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Editorial: Special Issue

Educational Leadership for Social Justice: Policy, Practice, Community

Nola P. Hill-Berry

University of Technology, Kingston, Jamaica

Carmel Roofe

University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica

Paul Miller

University of Greenwich, London, UK

Introduction

The theme of this special issue 'Educational Leadership for Social Justice: policy, Practice, Community' suggests a call to action. It suggests a call to action for justice in policymaking, how educational leadership is practiced and a call to action for justice in our relationship as stakeholders in an education community. But what is social justice one might ask and therefore what is educational leadership for social justice. The answers to these questions provide the stimulant for the actions that those who are educational leaders need to demonstrate.

Brooks (2008) argues that, 'Justice is both an abstract "big" idea and also a concrete "little" idea' (p. 8) and is understood as a process or a way of "ethical living" in a diverse society' (Furman & Shields, 2003, p. 1358). Social justice then is "where all members of a society, regardless of background or procedural justice, have basic human rights and equal access to the benefits of their society" (Hemphill, 2015, p. 2). Educational leadership for social justice is leadership that ensures fairness in rights and access to the educational benefits of one's society. However, the processes and systems for ensuring fairness are open to various interpretations, are influenced by leaders' conception of social justice and may be seen as complex and contextualized endeavors (Arar, Ogden, & Beycioglu, 2019). Consequently, educational leadership for social justice is a bold undertaking. Educational leadership for social justice assumes that those who are assigned formal leadership roles pay attention to issues of equity and ensure that the power that resides within the social structures of education are more responsive to the rights of citizens (Miller, Roofe, & García Carmona, 2019). As stated by Theoharis (2007), at the heart of educational leadership for social justice are leaders who "…. 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 condition" (p. 223). Furthermore, Corbett (1976) notes that in order to do justice one cannot work alone, one needs a community approach. This community approach involves all education stakeholders giving attention to issues of equity and fairness in how policy is designed, how educational leaders practice leadership and the types of partnership relationships that are formed and leveraged among stakeholders to support leading for social justice.

The papers in this special issue lead us to examine a range of issues associated with two broad areas of educational leadership for

social justice; school leadership and higher education. Reflective of issues at the two broad levels of education the papers provide insights into the ways, as educational leaders, we may have intentionally or and unintentionally disadvantaged one another. Consequently, demanding us to intentionally conceptualize and implement systems and procedures to eliminate the ways in which we disadvantage one another in education.

With the expansion of knowledge, the narrowing of cultural borders, the increased use of technology, as noted by Miller's paper in this special issue, governments are requiring more from less; there is an increased need for ways of addressing social justice issues within the social structures of education. Miller's paper with examples from 16 countries further draws our attention to the political complexities involved in addressing social justice issues. These issues within education require social justice actions of inclusion at the policy level. In other words, educational leaders must ask the question, to what extent do educational policies include all members of the society and if not, how can we design policies to facilitate inclusion? Partington's paper raises awareness of the policy implications of market-led Higher Education on addressing issues of inclusion; while Russell and Jarvis' paper raises awareness about what can result if policies are not appropriately designed to facilitate inclusion. Careful attention must therefore be given to how needs are addressed as these issues arise.

While recognizing that policies are important to eliminate social injustice, we note that policies alone will not be enough to change injustices. In order to effectively address social injustices in educational leadership policy and practice must meet. This is why Hughes' paper on mentoring school leaders through cultural conflict is relevant as it gives us insight into the visible actions that need to be undertaken to

ensure social justice leadership. At the same time Conrad, Lee-Pigott and Brown's paper tells us that social justice actions is multifaceted and requires a combination of conceptual processes and actions to eradicate social injustices in education. Similarly, we note that leadership cuts across different levels hence leadership is not just for those leading at the macro level but also includes those leading at the meso and micro levels. Therefore, to say one is a social justice leader is to say that at whatever level you lead, the leader is deliberately thinking about, shows knowledge of, and is acting on issues of social injustices. For those who are educational leaders in the classroom (teachers/lecturers), social justice practice is linked to actions carried out during the teaching and learning process. This is important since Williams' paper on foreign language learning showcases how issues from one level of learning affects the next level of learning. Highlighting challenges experienced in the Foreign Language classroom as a result of issues students take with them from the secondary level of learning Spanish as a foreign language, Williams recommends the use of the communicative approach to teaching Spanish as a foreign language to better equip students with skills of language awareness thereby increasing their communicative competence as members of a global community. Wallder and Browns' paper also reminds us that what we do in the classroom, especially at the higher education levels, have national implications. Hence educators at the tertiary level should strive to be student centered in order to provide the workplace with effective and competent workers armed with 21st century skills.

As demonstrated by the papers in this special issue social justice issues are wide ranging and therefore need deliberate and coordinated efforts to address. Therefore, drawing on Shulman's ideas about Pedagogical Content Knowledge, Mayne suggests that for teachers to

develop the knowledge needed to enact social justice ideals perhaps a model of teacher preparation that provides teachers with Social Justice Pedagogical Content Knowledge is needed to empower teachers to illuminate their voices inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, Hill-Berry's paper closes out this special issue with showcasing distributed leadership as an approach to expanding leadership capabilities and building an academic leadership community as a necessary means for working towards social justice ideals. To this end we encourage other scholars to join us on the journey in conducting research to develop strategies for mitigating social injustices in educational leadership.

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About the Authors

Nola P. Hill-Berry is a lecturer and Programme Director for the health information management courses of study at the University of Technology, Jamaica. She serves the IEAL-J as Secretary, Director of Branding, and Conference Chair. Nola has special interests in leadership in health information management education and practice.

Email: chuckberry.nhb@gmail.com

Carmel Roofe is a Senior lecturer and programme co-ordinator for the M.Ed and MPhil/PhD programmes in Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at the University of the West Indies, Mona. She is a former Vice-President of the IEAL-J, and is currently convenor of the Curriculum and Innovation Research Interest Group (RIG) and conference programme Chair.

Email: carmelg.roofe@gmail.com

Paul Miller is Head of the School of Education, University of Greenwich, and professor of educational leadership & social justice. He co-convenes the "Educational Administration & Social Justice" Research Interest Group (RIG) of the Institute for Educational

Administration & Leadership- Jamaica, and the "Race & Educational Leadership" RIG of the British Educational Leadership Management Administration Society (BELMAS). He is also president of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM).

Email: p.w.miller@greenwich.ac.uk

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The Political Dichotomy of School Leadership: Policy, Practice, Social Justice - Evidence from Sixteen Countries

Paul Miller

University of Greenwich, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

Globally, schools continue to face ongoing reductions in budgetary allocations, increase in student numbers, performativity pressures and high stakes accountability. Like it or not, schools/ school leaders are operating in rapidly changing national educational policy contexts that are demanding more from less and a much greater contribution to national economic development – leaving some commentators and school leaders alike to suggest that schools are being reoriented towards national economic development and less towards social transformation, a fundamental aim of education as set out in the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This widening dichotomy is the site for several tensions occasioned by the approach to educational policymaking, and the policy apparatus of national governments, played out in schools, where school leaders are caught between implementing government policy, delivering an education to students that equips them to reap the espoused benefits of education, and keeping staff engaged and motivated. How do school leaders lead for social justice in contexts where educational policy appear out of sync with social justice principles? How do school leaders lead in contexts where the good of the national 'community' appears to supersede the good of local communities and individuals? This paper examines the

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dichotomy of school leadership, brought about and sustained by national political actions which, although professing to 'futures' orientated, appears in conflict with quality school leadership and outcomes consistent with social justice.

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Introduction

Educational policies are crucial to the shaping and orderly functioning of a national education system. They underpin, and, therefore, influence every aspect of schooling and have very important functions. For example, they "provide standardisation, uniformity and confidence to stakeholders"; they serve as "actual parameters or as shaping the parameters for actions and behaviours of individuals and groups within a system" and they "exist for creating order within an education system as well as in individual schools" (Miller 2018a, p.39). Accordingly, educational policies "establish frameworks and constraints in areas such as staffing, curriculum, safeguarding and protecting students and the welfare of staff" (Miller, 2018a, p.39). Nevertheless, educational policies do not exist in a vacuum, as they are interwoven into the fabric of a national society, and they are sometimes famed to reflect the ideological and other viewpoints of a certain segment of society (whether the middle to upper class and/or governments and political parties).

On the face of it, educational policies exist to "guide and shape the work of school leaders and what goes on in schools" and to "provide school leaders an essential framework through which to exercise and emancipate their leadership" (Miller, 2018a, pp. 39-40).

Nevertheless, school leaders, globally, are increasingly regarding educational policies as problematic, "not only because their implementation sometimes competes for limited resources in the implementation of other policies, but also because the content of policies can be vague and conflictual" (Miller, 2018a, pp. 39-40). Acknowledging this tension, former UK Schools Minister Ed Miliband (2003) argued "There is nothing more infuriating for professionals in the field than the feeling that the latest set of ministerial priorities will soon be superseded by a new set" (np). This position is also supported by Lumby and Coleman (2017) who argued, "The policy context changes not only what is done in schools, teaching and learning, but also the relationships between staff and children, between staff, and between staff and parents. The pressures of performativity, that is, constant scrutiny by means of league tables or inspection, accompanied by fear of potential public exposure, are particularly corrosive" (p.20). These tensions are problematic for those who work and study in schools, in particular school leaders, who, through education and schooling have a vital role to play in nation building and in the social and economic transformation of nation states.

An important point of departure from the past, however, is the steady "repositioning of a school's work mostly around national economic imperatives", which is a feature of "a broader market culture that has infiltrated the field of education" (Miller 2018a, p. 40), which, according to Grace (1989), "…puts market before community … maximizes strategies for individual profit and advantage; conceptualizes the world in terms of consumers rather than citizens, and marginalizes issues to do with morality and ethics…" (p. 134). The actions of policy makers therefore highlight that "… policies cannot be divorced from interests, from conflict, from domination or from justice" (Ball 1990, p. 1).

Conceptual Framework

Educational Policies as Fuel and Road Map

Educational policies, according to Miller (2016), "are the fuel on which education/schooling is run, simultaneously establishing parameters and providing direction" (p. 142). As fuel, educational policies provide education systems and education institutions in those systems with the energy needed for their functioning and their sustenance. The dual role of educational policies is important since education systems cannot function without educational policies; and new and revised educational policies are needed to maintain an education system and to reflect and respond to the complexities of the environment within which educational institutions operate. Embedded in Miller's observation is the fact educational policies also provide direction to actors and events within an education system. Yet, the top down nature of educational policies have led to tensions among school leaders who are responsible for their implementation.

Educational Policy as Environmental Hazards

Miller (2016) also noted that, "Educational policies give shape and structure to an education system and can lead to both coherence and mayhem for those who must enforce, deliver or otherwise experience them" (p. 142). This tension was also highlighted by Miliband (2003) who characterised the approach to educational policy-making in the UK "as either the motor of progress or its handbrake" (np). Highlighting a further tension, Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004) noted, "There was a time when educational policy as policy was taken for granted … Clearly that is no longer the case. Today, educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy and public contestation … Educational policy-making has become highly

politicised" (pp. 2–3). This view is supported by Bell and Stevenson (2006) who point to "relatively fragmented approaches" to educational policy-making which "often fail to provide a cogent account of the policy process" and which makes it difficult "for those working in schools that are subject to educational policies to make sense of the policy contexts within which they have to operate" (p. 2). Accordingly, Shilling (1993) questioned "whether education systems have the capacity either to be fully controlled, or to accomplish planned social change with any degree of accuracy" (p. 108).

Literature Review

In his study of school leaders in England and the Caribbean, Miller (2016) noted, "The external policy environment of a school consists of two discrete but interrelated contexts: the supranational and the national" (p. 81), and it is important to establish that events in both these contexts are primary determinants of the scope, content and character of educational policies. Global level educational policy-making have been described by Schriewer (2000) as "a web of reciprocal references …. moving, reinforcing and dynamizing the worldwide universalisation of educational ideas, models, standards, and options of reform" (p. 334), and for "standardizing the flow of educational ideas internationally and changing fundamentally what education is and can be" (Carney 2009, p. 68).

Accordingly, and increasingly, whether in response to events in the supranational environment, or as a response to national events and a strategy aimed at securing certain benefits for a nation state, "[E]ducation is being positioned as a golden ticket to individual and national prosperity and a hedge against social displacement, since through education, students should be in a better position to assess

and develop their talents and to produce goods and services that are more highly valued and more useful to society" (Miller 2018a, p. 41) Accordingly, the buffer effect of education is "…embedded in a universalized web of ideas about development and social problems" (Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012, p. 10), articulated by educational policies, not only framed in economic terms, but whose content and nature, underline the fact that "a country's journey to national economic development starts at the gate of a school" (Miller 2018b, p. 13).

This situation, associated with, and is a feature of the market culture, has not only resulted in a shift in educational priorities, but has also created a situation where educational policy priorities are determined and developed by actors outside of education (Bell & Stevenson, 2006), although it is the duty of those working in education to deliver and achieve them (Gunter, 2012). Accordingly, Miller (2018a), argued that "As a process, policy-making and implementation in education have become fraught, arguably a victim of political interests and expediency" (p. 41). Miller concludes, "A further consequence of this [policy] shift is that schools and school leaders are finding themselves in cross fires between differing political interests and dictates as they try to deliver on their primary commitment to students and their secondary commitment to the national state" (Miller, 2018a, p. 41).

National Policy Environment

As discussed above, within a nation state, it is the responsibility of a government to establish the context within which education/schooling is provided to citizens, and therefore it is the responsibility of a government to establish educational policies and to determine their scope, nature and content. National educational policy environments will vary significantly depending on a range of factors, not least the economic, cultural, social, economic and political realities of a nation state. Put differently, "Despite the ambitions of nation states and governments, economic, political and social realities of a country can delay or defer the realisation of some policy intents" (Miller, 2018a, p. 44). Miller also described "on-the-spot, off-the-cuff policy pronouncements" (2018, p. 46) or "overnight policy delivery" (Miller, 2018a, p.44) as characteristic of national governments in both developed and developing countries, which often did not reflect the "on the ground realities" (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011, p. 629) of schooling. Nevertheless, in as much as school leaders are under pressure to deliver national educational policy objectives, they are not "merely passive receivers and implementers of policy decisions made elsewhere" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 2).

From his study of school leaders in England the Caribbean, Miller (2016) reported that, in response to increased and "overnight" demands from policymakers, school leaders were exercising personal agency by filtering out and mediating national policy implementation, by focusing "on what their school is capable of doing, what would work in their school and how, and whether they had the human and material capacity and resources to deliver in ways that were practical and reasonable" (Miller, 2016, p. 86).

The Study

This cross-cultural study of school leadership in 16 countries was undertaken over a period of two years, 2014–2016. Data were collected using a mixed method approach, thus allowing for comparisons of different practices across, within and between different national and sub-national spaces. Given the fact school leadership may be viewed as a "functionally equivalent phenomena" (Miller, 2018c, p. 6), it was crucial to acknowledge 'emics' (things that are unique to a culture) and their role in shaping the practice of school leaders, and 'etics' (things that are universal to all cultures), since they both have an important role in enabling and improving understanding of the practice of school leadership in different national and sub-national cultures/ contexts.

Analytical Approach

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from participants. Correlational and regression analyses were conducted on the quantitative data to establish patterns of dependence and/or correlation. Qualitative data were the larger of the two data sets and these were analysed using narrative post-structuralism. In using this approach, attention was given to the discourse and narratives of school leaders in relation to social institutions (e.g., schools) and cultural products (e.g., a national education system). According to Foucault (1981), "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). Accordingly, discourse was acknowledged to be a useful tool for understanding the work of school leaders, since narratives constructed by actors are often subsumed into the actions that comprise their practice. Ethnographic methods and procedures (in particular, key informant interviewing) were also incorporated into

the analytical frame, in order to generate critical insights from school leaders in relation to their practice in their national, local and cultural settings. This allowed the researcher to access events, discourses and tactics in different school contexts and/or cultural spaces, which may not have been [adequately] captured by quantitative methods, and which as a result provided "a more direct style of thinking about relationships among knowledge, society and political action" where the "central premise is that one can be both scientific and critical, and that ethnographic descriptions offers a powerful means of critiquing culture and the role of research within it" (Thomas 1993, p. vii). Incorporating ethnographic methods within the analysis of data was therefore a methodological and a political act, for giving voice to school leaders, especially those located in smaller and developing countries, as well as for zeroing in on how school leaders manage shifting educational policy agendas in their different national and cultural spaces. The interview excerpts included in this paper are therefore to illustrate and enable our understanding and analysis of discourses and 'events' in these spaces.

Participants

Sixty-one school leaders from 16 countries were involved in this study. Each is currently a "principal" or "Head teacher" in their country's national education system. All participants work in public schools or schools operated by their country's national education ministry or education department. Twenty-four male and thirty-seven female took part in the study. Forty-six lead schools in urban and/or inner city areas and 15 lead schools in rural and/or remote areas. Thirty-six are primary school leaders and twenty-five are secondary school leaders.

Table 1.

Demographics of participants

Country	# of participants	School location		Gender		School type		Average years of service	
-	-	Urban	Rural	M	F	Pri	Sec	Teacher	Leader
Anguilla	2	2	-	-	2	2	-	25	10
Antigua	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	24.5	9.5
Brazil	2	1	1	-	2	1	1	19	9
Canada	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	31.5	15.5
Cyprus	7	6	1	5	2	2	5	22.8	8
Guyana	2	2	-	2	-	2	-	24.5	14.5
Israel	3	2	1	-	3	2	1	26	3
Jamaica	9	6	3	2	7	6	3	24.4	4.6
Montserrat	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	28	11
Mozambique	3	1	2	2	1	3	-	27.6	16
Pakistan	8	8	-	2	6	5	3	11.6	5.1
South Africa	6	2	4	3	3	2	4	21.5	6.6
St Maarten	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	20	6
Turkey	1	1	-	1	-	1	-	15	10
UK (England)	10	9	1	4	6	4	6	24.4	7.1
USA	3	3	-	1	2	2	1	24.3	7.6

Continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, North America

Participants were from all over the world representing a good mix of ethnic, linguistic, social, religious, political and economic characteristics. For example, participants were from five developed countries and 11 developing countries. 11 countries represented are members of the Commonwealth. English was not the official language (although spoken widely) of participants from nine countries. In the main, male school leaders had more teaching and leadership experience in years.

Findings

Educational policies exist for the smooth running and good order of an education system and the schools operating therein. Based on interviews with 61 school leaders located in 16 countries on five continents, there is evidence that the approach to, scope, content and character of educational policies, in the global and national environments, are having a significant influence on what goes on in schools as well as how school leaders approach and enact leadership in these countries. Four main themes, the necessity of education policies, hazardous educational policy environment, educational policy, agency and social justice, and the political environment a challenge to school leadership, are discussed in turn below. Findings are presented to reflect the country, participant number in a country, and gender. For example, "Israel, 3F" means: Country- Israel; participant 3; Female.

The Necessity of Educational Policies

Among the main aims of educational policies is the provision of direction and focus, and of helping to establish the character and the tone of an education system. School leaders in this study acknowledged the necessity of educational policies in setting out national expectations, in shaping institutional practices and targets and in demanding accountability. They said:

- *The school does not exist in a vacuum or in an empty space, it is affected and driven by many factors, and one of these factors is education policy (Israel, 3F)*
- *Without … policies and procedures, a school can be like a rudderless ship… It is important to have clarity, which leads to consistency – allowing staff to do their jobs without ambiguity. (Canada, 1M).*

- *In order for schools to function in a structured manner, policies are extremely necessary. The absence of policies tend to cause chaos and misinterpretations of what procedures should be followed. (St Maarten, 1F)*

School leaders were very clear about the role of educational policies and how these set and shaped the context for their work. For example, they argued educational policies demanded (and led to) *"better accountability from leaders" (Antigua, 2F)*; and helped *"with strategic resource decisions" (Jamaica, 2F)* in particular, regarding monitoring of performance and student progress. Although the approach to policy making in many of the countries in the study was top-down or heavily centralised (e.g.: Cyprus, England, Jamaica, Mozambique, Guyana, Montserrat, St Maarten, Antigua, Anguilla), and although school leaders very much resented this approach to policy-making, they nonetheless regarded educational policies as establishing accountability, maintaining consistency, developing and maintaining standards, reducing discretion, focusing and refocusing vision, and defining and clarifying purpose at both system and institutional levels. On the one hand, this highlights that school leaders are clear about the role and functions of educational policy in a national education system and in school leadership. On the other hand, they acknowledge (although they may not appreciate) that their practice is very much one that is influenced and contextualised by actors and by events in the national (Gunter 2012) and/or supranational (Miller, 2016) policy environments.

Hazardous Educational Policy Environment

Many challenges faced by school leaders are the result of a national educational policy environment that is in conflict with itself, due to multiple policies requiring simultaneous implementation, policy directives that compete with each other for [scarce] resources,

and/or policies that do not sufficiently address local or other context specific issues or circumstances. As a result, school leaders very much saw the policy environment as a potential hazard to their practice and to nation education systems as a whole.

- *The policy environment poses new challenges for school leaders … we are sometimes unclear about the content and purpose of policies we are expected to deliver. (Turkey, 1M)*
- *[H]ead teachers must adhere to policy or face punishment. A school is policy driven because you are threatened to follow them. (Guyana, 1M)*

Bell and Stevenson (2006) argued that governments want policy implementation to be seen as done, to be reported as done and to be accounted for; described by Gunter (2012) as a "game … where those outside of schools … controlled the leadership of schools" (p. 18) and where "the interplay between the agency of the head teacher and the structures that enable and prevent that agency" (Gunter, 2005, p. 172) are almost always at a crossroads. Furthermore, from the evidence presented in this study, it thus appears that, globally, school leaders are caught in a "... game in which market-based economic imperatives have become central to both their professional success and leadership practice" (Addison, 2009, p. 335), and where they must learn a set of rules "couched in economic language and with frequent intervention, or interference, from those beyond education" (Eacott, 2011, p. 50).

- *Leaders must follow guidelines. These are tested and tried and are usually aimed at achieving national goals. However, these must be tweaked, and fitted to the organisation. (Jamaica, 1F)*
- *School leaders continually tread the balance between policy dictates and remaining true to their own and generally accepted educational philosophy. Change through policy is a daily reality in the current target led educational context, a pressing reality for leaders. (England, 9M)*

School leaders in this study described being driven instead of being led by policies - an important distinction characterised by ad-hoc policy-making, short-termist policies, and where those required to implement policy are often not provided with adequate time or resources to do so (effectively). Grace (1995) highlighted that such a reductionist approach emphasises quasi-scientific management solutions, which do not make space for the "on the ground realities" (Ball et al., 2011, p. 629) of schools or the uniqueness of a school's context. Thus, Grace (1995) warns that the study of school leadership effectiveness should be placed within the "wider political, cultural, economic and ideological movements in society" (p. 5) in order to make sense of how school leaders "do" leadership. Furthermore, Eacott (2011) reasoned that current approaches to educational policy making is steadily leading to "the cultural re-engineering of school leadership and the embedding of performativity in the leaders' soul" (p. 47).

Educational Policies as Politics and a Threat to School Leadership

The educational policy environment itself was considered by some school leaders as a hazard, which was having an impact on their autonomy and ability to do their jobs. School leaders in England, especially, highlighted how a change of government, and a change in education secretary had led to changes to policies and priorities- many of which they didn't feel were in the best interest of schools.

- *Policy drives too much … which wouldn't matter if they didn't constantly change and if they were grounded in moral values. Current policies around accountability measures and the curriculum are particularly challenging. (England, 7F)*
- *The policy environment of schools cannot be ignored. Currently in the English system, the push for increased standards with the threat of academisation has*

pushed many headteachers in a direction they may otherwise not have taken had it not been for the prevailing governmental policy. (England, 3M)

These tensions have been noted by Bell and Stevenson (2006) who pointed out that, "[T]he tools of policy are of course not value neutral, and the way in which particular policies are enacted in particular contexts is intensely political … policies cannot be disconnected from the socio-political environment within which they are framed" (p. 44).

- *There is the negative or downside to policy where power and politics often determine the dominant voice (s) to be heard as well as how the policy should be enacted. This rhetoric, I often observe, is not based on adequate philosophical assessment or empirical data, hence, it frequently produces some undesired outcomes. (Montserrat, 1M)*

As discussed earlier, those who develop educational policies and those who must implement them do not always see eye to eye. Accordingly, Miliband (2003) proposed, the approach to educational policy-making in the UK and the relationship between policymakers and policy implementers may be described "as either the motor of progress or its handbrake" (np). The evidence from school leaders highlights several tensions in the relationship between policymakers (governments) and policy implementers (school leaders), tensions believed to be having a negative impact on the motivation, ambitions, vision and aims school leaders have for their schools. Bell and Stevenson (2006, p. 44) asked, "How does state policy manifest itself?" A response from Ball (1990) included, "Policies are the operational statements of values … We need to ask whose values are validated and whose are not … policies cannot be divorced from interests, from conflict, from domination or from justice" (p. 1). Furthermore, the evidence from school leaders suggests educational policies, at times, appear to be amoral, conflictual, top-down, fast paced and ad-hoc.

Educational Policy, Agency and Social Justice

Schools leaders are often constrained by educational policies, and left frustrated by policy-making that appeared amoral, conflictual, top-down, fast paced, short-termist and ad-hoc. By nature, educational policies are neutral to institutional contexts, and it was left to school leaders to navigate, mediate and otherwise manage the implementation of educational policies in ways that created as little disruption as possible to agendas and plans they had for their schools.

- *I am more independent in making decisions. I do not always rely on policies. (Cyprus, 7M)*
- *Objective decisions should be made, but the experience of school leaders and others on the ground should be included. (Cyprus, 6M)*
- *I have never been fond of working within the limits of policies. Rules are OK but not on their own. (Cyprus, 4M)*
- *We follow policies, but with our character. (Cyprus, 1M)*
- *It may be necessary to circumvent a policy to facilitate mitigating circumstances. (South Africa, 1M)*

School leaders in Europe, especially in Cyprus showed a greater degree of resistance to policies by mediating their implementation. That is, they decided against implementing policies they felt they were unable to deliver, or they only implemented aspects (parts) of certain policies. School leaders in developing countries were most likely to adopt a filtered approached to policy implementation. That is, they decided what was appropriate and manageable for their school, and when. School leaders in England showed the highest degree of frustration with educational policies. Nevertheless, this did not [always] translate into policy filtering and/or mediation. In the main, the actions of school leaders in the study mirror Giddens' (1984), observation that at one point or another, it will become necessary for people to assert their agency against both the rules (structures) and the

systems, an observation also made by Miller in his 2016 study in England and the Caribbean who found school leaders chose to focus "on what their school is capable of doing, what would work in their school and how, and whether they had the human and material capacity and resources to deliver in ways that were practical and reasonable" (p. 86).

