

ABSTRACT

SEATON, LACEY ELIZABETH. Principals' Understanding of Equity and Social Justice Practices in Education: A Mixed Methods Study of the Perceived Barriers and Supports Necessary to Achieve Equitable Outcomes (Under the direction of Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli and Dr. Lance Fusarelli.)

In an effort to combat the injustices within schools, many educational leaders and scholars have emphasized the role of principals working to implement socially just and equitable practices. This study sought to provide insight into the needs of administrators in their pursuit of equity. Further, the research study examined school leaders' perceived role and effectiveness for implementing the skills learned within their principal preparation program to increase equity within schools through a mixed methods analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The study explored the successes of implementation and the barriers that school leaders face when working to ensure diverse and inclusive school communities that support and value students from all backgrounds.

Of the principals who responded to the survey, 61% indicated they had not received training around social justice and equity prior to becoming an administrator. Principals' felt as though they needed the autonomy and flexibility to make decisions based on their context and the needs of their students to truly honor the tenants of Social Justice Educational Leadership (Sarid, 2019). Study participants reported sparse involvement of parents, teachers, students, and community members. Principal preparation programs and state policy makers need to enforce components of equity and social justice in the curriculum and evaluation standards (Brown, 2006; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Liou & Hermanns, 2017). Principals need to increase their efforts to involve others in the schools' decision-making process. District leaders should consider ways to support the contextual needs of a school and provide ongoing professional development (Kose, 2009).

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Principals' Understanding of Equity and Social Justice Practices in Education: A Mixed Methods
Study of the Perceived Barriers and Supports Necessary to Achieve Equitable Outcomes

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the students who deserve a more equitable and just education.

For the students who, through no fault of their own, continue to experience inequities through
discrimination persistent in educational entities.

BIOGRAPHY

Lacey Seaton earned an undergraduate degree in adapted special education from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Lacey received her master's degree from North Carolina State University (NCSU) through the Northeast Leadership Academy (NELA). She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in education administration and supervision at NCSU. Lacey taught in the Exceptional Children's Department in Granville County. Lacey completed her Principal Residency at Williford Elementary School then served as an Assistant Principal in Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Each and every child within our society deserves the opportunity to receive an educational experience that will enhance their ability to achieve their dreams. Schools are expected to be a safe place where children can acquire knowledge to the best of their ability, regardless of their demographic background. Young scholars ought to have access to high quality teachers, rigorous instruction, and extracurricular activities with the same likelihood as their peers. Children should feel included throughout the total school environment and desire to engage in the educational experience based on the culture and climate established by the educational community.

The aforementioned characteristics of education should be the norm in every school, yet unfortunately that is not the current condition provided in many of today's school systems. While schools exist that exhibit the previously described opportunities and are creating wonderful educational experiences for young scholars, there are also students attending schools whose academic and social needs are simply not being met. Principals have the ability to influence a variety of programs that students are granted access. The following study sought to understand how principals are working to improve the lives of students who have traditionally been underserved by the educational systems inequitable access to high quality teachers, rigorous instruction or disproportionate placement in restrictive educational settings. In addition, this research exhibited the additional support that is needed to further enhance the principals' ability to make progress towards creating equitable and socially just school environments.

Personal Experiences

Prior to diving into the educational jargon that is the nature of academic research, please allow me to share a few personal stories to explain why this work is so important to me and why I hope this research will create a sense of urgency within educational leaders throughout North Carolina. My goal when becoming an educator was to give a voice to the voiceless. I wanted to empathize with students who were nonverbal in a school community, and in doing so, I would be able to advocate for their needs and desires.

In many ways during my tenure, we experienced success, yet unfortunately in many ways, injustice prevailed. Shockingly, one of my students was denied the right to attend the fifth-grade promotion ceremony. Leaders attempted to prevent another student from moving to middle school because of his intensive needs. Regretfully, one young scholar was denied the right to attend gym class with her typically developing peers. Following a year of demonstrating success, a whole class was denied access to an inclusive educational experience, due to principal turnover.

As a leader, I was encouraged when meeting students who were benefiting from a truly inclusive education, thus modeling to me that some schools are working towards justice. I also personally experienced resistance when attempting to combat issues of disproportionate discipline and placement by race that plagued a particular school. These factual accounts keep children at the heart of the matter and shed light on the biases I bring to this research. Ultimately, these encounters have led me to believe that great work is being done for children throughout the state of North Carolina, yet tremendous room for growth remains.

The remainder of this research will focus on principals; yet it is important to remember that as school leaders, their actions or lack thereof affect children and their intrinsic right to be

included. It is imperative that researchers and practitioners understand what needs are crucial to adequately support principals working to create a socially just education experience for children. Ultimately, the goal of the study is to identify what is essential to equip principals with the support and resources to create an equitable learning environment. Each child deserves the opportunity to achieve their dreams, may that be to become a doctor, a graphic designer, or to attend a prestigious university and become an educational leader. Every child deserves an educational experience that will enhance their ability to become whomever they choose. This study hopes to ensure that children achieve their dreams by creating an awareness of the supportive requirements of principals.

Background

Inequities, such as disproportionality of suspensions and varying access to high quality teachers, are prominent and persistent issues in education (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Friere (1990) describes education as a system for maintaining an oppressive society and makes a charge for those within the system to take action in order to free those who have suffered from such a toxic cycle. Marshall and Parker assert that “social justice challenges must be addressed systematically, not with quick fixes...making all students learn the same, undermines social justice efforts” (2006, p. 195). Individuals who tolerate disproportionate placement in special education, fail to support females’ access to opportunities presented to males, or deny the rights of queer students cannot claim to promote social justice within the walls of the school (Marshall & Parker, 2006). School leaders are a critical lever to implementing change and establishing educational environments that are inclusive of all backgrounds and abilities (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Principals have the opportunity to serve as change agents and initiate

educational structures that promote equity for persons who have been marginalized through the current system of education.

Due to steadfast inequities in the outcomes of schooling, principal preparation programs have become increasingly aware of the need to train school leaders in ways to improve access and alleviate oppressive structures in education (Brown, 2006; Liou & Hermanns, 2017). Unfortunately, not all school leadership programs emphasize an equity lens when training administrators and continue to perpetuate the current system (Laura, 2018; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Vogel, 2011). An example of this discrepancy is demonstrated by the limited understanding of practicing administrators from one university, regarding what social justice in education means let alone how to implement the concept (Vogel, 2011). Fortunately, there are preparation programs throughout the country that do emphasize social justice and equity throughout their coursework and experiences when preparing future school administrators (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019; Gooden, Davis, Spikes, Hall, & Lee, 2018; Liou & Hermanns, 2017).

While select school leaders are being directed in their preparation programs to increase equity, presently, there is limited data regarding how principals are implementing the knowledge acquired during their training. Research is needed concerning how principals are currently making equitable changes throughout schools. Regrettably, equity and social justice are not emphasized on the evaluation instrument used for educators and administrators in North Carolina (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2015). Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) propose a framework for educational entities to consider revising the school leadership standards to stress equity as the core focus. Revising the standards could accentuate the importance of equity in education and evaluations could provide evidence regarding how such practices are put into

action. The third standard of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) states “effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and wellbeing” (National Policy Board for Education Administration, 2015, p. 11). The PSEL’s emphasis on equity ought to serve as a model for state education agencies when revising the standards for educational leaders.

Presently, a paucity of research exists regarding how school principals perceive their ability to implement equitable and socially just practices within their building. Theoharis (2008) provides an overview of the traits associated with school leaders that are socially just. Within the synopsis, Theoharis describes such characteristics as arrogant humility, passionate visionary, and tenacious commitment, yet fails to describe what socially just principals do in action (2008). Wang (2015) conducted interviews with principals which emphasized the diverse perspective of the leader’s view as to the meaning of social justice in practice. Wang's (2015) work does not describe the successes or failures that principals experience when attempting to enact the concept of social justice. Suggestively, the varied understanding of a principal’s definition of justice in action has impacted the outcomes as opposed to any potential community, school district, or political influences (Laura, 2018; Wang, 2015).

Depending on the context of the school, principals might experience heightened success while other principals are facing barriers that prevent them from making necessary changes to the systems within a school or system (Szeto & Cheng, 2018; Wang, 2015). One example of the barriers these administrators might face could be discourse from parents and community members when attempting to eliminate tracking of students (Burriss & Welner, 2005). Additional research is needed to determine the implementation factors that prohibit or enhance the ability of

school leaders to reform a school's prejudiced systems and structures. This research study sought to understand the experiences that principals undergo while attempting to implement practices that are supportive in increasing equity and social justice in schools.

Purpose of the Study

Fundamentally, this study explored the successes of implementation and the barriers that school leaders face when working to establish diverse and inclusive school communities that support and value students from all backgrounds. In order to bolster school administrators in their work towards justice, principals need to be given a platform to articulate their experiences, which was provided in this research study. The purpose of this study was to gain wisdom regarding principals' perceptions of their ability to implement socially just and equitable practices within the schools where they led. Understanding the experience of the school leader provides guidance to future principals on the successful and unsuccessful ways that current administrators have navigated efforts to make systemic changes. The data collected throughout this research indicated the essential skills that principals must have to implement change. Data analyses highlight training needed for both current and future administrators based on the perceived abilities of practicing principals to create more equitable school environments. This study examined policy barriers that principals faced and considered potential policy solutions that would increase equity for schools within a particular district or throughout the state (Sarid, 2019).

Definition of Terms

Educational jargon can have different meanings depending on the context and the use of a given word in a distinct setting. The following will provide a clear definition of the terms used regularly throughout this study. While researchers might argue about the interpretations of

certain words, for the purposes of this research, commonly used words will assume the definitions as follows:

- Allies: “persons who are members of a dominant cultural group who choose to take on the struggles of members of the nondominant group” (Chen-Hayes, 2001, p. 193).
- Disproportionality: “when a particular group of students' identification and placement into special-education programs surpass their relative enrollment in a community” (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 141). Furthermore, this study will use disproportionality to describe the proportion of students engaged in any portion of the educational experience in relation to the enrollment within the school such as discipline, gifted education, or access to higher quality teachers.
- Equity: “a focus on the fairness of opportunities and outcomes within the context of an unequal playing field” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 374)
- Inclusive Education: “providing each student the right to a sense of belonging to a school classroom community where difference is expected and valued” (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011, p. 649).
- Intersectionality: “the tension between assertions of multiple identity and the ongoing necessity of group politics” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1296). Another way to think about intersectionality is “the intersection of different forms of discrimination (i.e., race and gender)” (Sarid, 2019, p. 6).
- LGBTQ+: refers to persons who identify as lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning, plus any additional sexual orientations that are not representative of the dominant heterosexual orientation (Chen-Hayes, 2001).

- Principal: refers to the chief leader of a local school building who oversees the educational experience, serves as a manager, visionary, and a political figure throughout the community.
- Social Justice Leadership: “these principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice and vision” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223).

Significance of the Study

Results of this study provide school leaders with strategies for navigating the educational system in ways that potentially increase their ability to implement socially just and equitable practices throughout their school. School district leaders and principal preparation programs are presented with insight on ways to further offer support to practicing and future school administrators. Principals provided knowledge regarding policies that have historically enhanced or hindered their abilities to make changes. Outcomes produced relevant knowledge to current school district leaders or policymakers to consider when reviewing current policies or enacting future changes.

The research contributed to the body of literature surrounding this topic by providing some quantitative analysis pertaining to a larger quantity of school leaders than has previously been examined. Through the use of a mixed methodological approach, this study provides robust data qualitatively to support the quantitative analysis. Additionally, this research combined a multitude of social justice practices which further broadens the understanding of the total school experience where principals worked, as opposed to studying factors in isolation as previous literature has presented.

Overview of Approach

In order to study the perceptions of acting school leaders in their ability to implement equitable and just practices in schools, a convergent parallel design was utilized (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Practicing school principals were the target participation group who were at least in their second year of serving as a principal during the 2019-2020 academic year. The study applied sequential mixed methods sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Data was collected from principals across the entire state of North Carolina during the Summer and Fall of 2020.

The mixed methodological approach provided both qualitative and quantitative data through the use of a large-scale survey and focus groups. Survey questions included quantitative five-point Likert scale items and qualitative open-ended questions. By collecting both strands of data, the analysis included individual and merged interpretations of the data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Triangulation of the multiple data points produced a robust analysis and strengthened the validity and reliability of the interpretations (Preissle, Glover-Kudon, Rohan, Boehm, & DeGross, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

The Social Justice Educational Leadership (SJEL) framework (Sarid, 2019) served as a guide for the theoretical lens for the research study as seen in Figure 1.1. Sarid's framework demonstrates the complexities within the educational environment that a school leader must consider when making decisions regarding equity and social justice. All portions of the framework were considered throughout the design of the study and during the analysis, except for the environmental justice component. The major overarching components that Sarid (2019) emphasizes are social equality and individual self-determination. Additional elements are as follows: inclusion, equal opportunity, active participation, community competencies,

environmental justice, action and reflection, and social justice policy (Sarid, 2019). Each of the components of the SJEL framework (Sarid, 2019) will be further elaborated upon in chapter three.



Figure 1.1 Sarid (2019) Framework for Social Justice Educational Leadership.

Research Questions

The following questions served as a guide for this convergent parallel research study:

1. How do principals understand the role of social justice and equity in the principalship?
2. What do principals believe their role to be in promoting social justice and equity?
 - a. What are the perceived barriers for principals attempting to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?
 - b. What are the perceived additional supports needed for principals to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?

Organization of the Study

Chapter one has provided an introduction to the proposed research study including the purpose and significance of conducting the study. The second chapter will provide an in-depth review of pertinent literature relevant to understanding the existing knowledge surrounding the topic being studied. Chapter three will detail the methodological approach implemented. Chapter four will present the data, findings, and analysis from the various sources. The final chapter will discuss the implications and recommendations illuminated as a result of conducting the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last couple of decades, academic scholars and educational leaders alike have been emphasizing the importance of school principals working to increase equity and justice (Hyttén & Bettez, 2011; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Marshall, 2004; Wasonga, 2009). Principals play a critical role in establishing the culture and climate of a given school, including establishing the vision and ongoing priorities (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). A recent study conducted by Grissom, Egalite, and Constance found that, “Effective principals are at least as important for student achievement as previous reports have concluded—and in fact, their importance may not have been stated strongly enough” (2021, p. 91). They go on to state that, “Principals have substantively important effects that extend beyond student achievement” (Grissom, et al., 2021, p. 91).

Principal preparation programs have been charged with the task of preparing socially just school leaders and embedding such practices throughout all elements of the curriculum (Brown, 2006; Kose, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). However, school communities are oftentimes resistant to implementation of changes that would increase equitable practices (Burriss & Welner, 2005; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). The principal's ability to implement change concerning equity and social justice are limited by the willingness of the local school district administrators and educational community members to support necessary changes (Marshall, Gerstl-Pepin, & Johnson, 2020; Wang, 2018). Essentially, even when future school leaders received appropriate training with regard to socially just education, minimal evidence exists in the literature demonstrating actual changes in implementation during their tenure (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Ryan, 2010).

Studies to date have focused on defining social justice leadership (Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007), evaluating principal preparation programs on their implementation of justice and equity practices (Bryne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013; Theoharis, 2008), and characterizing principal's perception of social justice in action (Mafora, 2013; Szeto & Cheng, 2018; Wang, 2015; Vogel, 2011). While these elements are important to understanding social justice and equity in educational leadership and developing a common language around the concepts, the purpose of this study was to understand what impact such knowledge is having on pertinent practice. Knowledge and skills are critical first steps for creating systemic change; however, actions must come from learning about the issues of equity and injustice that plague the current educational landscape (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Furthermore, school district leaders, policymakers, and university preparation programs need to understand the resistance that principals face when attempting to enact change (Ryan & Tuters, 2017), in order to establish mechanisms of support for leaders experiencing push back.

Defining Social Justice Leadership

In an effort to establish a shared definition of social justice leadership, Theoharis defines social justice leadership as “principals advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States” (2008, p. 5). Another way of considering social justice leadership is “pursuing policies, practices, and politics that enhance the lifetime opportunities for all children, particularly those children who have been historically marginalized” (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006, p. 279). Students do not identify as one trait in isolation, rather, each person is a combination of their abilities, gender, race, linguistic background, and all other aspects of their demographic makeup (Marshall, et al., 2020; Sarid,

2019). The multiple identities that students bring to the classroom and the intersectionalities of their differences were considered when analyzing ways in which inclusive environments best support the diverse needs of the schools represented by the principals in this study (Capper & Young, 2014; Sarid, 2019). “Social justice leaders tend to not focus on the student as the problem but focus on the structures and services as the means to better address the needs of the students” (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016, p. 1102).

The Role of Principal Preparation Programs

Principal preparation programs are the conduit for leadership in education. Thus, school administration programs play a crucial role in the development of leaders who implement socially just and equitable practices upon being hired as principals. Select programs are implementing curricula that include a focus on equity and social justice. For example, at North Carolina State University (NCSU), the principal preparation program has integrated retreats and curriculum throughout the required coursework which is focused on increasing equity in education (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, & Drake, 2019). Principal preparation programs have been urged to consider ways to screen for candidates to ensure that future school administrators are focused on equity and justice prior to beginning the journey of becoming educational leaders (Kose, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen; 2014).

Although the practice of preparing leaders to be socially just may not yet be the norm (Laura, 2018; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Vogel 2011), leaders of such graduate programs should continue to evaluate ways to enhance the knowledge of the attendees, emphasizing what it means to be a leader for equity and justice. The following two cases examine a preparation program at a university in Arizona and at the University of Texas which provide examples of ways in which leadership programs strategically evaluate how equity is addressed throughout the

programs (Gooden, Davis, Spikes, Hall, & Lee, 2018; Liou & Hermans, 2017). Following the program evaluations, a review of a study conducted by Vogel (2011) will provide evidence of concern regarding the amount of knowledge gleaned by students while attending school administration training programs focused on concepts of social justice and equity. Lastly, this section will contain Wang's (2015) research results pertaining to practicing principals understanding of social justice. While Wang (2015) is not referencing principal preparation programs, his research contributes to the mindset of existing administrators regarding their role.

Principal Preparation Program Evaluations

Liou and Hermans (2017) provide an evaluation of a principal preparation program in Arizona through the use of narrative inquiry. The focus is more specifically on transformative leadership that works to address issues of systemic racism. Procedures were used to help students develop an understanding concerning the impact of privilege on decisions made within the school building. The aforementioned Arizona program embeds strategies that address racism throughout the total curriculum. While Liou and Hermans (2017) provide clear evidence that aspiring administrators are being instructed with respect to equity, more information is needed regarding the actions that are being taken based on the acquired knowledge.

Gooden and colleagues conducted a program evaluation at the University of Texas to encourage developers of principal preparation programs to additionally embed a focus of antiracist and social justice-oriented practices (2018). Survey data and semi-structured interviews of eight graduates from the referenced principal preparation program were used to evaluate change in thinking and impacts of graduates' intrinsic concepts inclusive of race and social justice. The program had a positive influence on participants' focus on race-focused leadership through strategic curriculum, relationship building and the use of student reflection. Once more,

evidence is not provided about how knowledge is put into action upon completing the preparation program when the individual begins serving as a principal (Gooden, et al., 2018).

Practicing Administrators' Understanding of Social Justice

Educational leaders who graduated from a university in Colorado were surveyed and the results illuminated the limited understanding of social justice in education acquired by students while attending one particular preparation program (Vogel, 2011). Only a small percentage of graduates attributed their knowledge about social justice to the experiences and insights gleaned as a part of the principal preparation program. Although Vogel (2011) does not conduct a formal evaluation of the graduate program, results demonstrate concern regarding the amount and the quality of the experiences of future school administrators related to social justice and equity implementation within schools.

