DE-NORMALIZING NORMAL: PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

By

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To my husband Rob, my son Robbie, and my daughter Becky for their endless love, inspiration and support as I chased dreams of a better future for them and for all children through excellent and equitable education in public schools everywhere. You are the loves of my life, without your sacrifices, support and unconditional love, none of this would have been possible.
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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

DE-NORMALIZING NORMAL: PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

By

Rita Vasquez

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Chair: Elizabeth Bondy
Major: Curriculum and Instruction

The purpose of this study is to understand how two high school principals purposely worked to disrupt the inequities in educational opportunities and outcomes that had previously existed for marginalized students in their schools. Committed to a social justice agenda, the two principals systematically changed the culture, structures, and processes in their schools, thereby destabilizing the status quo, or de-normalizing what had come to be considered normal practice. The study is highly relevant in the local context because the school district has been under federal court order to close a persistent black versus non-black achievement gap. The school district and the plaintiffs in the federal court case have focused on the academic achievement gap as defined by the following parameters: proficiency rates on state assessments for black vs. non-black students in literacy and mathematics, graduation rates of black vs. non-black students, and percentages of black vs. non-black students accessing advanced academic courses such as honors and College Board Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The findings of this qualitative case study will add to the literature about principal leadership for equity by shedding light on the strategies the principals used to transform school practice as well as the motivations and commitments that fueled their
efforts. Implications for social justice leadership in the local and broader contexts are discussed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The idea of schooling as a conduit for social equity, improved social position, and economic mobility has yet to be realized. Overwhelmingly, schools continue to be propagators, if not sometimes defenders, of the status quo when it comes to ensuring equitable opportunities for the educational success for all students. The education of marginalized students in American schools today continues to be in crisis. There is a burgeoning body of evidence that can no longer be ignored that documents the inequitable educational conditions that marginalized groups of students experience on a daily basis in our schools (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

National and State Context

Boykin and Noguera (2011) assert that as a nation, Americans should be troubled by the fact that in our schools, race and economic background are the greatest predictors of student achievement or lack thereof. Institutional racism, oppression, and discrimination are alive and well in American schools today. Furman (2012) proclaims that the “alarming disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes among student groups distinguished by differences in race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, primary language, and so on suggest an educational system that is un-just and even oppressive” (p. 212). Data supporting these untenable realities abound. In an alarming Schott Foundation report on the failure of America’s schools to adequately educate, black males, Holzman (2010) tells us that only 52% of black males in the nation are graduating from our high schools, 47% in my state of Florida. Also referring to black males specifically, the National Education Association (NEA) (2011) writes that there is no clearly coordinated or comprehensive national response to what we must admit is a
national crisis, if not a national shame. This shame should be extended to what we know are the discriminatory inequities suffered by other marginalized groups of students in addition to black males. Students of all non-dominant races, students in poverty, students with disabilities, and students with non-traditional sexualities and gender identities all struggle to succeed in our current educational system. Although national, state and local responses to this crisis have been uncoordinated and unclear, what is clear is that the ramifications of our collective and continued failure to address the problem of educational inequity in our schools extend far beyond the moral realm. This crisis, in addition to being a continued manifestation of historically institutionalized racism (Holzman, 2007), also threatens our nation, our states, and our local communities economically. Palmer, Davis, Moore, and Hilton (2010) explain that minorities in America are projected to increase rapidly in the next 40 years. This increase will be accompanied by a decrease in the white population during the same time span. The very existence of a thriving and productive citizenry is threatened by our inability and our seeming unwillingness as a nation to act to ensure our schools bring all students in from the margins and work to serve them equally well.

**Local Context**

The school district in which I work is the 7th largest school district in the state of Florida and the 24th largest district in the nation. The district serves over 103,000 students in grades K through 12, 63% of whom are White (New America Foundation, 2012). African Americans comprise 20% of the student body, Hispanics 10%, and lastly Asian and Native Americans represent around 4% of the population (New America Foundation, 2012). The district’s student poverty rate is 17% and its free and reduced lunch rate in grades K through 12 is 43% (New America Foundation, 2012). Although
the school district operates many schools in suburban middle class communities, a
significant number of schools are located in one large urban community. The majority
of the district’s urban schools significantly underperform all of the other schools in the
district and many have been included in lists of persistently low-performing schools
statewide. In fact, the district is under state sanction for the under-performance of its
minority students and is considered a district in corrective action by the state of Florida.

In a nationally renowned report, *The Urgency of Now*, the Schott Foundation
(2012) singles out this school district for inequities in the education of black males citing
data that show the district performs below national and state averages in overall
graduation rates for this marginalized group. The Schott report (2012) cites the black
male graduation rates as 34% for the district average, 52% as the national average, and
47% as the state average. Relatedly, this school district is in mediation in two civil suits
regarding the gap in the achievement rates between white and black students. One
such suit was originally “filed in 2000 as a class action suit based upon Article IX
Section 1 of the Florida Constitution and the legislation commonly referred to as the
Florida Equity in Education Act,” (Crowley v. Pinellas County School Board, 2010). The
Crowley (2010) suit essentially claimed the following:

There exists in Pinellas County a materially significant gap between the
academic performance of black students and students of other racial
origins. While on an individual basis many black students have excelled
and prospered in the Pinellas County School System, there remains a
large statistical disparity in the academic performance of black versus
non-black students. (p. 2)

As of the current year, the district continues to be required to provide data to both the
state and to the plaintiffs in the suit to substantiate that the educational gap is closing
and that the district is enacting transformational change to ensure this happens (Crowley v. Pinellas County School Board, 2010).

**Problem of Practice for this Study**

This study, focused on how school leaders engage in social justice practice, seeks to elucidate how some principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools to transform the achievement of those students. By focusing on how school leaders lead for social justice in their schools, this dissertation aims to add knowledge to the existing body of literature on this topic, and to inform practice in the local context.

**Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to understand how school leaders purposely work to disrupt the inequities in educational opportunities that traditionally exist for marginalized students in their schools. This project seeks to identify how school leaders committed to a social justice agenda systematically change the culture, structures, and processes in their schools, thereby destabilizing the status quo of underachievement. Through this case study, I would like to add to the current literature about how school leaders go about leading their schools guided, knowingly or unknowingly, by social justice principles. In this research I hope to identify key strategies school leaders have employed which have served to disrupt the status quo and create equitable educational conditions for all students in their schools.

The following research question will guide this study:

- How do principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools?
Literature that Frames the Study

Leadership for social justice literature will be the predominant body of literature that will inform this study. Leadership for social justice research is an emerging, growing body of study and literature (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006). In fact, Capper et al. (2006) tell us that literature on the preparation of school leaders and administrators in general is scant, with preparation according to a social justice perspective being even more difficult to find. It is important to note that much of the literature about leadership from this perspective addresses issues of inequities stemming from poverty, race, and/or gender. Capper et al. (2006) explain that much of the literature that addresses leadership preparation for tackling the needs of students with disabilities in exceptional education programs tends to address specific learning needs and differences. There is not a lot of research on how learning disabilities intersect with race and poverty to compound marginalization, discrimination, and oppression and what school leaders need to be prepared to do to ensure equity for these students (Capper et al., 2006). Bodies of literature for social justice leadership preparation that deal with issues of sexuality or gender identity are even rarer. In their review of 72 articles on leadership for social justice, Capper et al. (2006) found only six articles that dealt with this facet of marginalization.

More generic literature addressing social justice in education will also help to frame this case study. Both kinds of literature will be necessary to justify and build value for this study as well as to effectively communicate the significance of the work. Social justice literature will help me explain the assumptions that I and the principal participants bring to this work. Furthermore, I will interpret the data through a social justice lens.
Significance of the Study

A large part of my role as Executive Director of High School Education is to assist school principals to transform their school cultures and core academic programs and practices so that we meet the needs of all students and conquer the achievement gap. Improving the district’s graduation rates, which requires closing the gap between white students and students in marginalized groups such as black males, is a major responsibility of my current position. The findings of this study will be used to inform this work.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The intent of this study is to better understand how school leaders lead for educational equity for marginalized students. Through deeper comprehension of how educational leaders are engaging in social justice work, I hope to build capacity for this work in the local context and to contribute to the existing body of literature on this crucial topic. In this chapter I outline how this study is situated in the existing literature related to social justice in education. First, I will present a discussion of leadership for social justice providing a conceptual definition for this construct which underpins the study. Next, I will address social justice as it applies to schools and the systemic marginalization of groups of students within schools. And finally, literature regarding principal leadership for social justice is presented.

Social Justice

Literature on social justice theory provides the underpinnings for this study which is situated within a social justice interpretive framework. The work of Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) provides the conceptual understanding for social justice which this study employs. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) explain that a social justice perspective is one that acknowledges that there are profound and institutionalized inequalities in society still today and then seeks to alter this state through a commitment to action. The inequalities stem from the devaluing of non-dominant groups by dominant groups. Membership in one group or the other is inherent through the stratification of society with divisions falling along lines that typically separate people such as race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual identity, and physical or mental abilities (Sensoy &
DiAngelo, 2012). The races, socioeconomic classes, and gender type possessing the least social, political, and economic power form the non-dominant groups.

Adopting a social justice perspective requires an acceptance and understanding that these social inequalities are deeply entrenched both at the systemic (structural) and individual level and lead to injustices which have adverse effects on the social groups that are systematically devalued and oppressed (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Adopting a social justice perspective also means accepting a lifelong call to action to reverse the inequalities, the injustices, and in essence working to de-normalize what has come to be seen as normal practice in schools.

Social Justice and School

Tutwiler (in Books, 2007, p. 144) gets right to the heart of the problem when she describes schools as institutions which selectively value the “skills, behaviors, attitudes, and language styles preferred by the majority in society.” What the dominant or majority group values becomes valued, accepted, and normal in school. All students, including students of color and/or in poverty, are consciously and subconsciously measured against this canonized normal and against all other students on a daily basis (Tutwiler in Books, 2007). The passage of hours in school is marked by a constant struggle for acceptance by teachers and school leaders who control and implement the structures and processes that protect the canonized normal, the status quo (Tutwiler, in Books, 2007). Acceptance is given to those who measure up against the school's definition of normal, and consequences are incurred in multiple ways to those who don't. Systematic denial of equal and better educational opportunities to marginalized students versus students of the dominant culture is common in traditional schools (Banks, 2001). For example, in the school district in which I work, there is an accelerated course
enrollment gap for black students, economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic students, and English Language Learners. The gap is not an ability gap, it is an access gap that results from, and is perpetuated by, their lack of membership in the dominant group.

The denial of acceptance and approval in school is all too often felt by groups of students whose foundational normal is different from what is prized in school. The end result is that these groups of students are at risk for marginalization (Tutwiler, in Books, 2007). Dantley and Tillman (2006) agree that the marginalization of groups of students in schools is the transference or the embodiment of the oppression and injustices experienced by devalued groups in society at large. For devalued, non-dominant groups of students, an immoral cycle of despair and perpetual failure in schools becomes their reality. Inequitable school practices and structures result in a marginalization which, left uninterrupted, feeds itself. The result is more deeply embedded inequitable practices and structures such as lack of access to accelerated programs and courses. Ignoring that race, socioeconomic status, and gender create at least an un-level start to the game we call school, if not an entirely un-level playing field in life, our meritocratic culture allows us to blame the marginalized students for their own failures attributing a lack of merit to entire sub-groups of students. Social justice leadership is the key to disrupting this status quo, ushering in a new normal that works to bring all students in from the margins.

**Principal Leadership for Social Justice in Schools**

There is an emerging, growing body of literature that addresses school leadership for social justice (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006). Much of the literature that has been used to frame this study addresses principal leadership for
issues of inequities and injustices in schools stemming from the marginalization of
students in poverty and students of color.

There is great consensus about the very important role school leaders and strong
leadership play in the success of students and schools. An empirical link exists
between the effectiveness of school leaders and improvement of student achievement
(Seashore-Louis et al., 2009). In fact, “Leadership is second only to classroom
instruction as an influence on student learning” (p. 7). What is not always made clear is
that in schools with greater numbers of marginalized students, the impact of school
leadership on student achievement is significantly greater (Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillow,
& Urban, 2011). In order to truly address the crisis of persistent failure for marginalized
students, alter the status quo, de-normalize normal, and truly transform schools,
Furman (2012) places the responsibility for transforming schools directly on school
leaders. Strong school leadership alone, however, is not sufficient. School leaders
must closely analyze their own belief systems before they can lead others in navigating
these difficult issues (Barbara, 2010). Working for social justice requires deep reflection
and conscious awareness of one’s own socialization (Hinchey, 2010). Leaders must
also reflect on their own position in society to ensure they are aware of the beliefs that
drive their decisions (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

School leaders who engage in the work of leadership for social justice use critical
consciousness to practice a questioning attitude. Critical consciousness (Freire, 2005)
entails possessing an understanding that systems such as schools are not inherently
equitable, that schools are historically structured to oppress non-dominant groups of
students and that school leaders work to take action against the oppression. School
leaders may or may not possess the language of critical consciousness in order to operate from a critically conscious stance. Critical consciousness calls for a constant examination of the decisions school leaders make and of the existing structures and practices they are working to preserve (Hinchey, 2010). The aim of this critical examination is for school leaders to see who their decisions, and their school structures, benefit and who they exclude. It is crucial that school leaders make conscious and deliberate decisions to change the status quo and build a more socially just structure and processes in their schools. This means that principals must themselves be transformed from just being school leaders to being school leaders who are deeply aware of who they are, what they believe and constantly vigilant about examining how their actions align with their beliefs.

Informing beliefs and practice with social justice theory is what effective leadership for social justice requires. Hinchey (2010) points out that critical theory is futile without ensuring that practitioner actions are matched to their social justice beliefs. The pairing of theory and practice is called praxis, also defined as “action based on reflection” (Hinchey, 2010, p. 133). Social justice leaders challenge assumptions that things just have to be the way they always have been in their schools (Hinchey, 2010). When school leaders adopt a social justice stance, then the ephemeral concepts of critical theory become tangible, the hegemonic practices historically entrenched in their schools are countered, and what was once normal in school is no longer.

So how do school leaders practice social justice leadership? Furman (2012) hones in on what strong leadership with a social justice agenda entails. She explains that it begins with school leaders who are out in the open about their social justice
stance and work publicly for equity and social justice within their schools. Theoharis (2010) tells us that school leaders must make deliberate public decisions and take overt actions to change the status quo. Theoharis explains that “school leaders must create school structures, teaching staff, climate, communities, and achievement results that support and demonstrate success for every child” (2010, p. 332). He claims that social justice leaders keep marginalization issues at the forefront of their minds when making all decisions, no matter how big or small, from creating schedules for after school extracurricular activities to the hiring of teachers. Theoharis (2010) goes on to express that when school leaders decide to act openly on the injustices suffered by marginalized students in schools, they model leadership for social justice and they change the reality for these students.

Are school leaders single-handedly able to engage in the difficult work of de-normalizing normal in schools? In a study about principal practices that worked to integrate shared leadership and social justice for children, Wasonga (2009) tells us that shared leadership did not always lead to school decisions that were in the best interest of marginalized students. Instead, effective social justice work in schools required a school leader who is willing to use “moral power or control” (Wasonga, 2009, p. 221) when necessary in addition to shared leadership to build trust, develop common interest, and build collaboration to break down barriers that prevent equitable practices school wide. Although school leaders need courage to engage in this work, a Super Man style of single hero leadership alone will not get the job done. School leaders must engage their entire staff in the work to transform a school and build educational equity for all students.
Transforming an entire school is not possible without also transforming a school’s culture. School leaders are largely responsible for developing and fostering the culture of a school (Horsford, Grossland, & Gunn, 2011). Embedded in school cultures are the values, beliefs, and structures which operate explicitly and implicitly within a school. School cultures create the conditions that either meet or do not meet the needs of all of the students (Horsford et al., 2011). Principals who lead with a social justice agenda build and foster school cultures that embrace diversity (Theoharis, 2010). They work to infuse the practice of community outreach particularly into marginalized communities as part of the culture of their schools (Theoharis, 2010). Theoharis (2010) tells us that principals who lead for social justice take on the responsibility to bridge the divide between their schools and the marginalized communities they serve, welcome and honor families who do not traditionally interact with school, and set expectations for all staff to follow their lead. To counterbalance the unequal power schools and principals hold in relation to marginalized families (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), these principals make connections with marginalized communities in order to change the status quo of low expectations and benign neglect and give voice to those who do not normally have access to the power structure of school.