The agency of school leaders in this study is manifest in Miller and Hutton's (2019) revised theory of 'Situated Leadership', in which they argue that effective school leadership is 'situated' within an individual but emerges from how they engage with and manage, negotiate and navigate environmental factors. Environmental factors, they argue include legal/ regulatory factors, and institutional factors. Accordingly, leadership is a function of environmental and personal factors, or L= f(Ef + Pf), where: L= leadership practice; EF= environmental (legal/regulatory factors + institutional factors) + Personal factors. School leaders approached policy implementation with their character as well as with their heads, and pushed back against wholesale policy implementation, an important exercise in personal agency. Miller and Hutton propose that whereas environmental factors, set parameters for the practice of leadership, it is personal factors that produce the effectiveness of leadership through how school leaders deconstruct, interpret and engage both legal/regulatory and institutional factors. Moreover, as suggested by Hutton, the quality of leadership is enhanced by the level and intensity with which personal factors engage and overcome environmental factors (Hutton, 2011).

Implications

Schools are at the core of ongoing changes initiated and led by events in the supranational and national educational policy environments. As a result, how school leaders experience and enact their leadership is being shaped and re-shaped, rather decisively, by events well beyond their schools and their control. Although not exclusively, national educational policies are heavily influenced by and can be overturned by events in the supranational environment. Similarly, school agendas are heavily influenced by and can be overturned by events a national educational policy environment. This interlocking relationship, described by Schriewer (2000), as "a web of reciprocal references …" (p. 334), shows a dynamic process of influencing, based on "an ever-evolving pattern of relationships … between constituent parts" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 4). How can school leaders in these contexts demonstrate fidelity to mission? How can they articulate and exemplify social justice leadership? How can they maintain moral purpose in the face of a conflictual educational policy environment? These are but few of the questions national societies must ask themselves, as school leaders grapple with educational political environments that "… can be as volatile as they are unpredictable" (Miller, 2016, p. 81).

Educational policymaking is invariably a complex exercise, and current approaches to policymaking risks forcing individual school leaders towards policy filtering and policy mediation, responses and strategies which, on the face of it affirms the agency of school leaders, but which if not carefully managed, can lead to dwarfed outcomes for teachers and students, as well as resulting in problems for a national system. Accordingly, "privileging of policy-making over policy implementation risks alienating school leaders who have

responsibility for implementing educational policies" (Miller 2018, p. 56). Nevertheless, as educational policies are shaped and reshaped until the point of implementation (Bowe et al., 1992), national governments can reduce the perception of privileging policy making over implementation, by meaningfully drawing on the experience and field expertise of school leaders, in ways that support national policy agendas and ultimately schools.

Bell and Stevenson (2006) argued that those working in schools should be able make sense of their national policy context since policy agendas demand they are able to respond to and implement policy directives. School leaders, given their positions, have particular responsibility for doing this, since they are a buffer between a school's internal environment and its external [policy] environment. Although school leaders make key decisions related to the interpretation and implementation of external policy agendas at school level, these are usually influenced by a "complex mix of factors including personal values, available resources and stakeholder power and perceptions" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p. 8). Thus, an ability to anticipate and understand events in a school's external policy environment, and being able to understand the meaning, purpose and resource requirement of events is an important leadership quality. Yet, the ability of a school leader to anticipate and understand is always to be juxtaposed against the fact that, "education is an (impure) public good, in the economist's sense, but that conclusion alone does not tell us whether or not markets, internal or free, are appropriate mechanisms for educational provision" (Tooley 1993, p. 121).

Conclusions

Educational policies guide, and to a large extent, shape the practice of school leadership. Schools, like other educational institutions do not exist in a vacuum, and nor can they function without policies developed by a national government. Educational policies are neutral to any singular school context. Yet, in order to increase the likelihood of buy-in from school leaders, and their ultimate success, developing educational policies should draw on the "on the ground realities" (Ball, et. Al., p.629) of those working in a range of educational contexts so that the policies developed are more inclusive and more reflective of the realities of all types of schools within a national education system. Educational policies must not undermine, or appear to undermine, the work of school leaders but rather align with and emancipate their work. The evidence from this study points to "theoretical and perspectival and ethical challenges" (Ball et al., 2011, p. 52) – which, may intensify the quality of leadership (Hutton, 2011), but which also risk undermining the effectiveness of leadership (Miller, 2016).

The national educational policy environment of a school is crucial for establishing order and coherence within a system, and educational policies are important guides for school in clarifying and working towards national imperatives. As policies are not value neutral or context neutral, they bring into sharp focus tensions among policy makers, school leaders, the objectives of policies and how these tensions [can] impact the practice of school leadership. Put differently, educational policies, the very instruments designed to bring coherence, structure and/or order to a national education system, is arguably the same instrument that can undermine the overall effectiveness of the system- first by being amoral, conflictual, top-

down, fast paced, short-termist and ad-hoc, and second, by undermining the work of school leaders, the very persons tasked with educational policy implementation. This is the political dichotomy of school leadership.

Although Habermas (1976) portrayed increasing state intervention as necessary to mitigate inherent contradictions in capitalist modes of thinking, the precise nature of such interventions is a matter for government, in whose gift is the power to deploy a range of policies and strategies in attempting to secure compliance and/or change (Simmons & Smyth, 2016). School leaders are united in their concern that current approach to educational policy making is seemingly reducing the practice of school leadership to "a purely instrumental, tactical, administrative exercise" (Plant, 1982, p. 348). It appears that current approaches to policy- making could lead to motivational crises among school leaders brought about by the educational policy environment that carry a severe risk of not only challenging but also undermining their leadership and thus their schools.

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About the author

Paul Miller is Head of the School of Education, University of Greenwich, and professor of educational leadership & social justice. He co-convenes the "Educational Administration & Social Justice" Research Interest Group (RIG) of the Institute for Educational Administration & Leadership- Jamaica, and the "Race & Educational Leadership" RIG of the British Educational Leadership Management Administration Society (BELMAS). He is also president of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM).

e-mail: p.w.miller@greenwich.ac.uk

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Student Withdrawal, Retention and Their Sense of Belonging; Their Experience in Their Words

Lisa Russell & Christine Jarvis

University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, United Kingdom

Abstract

Student withdrawal has received increased attention in the context of an expanding and more diverse Higher Education (HE) student population. Students leave University for interconnected, multiple reasons. Some explanations are internal to the University and may include support mechanisms, assessment feedback and quality of teaching and others are external, comprising critical life moments such as bereavement, ill health, financial constraint and domestic responsibilities. It is the complex interaction of these factors that shape students' 'sense of belonging' and identification and experience with a Higher Education learner identity. This article provides insight into the students' experiences of non-continuation in one English University. Wenger's social theory of learning is applied to explore students' perceptions and gain a qualitative understanding regarding their experiences. Student withdrawal involves negotiation between the student and the University and relates to how the student experiences a 'sense of belonging' to University.

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Introduction

Building student belonging and engagement for retention and success has been at the centre of Higher Education (HE) policy discourse during profound sector-wide change in England and across the globe (Masika & Jones, 2016; Thomas, 2012; Trowler, 2010). Student withdrawal is costly to the student and the institution (Simpson, 2005); evidence suggests that a students' 'sense of belonging' alongside their development of a HE learner identity are important considerations when thinking about retention strategies (Kane, Chalcraft & Volpe, 2014; Reid, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). Recently there has been much interest in the retention of students within the UK context, motivated in part by the government's target to reduce rates of non-completion. Consequently, Universities have wider concerns about the quality of the student experience in the context of expanding diverse, student populations and decreasing resources (Joyce & O'Boyle, 2013; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). When the budgets, curriculums, directives and goals of Universities change so do the experiences of students (Dolhinow, 2017) and thus Universities are increasingly made aware of the social injustices evident within HE and are ever more concerned with implementing inclusive leadership to do something about it (Ryan, 2006). Leadership practices are therefore crucial elements in gearing all educational systems towards inclusive values and bringing about sustainable change to better the educational experiences of all its students (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). The research on which this article draws aimed to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the complex process of belonging and engagement for HE participation and retention. Social justice in the broader HE context has included a commitment to equitable participation of *all* students and so issues

related to belonging and identity are related to widened University access facilitating a just, competent and diverse student body and graduate workforce who can, in turn, contribute to society (Gair & Baglow, 2018). Findings are drawn from 80 participants' experiences of studying and leaving one English University, using Tinto's model of retention and Wenger's social theory of learning, encapsulated in communities of practice (CoP) perspectives to understand the complex interaction of how a student's 'sense of belonging' is linked to the interaction of individual and institutional factors that shape students HE experiences.

Student Withdrawal

The literature identifies that the reasons students withdraw tend to be multiple and interconnected (Merrill, 2015). Students may withdraw due to a lack of preparedness for HE and an incompatibility between the student and their selected course and institution (Ozga and Sukhnandan, 1998); because the course or University is not what they expected and a mismatch between their expectations and the reality of HE learning is experienced (Hamshire, Willgoss & Wibberley, 2013). Some struggle academically, with course content and workload. Others may tussle to manage debt, finances, health concerns or bereavements (Christie, Munro & Fisher, 2004; Gavin, 2012; Michalski, 2014). The quality of course pre-entry information matters, as do relations with placement mentors (Chambers, Hobson & Tracey, 2010; Gavin, 2012; Hamshire, Wilgoss & Wibberley, 2013; Wray, Aspland & Barrett, 2014), types of learning, teaching and assessment approaches (Tinto, 2002), the nature of relationships between academic staff and students (Thomas, 2002) and the ease with which students establish friendship networks (McGivney, 1996). Issues related to a student's ability to make compatible friends are

related to where a student lives; living in halls for example can act to facilitate social support ties amongst peers during the initial stages of university transition, but this can also present problems for the maintenance of these friendships (Wilcox et al, 2006). Students leave University because they feel isolated, struggle to make friends and have no peer support networks to draw on. Furthermore, if students are not aware of the support available, or feel it is insufficient, their ability to develop a HE learner identity is thwarted (Christie, Munro & Fisher, 2004; Merrill, 2015; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Withey, Fox & Hartley, 2014; Wray, Aspland & Barrett, 2014).

Often students will cite personal circumstances as reasons for leaving, which can be difficult to unpack as it can obscure the part that institutional factors play in the students' decision to leave. Students may blame themselves for their inability to cope academically, but the interaction of personal and institutional factors may be more nuanced (Withey, Fox & Hartley, 2014). Christie, Munro and Fisher (2004) acknowledge the under-reporting of academic difficulties as reasons for withdrawal. Young, Glogowska and Lockyer (2007) explored the difference between staff and student conceptions of why students withdraw. While many staff tended to suggest factors that locate the issue with the individual student and their deficient abilities, students in contrast were more likely to suggest their experiences on the course and lack of guidance and support from academic staff as key reasons for leaving (Young, Glogowska & Lockyer, 2007).

A multitude of reasons shape a students' decision to withdraw. Students' ability and experience of integrating into the academic and social spheres matter, with successful integration across both of these domains leading to a reduction in the probability of student withdrawal (Beder, 1997). Social and academic support is vital for

effective adjustment into University life and transition into a HE learner identity and that support from peers, tutors and parents all play a different role in developing this connection (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2000). Becoming a student involves constructing a new identity and a sense of belonging, as well as developing fresh academic skills (Beder, 1997).

Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging has been deemed a universal human need (Maslow, 1954) and is thus vital to mental health (Hagerty, Lynch-Saur, Patusky, Bouwsema & Collier, 1992). Much of the postsecondary belonging literature (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012) builds upon Tinto's (1987) model of student retention which suggests that students leave universities if they fail to become integrated into social and academic life. Tinto's model of integration has been critiqued for emphasising student, rather than institutional responsibility for adaptation, rather the students' sense of belonging should illustrate the interplay between the individual and the institution (Johnson et al, 2007). Within the HE literature, a sense of belonging has been referred to as the "psychological sense that one is a valued member of the college community" (Hausmann, Schofield & Woods, 2007, p. 804). Other literature describes sense of belonging as being fostered specifically through campus involvement. Other research focuses on historically marginalised groups such as students from the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) community (Strayhorn, 2012); ethnic minority groups (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Meeuwise, Severiens & Born, 2010) and students with disabilities (Vaccaro, Daly-Cano & Newman, 2015). Common to the literature is an emphasis on psychological feelings of fitting in, acceptance and support from a group or indeed a University community (Strayhorn, 2012). The

inability to create and maintain positive social bonds may lead to feelings of loneliness and anxiety (Wilcox et al, 2006). Here, we argue that a sense of belonging is indeed an important matter to foster for all students, but that wider hegemonic forces, in addition to University and personal individual motivations and experiences help nurture or diminish it. This article aims to develop understandings regarding the complex processes of belonging and engagement related to student withdrawal and retention. It deliberates on issues related to belonging and the development of a HE learner identity.

Learning and Identity

Wenger's (2009) social theory of learning posits learning as social participation involving active participation with people and practices in social communities, whereby identities are constructed within these communities. Over time the historical practices of learning become a social structure constituting a community of practice (CoP). Conceptually, the theory amalgamates four interconnected learning components to include, *community* – learning as belonging; *practice* – learning by doing; *meaning* – learning by experiencing and *identity* – learning by becoming to characterise social participation as a constructivist socio-cultural process of learning, knowing and being (Masika & Jones, 2015). Thus the concept of a community is a learning organism which can be utilised as a theoretical lens to understand learning as a social process, a procedure whereby the very act of learning transforms our experience and our identity and so the institution and the individual interact to manifest the experience of learning - something which cannot be separated from identity development (Smith, MacGregor, Mathews, & Gabelnick, 2004).

Understanding learning via this frame allows for the importance of sense of belonging to be negated by the individual student and the

institution, while simultaneously linking this sense of community and belonging to the manifestation of a HE learner identity.

The Study

A qualitative research design was adopted to include eighty participants who were interviewed using a semi-structured format, to enable participants to tell their own stories in their own way. Many previous studies have explored notions of 'sense of belonging' among HE students using a quantitative design, utilising survey instruments such as Goodenow's (1993) Psychological Sense of School Membership (Kane, Chalcraft & Volpe, 2014); or have focused on either undergraduates or postgraduates across specific semesters. This study sought an exploratory, inductive design that pursued in-depth, valid data from any willing participant who had experienced withdrawal or issues with retention in one English University. The University had withdrawal rates in line with expectations according to the benchmarks set by the UK's Office for Students. A relatively large number of students are from working-class backgrounds and approximately 50% commute from their homes, with the remaining students either living away from their UK home or are international in their status. Detailed analysis of withdrawal data, standardised for ethnicity, entrance qualifications, gender, disability and domicile, revealed that students at this University who had undertaken vocational qualifications prior to entry (such as BTEC qualifications rather than 'A' Levels) were more likely to withdraw. These students were more likely to live at home and derive from a Pakistani/Bangladeshi heritage. The University's leadership recognised that it was operating within what Shapiro and Gross (2013) call 'multiple ethical paradigms' in 'turbulent times'. It was

challenged to meet outcomes related to targets regarding student retention and achievement) and was influenced by a neoliberal ethical paradigm focusing on value for money for taxpayers. The University leadership actively sought to support the most vulnerable students and vigorously engage with widening participation (Devlin, 2013). To facilitate this, The University needed a deeper understanding of the factors within its control so it could activate change and better support all students, thus improving student retention was a key strategy.

Fieldwork commenced in March 2017 and concluded in April 2018. Interviews were participant-led; they were arranged at a time and place convenient to the participant. A mixture of opportunistic, purposive and snowballing sampling techniques was used to increase the cohort. Up to 2000 students who had withdrawn from the University between 2015 and 2018 were contacted via telephone, email and/or text message. Large datasets comprised centrally and on an individual school basis were obtained and followed up. In addition to this, key staff, including Personal Tutors, Lecturers, Deans, staff with academic support roles and Student Union Professionals were accessed as gatekeepers in an attempt to keep abreast of the ever changing student population.

Approximately 30 hours was spent 'hanging around' the Student Union, the library and eating and leisure areas with the aim of gathering participants at risk of withdrawing. The sample consisted of those who had left the institution and those who had thought about leaving or had attendance issues during their time at the University. Interviews lasted between fifteen minutes to one-hour and thirty minutes; varying in length depending upon how complex their reasons for leaving were and how quickly they were able to reflect on their experiences. These interviews were participant-led and so the

length of them, as well as where they occurred, were dictated by the participants. Interviews occurred face-to-face at the University, in participant's homes, workplaces or local shopping centre/coffee houses, via skype or email.

Interview questions concerned exploring participants' overall experiences at the University, their course, opinions on staff, peers, available support mechanisms (formal and informal) and general teaching and learning strategies. Participants were also asked about their decision to leave (or to stay) at the University and they were asked to reflect on how they felt about that decision now in retrospect. The overall sample included sixty-four individual interviews, three paired and the remainder were grouped including 3-4 participants. Seventy-five of these interviews were conducted face-to-face, three were interviewed via telephone, one via Skype and one via email.

A total of eighty undergraduate and postgraduate students who had either withdrawn or were at risk of being withdrawn from the University comprised the sample, including 29 males and 51 females; 71 Undergraduates and 9 Postgraduates across seven academic schools. Their ethnic make-up was defined by the participants themselves and included 37 White, 17 Pakistani, 9 British Muslim, 2 Indian, 2 Asian, 1 Bangladeshi British, 1 Black, 1 Black African, 1 Nigerian, 1 Persian, 1 Cypriot, 1 Syrian, 1 Lithuanian, 1 Gambian, 1 Polish, 1 Chinese, 1 from Kuwait and 1 'unknown' ethnic identity. A total of thirty-four had withdrawn and forty-three were at risk of withdrawing, leaving three who had suspended their studies.

Interview data were analysed and key themes identified via Braun and Clark's (2006) open coding technique. Key themes included the students overall 'sense of belonging' which was linked to their 'higher education learner identity' – both of which ultimately shaped

their experiences of the withdrawal or retention process, in terms of how and why they decided to continue (or not) with their University experience.

Students Withdraw for a Variety of Reasons

A number of key themes emerged from the interview data, exemplifying that the reasons students leave University are multiple and inter-connected. The process of non-completion involved negotiation between the student and the institution and comprised how the student experienced a 'sense of belonging' to the University and their transition to a HE learner identity. It is important to note that these findings reflect student perceptions, but also have implications for Higher Education Institutes strategies for widening participation and ensuring all students enjoy a rewarding University experience.

Findings indicate that the key factors for leaving can be grouped into internal factors (structures within the University such as institutional support mechanisms, course availability and content and course population cohort culture) and external (structures outside of the university such as wider financial support policy and more agentic personal and social reasons such as health, domestic responsibility, bereavement and feeling of compatibility with certain courses and institutions). These categories often overlap and interconnect consequently influencing students' decision to leave or indeed stay at University.

Feelings of exclusion, lack of support, isolation and anxiety can be grouped under the students overall 'sense of belonging' to a particular institution. Students' lack of sense of belonging is often directly related to key transition points and identity concerns related to first becoming a University student, periods of prolonged absence

such as holidays and placements and movement from undergraduate to postgraduate status. How a student experiences their shift to a HE learner identity is often related to agentic personal circumstances external to the University and structural support mechanisms, course availability and population cultural make-ups internal to the organisation itself. For most, it is the interaction of these internal and external factors that lead to a student's non-continuation.

Higher Education Learner Identity

First year retention remains a key challenge across the sector (Jones et al, 2017). Reasons for non-continuation are interrelated and complex (Yorke & Longden, 2008) but a student's transition to a HE learner identity features prominently in the interview data as a key indicator for withdrawal. A student's 'sense of belonging' shapes how they view time spent in University, which may be related to their management of study and view of travel time. When students first move into HE they often enjoy, but are somewhat overwhelmed by the level of flexibility and freedom they are afforded. This shift to working in an increased independent way is problematic for some and their adaptability may be dependent upon the student's cultural background and personal circumstances. Students may consequently struggle academically.

Mohamed Asif, a twenty-six-year-old British Muslim accountant and finance student, was withdrawn due to academic failure. During his interview he illustrated how he enjoyed the independence of study time, but also found this challenging in terms of keeping him motivated to attend lectures, study autonomously and improve his chances of academic progress.

> *MA: At first it was different because it was a new place with new people and the work is different from what you did at school and college (…) We had days off sometimes which I never had in school or college so we don't come in five days a week (…) Sometimes there used to be a lesson in the morning and then there would be a big gap and then a lesson from three 'till five.*
> *(Interview 07/02/2018)*

Many students cited feelings of 'lack of support' as key reasons for their withdrawal, lack of academic progress and consistent attendance. Such feelings were heightened during key transition periods such as entering HE in the first instance like Mohammad indicates above or during placement or after long term breaks such as embarking upon a new academic term or year. Successful movement to a HE learner identity is partly dependent upon the students' ability to work independently, but (may also be eased by having consistent and flexible support mechanisms in place). Some students did not find the various support systems that existed sufficient, particularly when they were used to having closer supervision in schools and colleges, where teachers would actively pursue students who missed small amounts of teaching, or appeared to be disengaging. They had to negotiate, develop and manage different CoP's, different ways of working with different people to help cultivate their HE Learner Identity.

Support Mechanisms

Internal formal support mechanisms may include how well students relate to academic and support staff, how well informed they are about available support structures, and how students view assessment feedback and keep abreast of their academic standing and attendance levels. Informal support mechanisms in the form of peer group networks are also key, with some students relying on these over

and above any formal support mechanisms set up by the University. Feelings of belonging are shaped by a student's ability to feel integrated, engage with other students, make friends and form good productive relations with staff.

Shai Ahmed, a male British Bangladeshi student, withdrew during the first year from a Law degree. He cited the quick turnaround of academic staff and consequent lack of classroom management as key reasons for his departure. Shai describes feeling a 'lack of support' from the University in terms of not effectively tracking his progress when he returned from a three-week period of absence due to illness. He also did not appreciate the change in staff members making it difficult to catch-up and follow different schemes of work taught in different ways.

He also cites poor classroom management as an issue, with some staff struggling to discipline disruptive students. A culmination of these factors left him feeling unsettled and contributed to his feelings of exclusion. He describes struggling to make friends and felt that the few he did make, consequently withdrew due to the lack of support they also felt. Together, these factors further exacerbated and increased his desire to withdraw.

> *SA: Different tutors kept coming in and they were bringing in their own material, and you'd always fall back. You'd go forward, you'd take two steps on and you'd take one step back, that's how it, sorry one step forward, two steps back. It was a bit disruptive.*
>
> *LR: Tell me about your friends at the University. So, you know, did you make friends easily?*
>
> *SA: No. Do you know what it is? That was one of the most, hardest thing I had to do, because everyone was so isolated on my course it's like no one wanted to do anything with each other. And during the course a lot of problems did go through, like there was, at the time there was this app out. I forgot what it was*

called, but it's like everyone will get into the app and they'll start taking pictures and they start texting and they'll make fun of other people, other teachers. It was very anonymous so no one knows who's talking (…) And that was a concern. It was a concern for everyone because basically they were taking the mick out of your tutors (…) It was an app which everyone just, as soon as they sign up everyone's in that chat and you can just talk. It's like a group chat but no one says who's who on that group chat (…) Everyone's on their own, it's like they don't disclose who's who (…) It went on for a month until one of the tutors found out (…) But they didn't put a complete stop to it, people carried on with it.

LR: And did you struggle making friends?

SA: (…) I was close with about two or three when I started but them two or three just dropped out. They dropped out within the first term.

LR: What was the population like on your course?

SA: I came across a few Asians and their personality was different. It was all about the swag, it was all about coming late, it was all about messing around, doing your work late, give in your assignment late. So I kind of thought to myself, I don't know which world I've landed myself in (…) I'm not going to take nothing away, I mean the concept of the course was very interesting. If I had the support at the time and if I had a good crowd around me I would go, I would definitely carry on with it, but it was the crowd thing and it was the fact that teachers kept on changing.

(Interview 21/07/2017)

Teaching quality, classroom management, course content, assessment procedures and quality of feedback all matter to students, but their relations with staff and peers and sense of belonging attributed to the course cohort can also all shape students' progress and their feelings of connectedness with a CoP. Many of these themes can be understood under the broader theme of 'support mechanisms' which can be formal and/or informal. If the student feels these are lacking they are more likely to withdraw. Indeed, sometimes it is the students' peer group networks that increase their 'sense of belonging'

and keep them motivated to succeed and complete their studies. In Shai's instance, the student appeared to have difficulty finding a group of friends with whom he could identify both culturally and academically with having a negative impact on his overall sense of belonging and ability to interact, contribute to and develop a community he felt a part of. Diversely, Kayley, a Masters student, below indicates the positive impact peer group networks can have helping to facilitate a CoP, whereby learning is viewed as a social practice involving active participation with other people, in this case peers, to help solidify Kayley's Master student identity, helping her to recognise her feelings and experiences were alike to others within that community that she and her peers actively developed and contributed to (Wenger, 2009).

KL: If we didn't have each other I would have left by now.
(Focus group 31/01/2018)

Issues of learning and HE identity development are related to a student's sense of belonging. What students do at University and how they experience it shapes how they become a HE learner and engage (or not) with the University CoP's (Wenger, 1998, 2009). Thus a CoP plays a vital role in nurturing a sense of belonging and engaging students in learning. Students may feel a sense of belonging (or not) to the University itself, the course and/or discipline, their peers and their tutors, thus emphasising the importance of belonging and the relation this has to identity and ultimate student retention and academic success (Tinto, 2003; Wenger, 2009). Overall students want to feel a part of something, learn together and have a positive experience at University and so University leadership needs to take on board the importance of a student's sense of belonging in order to facilitate the student's engagement and encourage their feeling a part

of the Higher Education Institute if they want to increase student retention – something which may be viewed somewhat as a challenge in the current societal climate (Shapiro & Gross, 2007).

There is rarely one defining moment that leads to student withdrawal, rather a culmination of interacting internal and external factors shape student withdrawal. Although Mohammad withdrew due to 'academic failure', the interview revealed that he did not feel comfortable with his choice of course. He attributed his academic struggle to lack of his own application. However, he also described feeling uncomfortable approaching support and academic staff about his personal issues, this consequently had a negative effect on his progress. It is also notable that systems devised to be consistent and fair (such as requiring students to identify problems before poor results come out, to ensure claims are genuine) are not always understood in good time.

> *MA: I think the course was not meant to be for me. At first I did want to be an accountant but when I started studying I lost a bit of interest. The course just wasn't for me. I don't really know how to say it (…) I didn't really speak to anyone. I tried to speak to my tutors after the results and I think they told me even before that that I was not in a good place because of my grades (…) I was sad because I wasted that one year and I really wanted to stay on at uni and get a degree. I wasn't really that happy (…) I spoke to Student Support because during my exams I had my first cousin diagnosed with a blood cancer so I used to visit him at Hospital because we knew that he was going to pass away. And I got a bit sad about the state he was in. So when the exams came I couldn't concentrate that well. I tried to explain, but there was nothing they could do about it. I did bring in some evidence from the hospital but it didn't work (…) I didn't want to speak about it then so when my cousin passed away and I knew that I hadn't done well in my exams, then I told them about what had gone on. I should have spoken to someone at the right time but I didn't do that. (Interview 07/02/2018)*

Tinto's model on student retention (Tinto 1975, 1987, 1993, 1997, 1998) considers the educational institution to consist of an academic system (related to academic progress) and a social system (related to informal peer group relations, engagement in extra curricula activities and interaction with support and academic staff). Tinto's model postulates that the more the student integrates and thus feels a part of the institution within the academic and social communities related to the university, the greater the likelihood of persistence (Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010). These ideas can be related to the student's 'sense of belonging' and ease of movement into a HE learner identity. Key transitions such as when a student first starts university, like Mohammad previously described, are vulnerable periods whereby ones 'lack of sense of belonging' may be heightened. Experiences concerning personal bereavement (an external reason for withdrawal) and the feeling of not being able to access formal support structures (such as those offered by the institution) and informal ones (in the form of peer group support) enhance a student's feeling of anxiety, isolation, lack of support and sometimes self-blame. Most students interviewed experienced a mixture of internal and external factors that lead to their ultimate withdrawal. Thus there needs to be a negotiation between themselves as learners and the institution itself. Few students attributed their withdrawal solely to internal reasons and fewer still described purely external factors as the sole determining factor for their non-continuation.