Utilizing a grounded theory approach, Wang conducted 22 interviews of principals in Ontario (2015). Wang sought to determine how school leaders perceive social justice and the commitment principals have to such actions in their current role. Ultimately, Wang does not provide researchers with a final framework to utilize and is still in need of additional work. Wang found strong variation in the understandings of social justice described by the acting principals interviewed. Wang's (2015) interviews of Canadian principals is helpful to understanding the perception of principals regarding their role in working toward establishing socially just schools and argues that the era of accountability hinders the principal's ability to focus on equity and justice. Wang posits that the backgrounds of the administrators and the contexts of their current work influenced the varying perspectives on what social justice in education means. Major themes included social justice as equity, which included "equity of resources and access, and equity with respect to diversity" (Wang, 2015, p. 671). Additional analysis and framing are

needed to establish a theoretical framework guiding socially just work for educational leaders to further inform future research.

Social Justice in Action

While some studies offer theoretical framing for what social justice and equity focused leaders should do (Theoharis, 2007), significantly fewer empirical studies have examined the experience of principals attempting to implement such strategies (Ryan, 2010). The following examples will examine the current literature specifically related to what is currently being done in schools with principals that are considered to be socially just leaders or schools that are attempting to increase equitable opportunities for students. Kose (2009) provides evidence for leaders to carefully consider when choosing professional development topics for school staff. Ryan (2010) asserts the need for principals to develop political acumen. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) provide observations considering ways to increase inclusive schooling. Hernandez, Murakami, and Cerecer (2014) emphasize the role of racial identity and the ability for teachers and leaders to connect with students who have experienced racism within the school system. Ryan and Tuters (2017) highlight the resistance from the total educational community that school leaders face when trying to implement change. Szeto and Cheng (2018) examine the effect of contextual differences on the ability of school leaders to implement change focused on social justice. Wang (2018) provides concrete strategies for leaders to implement as demonstrated by experienced social justice administrators. Finally, Laura (2018) observes the influence of hiring practices on establishing a staff committed to equity.

Kose (2009) utilized a multiple case study approach to examine the use of professional learning as a venue to focus on social justice. Kose (2009) employs interviews with three principals in order to understand their influence on professional development opportunities.

None of the schools examined would be considered high needs. One avenue that is underutilized for creating a socially just and equitable school community is through the professional learning that occurs within the school. Outside of state and district leadership requirements, the principal is the primary individual who sets the professional development agenda for a particular school. A limitation of Kose (2009) is evident in that the focus is primarily on the action that principals provide in an effort to increase equity and justice utilizing professional development. To ensure that teachers and staff are trained to address the inequitable system that persists, professional learning is one of the critical components facing school leaders attempting to make changes. By examining one element in isolation, Kose (2009) fails to provide a holistic understanding of the principal's experience when attempting to promote social justice throughout the total school environment.

Engaging in the politics of education is necessary for principals who desire to ensure equitable outcomes for students (Ryan, 2010). Among the 28 principals from Canada interviewed by Ryan (2010), principals who had a stronger sense of their political acumen experienced more success than those who struggled to navigate the political arena. Through engaging the educational community, school leaders were able to develop a sense of ownership in the decisions made throughout the school and come to a consensus. Principals who were not so politically astute either failed to produce the desired changes in the school or faced professional risks. Highlighted strategies included building relationships, persuasion, persistence, and acting intentionally. Ryan (2010) describes political acumen as a necessary skill that principals need in schools but does not describe the actual changes that principals are making to create an equitable educational environment.

School administrators working in high needs schools have a presumably varied experience from principals serving in affluent high achieving schools (Medina, Martinez, Murakami, Rodriguez, & Hernandez, 2014). Upon analyzing the perspective of two Latina principals serving at high needs schools, Medina and colleagues (2014) insist on meeting the basic physical and mental needs of students prior to addressing the academic needs. Medina et al. (2014) do not aim to understand social justice in action, yet by the very nature of their research, provide an important component that educational leaders must consider. When attempting to create socially just educational environments, understanding how principals address the physical, mental, and emotional needs of their students will influence the actions of future school administrators.

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) observed successes with social justice leaders who were committed to inclusion. Both of the principals included in the study had backgrounds in special education and worked to decrease the segregation efforts within the school. The school leaders in this study did face resistance regarding students with extreme behavioral concerns and had to make some compromises. Although all of the changes desired were not met, progress towards creating a more equitable and just school was achieved. DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) recognize that not all leaders will be focused on combating the racially exclusive practices typically found in the special education setting. Not all leaders will have a special education background, urging principal preparation programs to do a diligent job in training future leaders to sufficiently serve as administrators over all programs including special education. While the exclusionary practices are a component of segregation in schools, other areas outside of special education need to be considered when looking at socially just leadership in education.

DeMatthews (2015) examined a case in which a principal was making efforts to create a more inclusive school and yet was inevitably asked to resign. Progress was made towards creating more inclusive special education placements, yet discipline problems rose. Typical concerns of parents regarding inclusion are assumed to be from parents of general education students in reference to special education students causing behavioral problems or teachers lowering the instructional level of the classroom. In this case, the parents of the students receiving special education services did not want them engaging in the general education classroom. The principal failed to engage parents as a whole in conversations regarding the vision and ultimate goal towards creating a more inclusive school, which might have helped limit the amount of resistance faced.

Hernandez, Murakami, and Cerecer (2014) examine the influence of race on the outcomes that one particular school leader is able to make towards social justice. The areas of focus within the study include emphasizing high expectations for all students, relating to the student's value of family, and increasing student opportunities. This specific leader was consistently aware of the racism that plagues the school systems, especially in this instance towards students who identify as Latinas/os. As a leader with the same racial identity, the principal was able to empower students to see themselves in her role and influence the students to heed her wisdom by acting as their role model. Students demonstrated high achievement under the referenced social justice leader. Simple yet intentional efforts to ensure communications such as letters home or phone messages are always provided in multiple languages to ensure that families have access to school information (Hernandez, et al., 2014). This study focuses on the experience of only one leader and specifically emphasizes only two elements within social justice, that being race and gender.

Ryan and Tuters (2017) utilize interviews of school leaders and district personnel in Canada to explore the strategies that are used to implement social justice changes within a school and district. Leaders cited resistance by various individuals as one of the factors that impacts the amount of progress principals are able to make when supporting individuals who have been traditionally underserved and oppressed by the educational system. Educational leaders have to decide which of the changes are worth fighting for when their job has the potential to be on the line. Ryan and Tuters (2017) allude to the idea that school boards, superintendents, teachers, parents, and community members all have the potential to object to the actions of the school leader, causing them to be cautious when making changes. Because principals are experiencing resistance, further understanding is needed regarding successful strategies principals have found to engage in a social justice agenda and maintain their position within the political realm of schooling.

Szeto and Cheng (2018) conduct a cross case study of two principals in Hong Kong and analyzed the different experiences based on the context of the school. The researchers conclude that the contextual differences of a given school impact what social justice leadership might look like to a particular principal. As this study only told the story of two administrators, additional information is needed to understand how context plays a role in the actionable steps of social justice leadership and suggested strategies for navigating the variety of contexts a school leader could face throughout their tenure.

Wang (2018) examines the experience of 22 administrators in Ontario that self-identify as social justice leaders. Principals express specific strategies that have led to their success at combating issues of oppression and inequity. Contributing factors include the strategic involvement of teachers, community members, and the empowering partnership with the

students themselves. Administrators involved in Wang's (2018) study acknowledge that the students are the ones who are most aware and are experiencing the injustices within the school system. As such, students need to be allies and advocates of the work to create schools that value difference and ensure equity. School leaders are charged to be mindful in the hiring process and to consider candidates who are deeply committed to social justice work. Continual professional development for such individuals will help encourage and support individuals to overcome the systematic obstacles such as finances, time, and deficit thinking. Wang (2018) provides specific strategies for school leaders to implement, which supports the goal of this research study.

Limitations include the context of only utilizing the Ontario area and the unclear outcomes that the principals are seeing within the schools. Further research is needed to examine what changes are actually made in the school when the school community is committed to enhancing equity and justice.

Laura (2018) examines the hiring practices of one social justice leader to create a school faculty committed to the same cause. The principal is strategic throughout the hiring process, requiring nontraditional elements such as a demonstrated commitment to social justice and a written philosophy about social justice in schools. Candidates are required to prepare a lesson which is examined for elements which support diversity. The marketing of the position is through channels that are known to pursue equity. Laura (2018) emphasizes the need to further develop a retention plan, including professional development once high-quality educators are hired and committed to doing the difficult work of systematic change. As with aforementioned studies, the hiring process is only one element which affects the education system. Understanding the ways that hiring interweaves with professional development, discipline policies, curriculum selection

and works towards inclusion will help principals understand what implementing equity throughout the entire school environment entails.

Synthesis of Critical Action Elements

Strategies evident in the previous literature which were perceived as critical elements leading to the success of these social justice leaders are elaborated in the following section. Synthesizing the results of existing research, including empirical, theoretical, and literature reviews, will provide a more holistic understanding of how principals have attempted to increase socially just practices. The main tenants included focusing on community (Hernandez, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018; Zhang, Goddard, & Jakubiec, 2018; Sarid, 2019), maintaining high expectations for all students (Hernandez, et al., 2014; Jensen, 2009; Kose, 2009; Medina, et al., 2014; Parrett & Budge, 2012), providing continuing education experiences for staff (Hernandez, et al., 2014; Higgenbottom & Friensen, 2013; Slater, Potter, Torres, & Briceno, 2014; Wang, 2018), recruiting and retaining the right people (Kose, 2009; Laura, 2018; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018), embracing the role of racial identity (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Kose, 2009; Slater, et al., 2014), and creating a culture of inclusive education (Capper & Young, 2014; DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

Community

Zhang et al. (2018) presents a significant quantitative relationship between social justice leadership and the community in which the school is situated. Research indicates that focusing on the community as a whole by involving students, parents, and teachers alike, to participate in decision making and school wide activities, enhanced school leaders' ability to make more equitable changes within the school (Medina, et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010; Wang, 2018). Community

involvement promotes social justice by the mere act of giving voice to members who have historically been silenced (Wasonga, 2009). For example, when conflict arose between various student populations in the case of Reed and Swaminathan (2016), community organizations were able to alleviate tension in a way that the school staff could not have done alone. Administrators encouraged to enhance the involvement of the family, especially when considering diverse cultural views of familial importance (Hernandez, et al., 2014). Contextual differences have altered the course of action for administrators promoting the need to actively engage community members and agencies (DeMatthews, 2015; Ryan, 2010; Szeto & Cheng, 2018). Further understanding the strategies that school leaders are utilizing to engage with families and local community members is needed. Such knowledge is required to fully recognize the role of community involvement in establishing socially just and equitable routines in schools (Sarid, 2019).

High Expectations

Maintaining high expectations for students regardless of background and history is a critical component for establishing equitable practices and access in education (Hernandez, et al., 2014; Kose, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2008, Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). The educational system has a history of assuming less from students with historically marginalized backgrounds. Deficit thinking perpetuates a system of accepting inadequate academic and social growth of students (Jensen, 2009; Kose, 2009; Medina, et al., 2014; Parrett & Budge, 2012). Creating a schoolwide vision and culture that maintains high academic and social expectations are fundamental when pursuing a socially just and equitable educational experience for each student (Kose, 2009).

Involving the Students

Principals committed to social justice strategically involve students in making decisions in regard to their educational experience (Wasogna, 2009). Higgenbottom and Friensen (2013) describe an optimal practice of allowing each student to determine what success in their life would look like and develop a plan for working with the school to reach student defined success. Hernandez, et al. (2014), attribute the success of the principal in her ability to build relationships with her students and relate to them when the students are seeking advice. Through establishing strong relationships, students are able to envision themselves as future leaders, contributing to a break in the cycle of oppression through empowerment (Hernandez, et al., 2014). Student governments were offered by Slater, et al. (2014) as one way to promote student participation in the decisions made throughout the schools. “Students themselves are great facilitators in changing the system of oppression” (Wang, 2018, p. 490). Therefore, school leaders need to focus on identifying “students’ capacities and strengths, and channel their energy in ways that aim to promote social justice” (Wang, 2018, p. 490).

Recruit, Hire, and Retain

Strategic hiring practices are paramount when attempting to identify people that have the same focus, thus making progress more likely to happen (Kose, 2009; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018). Hiring people who have a proven track record of commitment in using their influence to make the educational system more equitable will contribute to creating an equity driven team (Laura, 2018). Rivera-McCutchen (2014) highlight the moral commitment that potential educators need to demonstrate when being hired to work in schools which are rooted in social justice. Furthermore, hiring practices should be targeted to meet the needs demonstrated by existing inequities, such as recruiting teachers from diverse demographic

backgrounds in addition to diverse experiences and training relevant to their prospective teaching role (Kose, 2009).

When school leaders are recruiting and hiring teachers and administrators, they need to be cognizant of the role that race plays in creating socially just schooling environments (Slater, et al., 2014; Wasonga, 2009). Research indicates that when students see themselves in the staff at their school, ultimately achievement rises (Egalite, et al., 2015). Likewise, when school leaders are able to relate to the experience of the oppressive system due to their own experience, they are likely to be more strategic about creating opportunities for historically underserved students (Hernandez, et al., 2014). While strategic hiring is critical, consideration needs to be made about the reality of the teacher shortage (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019), in that some schools do not have the privilege to attract and attain such quality educators (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2019).

Continuing Education

On-going professional development is a vital component of training and supporting teachers who are committed to social justice (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Kose, 2009; Laura, 2018; Pazy & Cole, 2013; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Wang, 2018). Teacher capacity must be addressed in order to fully meet the academic needs of students (Medina, et al., 2014). Since principals are usually the people in charge of determining the continuing education topics, principals have an obligation to focus on social justice approaches (Kose, 2009). When educators with a commitment to social justice experience a lack of relevant continuing education opportunities, high turnover persists (Laura, 2018). Administrators should likewise be continually engaging in professional development to renew their focus and stay

abreast of innovative strategies to increase the likelihood of socially just implementation (Mafora, 2013; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).

All educators can benefit from ongoing training regarding social identity and the influences of their backgrounds and biases in the classroom (Kose, 2009). White teachers need specific training about educating and supporting students of color, especially in developing an understanding of cultural differences (Hernandez, et al., 2014). Providing professional development to an entire staff and working towards unity contributes to ensuring that the progress being accomplished will not cease upon leadership turnover. Due to the fact that the entire staff will possess the same commitment and knowledge of equitable and socially just schooling, establishes a cohesive environment (Hernandez, et al., 2014, Kose, 2009).

Inclusion

Ultimately, socially just work in education must have a focus on inclusion considering all person's diverse characteristics (Capper & Young, 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Oliver and Barnes (2010) purport that the establishment of inclusive educational settings is the first step to ultimately creating an inclusive society. Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) contribute a case which demonstrates how increasing inclusive services for students with special needs can lead to an increase in academic achievement for all students. Creating an inclusive environment supportive of diversities would appropriately include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ+) students and the intersections of their race, ability, language, and gender, which are typically viewed in isolation (Capper & Young, 2014). Inclusive education ensures that students are provided with "a sense of belonging to a school classroom community where difference is expected and valued" (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011, p. 649). Furthermore, inclusive educational settings ensure that there is a proportionate distribution of students throughout the total school

environment, such as within classroom placements and equitable access to extracurricular activities (DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

Resistance and Risk

Navigating the political system of education poses risks to school leaders because “administrators work in hierarchical systems that make them legally responsible for enforcing policies and practices which may be unfair” (Ryan, 2010, p. 357). Principals have reportedly experienced issues of resistance when attempting to implement change, especially around strategies of social justice and equity (DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Higginbottom & Friesen, 2013; Norberg, Arlestig, & Angelle, 2015; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Slater, Potter, Torres, & Briceno, 2014; Wang, 2018). Overall areas of concern were related to the professional risk that could lead to job loss (DeMatthews, 2015; Higginbottom & Friesen, 2013; Ryan, 2010; Slater, et al., 2014), resistance from the local and educational community (Burriss & Welner, 2005; DeMatthews, 2015; Kose, 2009; Ryan & Tutters, 2017), financial restrictions (Norberg, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sarid, 2019; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang 2018), and lack of district support (DeMatthews, 2015; Higginbottom & Friesen, 2013; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018).

Professional Risk

Risk must be considered when principals are attempting to change the culture of an educational entity (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Ryan, 2010; Wang, 2018). School leaders recognize that when becoming a social justice advocate, they may be putting their profession at risk in some instances (Ryan, 2010; Slater, et al., 2014). The case illustration presented by DeMatthews (2015) demonstrated the realities of such concerns where the principal was ultimately asked to resign after only two years. Although the individual given notice as referenced by DeMatthews

(2015) could have been tied to other concerns, this is just one example of the concern regarding the loss of a job purportedly related to the principal's commitment to social justice. Professional risk is worth considering when debating the implementation of practices that are politically controversial, depending on the stakeholder. Principals need to have an understanding of their political status and the perceptions of the educational community when determining the best point of entry for implementing change (Kose, 2009). Higginbottom and Friesen (2013) featured a principal who experienced questioning from the assistant superintendent and the teacher's union in a manner that suggested professional risk could be anticipated if the principal continued to pursue their vision.

Community Resistance

For the purposes of this study, the term community included teachers, students, parents, and local community members. Historically, educational leaders have experienced resistance from teachers and community members when trying to implement changes (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Gooden, et al., 2018; Higginbottom & Friesen, 2013; Karpinski, & Lugg, 2006; Norberg, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Ryan & Tutters, 2017; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Wang 2018). For example, Burriss and Welner (2005) reported resistance from the community when attempting to detrack schools to create more heterogeneous environments. Parents of students with special needs have expressed concerns regarding their students returning to the general education setting because of the impression that services would no longer be received, which would be a backward trajectory on their progress (DeMatthews, 2015). Community resistance is further demonstrated through the high teacher turnover experienced in schools where teachers do not support the leadership making changes that promote social justice (Laura, 2018; Marshall, et al., 2020; Medina, et al., 2014; Norberg, et al., 2014).

Financial Restrictions

Financial restrictions have seemingly hindered the social justice agenda of school administrators (Wang, 2018). The reality is that funding has to finance significantly more social supports in high poverty areas than in high wealth schools (Slater, et al., 2014). Affluent areas are able to spend more of their dollars specifically on teachers and not on the social and emotional needs of students (Slater, et al., 2014). The issues experienced by the teacher's union in the case presented by Higginbottom and Friesen (2013) were associated with the proposal of the principal to redistribute funding that would promote social justice. The anticipated changes would reduce the funding provided to specific departments or programs which caused confrontation (Higginbottom & Friesen, 2013). Being restricted by finances limits one's ability to increase salaries to hire teachers with advanced degrees, or to purchase resources such as newer curriculum that includes culturally responsive materials (Samuels, 2020).

Moreover, financial flexibility allows administrators to meet the physical necessities of children, such as hunger and clothing, before educational progress can begin in schools with large proportions of students from households that are considered economically disadvantaged (Medina, et al., 2014). Educational leaders seeking to promote social justice must reflect and make tough decisions in order to equitably distribute the financial, material, and human resources within a school (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). Fusarelli (2015) suggests that financial redistribution of government funding in the United States "requires the political courage and will to realign our spending and reallocative priorities" (2015, p. 688). Likewise, being an educational leader for social justice requires similar gumption in order to make financial decisions which benefit the welfare of all children.