The quality of relationships between school leaders and individual marginalized students is a factor whose importance cannot be overstated. Noguera (2012) asks us to look to schools that are working for marginalized black boys to understand the importance of relationships with school leaders to the boys’ successes in school. He points to examples such as Frederick Douglass Academy, Thurgood Marshall Academy, and Eagle Academy, all predominantly black schools in New York City, that
emphasize the importance of the relationship between school leaders and black boys. Noguera (2012) explains that the leaders in these schools are strong without relying on intimidating or authoritarian tactics with their students. He tells us these successful leaders, all males, are more like father figures or big brothers to their students. For these male principals, taking a fatherly or brotherly stance effectively breaks the destructive tendency of administrators and other school personnel to view behaviors of black boys as oppositional or as representing disinterest and disengagement in school (Boykins & Noguera, 2011). It takes a committed social justice school leader who has reflected deeply about his/her own socialization and position in life, who understands the marginalization of students and the resentment and resistance of some of those students to the one normal that school values, to break the status quo of viewing these students as failures.

Just how difficult is the work of principals who lead with a social justice agenda? Scholars on this topic, including Theoharis (2007a) and others, have documented some themes in their research around the barriers, neutralizing forces, and pressures that principals have encountered as they’ve engaged in this work. Theoharis (2008) notes that advancing a social justice agenda is a messy job at times, and principals often have to learn on the job how to deal with resistance to the things they’re working to accomplish.

The school district central office can offer resistance that actually works to perpetuate the status quo, working contrary to school leaders’ efforts at creating more equitable conditions at their schools. Trujillo (2012), explained, “Districts act as mediating institutions in which individuals’ values about what constitutes good
instruction and for whom, interact with collective political or economic calls to take up rational, bureaucratic practices inside schools” (p. 552). District instructional policies can impede the work of school leaders working from a social justice stance when those policies offer “different opinions about practical strategies for change and entrenched values about what quality instruction looks like and for whom” (p. 532). Principals can face political pressure within their local communities, particularly from individual members and groups who have benefitted from the status quo. School leaders have described this pushback and resistance as relentless and sometimes insurmountable (Theoharis, 2007).

Principals working to create equitable learning environments face a myriad of other obstacles. Exposing cultural biases is an important part of transforming schools. Principals who lead with a social justice agenda have to “continuously examine whether . . . student learning is equitable for all student groups . . . and encourage teachers to critically examine their practice for possible bias in regard to race, class, and gender” (Kose, 2007, p. 279). Principals can experience an inability, despite extensive professional development efforts with staff, to overcome deficit thinking and other ingrained biases about what marginalized students can achieve in school. State accountability systems for schools often measure school effectiveness by proficiencies on standardized tests, discounting much work done breaking barriers and correcting access and opportunity gaps that are not immediately measurable by those tools. Another challenge is the scarcity of formal leadership preparation programs or ongoing in-service programs that are focused on social justice leadership. Furman (2012) expresses the need for better designed programs that develop critical leadership skills.
in new school leaders. She further describes limitations and insufficiencies inherent in leadership preparation programs that may be too exclusively focused on arming school leaders with social justice ideals and not focused enough on arming them with “specific practices used by school leaders to address social justice issues” (Furman, 2012, p. 212).

The importance of this study, in the local context and beyond, is in its potential to provide deep insight into the beliefs and practices of school principals who lead from a social justice perspective and are denormalizing what have been considered normal practice and outcomes in their schools. In their study about educational leadership preparation programs, Horsford and Brown (2011) advise that if we seek to reform schools, then focusing attention on the actions of school leaders, as extensively as we have focused on the actions of teachers, is essential. Theoharis reinforces this focus on the actions of school leaders by proposing that “exemplary leadership helps create the necessity for change and helps make the realities of change happen” (2010, p. 331).

This study and its research question aim to focus on the actions of local school leaders in order to inform the future practice of school and district leaders. Through interviews with school leaders individually and together in a focus group, this study seeks to reveal how principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools. The findings of this study, including the implications for practice that will be delineated as a result of this work, will be used to guide my work helping school leaders transform their schools and may be useful to leaders in other school districts.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study sought to reveal how principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools, thereby disrupting normal practice and ushering in and sustaining a new, counter-hegemonic normal. A qualitative case study design was used as the research approach for this work. The following research question guided this qualitative case study:

- How do principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools?

In this chapter, I will begin by explaining the qualitative research approach that I utilized in this work and why that approach was appropriate for this study. I will then provide explanations and/or descriptions of the following elements of this study’s design:

- Criteria for the selection of participants in this study
- Description of study participants and their settings
- Data collection methods and interview questions for each round of interviews conducted in this study
- Data analysis method
- Credibility and trustworthiness of study
- Researcher’s background and perspectives

**Qualitative Research Approach**

Case studies are often used as the research methodology in social sciences fields such as education (Yin, 2005). This study followed this conventionally accepted approach, and employed a case study for its research methodology. Specifically, I studied two cases of principal leadership for educational equity. A case study is a qualitative research methodology that allows the researcher to study a system (which is
known as a case) or multiple systems (cases) in the hopes of gaining greater understanding of a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the phenomenon I sought to elucidate, within the school district where I am currently employed, was principal leadership for educational equity. A case study approach was appropriate for this study because the central question I sought to answer was a “how” question. Additionally, as I expected, learning “how” principals lead the de-normalization of normal practice in their schools revealed several “whys” behind their decisions and strategies. Case study methodology was appropriate because it allows us to better grasp phenomena that are intricate and that possess multiple characteristics (Yin, 2005) such as the way principals work to effect change in schools. The central question in this study fits the criteria for the selection of this methodology as leadership for social justice is a complex set of behaviors. Additionally, case study methodology is an appropriate method for examining contemporary events where the behaviors under study are contextually important and are not able to be manipulated (Yin, 2005). I, as the researcher in this study, was not able to manipulate the behaviors of the cases this study examined. However, because of my role with the school district, one can argue that my work with the principals in the past could have an influence on the behaviors studied in this present study. This possible bias will be discussed more thoroughly later in Chapter 3 as I work to explain how I am situated within this study (see Researcher Background and Perspectives).

The findings for this case study are of an explanatory or revelatory nature. There are similarities between explanatory or revelatory case studies and historical studies. However, case studies differentiate themselves from historical studies in that they add
two sources of evidence not typically included by historians. First, case studies include direct observations by the researcher of the cases being studied (Yin, 2005). Second, case studies collect data from interviews with people who are directly involved in the cases or people who actually comprise the cases being studied (Yin, 2005). Both of the factors that distinguish case studies from historical studies applied during this study.

Case studies can utilize a multiple case research design and formulate cross-case conclusions at the end of the study (Yin, 2005). This study used a multiple case design with a holistic or single unit of analysis. Cases for the study were selected following a replication design with two cases ultimately chosen because I predicted they would produce similar results, referred to as literal replication (Yin, 2005). Each case was selected because it predicted similar results. A multiple case study following a replication design was selected because the evidence from such a study is often considered more compelling and vigorous than the evidence presented from a single case study (Yin, 2005). Although data analysis will be discussed in more detail later in Chapter 3 (Data Analysis), each individual case was considered an entire study with its own set of evidence from which findings and conclusions were drawn. In Chapter 5, I present insights drawn from across the two cases.

Criteria for Selection of Participants

Participants were selected for their potential to provide insights into the central question of the case, how principals lead for educational equity at their schools. Specifically, two principals who met the following set of conditions were selected as participants:

- The schools the principals lead have large percentages of students of color and/or students in poverty (>40% of the population in either demographic parameter).
The Federal Graduation Rate gap between black and non-black students at the principals' schools was significantly lower than the district's overall Federal Graduation Rate gap.

The principals have a reputation among district leaders as highly effective school leaders.

Description of Participants and School Settings

Both participants in this study were white male high school principals who at the time of the study, had more than 10 years of experience in education but less than 5 years of experience as school principals. School demographic and sample school achievement data that illustrate how the participants met selection criteria for this study are contained in Table 3-1.

Table 3-1. Principal selection criteria

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>40% minority 53% economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>School Black/Non-Black Graduation Gap: 9.2% District Black/Non-Black Graduation Gap: 16.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>41% minority 40% economically disadvantaged</td>
<td>School Black/Non-Black Graduation Gap: 10.56% District Black/Non-Black Graduation Gap: 16.72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative researchers view interviews as essential sources of data for their case studies (Yin, 2005). In this study, I conducted two kinds of interviews. The first round of interviews was conducted individually with each of the two principals. These interviews were conducted at each principal's school site in order to avoid inconveniencing the principals. The interview with Principal 1 lasted 1 hour and 28 minutes and produced 31 pages of qualitative data for analysis. The interview with Principal 2 lasted 1 hour and 9 minutes and produced 22 pages of qualitative data for analysis. The second round of interviews was conducted approximately four months after the first round of interviews at one of the two principals' school sites. For the
second round of interviews, the principals were interviewed together in a small focus group format, and the two principals took turns responding to interview questions. The second round of interviews lasted just under two hours and produced 19 pages of qualitative data for analysis.

All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim for data analysis. The interview questions that were asked during the individual interviews with each participant were open-ended (Appendix A).

The second interview was a semi-structured focus group interview to allow for conversation between the participants that might provide additional insights into the nature of their work and the similarities and differences between their leadership practices. The second interview took place approximately four months after the individual interviews. This allowed for an initial and partial analysis of the responses provided by the two principals during the first interview sessions. Questions for the focus group interview were formulated to be open-ended and to clarify and extend the responses provided during the individual interviews. As I had expected, the principals engaged in discourse with each other within the focus group setting. Both of them sometimes provided responses to the questions posed that were continuations or extensions of responses provided by the other principal. The focus group interview allowed for commonalities and differences between the two principals to emerge more clearly in that setting. The focus group interview responses reinforced the data collected during the individual interviews of the two principals. In other words the principals’ responses during the Focus Group interviews were consistent with their
individual interview responses. The interview questions that were asked during the second focus group interview of individual were again open-ended (Appendix B).

Experienced case study researchers understand that data collection and data analysis are activities that must be undertaken together (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). New questions for further exploration often arise in the process of working to understand data that have already been collected (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The study adhered to this synchronous and iterative principle in that I delayed formulating questions for the focus group interview until I had completed preliminary analysis of the individual interviews.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Data analysis in qualitative studies is complex and needs to follow a strategy best suited to answering the study’s central question (Yin, 2005). In order to tackle the analysis of 72 pages of transcribed interviews, I undertook a data reduction process to narrow an enormous number of words in the direction of my research question.

Following the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994) as to how best to deal with the large volume of interview data, I developed a data entry table for each of the two individual interviews and a separate data entry table for the focus group interview. Each data entry table (Appendix C) contained the following information in five columns: 1) participant identifier, the original tables contain actual participants’ initials, the sample data entry table uses P1 and P2 consistent with the narrative for this study; 2) verbatim responses from the interview transcripts for each participant; 3) page numbers where the verbatim response is found in the entire interview transcript; 4) main ideas from the response that directly address research question posed and still in verbatim form; and 5) a synthesized list of the larger ideas that answered the study’s research question.
when all responses to all interview questions for each principal were considered as a whole. Column 5 contains excerpts of the verbatim transcripts interspersed with my notes as the researchers synthesizing the data into its larger findings.

Following this data reduction procedure, I used what was essentially an outline of big ideas as a guide for writing the findings for each case study presented in this dissertation. This process enabled the composition of a case description for each principal participant. Finally, in Chapter 5 (Discussion) I provide a discussion of the commonalities and differences in the two cases and their implications for my work in the school district.

**Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Study**

The quality of a qualitative research study is judged on its credibility and trustworthiness along with its data dependability and confirmability (Yin, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that a researcher’s prolonged engagement in the field or culture in which a study is contextualized provides the credibility necessary for the trustworthiness of a study. For this study, I did not collect data over a lengthy/prolonged period of time. However, I’ve been in the district for a lengthy period of time, and my deep knowledge of the context helped me interpret the data in a way that a reader can trust. My entire career in education has been in the school district within which this study is situated. As a result, I understand the culture, have built trust, and very importantly, have excellent rapport with both of the participants allowing for them to participate in this study with honesty and forthrightness.

Confirmability was attended to in this study through data collection and data analysis methods. Data collected included verbatim transcripts of participant responses during the individual and focus group interviews. During data analysis, member, or key
informant checks (Yin, 2005) were utilized once major findings were established. The participants were asked to review the data entry tables and the major findings derived for their individual case studies to ensure the accuracy of the representation of their responses to the interview questions. The data entry tables produced for the case studies ensure chain of evidence is clear and is key to the confirmability of this study. Lastly, the trustworthiness of this study was further assured through frequent peer debriefing with my dissertation chair to ensure the information represented in this study was not over or under emphasized and accurately represented the practice of the principals studied.

The final section of this chapter, Researcher Background and Perspectives, is presented in part to demonstrate the reflexivity with which I entered and conducted this study and further contributes to its trustworthiness.

**Researcher Background and Perspectives**

I am a Hispanic female, born in Havana, Cuba, 55 years ago. I am a naturalized American citizen having emigrated from Cuba 50 years ago at the age of five. I had a very happy and successful K-12 educational experience, and those early fulfilling successes in education continued through undergraduate and graduate degree programs during the late 1970's and 80's. Seven years ago, I started a doctoral program through the University of Florida and up until that time, I had always believed that meritocracy was alive and well in the American dream. What I had not considered, and the omission was simply one of ignorance, was that although I am an immigrant, I have always passed for white—I can easily pass for a member of the dominant culture. It is only recently, through my studies in this professional practice doctoral program, that the veil of ignorance has been lifted, and I am in the midst of conscientization. I now
have an understanding of the privileges, as McIntosh (1989) explains, that have always been afforded to me, as a result of my perceived whiteness, and that are not afforded to historically marginalized students in our schools. I no longer laud meritocracy as the cause of my success. No longer do I cite lack of value and effort as the reasons behind the perpetual achievement gaps that plague marginalized students.

As a result of both my work in this doctoral program and my experiences as an educator for the last 23 years, I undertook this study with the assumption that social injustice and inequity are still alive and well in society and in our schools today. This institutional oppression and marginalization of subgroups of students is entrenched in the cultures, structures, and functions of our schools, and I believe it is our collective responsibility as educators and human beings to eradicate both for a socially just future.

Professionally, I am currently the Executive Director of High School Education for Pinellas County Schools (PCS). In this role, my responsibilities include serving as district lead for PCS Strategic Plan Goal 1: Increase Graduation and Promotion Rates. In short, I am responsible for leading a committee that will develop systems and processes to close the achievement gaps of underperforming groups of students that in turn affect the district’s grade-level promotion rates and graduation rates. Another responsibility in my current role is to provide professional development to principals regarding all aspects of instructional leadership. Within this context, I have worked to infuse critical social justice ideals in my work with school leaders. Although I am unable to directly influence the behaviors studied and discussed here, one can argue that my work with the principals in instructional leadership development could have an indirect influence on their behaviors as school leaders.
Lastly, I have a deep moral commitment to social justice work in our schools, and I bring a social justice lens to all I do. This perspective informed the research question and permeated the design of this study as well. A social justice lens also informed the data collection and analysis processes so thereby influenced the findings and implications for educational practice that have arisen from this work.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

Introduction

As the Executive Director for High School Education, I am responsible for the effectiveness of all of my district’s grades 9-12 core academic instructional programs. In this capacity, I am deeply professionally and personally interested in the key role school leaders play in the success of their students and, by extension, their schools. There exists in my district, much like in most public school districts across the nation, an achievement gap that is delineated mostly by race and socioeconomic status. As a district curriculum leader, I am responsible for setting the direction and providing resources and support for teaching and learning in schools. Part of that task absolutely entails developing a laser-like focus on closing the achievement gap; this is explicitly a major focus if not a covenant within my district’s overall strategic plan. But the actual work of running schools is and always has been up to individual school leaders. I deeply believe that as a school leader goes, so goes their school. Much like how siblings from the same set of parents can become very different adults, schools, although receiving direction and support from the same central office, in the end are all unique institutions more reflective of their school leaders than of the district office. This is not meant as an indictment of the autonomy of individual school leaders to lead their schools following their visions within the framework of the larger whole. It is instead a compelling rationale for my study.