Personal Circumstances

The main external reasons for withdrawing included bereavement, health (mental and physical), reasons related to family/domestic responsibility and lack of finance. Sole external reasons for withdrawing are harder for the institution to effectively

manage since it is the students' life outside the University that acts as a barrier to their academic progress and retention. An example of which can be found in Sally Ram's interview, a 38-year-old White female who withdrew from a Youth and Community course due to family issues.

LR: How did you feel about the University?

SR: Overall extremely pleasant. Really, really enjoyed my time here, loved the tutors, the organisation, things like that were very well organised, the classes were well-structured and I couldn't really fault that side of it at all. And, yeah, I'm quite sorry that I left but I just couldn't carry on (…) I liked the tutors, you know, I liked all the tutors that we had (…) I even enjoyed the huge amount of reading that you had to do.

LR: Was there anything that you didn't like?

SR: Not really, no. I think one thing I would find is that coming back as a mature student is quite hard (…) it's hard to find your place within a group, because they're predominantly younger students, but saying that I actually came with a lady who was on my access course and there were other mature students there (…) but again I actually found that that added to it because there was such a mixture of people that everyone brought something to the mix.

LR: What was your relationship with tutors like?

SR: They were supportive and with hindsight I wish I'd have kind of gone to my own tutor first, but it wasn't, I didn't really make, I know it sounds silly, a conscious decision to go (…) I came in one morning and just thought, I can't carry on like this, and found myself at the wellbeing clinic (…) The reason why I left was because my husband had trouble with a gambling addiction (...) And he was actually having counselling for that and when I left the access course that was when things came to light, but over the summer things started getting easier. He was getting counselling and everything else, and I did discuss it with my tutor at college and she said 'no, carry on the road that you're doing, don't leave it a year', you know, 'just carry on and see how it goes', but I actually wish now I'd have taken a year out because I think with me being here and not realising how much support he needed as well, because he was trying to play it

down, he actually regressed and went backwards and ended up in suicide watch. Which is why I left. And it got to the point where, like I said, it wasn't a conscious decision. I came in one morning stressed, anxious. I knew that I'd got a placement to do as well, so that, as well as everything else, and I hadn't said anything to anybody here, thinking it would calm down or sort itself out. And I think it just pushed me over the edge.
(Interview 30/06/2017)

Anybody under such intense circumstances would struggle to progress and continue with their studies regardless of the institutions formal structures of support and positive relations with staff and peers. Tragic personal issues do occur and prevent students from continuing with their studies and although there is some indication here about wanting to talk sooner to someone, overall Sally felt as though her personal circumstances outweighed her ability to study. Interestingly though, the financial barrier in terms of re-engaging despite her comfortable standing previous to her husband's recognised gambling addiction did seem to act as a barrier for her re-engaging with HE at a later stage in life.

Financial Barriers

External HE financial shifts mean student debt acts as a real barrier to engage and re-engage once one has withdrawn. As Ismal Halm, a twenty-two-year-old Pakistani male, who withdrew from a Tourism course in favour of a job working in tourism outlines:

LR: Well do you think you'll go back to studying at all?
IH: Probably not, no. It's just the fees as well, like I don't see the point in doing it because it's just like, I wouldn't recommend anyone to go to University to be honest because it's just like, it's just all the fees and like all the money that you have to pay and get in debt practically all your life anyway, and it's just ridiculous what they do to people.
(Interview 10/07/2017)

Part of a student's decision to withdraw is linked to other options available to them outside of the University, some of which may be viewed by the student as a more financially viable pathway that serves them just as well in terms of career development.

Valuing Time

External financial pressures do act as a barrier to some students' retention as some juggle family, work and/or study responsibilities, but many described this as a major concern about re-engaging with their studies once they had already withdrawn. How the student values time spent inside and outside of the University impacts upon their overall sense of belonging either easing or impinging upon their journey to a HE learner identity.

Norman Cannon, a White twenty-one-year-old who withdrew from Journalism, describes this tension below. Having a strong work ethic and desire to become financially independent impacted how he viewed his sense of belonging and time spent in University. Students who juggle work, study and maybe family responsibilities have to choose how to best utilise their time, and sometimes University and study time are not prioritised. How Norman viewed 'time' was crucial: time to get to and from campus, time to fit in his studies around work, time to do his own thing and relax. He experienced time at University slowly in comparison to his time outside of it and valued his time outside of the University more highly when compared to his time spent within it.

> *NC: In the end I was like weighing up these options, from do I quit my job and continue or do I leave and get a job? And probably the nail in the coffin was the fact that I wasn't going to pass my second year and I didn't want to do a fourth year, because I'd have to redo the second year and then do the third, and I didn't, that's something I just didn't really want to do at all (…) I were struggling to*

get the stuff done. So, a lot of it is with that course particularly, it's going out into the field, and I couldn't manage that. It was even more difficult for me because as I say we had to use cameras. I had to come to Uni', get the equipment, we could only keep it until a certain point when I had to bring it back, like the next day. And because I live far way and it takes me about an hour roughly to get here, or more, doing that was difficult.
(Interview 12/06/2017)

Understanding the Student Demographic

Understanding the student demographic matters so that individualised tailored support systems can be put into place to help retain 'at risk' students. This study indicated that in this sample, males, particularly those from a Pakistani background are less likely to seek support from their institution or indeed their family or friends. This has direct implications for how they manage periods of turbulence during their studies.

Abdul Ira, a 20-year-old Pakistani male repeated his second year of studying Law and had by his own admission 'very low attendance'. Abdul, like other students regardless of their ethnicity or gender found the transition period between the first year and second year 'a bit of a shock' and also had a car accident which effected his attendance and ability to sit exams, meaning he had to re-sit his second year of study. He had recently been to Pakistan for over a month during semester time to care for a sick grandmother; this had also affected his attendance but his absence was authorised. Abdul depicts a sense of 'lack of belonging' related to his need to re-integrate himself into a new year group upon his return and discusses not conferring with or even contacting his Personal Tutor. Like many other Pakistani males interviewed during this study, he felt he needed to deal with such issues alone.

AI: I don't think I chat to people this year as much as I did last year, but the majority of my friends are in their third year and there is only a couple of us in the second year and I think that is why it might have affected my attendance this year. My actual attendance is pretty low, but that is because my grandmother has not been well so during the first semester I was abroad and I think I've made three visits in the past six months (…) I'm redoing my second year but I've done the bulk of it last year and the stuff that I'm resitting is because last year I wasn't feeling too well during my exam period so I didn't take the exams. So I'm just resitting the exams from two modules.

LR: Do you have a Personal Tutor that you talk to?

AI: I do but he's changed this year and I haven't seen him. I had Molly last year and she was lovely but this year it's changed.

LR: Do you think you need that kind of support?

AI: Probably.

LR: So have you seen your Personal Tutor at all this year?

AI: No. I've spent most of the first semester abroad but I might pop in soon just to show my face so that he knows who I am.

LR: Have you made new friends?

AI: Right now I just come into Uni' and get on with my work because I still have my friends outside Uni', but in Uni' I've got a couple that I chat to and that is it. I'm quite good by myself, so I don't really mind not having friends here (…) From first year to second year there is a big jump and I was taken back by the workload because it is a lot more but, apart from that, it's been fine and I've been doing well in my coursework and it is just the exams that I need to get. Last year I was off ill for about a month before my exams and I knew I wouldn't be able to do my best so I extended to July and I wasn't well in July so I have to re-sit two exams.

LR: Do you think that was the right decision for you?

AI: Now I kind of regret it because it feels as though I've wasted a year, but if I had taken the exams I wouldn't have done my best and I would have probably just come out with passes and I know I am capable of better than a pass. Hopefully in the long run it will work out.

LR: Did you feel supported in your decisions by people at home and here?

AI: I don't think I spoke to anybody here actually. I might have spoken to my family and they said I should do what was best for me.
LR: So you just put a request in without speaking to anybody.
AI: Yeah.
LR: And did anybody come to ask you about that?
AI: No.
LR: Why didn't you talk to anybody at the University?
AI: I don't know. I just thought it would be the best thing for me.
LR: Any advice about student withdrawal that might be of help to us?
AI: I think students should speak to their Personal Tutor before making a decision. That was the mistake I made because I had a good Personal Tutor who would be quite understanding about it.
LR: So why didn't you go?
AI: I honestly don't know. Probably I might have been a bit shy to speak to her about it but, looking back, I should have spoken to her about it.
(Interview 29/01/2018)

Abdul like many other students experienced a number of interacting factors that led to his turbulent HE experience, some of which were external to the University itself. Abdul demonstrates perseverance in his motivation to succeed and complete his degree, despite the fact that he seems to have accessed little support from within the University, regardless of his relations with tutors. There is evidence from those interviewed for this study that males, especially those from a Pakistani background struggled to seek support from the institution and sometimes from their peers, many described feeling a sense of family responsibility that sometimes directed them away from their studies. Being able to cope on your own and sort out your own personal issues were common themes evident amongst such men.

Some ethnic minority and international students reported a struggle they experienced when trying to form good formal relationships with their tutors and fellow students. Some of this was

related to the fact that the demographic they were used to interacting with differed from their previous educational experiences. Alina, a twenty-one-year-old Indian student explains below how she grappled with the University student demographic, but later felt integrated after finding where she liked to be and who she liked to spend time with.

> *A: My school was quite dominated by white people and coming from an Asian background – but I wasn't always comfortable hanging around with Asians – but when I came here I was, like, wow! And I wasn't quite sure if I liked the course or not and I wasn't even sure if I liked uni altogether.*

This in turn may have had a negative impact on Alina's overall sense of belonging to the University and sustained academic progress. For some, a physical detachment from the institution occurred. In Abdul's case this meant leaving the country for three prolonged periods during his studies and consequently disengaging from his CoP (Wenger, 2009). For Alina, this meant a drop in attendance, but by being able to nurture her own CoP via her peers and boyfriend she remained at the University, found friends and a comfortable space to be, interact and develop her HE learner identity.

> *A: I started to come up here to the Student Union a bit more and met more people and stuff like that and met new friends and it got better. But I still wasn't sure about the course itself because it was a big transition and I wasn't sure if I could do it. I guess my boyfriend did help because he said I should stay.*

Alina was learning and becoming part of a CoP via her social participation whereby she 'met more people' and had the help of her boyfriend (Masika & Jones, 2015). By relating with others, she was engaged with a social process whereby her sense of belonging and HE learner identity were intertwined and ultimately led to her remaining at the University to complete her studies. Understanding learning and feelings of acceptance via this frame allows for the importance of sense of belonging to be negated by the individual student and the

institution, while simultaneously linking this sense of community and belonging to the manifestation of a HE learner identity.

Conclusion

There is rarely one defining moment that leads to student withdrawal from University; rather students withdraw for a variety of inter-related reasons. Some of these are internal to the University and are related to quality of teaching, assessment feedback, consistent accurate communication and support mechanisms and others are external and include critical life moments such as bereavement, ill health, financial constraints and domestic responsibilities. Using Tinto's model of retention and Wenger's social theory of learning allows for an understanding that it is the complex interaction of these factors that lead to a student's 'sense of belonging' and identification and experience with a HE learner identity that ultimately shapes their withdrawal. Most students interviewed in this study experienced a mixture of internal and external factors that lead to their non-continuation. Less attributed solely internal reasons and fewer still described purely external factors as the determining factor for their non-continuation.

Certain transition periods such as becoming a University student, moving from an undergraduate to a postgraduate identity and returning after placement and prolonged non-teaching/contact periods intensify a student's sense of not belonging. Males, especially those from a Pakistani background are especially vulnerable to trying to cope on their own and often neglect gaining available institutional support. Such findings reflect national research which suggests that some groups of students (namely those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and working-class backgrounds) are more likely to

withdraw and find it more difficult to identify with University, develop a student CoP, seek help if needed and ultimately shape a strong sense of belonging to the University. Whilst the University researched in this instance here has a particular demographic – one with significant ethnic minority groups and working-class students, it is a demographic found in other Higher Education Institutions and as such, although not universally generalizable, findings may be relevant to other institutions working with similar demographics.

Findings highlight the need for Higher Education Institutions to develop student CoP, and actively cultivate a strong sense of belonging need to be present and nurtured by a range of University provisions, that may include academic and extra curricula activities via face-to-face or virtual means. In a climate of decreasing staff resources and dealing with large numbers of students (Rowley, 2003), HE Institutions need to consider how they may better integrate an increasingly diverse student population as the importance of belonging remains paramount to students' success.

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About the author

Lisa Russell is a Reader in Education and Community Studies at The University of Huddersfield, England. Her research interests focus mainly on issues of social justice and education policy. She has a longstanding history of conducting research that prioritises creative participatory research methods to unearth voices that often remain 'hidden'.

Email: l.russell@hud.ac.uk

Christine Jarvis has worked in further, adult, community and higher education and had held leadership positions in HE as Head of Department, Dean and Pro-Vice-Chancellor. She has led and contributed to a range of projects to promote access and inclusion in education and was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2010. Her research focuses on fictions and the imaginary as critical social pedagogies.

Email: c.a.jarvis@hud.ac.uk

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Learner or Consumer? Market-Led Higher Education, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equality

Angela Partington

Kingston University, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper addresses issues associated with leadership in Higher Education (HE), by drawing on research and debate in relation to the role of education in reproducing social inequalities, and on expertise developed through academic leadership roles in British art schools. It seeks to stimulate discussion about the commodification of HE, which is often perceived as a threat to its accessibility, and therefore to its positive impact in enhancing social mobility, and will argue that it is only a threat if we cling to a culturally conservative belief in value-free learning, which serves only to reproduce the values of the white middle-class intelligentsia. By addressing the question of how to respond to the changing profile of all HE students, in terms of the diverse social and cultural capital which they bring with them, (which shapes what and how they want to learn), this paper will challenge some of the prevailing views about student engagement, from the perspective of an academic whose leadership role includes responsibility for developing learning and teaching strategies to ensure student progression, achievement, and graduate outcomes, and for enhancing the quality of the student experience.

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Introduction

Leadership within a post-'92 British university requires the development and implementation of strategies for change, in response to a number of pressing challenges which are facing the sector, including, (amongst other things), the creation of a market economy in higher education, the changing demographics of its markets, and the changing needs and expectations of students (Amos & Doku, 2019, Bhagat & O'Neill, 2011, Moran & Powell, 2018, and Willis & Gregory, 2016). This paper seeks to stimulate discussion about the marketisation of Higher Education (HE), and contribute to the development of learner-centric pedagogies, which is increasingly important in this context, in order to promote and facilitate changes in practice. It will challenge prevailing views about student engagement, in order to argue that students cannot be understood as *either* just 'learners' *or* just 'consumers', but must be understood as learner-consumers who will drive innovation in HE, but only *if* a more 'commercial' approach is adopted in the use of student feedback, as a source of market intelligence, by fully recognising that inclusive practice is not about increasing access to HE as it already exists, but about *changing* HE by responding to the needs of its increasingly diverse markets, in order to develop learning cultures which are relevant to the 21st century (McWilliam, 2010).

Many universities in the UK are currently seeking to develop competitive strategies to secure their viability within this new marketised environment. Some of these strategies are focused on

'selling' what is already offered (e.g., investment in advertising, re-designed website, and statement buildings). But in order to maintain competitiveness, it is even more important to understand that 'selling' is not 'marketing' (Brown, 1995), and to implement marketing strategies to *develop* the offer, in response to needs of *all* C21st students (which are now dominated by 'Generation Z', who have quite different expectations and aspirations from previous cohorts).

In this context, leadership requires the capacity to recognise these challenges as opportunities to transform HE. Increased competition will allow us to co-create learning experiences which reflect the values of diverse consumer groups (i.e. to become more inclusive), and to promote diversity as a way of providing choice (both through product-differentiation and through a pluralised approach to learning and teaching); in short, to become properly market-led, in contrast with the established 'research-led' approach to curriculum development (which has largely failed to drive innovation in learning and teaching).

But this requires the development of a new approach to student engagement which recognises the value of diverse sets of knowledges and competences which students have already acquired and accommodates a far wider range of learning styles (see below). In this context, then, effective leadership depends on the extent to which teaching teams can be influenced and motivated, in response to the challenges faced by the sector, and provided with ways of understanding the 'learner-consumer' (see below).

It also involves the development of an inter-disciplinary 'learning culture' in response to C21st economic and social contexts (McWilliam, 2010), e.g. by contributing to the 'STEAM' (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics) agenda. The

development of an interdisciplinary learning culture is not the main focus of this paper, and will be explored elsewhere, although it is important to note that it is linked to questions of student engagement – indeed the two projects are mutually dependent.

This requires HE leaders to promote a strong staff-development ethos, and to adopt the role of 'lead-learner'. This is particularly challenging in a culture which is not only resistant to change, but within which many academics are resistant to the very notion of being 'developed', and staff engagement is at least as much of an issue as student engagement.

Learner-consumers

Before entering HE, learners have already acquired literacies and competences which help to determine what and how they want to learn, to achieve their aspirations.

> *The learner brings an accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions, and previous knowledge that envelopes every teaching/learning situation and determines the course and quality of the learning that may take place. The teacher may ignore or use this learner-structured framework, but the centrality of the learner is given'. [So] 'what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does', and the teacher's role is primarily to adopt 'a focal awareness of the learner and the learner's world…….Consequently, teachers should view students' conceptions from the students' perspectives, and 'recognise that substantive learning occurs in periods of conflict, surprise, over periods of time, and through social interaction. (Biggs, 1996, pp. 348-9).*

It is not uncommon in art schools though, for teaching to be understood as a process of transforming students from 'consumers' (or 'fans') into 'producers' (professionals). This suggests that the knowledges, competences, and literacies that students bring with them

is not valued as a form of cultural capital (indeed I have often heard it said that students need to unlearn much of what they already know). This understanding is based on a notion of consumers as passive recipients of (rather than active participants in) experiences, and a failure to recognise consumption as a driver of innovation, despite the creative industries' increasing use of 'consumer generated content' and the success of YouTubers and other internet entrepreneurs (who have never been anywhere near an art school, but have found better opportunities to demonstrate creative risk-taking elsewhere).

It has become accepted amongst cultural theorists that identity is always in production, fluid and complex rather than fixed/determined. Identities are performative "temporary attachments to subject positions constructed through discursive practices" (Hall, 1996, p.6). Identities are developed not in a relation of absolute distinction from others, but through parodic copying/emulation and appropriation which creates hybridisation. This cultural promiscuity drives the production of newness and difference and testifies to the "instability and mutability of identities, which are always unfinished, always being remade" (Gilroy, 1993, p. ix).

Consumers are not passive recipients of goods and services, but active participants in their production, and have always driven innovation in the cultural industries. Consumption is the active ('creative') production of socio-cultural distinctions, rather than a passive reflection of distinctions which already exist, and is therefore the vanguard of history (Miller, 1995).

Consumption is always necessarily creative, i.e. selective, eclectic and, above all, *unpredictable.* It is this very unpredictability which explains why reflexivity is so highly valued in the creative industries. Because of consumers' unpredictability, "no one knows" (Caves, 2000,

p.5) what new forms and practices they are going to develop, so the cultural industries need reflexive "cultural intermediaries" (Nixon, 2003, p. 18). Brand-owners are increasingly conscious of how discriminating and sophisticated consumers are, in their expectations that the brand must match their changing values (Noble, 2018), and through the work of cultural intermediaries, industry enables consumers to become the co-creators of their products.

Consumer culture is increasingly fragmented into highly differentiated taste cultures whose habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) articulates the social position of participants. But taste is not the expression of an already-formed identity, because, as has already been acknowledged, identities are performative, never formed but always in production. The exercise of taste is the transformative production of identities.

As consumers, students engage with learning experiences as a range of commodities through which they invest cultural capital, in the transformation of their own identities, and consequently in the development of a global knowledge economy. For example, the graduates of British art schools have arguably driven the success of UK creative industries during the last 60 years. The UK creative industries is now worth £101.5 billion (Bazalgette, 2017), the Creative Industries Clusters Programme has invested £80m in research and development partnerships between regional universities and a network of creative businesses.

It is often assumed that this success is the result of the particular approach to learning and teaching adopted in British art schools, which is practice-based and, (supposedly) student-centred. However, I would argue that this success is not due primarily to a particular pedagogical approach, but to the participation of 'first generation' working-class students, which increased the diversity of the student

population. This reflected the impact of post-WW2 multiculturalism and social mobility, brought about by the Education Act of 1944, which provided *opportunities* (Gladwell, 2008) for working-class children, (even though the proportion of working-class students in higher education was still relatively small).

This success is due to the practices involved in using the knowledges and competences which these students had already acquired as consumers of 'popular culture', enabling the products of the creative industries, in which they went on to work, to become much more highly differentiated, reflecting the changing tastes and preferences of more diverse social groups. These students became successful professionals because they became cultural intermediaries, enabling differentiated consumer groups to participate in the development of contemporary culture, as new markets whose tastes and preferences had to be recognised and appealed to, and therefore driving innovation in the creative industries.

Access and Participation

It is now widely accepted that the success of the creative industries depends on the diversity of their workforce (Easton, 2015), because creative practice is driven by the diversity of its participants (Negus & Pickering, 2004), and that widening access to HE is therefore essential. However, widening access to HE does not in itself guarantee inclusive practice in learning and teaching, which would involve recognising and valuing the diversity of students. Education is one of the means by which social and cultural hierarchies are reproduced within a capitalist economy (Bourdieu, 1984), so it cannot be assumed that access to education leads to democratisation. Education is only a means of promoting equality to the extent that it values the different

competencies and literacies which students bring, in order to foster reflexivity, i.e. enables students to develop their own capacity to recognise the forces of socialisation and to consciously change their thinking and behaviour, through *shaping their own* norms, tastes, politics, and desires.

Many British universities aspire to provide learning experiences which not only equip students with the skills to compete in the job market, but to *lead and shape* the future of the industries they will work in, and of the new socio-cultural spaces they will create. For example, the Vision of Kingston University is as follows:

- Our students will be sought after for their academic achievements and their ability to *shape* society and contribute to the economy (my emphasis);

and its Mission is:

- To enhance students' life chances through inspiring learning, advancing knowledge, *innovating* professional practice, and engaging with society (my emphasis).

Kingston School of Art's Vision is to be a unique catalyst for *creative risk-taking* and *cross-discipline collaboration*. A place for *challenging norms, pushing boundaries and exploring the unknown*. [To] *stand at the forefront of thinking, creativity and culture*, and *redefining the world around* us (my emphasis). And its Mission is to 'fuel a collaborative ethos through which we forge connection with industry and business, bring *innovative thinking*, and solve real world problems.

In order to achieve this, universities have to be able to foster students' reflexivity, which means allowing them to *shape their own* norms, tastes, politics, and desires. And, although British art schools have pioneered 'student-centred' learning, and are increasingly

committed to the concepts of student-led pedagogy and an inclusive and co-created curriculum (Finnegan & Richards, 2015), it has been pointed out that art school pedagogies actually sustain a particular 'habitus' through which culturally-specific values are re-produced (Orr, 2010). This exposes the claim to student-centredness as self-deluding, and explains the striking attainment gaps in art & design HE, even though many students from low-participation groups continue to be excluded from studying at art school in the first place, not only by economic barriers, but also by the cultural conservatism of art schools, which informs a wide range of practices, including admissions.

> *Admissions practices [in British art schools] …privilege the habitus, subjectivities and cultural and linguistic capital of 'traditional' students, who tend to come from white, middle-class backgrounds. Although ...designed to be 'fair' and 'transparent', the lack of attention to complex sets of inequalities, differences and mis/recognitions …undermines the project of widening participation… . The focus on individual practices rather than wider sets of discursive practices helps to hide the workings of inequality in processes of selection. (Burke & McManus, 2009)*

These selection criteria are arguably more insidious than traditional academic criteria such as UCAS points because, as the basis of value judgements which become a form of discrimination, they are far more subtle.

> *[T]he concepts of cultural capital, habitus and field, as conceived by Bourdieu ...are …perhaps particularly pertinent in Art and Design, where it can be argued that [cultural capital]'s pervasive implications are masked by notions attached to 'creativity' and 'talent'. …and …offers a lens through which widening participation can be seen as encouraging a more radical critique of the university and more particularly of Art and Design. …[T]he 'liberal' nature of Art and Design and the focus on receptivity to more diverse 'talents' and offering the 'fruits of the academy' to wider student populations may in fact stand in the way*

of more fundamental changes to education, which a widening participation focus may require. (Bhagat & O'Neill Eds, 2011, p. 21)

The art school habitus is sustained by a number of unquestioned assumptions about practice-based learning and active participation which, far from being student-centred, inform a culturally specific pedagogy. For example, the art school's studio culture depends on a visibly participatory environment which, it is assumed, enables active learning, in contrast with more solitary and/or cerebral activities (such as working at home and/or engaging with the world via the internet), which are assumed to be passive. However, the ways in which this culture privileges middle-class students equipped with particular forms of cultural capital has not been acknowledged. Underpinning such assumptions is a binary active versus passive opposition which seeks to privilege some ways of learning above others and fails to appreciate the wide range of learning styles which different students might prefer or might adopt in different situations. It fails to acknowledge that reading, viewing, thinking, and using social media are just as active (and interactive) as the learning activities which involve visible participation in a particular community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Worse, it marginalises and alienates those learners who do not conform to acceptable forms of student behaviour which are recognised as evidence of engagement.

But I would argue that there is no such thing as passive learning. For example, attendance at lectures is now typically viewed as a form of passive learning, and students who want to be taught are often seen as passive learners. But attending a stimulating and thought-provoking lecture is an opportunity for active critical thinking and the generation of ideas. Students want to be taught because they already know that a good teacher will inspire and motivate them, and as

consumers they (not unreasonably) also see this as value for money. And, not surprisingly, students from underprivileged backgrounds are more concerned with value-for money than their wealthier counterparts.

When asked about their experience of lectures, students frequently report that they find lectures valuable: the "evidence suggests that lectures elicit the lowest levels of anxiety in undergraduates… (and that) students are more engaged, learn better and enjoy themselves more when attending lectures….while students are frequently found to report that they learn less in active (sic) learning contexts" (Garnham, 2018, p. 10).

This binary opposition (active versus passive) underpins prevailing approaches to student engagement, which need to be challenged if we are to succeed in delivering on the aspirations articulated in our Vision and Mission statements. Student engagement is "the process whereby institutions and sector bodies make deliberate attempts to involve and empower students in the process of shaping the learning experience" (HEFCE, 2008, p. 8). British HEIs have invested heavily in ways to capture the student voice, and to measure their levels of engagement with their studies, and in using the data to drive change, via staff development. These data tell us a lot, and especially that *not all students are the same*, e.g. survey data tell us that that students from low participation groups are less satisfied with their courses than those from more privileged backgrounds (Warwick Economics & Development, 2018). However, the relative lack of effectiveness of this investment, so far, suggests that we are not hearing what students are telling us, because the established mono-cultural approach to student engagement is preventing us from hearing it.