Lack of District Support

Principals were not able to maintain their commitment to change when experiencing a lack of support by district leaders (Mafora, 2013; Ryan, 2010; Slater, et al., 2014). Support from the district level at times is focused primarily on compliance and making sure the laws are followed, as opposed to shaping the specific needs of a school attempting to be more inclusive (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). Considering the era of accountability that persists, the emphasis on standardized testing can prevent administrators from focusing on opportunities other than immediate achievement results (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2019), which can minimize the needs of the whole child (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). As previously mentioned in DeMatthews (2015) the principal was asked to resign, which provides an example in which district leadership did not support the principal enough to persist through a time period of trepidation. The school leader highlighted in Higginbottom and Friesen (2013) was not asked to resign at the time of the case study but was having to address concerns presented by the area superintendent indicating a lack of district level support.

Research Lacking on Administrators Leading for Equity

Ultimately, while all of the aforementioned approaches make a difference in the lives of students, additional information is needed concerning the specific actions' leaders take in an effort to increase social justice and equity within schools. Scholarship that explores specific administrators' actions may help guide future leaders on how to make deliberate changes to increase access and opportunities for diverse students. Specifically examining alterations such as detracking, ensuring access to high quality teachers and/or advanced programming will provide guidance for practicing administrators on how to initiate such change within their school (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Kose, 2009).

Qualitative research currently dominates the few empirical studies related to educational leaders working to promote social justice. Through using a mixed methodological approach to gain understanding from a larger sample size, a much needed well rounded view of the experiences of the principal resulted. In much of the extant research, many elements of exclusionary practices were viewed in isolating categories such as specifically for people of color, disabilities, sexual orientation, or language different from the dominant culture (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Recommended actions were also typically studied in separate research such as inclusion, involving community, or hiring strategically.

Therefore, this study examined practices implemented in unison, to understand how principals implement socially just practices throughout the total school environment and not in isolation. As scholars and practitioners, we need to be conscious of the many identities that students bring with them to the schoolhouse and develop ways to increase our support for inclusion of each student (Capper & Young, 2014). Addressing existing inequities throughout the educational system is a wicked problem (Rittle & Webber, 1973) and yet one that must be challenged for the sake of all the children who deserve a better schooling experience and improved outcomes. “Without recognizing the various ways that patriarchy, racism, homophobia, and class privilege manifest, the power systems of oppression will prevail” (Marshall, Gerstl-Pepin, & Johnson, 2020, p. 185).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the literature related to principals attempting to implement equitable and just practices within their schools. An overview of the role of principal preparation programs and studies with reference to the perception of the meaning of social justice in education have been provided. Additionally, relevant research pertaining to the

experiences of principals attempting to make changes within their schools have been reviewed, including the need for administrators to create inclusive schools through involvement of the community and students. Chapter three will detail the convergent parallel mixed methodological design implemented for this research study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of principals in their ability to implement equitable and just practices in schools. This study explored barriers that principals had encountered throughout the process. Prior research has focused on one or two components such as: examining inclusion, community involvement, teacher hiring practices, or professional development, rather than a combination of the priorities of social justice and equity in schools. Previous research that has examined school leaders and their efforts to increase equity and social justice practices have primarily utilized qualitative research designs. The current study addressed current gaps in the research by examining multiple strategies to increase equity and social justice. The results provide a holistic perspective of the experiences of school leaders through the use of a mixed methodological approach. This chapter will describe the convergent parallel design, which will include a review of the research questions, data collection, and data analysis as described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011).

The study implemented a mixed methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative survey data in addition to focus groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The quantitative portion of the study provided a view of the current realities for principals working towards social justice throughout the state. The use of qualitative methodology is designated when the researcher seeks to conduct an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of interest, as reflected in this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Both the qualitative and quantitative stands had equal priority throughout the research process. The convergent parallel design most often employed in mixed methods research, guided this study and utilized the parallel-databases

variant (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). A diagram of the research process and data analysis is shown in Figure 3.1.

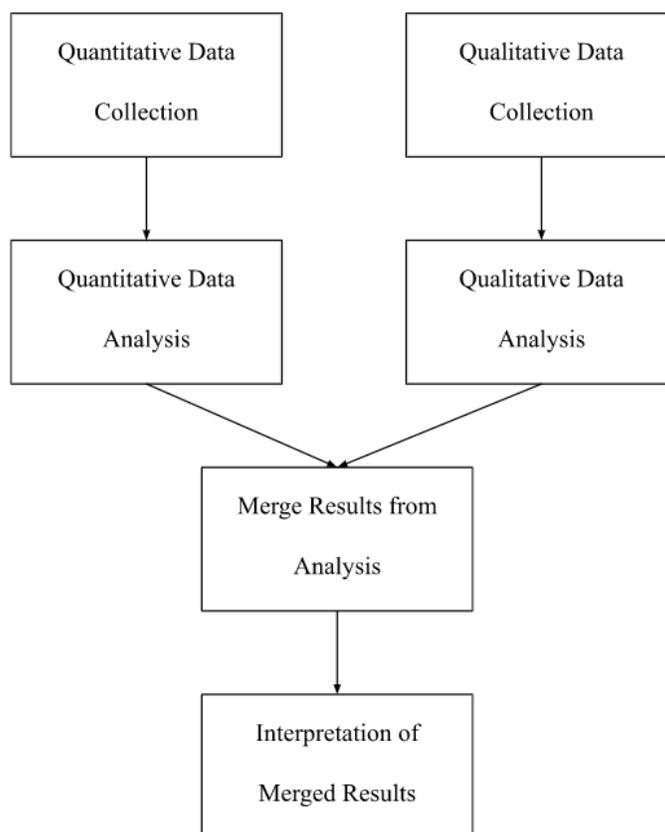


Figure 3.1 Convergent Parallel Methodological Diagram (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

I sought to learn how principals perceived their ability to implement social justice and equitable strategies from their experiences as school leaders. I utilized a three-pronged approach including focus groups, open-ended survey questions, and Likert scale survey items. Such methodological triangulation assured that the research questions were fully addressed. Mixed methodology was chosen for the present study in order to ensure that the areas not addressed by one method were further explored by implementing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The combination of strands enhanced the validity of the study that each part individually could not have achieved (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

I incorporated focus groups (Barbour, 2014) and a large-scale survey (Thomas, 1999) in order to understand the perceptions of school leaders and their ability to impact change by implementing socially just leadership. Focus groups facilitated synergy and rich discussion among participants so that they could recall meaningful stories that addressed the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus groups provided participants with the opportunity to share their own narrative in addition to “supporting or challenging others’ narratives” (Barbour, 2014, p. 8). The survey instrument allowed the participants to reflect upon their experiences and to share accounts in a secure, private manner.

Theoretical Framework

Sarid’s (2019) Social Justice Educational Leadership Framework guided the research study as seen in Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.2 Social Justice Educational Leadership (SJEL) Framework (Sarid, 2019).

The model demonstrates tensions that are ever present within schools when determining the best course of action to enhance social justice practices. The two overarching contradictory mentalities are Social Equality and Individual Self Determination. Within the Social Equality component there is an emphasis on the dichotomy of Inclusion and Equal Opportunity. Individual Self Determination is divided among individuals who debate between Active Participation and Communicative Competencies. Furthermore, Environmental Justice is an element considered within all portions of the framework. Each of the components will be explained below in greater detail. Sarid's (2019) framework emphasizes the importance of action and reflection around the aforementioned components. Upon reflection, policies regarding social justice should be developed based on the needs of the local community and school context.

Social Equality

As seen above, the major tensions within the social equality component are comprised of Inclusion and Equal Opportunity. Both aspects involve practices essential for consideration among educational leaders committed to social justice. Social Equality emphasizes:

the complexity of applying inclusion/integration-based policies specifically as it applies to the intersectionality of different social justice agendas (race, color, low-income, LGBT and so forth) as well as the intricate nature of promoting student achievement, especially in relation to inclusion/integration policy. (Sarid, 2019, p. 11)

Inclusion. For the purpose of Sarid's (2019) framework as a guide for this study, inclusion refers to "breaking down cultural, procedural, and distributive barriers inhibiting the recognition or acceptance of difference based on disabilities, special needs, race, ethnic background, color, gender and so forth. Inclusion is about integration rather than segregation" (Sarid, 2019, p. 12). Inclusion stresses heterogeneous grouping throughout the total school

environment for all human differences. The inclusion model advocates for historically marginalized populations involvement in all aspects of an educational experience.

Equal Opportunity. On the opposing view of Social Equality is the Equal Opportunity mentality, which cannot be fully implemented in unison with all of the necessary decisions required under a full inclusion model. According to Sarid, Equal Opportunity refers “to policies and actions addressing *every* individual’s needs; and in this context this involves acknowledging differences in *all* individuals’ cognitive, emotional, and affectionate development” (2019, p. 12). In this setting, principals have to make difficult decisions regarding funding and priorities. Typically, within this mentality there is an understanding that all students with disabilities cannot access general education settings based on their individual needs (Sarid, 2019).

Individual Self-Determination

Active Participation and Communicative Competencies are the major components within Individual Self-Determination. The primary focus of Individual Self-Determination is the voice of the individual and the community, as active members within the educational design and implementation (Sarid, 2019).

Active Participation. The SJEL framework describes Active Participation as “the practice of actively and collectively interacting in deliberative democratic processes, and this practice necessitates the enablement of the proper educational conditions for engagement in and for the community” (Sarid, 2019, p. 11). Essentially, social justice educational leaders have to learn to work “with the community rather than on the community” (Sarid, 2019, p. 11).

Communicative Competencies. The importance of educational leaders to develop Communicative Competencies focuses on “being heard and hearing others, and taking a stand on issues of importance to the individual and the community at large” (Sarid, 2019, p. 10). The

Communicative Competencies emphasize the ability of the educational leader to listen to the needs and desires of the community, including teachers, students, parents, and local community members.

Environmental Justice

Sarid refers to Environmental Justice as “policy and actions aimed at addressing the protection of the *natural* environment (i.e., the non-human world), conceived as either bearing rights (such as other species) or as the responsibility of human beings” (2019, p. 12).

Environmental Justice is beyond the scope of the current study and is the only component of the SJEL framework that was not considered (Sarid, 2019).

Social Justice Policy

In an optimal setting based on the presented framework by Sarid (2019), after active reflection on the aforementioned components, policies would be established for the local school based on the social justice needs. Principals’ decisions will be directly impacted by their worldview and biases towards the various components within the SJEL framework (Sarid, 2019). The school leader needs to consider the various tensions regarding the conflicting components that are present when attempting to implement practices that increase social justice and equity throughout the total school environment.

Research Questions

The following two overarching research questions were established to drive the present study:

1. How do principals understand the role of social justice and equity in the principalship?
2. What do principals believe their role to be in promoting social justice and equity?

- a. What are the perceived barriers for principals attempting to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?
- b. What are the perceived additional supports needed for principals to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?

Site Selection and Sample

This section will review how the location and participants were chosen to participate in the study. A description of the context and the people who participated in the various parts of the study will be provided. This study was conducted during a time of societal unrest including significant protests and racial discord due to public videotaped murders of black humans by police. Additionally, data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic at a time when principals were having to make adjustments to their service delivery in order to accommodate state guidelines regarding safety measures for the coronavirus (Porter, 2020).

Local Context

In 2019, inequities due to access, race, and funding were named among the most critical issues in education for the state of North Carolina (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2019). Overall, educators throughout the state needed to address racial disparities in tracking of students, discipline disproportionality, and the need for a more diverse teaching staff (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2019). Students in rural areas of the state lacked access to equitable resources, including high quality teachers (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2019).

Students who were Black, Native American, or identified with a special need, were disproportionately more likely to be suspended in North Carolina (BEST NC, 2019).

Specifically, Black students as compared to their White peers were four times more likely to be

suspended (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2019). Over 70% of educators and administrators throughout the state were White, while 51% of the students were nonwhite (BEST NC, 2019). Understanding social justice leadership in North Carolina is critical to making educational practices more equitable for children throughout the state at a time when disparities were prevalent throughout the educational experience.

Study Participants

This section reviews decisions utilized regarding who were included within the study and who were excluded. Criteria on exclusion was primarily based on who would have prior knowledge that this study seeks to address (Thomas, 1999). Table 3.1 and Table 3.2 provides data displays for clarity regarding the participants of the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Mixed methods research lends itself to a combination of sampling techniques because the aim is “to generate complementary databases that include information that has both depth and breadth regarding the phenomenon under study” (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 85). Sequential mixed methods sampling allowed for the qualitative participants to be chosen through the use of stratified purposive sampling from the quantitative sample (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Volunteer sampling was used to recruit participants through email to principals in North Carolina (Hayes, 2009). While the sample size was larger for the survey data, with a sub sample used for the focus groups, participants were from the same sample (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Dual participation in the study increased the ability to compare results across datasets without being concerned regarding external factors (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Survey Participants. In an effort to obtain the perspective of leaders in various regions and districts of NC, school administrators throughout the entire state received the survey instrument. Principals self-reported on their perceptions of relevant progress and needs to further

increase equity and justice throughout their school (Hayes, 2009). Principals received three email reminders over the course of six weeks in an effort to maximize participation. At the end of the survey, participants indicated interest in participating in a focus group. Table 3.1 provides descriptive statistics of the participants pertaining to their independent variables (Hayes, 2009).

Table 3.1

Principals' Participation in Survey

Variables	Answer Choices	Responses
Race	Black	27.87%
	White	67.21%
	Other	4.92%
Gender	Male	42.62%
	Female	57.38%
Degrees	Masters	67.21%
	Doctorate	31.15%
	Post Doctorate	1.64%
School Location	Rural	55.74%
	Urban	14.75%
	Suburban	29.51%
School Type	Traditional Public	90.16%
	Public Charter	9.84%
Grades Served	K-5	52.46%
	6-8	18.03%
	9-12	19.67%
	6-12	1.64%
	K-8	8.20%
Average Years' Experience	Principal	7.07 Years
	Assistant Principal	3.70 Years
	Teacher	10.07 Years

Note: Principal data from survey respondents are included in Table 3.1. There were additional race options provided; the ones included were the only ones selected.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s Statistical Profile for Public School Principals during the 2019-2020 school year, indicated that 25% of principals were Black, 72% were White and 3% were other race, 58% of principals were female and 42% were male. Similarly, of participants who responded to the survey, approximately 28% of respondents were Black, 67% were White and 5% identified as other race. Furthermore, 43% of study participants were male and 57% were female. The average length of principal experience among study participants was about 7 years. See Table 3.2 for a comparison data.

Table 3.2

Survey Participants Compared to North Carolina Principals

Variables	North Carolina Principals	Survey Participants
Black	25%	28%
Other Race	3%	5%
White	72%	67%
Female	58%	57%
Male	42%	43%

Note: Principal Statistics for North Carolina were obtained from North Carolina Department of Public Instruction’s Statistical Profile for the 2019-2020 school year (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2020).

Focus Group Participants. Descriptive information about the focus group participants can be found in Table 3.3. Participant’s names were removed in order to maintain anonymity.

Table 3.3

Principals' Participation in Focus Group

Participant	Principal Experience	Race	Gender	Degrees	School Location	Grade Level	Economically Disadvantaged
Principal 1	9 Years	White	Male	Masters	Rural	9-12	70%
Principal 2	7 Years	White	Female	Doctorate	Suburban	6-8	60%
Principal 3	5 Years	White	Female	Masters	Rural	K-5	40%
Principal 4	2 Years	Black	Female	Masters	Rural	9-12	73%
Principal 5	11 Years	White	Male	Masters	Rural	6-8	84%
Principal 6	12 Years	White	Male	Masters	Urban	6-8	63%
Principal 7	3 Years	White	Male	Masters	Rural	K-5	100%
Principal 8	2 Years	White	Female	Masters	Rural	K-5	55%
Principal 9*	9 Years	White	Male	Masters	Suburban	9-12	12%

*Note: Principal data from all three focus groups are included in Table 3.2. *The only principal from a public charter school.*

Participation in focus groups included principals who self-identified as having incorporated training in social justice and equitable approaches to implement change in schools through the survey data. Participants were recruited from throughout the state as a part of the survey.

Three additional participants were expected to be included in the focus groups but did not show up on the day of the scheduled virtual session and failed to provide any notice or follow up regarding future participation. Two out of the three principals who were unable to attend were Black, female participants, which simply limited the racial and gender diversity of the focus group participants. Selecting principals from various school types provided a robust view of the perceptions throughout education, as opposed to a single level such as elementary (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). While the majority of the participants identified their schools as being rural, there were two suburban participants and one principal from an urban school. Precisely three focus groups were conducted with members from different types of schools.

Selection Criteria

Principals had to be in at least their second year of serving as a chief administrator to participate in the study. Principals in their first year were excluded because new administrators were assumed to likely still be determining the overall needs of the school and developing new relationships. Principals in their first year may not have attempted to implement the changes proposed within the SJEL framework. Assistant principals were excluded from participation because they are ultimately under the purview of the principal.

Data Collection

The following section will provide a thorough description of the steps made throughout the data collection process. Data collection occurred in a roughly simultaneous collection phase as recommended by the convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, data collection occurred during the Summer of 2020. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (NCDPI) (2019) Educational Directory and Demographical Information Exchange (EDDIE) webpage granted

access to email addresses for principals serving at a public school, both traditional and charter, for the 2019-2020 school year. According to the statistical profile obtained from NCDPI (2020) for the 2019-2020 school year there were 2,433 school principals. Principals had six weeks to complete the survey. Each participant who had not completed the survey, received three reminder emails. Focus groups were established during the fourth week of the data collection period, although additional responses were still collected via the online survey in the remaining two weeks of collection.

Survey Data Collection

A large-scale survey was utilized to gather data from principals throughout the entire state. All survey questions were peer reviewed (Thomas, 1999) and piloted (Creswell & Poth, 2018) prior to distribution to the target group of the research study. Questions for the survey comprised items from prior studies conducted (Chen-Hayes, 2001; Denbo & Ross, 1983; Zhang, Goddard, & Jakubiec, 2018) and newly generated questions considering the SJEL framework (Sarid, 2019) and prior research results reviewed in the literature review in chapter two. Parallel questions were posed to address the research questions for the quantitative and qualitative strand to increase the ease of comparing results during analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The survey instrument containing both qualitative and quantitative questions can be found in Appendix A. The quantitative questions incorporated a five-point Likert scale (Thomas, 1999).

Focus Group Data Collection

Three focus groups were conducted which lasted approximately 60 minutes each. Virtual focus groups were used to limit the burden of participation (Preissle, Glover-Kudon, Rohan, Boehm, & DeGross, 2015). Focus groups consisted of up to five participants (Gaber & Gaber, 2007). Two of the focus groups only had two participants due to drop out and the third focus

group had five participants. Naturally, the focus group with the larger number of participants provided greater variation in the participants experiences. However, the two focus groups that only had two participants allowed for a more in-depth understanding of their experiences while still allowing for affirmations and disagreements. Each focus group was audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the primary investigator using conventional transcription (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004). Data coding for one focus group occurred before the next focus group was conducted (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The protocol utilized during the focus groups can be found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

This section will describe how the data was analyzed throughout the research study. Data was examined in an effort to understand the similarities and differences in the experiences of leaders implementing social justice and equitable strategies. In accordance with the convergent parallel design of the study, both strands of data were analyzed separately before merging the results for interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Qualitative Analysis

In accordance with the guidelines provided by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, (2014), a minimum of three cycles of coding were used for all qualitative data. In Vivo codes were established based on the responses of the principals, in an effort to ensure that the results were aimed at practical solutions for current administrators. The first cycle of coding focused on creating the In Vivo codes. The second cycle of coding organized the data into major emergent themes. The third cycle of coding focused on categorizing the themes (Miles, et al., 2014). The data analysis software Dedoose was used for analyzing the qualitative data.

