenomenon studied, data collection in the participants' setting, data analysis that builds from specific to general themes, and the researcher's ability to make meaning of the data.

Creswell (2014) defined phenomenological research as attempting to describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Qualitative phenomenological research allowed the researcher to take a deep look into data collected through individual interviews. Interviews were conducted with one principal and one school site instructional leader from a total of four high-poverty elementary schools. The collective number of interviews totaled eight. These participants were selected carefully for the purpose of gaining a complete understanding of elementary school leaders who seek to transform their schools through the lens of social justice leadership. The semi-structured interviews were held at each individual school site. The names of the schools, principals, leadership team members, and the school district have been concealed to protect confidentiality of everyone involved in the study.

Phenomenology

This study utilized a phenomenology methodology.

> Phenomenology offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretive, and engaging mode of inquiry from which the essence of an experience may be elicited. Experience is considered to be an individual's perception of his or her presence in the world at the moment when things, truths, or values are constituted. (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 67)

Using a qualitative approach, whereby lived experiences were explored, provides pathways for the researcher to define and illuminate the investigated phenomenon. Creswell (2013) indicated that a qualitative study utilizing phenomenological methods considers commonalities between multiple individuals and their lived experiences specific to a concept or phenomenon. In some cases, the researcher has had personal involvements related to the topic. In this specific case, the researcher sought to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of identified principals who demonstrate leadership practices that address learning supports in reading and math for Black students.

A phenomenological approach to a study is empirical; it examines and analyzes individual results from both principals and leadership team members. This method is preferred because of "the view that the lived experiences are conscious ones" (Creswell, 2013, p.77). The ability for participants to speak directly about their experiences in their natural setting as it relates to academic accomplishments for Black students will greatly support theories regarding the need for social justice leadership as a means to transform educational settings that focus on equity, access, and opportunity as a means to help close the achievement gap for Black students.

Hermeneutical phenomenology. Two identified types of phenomenological study exist, hermeneutical and transcendental. Hermeneutical phenomenology is one whereby researchers focus on identified themes that establish the nature of the lived experiences and later make

interpretations of the meaning derived from those lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). A few key steps are embedded in in hermeneutic phenomenology:

1. The researcher identifies and determines a phenomenon that is of interest.

2. The researcher contemplates themes that embrace the nature of the lived experience.

3. The researcher makes a direct connection to the topic of interest and writes a concise description of the phenomenon.

4. The researcher interprets the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology methods focus less on interpretations of the data and more on providing descriptions of participants' lived experiences. The transcendental method also involves bracketing (setting aside one's own experiences) to yield a fresh point of view of the phenomenon being studied. Using a transcendental phenomenological method, the researcher ensured the development of a *textural description* of participants' experiences (what is experienced), a *structural description* of the experiences (how they experienced it specific to conditions, situations, and context), and the *overall essence* of the experience (combination of textural and structural; Creswell, 2013).

For this study a transcendental phenomenological approach was used. The researcher used this approach to gain an understanding of the essence of the experiences of principals and instructional team members who consistently foster academic successes in reading for Black students who attend high-poverty urban elementary schools. This method was also used as a means to ensure inquiry methods that were reflective, interpretive, and engaging (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Setting

Superior Unified School District (SUSD, a pseudonym) was selected for this study. SUSD is one of the largest urban school districts located within Southern California. SUSD is an urban Title I school district with approximately 542,433 Kindergarten through 12th grade students. Student demographics represented include approximately 74% Latino, 8.4% African American, 9.8% White, 6.0% Asian, .04% Pacific Islander, and 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Native student characteristics. Of the 542,433 students (excluding 101,060 independent charter school students) 266,311 of those students attend one of the 452 elementary schools and of those elementary schools approximately 312 schools are identified as school-wide low income school sites with 80% or more of the students receiving free and/or reduced meals. Each of the participating schools are considered Title I schools with a minimum of 51% of the students living in poverty.

SUSD experienced success in their graduation and dropout rates during the 2014-2015 school year. SUSD experienced a 2-point jump over the previous year, with increases reported across all major ethnic subgroups, according to figures released by the California Department of Education (2015). The district's graduation rate has increased nearly 10 percentage points since 2009-10, when the state began using 4-year cohort graduation rates as a measure of accountability. At the same time, the dropout rate declined from nearly 25% to 16.7%. Graduation rates for Black students increased by 13.3 percentage points and Latino students by 10.8 points between the 2009-2010 school year and the present 2015-2016 school year. Although there have been fluctuations in the last 5 years, rates for English Learners increased by 10.3 points and students with disabilities increased by 13 points. The 2015 NAEP reveals that some successes have been noted with regard to the increase in graduation rates for students of

color; however, these same reports indicate that the current proficiency rates are lower than they have been since the 1990s (The Nation's Report Card, n.d.). Table 2 provides a summary of SUSD's academic performance for elementary students for the 2015-2016 school year. This summary is helpful because it helps to demonstrate the achievement gap as early as the third grade.

Table 1

Summary of SUSD Academic Performance

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Smarter Balanced Assessments	Student Outcomes (2016) English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA) & Mathematics (Math)
English Language Arts/Literacy Minimum Scale Score (3rd Grade) = 2114 Maximum Scale Score (3rd Grade) = 2623	2015 Mean Scale Score (3rd Grade) 2384.4 • Percentage of all 3rd grade students meeting and exceeding standard = 29% • Percentage of all 3rd grade Black students meeting and exceeding standard = 17%
Minimum Scale Score (4th Grade) = 2131 Maximum Scale Score (4th Grade) = 2663	2016 Mean Scale Score (4th Grade) 2437.0 • Percentage of all 4th grade students meeting and exceeding standard = 36% • Percentage of all 4th grade Black students meeting and exceeding standard = 22%
Minimum Scale Score (5th Grade) = 2201 Maximum Scale Score (5th Grade) = 2701	2016 Mean Scale Score (5th Grade) 2475.9 • Percentage of all 5th grade students meeting and exceeding standard = 40% • Percentage of all 5th grade Black students meeting and exceeding standard = 24%
Mathematics Minimum Scale Score (3rd Grade) = 2189 Maximum Scale Score (3rd Grade) = 2621	2015 Mean Scale Score (3rd Grade) 2398.9 • Percentage of all 3rd grade students meeting and exceeding standard = 32% • Percentage of all 3rd grade Black students meeting and exceeding standard = 18%
Minimum Scale Score (4th Grade) = 2204 Maximum Scale Score (4th Grade) = 2659	2016 Mean Scale Score (4th Grade) 2445.7 • Percentage of all 4th grade students meeting and exceeding standard = 31% • Percentage of all 4th grade Black students meeting and exceeding standard = 17%
Minimum Scale Score (5th Grade) = 2219 Maximum Scale Score (5th Grade) = 2700	2016 Mean Scale Score (5th Grade) 2464.4 • Percentage of all 5th grade students meeting and exceeding standard = 24%

Population Sample

Four schools were identified as schools where student achievement proficiency rates for Black students are within close proximity to their school district's and/or the state proficiency rates for all students. These schools were also selected because of the principals' participation, for three years or more, in professional development opportunities intended to help participants with increase critical consciousness and knowledge/skills specific to tackling the varied academic and social needs of Black students. The names of schools, principals, leadership team members, and school district are fictitious as a means to protect the confidentially of all participants.

Ambitious elementary school. Ambitious Elementary School has an enrollment of approximately 550 students in grade Kindergarten through fifth grades with a school district Title I ranking that delineates 80% of the students coming from low-income families. Ambitious Elementary School has a student population of 75.3% Black, 21.9% Hispanic, and 0.7% White. State assessment measures as identified by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium indicates that 30% of the students who tested in Reading met and/or exceeded the grade level standard, whereas 17% of the students tested in Mathematics met and/or exceeded grade level standards. When comparing these numbers to the district and the state the numbers are measured at 33% and 44%, respectively. It is important to note that Ambitious Elementary School serves as both a Gifted Magnet School and a Community School on one single campus, with students' academic achievement scores calculated together for an overall school percentage.

The leadership team at Ambitious Elementary School is reflective of the principal and a Standard English Learner Coach. The principal has participated with the culturally responsive

district program for over a decade and suggest that culturally responsive instruction is necessary to meet the academic and social needs of Black and Hispanic students for whom they serve[2].

Bountiful elementary school. Bountiful Elementary School is an urban, high-poverty elementary school with an enrollment of 385 students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. The California Department of Education School Accountability Report Card indicates that 67.8% of the students enrolled qualify for free and reduced meals. Enrollment includes 73% African American, 21% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.9% White, and 2015-2016 district data shows 19 teachers with full credentials and 0 teachers teaching outside subject area of competence. Data gained from the Smarter Balanced Assessments indicates the percentage of students who meet and exceed English Language Arts/Literacy standards in grades three through five represent 50% while 41% of the Black students meet and exceed standards in these same grades. Data further indicates the percentage of students who meet and exceed Mathematic standards in grades three, four, and five represent 34%, while 21% of the Black students meet and exceed this same standard in grades three, four, and five. It is important to note that Bountiful Elementary School is both a Magnet School and a "Community" neighborhood school.

Courageous elementary school. Courageous Elementary School has a student enrollment of approximately 377 students in grades Transitional Kindergarten through fifth grade. The California Department of Education School Accountability Report Card indicates that 82.8% of the students enrolled qualify for free and reduced meals and 90% of the students come from low-income families. Student enrollment includes 49.9% African American, 45.1% Hispanic or Latino, and 5.0% White. 2015-2106 district data shows 17 teachers with full credentials and 0 teachers teaching outside subject area of competence (National Center for

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[2] This information, and all information about the participating schools, was derived from sources that would compromise the participants' confidentiality. Therefore, these sources are omitted intentionally.

Education Statistics, n.d.b). Data gained from the Smarter Balanced Assessments indicates that the percentage of students who meet and exceed Reading standards in grades three through five represents 34% with 32% of the Black students meeting and/or exceeding grade level standards. Data further indicates the percentage of students who meet and exceed Mathematics standards in the respective grades are represented by 32% of the overall student population, with 30% of the Black students meeting and exceeding these same math standards. Courageous Elementary School is unique because it is a full Language Arts/Social Justice Magnet Elementary School and the only one of its kind within the entire school district.

Fortified elementary school. Fortified Elementary School is a high-poverty school with a low-income percentage of 86%. Student enrollment consists of 290 students in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. The California Department of Education School Accountability Report Card indicates that 72.1% of the students enrolled qualify for free and reduced meals. Enrollment groups include 75.9% African American and 18.6% Hispanic or Latino. Data gained from the Smarter Balanced Assessments indicates that the percentage of students who meet and/or exceed Reading standards in grades three, four, and five represent 31%, while 28% of those student are Black. Data further indicates that 31% of the overall student population in grades three through five who took the assessment met and/or exceeded grade level standards. The percentage of Black students meeting and/or exceeding the grade level standards represents 29%. Fortified Elementary School is the only school within the group that is neither a partial Magnet nor a complete Magnet Elementary School.

Subjects

Principal participants and school site instructional leaders were selected intentionally for this study. The researcher searched for participants who were highly knowledgeable and willing

to reflect about strategies and skills used to meet the academic and social needs of Black students. Consideration was also given to those who would have the time needed to participate in the study (Richards & Morse, 2013). The process of seeking participants began with retrieving a list of all elementary schools within the school district that were participants with the school district's culturally responsive learning (CRL) program. This condition was set as a means to ensure potential principals were provided with exposure to adequate principal trainings with regard to culturally responsive leadership, embodying key characteristics of social justice leadership such as critical consciousness and the knowledge/skills needed to lead stakeholder groups in addressing the academic and social needs of marginalized students (Kemp-Graham, 2015). The following criteria were used to select possible principal participants. Participants must have:

1. Participated with CRL program for no less than 3 years.

2. Served schools with Black student populations comprised of 30% or more of the total school's enrollment.

3. Served schools where the poverty rate is 70% or higher because this percentage is representative of high-poverty rates.

4. Served schools where the student percentage rate is 51% or higher representing students who qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Additionally, academic achievement data had to demonstrate continued improvements in Reading over a 3-year time period based on both Smarter Balanced Assessments and the 2013 California Standards Test (Smarter Balanced Assessment are a new assessment and only have results for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years).

The researcher used these criteria to identify principals and instructional leadership team members for each of the schools. The next step included contacting potential subjects via electronic email to seek interest in the study whereby a packet describing the study, data collection protocol, participant involvement, and informed consent was attached for review (Appendix A). Responses from potential participants helped the researcher set dates and times for an interview session (Appendix B). The researcher met with the prospective participants individually, after working hours, in a secure meeting place.