This study aims to understand how individual school leaders purposely work to disrupt the inequities in educational opportunities that traditionally exist for marginalized students. Not all principals believe the same things, are equipped with the same skills,
or follow the same visions for how to lead schools that are purposely designed for the success of all students. Through this case study, I intended to add to the current literature about how selected principals lead their schools by social justice principles. In this research I hoped to identify key strategies school leaders have employed which have served to disrupt the status quo and create equitable educational conditions for all students in their schools. The following research question guided this study: How do principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in their schools? In this effort, interviews were conducted with two school principals who are respected by district leaders and their communities as strong instructional leaders. Additionally, during the time that I have worked in my current capacity as Executive Director of High School Education, the two principals have consistently challenged the status quo, attempting to de-normalize what has come to be seen as normal in American high schools, even if they have never explicitly used this language. For this study, in the interest of confidentiality and anonymity, the identity of the principals selected as participants will be protected by using the designations of Principal 1 and Principal 2.

Organization of the Chapter

In this chapter I begin by presenting my findings as two case studies (one for each of the principal participants) with three sections within each case study. The first section of each case study outlines each principal’s personal story as a student in school because those personal histories are highly relevant to what drives their work as school leaders. The second section of each case study will present the “missions,” which I’ve likened to “ministries,” that have guided the work of each school leader. And lastly, the third section of each case study will feature the “methods” that each school
leader purposefully employs to disrupt normal and make school work for the success of all students.

**Principal 1’s Story: A Ministry of Giving Back**

**Personal History as a Student**

Principal 1’s personal history as a student set the stage for his work as a school leader. Principal 1 is driven to recreate for others what school was for him, a safe place where all kids can be successful. Principal 1 never knew his biological parents as married, although they were at the time of his birth. He does have strong recollections of the man who would become his stepfather. Principal 1 describes him as “one of the most awful people I’ve ever met in my life” (P1, 1, p. 24). He comments that “fortunately she divorced him several years later, but not until he had inflicted pain on everyone” (P1, 1, p. 24). Because of this, school for Principal 1 was “always a place that was a safe place” (P1, 1, p. 24). He connects his experience with that of his students, commenting that he believes this is a common situation for “most kids”. He expresses that school for him was “like most of our kids, it is the best part of their day” (P1, 1, p. 24). There is a paradox in his personal story, however, as Principal 1 also explains he doesn’t mean to imply that he “didn’t have a loving family because I did” (P1, 1, p. 24). His perception, looking back now, is that his biological mother and father, despite divorcing, were a loving family for him while he was growing up. So despite a personal past which apparently included some conflicting experiences involving both loving and painful memories around his home environment, Principal 1 is crystal clear that school for him was always a place where he “experienced success because it was an outlet for me” (P1, 1, p. 24).
Principal 1 also positively attributes high aspirations for his future to his loving biological parents and this was despite the fact that his “family was poor” (P1, 1, p. 24). His parents lacked the knowledge and skills to help him get resources within school. Principal 1 shared that although his parents worked, they “didn’t have a lot of money” and if he as a student had known better he “would have applied for free and reduced lunch, but we didn’t know” (P1, 1, p. 24). He shared, “My parents always said- you’ll go to college, you’ll go to college- but my parents never went to college. They couldn’t assist me with getting into college” (P1, 1, p. 24). Principal 1’s parents couldn’t help him establish a path for his future despite their ability to clearly communicate their aspirations for him and his biological father impressing upon him the importance of doing “something you enjoy; just do something you enjoy because you’re going to have to do it for the rest of your life” (P1, 1, p. 24). Principal 1 shared that his parents would say, “Just tell us what to do and we’ll do it for you, but we don’t know how to do it” (P1, 1, p. 24). Principal 1 believes this lack of navigational capital, the ability to use available resources in institutions to make informed decisions (Yosso, 2005), was difficult to overcome and led him as a student to make some mistakes. Because of his good test scores, Principal 1 headed to college after having “probably made an uninformed choice” (P1, 1, p. 24) which he explains looking back now “was not a good experience for me” (P1, 1, p. 24). Specifically, he was not aware that his “chosen” university only had a 5 year program for students who wished to be educators and only allowed freshmen, no matter how driven, to engage in 12 credit hours a semester. He decided at that point that he would “take my scholarships and myself and … go somewhere else” (P1, 1, p. 24). This decision enabled him to “graduate … in three years and
become a teacher” (P1, 1, p. 24). When he became a school leader he “was motivated by doing better for kids” (P1, 1, p. 24) with regard to helping them navigate a path through and post high school.

**A Ministry of Giving Back**

The central mission of Principal 1’s work is giving back to people, and as a school leader, it specifically involves giving back to students and teachers. Because of this, his work may be likened to a calling to minister. A man of faith, his work as a school leader is deeply connected to that faith via a ministry of giving back. Principal 1 gives back by working to raise people up, to help teachers and students improve their lot, and accomplish their dreams in life. He explains that the work of a school leader “is an altruistic thing for me. I’m a very Catholic Christian and I believe deeply in faith … I don’t talk about it with a lot of people. I’m not evangelical I guess you’d say in certain ways, but this is how I give back; this is my ministry” (P1, 1, p. 24). He speaks openly in interviews about his commitment to this school leadership ministry which makes the hard work of ensuring school is equitable for all students meaningful and easy for him:

> I don’t walk around telling people that, blessing them and things like that, but this is how I give back and I can feel like I am really contributing to society by creating circumstances where people can get better in their life. So you take those marginalized groups and you give them a better chance and that’s what we’re supposed to do as educators, but that’s really what we’re supposed to do as Christians, that we are supposed to raise people up. So that’s to me, my foundation is never questioned; that’s why I’m doing what I do, so that makes it easy. (P1, 1, p. 25)

The data indicate Principal 1’s mission has two related components that together define the “giving back” he’s called to do: 1) Raise students up, and 2) Do the right thing
Raise students up

Although Principal 1 did not hesitate to express that he is a man of deep faith, he is also not one to overtly express or even impose that faith on others. He explained, “I don’t talk about it with a lot of people…. I don’t walk around telling people that, blessing them and things like that” (P1, 1, p. 25). Nevertheless, he is very self-aware that his work as a school leader is strongly driven by his faith. He reflects, “This is how I give back and I can feel like I am really contributing to society by creating circumstances where people can get better in their life” (P1, 1, p. 25). He further expresses that this calling, this ministry, is to “take those marginalized groups and …give them a better chance” (P1, 1, p. 25). Principal 1 truly believes he “can improve the situation for kids” (P1, 2, p. 1). He’s personally drive to raise kids up and by “really wanting to do good things for kids” (P1, 2, p. 1). He shares, “That’s what we’ve continually done, and it’s an example of getting marginalized students – maybe they’re not the bottom of the barrel but…… there was this glass ceiling and they couldn’t get up and now they can” (P1, 1, p. 6).

Developing the professional practice of teachers is another way Principal 1 gives back by working to elevate teachers who then ultimately elevate children. Improving teacher practice is an important method Principal 1 used to accomplish his ministry of giving back. Principal 1 carefully crafted a system of teacher learning through strategy walks so that it “is not sit and watch after school, but it’s go and watch with your colleagues, with your students, the same kids that you’re going to have next period and see the strategy in action” (P1, 1, p. 11). He wanted teachers to see that if their colleagues could use effective teaching methods with students who traditionally struggle in school, “then I sure as heck can do it with mine” (P1, 1, p. 11). The success of these
strategy walks is such that it garners “100% participation” and teachers “love it, and that's been huge in terms of increasing the capacity of teachers to work with marginalized students” (P1, 1, p. 11).

**Do the right thing**

Principal 1 is strongly guided by doing the right thing. He operates from the belief that if you do the “right” thing or pursue the “right” direction, that which is morally and ethically sound, you can build trust which then creates the conditions within which you can drive change. He points out that stakeholders “have to trust you, they have to trust the data, they have to believe that you’re going to use it for the right reasons” (P1, 1, p. 3). Principal 1 reflected that there are a “million avenues” for building a case for school change, but if you “build it….for the right reasons….then we can all move forward” (P1, 1, p. 4). He is committed to following the “right” path which is something that you “have to live….and walk….every day” (P1, 1, p. 4). For Principal 1, working for more equitable conditions for marginalized students is doing the right thing. He explained, “I think depending on the school if we’re talking about equity I think a person has to have that at their heart; that is not something they can come to work and turn on and go home and turn off. If you believe in equity you believe in that all the time” (P1, 2, p. 5). For Principal 1, doing the right thing is intimately tied to raising students up. He employs a variety of methods to accomplish his ministry of giving back.

**Methods for a Ministry of Giving Back**

Principal 1 drew upon four distinct methods to help him accomplish his mission including 1) maximize time through preparation and organization, 2) build a culture of trust and happiness among educators and students, 3) use data to drive change, and 4) build systems and processes to cause change. There is significance to the order of
presenting these four methods in that the first two methods are foundational to the success of the last 2 methods. The four methods are interconnected and together they comprise the methods Principal 1 leverages to accomplish his mission.

Maximize time through preparedness and organization

Principal 1 describes a commitment to preparedness and organization that is "relentless" and purposeful. It is not an exaggeration to say that Principal 1 is devoted to making the most effective use of the precious little time he has with teachers and students and, as a result, preparedness and organization are ever present on his mind to the point that they are what he has “worry about and stress about at night” (P1, 1, p. 6) and they are what he makes “sure that I attend to” (P1, 1, p. 6).

Principal 1’s commitment to preparedness and organization is revealed as he describes his belief that both are fundamentally necessary for overcoming the ever-present barrier in the life of an educator or school leader- time. Time is all too often the enemy of school improvement and school change efforts which can have the greatest impact on the success of marginalized students. He shares that “time is always a huge barrier for everybody, so you just have to be strategic about that……time of our staff from our secretaries to all of our support staff to our assistant principals to our teachers, everybody. How do we give everyone the time to maximize student achievement?” (P1, 1, p. 16). Planning, planning and even more planning is Principal 1’s solution for ensuring preparedness and organization as it helps reduce the barrier of time to work on the important things- building equity for student achievement. For example, he’s “militant about faculty meetings” (P1, 1, p. 7). Principal 1 is focused on “attention to detail…efficiency …being able to articulate…how everything contributes to the end” (P1, 2, p. 10) so that no time is wasted. Making every moment he has with teachers count
toward driving improvement, means he strives to always be prepared with an “agenda that's going to meet the needs of our students, and so let's let that be our focus rather than, 'What are we going to do about the parking lots?' Come on!” He explains that he does not run many whole faculty meetings, but when he has them “they will be ultra-organized. I won’t have anybody stand in front of our folks who I don’t already know what they’re going to say, I’ve seen them do this before, I know how it’s going to go. I don’t roll the dice on those things because I’m not going to waste our folks’ time and get them angry, because I’ve sat in too many of those.” (P1, 1, p. 7). He reiterates often that his focus on preparedness and organization means that “the time we’re going to use is going to be focused on student achievement and how do we move forward” (P1, 1, p. 16). Doing so is “how you overcome the barriers; you try to make your time useful to improving student achievement; again, focusing on those marginalized groups” (P1, 1, p. 17).

A second reason for Principal 1’s focus on preparedness and organization is his belief that failing to plan is the equivalent of planning to fail. To execute less than meticulous and purposeful planning, according to Principal 1, could actually damage his efforts to create equity at his school. He asserted, “If you have a conversation about equity and race and you’re winging it and you’re not strategic, you have done more damage than if you just ignored it, so you have to really plan” (P1, 1, p. 21). The costs of being unprepared and unorganized are just too great, possibly even ruinous for the change he’s trying to drive: “We’re going into a meeting so well-scripted and planned that we’re allowing for people to think and reflect but we’re not chancing what we cause
them to reflect on… oh my gosh, this could ruin our campus – no, why would we do that?” (P1, 1, p. 21).

Each of the reasons that support Principal 1’s commitment to making the most of educators’ time supports and drives the other. A final reason for Principal 1’s commitment to preparation and organization is driven by his efforts at improving teacher practice as a vehicle through which to improve student achievement, especially for marginalized students. This final reason is no different. Principal 1 explained that when he first became principal at his school, what the school “didn’t have was great instructional ….momentum” (P1, 1, p. 10) a phrase he uses for instructional leadership which drives the improvement of teacher practice. So, for him, when there is time available for working with teachers, any time of the year and in any capacity, the time must be “meaningful and people have to engage in adult learning styles and there’s value for them being there” (P1, 1, p. 10). Principal 1 shared that when planning for his time with teachers during pre-school for this coming school year, he looked back to what he planned for last year and was proud because:

The bulk of our time was spent on what we thought were keys for school improvement so we spent time on planning for success, on organizational tools that kids and teachers will use to get better because that’s something that we felt we needed to improve upon. We spent time on the Florida Standards and how do we get better. We spent time on what are our school improvement goals and what do they mean to you as a teacher in your room, and then we spent time on what does it mean to be college and career ready and our teachers engaged in a Socratic seminar led by other teachers and using Connelly’s Keys for College Readiness. (P1, 1, p. 16)

Principal 1 is ever-vigilant about protecting the time he has available with teachers:

When you’re talking about having teachers do certain things to improve practice, they don’t need to know and be involved in the ten thousand moving parts that get to what’s in front of them unless it’s relevant to what they need to do…they don’t maybe have the time to do that. (P1, 2, p. 10)
Principal 1’s meticulous preparation and organization means he’s planned for successful professional learning experiences, within the limited time available, that will grow teachers and impact their professional practice. It means “they have to engage in something; they have to talk about their content, they have to talk about their data, they have to talk to their colleagues about something else, they have to do a chalk talk” (P1, 1, p. 11). For Principal 1, failing to be prepared and organized, when it comes to working to improve school for all students, is a failure of leadership which for him is not an option.

**Foster a culture of trust and happiness**

Principal 1 is attuned to the fact that his ministry is a collaborative venture. To accomplish his mission, he needs to foster a school culture of trust and happiness for both teachers and students. He expresses that he wants more than just a willing staff, he wants his “faculty to be happy” (P1, 1, p. 7). Principal 1 works purposely to create a “happy and positive school climate” (P1, 1, p. 7). Principal 1 thinks “the culture at this school is one of positivity” (P1, 2, p. 17). Part of fostering positivity and happiness in a faculty and creating a positive school climate is ensuring that the faculty trusts him. Principal 1 clearly conveyed that building and protecting happiness and trust are “very, very important to me and I think that comes in a lot of ways. One is just being positive but two is following through, whatever that is, with parents, with students, with teachers, with community members. If you say you’re going to do something do it; don’t promise things that you can’t come through with” (P1, 1, p. 7).

Consistency is a vehicle through which Principal 1 works to build a trusting and positive school climate. Principal 1 believes consistency is a drive for building and
fostering trust and happiness. Students, he explains, have a fundamental need for consistency. He believes students need to:

Know that when I come to school today the busses are going to get off in the same place, I’m going to go to the cafeteria, the food’s going to be warm, the bell’s going to ring on time; if I’m late, here’s where I go. There’s not going to be this “Today walk on this side of the hallway, tomorrow park your cars over here. Next week we’re changing our English curriculum.” There’s going to be a structure and that’s not going to change…..it’s not going to be chaos. (P1, 1, p. 7)

Principal 1’s shares that his attention to consistency also pays off in trust and happiness by providing consistent access to him by students and teachers. He believes it is very important that teachers and students know that he is always “out front in the morning at 6:30….out front in the afternoon for 20 minutes. I don’t miss a lunch unless I’m off campus, I don’t miss a class change unless there’s something really pressing” (P1, 1, p. 7). He explains that this “puts me in front of teachers and kids and parents three hours a day….and that eliminates a lot of problems; people can find me” (P1, 1, p. 7). They can come with “questions that they need answered, and they know they can come find me” (P, 1, p. 6).