Student Engagement

In debates about student engagement, the concept of 'student as partner' (SaP) is commonly used in opposition to the concept of 'student as consumer' (SaC), and the majority of researchers have argued that approaching students as consumers is associated with a lower academic performance, whereas approaching students as partners enhances their learning (Senior at al, 2017; Curran, 2018).

It has been recognised that there are a number of problems with the 'students as partners' approach, including the issue of how to reconcile the power relations between students and staff. Students' awareness of the power relations between themselves and their tutors helps to explain why some of them might enjoy 'active' learning less than lectures, and also why the experience of receiving feedback is perceived by them as de-motivating and unfair. Research has shown that tutors often make judgements about students, (not just their work), when marking and giving feedback (Orr, 2010; Orr & Bloxham, 2013). Research also shows that, far from being supported and enabled, students often feel disempowered by feedback from tutors, which they see as reflecting the values of the tutor (Blair, 2007; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Parker 2017), rather than a recognition of the student's own values and ambitions.

This issue has been responded to by recognising the complexities of student engagement (i.e., behavioural, emotional, and cognitive) and by 'recognising the importance of personal growth for both staff and students' (Curran, 2018), i.e. that both are learners in the partnership, but primarily by simply challenging the 'customer-provider' model of HE and what is perceived to be a 'dominant SaC ideology'.

However, I would argue that this does not reconcile the power relations between students and staff, but simply masks it. This distinction between SaC and SaP is a spurious one, which not only masks the power relations between students and staff, but fails to value the cultural competencies and literacies which students brings with them *as consumers*, and fails to acknowledge the centrality of meaning-making – creating and interacting with diverse forms of representation - to student practices.

As previously mentioned, consumers engage in the transformative production of their identities through the exercise of taste, and we know that students achieve more when they enjoy learning. However, pleasure, and enjoyment are not inherent features of experiences, but the effects of experiences which provide opportunities to use socially-specific skills and competences (cultural capital) which have already been acquired, in the ongoing transformation of self-identity (reflexivity). Students have their own criteria for assessing the value of learning experiences, which is often completely at odds with the values of staff, e.g. lectures rated highly by peer observers are not necessarily rated highly by students, who expect lectures to 'add value' to material which could be accessed elsewhere (Smailes, 2018), which explains why students often choose not to attend (Kashif & Basharat, 2014), and the amount of time which students choose to spend on assessments is determined not by the weightings given by academics but by their own tastes and preferences (Attenborough et al, p. 16). Furthermore, students' perceptions of their own development is partly through their engagement with non-study activities (Neves & Stoakes, 2018).

> *Students (now) have high expectations of their university experience and what it can offer them in order to improve their lives. Diversity across the sector indicates that there is no one "student experience"; rather individual students*

have their own experience. It is therefore our responsibility to provide our students access to …opportunities ... which will transform their lives. (Shelton, 2018, p. 7).

Research shows that there is no one single element of the student experience that can be controlled to enhance satisfaction. Evidence gathered through research at the University of Derby in 2015 highlighted students' *personal* expectations and priorities, and that student satisfaction is determined not only by motivators (e.g. students' individual goals and achievements, leading to perceived satisfaction when fulfilled), but also by 'hygiene factors' which are beyond the individual's control. The research demonstrated the significance of both academic opportunities, (in relation to which students' priorities are based primarily around intellectual challenge and career aspirations), and of other priorities such as building social networks, which depend on the social and cultural aspects of student life.

This resulted in the introduction of a Student Experience Framework, intended to be inclusive of all learning styles. However, because the University explicitly positions its students as 'partners' but '*not* as consumers' (p. 8, my emphasis), the research neglected to capture the diversity of students' notions of their own 'total' experience, to enable an inclusive understanding of the lived experience of students, so the resulting Framework contradicts the principle that 'there is no one student experience', and re-enforces an established and singular notion of student engagement as 'active participation' in a relatively narrow and prescriptive range of activities, (e.g. international study trips, and involvement in University processes and projects). This re-enforces conservative notions of acceptable student behaviour and, far from embracing diversity, re-asserts the values of the middle-class intelligentsia, for whom these

activities have inherent value. An inclusive Framework would not only recognise a much wider range of forms of 'lived experience' as 'active' engagement, but would embrace the *unpredictability* of what these might be, as the learner-consumer engages in their own self-transformation.

To develop inclusive practices in learning and teaching in response to the changing profile of HE students, we need to develop a more sophisticated socio-material approach to student engagement, where agency is understood to involve objects and artefacts as well as students and staff (Gourlay, 2015; Latour, 2005). To do this, we need to move away from the prioritisation of Student-as-Partner above Student-as-Consumer, by recognising that students are learner-consumers who are actively engaged (as all consumers are) in the development of their own identities through the constant appropriation of objects and experiences, through a wide range of learning styles and modes of interaction.

Participatory culture, and related concepts such as co-creativity, are often associated with the digital world (Leadbeater, 2008), in which the current generation of students have grown up. But it is a mistake to assume that some forms of learning are inherently more participatory than others (Ferreday & Hodgson, 2008). In C21st culture, old and new media have converged (Jenkins, 2006), and consumers choose, in highly unpredictable ways, how and with what to create meaning. Participation is not an effect of the medium or form ('high' vs 'low', analog vs digital), or the spaces (actual or virtual), or the types of learning activities (solitary vs communal, face-to-face vs networked) through which the learner participates – it is an effect of the *practices* involved.

The concept of 'student as partner' masks the power relations between student and academic (and even supports the coercion of students into 'subject positions in the service of the ideologies of the more powerful') because it derives from a discourse where 'participation' is understood only as 'a desirable set of practices' (Gourlay, 2015, p.402, p.404) rather than in terms of the complex day-to-day practices involved in 'being a student', as a temporally situated social practice. These practices involve a range of 'literacies' and competencies which students have already acquired as consumers of a range of media, both new *and* old. But in prevailing discussions of student engagement, what students bring is valued less than what they are *expected* to do, and what appears to support a 'student-centred' ethos is simply a re-enforcement of culturally-specific notions of acceptable student behaviour.

Moreover, normative notions of student behaviour are clearly culturally-specific, and reproduce white middle-class values, which explains why survey data tells us that students from low-participation groups are less satisfied with their course than those from more privileged backgrounds.

Students are the (co-)creators of their own learning experience, through the active appropriation of the resources which universities provide. Like all consumers, students are learning all the time, and making their own choices about what is interesting, appealing, useful, meaningful, enjoyable i.e. they are *discriminating* and *reflexive*. This might mean *not* engaging with some aspects of their course, and selecting and appropriating objects, images, and experiences (none of which are inherently more 'interactive' than others), to create their own hybrid knowledges and competences, in building on their already acquired cultural capital.

The 'student-as-partner' approach to student engagement fails to acknowledge the centrality of meaning-making – creating and interacting with forms of representation - to student practices and subjectivities. 'The day-to-day business of being a student is saturated with a range of complex textual (including the visual and the multimodal) practices, both face-to-face and online. These texts are not merely means of information transfer, but are constitutive of both disciplinary and individual knowledge, and also *identities*' (Gourlay, 2015, p. 406, my emphasis). Students engage with a huge range of both digital and analog texts, via a complex range of both digital and analog spaces, and it is this *hybrid* setting within which student engagement takes place, i.e. student engagement is a socio-material practice. Student engagement is identified by Gourlay as residing in networks of agency involving mobile devices and computers as well as books, artefacts and other objects which are usually thought of as merely tools or inert materials. But these texts are constantly being 'appropriated' by students and re-used in the practice of meaning-production, and in developing their own identities.

An approach which privileges student-as-partner over student-as-consumer arguably *stifles* students' reflexivity, by failing to value whatever cultural competencies and literacies they bring with them, regardless of the types of media with which students have interacted to acquire them, and regardless of the types of learning activities through which they wish to develop them.

Conclusion

An increasingly competitive landscape provides HE leaders with the opportunity to actively demonstrate commitments to student-centredness and inclusivity, by recognising that students are learner-consumers, actively engaged (as all consumers are) in the development of their own identities.

Some of the universities in the UK which have made some progress in narrowing the BME attainment gap have achieved this by recognising (implicitly at least) that students are learner-consumers, in that they have socially and culturally specific values and tastes through which they develop their own identities. For example, Kingston University London (Amos & Doku, 2019, p. 30) has introduced an Inclusive Curriculum Framework which seeks to ensure that individual learners see themselves reflected in the curriculum (just as the producers of all commodities seek to ensure that consumers see themselves reflected in their products), and De Montfort University has established a pedagogical model (Universal Design For Learning) which reflects an awareness of the unique needs of individual learners in a wide variety of learning contexts, to create learning experiences that remove barriers from the learning environment, which provides students with choices about how they acquire information, and with multiple means of engagement which take into account learners' interests and preferences, and which allows learners to demonstrate their understanding in alternative ways (Merry, 2018).

The commodification of HE is often perceived as a threat to its accessibility, but access is not in itself inclusive, indeed it can be just the opposite. I argue that it is only a threat if we cling to a culturally conservative belief in value-free learning, which serves only to reproduce the values of the white intelligentsia. This belief underpins

the binary SaC v SaP opposition which is not only spurious, but is preventing HE from developing innovative practices, despite all its rhetoric.

In a highly competitive environment, leadership in HE is, above all else, about enabling innovative practice to flourish. Creative industries learned long ago that innovation does not 'trickle-down' but is consumer-led (King, 1973), and the history of consumer cultures shows us that markets are complex, continually shifting, and subject to fragmentation, because consumers are increasingly reflexive and therefore unpredictable.

HE is lagging behind the creative industries in its failure to value students as consumers. This would require a willingness to take risks (as with any market-orientated enterprise), but increased competition, league tables and TEF metrics have tended (so far) to intensify the risk-averse tendencies of HEIs.

Innovation in HE is too often understood simply as a matter of promoting 'new' tools (e.g. 'technology enhanced learning'), and, without a more sophisticated approach to student engagement, this merely de-values some learning activities and re-enforces a spurious distinction between 'active' and 'passive' engagement.

The notion of students as co-creators of their learning is a 'wicked problem' for universities (Willis & Gregory, 2016), but academics protest that a co-creation is *not* to be confused with being driven by conspicuous consumption (Senior, Moores, & Burgess, 2018). Consequently, while "co-creation is often spoken about as a pedagogical strategy … there is little evidence of implementation" (Willis & Gregory, 2016, p. 1), and it is reduced to merely enabling the student voice, through which good NSS (National Student Survey) results can be used to justify the *lack* of innovation.

Similarly, while all universities now claim to enhance students' employability, there is little evidence of new pedagogical strategies to support this. For example, we know that interdisciplinarity has driven innovation in the creative industries, because media and practices have converged, and 'hybrid' practitioners are more likely to progress to professional jobs (Cox, 2005; Bakhshi, Hargreaves, & Mateos-Garcia, 2013; Bakhshi & Yang, 2018). Yet most students are still taught by a relatively small course team, without access to the expertise in other departments, and the majority of academics are entirely focused on their own discipline, encouraged to do this by an environment where curriculum currency is reduced to 'research informed teaching', and where 'research' is almost always subject-based.

Many practices in HE have remained unchanged for more than a century, and the failure to innovate is due to a failure to recognise that innovation is consumer-led. Effective leadership would promote a staff development ethos to support teaching as a creative practice, i.e. which is responsive to change, for example by considering how we seek out problems as a stimulus for creative thinking, and develop new ways of working within constraints, rather than viewing them merely as threats to established practices.

While many academics colleagues are engaged in pedagogical research, and often showcase impressive examples of innovative practice at learning and teaching conferences, these individuals often struggle to disseminate innovative practice within their own institutions, where innovation in learning and teaching is not incentivised or recognised except in tokenistic ways.

HE leaders need to ensure that research and staff development strategies are focused on curriculum currency, informed by the knowledges, literacies and aspirations which *all* students bring with

them, (rather than on the discipline/subject). An understanding of culture as 'participatory' requires acknowledgement that knowledge is never value-free, and that its production is always contextualised by and contingent upon, socio-economic circumstances. The purpose of HE is not, therefore, to compensate for an assumed unequal distribution of competences and literacies, but to recognise what *all* students bring to their learning, to encourage them to use these resources, and to value the unexpected ways in which they might do this.

Therefore, a wider, more pluralised, range of ways of learning need to be encouraged and accommodated, to reflect a much more heterogenous mix of students, and the diversity of contemporary culture. Curriculum content and assessment strategies need to explicitly recognise that social and cultural diversity is essential in driving innovative practice, because the diversity of contemporary culture is driven by the promiscuity of its participants. This would enable the concept of the learner-consumer to be embraced, and a new approach to student engagement to be developed, allowing *all* students to drive innovation in HE.

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About the author

Angela Partington lectured on Art, Design and Media courses for many years. Her career has included Head of the Department of Creative Industries at UWE Bristol, and membership of the CHEAD Executive. She is currently Associate Dean for Learning & Teaching at Kingston School of Art, Kingston University London.

Email: a.partington@kingston.ac.uk

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Social Justice Leadership: Principals' Perspectives in Trinidad and Tobago

Dennis Conrad

Ministry of Education, Trinidad and Tobago

Rinnelle Lee-Piggott

University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago

Launcelot Brown

Duquesne University, PA, USA

Abstract

The paper "Thinking of, Knowing, and Doing Social Justice Leadership: Principals' perspectives" explores the understanding and practice of principals regarding social justice leadership. The study adopts phenomenography as its methodology and presents findings gleaned from the semi-structured interviews of 11 principals in Trinidad and Tobago. Findings indicate that principals were generally unaware of a social justice leadership orientation, but values of fairness and equity, for instance, were common in their understandings. Social justice leadership roles were conceptualized as multi-faceted, difficult and requiring strategy and caution, but emphasized a need for self-investment and collaboration. It was found that principals' unclear conceptualizations translated into guesswork when practicing social justice leadership from which emerged unique ways of 'doing' social justice. Findings point to the need to place social justice atop Trinidad and Tobago's school improvement agenda.

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Introduction

Many educators acknowledge that school leadership goes beyond productivity and efficiency towards a moral mission related to democracy and fairness for all. Social justice is one such approach, and inclusive education one tool, to address the unequal distribution of resources including access to an equitable education for marginalized groups. According to Ryan (2006), inequitable access lies neither with the actual distribution itself nor with the individuals who are part of this process. It is about the formal and informal rules or norms that govern how members of society treat one another. Inclusive education is one way to alter these 'norms'. Educators promoting inclusion believe that social justice can be achieved if people are meaningfully included in institutional practices and processes or have shared insights and values (Owens & Valesky, 2007).

The standard by which schools are considered effective is generally understood as high academic success rates. These, in Trinidad and Tobago, are typically measured by the number of students gaining their first choices of secondary school placement for the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) exam at the primary school level. At the secondary level, achievement of the top grades at Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) and Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) is the focus. This is the legacy of a colonial past in which the education system became highly stratified

along the lines of race, class and gender, incited by competitiveness for scholarships (Campbell, 1992). Within this context then, equity-focused school leadership seems to be more a 'blue skies' vision and idealism than reality. Studies on successful school leadership highlight successful leaders' commitment to social justice, inclusivity and equity (Belchetz & Leithwood, 2007; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2007; Harris & Day, 2003; Theoharis 2007; 2008). The challenge then is to understand how those who prepare educational leaders foster a sustainable culture of leadership that is responsive to all learners and committed to an equitable education. Such an endeavor first requires an understanding of what school principals know about social justice leadership (SJL) and the degree to which it is practiced in the nation's schools. The Ministry of Education of Trinidad and Tobago's (MOETT) Strategic Plan (2011-2015, p. vii) and National Model of Education (2007) identify social justice as one of its seven pillars. Further, the Education Policy Paper 1993-2003 and its Strategic Education Plan 2002-2006; MOE Strategic Plan (2011-2015, p. vii); National Model of Education (2007); and/or Medium-term policy framework (2011-2014), assert every child's right to an education for maximum capability. This inherent right exists regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. This places equity as a central tenet of educational provision, and underscores the mission of a seamless, equitable system. School principals then have a responsibility to facilitate and lead schools towards this seamless equitable mission and achievement of school goals.

Earley (2013) and Leithwood et al. (2006) assert that a key to successful schools and optimum student outcomes is high quality leadership. Such leadership, Earley contends, is characterized by

transformative, learning-centered, and distributive practices. These practices are largely facilitated through indirect influence on teacher development including motivation, commitment, pedagogy, and leadership capacity (Day et al., 2011). These in turn are driven by the principals' personal and professional values and practices (Day, 2003; Lee-Piggott, 2016). For example, Lee-Piggott (2016) noted that even among new principals, a love for their students and an ethic of care (Smith, 2011) were evidenced in their leadership strategies. Values are determined and shaped by the perspectives and experiences of leaders and their centeredness in the needs of their learning communities (Brown & Conrad, 2007).

Challenging Times

Principals that head schools particularly in communities with low socioeconomic status are at risk of being underprepared, handicapped, and overwhelmed in facilitating equitable learning communities. The emphasis then is on creating conditions where an inclusive approach that takes cognizance of special needs, individual talents, different learning styles, and socioeconomic circumstances, along with high standards and a demonstration of a commitment to advocacy are all interrelated. One way to facilitate this is to determine how principals understand and experience their role as facilitators of social justice.

On Social Justice Leadership

To epitomize social justice leadership, according to Bogotch (2002), one must recognize inequities in learning contexts and be committed advocates for addressing these and making positive changes. However, identifying what constitutes effective social justice leadership is complicated with the uniqueness of each school's needs and resources, attitudes, and resistance (McKenzie et al., 2008), goals and priorities (Wang, 2018).

According to Berkovich (2014), social justice leadership is primarily an intra-school activity which typically focuses on the academic and economic well-being of students from marginalized groups. These might comprise specific student groups defined by ethnicity/race and social class (Capper & Young, 2014). Dantley and Tillman (2006), Furman (2012) and Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) all assert that social justice leadership is characterized when culturally appropriate and equitable practices replace unjust practices. To achieve this, leaders must be prepared to identify unjust practices; interrogate school and community expectations, policies and practices, and utilize democratic processes to change the status quo in targeted schools (Wasonga, 2009).

Effecting such a change from generic to social justice leadership involves many challenges, which might even be paralyzing for principals (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Principals have also been found to compromise on some of their religious obligations for social justice, which Marshall and Oliva (2010, p. 143) term the 'neutrality principle'. Administrative and instructional leadership combine with social justice principles to identify concerns and

solutions in facilitating equitable education. Social justice leadership then seeks equity rather than equality across school contexts, student experiences and learning opportunities.

Allen, Harper and Koschoreck (2017) and Causton-Theoharis (2008) are among educational researchers who focused on leader dispositions for social justice leadership, which are key to affecting social justice in schools. Causton-Theoharis (2008) identified three key dispositions of such leaders: 1) broader, even global, theoretical perspectives on schools and on inclusion that extend beyond special education; 2) bold imaginative vision; and 3) sense of agency. Allen, Harper, and Koschoreck identified key dispositions as: 1) commitment to the common good over personal interests, (2) value of diversity, (3) readiness to develop safe, supportive and sustainable learning environment, (4) beliefs that every student is learning, and (5) engagement in the development of diverse social and cultural assets. Researchers including Dantley and Tillman (2010), Oplatka and Arar (2015), and Pazey and Cole (2013), also mention self-reflection and a critical consciousness of diversity and social justice issues that promote social justice and encourage exposure of one's prejudices.

Methodology

Using a phenomenographic approach (Marton & Pong, 2005; Sin, 2010), through qualitative semi-structured interviews, the researchers collected and analyzed the perspectives of eleven primary school principals about how they understand, experience, and facilitate social justice leadership in their schools. Phenomenography aims at describing, analysing, and understanding experiences; that is experiential description (Marton, 1981). According to Khan (2014), the

term phenomenography has derived from the two Greek words, 'phainomenon' (appearance) and 'graphein' (description). In phenomenography, the study focuses on how subjects (the person/population of the research) conceive an object (aspect of the world) in a given situation based on their understanding and experiences. The rationale for using phenomenography for our study is that it allows us to investigate the conceptions and experiences of principals about social justice leadership, which we consider to be a complex phenomenon (Spencer, Ritchie, Lewis & Dillon, 2003; Svensson, 1997). We aim to develop an understanding of these experiences with a view to improving the quality of student learning.

Phenomenography is distinct from phenomenology. The latter would have meant that we were studying the phenomenon of social justice leadership itself or trying to determine the *essence* of what it means.

Key Questions

Three guiding questions informed the interview questions, which were aimed at eliciting rich clarifications of the meanings implied in responses. The interviewers encouraged authentic, candid, and rich responses about the principals' experiences and beliefs. The guiding research questions were:

(1) How do school principals conceptualize and experience their roles as social justice leaders?

(2) How do such principals understand social justice leadership and its relationship to inclusion? And,

(3) What leadership preparation/development needs do these principals anticipate for aspirant and practicing principals?

Data Collection and Analysis

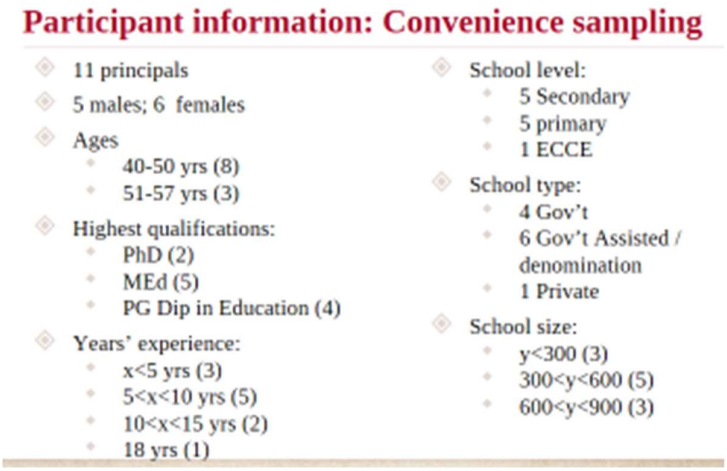
Using convenience sampling, eleven principals were selected as participants. We opted for convenience sampling because we consider this study 'exploratory', with easier access to a diverse population of principals, and a shorter duration of time for data collection (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, (2012). This sampling procedure was adequate given the methodology selected (Trigwell, 2000). The diverse group of practicing principals (see table 1 below) include, but was not limited to, those who are completing graduate or post graduate level Educational Leadership courses. Semi structured interviews comprised the data collection procedures, where participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and relate these to the researchers in order to facilitate mutual understanding about the meanings of the experiences.

Researchers separately read the transcripts, then identified principals' conceptions of the phenomenon of social justice leadership collectively rather than individually. Meanings or conceptions were interpreted in group discussions following the initial review of transcripts. As researchers reviewed participants' transcriptions for similarities and dissimilarities, they developed initial categories or codes that described the different experiences of social justice leadership using deductive and inductive coding (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994), following which researchers conducted a second review. This allowed modifications and development of categories that in turn allowed the generation of

substantive categories or themes in a process of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which was continued until data saturation (Newby, 2010) was achieved. At this point, final themes were generated.

Table 1.

Participant Information



Ethical Considerations

In considering ethical responsibilities, we paid particular attention to addressing informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. As such, we made sure through the principle of informed consent that the purpose of the study was shared with participants and that they understood how their information would be collected, used, and published. This was done prior to the interview date as we sought to determine their willingness and readiness to participate.

Participants were supportive, decidedly more so when they were assured that we would keep their perspectives confidential without any release of personal information. In some cases they determined the pseudonyms used to facilitate anonymity.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the high quality of this phenomenographic study within the qualitative tradition we used credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility represents how confident we are regarding the truthfulness of the research study's findings. This we accomplished through member checking and triangulation. We facilitated dependability so that the study could be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent by use of a critical friend as an inquiry audit. To demonstrate confirmability or objectivity that the research study's findings was as far as possible bias-free, we utilized reflexivity. For transferability or relatability, we provide thick description with supporting quotations from transcripts that corroborates findings.

Findings

On Meanings of Social Justice Leadership

In expressing their understanding of social justice leadership, principals seemed to generally be unaware of this leadership orientation and did the following: (1) unpacked the meaning by first defining social justice and then merging it with their knowledge of leadership or (2) admitted to reading up on the topic before the interview to analyze their practice and context. They all seemed to understand SJL as being multi-faceted, relating it to notions of

'fairness'; 'equality'; 'equal opportunities for all'; 'equity'; 'respect'; 'power over vs empower'; 'service and moral duty'. The promotion of fairness and equality constituted the highest indicators of what participants understood as social justice leadership. "Fairness" was evidenced in the narratives of some respondents [Charmaine, Giselle and Nora], as was "Equality [Stephen, Carla, Rodney and David]. Two respondents, Rodney and Carla, asserted that social justice leadership involved not only equality but equity, as indicated in Carla's statement, which goes on to recognize students as the primary recipients of social justice within an overall purpose for the school community – a notion also shared by Nora and Kelly:

> *I believe [social justice leadership] has to do with ensur[ing] that others, especially teachers, ensure that the students access education in terms of equality and equity. And their rights will not be more or less trampled upon by the adults in the environment. The children have a say in what they do… because the students are our main clients per say. A heavy focus should be on the students but because you are catering to building a school community which includes your parents, your stakeholders, your community members, the teachers. There must be a focus on all within the school community (Carla, Principal Primary).*

Most of the respondents saw social justice leadership as embodying respect for all but Matthew extended this notion by recognizing the benefit of empowering members of the school community as a "moral ethical duty":

> *You know, you are now within a strong kind of bureaucratic system with more 'power over' than 'empower to be'. But in my view, social justice leadership has a lot to do with the 'empower to be'… So, really it has a lot to do with what people bring and how we empower them… Social justice leadership is really about respecting people for who they are and in the context of principalship… it*

is really about your moral ethical duty. It goes beyond the legal requirements of your job spec… (Matthew, Principal Secondary).

David too saw 'respect for all' as a one-on-one commitment between himself and an individual, often student, where social justice leadership means acting as an instrument to that individual's destiny:

I never consciously thought of it as social justice but I really, really try. It comes from a personal nature. I look at the students and I want to respect every one of them and sometimes it's a commitment between me and a child… I cannot deny this child, I cannot deny somebody something or treat them unfairly because then I would really be doing a wrong. And even though it is a lot of students if one child is denied something because of me unfairly or unjustly then that comes back to me… So, that is how I look at it sometimes. You don't know who you are denying or what could have been… Sometimes in the masses you have to think of the individual… Because it is easy for me to say that that boy is to remain in that class but that is his whole life and I don't want to have to play with that whole life… (David, Principal Secondary).

The notion of fairness, however, is contentious as Charmaine emphasized. For her, to understand what is fair, she expressed that a leader must also understand certain cultural norms within a given school context:

It is a totally different culture that you need to understand before you start. So, they will speak to you and you will feel like they [are] being disrespectful… but they are not. That is how they know how to speak until we teach them the correct way (Charmaine, Principal Primary).