During the face-to-face interview, the prospective participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and the possibility of the results from the study being used to support principal preparation programs within the district and other institutions to further improve academic achievement for Black students. Prospective participants were also informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and at any time they may exclude or dismiss themselves from the study. Participants who accepted the invitation to participate were asked for final verbal consent as a means to assist with protecting participant confidentiality (Appendix C).

Of the 452 elementary schools in SUSD, 62 of those schools were identified as having principal leaders who participated with CRL for at least one school year. Demographics taken from SUSD's website further indicated that 20 of the 62 identified principals were assigned to elementary school campuses where 40% or more of the enrolled students met the ethnic category of Black and also met the criteria for high-poverty. The final selection of participants was based on student academic achievement in reading during the 2013, 2014, and 2015 school years. Of the final 20 schools, only five schools met all of the criteria as participants for this study, but only four schools were selected due to a conflict of interest between the researcher and one of the other identified schools.

Human Subjects Considerations

Care and consideration by the researcher was taken to assure that the study adhered to all ethical guidelines that have been established by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) as well as SUSD's Review Board. The researcher completed CITI Investigator Education to ensure protection of human subjects. The researcher made sure to inform all participants of the data collection protocol, confidentiality, and methods by which the researcher provided storage and security of the materials once the study was completed. Care was taken to protect the emotional well-being of all participants. The benefit of participating in the study is that the perspective of principals and instructional leaders whose academic data demonstrates consistent academic achievement in reading and mathematics for Black students attending urban, high-poverty elementary schools may be shared with central administrators. This information sharing may potentially lead to the implementation of policies and interventions intended to support leadership preparation programs that address equity, access, and opportunity for Black and other marginalized students.

Confidentiality was preserved for all participants. The names of principals and instructional leaders was not used in any oral or written notes. Instead, all participants and schools were given fictitious names to ensure the inability for responses to be tracked back to individual participants. All collected data are locked and secured in a locked cabinet that is only accessible by the researcher. All tapes and notes will be destroyed 3 years after the study is complete.

Instrumentation: Semi-Structured Interviews

The researcher used one instrument for this study. Semi-structured interviews were developed with questions specific to social justice leadership in advance of interviewing

participants. There were 16 questions used with each individual interview (Appendix E): enough

questions developed and organized in a logical order to lead inquiry, but not enough to anticipate

the answers (Richards & Morse, 2013). Identical questions were asked of all participants, but

they were not necessarily asked in the same order. According to Richards and Morse (2013),

semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with organization and comfort of preplanned

questions. Every attempt was made to ensure that participants felt comfortable during the

interviewing process by providing a space that had a comfortable temperature, as free from

distractions, and was well lit. Table 2 shows the connection between both research and interview

questions.

Table 2

Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Citations
What are the strategies, used by principals for social justice, to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend high poverty urban elementary schools?	Each school has a collective mission and vision. What is the personal mission you hold for your school with respect to Black students?	
	What are the strategies that you implement to create a climate of belonging for students?	Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014; Salazar & Abrams, 2005
	When you consider the topic of ensuring equity for Black students at your school site, what does that look like when providing teachers with the supports they may need to make this happen?	Theoharis, 2009; Turner & Ives, 2013; Wilson-Strydom, 2015
	Are there models of inclusion that you use on your campus? If so, what do those models look like and how are teachers provided with the skills needed to better educational environments for historically marginalized students?	Kemp-Graham, 2014; Capper et al., 2006
	How has the CRL program assisted you with the work of Social Justice leadership and equity?	Turner & Ives, 2013
	What does it mean, to you, to hear that Black students should be provided with access and opportunity in education?	Wilson-Strydom, 2015

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Citations
		(continued)
What are the strategies used by principals and instructional leaders that improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students when leading the work of social justice?	What strategies/tools do you deem as necessary to share with your teachers for the improvement of core teaching and learning that specifically address the needs of Black students?	
	What are the methods used to ensure implementation of knowledge and skills?	
	How are skills and knowledge regarding the affects poverty has on student academic achievement shared with others?	
	The Common Core State Standards are intended to increase academic rigor. What are the methods that you and your leadership team members use to assist teachers with improving the academic rigor needed to meet grade level standards?	Palmer et al., 2014
	What might you attest the contributing factors are for the consistent increases in student achievement for Black students on your campus?	Theoharis, 2009; Salazar & Abrams, 2005
	How do teachers of special education student provide academic rigor needed for their students to meet grade level standards?	
What barriers do principals and instructional leaders face when leading the work for social justice in high poverty urban elementary schools?	Your school was selected for this study because of its Title I status. What are the barriers, if any, that you face as a Title I school when seeking to address equity, access, and opportunity for your students?	Kemp-Graham, 2014
	What other factors might you see as barriers to social justice leadership outside of being a Title I school?	Alic & Turkyilmaz, 2014
What are the strategies used by principals and instructional leaders to develop resilience when faced with challenges towards educational injustices?	Being a leader for social justice may appear to be a tremendous task. What are the tools that you use to sustain yourself on a professional level?	Theoharis, 2009
	What are the tools used to sustain yourself on a personal level?	
	As you reflect on past experiences as a leader for social justice, what might you do differently in the future?	

Instrument Validity

The researcher used two methods to ensure validity and reliability for the study. First, the researcher clarified any bias that might be brought to the study. "This self reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with the readers" (Creswell, 2014, p.202). Second, the researcher used expert reviews as a means to strengthen the accuracy of the account. One expert review came from a district director (from another school district) who oversees the department responsible for closing the achievement gap in their school district. The second expert review came from an Instructional Coordinator who is responsible for planning and implementing professional development intended to build teachers instructional capacity throughout her Charter District. Lastly, expert review was sought from a culturally responsive Instructional Coach working for SUSD. Questions asked of each of the experts include the following:

- Am I asking the right questions?

- Am I asking the questions in the right manner?

- Do the questions asked sound appropriate?

- What might I be missing?

Responses from the expert reviewers led the researcher to ask only 17 questions instead of the original 18 to avoid redundancy. Further, a few questions were changed with respect to the manner in which in the questions were asked. The final interview questions are listed subsequently.

Data Collection

Data were collected by way of individual interviews. All interviews were recorded by audiotape; anecdotal notes were also taken to support participants' verbal responses. All

interviews took place in a quiet place on the campus of each selected participant during an agreed upon time and date. Prior to beginning interviews with the participant, the researcher reviewed the consent form and the purpose of the study. The researcher also reminded participants of the assurances to protect confidentiality. Each interview was scheduled to last for no longer than one hour. Participants were reminded that they had the options of not answering questions, answering questions partially, or answering questions completely. All interviews were audio-recorded, but the tapes were de-identified by using code numbers as pseudonyms to protect the identification of all participants. Anecdotal notes included body language and facial expressions, as they add to the delivery of responses and the possibility of changes or additions to questions asked. At the culmination of each interview, participants were provided with a copy of the consent form and contact information for questions that may have arisen at later date as well as a $20 gift card for their participation in the study. Transcripts were sent to each participant who was invited to respond to the information provided for representativeness. The researcher interpreted any non-response as an indication that the transcript was without fault.

Data Management

After each interview, the researcher labeled all collected recordings with dates, times, and pseudonym. All recordings and/or any notes taken during the interview process were transcribed by the researcher and stored on a password protected electronic word document. All copies of documents were stored in a secure location away from the school sites used during the interview process.

Data Analysis

HyperResearch is a tool that the researcher used to assist with open coding to analyze transcriptions from the individual interviews. Open coding is a method used to analyze

qualitative data and separates, examines, compares, and categorizes the data (Creswell, 2014).

Open coding suggests that the researcher ask questions of the collected data;

> "What is this data a study of?," "What category does this incident indicate?," "What is actually happening in the data?," "What is the main concern being faced by the participants?," and "What accounts for the continual resolving of this concern?" (Holton, 2007, p. 266)

Positionality

From a personal lens, I was born the younger sister of a sister with special education needs. She was a student with moderate specific learning disabilities. From an early age, I remember using different strategies to help my sister learn to read, write, and mathematically compute numbers. At her death, at the age of 51, she lived independently on her own, drove a car, and contributed to society by working at Costco as a Food Samples server. Early in life, I realized that everyone could learn and be independent if they were provided with access and the opportunity to succeed.

As the mother of three Black children with varied academic needs (the oldest measured as average in school, the middle child is an adult with Down Syndrome, and the youngest child is identified as Gifted and Talented), I have again seen the importance of ensuring that all of my children were provided with an education that was equitable and accessible, and provided opportunities for each child to academically achieve and thrive. With my personal background in mind, I have developed a personal commitment to equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized Black students, their teachers, parents, and the community members who serve them.

From a professional perspective, I am passionate about helping build instructional capacity for those who seek to ensure that all students have the access and opportunity for a quality education that is equitable and improves academic achievement for all. I see myself as

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an advocate for marginalized and oppressed students and took my first administrative role

because of the desire to help transform schools and adjusting mindsets to ensure that all students'

needs are considered and met. I pursued a doctorate degree in Educational Administration,

Leadership, and Policy because I hope to continue to vision of transforming education through

the lens of policymaking as well. Professionally, this research has the potential to create change

in leadership preparation programs both at the college and school district level toward social

justice leadership as advocacy for equity, access, and opportunity for all students, including

Black students attending high-poverty urban elementary schools.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Study Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of four elementary school principals and four instructional leaders who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance in reading with Black students for the duration of three consecutive years as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment and the California Standards Test from four urban high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California. This research also contributes to the work of Theoharis (2009) who identified seven social justice principals who led the way with respect to beating the academic odds for Black children.

Research Questions

This study was led by one central question: What social justice leadership practices are implemented by elementary school site principals and instructional leaders to promote and sustain grade level reading performance of Black students in urban high poverty elementary schools in Southern California? The following four sub-questions added further guidance to this study:

1. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools?

2. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders that improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools, when leading the work of social justice?

3. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to address barriers faced when leading the work of social justice leadership?

4. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to develop resilience when addressing the barriers faced when leading the work of social justice?

Methodology Overview

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach. This approach was used to gain an understanding of the essence of the experiences of principals and instructional team members who consistently demonstrate academic successes in reading for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools. Transcendental phenomenology methods focus less on interpretations of the data and more on the provision of descriptions of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013). This method was used as a means to ensure inquiry methods that were reflective, interpretive, and engaging (Richards & Morse, 2013

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four elementary school principals and four elementary school instructional leaders in an effort to learn about specific leadership strategies being used to create, promote, and sustain an equitable learning environment where Black students meet and exceed proficiency rates in reading. Each interview consisted of 16 open-ended questions. Each participant was mailed a recruitment letter with information regarding structures for accepting to participate in the study. Dates were set and meetings were established at each of the four identified school sites. One male participant and seven woman participants contributed to this study.

Findings

The following findings are organized and presented for each of the four guiding research questions. Within each research question section, sub themes are identified for each interview question. At the end of each research question section, the overarching themes are presented.

Research question one. Research question one asked, *What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools?* Interview questions one through four were closely aligned to research question one and were reflective of each school leader's vision to ensure equity, access, and inclusion, for all students. The questions were asked specifically to prompt participants to share strategies used to create and sustain an equitable culture where all students are provided with the supports needed to meet and exceed grade level standards in reading.

Interview question one. The first interview question stated, *Each school has a collective mission and vision. What is a personal mission that you have for your school? For your students?* The Wallace Foundation (2013) suggested

> An effective principal makes sure that notion of academic success for all gets picked up by the faculty and underpins what researchers at the University of Washington describe as a schoolwide learning improvement agenda that focuses on goals for student progress. (p. 7)

With respect to Theoharis's (2009) social justice framework, the leader/principal of the school is at the center of the leadership framework and is the one person in the school who leads the establishment of the vision and goals for the school.

After analysis, with the support of HyperResearch, two sub-themes emerged: the creation of a school culture where high expectations are the norm and child centeredness is intentional.

Six participants gave similar responses related to theme number one and two of the participants shared responses for theme number two.

Culture of high expectations. High expectations, as demonstrated by six participants included in this study, suggest that having high expectations for students is critical for advanced student achievement. "The infamous report *A Nation at Risk* declared that 'excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries every way possible to help students reach them'" (Anderson, 2015, p. 48). Participants one, two, and three gave similar responses.