Principal 1 describes another simple approach to building a climate of trust and happiness at his school- giving voice and choice to his staff whenever possible. Principal 1 relayed an example of how he gives options to his staff whenever he is able to. He shares a simple and rather benign instance of giving voice and choice to staff in the planning of the school’s master schedule that he believes went a long way toward building happiness and trust with his faculty:

So we do a lot of frontload work or what do you want to teach, why do you want to teach those things; if you could have any planning period what would it be? How do you want to work with in terms of an academy team, what clubs, because for the most part you can make those things happen. If you’ve got 15 English teachers then you’ve got 15 different planning
periods, and if one person really feels strongly about having fifth because they want to tutor kids at lunch, well we can probably make that happen. Now we're not going to make it happen at the detriment of getting kids in classes, but once we look at it all and go, “Oh, look, we can move her English II out of fifth and give it to somebody else,” and that person wanted a planning period earlier in the day anyway. You can do those things. So you get your faculty to be happy. (P1, 1, p. 7)

For Principal 1, building a climate of trust and happiness is essential for the more difficult conversations and decisions that arise when the discussion turns away from the benign topic of when a particular planning period might fall to a much more serious topic such as why students of color or students in poverty may not be succeeding at the same rates as white students. Principal 1 believes using data to drive leadership and instructional decisions is key to improving school. What makes that work is how Principal 1 uses data that will positively drive teacher actions. For him, it’s “really a key piece….using data and using it in a powerful way” (P1, 1, p. 3). He describes how when he started “data tracking on school improvement seven, eight years ago” (P1, 1, p. 3), resistance and worry from the teachers was small. “A couple teachers – not many, but a couple said, ’You’re going to use that against my evaluation; you’re going to do it this way, you’re going to do it that way,’ and I said you’re just going to have to trust me that we’re not” (P1, 1, p. 3). He fervently explains that in order to use data powerfully, especially when data reveal differences in the achievement of students across teachers, “They have to trust you, they have to trust the data, they have to believe that you’re going to use it for the right reasons” (P1, 1, p. 3). Principal 1 is adamant that in order for school leaders to leverage the use of data to drive improvement, teachers cannot be “worried that we’re going to air out some data, and I might be at the bottom of the totem pole” (P1, 1, p. 3). Instead teachers have to be able to receive the data within a trusting and positive climate where they can accept the data and believe that “I’m not going to
be embarrassed by it. I’m disappointed, but I’m going to be able to move forward with it” (P1, 1, p. 3).

Because of Principal 1’s efforts to ensure a climate of trust and happiness at his school, there are “trusting relationships” where “people see that that data is going to be used for the right reasons to excel and accelerate our kids and teachers (P1, 1, p. 4).

Additionally, Principal 1 believes that when “things academically aren’t going well, the culture of the school is one to say we can attack this; we’re not going to get hysterical about it; this is how we’re going to move forward” (P1, 2, p. 18). So fostering a culture of trust and happiness is a critical method supporting the collective work improving the practice of teachers and the success of students.

**Use data to drive change**

Of all the leadership traits and methods that Principal 1 is known and respected for in my district, his approach and ability to use data to drive improvement is always featured atop any list anyone might create about his strengths. For Principal 1, building a compelling rationale for tackling issues in school, such as the inequitable achievement of marginalized students, begins and ends with data. He strongly believes that “nothing speaks better to a teacher than data” (P1, 1, p. 3). When it comes to the really hard work of closing achievement gaps, of raising up marginalized students, Principal 1 expresses that you “start addressing problems by first identifying what are really the data points around there so that when you’re addressing an issue and you’re trying to improve the lot in life so to speak for a student or a group of students, you really have facts” (P1, 1, p. 2). This section will detail Principal 1’s methodical use of data to build a case for change that improves the achievement of all students, especially students who are traditionally marginalized and struggle in school.
The first issue, or barrier to raising the achievement of all students, that Principal 1 works to use data to address involves changing what are often unspoken belief systems of teachers that all too often perpetuate inequities. His experience has been that “you address beliefs by having people examine their own….really reflecting on them and you have to do that sometimes in a personal way” (P1, 1, p. 18). His approach to using data to drive change is so permeating that he described an experience where he collected statements about his staff’s beliefs regarding the “causes” of the achievement gap. His aim was to “use trends in beliefs that you do have from public things to try to help change beliefs” (P1, 1, p. 18). He got at the beliefs of his staff by providing them with reminders of the previous school year’s goals for the academic achievement of black students and contrasted those goals with the end of year data that was ultimately the outcome of their collective work on those goals. Then Principal 1 asked his staff a very simple question to get at their beliefs: “Why do you think the data is this way” (P1, 1, p. 20)? Once he had those belief statements, which were created privately, he picked some out to share publicly. He picked “seven of the responses that were in my view and in the view of people who value equity, not helping equity” (P1, 1, p. 20). All seven of the statements that Principal 1 selected served to surface beliefs about deficits within their black students, or their families, or their culture. Rather predictably, one particularly revealing statement explained that “if education isn’t valued in the home, then why would we expect it to be valued here?” (P1, 1, p. 20) when referring specifically to the homes of black students. Principal 1 placed the seven comments on a screen in public view and asked his teachers an incredibly poignant question. He challenged his staff to consider “if I’m a Black male and these seven
comments represent my seven teachers….what chance do I have for being successful at…..School?” (P1, 1, p. 20). Principal 1 explains that there was “silence in the room; total silence; people were embarrassed and sheepish” (P1, 1, p. 20). However, exposing the belief data around the causes of the gap opened the door for Principal 1 to share small pockets of great success where data about black student achievement painted a different picture of what could be done about the gap “with some intensive support” (P1, 1, p. 20). Principal 1 presented data that illustrated how with intensive support, “African-American males out-performed all other peer groups in writing, because we did pull-outs with them with our very best writing teacher” (P1, 1, p. 20). That pocket of impressive writing data for black males served, in a powerful way because of the framework within which it was presented, to dispel the notion that the achievement gap is due to deficits inherent in the students. In this example of using data to drive change as a method of working for equity for all students, “normal” is a set of beliefs held by teachers and that ultimately drive their actions and expectations with and for students. De-normalizing “normal” required Principal 1’s expert use of data, both qualitative and quantitative in this example, to drive a change in their beliefs and a subsequent change in their actions.

Principal 1 provided several more examples where his approach over the years has been to methodically use data to de-normalize normal, to take “away the myth or the tradition or legend of ‘his group of students can’t do,’ or, ‘This group of students does this’” (P1, 1, p. 1). One such myth about black students was that “they’re not engaged; they’re not academic” (P1, 1, p. 2). One year, to dispel that myth that was held as normal, Principal 1 added data collection points “on our walk-through for
‘Student Engagement’ for African-American students and non-African-American students and tracked that over and over and over in every walk-through” (P1, 1, p. 2).

Overwhelmingly, the data from

over four or five hundred walk-throughs….was there was no difference in African-American student engagement versus non-African-American student engagement. The difference was the teacher, so if the kids were engaged in your class then all students were engaged; if kids were not engaged in your class then all students weren’t engaged. (P1, 1, p. 2)

The normal belief that black students are not academically engaged in school is de-normalized by data which instead explains that “yes they are; they are when teachers engage them” (P1, 1, p. 2).

Principal 1 also worked to de-normalize traditionally high course failure rates for marginalized students by using data to drive a conversation about a glaring disconnect between those high failure rates and the school’s core values and mission. During a meeting with his staff, he provided data on the “the top ten failure rates in the school right now – I took the teacher names off obviously…. I think we put A’s, B’s, C’s, D’s all the way across so you could see” (P1, 1, p. 18) and highlighting an anonymous teacher “who has a 78% failure in their class” (P1, 1, p. 18). Next, he reminded the staff about the school’s graduation rate targets and their “school mission of every student will leave here college and career ready” (P1, 1, p. 18). Principal 1 used all of that data, all of that information to drive a collective discussion where teachers would own the obvious conclusion that their course failure data would prevent them from living their core values and accomplishing their mission. He explained to the faculty:

If those are our core values and this is our mission and these are what we said we’re going to do this year and we know that we have to get to this target graduation rate…We all agree to that…We cannot meet any of these goals with this; we can’t. There’s no amount of credit recovery,
there’s no amount of summer school, there’s no amount of double-blocking kids; it does not exist, that will undo this, ok? (P1, 1, p. 18)

And even more importantly, his use of data facilitated conversations that drove changes in how the staff would approach the issue of large percentages of course failures. The staff took ownership of those course failures and collaborated to discover “what do you do in your room and when kids don’t do this” (P1, 1, p. 19) to find solutions to prevent course failures. For Principal 1, “using data and using it in a powerful way” (P1, 1, p. 3) is an essential method to employ in order to “raise marginalized groups of students or even marginal teachers” (P1, 1, p. 3).

**Build systems/processes for change**

Some of Principal 1’s most observable, and measurable efforts in his quest to operationalize his mission of raising the achievement of marginalized students involves building systems and processes that will, by their nature, cause change. The data revealed three distinct examples where he either changed systems and processes purposefully to de-normalize and disrupt the status quo, or where he worked to institute systems and processes in order to raise the achievement of marginalized students: 1) creation of a pipeline for acceleration, 2) creating systems for school-wide college and career readiness, and 3) creating systems of support to navigate post-secondary success.

**Pipeline for acceleration.** When Principal 1 first became the leader of his school, the school “had a history of having just a handful of really bright, capable students in Advanced Placement courses” (P1, 1, p. 5). With Advanced Placement (AP) enrollment data in hand, he worked to build a case for increasing enrollment by providing access to students traditionally under-represented in those courses. Using
that historical data of very low enrollment in AP courses, Principal 1 showed his staff “a model and said, ‘Ok if we continue with those same practices, here’s what our school grade will be; we will always be a D; that will be our default….So let’s just know that’s our reality’” (P1, 1, p. 5).

Principal 1 then offered his staff a solution for moving forward, he shared, “If we want to change that, here’s one way we can change it….we can increase and open access” (P1, 1, p. 5). Opening access to AP classes and enrolling larger numbers of traditionally marginalized students would require accompanying changes in other school structures to support those students. Principal 1 tackled that issue next proposing a variety of plans to his staff explaining “Here’s how we’ll support students …. maybe we can have them in AVID so they have a support mechanism…. Maybe we can create some study sessions for students; maybe we can look at this…” (P1, 1, p. 6). AVID, or Advancement Via Individual Determination, is a class with the sole purpose of inspiring and academically supporting prospective high school graduates who would be “first in their family to go to college” (P1, 1, p. 9). Principal 1 worked to create a pipeline for acceleration by “working with kids in the academic middle” (P1, 2, p. 16). He knew he had to expand AVID so the school could accelerate “kids who would be the first in their family to go to college” to expand “advanced placement honors dual enrollment courses for all kids” (P1, 2, p. 16). Having more students in AVID meant there were yet more changes needed because even access to AVID had to be opened up. To accomplish that, Principal 1, had to end an application process and change personnel. He described how the school had “a very small AVID program when I came” (P1, 1, p. 9) partly because of a “cantankerous coordinator…who didn’t really believe that kids could
really achieve” (P1, 1, p. 9) and partly because “you had to have an application, the parent had to come in for a meeting and an interview. And so we’d send out like 150 invitations and we’d get five parents…. to the meeting” (P1, 1, p. 9). Principal 1 acted on both of those things and “changed our coordinator” and ended the application and parent interview system. The end result was that, through changes and additions to the existing AVID system and processes, Principal 1 was able to “expand that program and we went from about 30 students to now about 350 will be in AVID next year” (P1, 1, p. 9). Ultimately, those series of actions, whether they were changes to existing systems and processes, or newly instituted systems and processes, worked together to accomplish his initial goal of creating a pipeline for marginalized student to access accelerated courses. Through Principal 1’s pipeline-building methodology, the needle on AP enrollment data moved “from 150 registrations the prior year to 600 the next year, or a little bit less than 600, 580 I think, and guess what; the pass rate was the same” (P1, 1, p. 9). Although it was evident in this example that addressing even just one school structure that perpetuated inequity would mean setting of a cascade of necessary changes, with a range of complexities to navigate in order to effect change, the ultimate results paid a high return on Principal 1’s personal and professional investments. Principal 1 cited a “500% or 350% increase in the number of students” enrolling in accelerated AP courses who had traditionally had little access to those courses, not to mention success. Which is even better news because as Principal 1 shared “and our pass rate was the same” (P1, 1, p. 9). The pipeline of access to accelerated courses, and support for success in those courses, that Principal 1 built to de-normalize normal at his school could be sustained and scaled to continue the efforts
to increase the enrollment and achievement of marginalized students long after his tenure as Principal of that school.

**School-wide college and career readiness.** Principal 1 was keenly aware that raising the achievement of all of the marginalized students would require structural changes or additions to the systems and processes at his school. If acceleration was “good practice for kids, if this is a great way to expand more kids into college, if this is a great way to have more under-served populations get where they need to go” (P1, 2, p. 2), the next step meant Principal 1 had to ask himself, “What is the…. piece that makes that move?” (P1, 2, p. 2). He had to effect systems change if he was truly purposefully seeking to destabilize the status quo that had long produced inequitable student outcomes. This second example of how Principal 1 worked to effect change by changing systems and processes is a great example of those school-wide efforts. He realized that it was a wonderful accomplishment to secure open access and strong support for marginalized students who had long been excluded from accelerated courses, but what was happening school-wide for the same types of students in traditional courses? There were always going to be much greater numbers of students in those kinds of settings.

Principal 1 decided on his methodology for this work by drawing on the successes of his efforts at supporting the acceleration of students- leveraging those same supports to improve the achievement of all students in all courses. Principal 1 decided that although he could not open enough AVID classes to enroll all students in those classes, he could build a system and processes to ensure the school-wide spread of the effective pedagogy and strategies within AVID. After all, his staff had already
“bought into that and part of that is AVID’s mission to close the achievement gap; that is their mission, to close the achievement gap and prepare all students for college readiness” (P1, 1, p. 12). Because of his earlier work, Principal 1 realized that “our folks recognize that these sets of strategies works with the population that we have” (P1, 1, p. 13) so he set out to build systems to spread those and “get better at those” (P1, 1, p. 13) making those strategies “our platform for instruction” (P1, 1, p. 13). Principal 1 effected such impactful change in his efforts to make AVID strategies the “platform for instruction,” that the school is now a National AVID Demonstration School- the only school in our district to have earned that designation. Once again, making that structural change to his school set off a cascade of other necessary changes or additions to other long-standing structures and processes. For instance, Principal 1 changed hiring priorities. He purposefully “hired in the last two years three folks who were the AVID site coordinators at their school who wanted to come here and work in an AVID environment, and they’re not even the site coordinator; they’re just contributing” (P1, 1, p. 13). He added a central focus for teacher professional development, inside and outside of school, which the school would sponsor financially. Referring to AVID training, Principal 1 explains he leveraged funds from another school initiative to send “twenty-some teachers…. because we believe in this school wide to raise all students. We sent three ESE teachers; the first time we’ve ever sent ESE folks… we sent four Career Technical Education folks; the first time AVID’s ever offered Career Technical Education so our folks are some of the first folks in the country to get that strand.” The end result of these changes or additions to bring AVID to the forefront of their efforts on behalf of all students is “100% participation; our people love it, and
that’s been huge in terms of increasing the capacity of teachers to work with marginalized students” (P1, 1, p. 11).

**Support for post-secondary success.** Principal 1 leaves nothing to chance when it comes to ensuring students know how to navigate school in order to be maximally prepared to position themselves to access college or continuing educational programs after high school. His drive for this is deeply connected to his personal history as a student in school as discussed at the beginning of this case study. For Principal 1 this starts with intense efforts at systems and processes for providing information to, and engaging, parents and students. The school provides a lot information, provided in a lot of ways to ensure saturation:

We have a four-page handout on college-going culture on things that we’ve done that we give out… we have a college week; we have parent nights where we learn the trick to get parents in is to give them something about their child, so every parent gets their child’s transcript and we review it with them and that brings people out because, “Hey, that’s my kid. You’re not just lecturing me about college; I’m looking at my own child’s transcript and finding out…” Every bulletin board in this school has a college and career ready focus; it’s on FASFA, it’s on deadlines for college…..every single bulletin board is developed by students; the students manage them and they’re all college and career focused. We now have little flags in our hallways to represent all the different colleges, so as students walk through they’re looking up and at all times they’re thinking I might be able to go to college. (P1, 1, p. 23)

There was push back when all the traditional mediums and spaces in school for communicating events and non-instructional information to students were secured in support of promoting and informing the college-going culture. Principal 1 explains there “was a little bit of a… ‘Where are we going to put the homecoming stuff?’” (P1, 1, p. 23). And his response was a consistent, “Put it on a poster next to it” (P1, 1, p. 23), and he “bought little tack boards and those are somewhere else” and he steadfastly held to the
commitment that the main message students would be surrounded by, would revolve around information for accessing college.