Focus group data analysis examined lengthier conversational excerpts as a whole when appropriate to maintain the original intent within the interaction (Barbour, 2014). Singular quotes were still explored when concisely demonstrating the perspective of the group as a whole (Barbour, 2014). Analysis of the contextual differences among the focus group responses were provided because “focus groups are especially sensitive to and reflective of context” (Barbour, 2014, p. 5). Contextual variations attributed to differentiation of discussion priorities for the participants, as their local context impacted their specific advancements and continued needs (Barbour, 2014; Szeto & Cheng, 2018).

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were calculated in *Stata 16* and a data screening was completed before running analysis (Hayes, 2009). A codebook was created to explain each of the variables and can be found in Appendix E (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Correlations were included in the analysis to provide an understanding of the strength of the relationship between the numerous variables which can be found in chapter four (Hayes, 2009). Independent variables included race, gender, population of school, level of degree, and years of service. For nominal variables such as demographic data, effect coding was used to avoid having a reference group (Darlington & Hayes, 2016; Mayhew & Simonoff, 2015).

A hierarchical regression (Darlington & Hayes, 2016) was conducted to analyze the factors associated with social justice and equity in schools. The multiple regression model best fit the data collected due to the multiple independent variables of consideration in relation to the outcome variables of interest (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). The hierarchical model did not need to be adjusted for multicollinearity, suggesting that two variables providing the same information were not present in the model (Darlington & Hayes, 2016).

Mixed Methods Analysis

Upon completing the separate analysis of both strands of data, results were merged to compare and contrast outcomes per the parallel convergent research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Meta-inferences were drawn from the consolidated data analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Preissle, et al., 2015). A joint display was created in the results section of the study to show the analysis connections among both strands of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Research Validity and Reliability

Qualitative validity is used “to determine whether the account provided by the researcher and the participants is accurate, can be trusted, and is credible” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 211). Strategies used to increase the validity of the study vary among qualitative researchers including member checking, triangulation, external auditing, and reporting disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Triangulation was utilized through comparing the multiple data points throughout the study including the qualitative survey results, quantitative survey results, and the focus group analysis (Preissle, et al., 2015). Triangulation increased the validity of the results by demonstrating consistent outcomes through a variety of sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The research study did not include the use of external auditing or member checking. As the researcher, I reported all disconfirming results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Preissle, et al., 2015).

Qualitative reliability is not as heavily emphasized in comparison to qualitative validity, but mainly refers to the use of intercoder agreement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Since the present study is limited to one investigator, the use of intercoder reliability was not utilized.

Quantitative validity according to Creswell and Plano Clark “means that the scores received from participants are meaningful indicators of the construct being measured” (2011, p. 210). While the instrument as a whole was not used in previous studies, some of the quantitative questions were derived from prior research (Chen-Hayes, 2001; Denbo & Ross, 1983; Zhang, et al., 2018). The validity of the constructs was strengthened through the use of questions already established as valid in regard to the implementation of social justice practices. Assumptions that affect the accuracy of the regression were assessed through ensuring that the assumption of linearity was not violated (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). Tests for heteroskedasticity and skewness-kurtosis were conducted to further increase the validity of the study by ensuring such assumptions were not violated (Darlington & Hayes, 2016).

Quantitative reliability refers to the consistency of the scores from participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Descriptive statistics were provided (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). Tests of internal consistency were essential to ensure the reliability of quantitative results. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for reliability of the participants responses with a goal of $\alpha=.70$ (Hayes, 2009).

Bias Precautions

In an effort to eliminate elite bias, I ensured that the results were not dominated by a select group of participants and instead provided data representative of the entire group (Miles, et al., 2014). Considering the concern that the demographic information of the moderator had the potential to impact the responses of the participants within a focus group (Barbour, 2014), readers must understand that a white female in her late 20’s was the moderator with experience as an educator and an assistant principal. The moderator had not served as a principal, which was the target population of the focus groups.

Subjectivity

The experiences that I encountered during my principal preparation program have led me to the belief that practicing school principals are being trained around effective ways to address concerns of equity and social justice. As a previous school administrator, I had direct experiences related to the resistance that administrators can face when attempting to implement change for the benefit of the total school population. Due to my prior experiences, I was prone to assume that implementing change in action is extremely challenging when considering all of the individuals involved in the school experience.

I previously served as a special education teacher who prioritized efforts of inclusion. While I was understanding of the Equal Opportunity component presented in this SJEL framework (Sarid, 2019), I was biased towards Inclusion. I acknowledge that Inclusion has challenges and value the actions proposed within Equal Opportunity. Throughout the research study, I was actively conscious of my bias towards Inclusion as opposed to Equal Opportunity and especially careful not to guide the research questions or the analysis through this lens.

Reflexivity

Understanding the researcher's reflexivity position when conducting qualitative research helped guard against bias and increase validity (Preissle, et al., 2015). Being transparent about the role that the researcher played throughout the qualitative data collection provides understanding of their influence in the outcome of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). As the sole investigator of the research study, I positioned myself as an observer throughout the study as to avoid leading the answers in the direction of my personal biases. As the moderator, I only interjected during a focus group when the group needed to move to the next question

(Macnaghten & Myers, 2004). As a precaution to researcher bias, memoing was employed throughout the research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Ethical Issues

Each participant was made aware of the purpose of the research study prior to participating in the survey or focus groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University before conducting any research involving human subjects. Survey data was secured, and all identifiable information were removed. Standard procedures were established and implemented for all persons responding to the quantitative portion of the study in an effort to limit the influence of researcher bias (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Focus group participants were made specifically aware of the inability to conceal their identity, especially among participants who may already know each other. Due to the nature of the requirement that focus group participants communicate with each other, confidentiality could not be ensured. Each person participating in the focus group was informed of the audio recording prior to the start of the focus group. All human subjects were made aware of the risks of participating in the research study prior to engaging in the study and agreeing to participate (Preissle, et al., 2015). Consent was obtained from all participants of the focus group before beginning (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Appendix C provides an example of the participation consent form.

Limitations

Intentional efforts were made to ensure that the results of this study were limited from bias, yet the concern of having only one person analyze the data remains present. As the sole investigator, the data collection and analysis were limited to the perspectives and insights of one

individual. Optimally, multiple investigators would examine the data and then confirm their results, specifically for the qualitative portion of this study to increase the reliability of the analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

While this study focused on administrators throughout the state, a delimitation of this study is that the data was collected from only North Carolina. The robustness of the study could have been enhanced by understanding the experiences and utilizing the perspectives of principals outside of North Carolina to guide policy and practice. Within all research that requires volunteers, there is an element of selection bias. Principals who were not currently focused on increasing equitable and socially just practices in their schools might have opted out of participation due to the perception that their voice would not be relevant to the study. However, principals who were not engaged in equity work could add to the understanding of what other priorities are dominating their time and focus. The data from this study was collected at a singular point in time, which limited the study from assessing any changes over time (Hayes & Darlington, 2016).

The primary voice included in the study was that of the school principal due to their influence concerning change agency (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). The lack of student, parent, or teacher voice was a limitation of this study as they could have provided additional narratives of value. Missing voices may have included principals who were concerned about the risk of participation but would have provided pertinent data to the research study. The time commitment of participants to participate in both portions of the research under a short timeline could have excluded insight from principals with relevant knowledge (Preissle, et al., 2015).

Summary

This chapter has reviewed the methodology used for the research study. The following chapter provides an in-depth description of the findings and analysis. Individual analysis will comprise of both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the research. Per the parallel convergent design of the research study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), an analysis of the merged outcomes will be provided.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The goal of this research was to develop a robust understanding of the actual experiences that administrators are exposed to who are working to increase equity and social justice practices within their schools. The findings presented in this chapter were obtained from a large-scale mixed methods survey sent to principals, which was followed up with three focus groups. The total pool consisted of nine focus group participants who are practicing principals throughout the state of North Carolina with at least a full year of experience in the principalship. Qualitative data from the survey and focus groups and quantitative data from the survey will be presented separately. A merged analysis of the findings will follow to demonstrate how the data connect in accordance with the convergent parallel design of this research study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The following questions guided the research study:

1. How do principals understand the role of social justice and equity in the principalship?
2. What do principals believe their role to be in promoting social justice and equity?
 - a. What are the perceived barriers for principals attempting to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?
 - b. What are the perceived additional supports needed for principals to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?

Qualitative Findings

Qualitative data were collected from both the large-scale survey and three focus groups. All qualitative data were coded by the primary investigator in Dedoose (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004) and went through a minimum of three rounds of coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Emergent themes from both data sources will be discussed

throughout this chapter. Disconfirming results are presented in an effort to increase the validity of this research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Preissle, et al., 2015), which demonstrate the varying opinions of administrators' understanding of their role in implementing a more socially just and equitable education system.

Qualitative Survey Findings

After the first round of In Vivo coding (Miles, et al., 2014), a total of 92 codes represented the responses provided by the various principals who responded to the survey. Categories were created in the second round of coding. Ultimately, themes that emerged through the third round of coding the qualitative survey results include relationship building, education and training support, data analysis, and flexibility. These themes will be discussed in detail in the following section with direct quotes from the participants to show how the responses relate to each overarching theme.

Relationship Building. Principals consistently highlighted the importance of relationship building through various avenues. Responses on the value of such relationships varied from establishing opportunities to educate people about their own implicit biases to creating a welcoming atmosphere for persons who have been historically and are currently marginalized by the dominant society through relationships. One anonymous survey respondent described the importance of relationships while acknowledging the complexity of the current culture and climate when attempting to implement socially just and equitable practices in the following statement:

It can be a tightrope in a white conservative community. I discuss that I've been part of the BLM (Black Lives Matter) protests and explain that Black people have had a rough time for 400 years of slavery and then a century and a half of discrimination. These

conversations are usually one on one when the opportunity arises. Most people do not believe they are racists or have racist tendencies. I think we all have conscious and unconscious bias and none of us likes to think of ourselves as racist or discriminatory in any way.

The aforementioned respondent emphasized how conversations that illuminate bias and racial tendencies occur within relationships that have evolved over time. Developing strong relationships with people within the educational community provides a gateway to helping an individual self-reflect and to expound on ways to address such biases.

One anonymous principal from the survey responses stated the following about their school's emphasis on relationship building:

We have really looked to build relationships with families that previously have not felt welcome or may be marginalized to become a part of the larger school community, through providing interpreters at events at different times and building teacher skill sets to cultivate relationships.

This school was working to ensure that families are able to access events through acknowledgement of language differences and working to alleviate such barriers in order to establish relationships. One principal stated, "creating even more opportunities to celebrate our Latino students" as an outstanding need that their school had when it comes to building relationships. Another anonymous school leader commented on how their school works to build relationships in the following response:

We call, text, DOJO (virtual messaging platform) our families to make sure they are in the loop about school. Our counselor and social worker work with any families that are struggling. We have a self-supported backpack program to make sure that all of our

families at our Title 1 school have enough to eat on the weekends. We are continuing to increase our diversity in instructional content.

The main opportunities that educational leaders described in the survey for parent or guardian involvement at their school was through a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) or by having a parent representative participate on the School Improvement Team (SIT). While there were some other creative ideas from various respondents, PTO and SIT were the more commonly described ways for parents to be involved. One of the less frequent methods used to build relationships with parents by including them in the educational process was to receive input from parents through the use of surveys. Parent and guardian input could help principals understand if their efforts were noticed or mattered when attempting to build relationships with families. Such information could lead to insight about ways to further create a sense of welcoming to families who might feel isolated or excluded from the school community.

The lack of intentionality in building relationships with students who identify as lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, questioning, plus any additional sexual orientations that are not representative of the dominant heterosexual orientation (LGBTQ+) (Chen-Hayes, 2001) creates a gap for acceptance and inclusivity. One principal describes such a situation, “We are making strides, but it is not as ‘out in the open.’” We tend to be discreet with our support in an effort to not cause drama in the community with adults.” This principal’s response acknowledges an understanding of the risk associated with creating discourse due to value differences depending on the community context in which a school is located. For members of the LGBTQ+ community, including students, parents, and teachers, the lack of outward affirmation could limit the strength of any possible relationships with school members. This was not a consistent

response by administrators which could be interpreted as not something they are working on or simply not something they considered as an issue related with the research study.

Education and Training Support. Establishing a more equitable and just educational environment requires education and training support as suggested by the respondents. Only one person in the survey explicitly stated that they felt prepared upon entering into their leadership position to address the unique learning needs of all students. Additional respondents did respond with “not applicable” which could be interpreted as respondents perceived that they do not have any training needs related to social justice and equity implementation worth discussing.

Education and training support applied to various people depending on the respondent.

Subcategories within the overarching theme of education and training support highlight the importance of educating the entire school community on ways to alleviate oppressions and support equity and social justice in education. Throughout the qualitative survey data, respondents discussed the various ways that education was provided or needed to be provided to educational leaders, teachers, parents, and even students.

Some of the respondents expressed a desire to work toward creating better systems of equity within their school but felt as though additional progress would not be possible without receiving guidance about what practical strategies principals could effectively initiate at their school. For example, one principal stated, “I wish I had received more guidance on how to support educators with adjusting their mindset and how to counteract policies that do not focus on the needs of all scholars.” Another principal responded with “I would have asked to learn more practices that would allow me to engage students in a way that would foster an appreciation for diversity and multiculturalism of others outside of their race, gender, age, and ethnicity.” An additional respondent stated, “This is an area of focus for me, but I still feel like I could grow in

my capacity to lead this in my building.” These examples demonstrate school leaders who have a desire to create more socially just and equitable school environments, but are interested in receiving more guidance about how to achieve such a lofty goal or desire to have received additional training prior to entering into educational leadership.

When considering the education and training needed to equip an individual to be fully prepared to work towards social justice and equity in an educational environment one such respondent said:

The struggle of this (preparing educational leaders) is perhaps the greatest struggle we face as educators. Education of children is difficult if they all have the same access to begin with. When you add all the trauma, barriers, etc. the work of educators, to all non-educators, is an unfathomable task.

The scope of addressing the unique needs of each student in any given building is described by the aforementioned principal as unfathomable, suggesting that preparing an individual to initiate such an undertaking would require an abundance of ongoing training and support in order to experience success.

Training and education are being desired for educators throughout the entire school as opposed to pockets of teacher experts trained around equity and justice. “As an ethical leader, I put various practices in place by nature; however, it is not our practice to train staff. It (identified training) would be a need for our school.” Alternatively, one principal describes the hard reality of decision making based on the expertise of the teachers within their school by saying, “While I hate tracking, the reality is that only veteran teachers have the ability to truly differentiate instruction and there are limited funds for co-teaching support.” This statement emphasizes the principal’s perception that in order to make progress in the realm of detracking, beginning

teachers would need additional training to be able to effectively differentiate instruction. Another principal discussed how they were already working to ensure that all teachers are receiving additional training. The respondent stated, “Although it is not possible to elevate all of the phobias and isms that exist, a great effort is being made to educate all staff members to help them better understand their students.”

Furthermore, to educate the teachers and the leaders but not educate the students would be a missed opportunity according to survey respondents, because the students at times have direct involvement in incidences where oppression and discrimination exist. One principal advocated, “We need to be more explicit with providing our students with the tools to counter an array of isms” referencing isms not limited to heterosexism, racism, sexism, classism, and linguisticism. Another school principal stated, “We try to model how we treat others, and how others should be treated. Children attend class meetings. Teachers read stories to students to combat negative/sexist/racist attitudes and perceptions.” In essence, this principal describes the class meetings as an opportunity for directly educating students about ways to address incidences of oppression or microaggressions throughout the school.

Data Analysis. When considering ways that school leaders were working towards creating a more equitable and socially just educational environment, principals often referred to various forms of data analysis. The data that was being collected or reviewed depended on the school context and the principal’s area of focus. Analyses that were highlighted included that of existing practices, data provided by various stakeholders, and student achievement or access data to develop a better understanding of the changes that would need to be made throughout the school in an effort to increase equity and justice for all students. One principal described the way their school used data analysis to address inequities as follows:

We are a high poverty school with a balanced racial student population. We seek out ways to minimize disparities in discipline and removal, while also seeking ways to promote student success. Our data reviews allow us to see pockets of disparity or unequaled success so that we can find ways to provide solutions to all students.

Additionally, we have sought out hiring practices for teachers in an effort to make the staff more representative of the student population.

Understanding the inequities that exist in a school, through the use of data, help this particular school make adjustments needed to their current practices. Furthermore, understanding the data as it relates to the population of students within the school impacts their decision making even to the point of hiring practices reflective of their student body.

Another principal used data and analysis to determine ways to establish a more inclusive environment at their school by stating:

EC (Exceptional Children) self-contained students attend all school-wide functions, attend our house meetings every Friday, push-in to classrooms for circle times, and direct instruction. This was not the case when I started here. Teachers/administration regularly examine data and use the MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports) process to help meet student needs with intervention. We also train teachers and work closely with those who are struggling to meet the needs of their students. We have implemented an intervention time during the school day where all available staff push-in to classes to provide more individual attention for students with intervention or acceleration needs.

Data inquiry and analysis for this principal are pertinent to ensuring that students are receiving an individualized educational experience with appropriate rigor and support in the most inclusive environment possible.

Flexibility. A few of the principals describe their understanding of equity similarly to this, “providing what is needed to create equal opportunities for all, does not mean the same amount of resources but rather what is needed for each individual to access.” As such, understanding the flexibility that must be granted to educational leaders in order to create equitable learning environments is suggested in these principals’ responses.

Furthermore, the desire for flexibility from principals was emphasized all the more when describing interpretation of disciplinary procedures or policies that serve as barriers when attempting to eliminate tracking. One principal stated:

I am probably different from most principals because I was a special education teacher for 17 years and an EC (Exceptional Children’s) director for 8 years. I had experience of trying to level the playing field or looking at things through a lens of equity for 25 years. It has been difficult for many of my staff to understand that in discipline for example I will not do blanket consequences because we need to weigh factors. Mental health issues or social emotional issues may come into play.

However, disconfirming evidence was present when one respondent stated that their understanding of equity is, “Making sure that rules and consequences apply equally across the board regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, etc. Leadership that advocates for everyone to get justice.” This respondent’s emphasis on consequences as a form of equity was unique in comparison to the other responses.

Another area that principals highlighted the way they utilize flexibility in their role as school leader was through their ability to individualize the educational experience for any particular child. One principal stated:

We focus on each and every student and their needs. Not only are the teachers communicating with the students but also communicating with the families to figure out the barriers they are faced with and strategically work to find solutions.

Principals expressed a desire and appreciation for the autonomy and flexibility to create an educational plan based on the individualized needs of any given student, moving away from a one size fits all approach in order to alleviate barriers, provide academic enhancements, and help students achieve their fullest potential.