Charmaine explained that in order to understand that context, one must dare to be caring. This, in turn is more likely to foster more positive relationships between parent-givers and the school:

Older people in this area in the community, they came over and they would assist if we have broken pipes. Because they said, 'Miss we must see that caring and

we see a little growth so then we [will] come and we [will] give our help' (Charmaine, Principal Primary).

Diverse Social Justice Leadership Roles

All participants shared an understanding of the roles of a SJ Leader as being multi-faceted, difficult, requiring caution and keen strategy for taking action with both the affected and offender. Three principal participants also perceived their roles as limited by the actions that can be taken to treat with issues and/or people. However, their perceptions of their limitations differed in that while some felt dialogue and persuasion were their only ammunition for treating with issues, others were willing to use any tool from their tool kits or persons from their networks to ensure that justice was the order of the day. Four themes emerged from the data concerning principals' conceptualizations of their social justice leadership roles: (1) model of social justice principles, (2) buffer, (3) social justice advocate and (4) playing field leveler or neutralizer.

Modeling social justice principles. In conceptualizing their roles as social justice leaders all participating principals thought it important to model the very principles that they were trying to promote. Consequently, if they believed that teachers should respect students, they in essence led from the front in this way, as best articulated by Cleve:

[E]nsuring as the leader of the school that you are the one that models [social justice] or make sure to provide support for the staff to ensure that it occurs during the progress or development or the running of the school… At the end of the day everyone looks on the leader of the school… [T]he other teachers looking on and seeing [that] the principal does not have any favourites when it comes to [doing] the job, it shows quite a different picture where they have that

confidence that now they can trust their principal because he is above the board (Cleve, Principal Primary).

Being the buffer. Half of the participating principals also conceptualized their role as a buffer, weighing the resources available, be they time, finances, physical or especially human resources, and the consequences of actions to determine if or how students' needs and/or interests may be met. For Rodney, this meant paying particular attention to the needs and interests of boys:

I think… that as a social justice leader that we need to pay attention to where our male students are being impacted upon in ways that have become the norm in many instances… We have very strong female independent leadership happening in many areas. So, we have a lot of females, a lot of women, a lot of girls venturing into areas that traditionally they would not venture into because of the strength of the women's movement and so. And while that's happening… in many instances the males have lost the desire to get into education for some reason. I wouldn't venture to say why… and I don't think any effort is being made to encourage men to get into education, into teaching. And I think that if that continues, eventually we will have some skewed developments (Rodney, Principal Primary).

As buffer, principals saw their role as also operating as a last line of defence for protecting the affected or marginalized:

[E]specially if I have heard about [the programme] and I know about it from other schools that it has worked and/or when [persons] explain the programme to me and I look at it and I see and know our particular circumstances, I would say, "this would work in our school"; yes… knowing what our boys need... If it can't work, I would say no. [I]n particular, if I know that it's a good idea but who will I get to run with it because every programme needs a teacher to be in charge of it… I can't keep overloading the same people, do this do that, do the

other, and they become tired and burnt out. I have to look at things like that so that I pick and choose… (Ramona, Principal Secondary).

Being the advocate. All participating principals saw 'advocate' as being a key social justice leadership role, which emphasized voice as a powerful mechanism for ensuring justice for out-groups or the marginalized. This entailed also ensuring that school members too had a voice through systems and structures such as student council, Parent-Teachers Associations and the use of social media. Carla intimated, "[I]n a sense, the principal becomes a voice for especially the children because you must champion the cause of the children who may be underprivileged or at risk…" (Principal Primary). Yet, there were a few principals whose advocacy extended to 'change maker' as they got involved in issues of social justice to the extent of risk-taking:

I work along with the community police too and they were trying to get [four siblings] in a camp. So I said things real hard with them and I really wanted them out of that [home] environment so for at least the month [of school holidays] they would have that… [T]he police said they would take care of everything. Whenever there is anything to pay for them, the same guy who used to transport them, I does call him and say, 'Boy we children want so and so'… and he says, 'Doh worry I will pay for that.' Photocopies, he will pay for. I have other people I can call on for uniforms and so on. People will give me shirts and new things (Giselle, Principal Primary).

Playing field leveler. Principal participants also saw another aspect of their roles as needing to re-centre school members who may behave unjustly towards others. However, when this was not as clear cut the role morphed to function as neutralizer as recognized by Marshall and Oliva (2010), particularly on issues of religion or sexual orientation, prompting tolerance rather than ascription to an identified ideal:

Some children their parents are pastors, their parents work for the church. So, you have that difference in their minds that create a division where… they are royalty of the church. You know, if daddy is a pastor, I have a certain privileged position… So, we need to really ensure that we take away those imaginary conceptions in the minds of the children… [A]s a leader your role is to ensure that you remove all these barriers… (Cleve, Principal Primary).

Doing Social Justice Leadership: Mostly Guess Work

When it came to dealing with SJ issues, for principal participants it was often guess work. In the absence of no formal education policy on how they should function in treating with such issues they were often informed by their personal beliefs and values, experiences and personal knowledge. The issues that stunted them the most were those related to sexual orientation. They realized that these could not be dismissed in light of current national attention being paid to it. Thus, their practices also seemed to emphasize stakeholder partnering as they recognized that it was unwise to stand alone in SJL. Four key practices have been identified: (1) strengthening school capacity; (2) repositioning the affected; (3) practicing equity and (4) executing justice. The first and the third were more common among the principal participants' responses, though all used a multi-pronged approach to doing SJL.

Strengthening school capacity. Principal participants mentioned using internal resources to build personal, professional and organizational capacity, thus strengthening the capacity of their schools to promote social justice. Where internal help was unavailable, external supports, such as the Ministry of Education's School Support Services, were sought:

Wherever I can, or get the opportunity I would have people [Deans] attend things like mediation courses so that the deans then train the students and too some of our prefects have been trained [informally by the deans] in how to do peer mediation (Ramona, Principal Secondary).

We have recently tried our best to embrace the child friendly school concept that came out of UNESCO, where the focus… is providing an enabling environment for children and focusing on behaviour modification through a process of promoting values that you ensure for children to learn. So, for example we started a student council so as to give student voice… [W]e adopted four basic values: respect, responsibility, caring and kindness (Carla, Principal Primary).

Repositioning the affected. Another practice which was common to only a few principals was repositioning the marginalized. This repositioning targeted school members: students, teachers or parents who may be often marginalized. For instance, parental education is strategically planned with its focus being to increase the life chances of students through increasing parental knowledge. Principals also targeted the mindsets of teachers, through reminders and persuasion, encouraging them to think differently and more inclusively; while activities, including school assemblies were aimed at opening the eyes of students to wider possibilities and a positive outlook of life that frames social justice leadership as contributing to citizenship education:

We had something for the parents as well [on] the first two days about the value of education and what education could do for them and for the students of course, for their children… we felt that the parents needed some kind of mentoring themselves and being aware of some of the things they should be giving to their children coming into secondary school… (Stephen, Principal Secondary).

[W]e have a very good career week. It is not career day; it is career week that is organized by the guidance officer... So, over the years we have done and

structured the career week towards what [students] want, to the career that they might think they are interested in and the particular skills for like [an] artist. So they really enjoy the career week and I think they respond differently to choice of subjects because it is 'Ok I can do that, I can do this" instead of saying well, "I will join the police; ah doh know what else to do". They learn new careers and they realize, "I have this skill"… So, we would design programs to try to give them an awareness of where they fit or how they fit into society and their role in making Trinidad a better place (Ramona, Principal Secondary).

Practicing equity. In embracing their roles as playing field levelers, principals practiced equity by providing what was needed to students who are not as privileged as others may be. They also ensured that diverse opportunities were provided to all students, affording them greater choice among their peers:

Equity is a big part of what we look at. Because for the students that have greater needs, our alumni has a big brother program. They preach being your brother's keeper. The boys who are on the sporting program… the big brother program have mentoring where they have the extra lessons for them to make sure that they have the grades for their CXC, CSEC [final exams]. Most of our boys get into the A' Levels program even though they are not academically inclined because they have a support group. If you need clothes and books and things like that our alumni, they help in all those cases. They have even rebuilt two houses for boys… (Matthew, Principal Primary).

Such supports, while generally endorsed, was also balanced with empowering parents, as Kelly explained:

Well we give [support] to them as a first time, you know like a starter. You give them the aid [but] you tell them, "You know you need to help yourself", for them not to be dependent on the school… I know somebody in CEPEP [Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme], I could ask him; I know people who have little businesses around and they want people; like

the man in the grocery, he need people to do little things and I would ask him if he could help out this parent [with a job]... (Kelly, Principal Primary).

For Rodney, empowering junior members of staff was an example of his equitable practice in school leadership. He recounted:

[T]here is no 'junior' or 'senior' staff… I saw staff. I didn't see senior staff and junior staff and I set about in trying to remove those barriers. [I] look at people's strengths and give them… power to do things according to their strengths (Rodney, Principal Primary).

However, in practicing equity, use of the neutrality principle earlier described often meant that principals had to go against their personal belief systems in order to increase tolerance for difference:

[W]e had teachers who are Seventh Day Adventist [believers who] wanted to take the graduation to their church. So, we said that no you can't. Well I didn't say that in such an open way but in my mind, I said, "You can't carry this graduation in a Seventh Day Adventist church because in the class you have children who are Jehovah Witness, children who are Pentecostal… one little boy was a Hindu so therefore you didn't want to create any religious bias so that people will feel uncomfortable… But even if it wasn't a government school, it is enshrined in the constitution that each individual has a right to choose whatever religion they belong to… (Carla, Principal Primary).

Executing justice. Doing social justice was also evident in principals' execution of social justice, which they did in three reported ways that sought to treat with both affected and offender: (i) reparations for the affected, (ii) protecting the affected and (iii) de-privileging through status exchange.

Reparations for the affected. In ensuring reparations for the affected, principals like Kelly and Nora addressed intolerance and/or bias through open-mindedness and effective communication with the

parties involved. A few principals went beyond punishing misbehavior or issuing consequences to having offenders 'repay' those they had discriminated against. Reparations are intended to benefit both the affected and offender as observed in Cleve's statement:

> *"I will have discussions and meetings with parents and eventually with the [affected] child and even have the young man apologize and get some sort of redress for the children who were involved as the victims..." (Cleve, Principal Primary).*

Protecting the affected. This involved handling complaints discretely, culling unjust behaviours and removing the offender or affected from a situation, as indicated below:

> *A number of the teachers supported a particular political party and once [they] recognised that you did not support [their] particular political party it was not a level playing field. [Further], … one of whom was in a decision-making position who openly expressed her dislike for East Indian [persons]. That was something that [I] had to deal with. . . ensuring that the teachers of East Indian descent and persons of the other political party got a fair opportunity (Rodney, Principal Primary).*
>
> *It was a one-on-one situation so, that and all, kind of raised some flags and the male teacher who perhaps may have shown some sort of tendency of having some sort of sexual orientation [toward] a male student. So, we kinda like quelled that situation before the parents come in and yuh know blow this thing out of proportion. So, the child made a complaint to the form teacher, the form teacher came to me and I spoke to the teacher who was giving the lessons and the lessons was stopped immediately and the situation didn't go anywhere after that (Stephen, Principal Secondary).*

Removing a student offender may also mean requesting their expulsion from school.

De-privileging and status exchange. This was also used particularly with offenders by having them operate 'in the shoes' of persons who are normally discriminated against or having offenders serve them. Ramona articulates this most succinctly by saying:

> *I have the boys apologize to the staff… [I]f the person brings a complaint to me, one of the auxiliary or ancillary staff out there, that a student has been disrespectful, they are dealt with just as though they are a member of [the teaching] staff… And I have the boys work with the cleaner when they do something foolish… in that way sometimes the boys have actually developed a relationship with the cleaner.*

Needs of SJ Leaders: Social Justice Socialization and Training

When asked about what they conceived to be the preparation needs of aspirant and practicing principals that would enable effective social justice leadership, participating principals recognized the need for both personal and professional socialization and personal self-reflection. On the level of personal socialization, half the principals felt that a critical antecedent to a social justice orientation was for individuals to have a broad pre-knowledge and experience of living and interacting with many different people and cultures that would develop an acute sense of tolerance and consideration and thus a greater depth of understanding:

> *I think those who are willing to become principals, so as to develop their social justice capabilities, those individuals have to be willing to become lifelong learners, [demonstrating] adaptability, flexibility guided by moral principles… even their own spiritual development has to be one that is willing to embrace all persons and you have to be willing to work as a team… and team leader… because a school is a community and if you are building communities, you have*

> *to be willing to embrace the views of everybody who wants to be part of the community (Carla, Principal Primary).*
>
> *[T]hat individual will need as broad a socialization as possible. And this socialization should start from birth actually because being exposed to different experiences, social experiences, cultural experiences, it would basically form a type of individual who would have seen a lot, would have experienced a lot and [so] hopefully guide some of what they do. Again that is not easy because in Trinidad and Tobago, the type of experiences that we will have might be a [little] bit limited. Now if someone who has had experiences outside of the region perhaps lived in a developed country, see how the more marginalized people might be treated – now we have to be careful with that as well – that of course could inform how they see certain things (Stephen, Principal Secondary).*

For Stephen, Carla and Ramona, a discussion on such a socialization was intricately linked to one on the selection and promotion of principal candidates within Trinidad and Tobago. They felt that in selecting candidates, the Teaching Service Commission, the body responsible for same, needs to employ mechanisms, such as psychometric testing and assessment centres that ensure that only those with such a broad socialization are promoted:

> *[T]he selection to be an educational leader, whether it is a dean, principal primary, principal secondary, head of department... - that selection process has to be as rigid, rigorous, broad and general as possible. What we have now, anybody with a bias could slip through. You have fifteen multiple choice, fifteen true and false, a case study and then an interview. People can get past interviews for all kind of different reasons… [Needed are] more of assessment centre type exercises and that will more or less bring out some of the characteristics that we're talking about that leadership [and] especially [where] social justice education is concerned (Stephen, Principal Secondary).*

Too many times there are square pegs in round holes and I think there needs to be psychometric testing for the readiness of the post of principal… (Ramona, Principal Secondary).

On the level of professional socialization, on the other hand, every principal participant identified training as being necessary for a principal's social justice leadership development. This training, they emphasized, needed to be authentic, contextualized and meaningful, treating with 'real' situations rather than theoretical or hypothetical ones that principals have faced or will likely encounter:

I think you need a kind of training that comes from interaction not just maybe reading a book but a situation where you have hands-on [activities] or you have those training workshops where you interact with the situation as it happens. So, maybe move out of the school and dramatizing a situation… even have a discussion [like] we are having now, probing so that people may reflect on their school context... (Carla, Principal Primary).

Such training, Carla recommended, should be deep and count towards the credits of formal university programmes, thus hinting at a MOE-school-university partnership:

I really believe that if we wish to promote social justice in schools and promote effective schools, that somewhere along the line we have to provide leadership training for principals and not on a one day and two day basis maybe on a termly basis because not everyone may want to go [to] university but provide the opportunity for them to get some sort of credits like they do a semester and those credits can go on to the next semester (Carla, Principal Primary).

However, most participants also recognized that training, despite how well planned, was limited in the absence of principals' ability to be self-reflective and have a sense of consciousness in promoting social justice:

[W]e cannot force [school leaders], they have to see [social justice issues] as serious… [T]hat is also going to be a challenge in having the people who are already leaders seeing the importance and the criticality of social justice in education… [T]hey have to recognize within themselves that I may not be practicing the whole social justice in education to the level in which I should (Stephen, Principal Secondary).

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study bring to light much needed information about the knowledge and experiences of principals as social justice leaders. The 11 principals interviewed provided candid information on four aspects of social justice leadership: (1) meanings of social justice leadership; (2) diverse social justice leadership roles; (3) doing social justice leadership: guess work and; (4) needs of SJ leaders: social justice socialization and training. Some of the themes found within were consistent with existing knowledge on social justice leadership. Findings on principals' understandings of social justice leadership as promoting fairness, respect and equity, for instance, were found to be generally consistent with the work of Capper and Young (2014) and McKenzie et al. (2008).

Principals' conceptualizations of their social justice leadership roles as being an advocate where voice is central and being a neutralizer and playing field leveler also support findings in existing literature, such as those of DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014). Also consistent with existing literature is principals' strengthening school capacity (e.g. Capper & Young, 2014; Wasonga, 2009) and practicing equity (e.g. Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). However, notable departures in the narratives from much of the research literature were two themes

under 'doing social justice leadership': (a) 'Executing Justice', particularly through reparations and de-privileging through status exchange and (b) 'Repositioning the Marginalized' through particularly targeting mindsets.

It may be that in the absence of specific policy to inform principals' actions within the Trinidad and Tobago context that these ways of doing social justice leadership emerged out of a pressing need to act in the face of injustice. Although reflective of context within the study, the social justice needs of aspirant and practicing school leaders were also found to be generally consistent with existing literature, particularly the need for principals to be conscious and self-reflective (Dantley & Tillman, 2010; Oplatka & Arar, 2015; Pazey & Cole, 2013). These dispositions were needed in order to effectively promote social justice and serve the needs of the marginalized. Within these perspectives was a heavy emphasis on social justice for academic achievement, meaning that the focus for students was on multiple factors related to their well-being which in turn supported academic achievement but was not entirely focused there. Berkovich (2014) and Wang (2018) also concur that social justice leadership should not be limited to student achievement but to the overall well-being of the student.

The study is immersed within the Trinidad and Tobago and, by extension, Caribbean contexts. Miller (2013) in his situating of school leadership practices within the Caribbean, identified some of its key attributes from the dominant discourse. These include that the majority of school leaders are women; and the silence of Caribbean school leaders on some issues, inclusive of but not limited to ethnicity, religion, and disability. Brown and Lavia (2013) and Conrad and

Brown (2011) make the case for and demonstrate the roles of school leaders in facilitating inclusive practices and equitable education. Bristol (2012) noted from a critical post-colonial perspective, some of the tensions, contradictions, and conflicts presented to teachers, students, and principal alike in school settings. Principals can and do set the tone for value and respect among teachers and students in the way they lead.

In this study, the roles of principals were evident as exemplars of social justice principles and in all their practices. This recognition and related action are critical in order to empower both teachers and students and to positively affect and change attitudes and beliefs related to social justice.

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

The authors believe that this study directly addresses principal and leader development needs with respect to social justice in both the questions presented and the targeted population. Future research may seek to do likewise utilizing a larger sample of principals. We contend that understanding the perspectives of principals regarding social justice, with a view to addressing these, can contribute significantly to policy, practice, and more democratic learning and social communities. One implication of the findings herein is that it is time for the Trinidad and Tobago's Ministry of Education to place social justice at the forefront of its school improvement agenda. Such an agenda may involve:

(i) partnering with local universities to conduct research on SJ in schools;

(ii) the development of an evidenced-based policy that can guide principals' actions; and

(iii) social justice leadership training with a difference as discussed herein. We note that Social Justice and poverty reduction remain as one of five themes of Trinidad and Tobago's National Development Strategy. Namely Theme I - Putting People First: Nurturing Our Greatest Asset. Indeed, it is the first goal: 'Our society will be grounded in the principles of social justice' (Draft National Development Strategy 2016–2030; 2017). We contend that education and educators must lead this effort.

We stress 'local universities' as partners with the Ministry of Education (MOE), particularly the Division of School Supervision and Management. Both parties [universities and MOE] are key stakeholders committed to utilizing culturally relevant and localized approaches. Such programmes of study should include experientially focused, technical-skills driven competencies rather than be primarily theoretical. Course content may aim at facilitating:

- Review of international and local laws, policies and regulations related to education and students' welfare
- Field experiences and assignments that evidence participants' commitment to social justice
- Acceptance of the importance of diversity and inclusive practice beyond disability
- Explorations of post-colonial perspectives on the history of education in Trinidad and Tobago
- Critical reviews of schooling to determine elitist assumptions, privilege, and power

- Integration of social justice advocacy throughout curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, rather than offering as a single course
- Utilization of approaches to teaching that optimize engagement and critical reflection, for example life histories, films, and local music and fiction that challenge assumptions and biases, encourage reflection, and improve practice
- Use of school-based action research, and
- Exploration and utilization of Relational and Transformative theory

It is hoped that this phenomenography, in capturing the perspectives of 11 principals, may help to create and sustain conditions where inclusive education is facilitated. Principals will hopefully more increasingly take cognizance of special needs and talents, diverse learning styles, socioeconomic differences, high academic standards, and a commitment to advocacy. These are critical to effectively promote the tenets of social justice. We anticipate that a second study will be soon implemented, within the quantitative tradition to extend the study, and identify key factors that facilitate or hinder social justice leadership.

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About the author

Dennis A. Conrad, PhD is Emeritus Professor of Education with SUNY-Potsdam. He is currently Manager, Student Support Services with the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago. His research interests include educational leadership, learning differences, and learner diversity. Recent work: co-edited book *Achieving Inclusive Education in the Caribbean and Beyond.*

Email: dennis.conrad@moe.gov.tt

Rinnelle Lee-Piggott, PhD (University of Nottingham, UK) is a lecturer in Educational Leadership. Her research interests focus on principal leadership and development, school culture and school improvement. Most recent publication: "New principals' emotions: Interactions with 'inherited' school cultures" (2019), in an edited book by I. Oplatka & K. Arar.

Email: ralpiggott_00@yahoo.com

Dr. Launcelot I. Brown is Professor of Educational Research and Evaluation in the School of Education at Duquesne University where he teaches courses in educational statistics. Dr. Brown is a former teacher, special educator for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties, and a former principal of the School for Deaf Children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Email: brownli@duq.edu

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Mentoring School Leaders through Cultural Conflict

Thomas Hughes

Northern Arizona University, Arizona, United States

Abstract

This article advances compelling information about deficits in training for inclusive school leaders, and presents viewpoints along with options intended to help support their efforts to lead others through cultural challenges and conflicts. It asserts that social justice on a whole and related values and norms have increasingly been caught up in added complexity and challenge that inclusive leaders may not have been prepared to lead through. The article also presents a rationale and supporting data for better developing overlooked administrator abilities. Finally, noting a lack of currently available resources to expedite training and foster important growth in key skill areas, this article ultimately advocates for expanded informal but qualified mentoring support being offered to inclusive school administrators.

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Introduction

Mentoring is probably not the solution for every challenge school leaders face. Still, when dealing with the unfamiliar, there are likely few better available resources to draw upon than guidance from capable and successful leaders who have already navigated through similar situations. Challenges associated with social justice offer a clear and important example of situations where school leaders could likely benefit from experienced insights. As the complexity of leadership issues intensify (Hughes, 2014; Miller, 2018), and principals find themselves on the front line of some of society's toughest challenges, having a mentor or two to call upon might just be the best alternative that leaders have available to them.

The initial impact and lasting influence of social media provides a contemporary example of the complexity just referenced. Twitter campaigns urging consumers to boycott businesses that align themselves with controversial organizations, programs or individuals already create turmoil that regularly leads to escalating tensions and wide-spread retaliation (Sakoui, 2019). In as much as social media is incredibly convenient and accessed by choice, Gray and Gordo (2014) contended that it is already poised to take on seemingly endless targets including businesses, social norms, and even schools and governmental institutions. The impacts of social media are real and alarming in that they are as immediate as the touch of a smartphone. School administrators leading in the age of social media regularly mediate critical issues between schools, community and society (Miller, 2018), and often need the immediate and personal guidance that can only come from someone with experience.

Social Justice

Social justice was mentioned as a potential area of disagreement. To a caring and inclusive educator, there is nothing controversial about the topic. Social justice is about maintaining high expectations for all students and focusing on their learning instead of locking in to a one-size-fits-all lesson or way of delivery. It is about acknowledging what students know, and building upon who they are instead of changing them (Belle, 2019). It is about encouraging them to persevere when they struggle instead of accepting less just to get by, or looking the other way when things get uncomfortable. Social justice in education is about supporting the unique person so they can excel in their own unique path as a learner, instead of insisting on conformity and limited choices already identified for them (Delpit, 2006).

Many educators would hold that what was just described is just the way education was always meant to be. While the important work carried out by inclusive educators in the classroom triggers plenty of challenges, it would seem that struggles outside of the classroom are also settings where school leaders can expect to find future complexity (Strom & Martin, 2017). Though America has historically been called the great melting pot (Napolitano, 2019) and public schools were originally intended to be the vehicle for shaping an educated, productive and diverse citizenry, we are increasingly and more forcefully hearing quarrel from segments of society that would prefer to marginalize people who do not look, worship or fall within family structures the way they expect them to. The escalating tensions associated with ongoing marginalization is indicative of greater discord than may commonly be perceived, and the lack of training inclusive educational leaders to address these challenges (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018), is the focus of this article.

Culture Conflict

According to Merriam-Webster (2019) the noun culture conflict describes discord that results when different cultures are incompletely assimilated. In as much as the term applies to social justice, this conflict is not linked solely to different ethnicities, but rather references quarrels surrounding differing identities, principles and values. A quick return to the classroom may provide the clearest illustration of how cultural conflict is viewed in this article. If we picture a classroom setting we can expect to find students representing differences with respect to race, economic standing, sexual orientation and other often marginalized characteristics. While efforts are regularly made to classify students according to only one of these discrete characteristics, the truth is that they overlap just like they do across society, and were therein referenced as being "cultural" differences in *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (Delpit, 2006).

Cultural conflict is a concept that was purposefully introduced into this article because of the increased complexity schools and their leaders are already encountering and the visible discord tied to differing identities, principles and values. Davies (2004) indicated that the very pluralism schools have been expected to nurture has helped trigger conflict over cultural difference and priorities found within schools and across society. We are becoming increasingly aware of this growing discord, in part at least, due to the transparency of social media which both informs us and fuels many of the growing rifts in society. These rifts are often indicative of purposeful alliances and large-scale strategic agendas that can dwarf the institutions' commitment to ending marginalization and providing an inclusive education (Spring, 2011).

Conceptual Background

As the complexity of leadership issues increases (Hughes, 2014; Miller, 2018) administrators invested in social justice and creating inclusive schools can expect to contend with additional variation and intensity from the challenges they face (Davies, 2004; and Ross, 2013). Recent history has supported this line of thought. In 2000, the topic of principal preparation focused on creating a safe and positive instructional setting in which theoretical discussion and self-reflection about racism as a system of oppression could be facilitated (Young & Laible, 2000). Almost a decade later the focus was expanded to include the development of critical consciousness (McKenzie, Christman, Hernandez, Fierro, Capper, Dantley, Gonzalez McCable, & Sheurich, 2008).

Around this same time, Theoharis updated the literature concerning the emerging types of strife inclusive of what principals were facing. Detailing expanding internal and external sources of discord that included bureaucracy, lack of resources, and lack of investment in the cause, the longstanding term "barrier" was updated to include an understanding of "resistance" that could be expected by advocates for social justice (Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2008). After an additional ten years of cultural history, Strom and Martin (2017, p.8) identified "shifting global social norms and political trends" which lend credence to earlier referenced predictions concerning future complexities and challenges facing social justice. Noting the election of a conspiracy theorist who rose to notoriety contending his predecessor was a Muslim born in Africa, they asserted that:

> *Collectively, these global events are underscored by xenophobia, racism, and religious intolerance-expressed as anti-immigrant rhetoric that is wrapped in the guise of ensuring national safety and preserving culture – and anti-globalism,*

which has been fueled by the extreme wealth inequality across the world (Strom & Martin, 2017, p. 5).