Maximizing the use of time they have when students are in school, but outside of classrooms, to promote a college-going culture was next in line as Principal 1 worked to build school-wide systems in support of marginalized students. He describes how they “do all kinds of games and different things during lunch time to raise college awareness. We do an SAT, ACT college game. We do college pong” (P1, 1, p. 23). They purposefully set up these activities during lunch “because that’s where our kids are and kids can’t stay after school, they can’t come to clubs; they don’t have transportation” (P1, 1, p. 23).

Lunch time is also a time that Principal 1 used to ensure all students were part of this college-going culture. He worked to ensure that all students felt they were equally important members of their school and that culture. He instituted a multicultural fair to raise the profile of traditionally marginalized students. In this now award-winning fair, he explains there were “25 different countries were represented with students who were so proud to show off their home country. And then our culinary students prepared dishes with the help of the ESOL students” (P1, 1, p. 24). The results of this fair, in Principal 1’s thinking, were “Awesome,” despite the efforts required to manage “a thousand kids running around the courtyard at once all engaged in these games and activities – kind of chaos…” (P1, 1, p. 24). The return on investment for instituting this now annual, multi-cultural fair, P1, 1, p. 24) was an increase in “the respect level…” (P1, 1, p. 24) by others for the cultures of marginalized students. There was great pride displayed by marginalized students as Principal 1 describes, “We had flags hanging from every
window across our courtyard so when students went up, ‘That’s my flag, this is my
country, here’s a food dish, here’s a traditional game that we play’” (P1, 1, p. 24).

A ministry of giving back provided the framework from which to answer the
central question of this study. It captured the mission and methods of Principal 1’s
work, creating equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in his
school. The findings for Principal 2, which are presented next, allowed for a
continuation of a ministry metaphor and framework through which we can understand
the mission and methods he pursued in his calling to social justice work.

Principal 2’s Story: A Ministry for Success

Personal History as a Student

Principal 2’s personal history as a student serves to set the purpose, agenda,
and urgency for his work as a school leader. Principal 2 is personally driven to change
school so that students do not experience what school was like for him. For Principal 2,
school was a place where he felt the entire system, including his teachers “did not
believe I could be successful,” (P2, 1, p. 22). In fact, school was a place where people
did not only believe he “could” be successful, he believed they “thought that I wouldn’t
be successful” (P2, 1, p. 22). Principal 2 experienced school as a place where people
sorted him “into some category of a lower achieving kid who was a nice kid who will do
fine in life doing whatever, but they didn’t believe that I could be more successful” (P2,
1, p. 22). As a result, “The system didn’t push me; the system didn’t believe in me” (P2,
1, p. 22). The failure of educators to believe in him was perhaps more significant to
Principal 2 than it might have been to others because he experienced a difficult family
life from an early age.
Principal 2 experienced the loss of his mother when he was quite young. He was raised by a “dad who worked as a maintenance guy and we didn’t make any money, so I am a kid of…. lower middle class….as low as middle class could be” (P2, 1, p. 18). He describes that his upbringing in a household that was just shy of poverty was a “struggle” and that he is somebody who “as a result of my struggle, had low expectations of myself and my future” (P2, 1, p. 18). As a struggling student, Principal 2 believed “it’s the system’s job; in this case it’s the school system, the community, somebody’s job, to help that young kid see the light” (P2, 1, p. 21). As a result, “Now….many years later and I’m helping to reform the system….And what I mean by that is I want to be at the table making decisions that contribute to a better system” (P2, 1, p. 22) that helps struggling students. Principal 2 explicitly expresses that he thinks “my personal history has made me hell bent on making that happen” (P2, 1, p. 22). A final important note about Principal 2’s personal story as a student in school is that Principal 2 actually was a student at the school he currently leads. To say that his work effecting school change on behalf of struggling students, with whom he identifies so closely, is personal to him is a great understatement.

How personally does Principal 2 take this work? So personally that he feels strongly that only people like him, who personally experienced the pain of struggling in school, “should lead those type of schools; you’ve got to have a heart for it” (P2, 1, p. 19). He ponders, however, if this personal drive and connection he has with struggling students could set contradictory or conflicting definitions for successful school change. Or could that personal experience at the very least set up contradictions in how school leaders like him prioritize and go about school change and what they decide to value.
and celebrate as successful school change. He reflects, “It’s funny…. I would also think those type of people though are in it for those reasons and then – as much as the superintendent doesn’t want me to say this probably – probably care less about the data and the outcomes because they’re fighting the fight for larger reasons and of course they want to reduce the achievement gap…. those things that mean a lot…. but they’re going to celebrate the smaller successes” (P2, 1, p. 19).

A Ministry for Success

Principal 2 identifies as a “pretty devout Christian” (P2, 1, p. 18). He brings that up because his “background and….religious beliefs” (P2, 1, p. 18) are such “that I think everybody’s equal and I think everybody’s equal in God’s eyes and all that stuff; it’s biblical; that exists” (P2, 1, p. 18). He believes, “Every human being wants to be successful; that every human being is equally able to be successful” (P2, 1, p. 19) and that “all parents want their kids to be successful” (P2, 1, p. 19). The work that Principal 2 undertakes to de-normalize normal in school, to transform it into a place where struggling students achieve success in school, is deeply rooted in his belief in a fundamental human right to experience success. Principal 2’s work is driven by the goal to experience success himself and to help everyone he touches to experience success. Principal 2 deeply believes that “once you become a turnaround leader, your school has to improve. It could be the look of your campus, it could be the growth of your magnets, it could be winning basketball games, and … academic movement, but there has to be some early victories” (P2, 2, p. 16). Success for all is Principal 2’s ministry—the story of his work within that ministry will unfold through the findings of this second case study.
The data indicate that Principal 2’s mission has two main components that together allow him to “help struggling students be successful” as he’s called to do in his efforts to transform school: 1) Build relationships and 2) Set high expectations for all.

**Build relationships**

Principal 2 believes so strongly in the power of relationships to improve the achievement of struggling students that he views his ability to build and foster relationships as the most important leadership skill he brought to this work. This is central to his mission, so much so that he wants to be sure he is recorded expressing that he does not “think systems and processes are the solution – I will be clear – did you hear me on that recorder? Systems and processes are not the solution because I don’t think it starts there” (P2, 1, p. 17). One of the reasons Principal 2 feels so strongly about relationships is that he once worked under a school leader who was a very poor relationship builder who subsequently had very poor relationships with his teachers: “He was not a relationship builder….so I think that he was an empty suit. I think we have principals around the nation that … operate like that, so they’re principal in name only” (P2, 2, p. 2). Principal 2 responded to a question about the nature of the most important work he’s engaged in since he was appointed as leader of his school by sharing that “the way I would answer your question is to start by saying something about relationships. So I would say it is the affect that I think about mostly in answering your question. And maybe that’s because I’m not somebody who believes the solutions are in process sort of stuff” (P2, 1, p. 3). Principal 2 believes so deeply in the importance of relationships and in taking stock of the state of one’s relationships that each year he uses a self-reflection tool with students where he asks them to consider things like whether they’ve “made more friends….built more relationships….been involved in my
community….repaired a relationship at home that I had lost” (P2, 1, p. 15). The examples that follow will serve to illustrate the ways in which Principal 2 works to bring his mission building and leveraging relationships to life at his school.

Principal 2 shared that the “first thing I thought about when I got to my school, the way I’ve characterized my school, is to have a school that kids of every sort enjoyed coming to and felt safe at…. and felt loved and all that sort of stuff – it’s totally affect,” (P2, 1, p. 3). Principal 2 explained that one way he went about ensuring that relationships would become central to the work of his school was through the hiring process. To that end, he pointed out that his “first concern at my school was to hire people from the secretary to the custodian to the cafeteria worker to the algebra teacher who cared about kids. That is it, because I know that kids will run through the wall for people who care about them” (P2, 1, p. 3). He reminded me that the struggling students for whom he is trying to drive change oftentimes, and like him, come from backgrounds of “single parent families, disenfranchised people and all the things that come with that” (P2, 1, p. 2). Those backgrounds, and the issues that are almost always connected to them, are aggravated when there’s also a lack of strong relationships in school. For Principal 2, strong relationships with struggling students are necessary to make school relevant to students who are traditionally not successful in school. He sees learning through the lens of relationships as well. His notion about students running through a wall for teachers who care about them is connected to ensuring that:

…the learning is relevant to that kid, and that’s relational, too, is the point, that there’s not a disconnect… it’s not just a friendly teacher who’s teaching content that’s irrelevant; it’s got to be a friendly, accommodating, supportive teacher who’s helping the kids to understand that the learning is important. Otherwise the kid will come to school and like the teacher and never learn the stuff. I won’t get too far into that but there’s a lot of
examples I could give you of a kid who did better because we explained to them the value. They cared about us and we created value for them. (P2, 1, p. 4)

Building relationships with the larger community in which the school is situated was another central part of the work Principal 2 engaged in to improve the achievement of the school’s most struggling students. Because Principal 2's school is a “School of Choice” with an application process for several of its programs that spans the entire district, there is great diversity in its student population. And of course not all of the students at his school are struggling academically or herald from the same backgrounds of the students who are the focus of this study. However, the school itself is physically located in a very low socioeconomic working class neighborhood, where the highest educational degree earned is very typically a high school diploma or a GED. Within that context, Principal 2 very purposefully reached out to form relationships with his school’s surrounding community which of course is where the majority of his most struggling students came from. He wanted the school to “get involved with the community; that was one of the first things I wanted to do” (P2, 1, p. 5) to strengthen the relationships with struggling students that he was working to build inside of school. Principal 2 also “wanted the community to see…. kids in a positive light so we started a…..community outreach sort of program” (P2, 1, p. 5), which he marketed extensively as our “[School] Cares” (P2, 1, p. 5).

Principal 2 also intended to use this community outreach project, and the improved relationships it would foster, as a springboard for another key component of his work to improve the performance of struggling students. That key component, presented in the Methods section of this case study, entails Principal 2’s building models of success within his school for students who rarely experience traditional
academic, or any kind of success, in school. He “wanted for those kids … to see success in something” (P2, 1, p. 6). Through the community outreach program he “had kids…..come in on a Saturday… we might come into the neighborhood and weed people’s lawns and those sort of things” (P2, 1, p. 6). And that in fact did happen--all students who participated in the outreach program experienced being successful contributors to the community.

There were other more mixed results for the program. Principal 2 noted that one of the tougher issues to resolve when working to improve the performance of struggling students, is poor attendance. Principal 2 believes that this problem has “not greatly improved” (P2, 1, p. 3) at his school. Ironically, he described instances where he “had kids who would come on Saturday for [School] Cares, every Saturday – you know what I’m going to say? Never came to school, never, never; I’m not kidding you” (P2, 1, p. 6).

However, Principal 2 understands that leveraging relationships and building value for students are not enough to drive academic improvement. Principal 2 is deeply aware that poor academic outcomes for struggling students are often a product of low expectations of students by teachers who, with the greatest of intentions, conflate caring for students with lowering expectations.

**Set high expectations**

Principal 2 noted after being appointed leader of his school that there was a large proportion of struggling students that comprised the school’s student body. He also noted that his teachers were very cognizant that this was the population they were serving and that they cared very much for their students. As a result, he concluded that the pervasive acceptance and care for “who and what” the typical student profile tended
to be at the school created the conditions for poor student performance and low student success via a culture of low expectations.

Principal 2 explains that there was a “complete disconnect between the teachers and the kids and maybe the principal about whether these struggling kids could actually succeed” (P2, 1, p. 4). He explained his teachers held a “total misunderstanding of kids from struggling backgrounds, because what they want… like all kids….all people, want to be pushed; all people expect to be successful – I believe in all that stuff (P2, 1, p. 4). This conflicted with Principal 2’s beliefs “that all people want to be successful, that all parents want their kids to be successful, that all, not some, not almost all, all children want to change the world and be successful” (P2, 1, p. 4).

The culture of low expectations for students was built around what the teachers saw in their student body. He shared that the school’s 1900 or so students were “for the most part highly Caucasian, low socio-economic” (P2, 1, p. 1) with “a small but growing Hispanic population of about 17% and a relatively small African-American population of around 10%” (P2, 1, p. 1). Principal 2 elaborated that his teachers had experienced working with their student’s families, that low socio-economic status often meant “single parent families, disenfranchised people and all the things that come with that – cycle of failure issues” (P2, 1, p. 2). He explained further that at his school, struggling students had been defined as kids who “do not come to school with the same set of skill sets and/or expectations for success that other kids do” (P2, 1, p. 2) including that the data showed “they do not perform well on standardized testing” (P2, 1, p. 2).

As a result, Principal 2 had to take action to change the unfortunate status quo of low expectations for success that had settled in as a result of teachers’ perceptions and
lived experiences with the typical student who comprised a large proportion of his school. Those low expectations governed the interactions between teachers and students. He explained, “Low expectations were not just the norm; that’s too easily said…..it was a school where people said if we don’t push the kids, they won’t push back and then everybody will be happy” (P2, 1, p. 4). Principal 2 decided on a course of action which would help teachers and students experience success, success at anything at first. He believed that teachers and students needed to be surrounded in a culture that expected and experienced success. What he did mostly at first “was talk about what it would look like to be successful” (P2, 1, p. 4) because at his school, to de-normalize the culture of low expectations for struggling students “it was just as important to have a great band and a great football team as it was to have strong algebra or reading scores” (P2, 1, p. 5). At Principal 2’s school, because “they didn’t expect to be good at anything…. when we started to be good at some things then they said, ‘oh, we can be good at this’” (P2, 1, p. 5). Principal 2 went about “instituting an expectation to be excellent, an expectation to be good” at anything they were trying to do (P2, 1, p. 5).

Setting high expectations for everything they worked to do with students, from athletics to academics, was very hard work. Principal 2 describes it as “a trying and tiring day-to-day struggle at a school like that” (P2, 1, p. 5). He continued, “It’s tiring, it’s draining and they sometimes want to give up; they believe in it but… What we’re talking about here isn’t easy” (P2, 1, p. 5). And the expectations he worked mostly to improve were those around the academic performance. He worked to set up an “enjoyable learning environment with high expectations at the end” (P2, 1, p. 12). Setting high expectations for everything meant sending “messages to kids that things matter and
getting this assignment right leads to getting the test right” (P2, 2, p. 8). When reflecting on those efforts, Principal 2 conveyed, “If you walk the school right now without me there I think you’d see bell to bell learning, kids on task doing grade level work, which we really weren’t doing before. I don’t think you’ll see kids doing things that are too easy, too simple for them” (P2, 1, p. 13).

Lastly, as Principal 2 set about methodically changing the culture of low expectations that permeated his school, the pace at which a change could and should take place was also something to wrestle with. He acknowledged that there’s also a sense of urgency that has to accompany this work. Principal 2 opined, “No pressure, no diamonds,” (P2, 1, p. 11). He had to find ways to “provide enough pressure on the kid to do better than he thinks he can do, the teacher to go to the training, to look at the data” (P2, 1, p. 11) to not just accept things for what they were but to believe they could be better and through this belief to drive actions to make them better. Making that work even more difficult, because his mission is to engage in this work through relationships, for Principal 2 “it was always pressure/support, pressure and support” (P2, 1, p. 11). He disarmingly reflects that there was “fair concern about me as a leader….would I push people enough to have the change occur because I believe in relationships” (P2, 1, p. 11). Knowing this, Principal 2 worked to find a “happy medium between… ‘Hey we’re getting there,’ and ‘What’s taking so long?’ So that sense of urgency came about” (P2, 1, p. 1). Principal 2 methodically worked with a compassionate sense of urgency to build models of success for his students and teachers. Those specific actions that Principal 2 undertook to set high expectations for student success where only low expectations previously existed will be described in the methods section that follows.
Methods for Success of All Students

Principal 2 drew upon two distinct methods to help him accomplish his mission, building models of success, and valuing and empowering others. Similar to the case study presented for Principal 1, there is significance to the order of presentation of these two methods. Principal 2 emphasized the importance of experiencing early/quick success with both students and teachers for his ability to transform the school. For that reason, building models for success will be presented first in this section.