> I hope that every student, when they culminate from here, are proficient readers and that they are reading to learn and not learning to read. The vision that I hold for my school is that this school would be a school of choice. (P1)

> I would love to have a school where students, underserved students, particularly Black students, have access to a quality education as well as learned character traits that would help them to be productive young people. (P2)

> Provide relevant and rigorous instruction that meets the students where they are and brings them to where we want them to be. We have to use different entry points to give them access to the curriculum. The school should be the hub of the community. (P7)

Culture of child centeredness. The second sub-theme that emerged was that of creating a child centered school culture. Participant number three and five shared similar responses.

> The vision that I hold for the school would include all stakeholders working together to provide a complete and thorough education fro all students. I envision a school where everyone's best interest is on the child and everyone works to ensure that all children are educated at their highest potential. (P3)

> I want to start with me first because that just popped into my mind. I had a teacher that took hold of me in elementary school. A Black teacher who was the only Black teacher in my school. She helped to mold me and so I wanted to become a teacher because of her. As a teacher, I always want to make sure that I put myself out there, that I am an ear, a social emotional ear for students. (P5)

Interview question two. Interview question two asked, *What are the strategies that you implement to create a climate of belonging for students?* A climate of belonging relates to

student connections to school. Debnam, Lindstrom-Johnson, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2014) stated, "We define student connection to school as the belief by students that other students and adults in the school care about them as individuals" (p. 448). Three sub-themes emerged from interview question two: student empowerment, connecting with parents, and the use of culturally responsive strategies.

Student empowerment. Five out of eight of the participants shared comments that supported the idea of empowering students as a means to create as climate of belonging. Many of them stated that there were intentional programs on campus intended to involve students in helping make the school feel inviting and safe for all. They also expressed the need to reach out to the community and benefactors to help support enrichment programs that would expose students to experiences they might otherwise never have. Similar responses were shared by participant number one, two, and three. Participant number five and seven gave differing response to interview question number two.

> One of the things that we do, and I am not sure who started this, but the anti-bullying and our commitment for not bullying, wearing the purple, being a visual commitment of our zero tolerance for bullying and reminding them of the golden rule, that they treat others the way that they want to be treated. Students wear purple on Thursday. This is something that I also include on the Monday morning announcements. It reminds them that this is not a free dress day, but they are doing this as an outward commitment to being fair and just to one another. (P1)

> One thing that we have to look at, especially Black kids, we have to look at the fact that as a group, we are under-achieving. We are doing as well as a group; probably as well as special education students and there is a reason for that. If we do not address the reasons why it is this way, then we will not be able to educate them. It is not because they are not as smart of as capable as other groups, the issue is, in my opinion, the baggage that they bring with them to school. Whether it it's poverty, lack of family support, etc. our students bring this baggage to school with you and we have to address the baggage that they bring. What we do is we set up a system that helps nurture the families. The school does not start until 8:00am but we open our doors at 7:00am for those who need to come early. Students learn chants and affirmations and community building skills during this time. (P2)

One of the things that we do here at the school is to greet each student each morning. We have a number of folks that help to monitor the yard in the mornings and we make sure that those people are kind to the students and know the importance of speaking to all students and if possible learn most of the students' names. We also make sure to provide students with spirit days where they can show their school spirit and work together as a community of learners. This year we incorporated opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership. Students are play-leaders, technology team members and student council members. The student council members lead the Monday morning assembly and they also help to plan and implement school events where we can make a difference in the community. (P3)

Connecting with parents. There were only two participants who felt that making parent connections was important to creating a climate of belonging.

Another strategy is to work with the parents. I help them to know what my job and my purpose is so that they feel welcome to come and ask me for assistance regarding instructional strategies that they can use with their students. If I see parents who are standing outside of my door waiting, I will invite them in to wait in the parent center where they can relax and have coffee, that kind of thing. (P5)

The "Coffee with the Principal" event is a good way for the parents to have a voice within a safe environment. It gives them a space where they are able to voice their concerns without teachers being around regarding things that may need to improve. Also there are a variety of parent workshops. The parent center is open and welcomes all parents. We also try to ensure that we are providing parents with workshops that are specific to topics that they are interested in. We believe that when parents feel comfortable, then our students will good about their school as well. (P7)

Culturally responsive strategies. The third sub-theme to surface supported the use of culturally responsive strategies to ensure a climate of belonging for students. Participants suggested that the use of culturally responsive instructional strategies was critical to creating a school climate where everyone could feel a sense of validation and affirmation. Participant number four shared this theme with participant number six.

Well, our school went through a huge conversion 2 years ago. We are now, officially a pilot-school giving us a myriad of autonomies, one of which is instructional focus inclusive of culturally responsive teaching, STEAM, and project-based learning. Those are three co-instructional tenants. We have co-autonomy. Which means that we make sure that all of our teachers are vested in the school and we make sure that there is a match or a fit. (P4)

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I utilize culturally responsive strategies to assist with creating a climate of belonging. It provides opportunities to connect where student come from. I use my own culture to assist students with connecting to whatever it is that we are working on. (P6)

***Interview question three*.** The third interview question asked: *When you consider the topic of ensuring equity for Black students, what does this look like specific to providing teachers with the supports they may need to make this happen?* "In relation to education and the school context, equity does not mean treating all students in exactly the same way, but rather treating students fairly by ensuring that each student receives what they need to be successful" (Debnam et al., 2014, p. 448). Two sub-themes emerged from this question: addressing negative mindsets and improving instructional practices. Five of the participants responded with references to changing and deconstructing negative attitudes and beliefs through culturally responsive trainings and three of the participants referenced the importance of improving instructional practices as a means to ensure equity on their campuses.

Addressing negative mindsets. The first sub-theme for interview question number three was addressing negative mindsets. Five of the participants suggested that it was important to view students with an asset-based mindset opposed to one centered around deficit-based thinking. Participant number one stated the following:

> First you have to deconstruct the negative attitudes and beliefs that may exist. One of the things that I do is remind them about who we serve and why we are here as well as bring in facilitators from our culturally responsive program to discuss with teachers that there are language differences that many of our students have and it does not mean that one is better than the other, it is just different. The approach that we want to take is additive versus subtractive and teach them what that looks like and what that sounds like in a class. (P1)

Participants number three and six provided similar responses and stated:

> It is important to assist staff members with knowing when equity is not happening at the school. We have professional development opportunities where equity and mindsets are discussed and put on the table. Just last week were afforded the opportunity to have someone come from the community health office to share with us what it looks like be

biased and what it looks like to create a school climate that is nurturing and free from biases specific to gender, race, religion, LGBT issues, etc. We try to be forward thinking on our campus because we know that our students come from varied backgrounds and that they also come with many traumatic situations since we are a Title I, high-poverty school. (P3)

We need a lot of training for equity to take place. Many of us may be used to using worksheets and it would be great to be trained on using other instructional strategies to meet students' needs. This would provide equity. I think that people assume that our kids can only reach a certain level. They can achieve as much as you want them to achieve. It may have more to do with changing mindsets opposed to changing instruction. (P6)

Improving instructional practices. Three of the participants shared similar thoughts around improving instructional practices as a means to ensuring equity for students. Participant number four and five stated:

The school has a history of having teachers that are very much vetted in culturally responsive strategies, knowing that the strategies provide affirmations, and build and bridge opportunities for equity for our students. Teachers that are new, of course went to the culturally responsive professional development training last summer and this is one of my strength areas so I provided support around this as well. (P4)

We always want to make sure that materials are available for teachers. I have been teaching for 26 or 27 years. I have a lot of materials and I will share with teachers if it would benefit their program. If the room does not look inviting I will assist teachers with improving their classroom, as well as the hallways throughout the school. Also, since I have access to the small playground (it is directly behind this room) teachers will come in and ask to book the playground for special activities. I will book it for them and they use it as a reward for students. If teachers do not have materials, we will find a way to get it, or because I have a great relationship with teachers I will ask to borrow something from one teacher and share it with another teacher. (P5)

Interview question four. Interview question four asked, *Are there models of inclusion that you use on your campus? If so, what do those models look like and how are teachers provided with the skills needed to ensure inclusion for all students?* "Inclusive education is an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings and it also supports and welcomes diversity among all the students, eliminating social exclusion as well as addressing their individual differences and needs" (Orakci, Aktan, Toraman, & Cevik, 2016,

p. 107). Two of the four schools have special day classes where students are intended to remain with their teacher for the entire school day. One of the schools has one resource teacher program where the intention is typical for students to be pulled out of the classroom to address their reading and mathematical deficits. The fourth school has two classes of Autistic students who typically remain with their special education classroom teacher for the majority of the school day with opportunities to mainstream with the general education students. Each of the eight participants referenced mainstreaming as a key strategy to ensure inclusion on their campuses. Only one sub-theme surfaced from analysis of the data: working together.

Working together. One hundred percent of the participants shared that inclusion is only possible with all stakeholders work together towards proficiency for all. Responses from participant number one, four, and seven are listed below.

> Our model is to include everyone. We do not have any special day classes meaning that all of our students are mainstreamed into the regular education classrooms. We have students with autism that are fully included and belong to our general education population. We only have a resource teacher program and other itinerants that need to provide support for disabilities such as speech. For teachers without special education backgrounds, the resource teacher works with all teachers as a team. She will review students' goal pages with all teachers and help them to think about what it would look like regarding instruction for each of the students that she also serves. In a mainstream classroom, she will help teachers to identify triggers, if there are any and she will help other teachers to understand modifications that may be needed for students. I think that teachers have an overall understanding that quality education looks different for every child. So, you have to move away from what a normal lesson might look like in your head, but what is needed for each student to thrive. (P1)

> There are a couple of things that come to mind. Our community Professional Learning Community is something that we use to make sure that we all work together, not Magnet only and the Community school only. They all plan together, organize units together, plan assessments together. Of course there is differentiation that needs to happen when they go back to the classroom. I was viewing planning notes this morning and I saw that the community teacher wrote that she would scaffold a bit for her students. Based on what they came up with, the students are all getting the same content and looking at the same standards and they all work together. We have three autism classrooms and they are all included with our arts and enrichment courses, so they will push in with music,

computer lab, during yoga, chess, etc. During PE, they are often broken up into clusters. (P4)

Our students with IEPs are mainstreamed into the general education classes throughout the day. Many of the students are included with all of the curricular areas. We also have a few students who are fully included in the general education classroom regardless of their disabilities. Again, I would like to address those students who are not normally seen as excluded and that is representative of the topic of gender. We have to do more around this topic to make sure that all of our students are included and feel empowered to do great things. (P7)

Main themes. After careful analysis regarding each of the listed sub-themes for research question one, the researcher identified the main themes overall by the number of participants who identified with the sub-themes. Any sub-theme where over 50% of the participants gave similar responses was considered a main theme for the research question. Table 4 represents the sub-themes and frequency of responses and corresponding main themes and frequency of responses for research question one, which included: culture of high expectations and student empowerment.

Table 3

Research Question One: Summary of Sub-Themes, Main Themes, and Frequency of Responses

Research Question One	Sub-Themes	Frequency	Main Themes	Frequency
	Culture of High Expectations	6	Culture of High Expectations	6
	Culture of Child Centeredness	2		
	Student Empowerment	5	Student Empowerment	5
	Connecting with Parents	2		
	Culturally Responsive Strategies	3		
	Addressing Negative Mindsets	4		
	Improving Instructional Practices	2		

Research question two. Research question two asked, *What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, that improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools?* Fullan (2014) suggested that

the principal is second only to the teacher regarding to his/her impact on student learning and thus it was necessary to identify strategies that teachers were using to improve core teaching and curriculum. Interview questions five through 11 were closely aligned to research question two with an intention of capturing specific strategies and skills needed to improve core teaching and curriculum.

Interview question five. Interview question five asked, *How has your school districts culturally responsive program assisted you with the work of social justice leadership and equity?* "Structuring schools to effectively educate Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students demands that leaders attend to both the cultural and linguistic dimensions of diversity that they bring" (Scanlan & Lopez, 2015, p. 3). Each of the participants stated that culturally responsive professional development was important for improving core teaching and curriculum. The only sub-theme that resulted from analysis of the responses to interview question five was culturally responsive professional development.