This article extends the point of view that in 2019 there is deeper, more visible as well as more unified and more forceful "objection" to the type of progress sought and realized by inclusive school leaders. A decade after Theoharis advocated for an intensification of training efforts, this article is doing the same in advocating once again for principals to receive better skill training in the areas of conflict resolution, problem-solving and hiring for change due to escalating tensions and trajectories that are consistent with predictions of increased conflict and complexity (Hughes, 2014; Miller, 2018).

Working, then, from a societal level and "cultural conflict" point of view, and embracing the call from Strom and Martin (2017) for new ways of thinking about training to combat increasing tensions, this article attempts to address three practical considerations. (1) That predictors of increased challenge and complexity are being realized. (2) To document skill deficits limiting administrator ability to lead through greater complexity. (3) To identify practical and immediately available approaches to improve administrator preparation to lead others through challenge and conflict.

Related Literature

Social Justice Leadership

Celoria (2016) defined social justice leadership as being invested in eliminating marginalization. Theoharis (2007, p. 223) held social justice leadership as a condition of leadership where "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".

Challenges presented to inclusive leaders can be more intense and more complicated than the norm, and according to Strom and Martin (2017), these leaders, along with members of marginalized groups, need to unite to confront social and economic agendas that are threats to equity and even democracy itself.

Social Justice Leadership Preparation

The preferred approach for training American administrators into social justice has long been to nurture and promote self-reflection and individual enlightenment in a safe instructional setting (Young & Laible, 2000). McKenzie, et al (2008) further advocated that administrator training programs only accept candidates already personally and professionally invested in supporting marginalized groups. Singleton (2014) established a framework for conducting "courageous conversations" about social justice. Furman (2012) observed the important work aimed at training for social justice, but considered the literature was especially thin with respect to specific skills school administrators needed and how to best develop them. Similarly, Bettez and Hytten (2013) spoke to the need to address additional skill areas. They called the literature vast and growing, but largely academic and theoretically based. Ultimately, they also identified a need for successful leaders in social justice to have critical thinking and analysis abilities to draw upon.

Escalating Leadership Challenges

According to Miller (2018, p. 22), "Ongoing changes in a school's internal and external environments require school leaders to find new ways of doing leadership". Along with Hughes (2014), Miller predicted escalation in the intensity and complexity of leadership issues. In no way were social justice concerns removed from that

prognostication. During the past ten years there has been ample evidence of expanding challenges for society, social justice, and subsequently school leaders. Not all of it has to do with the most recent presidential election in the United States, but plenty of it does according to Strom and Martin (2017). And, as former Superior Court judge and longtime friend of the president, Andrew Napolitano (2019) related, there is plenty of reason to be concerned about long-term consequences of positions taken by the president.

A frequently cited issue is the Trump campaign and administration's predilection to push feelings ahead of science, research or established facts, which Strom and Martin (2017) indicated only fuels reactionism. An example that directly impacts education, and demonstrated the way the reactionism spreads is the way all teachers were branded "socialists" by the president's son, and national media very friendly to the Trump administration has continued to champion that message ever since (Klein, 2019).

Another example of similar appeal to negative feelings took place when the president took issue with four female members of congress who are also persons of color. "Go back" along with "Love it or leave it" is not merely hyperbole, but instead "implicates a racial or nativist superiority according to his friend Judge Napolitano (2019, para. 10). According to conservative commentator Jennifer Rubin (2019, para. 8) this was business as usual, as the president's very clear agenda is to convince white males that they are the victims, and legitimize their claims to being the "real Americans" all while promoting hatred and racism.

Napolitano (2019, para. 8) went on to say Trump has "unleashed a torrent of hatred" with the deliberate intent of dividing the nation and destroying peaceful dialogue and all the while making it very clear

that dissenting opinions will not be allowed. Strom and Martin (2017) agreed with Napolitano's position that this type of behavior is a very serious problem for the United States, and more pointedly linked these growing challenges with the administration's daily efforts to dominate, alienate and eliminate members of marginalized groups in American society. These efforts have been so pervasive that White Nationalism has clearly become the cornerstone of current American immigration policy (Srikantiah & Sinnar, 2019).

Without question, barriers and resistance to social progress and equity continue to present themselves daily, but Ross (2013) stated that conflict is also part of the work of social justice. Recent events, though summarized only very briefly, are incredibly alarming and paint a troubling picture for both equity and democracy in America according to Napolitano (2019), Rubin (2019), and Strom and Martin (2017). They also affirm observations about ongoing change, increased complexity and the need for school leaders to "find new ways of doing things" (Hughes, 2014; Miller, 2018; Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018; Ross, 2013; and Strom & Martin, 2017). Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018) have also made it clear that there is not enough attention directed toward how to make things work in school settings. That focus is addressed next.

Missing Skills

The world educational leaders' function in is becoming increasingly challenging and continually requires them to better comprehend the life changing events taking place outside their immediate setting (Miller, 2018). Whereas they formerly enjoyed widespread support and a level of autonomy thirty years ago (Fullan, 2014), government domination has set in around the world (Miller, 2018), and has left educators with a compliance first mentality (Hughes

& Davidson, Forthcoming), that often limits their inclination to think critically, be able to solve problems or effectively address conflict (Goodwin, 2015; Mercer, 2016; and Sogunro, 2012). The compliance mentality also limits emphasis on developing important skills like these, and while it has been dominating K12 education for decades, it is now finally catching up with higher education as well. Professional training programs for school administrators typically have national standards to follow and accreditation hurdles to clear. Therein, local control over programs and courses is evaporating just as it did in K12 education.

Scholarship has widely been attentive to realities in the lives of educators at all levels, as well as to the national standards that have been promulgated over the years to help guide and define them. While pointing out that tremendous attention has long been directed toward study of the official role and responsibilities of administrators, Miller (2018) noted that leadership is incredibly personal, and that the way administrators "interpret and navigate" through challenges is less studied.

Fairly recently the literature has referenced the need for added skills to deal with the challenges surrounding social justice. Bettez and Hytten (2013) articulated the need for developing critical thinking abilities and problem-solving abilities. In addition, Laura (2018) and Theoharis (2008) tied into the need to hire more effectively. Noting that there are no easy answers for the conflict that will be encountered, Theoharis (2008, p. 33) indicated:

> *Preparation programs and current administrators are naive if they embrace the idea that leading for equity and social justice is straightforward and easy work. Therefore, the in-service and preservice development of administrators needs to include the ugly and hard aspects of this kind of resistance to leadership.*

National standards play a critical role in designing and evaluating administrator preparatory programs. Celoria (2016), and English before him (2006), have been critical of standards-based influences on educational leadership training, with Celoria having called for the development of cutting-edge approaches to solving problems as opposed to continuing to debate wording in standards that produce few direct benefits. Since leveling those criticisms, the National Educational Leadership Preparation "NELP" Program Recognition Standards have been adopted and disseminated by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA, 2018).

Analysis of the NELP Standard reveals two things. First, there is repeated reference made to the keywords of equity and inclusiveness and these terms are consistently integrated into training expectations. The two words appear in virtually every standard and also within multiple components. Celoria (2016) would perhaps still find limitations to these efforts as repeatedly including keywords in a document probably does not ensure the creation of the practical cutting-edge skills he called for. However, there were multiple places where components within the standards directly addressed the need for developing important skills which should be viewed as eventually providing some level of support.

Standard 2 "Ethics and Professional Norms" Component 2.2 establishes an expectation that administrators be effective in their work with ethical and legal decisions. This emphasis ties into conflict and critical thinking/problem-solving by encouraging school leaders to be well grounded in both moral and legal realities. With a focus on community and external leadership, Standard 5 has Components 5.2 and 5.3 which place emphasis on working collaboratively and then communicating effectively with external stakeholders. Both place

emphasis on skills that support conflict and critical thinking/problem-solving skills once again. Standard 6 "Operations and Management" and Component 6.3 spells out expectations about implementing laws and policies, which impacts hiring along with the other two skills (conflict and problem-solving). Finally, hiring is directly addressed in Standard 7 "Building Professional Capacity" in Component 7.1 specifying expectations for being able to effectively recruit, select and hire staff.

Defining the Problem

Furman (2012) has also drawn attention to the need for developing and refining additional skills among principals. While there is perhaps some "minimally mentioned" support within the literature for providing inclusive leaders with critical thinking skills, the larger body of scholarship really does not identify this as a skill area that truly receives any form of preparatory instruction. Similarly, despite the references that were already made in this paper concerning the importance of hiring in this paper, (Laura, 2018; Theoharis, 2008), it has also been established by Hughes (2014) and Hughes (2018) that training for hiring is a largely overlooked area for administrator preparation. This neglect contributes to teacher retention and student achievement concerns (Hughes, 2014, 2018); and school climate as well as trust and conflict resolution considerations (Hughes & Davidson, Forthcoming). Ultimately, even being skilled in "dealing with conflict in general" does not appear to be an area of emphasis articulated in national standards or made available in training programs according the professional literature. Therein having already been framed as important skill areas within the social justice literature, methodology

including survey administration and resulting data concerning skills to deal with conflict, problem-solving, and hiring are discussed next.

Methodological Considerations

This study evolved from the need to move beyond personal observations and secure confirmation from hard data that demonstrated administrator training has long been lacking in critical areas including dealing with conflict, to critical thinking, and problem-solving, as well as improving capacity for change through hiring practices. Though valuable for any administrator, these should be considered to be critical skills for school leaders who advocate for change in important but frequently challenged areas like inclusive education.

Directors from every state-level principal association across America were contacted by personal letter contained in an email. The potential for participation in the study was based on self-selection for state associations. Ultimately local decisions concerning participation were based on differing levels of interaction, and data collection became drawn out. Therein information from the first phase collected in Arizona was utilized for this article.

The survey instrument was developed to be as streamlined and efficient as possible. This was done knowing school administrators are busy people. It was also done having repeatedly heard up front that a simple survey that was not followed with repeated prompts reminding principals to complete it would go a long way to securing initial cooperation and improve the likelihood of continued collaboration during other studies concerning this topic.

In all, 127 active school principals in Arizona completed the survey. Records indicate the response rate came in slightly higher than

the 20 percent level. In an ideal world where there would be a request coming directly from an association or governmental entity, that return could have been higher. Still, considering there were association directors who were extremely interested in resulting data but still declined to participate in deference to the busy lives of their members, 127 responses are viewed as providing a worthwhile sample.

Sticking with conflict, critical thinking and hiring practices, the questions targeted for this study focused on: A) Determining how important principals viewed specified skills to be; B) Understanding the extent of their graduate-level preparation for each skill area; C) Ascertaining the administrators' beliefs about professional development options for a given skill; and finally, D) Securing administrator preferences for how initial training in a given skill area should ideally be carried out. Data was collected using "surveygizmo" and analysis was completed using their online analysis tools. Findings from the returned surveys are presented next.

Findings

As the purpose of the study referenced here was primarily to confirm the importance of skills traditionally overlooked in administrator preparation programs and to introduce this information to the dialogue on social justice, descriptive analysis was considered sufficient. The information in each table is organized according to the three skill areas described earlier, (conflict, critical thinking, and hiring practices) with a first table indicating A) how important the skill area was perceived to be, and a second table reflecting B) participants' levels of preparation during their graduate training. Immediately following these two tables are summaries also in table format for C)

beliefs about professional development offerings and D) preferences for how each of the three skills should be instructed.

Are Overlooked Skills Important?

Recent attention has been directed toward addressing the development of specific practitioner skills, above and beyond the tried and true practice of focusing only on general cultural awareness training and favorable dispositional factors (Furman, 2012). The line of questioning initiated through the survey sought to better understand if specific skills having to do with conflict, problem-solving and hiring were valued enough by administrators to stand out.

The three skill areas just referenced and represented in Table 1 were identified within the literature. A Likert Scale was utilized for this part of the line of questioning, with options ranging from Very Strongly Disagree up to and including Very Strongly Agree.

Table 1.

Importance of Working Knowledge

	Conflict resolution (N=126)		Critical thinking (N=125)		Hiring practices (N=127)	
Variable	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very Strongly Agree	60	47.6	47	37.6	47	37.0
Strongly Agree	49	38.9	49	39.2	51	40.2
Somewhat Agree	4	3.2	15	12.0	12	9.4
Neither	-	-	2	1.6	2	1.6
Agree/Disagree	-	-	-	-	1	0.8
Somewhat Disagree	4	3.2	4	3.2	3	2.4
Strongly Disagree	9	7.1	8	6.4	11	8.7
Very Strongly Disagree						

Results show that the sample group thought through their responses, as the ratings covered the entire range of possible choices available to them. As much as someone researching conflict would be shocked to see anyone very strongly disagree that conflict is important to a principal, 7.1% of the practitioners responding did just that. Sticking with conflict, the single most telling finding was that there was little to no "middle ground." Only 3.2% of the sample selected the most neutral responses of somewhat disagree, neither agree/disagree, and somewhat agree.

What is most striking considering there are no "neutral" or "somewhat" responses reported, a total of 86.5% of the practitioners strongly and ultimately very strongly agreed that being able to deal with conflict was an important skill for school leaders to possess. Numbers like that clearly need no further analysis or explanation.

Critical thinking, which would be expected to have direct implications on the ability to solve problems and address conflict, netted almost identical response, earning almost as many top scores and a still arguably significant 76.8% strongly and very strongly agree rate. Hiring practices and associated skills came in almost identical to the critical thinking results which is somewhat surprising in that Hughes (2014) reported that the literature still suggests hiring is not viewed with the importance it deserves.

Graduate Preparation

Furman (2012) broadened the conversation among advocates of social justice training to include a greater focus on leadership skills that could include learning how to more effectively deal with conflict. In addition to asking practitioners about the skills they need, the Arizona principals were questioned about the types of training they had

already received on the way to their administrative posts. Questions about training were again specifically targeted toward dealing with conflict, critical/creative thinking and problem-solving, and finally the development of updated hiring skills. Information corresponding to that line of questioning is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.

Extent of Graduate Preparation

	Conflict resolution (N=127)		Critical thinking (N=127)		Hiring practices (N=127)	
Variable	N	%	N	%	N	%
Devoted Course	3	2.4	1	0.8	5	3.9
Work Within Course/Program	15	11.8	6	4.7	11	8.7
Occasional Work/Mention	69	54.3	78	61.4	70	55.2
No Direct Preparation	40	31.5	42	33.1	41	32.3

Results summarized in Table 2 revealed little in the way of specially designed or even thoughtfully designated coursework was offered to better equip future leaders to contend with conflict, critical thinking, or even hiring practices that could better equip educators to meet future challenges. However, in each instance half to even slightly more than half of the practitioners indicated having at least "occasionally" come across all three skill/topic areas during the course of their preparatory training. Sadly, and consistently, a third of all responding principals shared that they received no training in any of the three important skill areas brought up in the literature.

It is not uncommon for school leaders to regularly voice how important local hiring decisions are. However, as Hughes (2014) pointed out, training related to this important function has historically

been lacking. Rather than benefitting from planned instruction, skills associated with making the best hire often come from "hand-me-down" learning experiences that are generally left to happenstance (Hughes, 2018). The paucity of integrated instruction in this area is particularly alarming considering the direct daily impacts of these hiring decisions on student learning organizational climate, and that as much as 75% of a school's budget is dedicated to the outcomes of any given search (Hughes, 2018).

Conflict is complex, and not something that a novice administrator can even begin to understand by way of a quick mention, an observation on the side, or a quick "how to" book aimed at getting them through the first tense moments of a face-to-face altercation. If managers get us through the moments and leaders get us to the places we need to be, how can it be acceptable to keep instruction about conflict in the "occasional mention" category? All the other standards we are expected to uphold and learning we are entrusted to advance fall by the wayside under the weight of everyday conflict. All too often we do not equip administrators with the skills to address everyday challenges let alone the deep-seated conflict that arises from disagreements at the cultural level.

Professional Development

The options for the survey prompts in this section were again more descriptive in nature, and ranged from professional development that is quickly and loosely pulled together all the way up to targeted and comprehensively developed successful continuing education. This approach was employed as the study itself was intended to start the conversation about missing skills, and allow for a more in-depth statistical examination at a later point in time.

Table 3.

Perceptions of Professional Development

	Conflict resolution (N=127)		Critical thinking (N=127)		Hiring practices (N=127)	
Variable	N	%	N	%	N	%
Comprehensively addresses	-	-	1	0.8	2	1.6
Systemically addresses needs	11	8.7	8	6.3	18	14.2
Addresses isolated needs	49	38.6	46	36.2	62	48.8
Mirrors what teachers get	19	15.0	17	13.4	6	4.7
Is largely an afterthought	48	37.8	55	43.3	39	30.7

Responses shown in Table 3 suggest the "help" administrators get for hiring correctly can be as much as or even more than "double" the help they get for conflict resolution or critical thinking. However, 15% of practitioners getting anything close to what they need for help in hiring is a totally unacceptable reality, especially if this is the high point for all skills considered in the survey. Administrators are often thought of as leaders, and therein are trained from a leadership orientation. For each of the three skill areas, there is far too much "afterthought" being reported. How can it be acceptable that the principals who did not receive appropriate training end up reporting on professional development that is at best an afterthought when they are expected to lead everyone through increasingly challenging situations?

Timely Instruction

For the fourth and final area of focus descriptive terminology was used to document how and just as importantly "when" practitioners believed the overlooked skills in question should be

taught. Participants were given options both during graduate training and following formal education to select from.

Table 4.

Preferred Time to Learn Skills

	Conflict resolution (N=125)		Critical thinking (N=125)		Hiring practices (N=126)	
Variable	N	%	N	%	N	%
In Depth Grad Training	67	53.6	59	47.2	48	38.1
General Exposure Grad Training	33	26.4	42	33.6	31	24.6
Professional Dev New Admin	22	17.6	20	16.0	41	32.5
Professional Dev As Needed	3	2.4	4	3.2	6	4.8

The information in Table 4 provides a roadmap for addressing the preferred means through which training for overlooked skills could take place. Roughly 80% of respondents chose graduate training of some sort as the best option for introducing conflict resolution and critical thinking skills. By comparison, slightly more than 60% indicated a belief that training on hiring was best when covered during original graduate training.

There is far more information to cover than there is time to teach in educational leadership programs. The data in Table 4 help us to prioritize according to practitioner perceptions. They suggest conflict resolution is an important topic for coursework, critical thinking skills appear to have received more of a blended response, and that there was twice as much support for addressing hiring skills with newly hired administrators than support for following the same path with conflict resolution and critical thinking skills and including it as a major graduate topic.

The movement toward social justice in America has run into intensified resistance at the very least, and appears to have been drawn into a culturally-based level of conflict according to reasoning set forth in this article. School leaders who have invested their time, energies and leadership into creating inclusive schools have long faced tremendous barriers and ongoing resistance which only appear to be intensifying. According to Fullan (2014), many of these same school leaders struggle to address conflict, and data shared in this article provide confirmation that they lack important training in skill areas vital to success in leading through it.

Dispositions and social awareness are critical considerations, though the literature is only beginning to touch on the need for broader, deeper and more extensive skill development for school leaders who face one of the toughest challenges around – advocating for and delivering social justice in their schools and their communities. The focus of this article now shifts to direct application of findings from survey results to the broader topic of inclusive leadership and social justice.

Discussion

This section is organized according to three themes that emerged from the survey, and each is considered in terms of how they relate to social justice leadership. Three themes emerged instead of four as reflection associated with topics represented in Table 2 and Table 4 had similar origins and similar endpoints. The themes presented here include the significance of overlooked skills, available training and its timing, and finally the rightful place for professional development. All three skill areas (conflict, critical thinking, and hiring) are among those that can be considered to be overlooked by professional standards and

by training programs (Furman, 2012) though each was highly valued by practitioners.

Understanding conflict helps to keep the inclusive leader effectively focused, and is of tremendous benefit when dealing with growing discord. According to Hughes and Davidson (Forthcoming), critical thinking and problem-solving ability is a complimentary underlying skill that strengthens the inclusive leaders' vision and overall understanding of conflict. Being able to contend with increased complication (Hughes, 2014; Miller, 2018) and potential conflict will require the ability to think adaptively about challenges we can expect to encounter with marginalization and social justice. While conflict resolution skills are vital for an inclusive leader, the ability to think critically will help the successful leader navigate challenges more effectively.

Conflict is not always resolved in a short time, which makes hiring the right people vitally important for long-term success because of the need to find those with dispositions that are more tolerant and committed to investing in organizational goals (Hughes, 2014). Thinking more globally, we also need to be finding future leaders, not today's followers. Therein again, hiring is of the utmost importance (Hughes, 2014), because we are not hiring only for the classroom but also for the future of the social justice movement (Theoharis, 2008).

When considering the delivery and the timing of training for the three skill areas, it is once again the long-term nature and the inherent heightened complexity associated with cultural conflict that drives the thought process. As important as hiring is, it was the skill area that was considered to be most appropriate for training just as an administrator starts a new job. Assuming the organization one works for is prepared to effectively address this topic, there are two distinct

benefits to offering training on hiring approaches after employment. First, the topic will be far more relevant to someone who is on site and can talk through the process and experience it instead of merely read about it and think "save it for later". Second, and even more importantly, from process to priorities we should expect that leaders invested in sustaining social justice would be more interested in dispositions and training good people than they would be inclined to shop for training and certifications as most of the profession is obsessed with doing (Hughes, 2014). Novice administrators will care more when these lessons take place at work, and they will get the right lessons when leadership is invested in the right priorities and the right dispositions working within those priorities.

Finally, the realities of professional development and how it relates to social justice leadership deserves mention. A lot of general criticism is often directed toward professional development opportunities. People often say they are more managerial in focus and are focused in almost a compliance manner on "what" people will be expected to do rather than provide insights into "how" people can do the important things better. It was noteworthy how principals viewed professional development more favorably when it addressed the more concrete "specific" and procedural skills (hiring) than with the more abstract abilities like critical thinking.

When considering the interests of social justice, it makes sense for the critical thinking skills to be introduced earlier through coursework and supported throughout the administrator's career in keeping with priorities established by Young and Laible (2000), and McKenzie, et al (2008). The same case can be made for conflict resolution skills, with hiring being addressed at the start of employment. Finally, organizations invested in social justice need to

become the lighthouse institutions for others. They need to be the training grounds for the development of crucial skills examined in this article just as much as they can serve as the training grounds for future leaders preparing to take on challenges in other organizations.

The skills reviewed in this article are often overlooked in training but hold tremendous value for inclusive leaders. When viewed primarily from a social justice standpoint, the significance of these abilities takes on more of a lasting leadership development orientation where leaders can better recognize long-term situations and bring respectful and tolerant people together to build a culture centered around equity and inclusiveness. Inclusive organizations can and should actively seek to serve as lighthouses for specific skill training and to broaden the type of understanding that can hopefully help promote increased tolerance and respect across society. National standards are not prioritizing the skills discussed in this article, but lighthouse organizations can do so by providing training and even providing mentors for aspiring leaders.

Mentoring Inclusive School Leaders

There will always be gaps in leadership training. Just as there is a place for lighthouse organizations to provide resources aimed at improving skills for inclusive leaders, there is also opportunity for mentors to help guide them as has been done successfully for centuries. This mentoring does not have to be part of a structured program in order to be effective (Hughes & Mouw, 2017). According to Roofe and Miller (2015), successful mentoring is far more about sharing insights through a genuine trusting relationship. The critical focus is a commitment to developing others, which Roofe and Miller viewed as being a crucial part of a transformative institution.

Bettez and Hytten (2013) have criticized social justice training as being too theoretical, and Fairhurst (2005) has questioned the effectiveness of teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills through a structured course. Conversely, the emphasis on reflective dialogue and problem solving that is a common trademark in mentoring relationships makes it a natural and practical option to nurture leadership skills vital for inclusive administrators. Mentoring does not need to wait for standards revision and does not have to come to an end at the completion of a course. It could involve current practitioners, retired leaders, or faculty – and if so inclined a single mentor can even support more than one administrator.

Proposed Social Justice Mentoring Framework

The framework proposed here draws from the emphasis on relationship building advanced by Roofe and Miller (2015), along with practicalities highlighted by Hughes and Mouw (2017).

Keep It Simple: As mediators often caught in the expanding differences between competing groups, inclusive school leaders are not typically called upon to dabble in a lot of theory. While their positionality may have resulted from considerable introspection, their work is typically practical and applied, and their challenge is often one where they have to communicate complex ideas with everyday words.

Identify Limitations Early: According to Roofe and Miller (2015), mentoring is about relationship. As shared earlier in this article, inclusive leaders can expect to face a multitude of intense situations. Everyone has limited experience, insight and time to support others. Identifying limitations early on can help maintain efficiency and effectiveness, and could even prompt the mentee to look elsewhere for assistance when needed.

Multiple Mentors: Issues connected with equity and putting an end to marginalization are often overwhelming individuals, organizations and even governments. No "one person" has all the answers. The novice administrator described by Hughes and Mouw (2017) actually had three regular mentors. Two of the mentors covered very specific aspects of the job, and the third provided a broader form of guidance. Inclusive leaders could similarly benefit by drawing on multiple forms of specific expertise, and by perhaps also having more general guidance available as well.

Don't Gear Up Too Much: Inclusive school leaders face a lot of immediate feelings and interactions through "touch of a button" social media. Their communications and their approach to mentoring relationship needs to be fluid and efficient (Hughes & Mouw, 2017), and not become bogged down with unnecessary formality, documentation, or complex communication apparatus when a simple text message will do.

Summary

Inclusive school leaders are on the front lines of some of the most important and most challenging issues facing education and society as a whole. They are called upon to mediate the tensions that develop both within and from outside the school setting (Miller, 2018). Their cutting-edge work is complicated by escalating challenges (Hughes, 2014; Miller, 2018), that are increasingly the topic of daily coverage in the news and round-the-clock discussion across social media.

Joining Strom and Martin (2017, p. 4) who stressed the need to "engage in new modes and thought," scholars including Bettez and Hytten (2013), Furman (2012) along with Murray-Johnson and Guerra (2018) have called administrator training for social justice into question

and have indicated that it needs to be less theoretical and better able to address needs in schools. Investigation into specific skill areas including critical thinking, conflict resolution and even hiring educators better suited to deal with change (Hughes, 2014; Laura, 2018; Strom & Martin, 2017; and Theoharis, 2008) has been suggested, with results reported in this article revealing a lack of coverage by leadership programs.

In the absence of training or national standards placing sufficient emphasis on developing the unique needs of inclusive school leaders, mentoring stands out as a viable support for social justice advocates. According to Roofe and Miller (2015), successful mentoring is about developing a trusting and genuine relationship where important insights can be shared. Its impact can be felt immediately, and can last a lifetime as it places emphasis on reflective dialogue and problem solving, instead of heavily linking itself to theoretical contemplation. The critical focus in mentoring, according to Roofe and Miller, is a commitment to developing others. It only makes sense that successful champions of social justice would be ideally suited and highly motivated to mentor next generation inclusive educational leaders who are expected to face future challenges that cannot even be imagined today (Hughes, 2014).

Recommendations. Practitioners need to reflect on their own personal connection to the broader concept of social justice. If they lack clarity, they should seek insights from others who can mentor them. If, in contrast, someone is experienced and able to help an emerging leader create opportunities for increased tolerance and cooperation in education and across societies, they should offer their service as a mentor to one or more administrators inclusively. Resources such as the book, Nature of School Leadership: Global Practice Perspectives by

Paul W. Miller can help leaders at all skill levels to refine vital leadership outlooks, and also provide a platform for dialogue on equitable leadership that broadens understanding and collaboration.