Build models of success

Principal 2’s personal history as a student in school influenced the first method he employed to work on behalf of the success of all students. Because he identifies so closely with struggling students, having literally lived the experience, Principal 2 worked to show teachers and students a different model of what the school experience could be like. He explains that seeing a different model, a role model of success, made a tremendous impact on his ability to see a different and better future than he had thought was possible for him. Principal 2 shares a story, with students and teachers alike at school, about his high school girlfriend. He explains that he

happened to date a girl in high school who lived in a more affluent family; two-parent family and all that, and I couldn’t believe there were people out there like that. I’d never met anybody who had normalcy. She was going to college, she did her homework… that helped change me, but the point in that is I was able to see how other people carried themselves and live; I had a model for success, and so then I opened my eyes to that. (P2, 1, p. 18)

So for Principal 2, disrupting the status quo of low expectations and the accompanying low academic performance that typically ensues, entailed building models of success as quickly as possible, in as many ways as possible, so that his teachers and students too could have their eyes opened to the possibilities for success. How strong is his desire
to do this? “I just think my personal history has made me hell bent on making that happen, so I think that’s what led me to take on this school” (P2, 1, p. 22). He proclaimed, “Well I’m looking for early wins, ok? I’ve never been part of a great school that didn’t have great athletics and didn’t have great arts, so I worked a lot… I spent as much time on the band and the football team as I did on reading because I knew it would affect reading – see what I’m saying” (P2, 2, p. 18)? In studying Principal 2’s work in this regard, there is great overlap with his work on building relationships. Principal 2’s first effort to show his students and teachers a model of success was also a method to build relationships. He developed the “School Cares” program right from the start because he “wanted for those kids….to see success in something” (P2, 1, p. 6).

Going further, and to help provide a model for success that was tied more closely with programmatic achievement, Principal 2 worked to build an arts program at the school. He explained that he was looking for opportunities for success that would be connected most naturally for his students, where he could leverage assets they did possess and help them experience success. He looked to “band, chorus, drama” (P2, 1, p. 6). He “built an arts program….because the kids I had…..were sort of artsy kind of kids” (P2, 1, p. 6). Principal 2 started to “work on clubs and sports and … performing arts and graphic arts programs.” He believed that the arts programs could serve as a model of success at school that could transfer to other forms of school success for his struggling students. And if in the real world, success in the arts meant artists had a venue for showcasing their work, then Principal 2’s school would create that model as well. So, Principal 2 started “a showcase evening, arts evening….And our arts evening
wasn’t just art; it wasn’t just paintings and drawings – there was some of that – but again it would be the kid who wanted to showcase one of his raps or one of their songs, a kid playing the guitar – every type of kid” (P2, 1, p. 6). As evidence of the effectiveness of these showcase evenings to serve as models of success for struggling students, Principal 2 shares:

I think every kid could pretty much give you something they’ve created that they’re proud of. Again it’s like my school helped me to have something to show for my learning. I mean again we have a student dance team now, so some kids express themselves that way. We have a student literacy team that does like the performance poetry and things like that. When I’m saying arts you have to spend more time at my school. Arts in most schools is drama, and there’s chorus… that doesn’t really… We have those kids but when we have the school musical… ok, our school musical… I’m going to exaggerate but I would be willing to bet… it feels like half the kids are in the musical or helping with the musical. Our arts evening has 500 kids showcased in it. (P2, 1, p. 14)

These outcomes, Principal 2 explains, directly result from his efforts at building a model for success. His efforts have meant that about 90% of his students are “involved, by any definition of what that means to you. If you said that means joining a club or a sport, yes; they’re doing something….above and beyond coming to school and going home” (P2, 1, p. 14). This is extremely important to Principal 2 because he believes “that excellence feeds off of itself” (P2, 1, p. 5). This is foundational to why he continues to work so hard to elevate and leverage less traditional forms of success for struggling students in school--to help them expect and strive toward academic successes. His vision for the school, which is yet to be fully realized, is still for the arts “curriculum to be interconnected” with the academic curriculum for all of the reasons shared so far. The successes in the arts, successes that are now expected by students who otherwise struggle, are needed to help create expectations for success in academic endeavors.
A third, and final example, of how Principal 2 worked to provide struggling students at his school with a model of academic success, is his effort to diversify his school’s student body to be sure that every student had “access to the most rigorous program possible” (P2, 1, p. 7). Principal 2 has never been a leader who would seek to improve the achievement, perceived or real, of a school by simply working to change the demographics of that school. He would never avoid actually de-normalizing the way traditional school works because he deeply understands from personal experience just how much it doesn’t work for all students. But he does believe that models of success, models that may be missing in an environment that is disproportionally comprised of struggling students, are necessary. He clearly conveys that he does “believe schools need high-performing kids in them… I believe in the Pygmalion effect; I believe that if kids never see kids doing well, ok, then they don’t know what success looks like” (P2, 1, p. 6). From personal, and now professional, experience he vividly relates to the void created when there is no model for high academic success in a school. A struggling student responds to that void as follows: “I’ve never seen it, so I have no background knowledge, I have no understanding” of what’s even remotely possible (P2, 1, p. 6). Principal 2 sought a model for academic success that would complement and accelerate the work he had already undertaken at his school. To build this model for academic success, which would also help him raise expectations for all students, Principal 2 methodically worked to entice academically talented students to his school by building a rigorous academic program that allowed for a district-wide application process. He was “very purposeful in creating a school for all types of kids” (P2, 1, p. 6) for the benefit of his most struggling students. From the start, he committed to not
allowing any artificial separation, in culture or structure, between any new students who would apply to this rigorous academic program and his school's traditionally zoned students. Principal 2 brought the “Cambridge” program to his school, a program that enables students to work for an internationally recognized diploma, the Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Diploma. The net effect, as he had hoped for, was that AICE served to attract students that his normal population of students “had never seen before, kids who puzzled the class, dressed appropriately, never skipped… it was really funny to watch” (P2, 1, p. 7). For the first time, in the long history of Principal 2’s school, students primarily from low socio-economic households, had a model for academic success. Morning announcements at his school now included references to scholarships and college acceptances and other such things all too often taken for granted at other schools but that at Principal 2’s school are helping to create and usher in “a college readiness culture….which definitely did not exist” (P2, 1, p. 7) prior.

This model for academic success has irreversibly impacted his students and his entire school. Principal 2 proudly provides data, quantitative and qualitative, that serve to illustrate the effectiveness of this academic model of success in transforming the entire school:

We probably have a third of the kids who are in those Cambridge level courses which is like AP or IB who are the same kids who were at [SCHOOL 2] before! Five years ago at [SCHOOL 2] we ordered – ready for this number? – 67, 67 AP tests. Now that’s not 67 students, that’s 67 tests. It was probably 30 kids. In this year we tested 765 or something like that; we ordered that many tests. I can give you many examples of kids who would never have joined a program, probably couldn’t have gotten into an academic magnet quite frankly because of the standards….and once they were in…. “Oh, it turns out I can do this.” I have a girl I can think of right now who just graduated as a senior and did fine…..graduated but
just a little bit over the 2.0 and she’s going to go to community college….Well she took a couple Cambridge courses. So when I was talking to her recently she said, “I’m a Cambridge student.” Well we wouldn’t define her as a Cambridge student because she didn’t come into the program; she hadn’t taken the full complement; she was just as much a Cambridge student as any other kids. “I’m a Cambridge…” So we now are saying we’re a Cambridge school, not a Cambridge program. (P2, 1, p. 7)

Principal 2 summarized the transformational change that grew from building models of success at his school by sharing that the school as a whole, teachers and students didn’t expect to be good at anything. So I think when we started to be successful at anything… we still haven’t won any football games by the way… but when we started to be good at some things then they said, “Oh, we can be good at this.” So I think it’s just instituting an expectation to be excellent, an expectation to be good. (P2, 1, p. 5)

Value and empower others

Principal 2’s beliefs about leadership entwine with his mission as the leader of his school. His leadership beliefs are connected to building relationships and having high expectations for everyone at his school. But there is also a distinct leadership methodology that Principal 2 employs to raise the performance of traditionally low performing, marginalized students, and that will be discussed in this final methods segment of this second case study.

Principal 2 believes that “principal leadership is everything” (P2, 1, p. 9) when it comes to how a school and students perform--in other words, the results a school produces. He acknowledges that there are “different types of leaders” (P2, 1, p. 9) but he believes they all “have in common some vision that they are just bulldogs, hell bent to see” (P2, 1, p. 9). To Principal 2, this leadership vision is important because leaders are only leaders if they have followers, and people have to see a vision and believe in it…. to be disciples” (P2, 1, p. 9). Principal 2 worked to raise the performance of his
struggling students through leadership that valued and empowered others. He worked very hard to ensure teachers felt valued in his school. Principal 2 wanted all teachers to feel valued so they could lead from where they stood, from their respective positions and roles within the larger school ensuring they would all share responsibility for disrupting the status quos that lead to inequitable outcomes. Principal 2 was determined to ensure that “everybody feels part of the solution and everybody feels valued” (P2, 2, p. 10) because if he accomplished that then “there is a different level of impact on a campus” (P2, 2, p. 10).

To accomplish this, Principal 2 “felt like we needed teacher leaders” (P2, 1, p. 9). He explained that while “in most schools there’s like a teacher who leads within the math department, probably the math department chair or something like that” (P2, 1, p. 9) but he instead “just tried to empower everybody” (P2, 1, p. 9). His goal was to ensure “everybody – feels like they’re part of the larger mission” (P2, 1, p. 9) where every teacher believes that without them “we are not going to succeed” (P2, 1, p. 9). Ensuring teachers felt valued also meant that “teachers had to….know their role….and do it well” (P2, 1, p. 9). Principal 2 didn’t move a lot of teachers out of the school after he arrived: “I didn’t have to move teachers out a lot; I had a pretty good faculty there. They needed a lot of training and things like that” (P2, 1, p. 9). Teachers also knew that Principal 2 is “not going to beat me up over having a bad day” but they knew that being valued means “you cannot be lazy, you cannot take days off” (P2, 1, p. 12) instructionally. The result of his efforts at ensuring teachers felt as valued and important, to the point where they believed the greater good could not be accomplished without them, meant they each gave a “genuine attempt to do good teaching” (P2, 1, p.
13). For Principal 2, “that’s a game changer” for disrupting normal and improving the outcomes for struggling students (P2, 1, p. 13).

Valuing and empowering others is a leadership methodology that Principal 2 also applied to students. The manifestation of these strategies specifically with students often involved ensuring they all have voice in school. Principal 2 defined voice in a few ways and through a couple of examples. He began by stating that first off, voice to him means “everybody has an equal say, so I mean voice in that respect” (P2, 1, p. 14). His first example of voice brought in the idea that “equal voice” also means equal treatment by him and access to him. In that example, he elaborated that he meant all “students know me and they all see me in the hallway and they all stop in my office and they all get a soda out of my fridge. So voice meaning everybody is equal at my school” (P2, 1, p. 14) and there isn’t “any hierarchy at my school” (P2, 1, p. 14). For Principal 2, all students “have just as much say as the student body president, so there’s an equity issue there” (P2, 1, p. 14). He continued by expressing that there are very few if not zero examples of problems between students because of “ethnic or….racial or ….socio-economic” (P2, 1, p. 14) differences. For Principal 2, this is because “everybody feels like we’re all one team so there’s that level of voice” (P2, 1, p. 14).

In another example, Principal 2 defined giving students voice as helping them be successful and helping them “discover what you believe in, explore….what’s your contribution going to be in society and all that kind of stuff” (P2, 1, p. 6). This definition of voice was expressed within the context of Principal 2’s discussion about bringing programs to his school that matched the assets and appealed to the interests of struggling students so they could experience successes in school. For Principal 2 the
purposeful efforts to value and empower students grades “nine to twelve is for kids to find their voice” (P2, 1, p. 6).

For Principal 2’s case, a ministry for success provided both the framework from which to understand his work as a school leader as well as the framework from which to present the mission and methods of his work creating equitable educational opportunities for marginalized students in his school.

**Conclusion**

The cases for Principals 1 and 2 depict how these two school leaders, who are driven by their personal histories, work to ensure their schools are places where all students have a chance to succeed. Each case, representing each principal’s approach, is unique in its own right. But there is much that can be learned from what they two cases share in common and how the literature supports the notion that we should not seek one correct approach to effectively challenge the status quo and transform our schools. There is comfort in the idea that leadership for social justice can have its origins in varied backgrounds and be accomplished through varied approaches. Chapter 5 will both connect the two cases in this study and give value to differences as well. Chapter 5 will lead the reader through my reflection as a practitioner scholar as to the implications of this study for my work, including specific next steps in the local context.
The purpose of this study was to understand how school leaders worked, by design, to change the inequitable educational outcomes that are typical for marginalized students in their schools. This study sought to identify the mission and methods, the why, what and how school leaders worked to change those educational outcomes thereby de-normalizing normal and changing the status quo at their schools. The findings of this study add to the current literature about the importance of school leadership and offer implications for the work of the larger district, especially in the area of the development of future school leaders. The findings of this study also serve to inform next steps for my work specifically, as the Executive Director of High School Education, with current school leaders within my district.

Contributions to the Literature

Furman states that “despite the importance placed on social justice leadership over the last few years, its specific nature remains elusive” (2012, p. 193). The findings of the two cases described in this study provide a little more insight into the “elusive” way school leaders go about their work on behalf of their historically under-achieving, marginalized students. But the insights revealed do not provide a recipe for social justice oriented school leaders. In fact, the findings in this study support Bogotch’s (2002) conclusions that there is no singular approach or single correct model for social justice leadership. Instead, the findings in this study, as supported by Bogotch (2002), provide further evidence that principals must often reinvent the deliberate solutions they wish to employ in the work of reforming schools. Principals 1 and 2 invented different solutions for transforming their schools, and their solutions were designed to address
the needs of students in their specific contexts. The two cases do not provide one
model for this work, but there are commonalities between them and with the literature
that do add to the collective understanding of how school leaders engage in this work.
In this section I will present the contributions of the findings to the literature through a
discussion of the overarching commonalities in the two cases. The differences between
the two cases will also be evident throughout this discussion

**Personal Theologies Underpin Professional Beliefs and Core Values**

The findings show that Principal 1 and Principal 2 were driven by similar personal
faith systems that underpinned personal and professional core beliefs and values. Both
principals explicitly professed deeply held religious beliefs that guided their work as
school leaders. “I’m a very Catholic Christian and I believe deeply in faith” (P1, 1, p. 25)
was Principal 1’s response to a question asking how he was supported in the difficult
work of transforming his school. Principal 2 was equally clear when he share that he
was “a pretty devout Christian” (P2, 1, 18) in response to a similar prompt that sought to
understand factors that influenced him. Principal 2 further expressed that he believes
“everybody’s equal in God’s eyes….it’s biblical; that exists. And as a result of that then
every human being is equally able to be successful.” For both principals, possessing a
set of faith-based core beliefs and values, and coming to the work steeped in those
beliefs and values, is a pre-requisite for success. Vogel (2012) supports this thinking
stating that “A leader’s system of values, or deeply held beliefs, is the ethical
framework from which a leader develops a vision, defines and shapes the change
process, and takes actions to make his or her vision a reality” (p. 1).