Culturally responsive professional development. One of the participants described cultural responsiveness as a key lever to providing students with keys to the world. Each of the eight participants suggested culturally responsive professional development was a key lever with the work of social justice leadership. Selected participant responses are listed below:

> The culturally responsive program that is provided through our school district helps to bring awareness to the entire district, but specifically to schools with high populations of students who have been identified as marginalized groups. We have been lucky to participate in multiple professional development sessions and symposiums where culturally responsive strategies have been shared specific to responsive classroom management, responsive instructional practices, and academic language development. Parents are also able to participate in professional development sessions and trainings which teachers and parents to stay on the same page when it comes to addressing academic language and standard English language. We strongly believe in validating and affirming the home language while supporting students in building the academic piece as a bridge to the academic world. (P3)

My background is very extensive regarding CLR, but there is an annual conference that they provide educators with that is very beneficial. This conference also supports parents and my parents really enjoy attending this conference, as well as many of the teachers. We sent 10-15 people from our staff to this conference and this is budgeted for with our Title I funds. The parents really look forward to attending this event. Teachers, there was a summer institute and I attended also. I was glad that I attended because I was able to meet with teachers after the institute and discuss ways that we could connect the work to our unique needs. They have had large budget cuts and shifts in staffing and what they are able to provide may not be as rich as it has been in the past. (P4)

I only use culturally relevant literature with my students and I also use the culturally responsive management strategies such as "pick a stick" for discussion opportunities and the graphic organizers, I use them as well. Most of the time I am trying to help students make the connections with the literature and I have to make sure that students are engaged, students want to be engaged in the work and we have to also motivate them. Whatever hat you have to wear, you have to be prepared to wear that hat. I think that a lot of us are used to the same way that we have been doing things. I tell others that the things we have to do today to prepare students looks different from the way things looked in the past. We cannot use instructional time to focus on things that do not require critical thinking and rigor. If we want our students to compete and move along and grow with other students, then we have to provide them with the tools that they need for today's 21 century learning. (P6)

Interview question six. Interview question six stated, *One often hears that Black students continue to perform poorly on district and national academic assessments. What are you doing with your staff, students, and parents, to ensure access and opportunity for all of your students who may be considered marginalized?* Gee (2015) suggested that providing students with access is defined as the ability to "give individual students access to the kind of educational opportunities and environment that they might not have been able to afford otherwise" (p. 178). Two sub-themes resulted from analysis of the participants' responses: use of data and providing students with intervention supports.

Use of data. Six of the participants shared similar responses to sub-theme number one. Responses for participant number three and six are shared below:

We believe that being culturally responsive along with identifying biases and negative mindsets are key components to addressing access and opportunity for all students. When you know better, you do better. We also believe that it is important to use data as a

means to guide the work that we are doing. I use something from the work of Alan Blankstein's book, *Failure Is Not an Option*, on the top of my professional development agendas that states, "What do you want children to learn? How do you know that children have learned? and What do you do when they have not learned? This is the essence of the need to use all forms of data as a guide, especially when we are hoping to provide access and opportunity to those students who would otherwise not have it. (P3)

Data is important to the work that we do. The principal allows time for planning during the day so that we can plan lessons based on data sets from a variety of assessment points. We have to provide the administrator with a plan of action that we will be taking to help move students from one level to the next. (P6)

Intervention supports. Two of the participants, number one and five suggested that intervention supports were necessary when ensuring access and opportunity for marginalized students. Their statements are listed below:

Providing them with language development. It can look differently at various grade levels. We are focusing on and identifying those students who struggle based on language difference and then we provide strategic and targeted language support. This may be seen by way of Saturday school, afterschool tutoring, meeting with the Learning Resource teacher to provide BURST intervention and other models of support. We try to isolate those grammar and writing differences that cause a challenge on standardized test. (P1)

Exposure at really higher levels. We are working on NGSS and the students are learning higher-level vocabulary that they are integrating into the curriculum. A student may have written a paper and the teacher might not believe that the student wrote it on their own. This train of thinking is also coming from your own Black staff members. But, if a White child said the same sentence, they would not be questioned. When students indicate that they do not know about historic figures or hidden figures, we make sure to provide them with the tools needed to address the gaps. (P5)

Interview question seven. Interview question seven asked: *What strategies/tools do you deem necessary to share with your teachers for the improvement of core teaching and learning that specifically address the needs of Black students?* DuFour and Marzano (2011) stated, "When you talk about school improvement, you are talking about people improvement...The school is people, so when we talk about excellence or improvement or progress, we are really talking about the people who make up the building" (p. 15). One sub-

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theme resulted from the analysis of participant responses for interview question seven:

collaboration

Collaboration. Seven out of eight of the participants suggested that collaboration was

important to improving core teacher and learning. Responses from participant number two,

three, five, and eight is shared below:

> Common planning time is essential to building instructional capacity. I invest in
> providing students with enrichment activities through community supports so that
> teachers have the opportunity to plan rigorous instruction. Teachers are always provided
> with data, as I mentioned earlier, to help guide their instruction. The teacher is the key to
> student achievement and we have to invest in giving teachers time to plan for our
> students. (P2)

> Teachers have to have time in their day to plan their lessons and to collaborate with one
> another about what is working and what is not working. Teachers must have high
> expectations for students and plan accordingly. (P3)

> It is important that teachers work together and meet with each other outside of the school
> day. When we meet and bounce ideas off of each other this is when we do our best work.
> It is important that we development instructional strategies that help students to connect
> to the standard and rigorous work. It helps to ensure that we are able to provide more
> hands-on activities for students. (P5)

> Collaboration is a key component that we have cultivated and are happy about here. It is
> nice to be able t say that we all get along and we are all working towards the same goal.
> (P8)

Interview question eight. Interview question eight asked, *What are the methods used to*

ensure implementation of knowledge and skills? One sub-theme resulted from this interview

question about ensuring implementation: trusting relationships. Six of the eight participants

alluded to building trusting relationships as key lever for implementing knowledge and skills.

Three of the participant responses are shared below:

> You have to build trust and try to get everyone on the same page. Everyone has to
> believe that the work they are involved in is important because when they too believe that
> something is important then you have more people willing to go the extra mile to get the
> job done. We also try to identify lead teachers who can help to provide support when

their colleagues need them. This is always a better method of making sure that teachers implement what they have learned. (P3)

Because we all work so closely together no one is afraid to take risk or chances. We know that if we need help or support we will find it from our colleagues. (P5)

Supporting each other lends itself to making sure that we implement strategies. Of course some people may need more of a push from the principal, but we try to work together because we don't want any of the children left out or left behind. (P6)

Interview question nine. Interview question nine asked, *The Common Core State Standards are intended to increase academic rigor. What are the methods used to assist teachers with improving the academic rigor needed to meet grade level standards?* Steinberg and Waspe (2016) defined rigor as, "rigorous and aligned curricula, pedagogy and assessment" [that ought to] "promote in-depth learning and the use of cognitive skills similar to those found in the higher order thinking levels of Bloom's taxonomy" (p. 54). One sub-theme surfaced with regard to interview question nine: professional development.

Professional development. Each of the eight participants indicated that professional development was not always designed to target the same instructional areas from each school, but the opportunity for teachers to participate in training sessions and share knowledge and skills was present in their statements. Participant responses are listed below:

In the last few years, we have participated in professional development to deepen our content knowledge about CCSS and knowing what rigor really looks like within the context of the instructional program. We have spent a significant amount of time on learning what DOK levels are and how to adequately use them throughout our lessons. Teachers spend time working together and sharing instructional content to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all students and preparing them for the next grade level. (P1)

Teachers are asked to create their assessments first and then backwards plan to ensure that they are helping students to meet the goal. It is not easy, it takes a lot of work, but it is necessary to ensure that we meeting Common Core State Standards. I have the make sure to check the Depth of Knowledge levels because they should ask questions of students on every level. You have to provide teachers with the time for this work. (P2)

I am a teacher first. I love to sit and plan with them. I go to PDs with them, I give feedback on everything, I push to a PLC, I will model a lesson. At the beginning it was like, "Who is this lady," but now it is invitation to work together. Now, I feel like there is a level of trust because they see that I am there with them, committed and invested, and instruction being the core of my background. They have seen that this will help us to push our students and help them excel over time. (P3)

Teachers are currently participating in Project-Based Learning professional development as a means to improve rigorous instruction. Teachers are excited about the learning and it can be seen throughout the school. Other strategies include the use of constructive conversations to assist students with communicating their ideas. Professional development has also been used specific to addressing the needs of gifted students as well as those students who perform at more strategic levels. Teachers are also provided with opportunities to analyze student data and make the necessary adjustments in their instructional program. Lastly, all stakeholders have high expectations for the students here and we work hard to hold all students accountable for working with the staff to access their knowledge. (P7)

We work diligently around reframing the approach to the lesson. I want teachers to invoke a particular frame of thought. The mindset is centered around always questioning such as, "I wonder what would happen if…we also use this approach with students and encourage them to question what they know and then have them questions themselves. (P8)

Interview question ten. Interview question 10 asked, "*What might you state are contributing factors for the consistent increases in student achievement for Black students on your campus?*" Wagner (2008) defines academic achievement as "the quality of education most middle-class kids get in America" (p. 8). There were two sub-themes that surfaced from the participants' responses: Aligning all strategies and Collaboration. Five of the participants identified the need to align all strategies and/or best practices to ensure consistent increases in student achievement for Black students. Participant number three, four, and eight expresses similar responses.

We have a strong focus on looking at data and deciding what the next steps are to improve instruction. The administrative team meets with teachers and discusses findings along with ways to improve. Teachers are asked to progress monitor with a selected number of students prior to returning after approximately 4-6 weeks. There are also opportunities for teachers to have grade level and across grade level articulation about best practices. Lastly, we recognize that we cannot do anything with parent support, and

thus we ensure to provide parents with many opportunities to come to the school to meet with teachers outside of parent teacher conference days. We also provide parents with workshops, like I mentioned above and other parent trainings. (P3)

Everything that we have discussed must be in place for students to academically achieve. You must have time for planning, analyzing data, parental involvement, community supports, etc. (P4)

I think that everything has to work together to get the desired outcome. There is not just one component of what I have talked about that makes it work. It's everything. (P8)

Collaboration. Two of the participants expressed the importance of collaboration as a

tool for success.

Here we use time in the week for teacher planning and reflection. Teachers participate in backwards planning where the lead teacher helps to guide the development of the curricular program. (P2)

Collaboration with the grade levels. We plan in groups from K-2 and 3-5. We also use a learning tool, study island. We create weekly assessments with that as well. We look to see if we can get 80% of our students at proficient on that standard before we move. (P6)

Interview question eleven. Interview question 11 asked, *How do teachers of special*

education students provide academic rigor needed for these students to also meet grade level

standards? Only one sub-theme surfaced from the participants' responses: aligning all systems.

Aligning all systems. Seven of the participants suggested that there was not a single

approach, but multiple strategies needed to support students with special education needs.

Multiple responses are listed below:

First, we start where the student is and we make sure to scaffold to help students meet or get as close as they can to grade level standards. Parents also need us to be available to them as well. We can assist our students by reaching out and working with our parents in a positive manner. Projects that begin in the classroom are often supported by the resource teacher who also connects with the parents for support. (P1)

Teachers of special education students participate in the same level of professional development and they also meet and collaborate with teachers during their grade level planning time. We believe that *all* students can succeed and we hold high expectations for all of our students." There is never one single thing that we incorporate, we use

multiple strategies and supports for all of our students, including our students with special education needs. (P2)

First, we start where the student is and we make sure to scaffold to help students meet or get as close as they can to grade level standards. Parents also need us to be available to them as well. We can assist our students by reaching out and working with our parents in a positive manner. Projects that begin in the classroom are often supported by the resource teacher who also connects with the parents for additional supports. (P5)

At our school we participate in departmentalized classes at the upper grades. This helps our teachers to focus on only a few core subjects, which in turn helps them to make sure the all students are provided with the highest level of knowledge specific to the courses that are taught. All of our students participate in the general education program and they are provided with in-class intervention supports that are not watered down. (P6)

Main themes. After careful analysis regarding each of the listed sub-themes for research question two, the researcher identified the main themes overall by the number of participants who identified with the sub-theme. Any sub-theme where over 50% of the participants gave similar responses was considered a main theme for the research question. Table 5 represents the sub-themes and frequency of responses and corresponding main themes and frequency of responses for research question two. Main themes for research question two include: working together, culture of high expectations, and student empowerment.