Instead of assuming that an advanced degree automatically qualifies anyone to weigh in on any subject, trainers need to be honest with themselves when determining the role they play in the area of social justice. They should be available avenues for improving their own contributions to this critically important subject. Faculty with experience and insights concerning social justice, cultural conflict, and leading through conflict should strongly consider making mentoring available to others and coordinating outreach efforts to bring young leaders together with experienced practitioners who could also potentially serve as informal mentors to them.

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About the author

Thomas Hughes is an Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Northern Arizona University. He is a former school psychologist, director of special education and school superintendent. His teaching and scholarship address education law and conflict resolution, and employ a capacity building focus to help practitioners prepare for increasing complexities and discord in school leadership.

Email: thomas.hughes@nau.edu

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The Use of Language Awareness Strategies in the Teaching of Foreign Languages to Creole Speaking Students

Gaye-Leon Williams

University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica
&
Caribbean Maritime University, Kingston, Jamaica

Abstract

The language de jure in Jamaica is Jamaican English (JE); however, the language de facto of most nationals is Jamaican Creole (JC). As such, there are many students who enter the tertiary level without fully acquiring JE. As a CARICOM nation, it is mandatory that foreign languages are taught beginning at the primary level of education. Although the main foreign languages taught in Jamaica are Spanish and French, this paper focuses on Spanish because of our proximity to Spanish-speaking countries, and because of the government's declaration of Spanish as our official foreign language. However, in spite of best efforts, there are still difficulties encountered in the foreign language classroom which manifest at the tertiary level. Some of these are attributable to the Jamaican language situation. Particularly, the linguistic background and language awareness (LA) of teachers and students alike. Previous studies have investigated the implementation of LA strategies within the Jamaican language classroom regarding the teaching of English as a second language. However, no such study has been conducted

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on the teaching of foreign languages. This ongoing mixed-methods action research implemented various LA strategies at a non-traditional university using the communicative approach to teaching foreign languages. The effects of these strategies were examined quantitatively and qualitatively within a constructivist framework that embraces student-centred learning while incorporating JC. Some of the students' perceptions of and their actual performance increased after implementing the LA strategies. As LA increases, students' communicative competence and their ability to function globally should also increase.

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Introduction

The learning of a foreign language can be quite challenging for most students. However, for Creole speaking Jamaican students, the challenge is greater given the Jamaican language situation. Although the official language of our island is Jamaican English (JE), most of our nationals use Jamaican Creole (JC). There is a widespread lack of language awareness (LA) of both JC and JE even, and especially in teachers and students. Additionally, the Caribbean has created a model for teaching Spanish that relies on competence in the English language. Many studies have been conducted to learn more about the various aspects of the teaching and learning of foreign languages, both globally and locally here in Jamaica. Furthermore, LA and consciousness raising (CR) have been the focus of recent studies, especially for English as a second language (Antwi, 2015; Kennedy, 2017; McKenzie, 2013). Additionally, there is a renewed focus on

transformational leadership in education, especially in the Caribbean (Smith, Francis & Harper, 2015). This renewed focus also has implications for leadership in the improvement of LA. In this paper, the preliminary results of an ongoing mixed-methods study are presented.

Statement of the Problem

Creole-speaking students in Jamaica struggle to learn foreign languages; however, the problem faced is not linear. There are several factors that contribute to the complexity of the challenges faced. Firstly, the current models for teaching foreign languages in Jamaica often require a comparison to the English language (Cooper, 2007). As such, a working knowledge of JE is an unstated prerequisite for learning a foreign language but, most Jamaican students are not competent in same. Secondly, JC, the language most students use in both informal and formal situations is variable and superficially similar to JE, its lexifier. However, it requires awareness of the language features to recognise the real differences (Kennedy, 2017). Thirdly, the Jamaican language situation is also a complex context within which to learn foreign languages. There are three primary linguistic descriptors used to characterise the current Jamaican language situation: Diglossia, Creole continuum, and Bilingualism. Diglossia can be defined as "two separate language varieties, each with its own specific functions within the society" coexisting (Devonish, 1986, p. 9). There is a high or formal variety spoken by the upper class and a low variety that is associated with the lower class. In Jamaica the high variety would be JE and the low variety JC (Davy, 2016; Devonish, 2003; Evans, 2001). The Creole continuum represents the mutual existing of a creole variety and its

lexifier language. There are points on the continuum ranging from the most creolised form, the basilect, to the form that most closely resembles the lexifier language, the acrolect. The speech in between both of these forms constitutes the mesolect (Bryan, 2010; Davy, 2016; DeCamp 1971). Bilingualism, the third descriptor, is defined as the coexistence of two languages where one is considered strong and the other weak. For most Jamaicans the weak language is JE and the strong one is JC (Bryan, 2010).

This study began after the researcher noticed what appeared to be JC like formations present in the students' target language written and oral productions. For example, instead of saying *mi familia y yo* the student would write or say **mi y mi familia*, literally my and my family. However, what should have been *my family and I,* was translated to more closely resemble the JC *me an mi faamili.* This and other instances were initially attributed to the students' lack of exposure to the target language and their poor attitude towards learning combined with a general disregard for foreign languages. It was only after enrolment in two graduate level linguistic courses, and the subsequent increase in the researcher's LA, that it became more apparent that there were other contributing factors worth researching (Williams, 2019).

These challenges in the foreign language classroom are not unique to Jamaica as similar observations have been made in Trinidad for example (Cooper, 2007). Nonetheless, this particular study only examined the Jamaican context at the tertiary level. In conducting this action research, the researcher was looking for strategies that could immediately assist the students.

Purpose of the Study

This study was created in order to find a compromise between teaching and learning styles that would improve students' target language productions. The study would be used to enumerate strategies that augment the students' target language productions.

Objectives and Questions

The objectives included enhancing students' awareness of a foreign language using CR and LA strategies and improving students' performance in the foreign language using the same strategies. In order to accomplish the objectives:

1. tertiary students' responses towards the use of both their native and second language in the foreign language classroom were explored,
2. their perception of their performance after the strategies were implemented were elicited,
3. and their responses and perceptions to their performance on specific tasks were correlated (Williams, 2019).

There were four research questions:

1. How do students generally respond to the use of JC in a foreign language classroom?
2. How can LA and CR strategies regarding JC be effectively incorporated into a foreign language classroom?
3. What are the students' perceptions of their performance after these strategies have been implemented?
4. What is the correlation between student responses, perceptions and performance?

Literature Review

In order to ascertain more information that could help alleviate some of the challenges faced by the students, the literature review included research on third language acquisition, foreign language teaching and learning methodologies, language use in the foreign language classroom, a theoretical exploration of consciousness and language awareness, some of the studies conducted on foreign language teaching and learning, and those that used CR and LA strategies.

As it pertains to third language acquisition, it is important to underscore the difference between second and foreign languages. Although both are non-native languages, a second language is the other language spoken regularly in a locale but, was not the first language to be acquired. On the other hand, the foreign language is any language other than the first and second languages that is not spoken regularly. In Jamaica, JC is the native language, JE is the second language, and every other language is considered a foreign or third language. Third language acquisition studies have inferred that several factors contribute to the cross-linguistic interference that usually occurs. These factors can include the learners' preference to use the L1 or L2, metalinguistic awareness levels, recency, and the order of acquisition (Carvalho & Bacelar da Silva, 2006). This is just one of the factors to consider in our Creole-speaking context where there is the Creole and the lexifier. However, it is important to note that although these are two distinct languages, the differences are not as stark, and therefore not as easily recognised. Even within the Creole-speaking context the language learning and language teaching methodologies are the same ones utilised in many foreign language classrooms. Nevertheless, for this study, the Communicative

Language Teaching Method (CLT) was utilised and will be briefly discussed next.

The CLT is more than just a method; it is an approach which focuses on achieving authentic communicative competence. This functional teaching philosophy is rooted in using language as a communicative tool to attain communicative competence in addition to grammatical competence (Lovelace, 2007; Omaggio Hadley, 2001). For this approach to teaching, the target/foreign language is the primary language used in the classroom. The students are encouraged to use it to think, negotiate meaning, express, and interpret (Lovelace, 2007). The fundamental tenets of CLT include comparisons and contrasts with the native language, culture, communities other than the classroom, connection across other disciplines, and curricula that are content related (Ramsay, 2007).

However, in the foreign language classroom, the target language is only one of three that interact in the Jamaican context. It is arguable that the target language should be the one most utilised especially since in the Jamaican classrooms foreign language learning occurs in isolation. The students are not afforded many opportunities to use or hear the language daily, outside of the classroom. Nevertheless, second language theories endorse using the target language as the medium of instruction (Lovelace, 2007). Frankly, it is almost impossible to:

> *…deny all learners even occasional explanation of linguistic structure. People who attempt such hard-line implicit methods will swiftly come to appreciate the fact that they require an inordinate amount of time and energy;…This also goes for a methodologically inspired refusal to use the native language in the classroom:…(Sharwood-Smith, 1981, p. 159).*

Theoretical posturing aside, regardless of how one categorises the Jamaican language situation, three languages interact in the foreign language classroom. "Therefore, for students that are already struggling to master a second language, alongside their native language, adding a third/foreign language only further compounds an already complex language situation" (Williams, 2019, p. 35). Ideally, JE should be used to facilitate learning in the foreign language classroom. Unfortunately, some students do not fully understand JE, therefore JC is used in its place. However, sometimes when JC enters the academic setting it remains, JE is not acquired, and the learning of a foreign language is even more farfetched. One way to approach the issue is through LA and CR. It is on the implementation of these types of strategies, in a creole context, on which this study focused. LA and CR are not easily defined concepts; however, one lens through which one might comprehend CR is the Noticing Hypothesis as posited in the 1990s by Richard Schmidt (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Jin, 2011).

Consciousness may be defined as any context necessitating that learners focus deliberately on, or pay attention to, the required information for learning (McKenzie, 2013). Therefore, any strategy that fosters the acquisition of information that students pay attention to is considered a CR strategy. According to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis there are four concepts of consciousness: intentionality, control, awareness, and attention. Although attention and awareness are indistinguishable at times, the study primarily focused on the concept of awareness (Jin, 2011; McKenzie, 2013; Schmidt, 1990; Schmidt, 1994; Schmidt, 2010).

Awareness is "an individual's subjective experience of a stimulus or cognitive content" (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011, p. 438).

Essentially, the things that persons pay attention to are the ones they become aware of. These constitute the very things that enter a learner's consciousness. Therefore, the more attention a learner gives a particular grammatical structure, the greater the likelihood of them being aware of, and understanding the structure (Schmidt, 2010). Notwithstanding there are some prescribed conditions that must exist for awareness to occur. These include a demonstrable change in behaviour that is secondary to particular experiences, documentation of the awareness of those particular experiences by the learner, and the ability to describe the encountered experiences (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Svalberg, 2007).

Language awareness in particular focuses on the form and function of the language being learned. It helps the learner to compare and contrast what is known, the native language, to what they are now learning, the target language. The learner also tests same using a series of hypotheses, and interlanguage, thereby increasing their sensitivity to the meaningful use of language (Williams, 2019). As such educators are encouraged to create more opportunities for authentic interactions to occur. Learning should be active and not passive, and affective factors should be considered alongside the cognitive ones. These affective factors include the students' perspectives on the LA strategies utilised and their implementation (Svalberg, 2007).

Therefore, concerning language, the main outcome for CR and LA strategies is an increased level of awareness of the functions of various grammatical and linguistic features in a given language. Schmidt also ascribes three degrees to consciousness as awareness: perception, focal awareness and understanding. Perception is defined as one's mental reflections or subliminal thinking on an

occurrence. Focal awareness or noticing is an apperceived input that involves subjective or private experiences which occur when a learner attends to the linguistic features that accompany the input. However, noticing is not the same as understanding because the former can occur without progressing to the latter. Understanding then is the highest order of awareness, and includes problem solving and meta-cognition (Jin, 2011; Schmidt, 1990). Further comprehension of awareness is fostered through understanding the difference between explicit and implicit knowledge (Robinson & Gass, 2012).

Explicit knowledge is the knowledge of which the learner is cognizant and can readily access. It is normally derived through formal instruction from focusing directly on language structures. Implicit knowledge is knowledge acquired without awareness that is used spontaneously. It is usually inaccessible to the learner's conscious memory and is deduced experientially (McKenzie, 2013; Robinson & Gass, 2012; Schmidt, 2001). When taking a test, learners often rely on their explicit knowledge but utilise their implicit knowledge for comprehension and production (Robinson & Gass, 2012). In our classrooms when the conversations continue unscripted, or during the dialogues amongst students or teachers to students, in answering open-ended questions, and when interacting, implicit knowledge is employed. However, in order for the changes in the classroom to be more widespread and affect the majority of the students, educational leaders must be trained to support teachers in facilitating students use of implicit knowledge as a means of addressing issues of diversity and social injustices that are present in the classroom. In so doing, the definition of "good" educational leadership is widened beyond the academic performance of the students (Smith, et al).

Lastly, a constructivist epistemology is used to underpin the use of CLT as the foreign language methodology along with LA and CR strategies given the Jamaican language situation. In particular Vygotskian constructivism, in which the teacher as most knowledgeable other (MKO) takes the students via social interaction across their zone of proximal development (ZPD), is the school of constructivism being followed. For this study, JC is used as the scaffolding that the MKO uses to move the students from the known [JC] across the ZPD to the unknown [JE and Spanish] (Schwieter, 2010; Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Although many studies have been conducted on foreign language teaching and learning generally, and in Jamaica, none have combined the implementation of LA and CR strategies at the tertiary level, in a foreign language classroom which incorporates JC. The teaching and learning methodologies have been studied, LA in high school students have been explored by Antwi (2015), and McKenzie (2013) has examined CR in a tertiary English language classroom.

Method

This study is a sequential explanatory mixed methods research carried out as an emancipatory and critical action research. As a sequential explanatory mixed methods research, the data were collected quantitatively first then qualitatively. In other words, after the data were collected quantitatively, further comprehension of the findings was afforded through qualitative methodologies (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2008; Morse, 2008; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). Additionally, a mixed methods research design increases the credibility and rigour of a study through triangulating the theory, data collection methods and during the data analysis

(Creswell et al., 2008; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 2008; Jick, 2008; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007; Morse, 2008). An emancipatory and critical action research genre was selected because it allows teachers to reflect on their own practice and test different ways of improving same (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Denscombe, 2003; Glesne, 1999; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). There are several research philosophies that influenced the decision to carry out this emancipatory and critical action research as a mixed methods study.

In eliciting the students' perspectives regarding the incorporation of JC through both CR and LA strategies, the researcher was influenced by constructivism which is concerned with constructing subjective meanings to individual experiences through qualitative research. The transformative worldview mixes research theory with politics and social justice for the marginalised persons in society. Through critical and participatory action research, this study endeavours to not only identify a problem, but to also change the lives of the participants or the context in which they work and live. From a pragmatist perspective, a mixed methods approach was taken as the means of finding a practical solution to the problem (Mertens, 2009).

For this study, first access was gained through sending proposals to the gatekeepers at the site of the study. Once site approval was granted, a copy of same was sent to the University through which the Master of Philosophy degree is being pursued. The study sample was purposive in that it was both typical and convenient because, these students represented the average student in a tertiary foreign language classroom, and they were students that I taught. At the time of the study, three sets of students were pursuing the same degree course. For the purposes of the study the

strategies were implemented in all three classes. Initially, the third set was reserved as a control group, but secondary to low participation at the appointed time, the third group had to be included (See Discussion for further detail).

Once the requisite approvals were obtained, a draft of the questionnaire was piloted with a different set of students to check for reliability using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Once found to be reliable [Cronbach's Alpha = 0.848, Confidence level = 5%], the questionnaire was utilised as a pre- and post-implementation tool for data collection. Prior to completing the pre-questionnaire and the other instruments (pre-test), informed consents were obtained from the participants.

The pre-questionnaire consisted of thirteen statements accompanied by a Likert scale with options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. There was also a pre-test which consisted of five sections that tested for the acquisition of various target language grammar features such as *ser* versus *estar*, and number and gender agreement of nouns, their adjectives and articles. Whereas the questionnaires were submitted anonymously, the students used their school identification number when completing the pre-test. Once the data were collected the answers from the questionnaire were given a numerical value and the raw data inputted into Microsoft Excel prior to SPSS analysis. The pre-tests were marked, the errors loosely categorised, and the marks awarded per section calculated along with the total marks. The marks were entered into Microsoft Excel as raw data for analysis using SPSS. The frequency of each error type was also entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis via SPSS. Prior to entering the data from the pre-test into Microsoft Excel, the test papers were assigned a simple numerical code.

After the pre-implementation data were collected, the implementation of LA and CR strategies begun through the action plans that were created for each of the units taught during that semester. Although these strategies were not new to the foreign language classroom, the incorporation of JC alongside these strategies was the distinguishing characteristic. The manner in which the strategies were implemented can be related to Gagné's (1992) nine events of instruction (see Discussion section). Some of the implemented strategies included the comparing and contrasting of JC and JE grammar to that of Spanish; using relatable scenarios; requiring the students to use more of the target language in class; using music to aid recollection of structures, or the lyrics of a song to demonstrate the language features in context; having general discourse about language and its use; grammar drills; repetition; and incorporating target language culture while articulating the similarities to, and differences from the native language. After each session, the students' responses to the strategies, particularly their response to the incorporation of JC in a formal setting, were documented in the researcher's journal. The focus group members were also asked to document their classmates' responses to the strategies.

The focus group initially consisted of eight members, four from each of the first two classes that were included in the study. The criteria for inclusion were male student with the lowest overall average, female student with the lowest overall average, male student with the highest overall average, and female student with the highest overall average. All the averages were determined from the students' performance on three course work assessments in addition to their final exam score from the previous semester.

The focus group interviews were conducted in one of the regular school classrooms during the same period of the implementation of the strategies. For the duration of the interviews, which lasted for thirty minutes to an hour, the classroom was rearranged allowing the focus group members and researcher to sit in a circle. The interviews were semi-structured and included a general discussion of language use but, were primarily employed to ascertain the rationale for their responses to the questionnaire. The interviews also elicited the strategies that the students found most helpful and others they suggested for future use to aid them in the acquisition of the target language. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality the group members consented a second time prior to being interviewed, and they were asked to choose their own aliases for use during the interview process. There were four interviews in total that were videotaped prior to being transcribed. The transcripts were imported into the QDA Miner software for coding. Some of the coding frequencies were calculated and represented graphically using the same QDA Miner software (See the Results section).

The focus group members were also required to maintain journals in which they were instructed to document their classmates' responses to the strategies being utilised. The materials were provided by the researcher, and the students used their aliases to identify their journals. In addition to documenting their observations, anything else regarding the implementation of strategies, suggestions for more or other useful strategies, and information regarding language use could also be included. The journal entries were photocopied and relabelled using the alias and a number for each of the entries assigned for each focus group member. The photocopies were scanned and imported into QDA Miner. However, the scanned PDF versions of the journal entry were not

readable in QDA Miner therefore these entries, along with the researcher journal entries, had to be coded manually. A WhatsApp group was formed by the researcher to facilitate communication to and amongst the focus group members during the study. During the analysis of the results it was utilised to gather further qualitative data particularly for answering question three.

Once the implementation phase was complete, the post-implementation tools were administered. These involved the use of the same questionnaire and test that were previously completed by the students. Again, the students submitted the questionnaires anonymously but used their school identification number on the post-test. The same data collection, processing, and analysis procedures were followed. The student identification numbers were used to match the pre- and post-tests to maintain congruence with the coding for correlation analysis. Using SPSS, a two tailed paired sample t-test was performed on the raw data for both the pre- and post-questionnaires and the pre- and post-tests; the Pearson correlation value was noted. Each of the four questions were answered both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results

The preliminary findings of this ongoing study are enumerated below for each of the four research questions that is guiding the study.

Question 1: The first research question – How do students generally respond to the use of JC in a foreign language classroom? – received a mixed response both quantitatively and qualitatively. Some students responded positively, others responded negatively, and in the focus group there was one student who was indifferent.

The data sources for this question included the students' responses on the questionnaire and the focus group. As it pertains to the questionnaires, recall that the answers were submitted anonymously therefore there is no direct correlation for the responses. As such the mean response to each question was noted prior to, and after the implementation of the strategies along with the significance of the responses.

There were approximately five questions on the questionnaire that were utilised either directly or indirectly to ascertain the students' responses about the use of JC in the classroom. The students had mixed responses prior to and after the strategies were implemented. Some of the responses did not change after the strategies were implemented. However, of note is the change in response to the statement about their performance in the language-based subjects. Initially the students did not think that knowing more about JC would assist them in that area, but after experiencing its use in the classroom the majority of the participants agreed with the statement.

The mixed responses persisted in the opinions provided during the interviewing of the focus group. Students oscillated between a positive and a negative opinion citing when the use of JC was acceptable, and when it was not. For some, JC should be used when the concepts being taught were difficult and were not being grasped using alternative methods. In addition, some focus group members suggested that knowing more about the structure of JC would "make it easier to understand the comparisons between languages, having properly grasped the structure and rules for JC" (Williams, 2019, p. 113).

My own observations of their responses to the use of JC were documented in a journal. Initially the students were not sure how to respond to the use of JC in the classroom. Their reaction changed from shock that a teacher would engage them on this level in a formal setting, to glee once they were able to make the appropriate connections. Overall one could say that a majority of students responded positively once they recognised how JC could be used in the classroom.

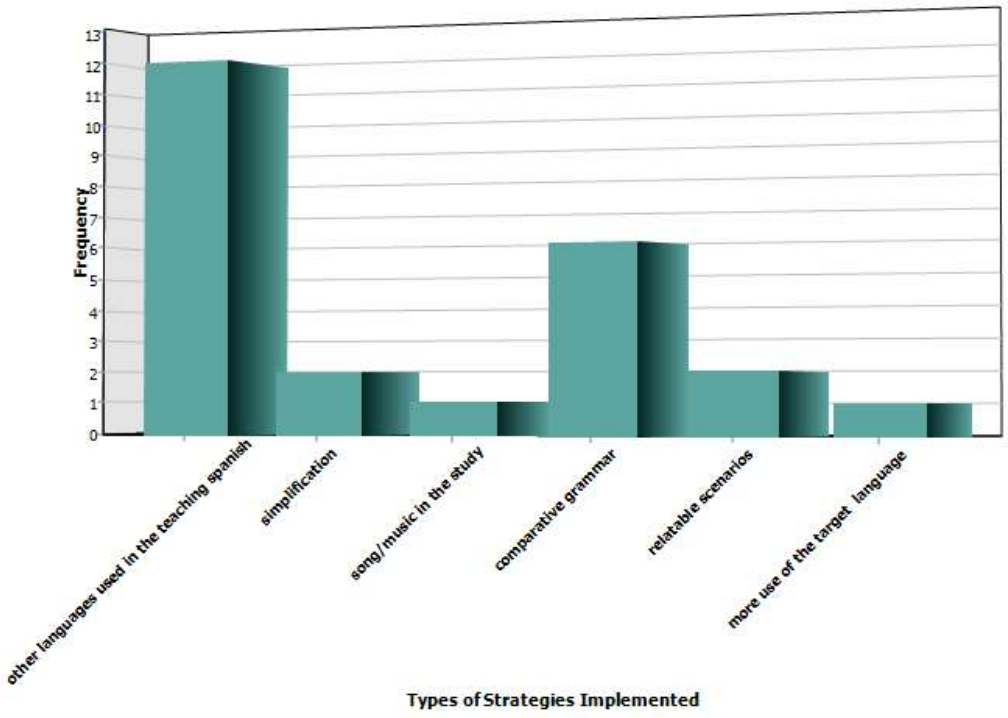
Question 2: The second question – How can LA and CR strategies regarding JC be effectively incorporated into a foreign language classroom? – was used to elicit how any lecturer, given what is known about these strategies can tailor that knowledge to meet the needs of their classroom. Again, for this question the data were taken from the students' responses on the questionnaires and in the focus group. From the questionnaires, we find that most students agree to the use of various types of strategies that incorporate aspects of Jamaican culture and uses JC in the classroom. Most of the participants were initially uncertain of how having a textbook that was more culturally relevant would benefit them; however, once they saw examples of how the culture could be used as tool for comparison and contrast, the modal response changed from *not sure* to *agree*.

During the interviews and using the focus group journal entries the students also suggested some of the strategies they found helpful during the study, and those they wanted to see incorporated. The focus group members, in addition to listing the strategies they found helpful, explained why those strategies were efficient. Most of these strategies could be classified as the manner in which content was presented [cultural elements such as song and music especially in

relatable scenarios], and the guidance they expected from the teacher [simplification and explanation, the use of other languages in teaching Spanish and comparative grammar] (Gagné, 1992). The frequency with which each of these strategies were mentioned is represented graphically in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.

The strategies implemented in the study identified as helpful by the students and the frequency with which they were mentioned.

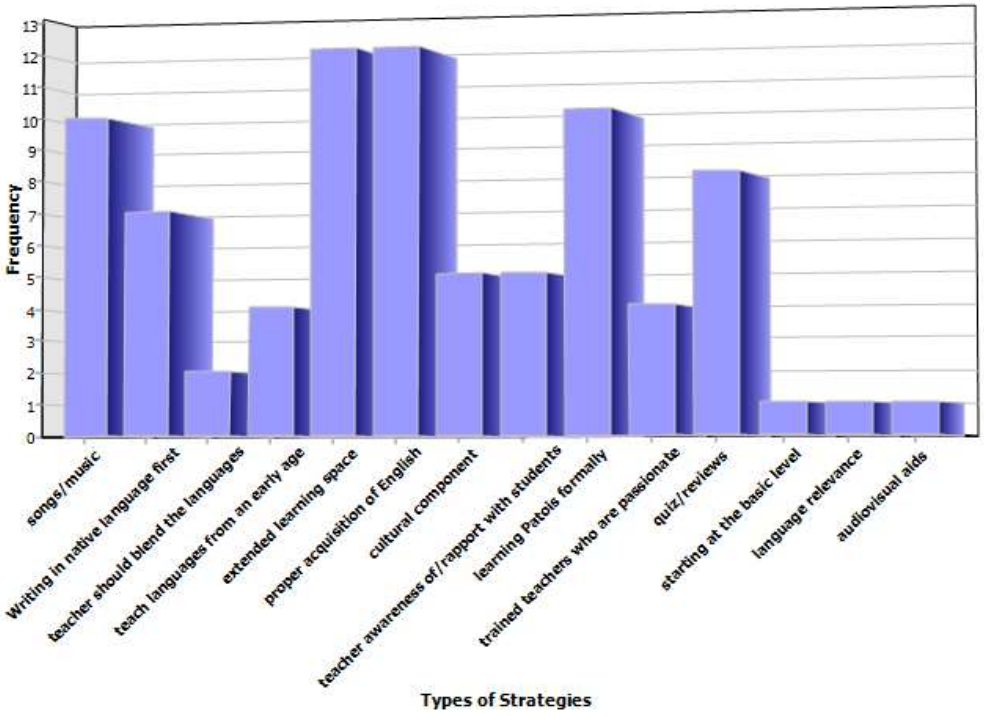


Note. Reprinted from "Language awareness in a tertiary level Creole-speaking foreign language classroom" by G. Williams, 2019, UWI Thesis.