Focus Group Findings

Prior to analyzing the collective focus group responses, the experience of one Black female principal is presented within the form of a vignette. Her honesty when specifically reflecting on current injustices that are prevalent within this particular community were profound. She is quoted as follows:

I have no formal training in social justice and equity, just kind of ... sighs ... in the field and watching what has gone on. I live in a county where I live on the North side of the county, which is very different than the South side of the county and seen some differences in spending 16 years on the North side ... I didn't realize that my neighbors were a different color or of a different economic status. We all did what we had to do to help each other out. After 16 years of spending time in the northern schools, I was transferred to an elementary school on the South side where it was pretty prevalent what was happening in the community which was a complete shock for me ... It was the first time that I was introduced to racism in economics. It was the haves against the have nots. And how the haves because the haves were not just of one race and so how they treated the children that did not have and how prevalent it was and how demanding they were in

walking into schools and demanding that their children could not be with certain kids in certain classes and it was an eye opener. It blew me away because I had never seen anything like that before. And I've been raised, I'm an adult and have lived in this community but I live on the North side of town and went to school and it just blew my mind. It was disheartening. I remember at the end of that school year telling the superintendent that I can't stay here. I can't be a change agent here because I can't sit idly by and watch how teachers treated kids that did not have. It just was disheartening. I had never seen that before. I had never and could not believe that was happening in the county in which I had lived all my life ... Going into my assistant principalship, the first thing that my principal taught me was that fair is not equal and don't ever treat it that way. Fair is not everybody. You have to look at every situation, each individual child and determine what that particular person needs. So, when you are disciplining them you may not give every student the same discipline based on what they bring or what they don't have. You have to take all of that into consideration. I think it made me a better person because what I had to do was get to know my kids, get to know those families, and those communities. So, we went out into the community, we went out and met our parents and went to their homes ... I just remember the first day, me being the assistant principal, the first day and one of the parents came up to me and demanded that her child's teacher be changed because she did not want her child with that Black teacher. She said that to me, and I was just like I need a transfer ... because you know when people are that bold it's just like WOW. And I'll never forget I was in the cafeteria talking to a student and his mother was a substitute teacher in that building as a long-term substitute. I had the reputation of being a very strong disciplinarian which is one of the reasons why I had

been asked to go to that school ... and so in talking to the student who was a white student I said well what do you think is the problem? Like you know you come up to me, you're talking pretty cool and so what's going on? He said, "well this would be a good school if you would get rid of all the BLACK" ... And he couldn't take it back fast enough. And his mother looked at me and I looked at him and I said that's just personal feelings. I said this is going to be an interesting school year and it was. So as much as we think we have come a long way, we still have a long way to go even in the year 2020.

While the vignette above is atypical within a focus group setting, the details provide great insight into the story of one principal's complicated experience. The participant spoke about the truth of the hardship of being a principal in a system that is still evidently grappling with racial and economic injustices in particular. Although this is the story of one principal, it speaks to the hardships that principals endure when attempting to enact change within a system where various forms of oppression still persist.

The following section will review the emergent themes evident from the focus group analysis. While each focus group was analyzed separately, the themes will be presented together. Major themes include autonomy, equity as access, and transparency. Various quotes will be presented within each of these themes as evidence of the findings. Strategic effort was made to ensure at least one response from each participant was included within the findings in order to represent the group as opposed to one dominant voice.

Autonomy. When principals were asked about ways in which structures such as policies and finances may or may not impact their opportunities to create a more socially just and equitable environment, a clear theme that came across was the principals' desire for more

autonomy. One focus group participant offered the following response when specifically asked about policy impacts:

I think one of the biggest issues I would say about policies is they tend to be very Black and White and you know our students are not. And I say that meaning you know there is not a one size fits all, especially when it comes to education and especially when it comes to how we can support and teach all of our students. And so, a lot of times, a policy while it tries to help us or benefit us can sometimes be more of a burden. I think about like an attendance policy. Attendance policies are there because we have to have something to help set some guidelines but then when we really look at it, it hurts those that may not. It's not equitable, I guess is what I'm trying to say. So, I feel like sometimes policies can hurt us, hurt us more than they help us, especially when it comes to equity and social justice.

Another respondent echoed these sentiments with the following statement in response to the aforementioned colleague:

One of the lessons that I learned early on in being a new administrator in a school is that you write policies so that you can use them when you have to. Trying to uniformly enforce any rule or policy denies the context, which is the whole nature of social justice, which is the whole nature of equity and empathy in particular. We believe that empathy is the first step you have to take towards equitable instruction. And, in fact that's our theme this year throughout the school has been building empathy first, then engagement, then equity after that. So, we are spending a great deal of time talking about empathy and what empathy means, I have to understand why this happened or who are and what that context is. So, policy can help direct how that is applied but you have to have the latitude to

recognize that policy is not appropriate or that a policy needs not to be enforced in this particular case. I get every year, every other year, on our teacher working conditions survey that say things like the administration doesn't enforce rules. Or the expectations for students aren't clear. What they mean is they want rules and policies, and they want to see those rules and policies very Black and White and very regularly enforced so that they feel confident in them. That is not the kind of leader that I am going to be. And so, the discussion that we have every year is look, we have these policies in place as far as guidelines, we are going to see how that applies to the student and see what needs to be done. So, yea so that's it, policies are there in case you need them.

Both respondents in this particular focus group made it clear that principals need to have the autonomy to apply policies as appropriate determinants of their particular context in any given situation.

Alternatively, one principal expressed appreciation for systemic policy that ensures uniformity by stating:

Luckily for us, I look at policy as a way to keep everybody uniform, everybody on the same step as far as a system. So, I think it's cumbersome having to make sure you're doing the right thing, but I think it keeps you at least on the same road. So overall, I look at policy as a good thing.

While autonomy was desired by many of the members of these focus groups, respondents such as the one above were able to recognize ways in which uniformity works to ensure that the system as a whole is focused on the best interests of students. Although the principal from the opening vignette of this section was not outright speaking to concerns regarding policies and finances, one can infer that such systematic structures that focus on equity throughout a district

might have alleviated some of the stark financial distribution inequities experienced on the north side versus the south side of her particular district.

Many of the principals discussed that they did not have a lot of flexibility in their budget and had restrictions based on timing of budget distribution. One principal highlighted the benefits of being able to have budget flexibility and the autonomy to make such adjustments:

I have, I am lucky to have a great deal of flexibility in how we spend money. You know we set our budget every year, we have a great deal of control over that budget. We can change it in the course of the year we can move things around if we need to. For example, this past year, or coming into this year we anticipated significant revenue cuts from the state, so we moved a bunch of things around. We cut a bunch of funding. We had budgeted a certain amount for our students for free and reduced lunch. The obligation that we ended up taking on and supporting both our students differently you know in the cafeteria and of course we don't have students on campus now anyways, but we began sending, actually sending food to their houses, providing gift cards for families and taking on a number of families that had not technically qualified but that were in clear need. We ended up, our budget needed to be increased by a factor of five in order to do that. But we were able to move things around in order to accommodate that. So, the flexibility to make decisions at the school level that may change on a month-to-month basis is critical and that is one of the advantages at the school that I work with and I am very happy with that. So, we do make those choices and changes frequently.

This unfortunately was not the perceived situation for other members of the focus groups.

Although this is a counter opinion to the normative response, I think it provides a good example of the possibilities that could be available to other principals if they had the autonomy to make

in-the-moment budget decisions based on the needs of their school. More commonly, principals made statements such as the following:

Our budget is always a challenge because it's based on the number of kids you have in your building. So, depending upon what that number is, and it fluctuates from year to year, you don't really know how much you're going to have the following year until sometimes in August if you're lucky but sometimes it's September. And so that's always a challenge. We just became a Title 1 school, so we receive federal money now. And that's a blessing and a curse. The blessing part is we do have a lot more money to be able to use for all types of programs. The problem is because it's a federal government program you have to go through a million miles of red tape just to try to get stuff approved.

Furthermore, in regard to the theme of autonomy, principals were clear in their desire for autonomy as a form of respect and recognition of their position from district leaders. Principals expressed the reality that they had been named the head of the school and felt as though in order to effectively execute their role, they needed district leaders to show support by allowing them to do the job they had been hired to do. When directly asked what principals need from district leaders, one respondent stated:

Stop saying no. And help us figure out how we can do what it is that we want to do.

(laughs) I'm going to be quiet after this one I promise. But as a school principal I need for the district leaders to help me do my vision not be roadblocks not tell me why I can't do it but help me to do it. I get there is always something that I'm not seeing, but I'm not seeing it because you haven't shared it with me. So, share those things with me so that I know what my constraints are but help me see the vision. So, we finally have a superintendent that understands that and says tell me what you need to do what it is that you need to do.

And so, if I say we need hotspots she and I say well the district says we don't have any she says well why don't we have any? When they tell us that the entire district has to use a particular digital platform, but that platform doesn't work for everybody and so the IT (Instructional Technology) director says well but we've already spent the money for the digital platform, so everyone is using the digital platform and she says no everybody is not doing the digital platform. The principal just said that she has teachers that want to use a virtual alternative, figure it out. That's what we need more of.

Another principal responded to this colleague by stating:

I think the district leaders need to support making sure that equity is a conversation we have at the district level and with other administrators. And also, I think giving principals the autonomy to do what they need to do in their school I think is really important. If you trust me to be the principal, then trust me to do what I need to do because most of us that I'm hearing in this conversation have some experience so trust me because we've got a proven track record. I think that's one of the big things that I feel like would be important.

Within the final segment of this focus group the last principal that commented in reference to the discussion simply stated, "don't let politics get in the way of doing what's right for kids."

Principals within this study were ultimately expressing the need to be able to make the best decisions for children within their school and the desire to have the autonomy to do just that.

Equity as Access. Principals highlighted the importance of equity as access especially during the pandemic and during virtual learning. The following conversational excerpts between principals shows how even though they are all focusing on access, what the students are accessing varies. One principal suggested that their current focus for ensuring equity was by:

Making sure that the kids have resources. When we think about social justice and access to the resources is what comes to mind. So, like the other principal just said, packets, hot spots, devices, making those accommodations for the kids that don't have internet access.

Another participant continued the conversation by stating:

So, I think I agree with what she just said. However, I'm also considering the mental health of individuals, how some students aren't able to handle being home. So, what do equitable practices look like for those students when it's a one size for everybody is on remote learning ... What do we have to do to ensure that we are also meeting the needs of students mentally and socially emotionally? ... How are we meeting their needs? Because a hot spot and a Chromebook is not going to fix that.

One of the principal colleagues continued this discussion by stating:

I think before COVID we looked at you know counseling services, or tutorial services, or extra academic support, whatever it took to make a kid successful. And then after COVID those things exploded, and we looked at how much we provided at school that wasn't going to be available to kids at home and how do we replicate that in a different environment with the resources we have or how do we get the resources we need to get that. And I think everyone still has a fear that those things aren't going to be equitable. We don't have what we need to make that happen for kids and I think that's ultimately some of our fears and some of our teachers' fears.

An additional participant further elaborated on their current experiences by openly sharing about her recent experiences:

It became real for us last spring when we closed. We had a student that died in a shooting and that was hard because the kids weren't there for us to check on. So, we realized we

had to really make time for that social emotional piece and actually as you hear in my voice it's not only the kids but the staff ... I will say more vigilant that even in our program we included a social and emotional piece because that is a need for the kids right now.

Social emotional support for students and staff was a common concern for principals.

Repeatedly, throughout all three focus groups principals expressed concern for wanting to ensure that every person had equitable access to social emotional resources and support.

Transparency. Principals talked about the importance of transparency when leading for social justice and in reference to making changes within a school. The perception was that when principals lead with a clear vision and remind individuals that decisions made are in an effort to support children, resistance fades or people find alternate places of employment in some cases.

One principal explained:

We've been very intentional this year about ensuring that parents know what steps we are taking. So, part of our problem that we've been forced to observe for a number of years is that we would do things that were designed to further an agenda, and that might be a social justice agenda or something, but we didn't talk about that we just did it. And people didn't know we were doing it. There are things that you can't talk about as an administrator whether they're you know hiring and dismissal practices that you can't relay to the public. There is just information that can't get out there. So, it's important for a school to be able to ensure that people see what it is that you are doing and why. I am not trying to get credit for it, it's not that I want people to say hey look at what a great anti-racist effort that school is making, I want them to know we are making the effort and that is the end of the story. So, in our case, you know at the beginning of the year we

talked about the revisions we made to the handbook. Each of our departments and each of the courses in the different departments talked about the steps that they were taking to distance white centrism from their practice. So you know it was look at the diversity of writers and works that we have in the English department, look at the historical events that we are talking about and the way that we are talking about these historical events in our history and social studies classes, how are we ensuring representation in science, how are we ensuring equal treatment in science, how are we including stories that are meaningful to our students and their families, and not just the things that we have all learned as the core instruction and we talk about those things. We put them out there so that parents can feel that there is accountability, that is the real root of all this. Parents and students have to feel that the school is accountable to their interests. It doesn't mean that they are going to drive what we do necessarily, but they have to know that we respond. So, we put that out there. I think that in our case and some of the focus groups we've had with parents have supported this, that they see that, and they recognize the effort that we are making. They see that we are trying to do this. They know that we are not going to be as successful as we want to be, but they know that we are constantly trying to be more and more successful. And that's what opens up that honesty, that's what creates the opportunity for parents to feel like alright I can go talk to the school leader about this. I don't have to worry that he is going to discipline my child differently because he is Black. You know there is so, as long as we are accountable to parents they will have a favorable opinion of us. They will recognize that we are being honest and transparent about what we are doing.

Another focus group participant followed up the above comment by stating:

I agree with that, transparency is so important. I think making it part of the conversation. When we go back to what we learned about social justice or training or equity or training in equity and we haven't really had any. If we don't bring that up or bring it to the forefront, then we are never really going to do anything about it. So, I think it's so important for that transparency, not only for our parents but also teachers. Sometimes we get our heads kind of down and we are chugging along, and we forget that. It's our job to make it part of a dialogue and all of our stakeholders are taking ownership of what we are trying to do.

These principals felt like they were able to experience greater success when implementing change for a socially just or equitable cause when they were being transparent with their stakeholders. One principal acknowledged that not everything can be shared with the community depending on privacy restrictions but emphasized how any element of sharing will help gain support and assurance from stakeholders.

Quantitative Findings

Forthcoming quantitative findings will include descriptive statistics, correlations, and hierarchical regression results. Tests to demonstrate the validity of the findings such as Cronbach's alpha, heteroskedasticity, and skewness-kurtosis were conducted. All data were reviewed for any missing data prior to running analysis in *Stata 16* in order to avoid potential problems caused by omitted data (Cox, n.d.; Ngo, 2012). The only independent variable that needed to be reverse coded was the policy variable which was completed prior to analysis. See Appendix E for the complete codebook with variable descriptions. Cronbach's alpha was less than the original goal (Hayes, 2009), but was still within the acceptable range, $\alpha = 0.60$.

Survey Responses

This section will provide an overview of the direct responses provided by the principals who participated in the survey prior to the more advanced analyses that will be discussed in the two sections to follow. See Table 4.1 for respondents' responses to the quantitative survey questions.

Table 4.1

Summary of Survey Respondent Answer Choice Percentages

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
Social Justice Understanding	3.28%	3.28%	1.64%	42.62%	49.18%
Social Justice Focus	0.00%	1.64%	1.64%	47.54%	49.18%
All Students	0.00%	1.64%	0.00%	13.11%	85.25%
Social Justice PD	11.48%	14.75%	19.67%	34.43%	19.67%
Hiring	10.00%	3.33%	16.67%	35.00%	35.00%
Data Audits	1.64%	4.92%	14.75%	39.34%	39.34%
Student Grouping	3.28%	1.64%	8.20%	19.67%	67.21%
Detracking	4.92%	9.84%	31.15%	32.79%	21.31%
Community	0.00%	9.84%	16.39%	49.18%	24.59%
Student Involvement	0.00%	14.75%	18.03%	50.82%	16.39%
Professional Risk	21.31%	16.39%	26.23%	27.87%	8.20%
Finances	4.92%	19.67%	8.20%	29.51%	37.70%
Policy	35.00%	35.00%	8.33%	16.67%	5.00%
Inclusion	0.00%	0.00%	6.67%	43.33%	50.00%

Note: See Appendix for A for Survey Instrument. All quantitative questions used a five-point Likert scale with a variation of 1 being associated with Strongly Disagree, 5 being associated with Strongly Agree, and 3 representing a neutral response such as neither agree nor disagree.

Findings from the raw data provide insight into the perspective of the principals prior to analyzing the factors that influence the differences in their responses.

The vast majority of the respondents agreed with the proposed understanding of social justice in education, 91.8%, and felt that their schools were focusing on creating a socially just environment, 96.72%. Likewise, 98.36% of principals felt as though the belief that all students

can learn was emphasized throughout the school. Principals who responded to this study generally reported that policies were not a barrier in their work towards implementing socially just practices in their school.

The distribution of responses pertaining to the construct of professional risk appeared to be one of the more divided opinions of participants. Professional risk was not a concern for 37.70% of respondents and yet 36.07% of respondents suggested that professional risk was a concern when considering how to approach social justice and equitable practices within their school. Meanwhile, 26.23% of the principals who responded to the survey indicated that they were neutral in their opinion regarding professional risk when taking action.

The difference in responses among the constructs of student grouping, detracking, and inclusion are worth highlighting. For inclusion, 93.33% indicated working towards inclusion was a top priority within their school by either strongly agreeing or somewhat agreeing. Furthermore, 86.88% of principals stated that they were somewhat or strongly involved in the student grouping within their school. Yet only 54.1% felt as though detracking was a focal point of their work. While these are different constructs considering different priorities within the school, the difference from detracking to inclusion is significant.

Correlations

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all of the dependent variables and correlations were tabulated to illuminate any existing relationships between variables (Darlington & Hayes, 2016). See Table 4.2 for statistics table including means, standard deviations, and correlations. There is a moderate, positive association between student grouping and social justice, $r = 0.47$. Another moderate, positive association exists between detracking and the belief that all students can succeed, $r = 0.56$.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics including Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Social Justice	4.31	0.92	1.00													
2. Social Justice Focus	4.44	0.62	0.09	1.00												
3. All Students	4.81	0.50	-0.13	0.21	1.00											
4. Social Justice PD	3.36	1.27	0.12	0.31	0.11	1.00										
5. Hiring	3.82	1.24	0.16	0.14	0.17	0.60*	1.00									
6. Data Audits	4.09	0.94	-0.15	0.15	0.22	0.35	0.16	1.00								
7. Student Grouping	4.66	0.95	0.47	-0.14	-0.14	0.05	0.05	0.10	1.00							
8. Detracking	3.56	1.09	0.14	0.08	0.56	0.08	0.28	-0.15	0.08	1.00						
9. Community	3.89	0.90	0.10	0.15	0.06	0.24	0.22	0.27	-0.15	0.09	1.00					
10. Student Involvement	3.69	0.92	-0.26	0.13	-0.06	0.03	-0.08	0.21	-0.29	-0.11	0.57	1.00				
11. Professional Risk	2.85	1.28	0.13	-0.16	-0.08	0.02	0.00	-0.18	0.01	0.17	0.11	-0.09	1.00			
12. Finances	3.75	1.29	0.14	-0.03	-0.12	0.00	0.11	-0.21	-0.09	0.05	-0.01	0.02	0.24	1.00		
13. Policy	2.22	1.24	0.19	0.01	0.15	-0.08	0.01	0.05	0.17	0.03	-0.04	-0.15	0.29	0.18	1.00	
14. Inclusion	4.43	0.62	-0.17	0.13	0.36	0.38	0.25	0.50	-0.06	0.05	0.21	0.18	-0.12	-0.29	-0.32	1.00

Note: SD represents standard deviation. PD represents professional development. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Additionally, a moderate, positive association exists between hiring and social justice professional development, $r = 0.60$. A moderate positive correlation exists between inclusion and data audits, $r = 0.50$. Lastly, a moderate, positive association exists between community involvement and student involvement, $r = 0.57$. A zero correlation was present between professional risk and hiring as well as finances and social justice professional development. The strongest negative correlation which would still be considered a weak correlation exists between inclusion and policy, $r = -0.32$. Slightly surprising is the lack of any correlation between the constructs of detracking and inclusion, since both pertain to restructuring of student groups in classrooms to generate a more diverse and accepting educational experience for all learners.