Table 4

Research Question Two: Summary of Sub-Themes, Main Themes, and Frequency of Responses

Research Question Two	Sub-Themes	Frequency	Main Themes	Frequency
	Culturally Responsive Professional Development	8	Culturally Responsive Professional Development	8
	Use of Data	2		
	Intervention Supports	2		
	Collaboration	7	Collaboration	7
	Trusting Relationships Strategies	6	Trusting Relationships	6
	Professional Development	4		
	Aligning All Systems	7	Aligning All Systems	7

Research question three. Research question three asked, *What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to address barriers faced when leading for*

social justice? Theoharis (2009) defined barriers as "pressures or tensions or resistance against achieving equity" (p. 87). Interview questions number 12 and 13 were aligned to research question three and both questions were asked at the same time.

Interview question twelve asked: *Your school was selected because of its Title I status. What are the barriers, if any, that you face as a Title I school when seeking to address equity, access, and opportunity for your students*? Question 13 asked*: What other factors might you see as barriers to social justice leadership outside of being a Title I school?* Two themes emerged from analysis of the participants' responses: lack of community partnerships and chronic absenteeism. Four participants commented on lack of community supports as barriers while three participants suggested student absenteeism as a critical barrier. Participant number three gave a response that connected to both themes.

Lack of community partnerships. Four of the participants suggested the importance of building community partnerships as a means to increase equity, access, and opportunity for black students. Participant number one and four shared similar responses.

> Lack of dollars when fundraising. Schools in more affluent areas may benefit from parents extended support. We made $8,000 in a fundraiser this year and we were very excited about it, but we know that some schools are bringing in $30 and $40 thousand dollars in a year. One of the big contributing factors includes the fact that many of our families are not able to provide much in terms of financial contributions to the instructional program. Any opportunity that we deem positive towards ensuring equity has to be purchased with school funds and that may limit other opportunities for students, things such as multiple field trips and other means of exposure to the world in which we live. Folks who are not willing to think outside of the box can also be a barrier. Social Justice is that which is right between others and groups of people and this may mean that schools have to do things slightly different from those schools that are more affluent. We connect to a variety of community organizations, but I know that this is not always applicable for many schools that are considered to be low socio-economic. (P1)

> A Title I school that is primarily made up of Black students often inhibits your ability to access dollars. So, there are supplemental funds that come when you have a high population of English language learners, but we don't get those funds because Standard

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English Language learners are not classified as English Learners. So, of course with on-going cuts, the Title I budget was cut and we had to make decisions around cutting a teacher assistant. We had to scale back some of our time that we pay teachers to provide intervention. But, that is being buffered with, which gets to your next question, because we have been a school that has the demographics that we have and having the strengths that we have academically, there are people who know on our door who say, hey can we get you to pilot this for us, or try this out for us, at no cost because you have approximately 80% Black babies and you have had some success with them. We have partnered with a woman who is seeking to open her own charter school down the line and has gotten grant money to try some things that she has been thinking of doing, one of which is using technology. (P4)

Absenteeism and transiency. Participant number five and eight spoke of the need for student stability in school.

The transiency rate, foster care, not having stability moving from one household to the next contributes to the barriers that students face when seeking an education that is equitable. I think that may of our kids come with a great deal of baggage. I think that they are very capable, but there are a lot of issues for them to deal with as far as academically, they could be there, but the baggage stops them. (P5)

Attendance is more prevalent. It is important that our students come to school each day and this is an area where we find that our families need more support. A good number of our students are bused into our school and this may sometimes create a problem with getting here and with parental involvement. (P8)

Main themes. After careful analysis regarding each of the listed sub-themes for research question three, the researcher identified the main themes overall by the number of participants who identified with the sub-theme. Any sub-theme where over 50% of the participants gave similar responses was considered a main theme for the research question. Table 6 represents the sub-themes and frequency of responses and corresponding main themes and frequency of responses for research question three. Main themes for research question three include the following (see Table 5).

Table 5

Research Question Three: Summary of Sub-Themes, Main Themes, and Frequency of Responses

Research Question Three	Sub-Themes	Frequency	Main Themes	Frequency
	Community Partnerships	5	Community Partnerships	5

| elementary principals and instructional leaders, to address barriers faced when leading for social justice? | Absenteeism | 4 |

Research question four. *What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to develop resilience when addressing the barriers faced when leading the work of social justice?* Theoharis (2009) defined resilience as "developed strategies to sustain oneself both professionally and personally" (p. 16).

Interview question 13. Interview question 13 asked, *Being a leader for social justice may appear to be a tremendous task. What are the tools that you use to sustain yourself on a professional level?* One sub-theme emerged from interview question 13: professional study.

Professional study. Six of eight of the participants recognized professional study as a sub-theme for sustaining oneself professionally. Responses are stated below.

> I use the teaching of Dr. Alfred Tatum. He speaks of how to effectively teach African American boys when it comes to reading. I enjoy reading professional literature which helps me to build my own leadership capacity. I also try to look at and examine text that speaks towards social justice issues. That which speaks to being agents of change. (P1)

> I read a great deal of professional literature to keep be abreast of strategies that have been tried and work for students of color. I also try to collaborate with colleagues at other schools with similar makeups. It is important to stay fresh professionally and to connect with people who are not burnt out and negative. I find that I have to work with people who see the vision and who expect the best for students of color. They have to have a willing heart to meet the unique needs of our students. (P3)

> I find myself always looking for literature and articles that are related to education, specifically that which addresses the needs of Black students. Collaboration with peers is something that I like to engage in as well. (P6)

Interview question 14. Interview question 14 asked, *What are the tools used to sustain yourself on a personal level?* Two themes emerged from the analyzed responses: Self-care and honoring relationships. Six participants identified with some form of self-care and two participants felt that time spent with family and friends was important.

I have a very spiritual life that keeps me grounded. I use a form of meditation and a positive outlook to help with sustaining myself. I try to belief that things will work themselves out and I try to stay away from stress or high levels of anxiety. (P1)

I try my very best to exercise regularly. Three times a week is minimal for me. I also ensure that I am spiritually connected. My church family and faith help me to have continued hope and to stay positive. (P3)

I attend therapy once a week. This helps me to stay balanced. I also have the joy of driving to school with my little one and then driving home with him as well. This gives us time together just the two of us, and that is also very gratifying. (P4)

Self-care is important to sustain this work. Those of us who are passionate about it, we have to be able to continue this work because it is not a sprint it is a definite marathon. (P7)

Interview question 15. Interview question 15 asked, *As you think back on this year and the past, what is your next step towards ensuring equity, access, and opportunity*? The key theme that surfaced from one hundred percent of the participants' responses included planning for the upcoming school year. Each of the eight participants' responses included some form of planning. Participant number one, four, five, and eight share responses below:

I think making the connection with parents. Involving them and letting them know about the importance of social justice. Kind of putting it out there, showing or broadcasting the good things that are happening. We are like a hidden gem that most people do not know about, but there are many good things going on here. Many students are transported here throughout the district and the students' schools, where they come from, we do better here. This is mostly due to the culturally responsive work that we do. (P1)

So, after Spring break, I will begin the process of planning for the new school year. After having a nice few days, then I can begin to wrap up and then plan and organize for next year. This ensures our mission and vision stay true. (P4)

The next step is to create the mission for teachers and stick with it! Also, it is our goal to continue to remind students that it is up to them as well. They have to also put in the work to ensure success, but this comes with us, the teachers, modeling for them. (P5)

Next, I am preparing to close down for the year. I will be involved with ensuring that we have ample textbooks for the next year, we provide teachers with goodie packets and this year we are thinking of a multicultural day of celebration. This is a time to celebrate the year's accomplishments. (P8)

After careful analysis regarding each of the listed sub-themes the researcher identified overarching themes in Table 6.

Main themes. After careful analysis regarding each of the listed sub-themes for research question four, the researcher identified the main themes overall by the number of participants who identified with the sub-theme. Any sub-theme where over 50% of the participants gave similar responses was considered a main theme for the research question. Table 7 represents the sub-themes and frequency of responses and corresponding main themes and frequency of responses for research question four. Main themes for research question four include the following (see Table 6).

Table 6

Research Question Four: Summary of Sub-Themes, Main Themes, and Frequency of Responses

Research Question Four	Sub-Themes	Frequency	Main Themes	Frequency
	Professional Study	8	Professional Study	8
	Self-Care	6	Self-Care	6
	Honoring Relationships	2		
	Planning	8	Planning	8

Summary of Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study of the lived experiences and perspectives of four elementary school principals and four instructional leaders in Southern California contributed to the knowledge of social justice leadership toward ensuring equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students. The results provide a lens into the strategies used to ensure academic success in reading for Black students attending urban, high-poverty elementary schools as well as the tools needed for resiliency when leading this work.

Table 8 depicts the main themes from the overall findings for each research question. A discussion of the six main themes will occur in the following chapter.

Table 7

Summary of Main Themes and Number of Data References

Research Question	Main Theme	Number of Data References
One	Culture of High Expectations	11
Two	Culturally Responsive Professional Development	23
	Alignment of All Systems	7
Three	Community Supports	5
Four	Professional Study	16
	Self-Care	6

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the United States of America, Black and Latino students have consistently struggled to meet academic proficiency standards, as measured by state and national assessments and may often be viewed, unintentionally, as unequal citizens. Noguera and Wing (2006) suggested, "In nearly every category associated with positive academic outcomes, students of color are typically underrepresented, and in categories associated with negative outcomes, they are over-represented" (p. 3).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of four elementary school principals and the four instructional leaders at their schools who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance in reading with Black students for the duration of 3 consecutive years as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment and the California Standards Test from four urban high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California. This study used the social justice leadership framework by Theoharis (2009) as a means to better understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the strategies used to ensure equity, access and opportunity as well as improve academic achievement for Black students attending urban, high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California.

Research questions that guided this study were:

1. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools?

2. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders that improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools, when leading the work of social justice?

3. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to address barriers faced when leading the work of social justice leadership?

4. What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to develop resilience when addressing the barriers faced when leading the work of social justice?

Methodology Overview

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach. This approach was used to gain an understanding of the essence of the experiences of principals and instructional team members who consistently demonstrate academic successes in reading for Black students who attend urban high-poverty elementary schools. Transcendental phenomenology methods focus less on interpretations of the data and more on providing descriptions of the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013).

A total of one male and three female principals along with four female instructional leaders were interviewed for this study. Each participant in the study has been involved with the school district's culturally responsive program and made consistent references to culturally responsive strategies as a support for improving core curriculum and positive academic outcomes for their students. All of the participants lead schools that are Title I, high-poverty schools and expressed a variety of barriers that often slow down the progress toward equity for all students.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the four elementary school principals and the four elementary school instructional leaders at their school sites in an effort to learn about specific leadership strategies used to create, promote, and sustain an equitable and

accessible learning environment where Black students meet and exceed proficiency rates in reading. Each interview consisted of 16 open-ended questions. There was an original number of 17 questions, but interview question nine was redundant of interview question eight and question 13 was asked in conjunction with interview question 12.

Discussion of Findings

This section is dedicated to discussing the key themes found in the findings and their relationship to the professional literature. This discussion is organized according to each guiding question.

Research question one. Research question one asked, *What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders to advance equity, access, and opportunity for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools*? Interview questions one through four were aligned with guiding research question one. Only one main theme resulted from an analysis of the data related to research question one. The main theme for research question one was culture of high expectations. Theoharis's (2009) theoretical framework suggest that schools who reframe the way in which they address student disengagement and undesirable behaviors explore a different lens through which to create socially just schools. Creating schools with a positive climate of belonging can be seen as "an effective way to handle discipline and a holistic approach to creating more socially just schools" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 63).

Culture of high expectations. The Wallace Foundation (2013) suggested,

> An effective principal makes sure that the notion of academic success for all gets picked up by the faculty and underpins what researchers at the University of Washington describe as a school-wide learning improvement agenda that focuses on goals for student progress. (p. 7)

The findings related to the first research question indicate that each participant held high

expectations for his/her students and himself/herself. All eight participants indicated that there

were opportunities provided intentionally at each school for students to take on leadership roles

and participate in enrichment activities.

> Fullan (2014) suggests that principals set the tone for the way in which schools operate.

> Principals are expected to run a school that is free from distraction; manage the health and safety of all stakeholders; create a school climate that supports innovation and is free of disappointments; connect with students, teachers, parents and community members; and deliver academic results for all students. (Fullan, 2014, p. 6)

One of the participating principals felt very adamant about leading a school where she would feel

comfortable with her own children being there. She stated that she was the mother of two

African American sons and she was seeking a school atmosphere where they could be

academically pushed; an atmosphere where the expectation towards learning includes the

availability for her sons to reach their highest potential.