The findings also show that their mutual social justice work on behalf of their
marginalized students is at the core of each principal’s being as well as an embodiment
of their personal theologies. Principal 1 shared that he thinks to work for equity “a person has to have that at their heart” (P1, 2, p. 5). He continued that core values and beliefs are “not something they can come to work and turn on and go home and turn off. If you believe in equity you believe in that all the time” (P1, 2, p. 5). Principal 2 agreed that school leaders have to come to leadership for equity from “places in their heart” (P2, 2, p. 6) and possess “a core belief system that all kids can learn” (P2, 2, p. 6). Capper et al. (2006) support this finding and argue that this is a necessity when they discuss leadership preparation. They proclaim that “school leaders need to embody a social justice consciousness within their belief systems or values” (Capper et al, 2006, p. 213). The findings show that both Principals 1 and 2 shared personal religious beliefs from which sprang professional core values that committed them to social justice agendas to better the lives of marginalized students. Calvert (1996), in writing about the principal as minister, supports the need for this underpinning of professional core values in personal faith when she discussed how “principals for tomorrow’s schools need…a personal theology that encompasses commitment to ethicality, equity, democracy, and social justice. The spirituality of the principalship requires a prophetic focus that transforms institutions through commitment to equitable opportunity” (p. 56).

**Results-Driven Leadership**

“Leaders who create equity….specifically set out to change the way the schools respond to the needs of students. These leaders are results-driven” (Fraser, 2012, p. 10). The findings, for both Principal 1 and 2, demonstrate a results-driven leadership approach that was essential for their successes in effecting change in their schools. The “things” each principal worked to impact were not identical, varying as a function of the differences in their school’s student populations and needs, but the common finding
was results-driven leadership. Principal 2 explained he’s "seen a lot of initiative-heavy schools and….the principal’s trying to articulate, ‘We’ve got this going on, that going on, but I just don’t know why the needle is not moving’” (P2, 2, p. 16). He continues, “This is also in the literature…that leaders need early victories. Once you become a turnaround leader, your school has to improve” (P2, 2, p. 16). Principal 2 explained that in “the absence of that I’ve seen strong leaders – what I would consider strong leaders in schools where they didn’t get early victories and they lost faith, the staff, that this person was the one they had to follow” (P2, 2, p. 16). Principal 2 similarly articulates that “success relies on results….whatever that is” (P1, 2, p. 15). He goes on to say that “if there weren’t results following within small increments and then big increment data points, people would say….‘He doesn’t know what he’s doing’….there has to be results” (P1, 2, p. 15). Finally, Fullan (2014) supports the findings ascribing results-oriented leadership as key to the successes of these two principals in their quest for school change. He includes this attribute as one of seven critical competencies for leadership for change. The seven critical competencies for leadership for change describe leaders who innovate for results and move organizations forward (Fullan, 2014).

It is interesting to note, in further support of Bogotch’s (2002) assertions that there is no one correct approach for social justice leadership, that within this results-oriented commonality, each principal articulates different approaches for how he goes about getting results. Principal 2 has a relationship focus, and describes himself often as someone “who is a relationship builder” (P2, 1, p. 12), who accomplishes the results he is seeking through relationships. Principal 2 believes so much in the importance of getting results, especially early results as a leader begins to work to impact change, that
he connects a leader’s inability to get those early results with losing the faith of people who may no longer wish to follow you. Principal 1, whose results-oriented methods are profoundly data-driven, having used the word “data” 37 times in his responses during an hour long interview, connected results-oriented leadership with achieving both small and large incremental data changes. The findings show both principals sought results, from early and small results to more long-term and large results that together impacted school change.

**Collective Efficacy**

Another common finding, across both case studies was connected to how both principals worked to be sure everyone in their schools was included and felt effective and valued within their role in helping to bring about school change. Principals 1 and 2 both realized that the difficult and systemic work of transforming schools could not be accomplished unless they could engage everyone at their schools in carrying out their respective part of the larger effort. Principal 2 explained his efforts at ensuring everyone joined him in the overall efforts for change at in a response to a question about who he needed working with him in this work. He shared that he “just tried to empower everybody…. part of that was to say, literally I mean, we are not going to succeed without you. I can make an argument you are the most important person in the whole school” (P2, 1, p. 9). Principal 2 goes on to say that “the teachers had to buy into our successes and the belief systems and the teachers had to know their role….and do it well” (P2, 1, p. 9). Likewise, for Principal 1 ensuring change happened meant “empowering teachers to feel like we can… I’m going to be a change agent in this area at this school; our administrators support us, and we’re going to get this done” (P1, 1, p. 15). When the school moved the needle on the achievement of their marginalized
students, Principal 1 explained how his staff has always voted to distribute improvement bonuses the school qualified for as a result of those improvements. Principal 1 further shared when the school receives “school grade bonus money it has gone to every single employee… in an equal way, and that’s something that I felt strongly about” (P1, 1, p. 15) because of his beliefs in including everyone in the work to impact change and in the successes the school experiences as a result.

The finding regarding the two principals’ desires and specific actions to leverage the power of collective efficacy is supported in the literature. Collective efficacy is defined as “the judgment of teachers that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the actions required to have positive effects on students” (Hoy et al., 2006, p. 4). What this common finding shows, is that although the principals were not using the language of “collective efficacy,” implying perhaps that they were not fully aware of the construct, they were both unconsciously and instinctively working to utilize it to effect change at their schools. Although it is difficult to point out which factors or leadership practices might be the most important in impacting change that improves the achievement of marginalized students, Goddard et al. (2004) have posited that collective efficacy should be considered as part of a group of key factors in this work. Their research found that “collective efficacy beliefs have stronger effects on student achievement than student race or SES” (Goddard et al, 2004, p. 7).

The net effect of including everyone and unconsciously working toward collective efficacy, according to Principal 2, was that if questioned, the adults in his school “90% of them would feel they were the most important person in the school” (P2, 1, p. 9). Principal 2 goes on to say that “the thing that I think we realized happened – the faculty
will tell you this – everybody….who’s an adult – I almost would say everybody – feels like they’re part of the larger mission. So it was to try to create….this person’s value in the overall scheme” (P2, 1, p. 9). Similarly, Principal 1 expressed with great certainty that all of his efforts at impacting change at his school would have been for naught if he had not included everyone and helped them to believe they were contributing. He explained, “We did this together… they feel like we’re all in this together….I contribute to the school success, and here’s how I contribute and I’m valued for it” (P1, 1, p. 15).

Closing Opportunity Gaps

A final key and common finding across both cases is the actions of the school principals creating access and opportunity where they did not previously exist for marginalized students. The findings illustrate that both principals worked to close opportunity gaps, perpetuated by old school structures and processes, by instituting new programs and/or opening access to existing programs for marginalized students. This common finding is supported by literature as noted by the findings of Theoharis’ study on disrupting the injustices typically found in school (2010). Theoharis (2010) found that when principals disrupted two-tier systems, systems where there were clearly academically lower tracks and higher tracks for students, by providing increased access to the higher track for marginalized students, they improved the achievement of those students. Fraser (2012) addresses the importance of school leaders working to address opportunity gaps multiple times in her work exploring the practices of leaders who work for social justice at their schools. She shares that “equity centered leadership practice means that the leaders understand the lack of opportunity different groups have continually experienced and based on that understanding they focus on creating
opportunity for all” (Fraser, 2012, p. 10). There are multiple examples of this common finding which is supported by the literature across both cases.

Principal 1’s case study demonstrates his solid commitment to closing opportunity gaps. Principal 1 expressed this desire explicitly to his staff during a faculty meeting in which he shared the achievement data for black students and depicted their under-performance, by stating, “If we want to change that here’s one way we can change…we can increase an open access” (P1, 1, p. 5). The findings for Principal 1 describe his methodical construction of access to the Advanced Placement courses and increased enrollment in the school’s AVID program to support students who would be engaging in more rigorous learning for the first time in their educational histories (P1, 1).

Principal 2’s case demonstrates great commonality with the work of Principal 1 as he too worked to close the gap in opportunity and build new opportunities for marginalized students. But, it also depicts the differences of their specific methodologies and plans that must be tailored, as discussed previously, to the needs of their students. The findings presented show Principal 2 identified closely with struggling students, having himself been a child from a single-parent, low socioeconomic household, and having himself lacked a vision for what a different future could hold. The findings show that Principal 2 worked to add opportunities that did not exist previously at his school for the success for his struggling students. Principal 2 created opportunities for success for his marginalized students by building “an arts program…because the kids I had would be singers and rappers and poets and painters and they were sort of artsy kind of kids” (P2, 1, p. 6). He was “very purposeful in creating a school for all types of kids” (P2, 1, p. 6) including kids who “just do not fit any of the
success factors as outlined by a typical school district” (P2, 1, p. 2). Principal 2 believed that providing opportunities for non-traditional successes at school for non-traditional students opened the door to successes for those same students in those more traditionally valued measures. For Principal 2, the findings show that his less conventional approaches to creating opportunities for success for his marginalized students ultimately did translate to closing more traditional academic opportunity gaps for marginalized students. Principal 2 characterized the change this work caused in his marginalized students as simply a revelation that, “Oh, it turns out I can do this” (P2, 1, p. 7).

**Implications**

As an administrator working in the Division of Teaching and Learning within my district’s central office, my responsibilities are many and all fall under our District’s Strategic Plan (DSP). The strategic plan was developed so that our district could accomplish our vision of 100% student success and our mission of ensuring all students are prepared for college, career, and life. The simple word “all” in those statements has universal meaning but because of my district’s current and unique circumstances, operating under federal court order to close the achievement gap, the word “all” for us might shine a stronger and more urgent spotlight on traditionally marginalized students than might be the case for many districts across our state and nation. Because this study’s purpose was to elucidate, in the local context, how leaders work to make school a place where students who are traditionally marginalized are as successful as their peer members of the dominant group, the findings from this study, have multiple implications for my work as well as the work of the larger district.
The first implication for the larger district is in the context of leadership development. Because of our DSP, and a specific goal within the plan committed to equity and excellent for all students, there isn’t room for school leaders to wonder if raising the achievement of students who underperform their peers should be a focus of their work. That this is important is neither a secret nor a mystery in our district, it is a clear expectation. Just making it an expectation does not mean each leader has the inner fire for this work, or comes to the work with the belief systems and core values described in the two cases in this study— but the implications of that issue will be discussed as next steps for my work both professionally and personally. So, for the district level implications, the focus should be about praxis, define as (what). We, as a district, must be able to answer a question we can’t address now. The question we must be able to answer is how we prepare all school leaders to take action for social justice. The two cases presented here are filled with specific, yet individualized actions, that the two school leaders took to de-normalize normal at their schools. We must work to institutionalize a pedagogy for praxis-based social justice leadership. Furman addresses the need to create a model for leadership preparation what was not one size fits all, but would be based on “developing the capacities for social justice leadership in K-12 schools” (2012, p. 193). As a district, we can’t move the needle on the key factor that will define our accomplishments, the improvement of the performance of struggling students, unless we can close the gap between district expectations for equity and excellence and the practice of our principals.

A second major implication for the work of the larger district is connected to the “collective efficacy” finding presented in this chapter which appears to be a powerful
emerging construct in education and specifically in the area of educational leadership. The construct of collective efficacy seems to have originated in the social sciences, specifically within the areas of sociology and criminology. Collective efficacy, in its original context, is defined as “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (Samford et al., 1997, p. 918). Samford et al. (1997) found “a measure of collective efficacy yields a high between-neighborhood reliability and is negatively associated with variations in violence, when individual-level characteristics, measurement error, and prior violence are controlled. Associations of concentrated disadvantage and residential instability with violence are largely mediated by collective efficacy” (p. 918). In other words, the construct of collective efficacy appears to buffer or otherwise positively impact the typical ills that befall communities with concentrated disadvantage and instability. Samford’s work and the emerging literature on collective efficacy by educational researchers like Goddard and Hoy within the context of educational leadership, support further examination by the larger district in order to learn more about how to foster collective efficacy in schools and to learn more about how schools might themselves be agents of fostering collective efficacy in their surrounding communities.

**Next Steps**

The reason I chose the topic of this study for my doctoral dissertation was that this is the work I am engaged in. As a result, each finding identified through this study will inform next steps for my work as the district’s curriculum and instruction leader for all of our high school programs. For the purpose of this section, I will focus on two major next steps I will undertake in my professional practice as a result of having conducted this study.
The findings of this study were clear that the two principals featured in the two case studies came to their work as school leaders with internalized core beliefs and values that made social justice work as leaders an extension of who they were as people. Although I agree that it is incumbent upon the district to develop a leadership pedagogy, a leadership preparation program that teaches the praxis of social justice leadership to rising school leaders, I don’t see the larger district as equally effective at fostering the belief systems that the two leaders featured in this study bring to this work. For that challenging work, I believe it will take a more personal and relationship-centered approach that should take place in small group if not individual settings. Helping school leaders reflect on their belief systems, on the personal stances and values that they operate from inherently and that impact every decision they make and action they take, is personally demanding and intrusive work. I have strong and sometimes painful memories of my own experiences within this doctoral program of my own “conscientization”. My own awakening to the cultural biases and the cultural frameworks from which I act, and most importantly how I impact others through those frameworks, was often difficult. I believe that it is essential that similar work happen with people who are, or are preparing to be school leaders, but that the work needs to be carried out more personally and then integrated purposefully with the systemic pedagogy of praxis for social justice leadership. I don’t think there is a one size fits all method or timeline for helping school leaders who do not come predisposed with internalized social justice beliefs and values. So, my next steps are to find ways to weave this work into my relationships and interactions with school leaders. At least to the point where enough awareness and interest are developed, and potential resistance
is reduced, so that more structured and overt methods can be employed. For example, introducing the simple reflective questions ‘which students might this decision benefit’ and ‘which students might this decision harm’ to discussions with school leaders could start a conversation that over time can develop naturally into more overt social justice topics.

Finally, the findings connected to the construct of “collective efficacy”, helped me connect with Hoy et al.’s (2006) work on academic optimism as a driver of student achievement. Hoy et al.’s (2006) School Academic Optimism Scale (SOAS) is a tool that I will employ as I work with school leaders helping them to foster cultures in their schools that are conducive to the success of all students. The SOAS is an academic optimism survey which contains 30 questions that teachers asked to respond to about their school using two different sets of Likert scales. A six point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree) is used by teachers to rate the first 22 questions. Those questions address self-efficacy and trust in parents and students. A four point Likert scale (very often, often, sometimes, and rarely) is provided to teachers to respond to the last set of eight questions which are focused on the academic emphasis of the school. My work this academic year (2016-17) with school leaders aimed at building their instructional leadership capacity has incorporated Dweck’s growth mindset principles, and I’m seeing an encouraging and growing level of awareness and interest in how growth mindset can positively impact the achievement of marginalized students. Incorporating the construct of collective efficacy fits beautifully with our current focus on growth mindset for everyone, school leaders, teachers, and students alike. The SOAS is a tangible tool
that can stimulate rich discussion with school leaders. For instance, I can imagine working with school leaders to use the SOAS at the beginning of the school year as they initially introduce growth mindset ideals working to develop collective efficacy and foster a positive learning environment. This will allows us to gauge the emphasis necessary on professional development and culture building early in the school year.

**Conclusion**

A 2010 report by the Educational Testing Service, titled “The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress Stopped,” observed that since the late 1980s “there has been no clear trend in the gap, or sustained period of change in the gap, one way or another.” The No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, law was supposed to hold school districts “accountable” for results. Teachers, principals and superintendents were prodded to reach a goal and rebuked when they failed to do so. By 2014 every child, regardless of background, was supposed to be proficient in math and English language arts. (Freedburg, p. 3, 2015)

The group we may have left behind in our efforts to leave no child behind might be our school principals. They are at the very crux of all that happens in our schools, good, bad or indifferent. As a school principals goes, so goes his or her school. We must attend more closely to, and learn from, those principals who are in fact making strides and effecting change in the midst of the stagnation around them. This study presents the cases of two such principals who are effecting change for their students irrespective of the fluctuating successes and setbacks of the larger local, statewide, and national educational systems. As a practitioner scholar, I will leverage their cases, along with this study’s findings, implications and next steps, to foster social justice leadership in principals who will take up leading with a social justice agenda.
APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW 1: INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

1. I’ve recruited you for this study because I’ve noticed that you (for example—“are strongly focused on helping marginalized students excel”). I want to understand more about the work you do. Let’s start by having you talk to me about your work as principal of this school.

2. Do you see ways that your work as a principal is different from the work of other principals? Tell me about this.

3. What do you think are the most important things you’ve worked to institute or change at your school? What makes these so important?

4. How have you gone about making these changes? Are there other people and groups who have been central in making these changes? Tell me about them. How did you involve them in making changes at the school?