Hierarchical Regression

A hierarchical regression was run in order to understand the quantitative data and the influence of the various independent variables at different stages within the regression for each of the dependent constructs. Independent variables were added to the regressions at three different stages in order to isolate the variation due to particular variable groupings. Independent variables included age, gender, race, degrees obtained by the principal, school location, public traditional or public charter school, grades served, percentage of students from low socioeconomic status households, racial makeup of the school, whether or not the principal received any formal social justice and equity training, and the experience of the principal as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal.

Stage one for each hierarchical model included the various levels of experience for the principal during each of the aforementioned roles to understand the influence of experience. Stage two focused on the additional demographic information provided pertaining specifically to the principal. The third and final stage of the model focused on the demographic makeup of the

school which the principal was serving at when they participated in this research study. The same regression model was run for each of the independent variables included within the study. Some of the models produced minimal statistical significance and will not include a table with the results. Portions of the model that included significance will be included throughout the following discussion. The constructs Social Justice, Social Justice Focus, Hiring, and Social Justice Professional Development had no statistical significance in any stage of the hierarchical regression.

All Students. After all of the variables included in the model pertaining to the belief that all students can succeed (Debno & Ross, 1983), the statistically significant factor in all three stages was the experience of the principal. See Table 4.3 for the hierarchical regression stages and outputs for the construct All Students. The hierarchical regression for All Students was the only model in which all three stages of the model were statistically significant, $p < 0.05$.

Table 4.3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression for All Students

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	ΔR^2
Stage 1			0.31	0.27	
Constant	5.31***	0.20			
Teacher Experience	-0.00	0.01			
AP Experience	-0.02	0.03			
Principal Experience	-0.05***	0.01			
Stage 2			0.36	0.23	0.05
Constant	5.22***	0.51			
Teacher Experience	-0.01	0.02			
AP Experience	-0.01	0.03			
Principal Experience	-0.06***	0.02			
Training	-0.14	0.13			
Age	0.01	0.01			
Female	-0.11	0.14			
White Principal	-0.10	0.30			
Black Principal	-0.19	0.28			
Master's Degree	0.00	0.14			
Step 3			0.50	0.26	0.15

Table 4.3 (continued)

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² _{adj}	ΔR^2
Constant	6.11***	0.77			
Teacher Experience	-0.01	0.02			
AP Experience	0.00	0.03			
Principal Experience	-0.04*	0.02			
Training	-0.14	0.14			
Age	0.01	0.01			
Female	-0.10	0.15			
White Principal	-0.17	0.30			
Black Principal	-0.28	0.29			
Master's Degree	0.04	0.15			
Low SES	0.00	0.00			
Public School	-0.30	0.28			
Urban	-0.14	0.18			
High School	-0.19	0.19			
Asian	-0.02*	0.01			
American Indian	-0.01	0.01			
Black	0.00	0.00			
Native Hawaiian	-0.01	0.03			
White	0.00	0.00			

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Overall, the model accounts for approximately 26% of variance in the belief that all students can succeed, $R^2_{adj} = 0.26$, $F(18, 37) = 2.09$, $p < 0.05$. However, the aforementioned model did violate the Breusch-Pagan Chi-Square test for heteroskedasticity ($p < 0.05$).

Data Audits. The hierarchical model for the construct of Data Audits was not statistically significant as a whole. Predictor variables of significance in step two included principal experience, $b = 0.07$, $t(56) = 2.24$, $p < .05$, and age, $b = -0.05$, $t(56) = -2.05$, $p < .05$. In step three, principal experience, $b = 0.10$, $t(56) = 2.71$, $p < .01$, and age, $b = -0.06$, $t(56) = -2.09$, $p < .05$, remained significant with the addition of the percentage of Black students within the school, $b = -0.02$, $t(56) = -2.33$, $p < .05$. See Table 4.4 for all regression results pertaining to Data Audits.

Table 4.4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression for Data Audits

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>R</i> ² _{adj}	ΔR^2
Stage 1			0.31	0.27	
Constant	3.52***	0.43			
Teacher Experience	0.01	0.03			
AP Experience	0.06	0.02			
Principal Experience	0.02	0.02			
Stage 2			0.21	0.07	0.18
Constant	5.76***	1.04			
Teacher Experience	0.04	0.03			
AP Experience	0.06	0.06			
Principal Experience	0.07*	0.03			
Training	0.14	0.26			
Age	-0.05*	0.02			
Female	-0.21	0.29			
White Principal	-1.04	0.61			
Black Principal	-0.74	0.58			
Master's Degree	0.29	0.29			
Step 3			0.28	0.08	0.16
Constant	6.70***	1.59			
Teacher Experience	0.04	0.03			
AP Experience	0.09	0.08			
Principal Experience	0.10**	0.04			
Training	0.13	0.28			
Age	-0.06*	0.03			
Female	-0.21	0.31			
White Principal	-0.92	0.63			
Black Principal	-0.77	0.60			
Master's Degree	0.37	0.31			
Low SES	0.01	0.00			
Public School	-0.61	0.58			
Urban	0.21	0.38			
High School	-0.08	0.39			
Asian	-0.01	0.02			
American Indian	-0.02	0.01			
Black	-0.02*	0.01			
Native Hawaiian	0.01	0.07			
White	0.00	0.01			

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

The third stage would be interpreted that when all else is held constant, as a principal's experience increased so too did their perceived commitment to data audits. However, as a principal aged or the percentage of Black students within the school increased, data audits decreased. After conducting the Breusch-Pagan Test in an effort to measure for heteroskedasticity, the results indicated that the heteroskedasticity assumption was not violated within this model $X^2(1) = 0.03, p = 0.85$. Overall, the model accounts for approximately 8% of variance in the belief that all students can succeed, $R^2_{adj} = 0.08, F(18, 37) = 1.26$, but the entire model was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

Student Grouping. Influential variables were present for the construct of Student Grouping only in the second stage of the hierarchical regression which included the experience and demographic information of the responding principal. Once the factors associated with the school were included in stage three of the model, these factors were no longer significant predictor variables. Nevertheless, in stage two principal experience, $b = 0.08, t(56) = 2.59, p < .01$, had a positive influence on involvement in student grouping. While being female $b = -0.61, t(56) = -2.20, p < .05$, and a person's age $b = -0.06, t(56) = -2.56, p < .01$, had a negative influence on the principal's perceived involvement in student grouping. See Table 4.5 for results from all three stages of the Student Grouping hierarchical model.

Table 4.5

Summary of Hierarchical Regression for Student Grouping

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	ΔR^2
Stage 1			0.04	-0.01	
Constant	4.04***	0.41			
Teacher Experience	0.00	0.03			
AP Experience	0.07	0.06			
Principal Experience	0.02	0.02			
Stage 2			0.24	0.09	0.20
Constant	5.61***	1.00			

Table 4.5 (continued).

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	ΔR^2
Teacher Experience	0.04	0.03			
AP Experience	0.12	0.06			
Principal Experience	0.08**	0.03			
Training	0.04	0.25			
Age	-0.06**	0.02			
Female	-0.61*	0.28			
White Principal	0.68	0.59			
Black Principal	0.46	0.55			
Master's Degree	-0.02	0.28			
Step 3			0.36	0.05	0.12
Constant	4.58**	1.56			
Teacher Experience	0.04	0.04			
AP Experience	0.07	0.07			
Principal Experience	0.06	0.04			
Training	-0.12	0.28			
Age	-0.03	0.03			
Female	-0.45	0.31			
White Principal	0.52	0.62			
Black Principal	0.47	0.59			
Master's Degree	-0.23	0.30			
Low SES	0.00	0.01			
Public School	0.75	0.57			
Urban	-0.11	0.37			
High School	-0.24	0.38			
Asian	0.00	0.02			
American Indian	0.01	0.01			
Black	0.00	0.01			
Native Hawaiian	0.07	0.07			
White	-0.01	0.01			

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Stage two of the Student Grouping model accounts for approximately 9% of variance, $R^2_{adj} = 0.09$, $F(9, 46) = 1.59$, but the entire model was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). There is not significant reason to believe that this model violates skewness-kurtosis assumptions, $X^2(2) = 4.43$, $p = 0.11$. However, the heteroskedasticity assumption was violated, $X^2(1) = 19.51$, $p < 0.001$.

Detracking. The regression model did not produce any significant predictor variable for detracking. Attending an urban school was just barely outside of the cutoff range for significance, $b = -0.91$, $t(56) = -1.95$, $p = .058$. The model was tested for violations of skewness-kurtosis assumptions which were proven to be of no concern for the detracking variable, $X^2(2) = 0.32$, $p = 0.85$.

Community. The percentage of Black students attending a particular school was the only predictor variable of significance in reference to the Community Involvement construct, $b = -0.02$, $t(56) = -2.37$, $p < .05$. These results can be interpreted that when everything else remains the same within the model, when there is an increase in the percentage of Black students, there is a decrease in the commitment of the principal to engage the community in planning and decision making for the school.

Student Involvement. In the first two stages of the Student Involvement hierarchical model, Teacher Experience was the only predictor variable of statistical significance, in step one $b = -0.05$, $t(56) = -2.08$, $p < .05$ and in step two $b = -0.06$, $t(56) = -2.07$, $p < .05$. For the third stage of Student Involvement, students who attended high school when all other variables were controlled within the model was of statistically significant influence, $b = 0.99$, $t(56) = 2.65$, $p < .01$. The results of the skewness- kurtosis test indicated no concerns, $X^2(2) = 1.79$, $p = 0.41$. Heteroskedasticity was also not violated using Breusch-Pagan's Chi Squared Test, $X^2(1) = 1.68$, $p = 0.20$.

Professional Risk. In stage three of the professional risk regression model, the percentage of students from low socioeconomic status (LowSES) households was a significant predictor, $b = -0.03$, $t(56) = -2.61$, $p < .01$. The only other significant predictor variable was the population of American Indian students within a school, $b = 0.04$, $t(56) = 2.35$, $p < .05$.

Skewness-kurtosis results were not statistically significant, $X^2 (2) = 2.71, p = 0.26$. Breusch-Pagan's Chi Squared Test was also not of statistical concern, $X^2 (1) = 0.01, p = 0.94$.

Finances. Regarding the construct of Finances, being a Black principal was the only statistically significant predictor variable, $b = 1.78, t (56) = 2.09, p < .05$. The entire model did not provide overall statistical significance but did pass Skewness-kurtosis tests of normality, $X^2 (2) = 1.98, p = 0.27$. As such, financial constraints serve as more of a barrier to Black principal's when all other variables are held constant. None of the other predictor variables influenced any of the three stages of the hierarchical model for finance with any statistical significance.

Policy. In stages two and three of the regression, a person's age and being female had a statistically significant negative influence on the perspective of policy serving as a barrier in their work towards social justice and equity. See Table 4.6 for hierarchical regression results for the construct of Policy. In stage one, a person's age $b = -0.06, t (56) = -2.13, p < .05$, and being female $b = -0.95, t (56) = -2.76, p < .01$, were the only significant predictor variables. In stage three, a person's age $b = -0.07, t (56) = -2.12, p < .05$, and being female $b = -1.07, t (56) = -2.96, p < .01$, continued to be negatively associated with policy and the population of students who identified as American Indian was statistically identified as a positive associative predictor variable, $b = 0.04, t (56) = 2.29, p < .05$. Since the construct was reverse coded, it should be interpreted so that as the coefficient increases, as does the person's belief that policy serves as a barrier in their work. Likewise, as a coefficient decreases, so too does the principal's perception that policies are a hindrance in their work towards creating a socially just and equitable educational environment, when all else is held constant. Skewness-kurtosis results suggested that such assumptions were not violated for the policy variable, $X^2 (2) = 3.24, p = 0.20$, and neither was the Breusch-Pagan's Chi Squared Test assumption violated, $X^2 (1) = 2.98, p = 0.08$.

Table 4.6

Summary of Hierarchical Regression for Policy

Variables	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	R^2	R^2_{adj}	ΔR^2
Stage 1			0.07	0.01	
Constant	2.89***	0.52			
Teacher Experience	-0.04	0.03			
AP Experience	0.00	0.07			
Principal Experience	-0.05	0.03			
Stage 2			0.28	0.14	0.22
Constant	4.01**	1.24			
Teacher Experience	-0.01	0.04			
AP Experience	0.05	0.07			
Principal Experience	0.03	0.04			
Training	-0.22	0.31			
Age	-0.06*	0.03			
Female	-0.95**	0.34			
White Principal	1.13	0.73			
Black Principal	0.94	0.68			
Master's Degree	0.30	0.35			
Step 3			0.46	0.19	0.17
Constant	4.03*	1.83			
Teacher Experience	0.00	0.04			
AP Experience	0.05	0.08			
Principal Experience	0.05	0.04			
Training	-0.29	0.33			
Age	-0.07*	0.03			
Female	-1.07**	0.36			
White Principal	1.07	0.73			
Black Principal	1.14	0.69			
Master's Degree	0.23	0.36			
Low SES	-0.01	0.01			
Public School	0.21	0.67			
Urban	0.14	0.43			
High School	0.27	0.45			
Asian	-0.03	0.02			
American Indian	0.04*	0.02			
Black	0.01	0.01			
Native Hawaiian	0.00	0.08			
White	0.00	0.01			

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Inclusion. The Black student population within a school was negatively associated with the construct of Inclusion, $b = -0.01$, $t(56) = -2.20$, $p < .05$. The Black student population being the only predictor variable to influence the construct of inclusion, is particularly interesting considering the history of Black students being overly represented in special education classrooms and more restrictive placement categories (Zhang & Katsiyannis, 2002; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014).

Merged Analysis

Per the convergent parallel design of this research study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), the previous section provided an overview of the findings from each of the separate strands of data collected and analyzed throughout the study. The following section will provide a merged analysis of all of the results including meta-inferences determined by the merged analysis. See Figure 4.1 for a visual representation of the process of merged analysis that led to the meta-inferences to follow.

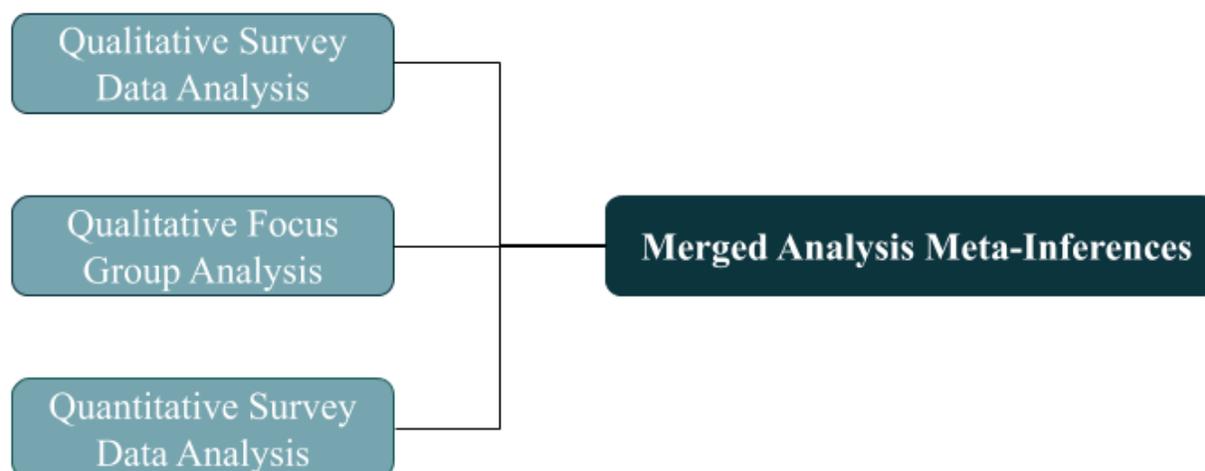


Figure 4.1 Merged Analysis Process

As shown in Figure 4.1 each data source was individually analyzed to understand the findings pertaining to those data. Following the individual analyses, the merged analysis focused on

developing an understanding of the findings across all data sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Meta-Inferences

Meta-inferences were made considering all pieces of information and merging an analysis of the entire data set from this research study including the quantitative data and both sources of qualitative data. The meta-inferences that will be reviewed in the following section include Professional Development and Ongoing Support, Teacher and Principal Turnover, Principal Experience, Inclusive Education, and Involvement of Students, Parents, and Community.

Professional Development and Ongoing Support. One of the more unanticipated quantitative findings is displayed in Figure 4.2.

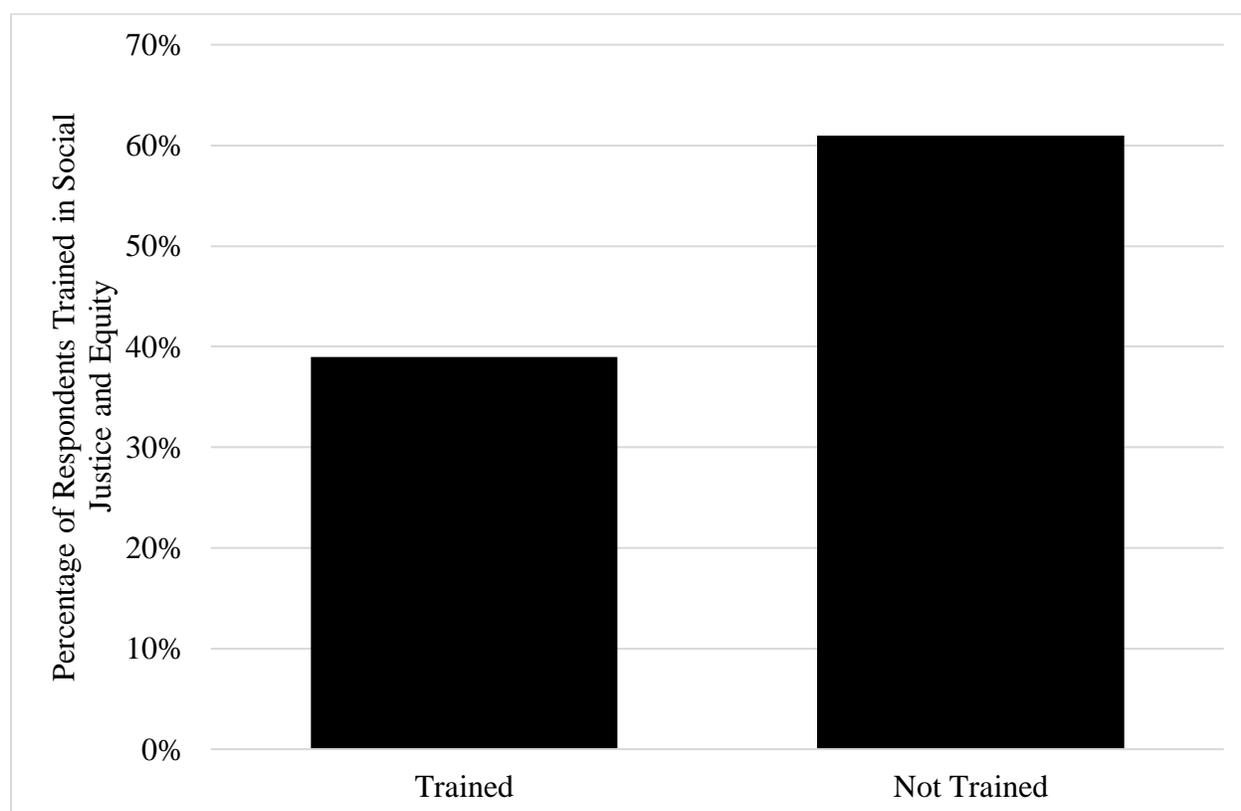


Figure 4.2 Percentage of Principals Trained to Promote Equity and Social Justice

Of the principals that responded to the survey, $n = 61$, 61% of respondents indicated that they had not received training around social justice and equity. As a researcher, I found the number of respondents having not been trained around equity and social justice to be surprising. A bias that I brought to the research was that I assumed the majority of principals would have received some type of training in this area, even if they did not perceive themselves to be an expert.