> Participants six and seven intentionally used words in their statements that included the

provision of strategies for students to work at their highest potential and their highest level

possible.

> My personal goal for the students would be that they work to their highest potential and that we, the teachers would provide the necessary resources that each child would need to be successful. It is also important the school works together to collaborate. To make it a building block from Kinder to fifth grade. (P6)

> My personal vision is in alignment with the current school's mission and vision because I was one of the people that helped to write the vision. To ensure that students feel capable at the highest level possible. We try to make sure that our students have every opportunity to gain self-esteem in themselves to take pride in themselves, to feel confident and capable. (P8)

> Woolley et al. (2010) found that "Teacher expectations, teacher instructional practices,

and aspects of student motivation are important to the school success of students who have been

historically discriminated against and who have historically experienced fewer opportunities to learn" (p. 42). Creating a school climate that is supportive of high expectations for students as well as one where teachers are provided with the instructional resources needed for student motivation and educational engagement can be encouraged by the principal and instructional leaders who seek to transform schools for marginalized students as well as those who have had fewer opportunities to learn instructional content.

Research question two. Research question two asked, *What strategies are used by elementary principals and instructional leaders that improve core teaching and curriculum for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools, when leading the work of social justice?* Interview questions number five through nine were aligned with guiding research question two. Two key findings resulted from an analysis of the data related to research question two and included: culturally responsive professional development and the alignment of all systems.

Culturally responsive professional development. When seeking to provide equity, access, and opportunity with respect to the day-to-day curriculum for Black students and other marginalized groups, multiple studies suggest culturally responsive instruction as a catalyst for improving and closing the academic achievement gap (Cramer et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; D. Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014; Polleck & Shabdin, 2013; Toppel, 2015). Again, each of the eight participants' responses demonstrated similarities when identifying key strategies for improving core teaching and curriculum.

Each of the schools involved in this study participates with their school district's culturally responsive program and shared the importance of having a space within their school district where they are able to build instructional capacity, collaborate with colleagues, and plan

strategies that specifically address the cultures represented on their school campuses. Many of

the participants inferred that it was through the culturally responsive professional development

events that they learned the skills needed to adequately support a climate of belonging for their

students. Participant number one stated:

> Being a part of the culturally responsive program has assisted with the facilitation of professional development as well as opportunities for teachers to learn and collaborate after the school day is over. The program has also provided resources such as lesson plans, classroom libraries, and research-based keynote speakers to keep teachers on the cutting edge of information. This school has participated with the CRL program for over a decade. (P1)

Researchers such as Gay (2010), Cramer et al. (2014), and Toppel (2015) stress culturally

responsive instructional strategies as being useful for meeting the literacy needs of Black

students and propose various practices as meaningful to student academic success. Toppel (2015)

further stated, "Culture strongly influences communication styles and how people convey

understanding to others. It is important that we do not dismiss students as being uneducated,

illiterate, or undignified simply because the way they communicate is not standard" (Toppel,

2015, p. 556). Participant number one and three expressed the idea of directly addressing

negative mindsets.

> First you have to deconstruct the negative attitudes and beliefs that may exist. One of the things that I do is remind them about who we serve and why we are here as well as bring in facilitators from our culturally responsive program to discuss with teachers that there are language differences that many of our students have and it does not mean that one is better than the other, it is just different. The approach that we want to take is additive versus subtractive and teach them what that looks like and what that sounds like in a class. (P1)

> It is important to assist staff members with knowing when equity is not happening at the school. We have professional development opportunities where equity and mindsets are discussed and put on the table. Just last week were afforded the opportunity to have someone come from the community health office to share with us what it looks like be biased and what it looks like to create a school climate that is nurturing and free from biases specific to gender, race, religion, LGBT issues, etc. (P3)

These school leaders are clearly using the strategies and tools provided through their school district's culturally responsive program to ensure equity, access, and opportunity for their students. They believe that these strategies have a direct correlation, when infused with all of the other systems that are in place at the school, with improved academic achievement for their Black students.

Alignment of all systems. The second key finding related to research question two includes the alignment of all systems to improve core teaching and curriculum. Blankstein (2013) asserted that there are multiple principles needed to advance student achievement in schools that are highly effective and all systems must be placed on *go* to create a school culture where all students have access and opportunity for success. Many of the principles shared in Blankstein's (2013) book were also shared by a few of the participants in this study. Common principles include: shared vision, inclusion, distributive leadership, data-based decision making, engagement of parent and community supports, and relational trust. Each of the participants' responses helped to demonstrate that when all systems are aligned, the ability to improve core teaching and curriculum is enhanced. Fullan (2014) stated, "All really does mean all. You can't solve the problem of whole-system reform through piecemeal efforts that try to get parts of the system improving in order to show the way. System reform does not, cannot work this way" (p. 5). One of the participants shared a response that clearly demonstrates the idea of aligning all systems. She stated,

> Our school motto speaks about the cultural piece as well as college and career and beyond. Anchored and grounded in strengths of our past. Our past can help to propel you forward. Monday is "Model Monday" and teachers sign up and make connections to what is happening in their classrooms. This connects to the cultural piece. We have thematic units that reflect the work that students are doing to the real world where college and careers is a part of the conversation. We begin as early as TK having discussions about going to college and preparing for college. Why are you going to college, what are you preparing for, and what will you do to get there. So it is not about if you will be

going, it is expected that all students will get there. Teachers, using data to help guide instruction is essential. When we have our data chats, we talk about the Interim Assessments and how students are doing as well as what the strategies are that can assist students with doing better. (P4)

The alignment of all systems can be seen as a critical lever toward social justice leadership and necessary for increasing academic achievement for Black students attending urban, high poverty schools in Southern California.

Research question three. Research question three asked, *What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to address barriers faced when leading for social justice?* Theoharis (2009) defines barriers as, "pressures or tensions or resistance against achieving equity" (p. 87). Participants in this study found community partnerships to be a viable strategy to address barriers faced when leading for social justice.

Community partnerships. Each participating school was selected for this study because of its Title I status, which placed them in high-poverty standings within the school district. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), students from low-income households are "three times as likely to be low achievers if they attend high-poverty schools as compared to low-poverty schools" (p.2). "Our nation has higher levels of child poverty than most other wealthy nations, with 23%, or almost one in four children, coming from households in poverty" (Blankstein & Noguera, 2016, p. 4). Many of the participants mentioned poverty as a barrier toward ensuring equity for all students. Principals of each school site felt the need to solicit the support of community partners as well as parents to help address the barriers faced when advocating for social justice.

Each of the four school site leaders used some form of additional resources (community or parental partnerships) to advance opportunities for teachers to collaborate, analyze data, and plan with one another during the school day. Schools utilized resources such as the Brotherhood

Crusade's soccer program, a parent sponsored yoga group, and funding for substitutes to relieve teachers for planning days and data chats with the principal. One of the schools found a way for teachers to collaborate outside of the school day whereby teachers created their own teacher's group that met once every other month at one of the teacher's homes. Each of the participants in this study referenced the need to improve community and parent partnerships.

Educational risk associated with families that live in poverty include parents who may have limited academic successes which in turn lessens the ability to provide a responsive environment in the home, including being read to at home.

> Children from poor families are less likely to be read to than children from better off families. In the United States fewer than half of low income preschoolers are read to on a daily basis, compared with 61% in families above the poverty line. (Engle & Black, 2008, p. 3)

This lack of exposure may lead to lags in classroom engagement and disruptive behaviors that often impede learning.

One of the principal participants suggested that she was able to provide students with volunteer readers who came and read aloud to students during the day as a means to generate community supports. This program also allowed students to hear other forms and styles of reading from the volunteer readers. Participant 01 stated, "We connect to a variety of community organizations, but I know that this is not always applicable for many schools that are considered to be low socio-economic."

Each of the participating schools works as a team to provide solutions for students who might not otherwise have outside supports. The principal of one of the school was able to gain the support of a community group that provides support to parents who have to be at work earlier then the morning drop-off time. The support of this organization helps to improve students' absent and tardy rates. Leaders for social justice try their best to ensure that economic and

community resources are established to provide varied opportunities for student access to any and all tangible materials needed for academic success.

Research question four. Research question four asked, *What strategies are used, by elementary principals and instructional leaders, to develop resilience when addressing the barriers faced for leading the work of social justice.* Two key findings resulted from an analysis of the data related to research question four: professional study and self-care. In an effort to sustain the level of leadership needed for social justice education, Theoharis (2009) suggest that leaders and their leadership teams establish both professional and personal strategies needed for individual well being.

Professional study. When seeking to take care of themselves on a professional level, overwhelmingly, the majority of the participants spoke of engaging themselves in professional study as a means of sustaining themselves through the work of social justice leadership. Six out of the eight participants mentioned the desire to stay abreast of educational research that would assist with self efficacy. One participant stated that she felt more comfortable staying abreast of recent research to support the work of educating Black students in relationship to supporting her staff and other stakeholder groups. Participant 07 stated, "I am often reminded from others that there is a moral imperative with education. You might be that one person that advocates for a student and change the trajectory of their life."

Thomas et al. (2003) asserted that the daily expectations of principals are very demanding and suggest that school site leaders partner with universities and other associations as a catalyst for professional study, research, and pedagogy. They also inferred, "These partnerships often focus on pre-service and in-service teacher development as well as leadership skills for principals" (Thomas et al., 2003, p. 43).

Self care. Self-care was another thread that appeared to be consistent with each

participant when seeking to address the barriers associated with creating more just and equitable

schools. Six out of the eight principals and instructional leaders stated that it was important to

take care of themselves through forms of spirituality, exercise, and/or doing simple tasks that did

not require a great deal of thought. One participants spoke of attending church regularly to stay

focused and not feel overwhelmed with the work of social justice leadership. Another

participant stated that consistent exercise was a means of taking care of himself. Lastly, one of

the participants spoke of weekly therapy as a way to keep her mind and soul clear from

distractions that would take away from the vision of ensuring equity for all. The majority of the

participants demonstrated an understanding of the need to sustain themselves on a personal level

and all of them shared a smile when asked about strategies that they used. Theoharis (2009)

stated, "Personal strategies are mechanisms that allow the principal to maintain their equilibrium,

so they can continue their efforts in enacting justice" (p. 122). Professional and personal

strategies are needed to ensure resilience when seeking to advocate for equity, access, and

opportunity for marginalized students.

Conclusions

In sum, six conclusions resulted from an analysis of study findings related to the research

questions, which were drawn from interview responses and literature review. The six

conclusions address: culture of high expectations, culturally responsive professional

development, alignment of all systems, community partnerships, professional study, and self-

care.

Conclusion one: Culture of high expectations. Leading and sustaining an inclusive

school culture in which stakeholders have high expectations for all students and shared

responsibility for learners and learning outcomes is an essential means for advancing equity, access, and opportunity for Black students in urban, high-poverty elementary schools. Each of the eight participants interviewed for this study shared strategies used that demonstrate the belief that creating a culture of high expectations is critical to improving academic achievement for Black students. The implementation of strategies to empower students varied at each site; however, the intention was to create a space for students where students felt a sense of belonging and respect. Collectively, stakeholders created opportunities for student involvement in leadership positions where students were instrumental in leading community service projects. Students were also afforded the opportunity to participate as technology team members in which they could learn the skills needed to assist teachers and other classroom peers with any technological problems that might arise.

"Definitions concerning culture usually include attainments of people, containing their productions, their experiences, values, beliefs, symbols that they developed through history and customs inherited from generation to generation" (Inandi & Giliç, 2016, p. 825). Each of the participants in this study demonstrated high expectations for his/her students and recognized the need to provide students with multiple opportunities to help all students reach social and academic goals. Many of the participants spoke of the desire to create a school culture where asset-based thinking was the norm. The infamous NAR report declared that "excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries every way possible to help students reach them" (Anderson, 2015, p. 48).

Having high expectations for students can also be defined as working within an asset-based thinking paradigm. "Educators are too often constrained by thinking and practice that view our students by 'who they are not' or 'what they don't have' rather than 'what it is they

bring to school on which we can build'" (R. Lindsey, Karns, & Myatt, 2010, p. 18). Participants in this study were not constrained by the fact that their students came from high-poverty households; instead, policies and practices were put into place that allowed parents to bring students to school earlier than anticipated to ensure that students came to school each day with an expectation that learning was important. Other practices included the provision of enrichment activities intended to broaden students' academic perspectives as well as providing planning time for teachers to collaborate and analyze data the purpose of improving instructional practices.