5. What would you say have been some of the most challenging barriers you’ve faced in doing the work that you’ve described? How have you gone about overcoming these challenges?

6. What do you think might be some tangible artifacts that someone could notice if visiting your school that would document your work toward equity at your school?

7. Who or what, if anything, supports you in this work? What keeps you engaged in this even when it is difficult?

8. If you were to leave this school, are the changes you’ve made here self-sustaining (would they last)? Why or why not? What needs to happen in order to sustain the work you’ve started here?

9. How have you come to be the kind of principal you are? What factors have influenced you?

10. Tell me about your professional history before you came to this school. Are there aspects of your professional history that have shaped your work at this school? Tell me about this.

11. Do you think there are aspects of your personal history that help explain how you approach your work at this school? Tell me about this.
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW 2: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. So, why did you wish to become school principals?

2. For you Principal 2, why were you placed at School 2?

3. For you Principal 1, you were selected for School 1 - a school with great needs of its own, but then pretty soon after that you were tapped to be principal at a different school - why do you think that was?

4. What are things you need to know or do to improve your work as school principals?

5. Are there “fundamentals” of high quality principal-ing? If so, what do you think they are?

6. Would your work as a principal look different if you were moved to [School X, or School Y]? If so, how so?

7. How about if you were moved to [School Z]? Tell me about this.

8. You’ve both mentioned that you do talk with other principals. Do you see yourselves as having some qualities in common with other principals? If so, what are these things?

9. Have you noticed any ways in which you are different from other principals? If so, what have you noticed?

10. In what ways has your work as principals improved since you served as assistant principals?

11. Choose a specific component of the academic program at your schools that you have worked on since you’ve been here. Tell me the story of the improvement of that component of the academic curriculum.

12. Can you do the same for another important component of life at your schools? Can you pick a component that you view as important and tell me the story of its evolution?
APPENDIX C
SAMPLE DATA ENTRY TABLE

Table C-1. Sample data entry table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview 2 Chart 1 P1 and P2 Verbatim Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Q</strong> Why did you wish to become school principals?</td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><em>I think I can improve the situation for kids really wanting to do good things for kids and as P2 sort of said, you really do have a lot of control as a school principal, and that allows you to see change firsthand and it’s fun. I think I thought that change happens – real change happens at the school level.</em></td>
<td><em>Both principals talked about instructional leadership being important (for their selections as school principals in difficult schools and for getting the job done-getting results) but fit or the “it factor” (as in other leadership and personal characteristics and charisma) is also important. The idea seemed to be that you need the right principal for the right school and they need to be results/success driven.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>P2</strong> This is Principal 2 speaking from High School 2 and I think that I’ve worked in the district a long time and I think I thought that change happens – real change happens at the school level. I think I felt like I could control that change and be a party to that change to a greater degree as a school principal. I think the principal serves a little bit like a CEO and in this district I think is given a fair amount of autonomy, so that was exciting to me because I believe in the change and it’s possible. I think that’s what drove me to want to be a principal in a turnaround environment. P1, I don’t know what you think about that?</td>
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<td><strong>P1</strong> Similar thoughts; I think one thing you see examples of leadership as a teacher in the district and you look at it and you say I wonder why the leader didn’t make that decision, or I certainly wouldn’t have done it that way and things like that, so I think that was part of my incentive was to almost see what I had seen and then say I think I can improve the situation for kids. That was the other piece of mine was really wanting to do good things for kids and as P2 sort of said, you really do have a lot of control as a school principal, and that allows you to see change firsthand and it’s fun. You have a team of people, you have to motivate them, you have to work with them, there’s a million moving parts, so there’s also a lot of challenge and I enjoy that piece, too, but the challenge yields sort of immediate results if you will.</td>
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Interview 2 Chart 1 P1 and P2 Verbatim Responses

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<td>P2</td>
<td>I want to add one more thing, and that is that I think... I have worked for poor principals and my first job wasn't in this school district under a principal that you all don't know and he was awful – sorry to say it, but he was not a good example of a principal, and so I think there is a lack of leadership... I think there is a lack of leadership out there and so I wanted to try and do it well. My final thought about that might be relevant to your work, Rita, is that I think the principal is the difference-maker. I really believe it. I know people talk about great teachers so it's obvious to say &quot;great teachers,&quot; but I just think the principal is the key and leadership is the key for all kinds of reasons that I think we'll discover through your work and through the research.</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Thank you. I'm going to ask a couple of follow-up questions to that first one. So you both used the term autonomy. What is autonomy to you and why was that important for your decisions to become principals?</td>
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<td>P1</td>
<td>I think that people who are good leaders in any business have a knowledge-base and expertise and they study their discipline, they study people, and they know how to get the two things moving in the same direction. So if this is good pedagogy, if this is good practice for kids, if this is a great way to expand more kids into college, if this is a great way to have more under-served populations get where they need to go, what is the human piece that makes that move? Anybody can go read a book and anybody can go do that, so the autonomy piece is being able to creatively get those things to go, where maybe for a year or a decade or fifty years in that previous setting it didn't happen. So what is the difference, and I think P2 just hit on that; a lot of times its leadership. It's not new knowledge; it's getting the current knowledge and getting it to go. I think that's the autonomy I like; that's what's fun and I think that's what separates school-based work from district-based work. In school-based work you really see that; you see the ability to make those things happen. That's where I see the autonomy as being really powerful, again, in any leadership capacity, whether it's an educational setting, a business setting, a social setting or whatever.</td>
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The "it factor, or leadership charisma" is NOT style for them—it's really more about being able to get others to buy into your vision and values, making them feel they can be effective at attaining the goals and expectations set out by the principal - whatever style you use because of your personality.
### Table C-1. Continued

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| **P2** The only thing I can add is I think P1’s speaking to sort of an intellectual autonomy that I have rules and policies I can follow, but I can creatively stay within those policies and procedures to then effect change and to know what I can... how creative I can get. I've seen principals follow policies and procedures almost to the degree of paralysis, and I think that is not leadership; it's following, that's not leading. So I think real change agents want to lead and in the absence of that autonomy I think you won't turn schools around. I think you need to let schools retain that autonomy.  
Q Thank you, and then one quick follow-up to P2. You mentioned that you had an example of an “awful” principalship or leadership. Can you cite a couple of things that made that awful?  
P2 Yes, I think that he was not a relationship builder. I think that he was not instructionally grounded. I think that he was not... he didn’t believe in the change that he spoke about, so I think that he was an empty suit. I think we have principals around the nation that I think operate like that so they’re principal in name only. I believe in that model of lead teacher; the principal as a teacher on special assignment sort of thing who grows the teachers, relates with teachers, relates with kids, believes in kids; all of that I think is the nucleus for change. I think that’s what he lacked and I think that’s what great leaders have.  
Q Thank you, alright. Our next question; this is for P2 and I’m going to talk to P1 about the same question. So for you, P2, why do you think you were placed at High School 2? | 2 | "how creative I can get. I've seen principals follow policies and procedures almost to the degree of paralysis, and I think that is not leadership *"in the absence of that autonomy I think you won't turn schools around  
"I think that he was not a relationship builder. *"I think that he was not... he didn’t believe in the change that he spoke about, so I think that he was an empty suit  
*I believe in that model of lead teacher; the principal as a teacher on special assignment sort of thing who grows the teachers, relates with teachers, relates with kids, believes in kids; all of that I think is the nucleus for change" | 3 |  
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<td>P2</td>
<td>That’s a really good question. I think that at the time what was said about why I was placed at High School 2 was because my school… and I assume this will come up… I don’t know how much detail you have on my school for your study, but my school was a school that needed instructional growth. All of the schools that we’ve taken over were schools that didn’t have good school grades and poor reading and math scores, things like that. So one of the reasons I think was because of my instructional background and I was an instructional coach. I think when we think in those terms I think that people think that means that I know a lot about instruction, what great instruction looks like and I think that’s something that can translate to other principals by reading the right books, what P1 mentioned. The other piece of that, though, is how to coach people to that change, and because I think I have the abilities to have a conversation with people – teachers I mean – about what that change might look like for them, so I think I view myself as not just instructionally grounded, but have the coaching qualities of being an instructional coach. So I think that’s what the leaders of the district saw in me that would affect High School 2, and schools like High School 2. There are in this district several schools that are sort of like that and would all need that sort of leadership. So that wasn’t unique to me; there are other people like P1 who have those qualities, but I think those are the kinds of qualities we should be looking for in principals in turn-around schools.</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Thank you. P1, yours has a little bit of a twist. You were selected for High School 1 High School, right, a school with great needs, but not too long after that you were also thought of as the best candidate for Boca Ciega High School, a turnaround school. Why do you think that was?</td>
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<td>P1 Just like P2 said, instructionally…I think that was part. I think anytime you’re hiring a school leader you’re serving the school, you’re looking at the needs and in the time that we made those changes in this district those surveys and things weren’t done; you didn’t go to teachers and say what do you need? You didn’t go to parents; what do you think this school needs? So they were made by people who also knew great things about the school, and I think when you replace people you’re looking at what were the strengths and deficits of the person who’s there and what do you need to change about that school. I think part of the reason I was selected for that school was I was different in some ways than the previous principal. The obvious – I was a male, she was a female. Our school had made some instructional growth in school grade gains; that school hadn’t. But I think there’s other pieces and because I was here when P2 started, too, just personality-wise. P2 had a different personality than the previous principal. I probably had a little more similar personality than the previous principal, but I certainly had a much different one than the one who I replaced originally at Northeast. So I think those things come into play, too. I think it’s more than just saying P2’s an instructional leader; he’s needed for High School 2. As P2 said there’s five or six or eight or ten people who have that knowledge and maybe even can coach people, but they’re not a good fit for that school because of some other set of characteristics. I had a conversation with a colleague during that time; [inaudible] called me and said, “I think certain people are made for certain schools,” and said… he was a high school principal at the time and said, “I’m at this school and I think if they asked me to go do what you’re going to do I don’t think I could do that. I don’t think my personality and my style would fit for what the needs of that school are.” So I think it’s instructional but I think there’s other pieces, too, to that. Sometimes that’s a new, younger, fresh face; sometimes that’s a seasoned veteran “I know what I’m doing; I know this county; I know this school.” So you know I think that goes both in school-based and even district-wise.</td>
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<td>P2 Just like P2 said, instructionally…I think that was part. I think when you replace people you’re looking at what were the strengths and deficits of the person who’s there and what do you need to change about that school. I think part of the reason I was selected for that school was I was different in some ways than the previous principal. The obvious – I was a male, she was a female. Our school had made some instructional growth in school grade gains; that school hadn’t</td>
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3-5 *instructionally… I think that was part
*I think when you replace people you’re looking at what were the strengths and deficits of the person who’s there and what do you need to change about that school. I think part of the reason I was selected for that school was I was different in some ways than the previous principal. The obvious – I was a male, she was a female. Our school had made some instructional growth in school grade gains; that school hadn’t
*I think it’s more than just saying P2’s an instructional leader;
*As P2 said there’s five or six or eight or ten people who have that knowledge and maybe even can coach people, but they’re not a good fit for that school because of some other set of characteristics.

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Table C-1. Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview 2 Chart 1 P1 and P2 Verbatim Responses</th>
<th>Page Nos.</th>
<th>MAIN Ideas: Verbatim quotes from responses</th>
<th>RESEARCH QUESTION: How do principals work to create equitable educational opportunities for historically marginalized students in their schools?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td><em>I think there's something we haven't found yet, haven't identified in the literature, and I think in other industries they haven't identified it either – it's the &quot;it factor&quot; sort of thing. I think that leaders, turnaround leaders, whether you're running for President of the United States or principal of High School 1High School have... you know the right person for the right time, and they have an it factor. They have a charisma... I think charisma is used a lot and the charisma I think... I don't want to characterize myself, but I think I have a certain charisma. I don't think all leaders have charisma the way we think of that defined, because I think there are quieter leaders. They have an it factor, and whatever that is... and I think of people who aren't P1 or I because it sounds like we're characterizing ourselves, but the other district leaders I've seen, they take charge, they know what they're doing; there's a confidence, people follow them. They have a thing that people what to follow them wherever they lead. They have different personalities and different leadership styles... do you see that, P1?</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td><em>I think one of the things you're touching on is they're well-rounded, so you're leading instruction and you're great at that, but you're also recognizing that the building... the air's not working and you're managing things as well. So I think going back to the question that you asked P2 about can you give examples of leaders in the past that maybe weren't great ones. I've worked for principals where their knowledge is very strong in different areas, but they're blind; they can't even see a whole other part of the campus that's going on and they may be here talking about, &quot;We need to dig into reading more,&quot; and this and this and this, but you know, kids are throwing stuff at teachers. You've got to get all of these things moving at the same time, whatever that might be, and I don't mean to speak poorly about other folks because I learned a lot from all of them. But people are well-rounded and they know when to put the foot on the gas for this initiative or that initiative or whatever that might be.</em></td>
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APPENDIX D
INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: De-normalizing Normal: Principal Leadership for Educational Equity

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this research study is to understand how school leaders purposely work to disrupt the inequities in educational opportunities that traditionally exist for marginalized students in their schools. This project seeks to identify how school leaders committed to social justice systematically change the culture, structures, and processes in their schools destabilizing the status quo.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

The participants will be asked to participate in 2 interviews what will be recorded and will not last more than 1 hour each. One interview will be with participants individually, and one interview will be with the 3 participants as a whole focus group. Proposed interview questions for the individual questions are attached. The questions for the focus group interviews will be prepared after the initial individual interviews utilizing the responses from the individual interviews to inform the questions that will be posed to the whole focus group. The types of things that I will likely be asking about include follow-up questions to the initial interview questions further exploring the “why” behind the behaviors they will describe they’ve engaged in to systematically change their schools. Additionally, this second round of interviews is purposely designed as a group interview as this study seeks to use a social constructivist approach for making sense of the work these principals are engaged in and why they engage in it. Although I will treat the Focus Group interview as confidential, I cannot guarantee that all members of the focus group will do so.

Time required:

1 hour for each interview, a total of 2 hours are necessary for participation

Risks and Benefits:

There are no risks associated with participation in this study.

Although you are likely to obtain insights into principal practice, there are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. The findings of this research study could assist high schools situated within the local context of this study to transform their school cultures and core academic programs and practices in order to serve the needs of all students. The findings could help high schools in their efforts to close the black/white achievement gap and to improve the graduation rates of marginalized sub-groups such as black males. Another potential benefit of this capstone study is the ability to contribute to the body of literature on leadership for social justice. The findings and implications for practice that could arise from this study have the potential to strongly impact local practice bridging the theory to practice gap that typically exists in school districts. This project seeks to identify how school leaders committed to social justice systematically change the culture, structures, and processes in their schools destabilizing the status quo. Through this Capstone Study, I would like to add to the scant current literature (about how school leaders lead with a social justice agenda seeking to build a constructive model of this leadership.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.
Confidentiality:

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be assigned a code number or a pseudonym. All identifiers will be replaced with a code or pseudonym in all transcripts. The list connecting your name to a code number or pseudonym will be kept in a locked file in my office. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. Although your name will not be used in any report we may use quotes and paraphrased material in the report for this study but we will use a code or pseudonym instead of your name to protect your anonymity. We will not publish anything that would reveal your identity.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study:

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Rita M. Vasquez (Principal Investigator)

Dr. Elizabeth Bondy, PhD (Supervisor), University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

IRB02 Office, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: ____________________________ Date: ________________

Principal Investigator: ____________________________ Date: ________________
REFERENCES


Boykin, A. W., & Noguera, P. (2011). *Creating the opportunity to learn: Moving from research to practice to close the achievement gap*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.


Crowley v. Pinellas County School Board, No. 00-5661-CI-07 (6th Cir. Aug. 10, 2010). Retrieved from: http://dspace.nelson.usf.edu/xmlui/handle/10806/4940


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rita Vasquez holds a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from the University of South Florida and a Master of Education in educational leadership from National Louis University. She received her Ed.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Florida. Rita taught science in Pinellas County Schools for over fourteen years, earning a National Board Certification in adolescent and young adulthood science. She has also held school and district leadership roles for more than seven years and currently serves as the Executive Director of High School Education with Pinellas County Schools.