Furthermore, see Table 4.7 below for participants' varied perceptions about the ongoing professional development being provided to staff pertaining to social justice.

Table 4.7

Principals' Perception of Ongoing Social Justice Training Being Offered

Likert Scale Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	11.48%
Somewhat Disagree	14.75%
Neutral	19.67%
Somewhat Agree	34.43%
Strongly Agree	19.67%

Note: Principal data from survey respondents to Ongoing social justice skills development are offered to staff ($n = 61$).

Of the respondents, 45.9% either were neutral in their response to staff members receiving ongoing social justice professional development or chose one of the disagreement options.

Figure 4.3 shows visual connections from the three various data sources within this study and how they connect to the overall meta-inference of professional development and ongoing support. Each meta-inference will not include a visual model. Figure 4.3 is to serve as an exemplar regarding how the meta-inferences were determined based on the data and analysis of this research study. All data points infer that large portions of educators and leaders are not

receiving regular training and support in relation to social justice and equity in education, the implications of which will be discussed in the following chapter.

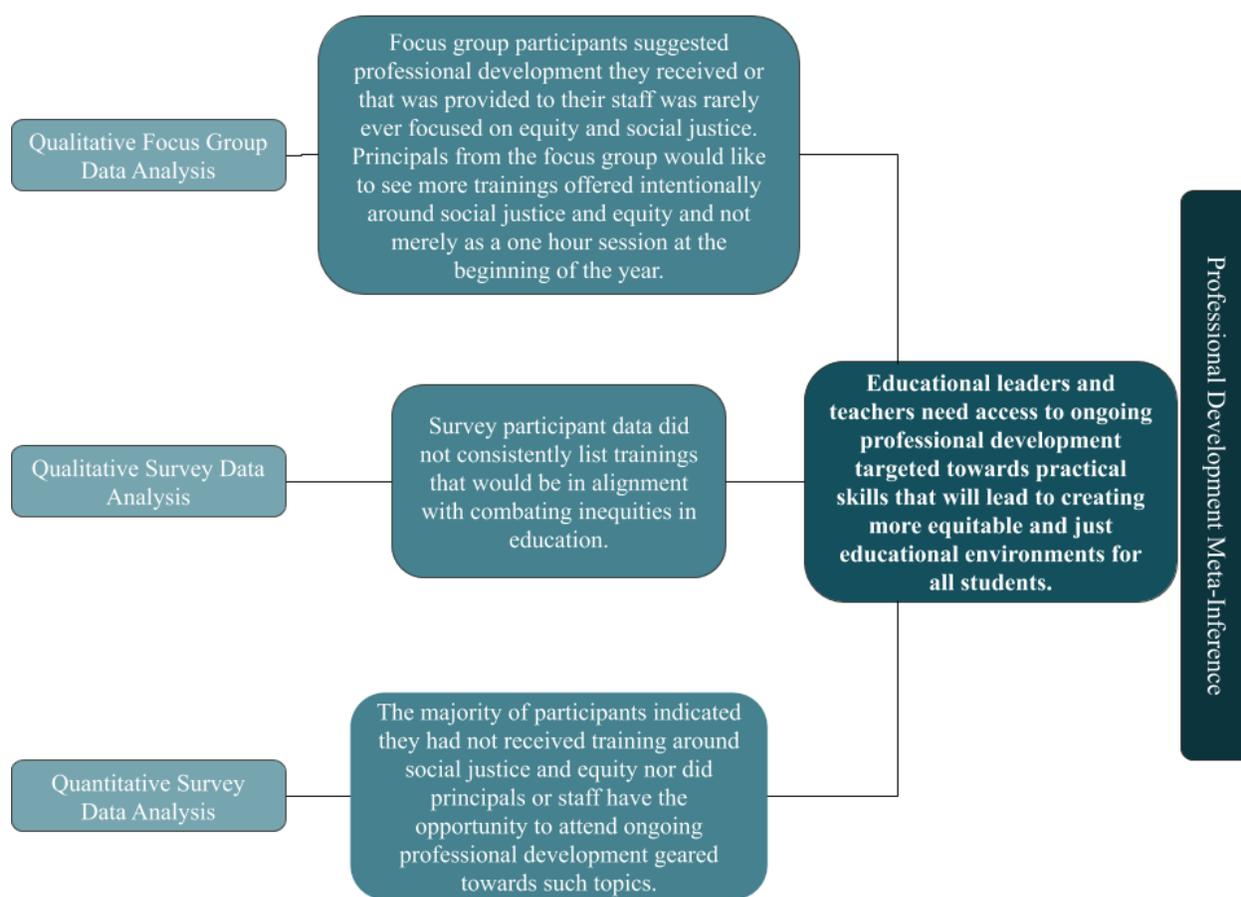


Figure 4.3 Professional Development Meta-Inference

Teacher and Principal Turnover. The churn of principals and teachers in education was indicated by principals as something worth considering when making decisions about equity and justice in their school. See Table 4.8 to see the survey responses for principals' perception of their professional risk.

Table 4.8

Principals' Perception of Professional Risk

Likert Scale Answer Choices	Responses
Strongly Disagree	21.31%
Somewhat Disagree	16.39%
Neutral	26.23%
Somewhat Agree	28.87%
Strongly Agree	8.20%

Note: Principal data from survey respondents when asked if Professional Risk was a factor when determining not to proceed with implementing a more equitable practice (n = 61).

Table 4.8 shows that 37.07% of the principals within this study factored into their consideration the risk associated with their own job when deciding not to proceed with a strategy that could increase equity.

The principals in the focus group discussed the reality that they experienced teacher churn when implementing changes with which people did not agree. Survey respondents acknowledged that considering hiring practices that promote social justice and equity in education are a nice consideration but in their context, acquiring qualified candidates can be cumbersome enough and thus do not have the capability to add the additional filter of only hiring equity minded educators. Concerns about finding a replacement were discussed as an issue of teacher churn, which can limit the changes for equity a principal is able to enforce.

Principal Experience. Within the multitude of hierarchical regressions run in order to understand the predictor variables that influences a principal's commitment to social justice and equitable practices, the experience of the principal was a more frequent variable of statistical

significance. Furthermore, a principal's experience was highlighted within the focus groups as a reliable lever when attempting to make major changes. Over time, the principals suggested that they had developed knowledge and the wherewithal to go about major overhauls while also gaining the political clout necessary to make big changes due to their track record of success as an educational leader. Principals in the focus group sought out confidence from their district leaders that they would indeed make the best choices for their school to support all learners considering the context of their environment and the needs of each specific student. While experience takes time, understanding is gleaned as to why novice leaders might feel as though they do not yet have the political capital to make big changes needed when dismantling inequitable educational systems.

Inclusive Education. As previously insinuated, the nuanced differences in the quantitative results for the constructs of Student Grouping, Detracking, and Inclusion were of interest. As previously stated, principals from the Likert-scale items of the survey indicated that they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed to their priorities focusing on inclusion (93.33%), student grouping (86.88%), and detracking (54.1%). When asked on the survey about ways that principals have worked towards detracking, principals repeatedly suggested that they were not experiencing success with detracking. Principals were able to discuss ways in which their specific school was working to create more inclusion. The discrepancies in the responses imply that the principals who responded did not recognize connections among these dependent constructs. The lofty goal to create an inclusive society begins within the school building to create environments where each student has purposeful access to an individualized education that pushes their intelligence and exposes them to a multitude of persons from all walks of life (Oliver & Barnes, 2010). Connecting back to principals' concern about training, specifically

educating them about how tracking hinders the concept of inclusion and likewise how within classroom grouping could still create a restrictive setting within a given classroom could provide clarity and skills for next steps.

Involvement of Students, Parents, and Community. Quantitatively, principals indicated that student (67.21%) and community (73.77%) involvement were practiced within their schools. However, when further asked qualitatively about the ways in which these various groups were actually involved in the school, the opportunities were seemingly sparse. The main opportunity for community involvement provided by survey respondents was through the Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO). A few of the schools offered additional opportunities such as by serving as a member of the school improvement team or through requesting feedback from parents through surveys. The discrepancies within the findings make involvement a concept that should be more closely examined by leaders to consider additional innovative ways to truly work in partnership with the total school community.

One of the focus group participants discussed the use of parent and students focus groups to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the school through their perspective. There was not as much emphasis on the involvement of community members outside of those already associated with the immediate school sphere through being a staff member, parent, or student at the school. Similarly, student involvement in school-based decision making was most often through student surveys and through a select few students getting the opportunity to serve on a leadership team. Such opportunities are commendable and demonstrate how efforts are being made, but consideration for further ways to understand the voice of the students and the community are likely to exist when principals are working to create equitable and just schools.

Limitations of the Analysis

Each of the survey questions had a variety of respondents put “N/A” in the response box for their answers. This response was difficult to interpret because it could have meant a variety of conditions, such as they simply did not want to take the time to fill out that specific question or more concerningly that they felt the question truly did not apply to their school or context. For example, the survey question, “How, if at all, do you implement social justice and equitable practices in your school?,” eight of the respondents answered with a variation of “N/A.” As stated, this is a limitation because it is difficult to determine if the respondent meant implementing social justice and equitable practices within their school was not applicable to them or if they simply were skipping that question. Attempting to interpret such survey results without the ability to member check each response in the larger survey is a limitation of the data analysis.

Concerns that principals had regarding approval of their district leadership team in order to participate in the research study resulted in unanticipated limitations. Institutional Review Board procedures did not require obtaining district approval from each school district due to the nature of the study. Nonetheless a number of participants responded that they were unable to participate in the study without the endorsement of their district. Each locale had their own review process and the survey had already been distributed to principals prior to learning that district approval was a concern for possible participants. The aim of the research was to understand the experience of principals throughout North Carolina and was not designed to examine the specifics within any particular district. Due to the concern presented by principals at the onset of survey distribution, obtaining the district name as a part of the data collection process was removed from the survey design to limit the risk to participants and in an effort to

increase the response rate. Removing this data adds to the limitations by preventing the ability to fully understand the location of principals from throughout the state.

Furthermore, distribution timing due to impacts of the pandemic on education may have contributed to a smaller sample size than desired. The initial survey was scheduled to be sent to principals on the morning of July 15, 2020. The prior afternoon, the governor announced that schools would be required to be at minimum 50% capacity for the start of the school year. The future academic challenges created stress and robust planning for principals and educators in preparation for an advanced start date (Porter, 2020). The absence of significance and the presence of skewness could be attributed to the small sample size that was obtained in the midst of a pandemic. Due to these concerns, generalizations will not be made to principals outside of this study and the results will only be interpreted as a representative of this sample.

Summary

This chapter has provided a clear synopsis of the research findings from both the survey and the focus groups. Initially, independent reviews of the qualitative findings were presented, followed by quantitative findings. Subsequent to the individual analysis, this phase provided a merged analysis of the data including meta-inferences in an effort to demonstrate the connections between the varying parts to strengthen the results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The following chapter will provide a discussion and conclusion, as well as implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This closing chapter will provide a discussion of the study's findings in light of extant research in the area, implications of the study for research and practice, and a final conclusion of the present research study. The following questions guided the research study:

1. How do principals understand the role of social justice and equity in the principalship?
2. What do principals believe their role to be in promoting social justice and equity?
 - a. What are the perceived barriers for principals attempting to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?
 - b. What are the perceived additional supports needed for principals to implement equitable and just practices within their schools?

The culmination will make clear the ways in which the findings from chapter four apply to the research questions stated above. The discussion will relate the findings to the extant literature presented in chapter two. The implications will describe applications for practice and the significance of the findings for the research field. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an overarching summary of the research study in its entirety.

Discussion

The discussion section will provide clarification on how the findings presented in chapter two are in agreement or disagreement with current research. Topics to be discussed include hiring, professional development, preparation programs, policies and politics, relationships, equitable access, and lastly, community and student involvement.

Hiring

One of the most important pieces to the work of principals when attempting to create a school that is reflective of social justice and equity focused is to ensure that the hiring pool consists of candidates with like-minded priorities (Kose, 2009; Laura, 2018; Rivera-McCutchen,

2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018). Research participants provided concrete examples as to how one might pursue such a goal, including intentional questions throughout the interview process such as to “describe how they (the teacher) embrace and promote diversity within the classroom.” Diversity was also important to respondents when considering whom to hire (Egalite, et al., 2015; Slater, et al., 2014; Wasonga, 2009), but ultimately hiring the best qualified candidate for the position was their number one priority. Study participants spoke about the reality in selecting an equity mindset or diversity bent as not always being a luxury they are afforded, because at times they are lucky enough to have only one qualified candidate (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2019; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2019).

When applicants are limited, providing future professional development will be even more critical for such hires, which will be expounded on below. Ultimately, hiring intentionality could help limit the turnover described by principals in this study and existent research (Laura, 2018; Marshall, et al., 2020; Medina, et al., 2014; Norberg, et al., 2014) when they do not agree with the mission and vision of the school related to equity and justice. Principals within the study acknowledged that the teacher churn persisted when educators could not buy-in to the changes being made within the school to enhance equity. Ultimately, the principals in this study felt the turnover was worth the additional effort to ensure the best outcome for all students, even if hiring a new teacher would likely be challenging in the current climate of education.

Professional Development

The concepts surrounding socially just leadership have been highlighted in literature as a priority in training future and practicing principals (McKenzie, et al., 2008). When educational leaders are seeking solutions to oppressive systems within education, researchers, district leaders, and policymakers need to understand the outcomes of such training and ways to provide

additional support to school administrators. Professional development programming at the state, district, and local school level should focus on pragmatic strategies that principals and teachers can implement to increase social justice and equity throughout the total school environment. Study respondents made it clear that their own professional learning, as well as that of the total school environment, needs access to multiple opportunities, in an effort to further their understanding of ways to increase equity and justice in education. Since the principal has significant flexibility regarding the focal points of internal professional development, local school leaders should maximize such autonomy by focusing on efforts that increase social justice and equity within the school (Kose, 2009; Laura, 2018; Wang, 2018).

Furthermore, district leaders should consider how to influence the agenda of professional development opportunities that are provided district-wide to principals and teachers (Kose, 2009). Respondents emphasized that if equity and justice topics were provided, they were typically mixed into the smorgasbord of sessions provided at the beginning of the year and not as an ongoing priority topic. As principals in this study suggested, a significant gap is present when the community of educators are trained yet there remains a breakdown in educating the students on ways to combat injustices throughout the school (Wang, 2018). Student instruction is intrinsic to success within the community, and the lack thereof results in a significant missed opportunity. Educational leaders should strongly consider ways to provide students with the tools and resources necessary to enhance equity within their educational environment (Wang, 2018).

Preparation Programs

It is paramount that aspiring principals receive formal training on practical ways to positively impact social justice and equitable practices within education (Brown, 2006; DeMatthews, Carey, Olivarez, & Moussavi Saeedi, 2017; Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021;

Kose, 2009; Liou & Hermanns, 2017; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Preparation programs should consider how to build capacity and influence at other universities in an effort to utilize equity focused curriculum and also to expand their impact. Common traits established by Theoharis (2008) through interviews of educational leaders focused on social justice included arrogant humility, passionate leadership, and a tenacious commitment towards equitableness. These characteristic traits could be considered by principal preparation programs as a precursor when evaluating candidates for admittance. If the applicants already have a strong commitment in relation to the work of justice and equity prior to admittance, their traits might increase the likelihood of their making systematic changes in practice (Kose, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014).

As described by Ryan (2010), school leaders need to have specific skills to navigate the micropolitics of the educational system, in order to address social justice issues relevant to their context. Such an awareness was echoed by principals who reflected on ways that they have independently learned to maneuver the political arena of education throughout their tenure. Principal preparation programs ought to consider ways to target the development of political acumen. This objective has the potential to enhance future administrators' ability to persuade members of the community in supporting changes that promote equity throughout schools (Ryan, 2010).

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) argue that educational leaders need to be trained in ways to understand and advocate in the special education arena of their school, as a component of efforts needed to further desegregate schools. Principal respondents in the current research study consistently indicated their desire for additional training regarding specific strategies for

increasing equity and justice in their school. Without definitive instruction regarding equitable and just practices, they believed that there was a lack of sufficient guidance prior to beginning their leadership career. A consistent argument was that educational leadership preparation programs should be inclusive of equity and social justice training (Brown, 2006; Kose, 2009; Liou & Hermanns, 2017; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014), and could be considered as a requirement at the state level, depending on the various state level controlling agencies (Fusarelli, Fusarelli, Seaton, & VanGorder, 2019). Principals with a priority of inclusion are only as successful as their training, which is emphasized by Angelle and Bilton in their statement, “Preparing future principals to lead in inclusive schools begins by creating truly inclusive leadership preparation programs” (2009, p. 8).

Policies and Politics

Policies at the local level should reflect the direct needs of the school upon examining each component of the Social Justice Educational Leadership Framework (Sarid, 2019). District leaders should consider analyzing existing policies in an effort to determine ways in which revisions can be made to alleviate persistent systemic injustices and provide flexibility for administrators, such as consideration of detracking barriers which were of concern for principals within this study (Burriss & Welner, 2005). Participating administrators crave the autonomy to make school-based decisions with consideration for the contextual needs of their building (Sarid, 2019).

Educational leaders suggested that political acumen as described by Ryan (2010) is beneficial when attempting to facilitate change within the system of education. Within this study, experience and political clout helped leaders advocate for the needs of their school in a way that

would increase the likelihood of district leadership support. Principals in this study acknowledged how longevity and their success as leaders provided confidence in their ability to make good choices for their various schools. Tenure provided tenacity when seeking out support or changes that might otherwise be considered politically risky by novice principals or those who had yet to demonstrate academic achievement. Practitioners might consider reflecting on ways that their political maneuvering have aided or hindered their ability to make desired changes and seek guidance on ways to adjust their approach in order to increase the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Relationships

Overall, contrary to the scholarly emphasis on relationship building in social justice leadership (Medina, et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010; Wang, 2018), this was not a focal point for study participants or at least was not heavily discussed. However, survey respondents acknowledged that building relationships with families who were English language learners was a weakness in their efforts to provide a socially just educational environment. Hernandez, Murakami, and Cerecer (2014) suggest simple ways to intentionally create access for such families. One example was removing the language barrier through ensuring that letters or phone calls home are provided in the home language for each family (Hernandez, et al., 2014). Likewise, one of the survey respondents suggested that interpreters be provided at all community building events for families in an effort to limit their perception of exclusion due to linguistic differences.