It is not enough to have high expectations; equity also means sharing responsibility for learning outcomes and ensuring that students actually perform at high levels. One of the participating principals specifically spoke of the professional learning community she established on her campus to not only provide opportunities for meaningful collaboration among staff members, but also ensure implementation of core teaching and curriculum.

> In Professional Learning Communities, teachers learn from and with each other, and come to see themselves as a community of teachers who focus on the implementation of new ideas and practices tailored to their individual strengths and capacities such that that the familiar phrase "my students" genuinely becomes "our students." (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016, p. 55)

Critically conscious leaders are key to leading and sustaining school culture. Fullan (2014) suggested that principals have taken on the role of *learning leaders*. He stated, "the learning leaders is one who models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis" (Fullan, 2014, p. 9). The principals and instructional leaders from each of the four schools have demonstrated that they are critically conscious leaders who seek and implement strategies that lead and sustain the school culture of having high expectations for all students.

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Conclusion two: Culturally responsive professional development. When seeking to

improve core teaching and curriculum to assist with improving academic achievement for Black

students attending urban, high-poverty schools, culturally responsive professional development

is a key lever in building instructional capacity. Each of the eight participants described

strategies used for the purpose of improving core learning and curriculum for marginalized

students and the methods used to build stakeholder capacity around the work of improving core

teaching and curriculum. Each of the eight participants described the necessity to accompany and

send staff and parents to the school district's annual conference dedicated to providing culturally

responsive workshops intended to assist all stakeholders in grades Pre-K through 12 with

improving instructional practices for Black students.

> Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as:

> Culturally responsive teaching views students' culture as educational assets. Culturally
> responsive teaching eliminates the implicit or explicit requirements that culturally diverse
> students make a choice between home and school. In doing so it also strengthens
> students' identity, therefore improving students' academic outcomes. (Scanlan & Lopez,
> 2015, p. 33)

Teachers and other stakeholder groups must be trained and supported to provide Black students

who live in high-poverty situations with intentional instructional strategies that validate and

affirm their cultural backgrounds as well as assist with providing a climate of belonging. A few

of the principals mentioned the need to incorporate strategies to assist with addressing cultural

biases and negative mindsets. Participant number one stated,

> First you have to deconstruct the negative attitudes and beliefs that may exist. One of the
> things that I do is remind teachers about who we serve and why we are here as well as
> bring in facilitators from our culturally responsive program to discuss with teachers that
> there are language differences that many of our students have and it does not mean that
> one is better than the other, it is just different. The approach that we want to take is
> additive versus subtractive and teach them what that looks like and what that sounds like
> in a class. (P1)

Generally, culturally responsive professional development is a strategy used to improve core teaching and curriculum "for the purpose of guiding one in making changes in school policies and practices intended to narrow and close access and achievement gaps" (R. Lindsey et al., 2013, p. 25).

Cramer et al. (2014) suggested that there are four tenets to facilitating equal access to quality instruction and learning for all students; one of the tenets states, "Implementing change in specific practices such as teachers confronting their own biases as related to language, culture, socioeconomic status, or disability label(s) of students. These biases must also be explored among the students toward each other" (Cramer et al., 2014, p. 119). Pedagogy and practice facilitate and support the achievement of all students in "culturally responsive schools; effective teaching and learning occur in a culturally- supported, learner-centered context, whereby the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement" (Schulz, Hurt, & Lindo, 2014, p. 5). Culturally responsive educational systems are grounded in the belief that culturally and linguistically diverse students can academically excel if given adequate support and resources (Scanlan & Lopez, 2015).

Theoharis (2009) reminds the socially just leader that advocating for equity alone is insufficient if the curriculum being taught is inadequate. He further suggested that "teachers must have the will and skill to reach all students" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 46).

Conclusion three: Alignment of all systems. Leading and sustaining an inclusive culture involves addressing the multiple barriers that one faces when leading the work of not only advocating for equity, but also ensuring access and opportunity, for Black students who attend urban, high-poverty elementary schools, to materials and strategies that address critical thinking skills and rigorous instruction. Educational risk associated with families that live in

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poverty includes parents who may have limited academic successes which in turn lessens the

ability to provide a responsive environment in the home, including being read to at home.

> Children from poor families are less likely to be read to than children from better off families. In the United States fewer than half of low income preschoolers are read to on a daily basis, compared with 61% in families above the poverty line. (Engle & Black, 2008, p. 3)

Many of the barriers associated with high-poverty schools include not having enough of the

funding, community, and parental resources to supplant the instructional program beyond the

core curriculum. This lack of exposure may lead to lags in classroom engagement and disruptive

behaviors that often impede learning (Engle & Black, 2008).

Participating principals and their instructional leaders gave responses suggesting that one

could not lead the work of social justice practices if one was seeking to use only one strategy

alone. Participants in this study suggest the need to align all systems together to ensure

academic and social success for students. When one looks for a magic key or a silver bullet to

eliminate inequities and address academic achievement, one will find that this silver bullet

approach does not exist or provide expected outcomes (Theoharis, 2007). Participant number

one shared a response that supports the idea of aligning all systems to meet the meet the needs of

all students.

> Schools in more affluent areas may benefit from parents extended support. We made $8,000 in a fundraiser this year and we were very excited about it, but we know that some schools are bringing in $30 and $40 thousand in a year. One of the big contributing factors includes the fact that many of our families are not able to provide much in terms of financial contributions to the instructional program. Any opportunity that we deem positive towards ensuring equity has to be purchased with school funds and that may limit other opportunities for students, things such as multiple field trips and other means of exposure to the world in which we live. (P1)

Milner (2015) suggested that is important to be reminded that not all students begin their

educational journey in the same place or at the same time; thus, it is unrealistic to expect that the

same strategies will work for all of the students all of the time. The critically conscious leader understands that one cannot accomplish the work of social justice leadership by using only one isolated strategy. It is through the alignment of multiple systems that these principals and instructional leaders have demonstrated academic success with their students.

      Conclusion four: Community partnerships. As an extension to conclusion three, the critically conscious leader recognizes the importance of establishing community partners as a means to enhance and enrich the current curricular program when seeking to advance academic achievement for Black students attending urban, high-poverty elementary schools. Due to the many pressures experienced by educators to single-handedly educate children, the need for schools to reach outside of the school site in support of extensions for the instructional program is evident. Each of the four schools has acquired academic supports for their students through established community organizations.

      Community organizations can be defined as "Partnerships that are built on social interaction, mutual trust, and relationships that promote agency within a community" (Casto, 2016, p. 140). Community partnerships were selected with the intention of providing students with greater opportunities to gain knowledge and skills that they might not have otherwise had access to. Two of the participating schools found community partners who were willing to sponsor a chess program for the entire school population.

> Studies indicate that chess is a healthy mental pursuit for children of all skill levels; the educational non-profit Chess-in-the-Schools reports improvements in reading scores and a variety of other intellectual and social benefits for kids who accept the rigors and rewards of chess study. (Carlson, 2004, p. 90)

The leaders of these two schools stated that their students were learning a lot and they have seen better concentration skills in their students since the implementation of the chess program.

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On another campus, leaders sought a partnership with Young Storytellers, an organization that provides students with the opportunity to learn about and write their own screenplays. The benefits of this program include the use of one-on-one mentorships to assist low-income students with the power of discovering their voice (Young Storytellers, n.d.). Not only does this program provide students with the chance to improve their writing skills, it also provides them with access to live screenwriters who write screenplays for a living.

The fourth school spoke of a community organization that supports their campus by sending trained volunteer readers to their campus to assist students improve their reading skills in grades K through three. Each of the volunteers commits to working with the teacher for a minimum of 10 hours each week, and most stay beyond the 10-hour commitment. Each of the eight participating leaders stated that they would not be able to attribute their students' successes without the support provided by their community partners. They also stated that they wished there was more district support with regard to acquiring community partnerships because of the time it takes to find partners who are willing to support each school.

Epstein (2011) shared a story about 161 deans and chairpersons in schools, colleges, and departments of education who examined course work for future educators and leaders and determined that indeed there was a need to provide pre-service students with the tools needed to effectively connect with community and parental partners. "About 19 percent of the leaders strongly agreed that the future principals and counselors who graduated from their programs were prepared to work with all students' families and communities" (Epstein, 2011, p. 7). This finding would also suggest that if only 19% of the leaders agreed that principals and counselors were prepared to work with families and community partners, then 81% of future principals and counselors are not prepared.

The principals and instructional leaders associated with this study find that partnering with community associations help to bridge the gap to providing students with access and opportunity to practices and strategies that improve critical thinking skills through methods or programs they may not otherwise have access to. The principals and instructional leaders credit their community partnerships as a key lever for addressing some of the barriers students face when living in high-poverty situations.

Conclusion five: Professional study. The critically conscious leader knows the importance of acquiring and implementing strategies needed to develop resilience when addressing the barriers associated with leading the work of social justice. Theoharis (2009) defined resilience as "developed strategies to sustain oneself both professionally and personally" (p. 16). Professional study can be defined as "the process of self-development, facilitated by the internalization of cognitive learning and is supported by affective processes that, together, yield favorable developmental outcomes for students" (Ugur, Constantinescu, & Stevens, 2015, p. 90).

The eight participants in this study acknowledged the desire to take time out of their work schedules for professional study that assisted with raising their consciousness toward the work of ensuring equity for all students. Each of the participants concluded that self-study has helped them to build their leadership capacity specific to the skills and knowledge needed for the advocacy of marginalized students.

Diemer and Rapa (2016) defined critical consciousness as "the analysis of one's social conditions and taking action to change perceived inequities, is argued to provide marginalized and oppressed people with the capacity to overcome structural constraints" (p. 222). The principals and instructional leaders involved in this study analyzed the barriers faced on each of their school sites and recognized that they needed to take action to change their perceived

inequities. Principals and their instructional leaders demonstrated a desire to participate in

professional study as a clear strategy to assist with the attainment of the knowledge and skills

needed to improve school climate that supports high expectations for students, culturally

responsive professional development for staff and parents, and structures to obtain partnerships

with community members. Each one of these skills was desired with the intention of improving

academic achievement for Black students attending urban, high-poverty elementary schools.

One of the instructional leaders summarized her thoughts about self-study in this way.

> It is important to read a great deal of research or books from those who address the topic
> otherwise you may lose the goal. I am often reminded from others that there is a moral
> imperative with education. You might be that one person that advocates for a student and
> change the trajectory of their life. I also think that it is important to have connections
> with the people that you work with. Yes, we have connections at home, but having that
> on-site support system is important too. (P7)

Conclusion six: Self-care. Lastly, including personal strategies needed to sustain

oneself when advocating for equity, access, and opportunity for Black students in urban, high-

poverty schools is critical to the work of social justice. Six out of the eight participants

interviewed for this study shared strategies used that demonstrate the belief that self-care is an

important skill to have when working with marginalized groups. Jensen (2009) stated, "Students

who have social and emotional challenges often display 'acting-out' behaviors, impulsivity, and

gaps in politeness and social graces while students who demonstrate cognitive lags often enter

school behind that of their well-off peers" (p. 36). Kwong (2016) spoke of the stressors that

social workers experience because of the profession's client-centered nature. With this in mind,

the role of an educator is also a profession that is client centered in nature. Kwong (2016) further

states, that the nature of the work involved when supporting clients that may be disadvantaged,

create higher levels of stress as related to their emotionally taking situations.

Principals and instructional leaders who advocate equity for students from urban high-poverty schools find the need to ensure self-care into their normal regime. Participants listed a number of self-care strategies, including leaving work related activities at work and using home for home-related activities. One participant spoke of taking the time out of her schedule to exercise at least three or four days each week as a means to relax and stay focused. Participant number seven stated, "Self-care is important to sustain this work. Those of us who are passionate about it, we have to be able to continue this work because it is not a sprint it is a definite marathon." These critically conscious leaders demonstrate an understanding of the barriers they face when seeking to advocate for their students and they have also recognized the need to take care of themselves both professionally and personally as a means to sustain oneself through the work of advocating for social justice.