Moreover, parental barriers were present when evaluating changes due to desires of parents having their students taught by a particular teacher or being placed within a particular grouping of students, which is consistent with the research presented by Ryan and Tutters (2017). Intentional efforts to build relationships with guardians and to find avenues for them to

participate in the decision-making process within the school could limit the resistance principals receive from parental figures (Medina, et al., 2014; Ryan, 2010; Sarid, 2019; Wang, 2018).

Principals in this study suggested focus groups, surveys, parent teacher organizations, parent involvement on the school improvement team, and having parent volunteers within the school as a few ideas to increase parental participation.

Community and Student Involvement

Community involvement was also a concept of seemingly less priority for the principal respondents of this study. As such, involving community members and students in the school instructional process could be an area of growth for principals who desire to become social justice educational leaders, especially since community involvement is a suggested component for equity focused leaders (Hernandez, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018; Zhang, Goddard, & Jakubiec, 2018; Sarid, 2019). Working on developing relationships within the community and to include community members and students in school based decision making could potentially help alleviate some of the resistance that principals have reported when attempting to make social justice and equitable changes (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Gooden, et al., 2018; Higginbottom & Friesen, 2013; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Norberg, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Ryan & Tuters, 2017; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Wang, 2018).

Involvement of community stakeholders was suggested through the use of surveys; strategic partnerships targeting specific businesses to help fund various school needs; requesting volunteers for specific needs of the school; participation on the school improvement team; and engagement as members of the parent teacher organization. Student participation was encouraged through the use of one-on-one conferences to develop student centered learning plans, surveys, participation on student leadership teams, focus groups, anonymous feedback

hotlines, student government, and through the use of student-centered clubs and extracurricular activities.

Equitable Access

The basic needs of access in the current climate of the pandemic were dramatically different to those within a traditional academic year. Focal points for principals emphasized a lack of access to the curricula through the basic need of WiFi or the assurance that students had access to food during such stressful times. The nutritional concerns and the concerns for students' social emotional needs were aligned to equity and justice concerns presented by leaders in research, such as that posed by Medina and colleagues (2014). However, the emphasis on WiFi to access the curriculum is not something that has usually been emphasized in social justice leadership literature. Specifically speaking, the ability to access the internet was typically a necessity for completing requirements for homework, not to access actual classroom instruction. As this was a significant concern for principals based on the current context of education, it is difficult to tell what these leaders might typically focus on as points of access, when virtual schooling was currently utilized but was not the normal avenue of instruction.

Frequently, respondents discussed their use of data analysis as a key indicator of changes needed throughout the school. Ensuring that students have equitable access to various parts of the curriculum, including extra-curricular opportunities, is an important element in social justice leadership (Hernandez, et al., 2014; Kose, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2008, Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Understanding and implementing data analysis that looks at the individual students' needs as well as the school as a whole is important for principals seeking to make purposeful decisions regarding how to increase equity through the avenue of access (DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Wang, 2015). Sklra and colleagues (2009) provide guidance for administrators regarding ways to analyze their data and existing practices within schools that utilize a socially just and equity focused approach.

Implications

Findings from this study provide implications for practitioners in the field of educational leadership and policy makers, as well as principal preparation programs. Additionally, implications for the academic field of research pertaining to the implementation of socially just and equitable practices will be provided.

Implications for Practice

As evidenced by the findings overviewed in chapter four and the discussion provided above, the implications for practice are plentiful. Principals should be trained on how to use equity audits to determine the elements that are being implemented within the school of a particular leader. In addition, instruction is needed to identify the element gaps perceived by the teachers and administrators and how it potentially affects their decision making (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009). Results from the equity audits will help provide summary data of components that leaders are missing in order to guide future professional development and training needs for their schools.

Results of this study provide guidance for current practitioners as action items that are presently being used to enhance social justice and equitable practices by participating school administrators (Sarid, 2019). Intended outcomes of this research study will help to guide principal preparation programs regarding additional training that current practitioners require for improving equitable outcomes for students. Insights gleaned from the study could direct planning for future professional development within a district that will enhance the abilities of the school leaders, based on the perceived needs indicated by the administrators within this study. Likewise, policymakers ought to consider the implementation of a state standard specific to equity and social justice as an area of focus for principals and teachers (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015).

Finally, this research project informs policymakers about the views of practitioners when making decisions regarding the requirements of preparation programs and continuing education credits needed for licensure renewal.

Implications for Research

Results from this research study provide a more comprehensive view of the principals' experience and perceptions of their role in implementing equity and social justice in education in contrast to current research. The benefit of using three points of data streams provides a robust analysis and understanding of the current realities principals face in education, which is needed in the academic field of research. Future researchers can utilize this model as an example of how to consider and utilize the various elements related to the Social Justice Educational Leadership (SJEL) framework posed by Sarid (2019). The SJEL framework accentuates the importance of looking at principals' experiences with multiple elements, as opposed to any individual criteria, as many studies before this one had done (Sarid, 2019).

Principals' understanding of equity and justice seemed to be skewed towards focusing on what that means during the present pandemic. Future researchers may consider revisiting some of these topics with principals in a post-pandemic setting. Additional studies in a more typical setting may serve to gain a better understanding of the priorities of principals during their more traditional leadership role as they pertain to equity and justice. Understanding the holistic view as it relates to principals outside of North Carolina, rather than one specific state, could add value to understanding the perceptions and experiences of principals in other contexts. Insight pertaining to how other stakeholders understand the efforts a school is making towards social justice and equity in education such as that of the teachers, students, parents, and community

members could be considered for future research. A more inclusive invitation for participation may garner a well-rounded perspective of the opportunities to make additional progress.

Conclusion

Utilizing a mixed methodological convergent parallel research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), this study examined the perceived role of the principal and their ability to increase implementation of socially just and equitable practices throughout the school in which they serve as chief leader. Data sources included qualitative data from open ended survey questions and focus groups, as well as quantitative survey responses. Individual analyses of the findings were provided, and a merged analysis provided a holistic overview of all data sources.

Results from this research provided practical implications for practicing administrators working to address the systemic oppressions that persist in education. Further emphasis is provided for principal preparation programs to support enrollment of future leaders in programs that already have a tendency towards social justice and equity. Moreover, principal preparation programs are advised to consider how to embed such concepts throughout the total program. Inclusion of curriculum and practical experiences is an approach that an appointed administrator may utilize in an effort to better prepare future educational leaders regarding action steps to create a more just and equitable school. Guidance is provided to state and district leaders as well as policymakers about ways to support administrators in their quest for equity and justice.

Summary

Chapter five provided a discussion of the research study and findings. Additionally, implications were provided for practitioners, including principals, teachers, and educational leaders at the district level. Furthermore, considerations for research and recommendations for future studies were also provided. Ultimately, the goal of the study was to identify the support

and resources principals need to create an equitable learning environment. This study hoped to ensure that children achieve their dreams by creating an awareness of the supportive requirements of principals throughout the state of North Carolina. Every child deserves an equitable and just educational experience led by an exceptionally trained principal that will enhance their ability to become whomever they choose.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Survey Instrument Questions and Citations

Question	Reference
1. How do you define the term social justice?*	(Chen-Hayes, 2001)
2. How do you define the term equity?*	(Chen-Hayes, 2001)
3. To me, social justice means providing opportunities to those who have been deprived *** (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Zhang, et al., 2018)
For the purpose of this survey social justice leadership is defined by Theoharis (2007) as “principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice and vision.”	(Theoharis, 2007, p. 223)
For the purpose of this survey equity will be defined according to Galloway and Ishimaru (2015) as “a focus on the fairness of opportunities and outcomes within the context of an unequal playing field.”	(Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015, p. 374)
4. Implementing social justice in your school is a clear focus. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Chen-Hayes, 2001)
5. How, if at all, do you implement social justice and equitable practices in your school?*	(Chen-Hayes, 2001)
6. What do you wish you had known before entering the school about meeting educational the needs of all children?	(Debno & Ross, 1983; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Sarid, 2019)
7. To what extent is the belief that all students can learn emphasized?*(Strongly emphasized to Not emphasized)	(Debno & Ross, 1983; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Sarid, 2019)
8. What have been the professional development priorities over the last two years?	(Debno & Ross, 1983; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Kose, 2009; Laura, 2018; Pazey & Cole, 2013; Reed & Swaminathan,

	2016; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Wang, 2018)
9. Ongoing social justice/advocacy skills development are offered to staff.* (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Chen-Hayes, 2001; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016)
10. Ensuring that new teachers are committed to social justice and/or equity influences hiring decisions at your school. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Laura, 2018; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018)
11. Describe your process in hiring new teachers. How, if at all, do you ensure they prioritize equity in their work?	(Laura, 2018; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018)
12. What are the priorities when determining the placement of beginning teachers versus veteran teachers?	(Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009)
13. Data is audited to ensure that all students have access to the same quality of teachers. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009)
14. Do you get involved in deciding how students are grouped in classrooms?	(Burriss & Welner, 2005; Debnor & Ross, 1983; DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011)
15. How, if at all, do you encourage teachers to group their students?	(Burriss & Welner, 2005; Debnor & Ross, 1983; DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011)
16. Detracking is a priority in your work. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Burriss & Welner, 2005; Debnor & Ross, 1983; DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011)
17. Please describe any successes that you have experienced with detracking or any barrier you faced when attempting to implement detracking.	(Burriss & Welner, 2005; Debnor & Ross, 1983; DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011)

18. How, if at all, are community members involved in planning and school based decision making?	(Burriss & Welner, 2005; Debn0 & Ross, 1983; DeMatthews, 2015; Gooden, et al., 2018; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sarid, 2019; Wang, 2019; Zhang, et al., 2018)
19. Community involvement is utilized when planning or making changes within the school. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Burriss & Welner, 2005; Debn0 & Ross, 1983; DeMatthews, 2015; Gooden, et al., 2018; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Ryan & Tuters, 2017; Sarid, 2019; Wang, 2019; Zhang, et al., 2018)
20. Students are involved in decisions about their school experience. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Hernandez, et al., 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018)
21. Please describe efforts made to involve the students in making decisions regarding their school experience.	(Hernandez, et al., 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018)
22. How have school district leaders supported or restricted your efforts to make changes that would create a more inclusive and equitable school environment?	(Norberg, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Ryan & Tuters, 2017; Wang, 2018)
23. Professional risk is a factor when determining not to proceed with a practice that would increase equity within the school. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Hernandez, et al., 2014; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang, 2018)
24. Finances impact your ability to make changes that would lead to a more equitable school environment. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Norberg, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sarid, 2019; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang 2018)
25. How have you been able to maximize finances to create a more equitable school environment?	(Norberg, et al., 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sarid, 2019; Slater, et al., 2014; Wang 2018)
26. How, if at all, do you allocate time to individualizing student experiences?	(Norberg, et al., 2014; Sarid, 2019; Wang, 2018)
27. How does policy affect your efforts to create a more inclusive school environment?	(Debn0 & Ross, 1983; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sarid, 2019)

28. School policy has not served as a barrier when attempting to implement social justice practices. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(Debno & Ross, 1983; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Sarid, 2019)
29. Inclusion is a top priority for our school. (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree)	(DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Zhang, et al., 2018)
30. Provide examples and/or stories about your efforts to increase inclusion.	(DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; Zhang, et al., 2018)
31. How, if at all, can the school make changes to ensure all persons are affirmed and welcomed in your organization?*	(Chen-Hayes, 2001)
32. How, if at all, has your school resisted heterosexism, biphobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, classism, linguicism, beautyism, and other oppressions over time?***	(Debno & Ross, 1983; Capper & Young, 2014; Chen-Hayes, 2001; Hernandez, et al., 2014; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011)
33. Were you trained to promote equity and social justice? If so, how?	
34. What else should I know about your experience implementing socially just and equitable practices in your school?	

Note: * Indicates that the question was pulled from Chen-Hayes (2001) Social Justice Advocacy Readiness Questionnaire ** Indicates that the question was pulled from Debno and Ross (1983) *** Indicates that the question was pulled from Zhang, et al., 2018

Demographic Information:

Years of experience: Teacher, Assistant Principal and Principal:

How long have you been serving as a principal at your current school?

Degrees Acquired:

Age:

Gender:

What pronouns do you prefer?

Race:

Are there any additional groups that you identify with?

District:

Rural, Urban or Suburban School

Public Traditional or Public Charter School

Grades Served:

What percentage of economically disadvantaged students at school?

What are the racial demographics of the school?

Please indicate if you are willing to participate in a virtual focus group:

Name:

Email Address:

APPENDIX B

Focus Group Protocol

Purpose: The purpose of this focus group is to develop a better understanding of the lived experiences of school administrators who are working to increase equity and social justice practices within their school. Participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary. The session will be audio recorded and transcribed, but your identity will remain anonymous in any reporting of the conversations. Please speak up and utilize the raise your hand feature. Please do not use names of people or schools or districts.

Provide a brief introduction of your professional career. Please also describe how you have been managing through this pandemic and how you were able to accommodate all of your students.

1. How do you know if students feel welcomed?
2. What practices come to mind when you hear the term social justice and equitable practices?
 - a. How do you work towards implementing such practices within your school?
3. How does your background impact your approach to Social Justice?
4. How are decisions made about change within the school?
5. Were you trained to promote equity and social justice? If so, how?
6. How might teachers and parents assess your efforts to promote equity and social justice?
7. What are the main professional developments related to social justice and equity you have attended in the last two years?
 - a. What professional development opportunities related to social justice and equity that have been provided to your school staff in the last two years?
8. How do you make sure that all students are learning and achieving their dreams?
9. What are your priorities when deciding to hire new teachers?
 - a. What procedures are in place to make sure that all students have access to high quality teachers?
10. How are decisions made regarding classroom composition?
 - a. How are students grouped within classes?
11. What does student involvement look like at your school?
12. How have you involved the total school community in implementing changes throughout the school?
 - a. Teachers, Parents, and or Local Community Members
13. How have your efforts of change been encouraged?

14. Have you faced any resistance when attempting to make changes? If yes, please describe.
15. How do financial decisions impact the changes you are able to make?
16. How have policies influenced your work?
 - a. Have policies been supportive or a hindrance?
 - b. If they have been a hindrance, how can policies be changed to be more supportive?
17. What can district leaders do to support the changes you are attempting to make to increase equity within your school?
18. What else should I know about your experience implementing socially just and equitable practices in your school? ** Move to this question if running out of time.

APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Form Obtained from NCSU eIRB

Title of Study: Principals Implementing Social Justice and Equitable Practices: A Mixed Methods Study (eIRB # <Insert eIRB number>)

Principal Investigator: Lacey Seaton, leplatt@ncsu.edu, (919) 225-9004

Funding Source: None

Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli, bcjohns2@ncsu.edu, Insert Dr. Fusarelli's office phone and Dr. Lance Fusarelli, ldfusare@ncsu.edu, Insert Dr. Fusarelli's office phone

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate, and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of school administrators experience when attempting to increase socially just and equitable practices. We will do this through asking you to participate in an online survey and focus group.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because you will be given the opportunity to express your experiences and needs to further your work. You may not want to participate in this research because if you participate in the focus groups, colleagues in the room might be able to identify you and your experiences.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office's contact information is listed in the *What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?* section of this form.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of school administrators experiences when attempting to increase socially just and equitable practices.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?

There will be approximately insert number range participants in this study.

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study and be serving as a school principal. You must have served at your current school for a full year prior to participation in the study.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study or if you are working in your first year as a principal or serving as a school district leader other than the principal.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following:

1. Take an online survey regarding your work as a principal. The survey should take you 20 to 30 minutes to complete.
2. Optional participation on a one-hour focus group with five to 11 other principals to discuss social justice and equitable practices in schools.

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is 10 to 20 minutes for the online survey and 70 to 80 minutes if you choose to participate in the focus group.

Recording and images

If you want to participate in the focus group portion of this research, you must agree to be audio recorded. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you cannot participate in the focus group portion of the research study. Please initial next to the sentence(s) that you agree to.

_____ I consent to being audio recorded.

_____ I do not consent to being audio recorded.

Risks and benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The risks to you as a result of this research include the social risk when participating in the focus group if known colleagues are present that can identify you, at which point you may choose not to disclose information that could provide professional risk.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are the knowledge gained to help provide better supports to principals working to increase social justice and equity in their schools.

Right to withdraw your participation

You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please inform Lacey Seaton at leplatt@ncsu.edu or (919)225-9004 if you do not wish to continue. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect to have any data collected removed from the study.

Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that we have described to you in this form. The information that you share with us will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law. Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to us.

How we manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that we protect your personal privacy. Data generated about you in this study will be de-identified.

De-identified. De-identified data is information or bio-specimen(s) that at one time could directly identify you, but that we have recorded this data so that your identity is separated from the data. We will have a master list with your code and real name that we can use to link to your data. While we might be able to link your identity to your data at earlier stages in the research, when the research concludes, there will be no way your real identity will be linked to the data we publish.

Data that will be shared with others about you will be de-identified.

Compensation

For your participation in this study, you will not receive anything for participating.

What if you have questions about this study?

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Lacey Seaton, leplatt@ncsu.edu, (919)225-9004. The faculty advisors for this protocol are Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli, bcjohns2@ncsu.edu, **Insert Dr. Fusarelli's office phone** and Dr. Lance Fusarelli, ldfusare@ncsu.edu, **Insert Dr. Fusarelli's office phone**.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

Consent To Participate

By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

For the online survey portion of the study:

"I consent to research" <insert Qualtrics button>

"I do not consent to research" <insert Qualtrics button>

For the focus group portion of the study:

Participant's printed name _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D

Email to Principals Inviting Participation

Hello (participant name):

I am writing to ask for your help through participating in a research study that I am conducting for my dissertation at North Carolina State University. The purpose of this research study is to develop a better understanding of the role of school administrators in working to increase equity and social justice practices within their school.

To participate in the research study, each participant would need to complete a virtual survey which will take about 20 to 30 minutes. Following the survey, each participant will be given the option to participate in an additional one-hour long focus group with five other principals from across the state. The main need for participants would be to complete the survey.

Participating in this research study hopes to gain insight on ways to better support the needs of practicing principals throughout the state of North Carolina. Furthermore, the results hope to provide insight for future administrators about the best ways to navigate the political systems of education based on the expertise and lived experiences of current leaders. While there is no financial compensation for participating in this study, your input could indirectly support the work of future principals.

If you choose to participate in the survey, attached you will find the consent form to review. Following your review of the consent form please follow this link to the Qualtrics survey: (insert Qualtrics survey link)

The survey will begin with the consent form and require you to click to either confirm you consent which will then lead to the survey or if you deny consent then the survey will immediately stop. You will have six weeks to complete the survey and I will send out three email reminders.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lacey Seaton

APPENDIX E

Code Book

Gender:

Female – 0

Male – 1

Training (pertaining to Social Justice and Equity):

No training – 0

Training – 1

Degrees Earned:

Bachelors - 1

Masters - 2

Doctorate - 3

Post doctorate - 4

Race (of the Principal):

White - 5

Black - 3

Other - 6

School Location:

Rural - 1

Urban - 2

Suburban - 3

School Type:

Traditional Public - 1

Public Charter - 2

Grades Served:

K-5 - 1

6-8 - 2

9-12- 3

6-12 - 4

K-8 – 5

APPENDIX F

Stata Commands

correlate DependentVariables

summarize IndependentVariables

tabulate NominalVariables, generate(NominalVariables)

rename NominalVariables appropriate names

nestreg: regress DependentVariable (TeacherEx APEx PrincipalEx) (Training realage gender

whiteprincipal blackprincipal masters) (LowSES publicschool urban highschool Asian

AmericanIndian Black NativeHawaiian White)

predict residDependentVariable, r

sktest residDependentVariable

estat hettest