Recommendations for Policy/Practice

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of four elementary school principals and the four instructional leaders at their schools who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance in reading with Black students from four urban high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California. The study's findings may be used to inform leadership practices, school policies, and procedures to improve academic outcomes at the elementary level. Key findings and conclusions from the study support the following recommendations

Recommendation one. Each year, SUSD holds training sessions for teachers specific to the current reading program. Teachers have the option of attending these training sessions or not. It is recommended that teachers be mandated to attend at least one training session a year where the objective of the session would include research based strategies for creating a school

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culture of belonging not only for students, but also for parents as well. Educators are salaried

employees who are compensated for each month of the school year. Just as principals are

required to attend principal meetings after the students have gone home for the summer, it should

be mandatory for teachers to attend at least one full-day professional development session where

social justice practices are shared and taught. Many school districts have exciting training

sessions for new teachers, but fail to provide continual learning opportunities for veteran teachers

outside of the 1-hour professional development given at the school site each week. Most

educators know that very little can be accomplished in a 1-hour time period especially when

many of the topics for discussion are district mandated and not school site specific.

        Recommendation two. It is recommended that SUSD's culturally responsive program

provide intentional professional development training opportunities for the principals and

instructional leaders throughout the school district with specific strategies aimed at addressing

cultural biases and asset-based thinking. The leaders of the culturally responsive program would

strategically develop multiple sessions for principals and teachers including opportunities for

participants to experience cultural biases and deficit-based thinking first hand. The opportunity

for participants to role-play these negative experiences as well as possibly view such actions

through via video might help others to see themselves without placing judgment on anyone. It

would also be beneficial for the leaders of the culturally responsive program include outside

partners such as the OCR and representatives from universities that have departments on their

campuses committed to the practices of social justice education.

        Recommendation three. Programs created should include knowledge related to the

creation of structures that support multiple systems going at the same time. Often, principals are

trying to figure out by themselves how to move their schools from one level to the next with very

little success. The creation of a webpage where principals can go and retrieve research based

articles, videos, etc., specific to the individual issues faced at schools would be of tremendous

benefit toward meeting the needs of not only the students, but also the teachers, parents,

classified personnel, and other instructional leaders also. This page might be developed and/or

updated by the Administrators of Instruction or the Operation's directors at each level (pre-

school, elementary, secondary, adult education).

  Recommendation four. It is recommended that SUSD explore ways to differentiate and

improve the parent and community engagement branch as a means to assist principals and

instructional leaders with community partnerships aimed at improving critical thinking skills of

students. One method that may prove to be beneficial would include the involvement of the

parent and community engagement branch with creating a webpage devoted to providing

principals with research based strategies to address specific educational and socio-emotional

needs of their students and their families. The website would provide research articles, a blog,

and a list of community partners who would be willing to provide schools with specific supports.

  Recommendation five. It is recommended that higher learning institutions provide

principals and instructional leaders with the knowledge and skills needed extend their learning

with regard to the myriad barriers faced when seeking to advocate equity, access, and

opportunity for marginalized students. Many leadership preparation programs do not offer

coursework specific to the topic of social justice leadership. It is recommended that higher

learning institutions review and collaborate with universities that have already begun the work of

preparing educators for social justice leadership and then begin the process of creating their own

programs to address the needs of diverse schools located in California and other states and cities

within the U.S. It would also be ideal if the universities and school districts partnered to provide

principals with tangible professional development strategies during their monthly principal

meetings. These meetings should also include opportunities for principals from like schools to

participate in professional study that is specific to their individual needs. For instance, if one

school is looking for strategies to incorporate and add community partners to their schools, then

this group of principals should be able to meet once each month and be given time for

collaboration and implementation of strategies learned.

Recommendation six. It is recommended that school districts have a webpage dedicated

to strategies for self-care. Links could be connected to upcoming concerts, museums,

exhibitions, hiking trails, counseling supports, various recreational events, etc. This page would

need to be updated continually and could be managed through either the district's health services

department or it could be contracted out through a local vendor.

Future Research

Findings from this study provided insight into the lived experiences and perspectives of

four elementary school principals and the four instructional leaders at their schools who are

committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level

performance in reading with Black students. Recommendations for future study were

determined based on interpretations of the key findings:

1. Given the feedback from all participants with respect to seeking community supports

     to enhance the instructional program and assist with creating a climate of belonging

     for students, the researcher recommends expanding the study outside of the current

     school district to collect data on the correlation between community partnerships and

     academic achievement for Black students in high-poverty schools.

2. A few of the participants acknowledged that the culturally responsive program in their district helped address negative mindsets and cultural biases that often stand in the way of academic achievement. The researcher further recommends expanding the work of principal preparation programs to include the delivery of professional development with an intentional focus on addressing cultural biases and asset-based thinking.

Final Thoughts

Reflecting back to Chapter 1, the researcher is reminded that students living below the poverty line face a unique set of challenges when seeking to attain reading, writing, and mathematic proficiencies. "According to official poverty statistics, 16.4% of Californians lacked enough resources – about $24,000 per year for a family of four – to meet basic needs in 2014" (Public Policy Institute of California, 2015, para. 1). Principals who advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students have a daunting task to overcome. Based on findings from this study, educators are faced with many barriers that hinder academic achievement for students when students attend urban, high-poverty schools, and principal leaders must develop and implement strategies to sustain themselves. The benefits of principals and instructional leaders utilizing a social justice leadership approach to advocate equity for all students is important to changing the academic trajectory for groups of students that continually demonstrate low academic successes based on national and state assessments and the need for leadership preparation programs is evidenced from the findings of this study.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter

Pepperdine University

Dear _____

My name is **Cherise Y. Pounders (Roper)** and I am a doctoral candidate in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study as part of my dissertation, focusing on the lived experiences and perspectives of elementary school principals and instructional leaders, inclusive of principals, Title I Coordinators, and Magnet Coordinators, who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance of Black students in reading for the duration of three consecutive years or more.

You are invited to participate in this study. In the event that you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an audio-taped interview, outside of the work day, that is anticipated to last for no more than 1 hour. The interview will consist of approximately 17 open-ended questions that seek to uncover that strategies used to advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students at your school.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential at all times during and after the study. Your responses will be coded with a pseudonym and transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio-tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and a hard copy will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigators office for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at
███████████████████████

Thank you for your consideration and participation,

Cherise Y. Pounders (Roper)
Pepperdine University
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule

Pepperdine University

Social Justice Leadership: Advocating Equity, Access and Opportunity for Black Students
Attending Urban High-Poverty Elementary Schools

Dear
_____

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your interview date has been
scheduled for _____ at _____am:pm at the
following location

_____

Please be reminded that you will participate in an audio-taped interview that should not last for
more than 1 hour. The interview will consist of approximately 17 open ended questions that
seek to uncover that strategies used to advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for
marginalized students at your school. You are welcome to use artifacts or materials to assist
with answering the questions. You are not required to answer any questions that you are not
comfortable with; if you do not want to be audio-taped, handwritten notes will be taken.

Compensation for your time and participation will include a $20.00 visa gift card. You do not
have to answer all of the questions in order to receive compensation. The card will be given at
the culmination of the interview

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns that you may have ███████
or ███████████████████

I look forward to meeting with you at the scheduled date and time.

Sincerely,

Cherise Roper
Pepperdine University
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Pepperdine University

Social Justice Leadership: Advocating Equity, Access and Opportunity for Black Students
Attending Urban High-Poverty Elementary Schools

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by, Cherise Y. Roper, as the principal investigator. Dr. Linda Purrington, Ed.D., is the faculty advisor and Senior Lecturer at Pepperdine University. You have been selected because you are the principal of an urban, elementary school, with a high percentage of Black students as well as being identified as a school that is a high-poverty school, as identified by your schools Title I status. Your school has also been identified as a school where a large number of Black students meet and/or exceed grade level standards in reading and have sustained high levels of reading proficiency for students in grades 3 through 5 over a three-year time span. Lastly, you were selected because of your consistent involvement in your school districts Culturally Responsive Instructional professional development program over a three-year time span.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore and describe the lived experiences and perspectives of elementary school principals and instructional leaders who are committed to social justice practices and who have improved and sustained grade level performance of Black students in reading for the duration of three consecutive years or more as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment and the California Standards Test in four urban, high-poverty elementary schools in Southern California.

STUDY PROCEDURES

In the event that you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate, after working hours, in an audio-taped interview that is anticipated to last for no more than 1 hour. The interview will consist of approximately 17 open-ended questions that seek to uncover that strategies used to advocate for equity, access, and opportunity for marginalized students at your school. You are welcome to use artifacts or other materials to assist with answering the questions. You will have an opportunity to review the final transcript and you will have an opportunity to respond for clarification. In the event that a response is not provided, the

researcher will interpret the non-response as an indication that the transcript is without fault. You are not required to answer any questions that you don't feel comfortable answering; if you do not want to be audio-taped, handwritten notes will be taken.

POTENTIAL RISK

The potential and minimal risk associated with participation in this study may minimal mild discomfort while sitting during a one-hour interview. This risk may be minimized by ensuring that all interviews take place in a quite place on the campus of each selected participant during an agreed upon date and time. Participants will be reminded that they have the option of not answering questions, partially answering questions, or completely answering questions.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Potential benefits of this study would include the identification of strategies and practices that might be replicated by other principals and instructional leaders to improve academic achievement for Black students as well as other students in high-poverty schools. This study may also benefit leadership preparation programs to provide leaders with strategies needed to support teachers, families, and communities of students attending urban high-poverty schools. Lastly, results from this study might support administrators and instructional leaders with establishing educational policies and practices that provide access, support, and empowerment to Black students (Turner and Ives, 2013). School districts, as well as State Administrators, would benefit from addressing the academic needs of Black students and use study outcomes to set educational policy to "protect diverse students from cultural domination, absorption, and social marginalization" (2013) p. 291.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICPATION

Compensation for your time and participation will include a $20.00 visa gift card. Participants do not have to answer all of the questions in order to receive compensation. The card will be given at the culmination of the interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records from this study will be kept confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required by law, I may be required to disclose information collected from you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality include disclosure of instances specific to child abuse. Pepperdine's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access collected data.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Your responses will be coded with a pseudonym and transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio-tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and a hard copy will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigators office for three years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

Your alternative is to not participate. Your relationship with your employer will not be affected whether you participate or not in this study.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance company will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

INVESTIGATORS CONTACT INFORMATION

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any questions I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact investigator Cherise Y. Roper by phone ███████████ or email ██████████████████████████ or faculty advisor, Linda Purrington, Ed.D at linda.purrington@pepperdine.edu if I have nay other questions or concerns about this research.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPATION – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institute Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive, Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90045, (310) 568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions and Notes

Questions	Notes
1. Each school has a collective mission and vision. What is a personal mission that you have for your school? For your students?	
2. What are the strategies that you implement to create a climate of belonging for students?	
3. When you consider the topic of ensuring equity for Black students at your school site, what does this look like specific to providing teachers with the supports they may need to make this happen?	
4. Are there models of inclusion that you use on your campus? If so, what do those models look like and how are teachers provided with the skills needed to ensure inclusion for all students?	
5. How has your school districts Culturally Responsive program assisted you with the work of Social Justice leadership and equity?	
6. One often hears that Black students continue to perform poorly on district and national academic assessments. What are you doing with your staff, students, and parents, to ensure access and opportunity for all of your students who may be considered marginalized?	
7. What strategies/tools do you deem as necessary to share with your teachers for the improvement of core teaching and learning that specifically address the needs of Black students?	
8. What are the methods used to ensure	

implementation of knowledge and skills?	
9. How are skills and knowledge shared with others?	
10. The Common Core State Standards have an intention to increase academic rigor. What are the methods used to assist teachers with improving the academic rigor needed to meet grade level standards?	
11. What might you state are the contributing factors for the consistent increases in student achievement for Black students on your campus?	
12. How do teachers of special education student provide academic rigor needed for these students to also meet grade level standards?	
13. Your school was selected because of its Title I status. What are the barriers, if any, that you face as a Title I school when seeking to address equity, access, and opportunity for your students?	
14. What other factors might you see as barriers to social justice leadership outside of being a Title I school?	
15. Being a leader for social justice may appear to be a tremendous task. What are the tools that you use to sustain yourself on a professional level?	
16. What are the tools used to sustain yourself on a personal level?	
17. As you look back on past experiences as a social justice leader. What might you do differently in the future?	

APPENDIX E

Grant of Permission

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 24, 2017

Protocol Investigator Name: Cherise Pounders

Protocol #: 17-01-483

Project Title: Social Justice Leadership: Advocating Equity, Access, and Opportunity for Black Students Attending High-Poverty Urban Elementary Schools

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Cherise Pounders:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

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