Furthermore, the students suggested strategies they deemed important along with the rationale for their use in a foreign language classroom. The frequency with which the strategies were mentioned is depicted using figure 2. These strategies may be categorised as the manner in which content is presented [incorporating cultural elements such as song, music, games; using various means to present the same content via audio-visual aids], ones that provided learning guidance [formally learning JC; properly acquiring JE; starting the language teaching at an early age; increasing the use of target language and creation of extended learning spaces], and those that elicit and assess performance [frequently administering quizzes and conducting reviews] (Gagné, 1992). Some of the suggestions were for the teachers that were being employed. The students wanted teachers who are properly trained for, and passionate about their job in addition to a willingness to cultivating a good rapport with their students. The suggestions for these extended learning spaces, as made by the students, included having a Spanish club and planning events that allow the students to socialise with native speakers (Williams, 2019).

Figure 2.

The strategies suggested by the students for implementation, and the frequency with which they were mentioned.



Note. Reprinted from "Language awareness in a tertiary level Creole-speaking foreign language classroom" by G. Williams, 2019, UWI Thesis.

From the researcher's perspective, articulating how to implement the strategies was more difficult than anticipated. However, using action plans were helpful in guiding the in-class process. Additionally, certain strategies were employed more frequently than others because these seemed to be the most helpful:

comparison and contrast of grammatical structures, repetition, music, games, and the use of mnemonics. What I have also learned during the process is that the strategies work best when used in combination with each other, not in isolation.

Question 3: The third question – What are the students' perceptions of their performance after these strategies have been implemented? – was asked to ascertain what the students' opinions of their own performances were and if that opinion was subject to change after employing an intervention. The data for this question were taken from the questionnaires and the focus group. According to the questionnaire results the only change in perception after the intervention pertained to their performance in language-based subjects. Initially, the students thought that increasing their LA would not affect their performance but, after those strategies were implemented, they felt otherwise.

Some students, without using the terms LA or CR, explicitly stated that their knowledge and understanding of the target language was better after the strategies were implemented. One student mentioned being made "more aware" and found the techniques very helpful. Since there was no question that directly sought out the students' opinion, a follow up question was asked using the WhatsApp group. The students were asked "What did you think about your performance in Spanish after the strategies were implemented in the second semester?" The responses were mixed; some students said their performance remained unaffected by the strategies and others said that their performance improved. None stated that their performance worsened. One could assume then, that their perception of their performance either remained the same or improved after the strategies were implemented.

Question 4: The fourth question is, What is the correlation between student response, perceptions and performance? There is a general assumption that a person's attitude about learning a language correlates to their competence in that language and their ability to perform tasks using said language. Quantitative data for this question were taken from the two-tailed paired sample t-test conducted using SPSS. For each of the five sections on the test, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was less than 1 but greater than 0. This is indicative of a positive correlation between the strategies implemented and the students' performance on the prescribed tasks. However, where p = 0.05, the values were not significant. Regarding the total marks obtained on the test the value of the Pearson correlation was 0.752. Again, the number was not significant where p = 0.05. For three of the five sections on the test the descriptive statistics shows that there was an increase in the modal grade obtained for that section. For the other two sections, the modal mark obtained remained the same. In other words, there were some positive changes notable regarding the students' performance in some areas of the prescribed tasks.

There was also correlation testing done for the pre-questionnaire and the pre-test compared to the post-questionnaire and the post-test. There was an insignificant increase in the Pearson correlation value from 0.055 to 0.290 (where p = 0.05). As documented in the researcher journal initially, most students were able to recall the material on the day they were initially taught. During the next class session most, students were unable to recall the objectives previously taught, and those who did, were unable to do so with full accuracy. Although not formally analysed, when compared, the performance on the final examinations were slightly

improved for most students in comparison to the similarly structured mid-module test.

Discussion

As demonstrated in the findings, JC can be used as the bridge or a scaffolding to assist students move across their own ZPD from the known [JC] to the unknown [JE and Spanish, or another foreign language] (Vygotsky, 1978). Although students daily used JC, they were using it without an awareness of what they were really doing and without the realisation that JC is a language. This confirms what was found in the exploratory study about the LA in high school students (Antwi, 2015). The mixed responses to the incorporation of JC in an academic setting mimics the general perspective of Jamaicans towards its use although other studies suggest that it would in fact be beneficial (Bryan, 2010; Carpenter, Devonish, & Coore, 2007).

Once the students were made aware of what constitutes a language, they realised that JC met those criteria and they became more open to its incorporation in a classroom setting as a part of the LA and CR strategies. Notwithstanding, the incorporation of JC is not a stand-alone strategy. It has to be done in tandem with other LA and CR strategies. Using action plans the strategies were implemented in accordance with Gagné's (1992) nine events of instruction as it pertains to instructional design. Using CLT as the foreign language approach did afford flexibility to implement the relevant strategies while keeping the students at the centre of the learning process (Lovelace, 2007; Overby, 2011). However, when the students understood the objectives, although they at times would get discouraged, their motivation increased and the perceptions of their

own performance improved. This improved perception seemed to correlate positively with their actual performance even though the improvements were not drastic. This particular finding is similar to what McKenzie (2013) found when she tried to find out CR strategies that would aid the production of grammatically correct JE sentences in the written discourses of first year tertiary students.

Regardless of their perceptions about their proficiency in JE all the students in the focus group still produced written journal entries that had numerous grammatical errors evidencing that there is more work required to improve their competence. The struggle to express themselves in JE was also very apparent during the interview sessions. They would often switch to JC or use ungrammatical JE to compensate. Notwithstanding, there were some minimal improvements noted for which the Pearson correlation value was not significant. These findings are also similar to those obtained by McKenzie (2013).

Regarding the Pearson correlation values not being significant where $p = 0.05$, there are several plausible reasons. Firstly, there was a difference between the number of participants who completed the pre- and post-instruments. Although the students were initially very excited to participate in a study on the pre-planned date for the administering of the test and questionnaire, there was reluctance. Various reasons were offered: some students claimed they forgot, and others cited the lack of compensation. At the predesignated time for the administering of the post-instruments most students were absent. The post-instruments were administered closer to the end of the regular semester, and it is commonly observed that general class attendance tends to dwindle at this time of the year. In addition, regarding the completion of the test, some students left as much as

fifty percent of the test blank. This could have been secondary to not realising there was a second page in spite of a verbal indication. Or it could have been that the students did not know how to answer the question type and left the section blank. Perhaps because it was not a "real test" they did not think it necessary to give their best efforts even though they were asked to do that (Williams, 2019).

A second reason might be the time period over which the implementation occurred, which is the same as the time span between the administering of the pre- and post-instruments. This time frame was approximately three months, the equivalent of one academic semester, for some. Perhaps if the strategies were implemented for a longer timeframe the students would be better helped. This particular reason was cited by McKenzie (2013) as one reason there was no dramatic improvement.

Thirdly, it became increasingly apparent that the students really did not comprehend JE. During the interviews at times the questions would have to be explained several times, particularly when reviewing the statements on the questionnaire. The explanations were often followed by "a dat yu did mean miss?" Sometimes the responses would even change after they better understood what was required. Further evidence of the lacking in comprehension of JE was seen in the journal entries. Some of the focus group members did not follow the instructions given for the journal entry data. It can then be assumed that some of the responses to the questionnaire statements might in verity be inaccurate because of a misunderstanding of what was required. It is important therefore, that those tasked with educating the future citizens of our nation, recognize the barriers that present themselves in the language classroom and devise strategies that are socially just to assist our students to fully acquire Jamaican

English and the foreign languages while recognizing the implicit knowledge they carry from their varied experiences.

Conclusion

In summary, there are at least three main conclusions that can be offered from these preliminary findings. Firstly, once the students' LA and knowledge about language increases there will be an increase in their overall academic performance especially in areas that rely heavily on language. However, the timeframe during which the LA strategies are incorporated is related to the level of improvement that will be attained. Secondly, the affective filter was lowered through a positive change in the students' perception of JC and their performance. When the affective filter is low, it engenders learning because the students are more comfortable. Thirdly, more research is still required in this area to further unpack issues present in the language classroom.

Therefore, the recommendations for future studies can be categorised in three ways. Firstly, there is still a need to further understand and test how to implement LA and CR strategies, especially in a standardised manner that is tailored to our Creole-speaking context. The timeframe during which the strategies are implemented should be increased. Perhaps the strategies can be implemented starting at the primary and secondary levels of education, especially where the students are being introduced to JE grammatical structures and concepts. Secondly, the increasing of LA should extend to the teachers as well. As such, those employed to teach language should be afforded training that would increase their Teacher Language Awareness (TLA) in addition to their proficiency in the language. Teachers should also be mandated to continue their

training as is required of other professions as well as conduct research to augment their practices and instructional delivery. TLA should be an integral part of any educational leader's plan to transform their institution. Additionally, social justice in education requires that every student receive quality education and training. Therefore, for the teachers to provide this quality education for their students, they too must receive quality training.

Lastly, the final recommendation is secondary to one of the strategies the students gave to improve their acquisition of language. LA involves learning about the forms, features and functions of languages. As such, the creation of [more] extended learning spaces in which the students can use the target language outside of the classroom is important. Once the interest in the target language is cultivated, it can be maintained by demonstrating the language relevance and through relatable immersion experiences. Although some institutions might have language clubs and celebrate language days, those do not exist at the research site. The students who participated in the focus group were adamant that in addition to partial and full immersion trips, the establishing of clubs and language days would be integral to them continuing to use the language even after meeting their academic requirements.

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About the author

Gaye-Leon Williams is a lecturer at the Caribbean Maritime University where she also serves as Course Coordinator for the introductory Spanish courses. She graduated from Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia with a BA with Honours in Biology and Spanish. She is a member of the Association of Graduate Researchers in Education (AGRE) and is pursuing her MPhil at the UWI Mona.

Email: gayeleon2@gmail.com

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Student-centred Learning in Higher Education: Implications for the Jamaican Workplace

Stephen R. Wallder & Nardia J. Brown

University of Technology, Kingston, Jamaica

Abstract

This paper explores the experience, impression and understanding of student centred learning by 44 business education students at a university in Jamaica. The study sought to establish whether such a learning approach enhances the competencies of students in accord with the demands made by employers for critical employee characteristics in the 21st century workplace, whilst also enhancing learning outcomes in students' current studies. The research reported here was informed through two studies, using complementary methodologies in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The first study utilised a survey instrument, while the second employed focus groups. The findings revealed that students generally held positive views of student centred learning and that they believed it enhanced their learning experience in their current studies. However, they were not clear as to whether the approach was being utilised fully and/or effectively and whether current resources were adequate to support the effective implementation and maintenance of such an approach. Findings further revealed that many of the competencies developed through the practise of student centred learning are complimentary to not only desirable, but indeed, identified characteristics that the 21st century worker should be

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ideally equipped with, according to the International Labour Organisation (Brewer, 2013). These characteristics also being in accord with the demands of employers in Jamaica. This latter point being affirmed by a senior figure from the Jamaica Employers' Federation through a one-on-one interview. The importance of "gearing" such learning at the tertiary level to the demands of employers for well prepared and effective employees that complement and indeed enhance the workplace is recognised as a national imperative, and thus policy, as developed through educational leadership should be in accord. This research posits that the utilisation of student centred learning will not only benefit learning at the tertiary level, it will also better prepare graduates for the workplace.

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Introduction

The performance, productivity and effectiveness of the Jamaican workforce continues to be at the centre of discussions surrounding the country's historically woeful levels of economic development (USAID, Jamaica Country Assistance Strategy, 2009; Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2019). Insipid levels of economic growth in Jamaica have remained stubbornly slothful in the 57 years since independence, with gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates averaging approximately 0.5% per annum (Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2016). Successive governments have continuously sought to address this as a central policy theme in their political strategising, most recently in referencing such weak growth through a vision of a "partnership for prosperity" (Jamaica Information Service, 2016)

thereby asserting the intent to enhance human capital development in the interest of improving economic growth levels.

A significant challenge for the Jamaican economy is to boost the human capital endowments of the labour force, equipping it with the knowledge and skills necessary to contribute to improved levels of employee productivity, economic growth, social development and international competitiveness. The Training and Workforce Sector Development Plan (Training, and Workforce Development Task Force, Jamaica, 2009) identifies competencies (consistent with the identified International Labour Organisation core work skills (Brewer, 2013), that the Jamaican workforce should possess so as to enhance economic growth and global competitiveness, crucially, and in tandem with Vision 2030 (Government of Jamaica/Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2009), the country's blueprint for making "Jamaica, the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business" (p. vi). In acknowledgment of this the Government of Jamaica has prioritised funding in higher education and workforce development with the intention of driving the stock of human capital to higher levels so that this may support the drive for economic growth.

Through education, escalation of future productivity and efficiency of workers is possible by enhancing the level and thus quality of the cognitive stock of economically productive individuals (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). Better educated individuals are likely to enhance levels of productivity and creativity, which in turn, amongst other things, can stimulate technological progress. In specifically referencing developing countries, Lall and Kraemer-Mbula (2005), reflect that such countries cannot simply import and

rely upon technologies without investing in the enhancement of workforce 'capabilities' alongside, so as to enhance, adapt and improve existing technologies. These capabilities (Sen, 1999) involve acquiring new skills and knowledge that, properly utilised will propel future growth and development.

An advanced level of education supports more competitive participation in the global economy. Furthermore, higher skilled persons have better opportunities to earn higher wages, for economies to have lower unemployment rates, higher mobility and improved employment opportunities than thus pervade the developing economy. Reformulation of human capital thinking in recent times has stressed the significance of education and training as a key to participation in the "new" global economy and as has already been referenced, such measures of a country's development and performance are regularly reported upon both nationally and supranationally through indices, such as those produced by the United Nations, World Bank, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Statistical Institute for Jamaica (Statin) (The World Bank, 2017; Statistical Institute of Jamaica, 2019). Foray and Lundvall (1996) state, that the overall economic performance of the OECD countries is increasingly more directly based upon their knowledge stock and their learning capabilities" (p.21).

According to the Training and Workforce Development Sector Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica (2009), Jamaica has yet to attain optimisation in its competitiveness based upon its workforce profiles. The task force indicates features of the ideal Jamaican worker, one who should possess basic educational foundation skills such as

mathematics and English language, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and high level interpersonal skills. In targeting outcomes for the education system, a priority is, to underpin a learning environment that is safe, non-violent, drug free, inclusive and respectful. Through the development of such skills, education is supporting the aforementioned policy, which clearly advances the need for Jamaica to focus on the training and development of traditional academic and technical skills, in addition to skills that enable an individual to possess attributes such as initiative, problem solving skills, communication, and team spirit (Jamaica Gleaner, 2014). These, not only are beneficial and indeed critical in an economic context, but also in Jamaica's drive to deliver a more just and socially inclusive society that promotes opportunities across its own divide. As such, employees possessing these aforementioned skills are likely to deliver increased productivity, thereby benefiting the Jamaican society (Government of Jamaica/Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2009).

Deficiencies in the level and quality of employability skills, as sought in the 21st century worker are regularly commented upon, both in the media and in academia (Jamaica Gleaner, 2017; Jamaica Observer, 2017), and this is not limited to the Jamaican context. Hargis (2011), noted that students in the state of Kentucky, United States, lacked proficiency in 21st century soft skills (employability skills). Proficiency levels were inconsistent with those soft skills employers required. In investigating common soft skills that employers sought in the state, Hargis (2011) found that many students lacked these skills. Pondering such discrepancies between

what employers require and what educational institutions provide is the subject of regular academic discourse (Abraham & Karns, 2009).

In a review of the impact of competency-based training upon the acquisition of appropriate employability skills globally, including for Jamaica, Boahin and Hofman (2013) found that employers sought "creativity, ICT skills, communication, problem solving, organisational skills, proactivity, teamwork, and adaptability" (p. 394). Thereby reinforcing the need for Jamaica, through the Training and Workforce Development Sector Plan: Vision 2030 Jamaica (2009), to continue to advance policies (and practice) toward enhancing workforce employability skills. This being imperative for the delivery and enhancement of competitive advantage. In lamenting such deficiencies, a Jamaica Employers' Federation leader (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009), pointed to this not only being an employability issue, but one that has wider consequences as these deficiencies become embedded, thereby becoming social issues.

The forgoing paragraphs clearly point to the need for a significant response from education institutions to address such identified deficiencies in critical employability skills. The importance of education and knowledge as key drivers, so as to advance the development of human capital for economic development is now widely recognised, demanding and gaining eminence through governmental policy (Government of Jamaica/Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2009) and thus the emphasis placed upon the relationship between elevating educational attainment and the ensuing competencies of the workforce must be responded to. In such a vein, Abraham and Karns (2009), in conducting a survey of what businesses consider as successful attributes of successful managers,

pointed to the need for educational leaders to ensure that curricula are aligned with business desires. A variety of teaching and learning strategies may be advanced to support such a response, one such approach being student centred learning. Such approaches have increased in this century and are practiced across the Jamaican education sector, alongside which, both in Jamaica and worldwide, the development and growth of vocationally based, competency based approaches to learning has also developed (UNESCO, 2012). In Jamaica, this advancement has been driven through the incorporation of competency based education in the secondary sector (Ministry of Education, 2014; Jamaica Information Service, 2014), building upon the approach as lead in the tertiary sector. This approach supports substantively the use of student centred learning to more effectively advance such learning strategies, as learners pursue vocational qualifications, such as the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ).

Student Centred Learning

Student centred learning has for many years held significant interest amongst educators across all sectors of education, with research into policy and practice surrounding the use of student centred approaches continuing to evolve. However, an initial issue when pondering this approach in teaching and learning is that of definition. What really does student centred learning encompass? As Greener (2015), Tangney (2013), Paris and Combs, (2006), amongst others acknowledge, there exists disagreement and divergence in what student centred learning actually is. This inability to define exactly what is meant by student centred learning has thus led to

variations to the central thinking in studying this learning approach, with a number of adaptations, pseudonyms and derivatives now present and thus this paper utilises term variations within the theme to reflect this (e.g. active learning, learner centred, problem based learning). Whilst at times this hinders comparisons, it does point to a central tendency, that is, to adjust teaching activities in ways that can enhance student learning (Brown Wright, 2011; Gleason et al., 2011; Reddan, McNally, & Chipperfield, 2016). In furthering one's understanding of the approach, researchers and practitioners highlight differing dimensions within the learning and teaching processes. Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) extensively explore definitions and features of what student centred learning embraces and how students in tertiary education perceive the approach, particularly as contrasted with traditional teaching methods. Significantly, it is in investigating the benefits of a student centred approach that the clear link to critical employability skills is harnessed. Features that are regularly expounded upon in relation to student centred learning include active and creative learning activities (Lumpkin & Achen, 2015), continuous facilitator/learner dialogue and feedback with balanced learning responsibilities, formative assessment, respect, equity, recognised and agreed outcomes, empowerment and accountability in learning. Russell, Comello, and Lee Wright (2007), point to student centred learning strategies shifting the focus of activity from the teacher to the learner; this approach being particularly relevant to tertiary and professional education, as it nurtures motivation and an incentive to learn. Rather than instructing, facilitators guide students, allowing learners to actively participate in deciding what to learn, how they learn and

how they evaluate what is learnt (Weimer, 2002); meaning that learners have more responsibility and ownership of their learning.

Salter, Pang and Sharma (2009), guided faculty in redesigning courses giving students and facilitators new roles in which students would be more actively engaged and not just be lectured to by facilitators. Increased reliance and emphasis was placed upon active rather than passive learning. Student centred approaches in content delivery allow students the opportunity to manage their learning as they are required to take responsibility for their learning through being actively involved in the learning process rather than simply passively receiving information through a lecture (Slunt & Giancarlo, 2004). Weimer (2002) emphasised deeper learning and understanding, whereby the teacher changes from the "sage on the stage" to the "guide on the side" viewing students not as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge but as explorers being guided along their intellectual and developmental journey. Weimer (2002) further points to increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student, supported by an increased sense of autonomy. This increased interdependence between facilitator and learner is emphasised by Tärnvik (2007), when contrasting whether the learner participates completely dependently or independently. Inherent within the approach is the belief that students should be consulted about the learning and teaching process, that for effective learning to be facilitated it is desirable to move toward a model in which students are actively engaged in the learning process, that it is student, rather than facilitator (teacher) centred.

Research by Schaefer and Zygmont (2003), suggests that an instructor centred environment promotes "dependent learning" (p.

238), as opposed to the independent learning that Tärnvik (2007) identified. Kemm and Dantas (2007) found that the use of information technology, including e-learning in a tertiary level programme accommodated many learning styles and enhanced student interest and engagement, resulting in better performance on written reports and examinations. In exemplifying the benefit of using information technologies in the classroom, Lu, Ma, Turner and Huang (2007) in an assessment of the impact of using wireless internet in student centred learning interactions, acknowledged favourable impacts upon pedagogical, technological, and cultural learning.

The student centred approach, therefore, differs quite profoundly from more traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Furthermore, differences in relation to what occurs in the learning environment are not the only differences. In determining the approach to learning, philosophically, student centred learning differs as it identifies as a constructivist epistemology, as opposed to traditional learning, which is commonly epistemologically positivist. The learning environment, context and the knowledge sought are intrinsically linked, participants in the learning determine its outcome and it is more experiential in its conduct, with the solving of authentic problems providing evidence of understanding, whilst promoting a connection between the classroom and "real world" problems (Gleason et al., 2011; Van Amburgh, Devlin, Kirwin, & Qualters, 2007).

Of note is the variance between what is stated as undertaken and what actually happens in learning interactions. Institutions or educators will cite the claim that they practice student centred

learning, whether it be for quality reasons, accreditation or personal advancement etc., when quite the contrary is the reality (Biggs, 1999). Further, Moore (2009), demonstrated that differences existed between facilitators in interpretation and application of problem based learning, in part due to facilitators' personal pedagogical beliefs and values; pointing thus to the need for consistency in facilitation through agreement, thereby reducing the void between rhetoric and reality in this approach.

Ultimately, the key direct beneficiaries of this approach are crucial. How learners understand, perceive, experience and benefit from student centred learning will decide its future as a pedagogical approach to learning. Its likely positive growth is signalled through much of the literature reviewed. With increasing access for students into higher education (Jamaica Information Service, 2018), academic institutions have and will continue to require adjustments to pedagogical approaches as such institutions look to offer learning that leads students to graduation and onwards to workplace and career success. Equipping graduates with identified critical employability skills (Brewer, 2013) will become all the more so, an imperative, as the workplace continues to increase its demand for ever more knowledgeable and work ready graduates into their organisations. Hence, as Jamaica continues to chart its development path in the global economy of the 21st century, further widening participation in higher education in the Jamaican context is necessary so as to meet country aspirations as identified through Vision 2030 (Government of Jamaica/Planning Institute of Jamaica, 2009). Consequently, an imperative for educational leadership will be to advance successful pedagogical approaches to support this vision for

tertiary academic institutions, as they seek to provide successful, relevant and beneficial learning outcomes in programme delivery.

Purpose of the Study

This paper explores students' experience of student centred learning, and its significance to education and the workplace. The study examined to what extent students understand the concepts of student centred learning and their experience of this learning approach in their studies. Students also give their impression of whether student centred learning enhances their quality of learning in their programme of study. Finally, in exploring the features that make up student centred learning, the study sought to establish whether such a learning approach enhances the competencies of students in accord with the demands made by employers for critical employability skills in the 21st century workplace.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of student understanding of student centred learning and its benefits?
2. Does student centred learning assist in enhancing the quality of learning outcomes in a business education course in a tertiary institution in Jamaica?
3. Does student centred learning enhance the knowledge and skills development of students in line with the attributes sought by the Jamaican workplace? *(this includes critical thinking, initiative, creativity, collaboration, communication, media and*

technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, productivity and social skills)

Methodology

The study was conducted using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions than either method by itself (Creswell, 2012). This integration, widely practised in research, likely delivers a more robust and corroborative outcome. A three-stage data collection approach was employed to gather data for the study. In the first phase, data were collected using a survey instrument, see appendix 1. The purpose of the survey was to gather data about the student centred learning experiences of the participants in the study. The participants are student teachers from the Faculty of Education and Liberal Studies, at the University of Technology, Jamaica. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

The survey was administered with two separate groups of students, totalling 44 full-time business education students completing their bachelor's degree in education. As student teachers, the participants were exposed to student centred learning approaches through their teacher education training. Therefore, in completing the survey, as they were aware of the concepts and issues being investigated, this knowledge, complemented and enhanced the richness of the research dialogue.

In the second phase, focus group sessions were held to gather data about the students' understanding of student centred learning and their experience of this approach, see appendix 2. Two separate focus group sessions were held, consisting of 11 participants in one group and 20 in another; thus, a total of 31 students participated in the focus group exercise. The participants in these focus groups were also selected using purposeful sampling.

In the final stage of the data collection process, an interview was conducted with the Chief Executive Officer of the Jamaica Employers' Federation (JEF) to gather information in reference to critical employability/soft skills that employers in Jamaica are seeking when graduates enter the workplace and as to whether these were present or not. The interview was a one-on-one interview, in which the researcher asked questions and recorded the responses (Creswell, 2012). The interviewee was selected based upon her experience and knowledge of the required skills being sought by Jamaican employers, as members of the federation.

The approach and design of this study purposively sampled each of the key population sets from which data were sought. These were student teachers with knowledge and experience of student centred learning and workplace representation that intimately understood, and had knowledge of what critical workplace skills Jamaican employers are seeking so as to enhance productivity and performance.

Data Analysis

The data were collated and entered into Google forms, then imported into Microsoft Excel for additional analysis. Descriptive

statistics were used to analyse the data and presented the participants' responses to the survey and focus group items, in order to address the research questions. Descriptive statistics describes and summarises the data (Fallon, 2016); this includes outlining the frequency, percentages, and measures of central tendency in this study. Microsoft Excel was used to organise the data and create the charts necessary to depict the results. This tool was adequate to aid in analysing the results as it allowed the researchers to sort information, analyse patterns and also perform calculations.

The data collected were processed and the responses that have common themes were identified and grouped together under the different research questions that guided the study. Inferences were drawn from the data collected and interpretation of the data presented was used to establish the actual perceptions of the participants.

The questionnaire responses were analysed using the steps for analysing qualitative data as outlined by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003). These steps entail reading over the transcribed data, analysing participants' responses, arranging the information in categories and sub-categories, identify patterns and connections between categories and themes, then finally interpretation of the data by attaching meaning and significance to the analysis (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Details of the data collection for each research question and the data analysis can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1.

Research questions, method of data collection and analysis

Research Question	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis
1. What is the level of student understanding of student centred learning and its benefits?	• Focus group (questions 3 – 5)	Descriptive Analysis
2. Does student centred learning assist in enhancing the quality of learning outcomes in a business education course in a tertiary institution in Jamaica?	• Survey (item 6 – 13)	Descriptive Analysis
3. Does student centred learning enhance the knowledge and skills development of students in line with the attributes sought by the Jamaican workplace? *(this includes critical thinking, initiative, creativity, collaboration, communication, media and technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, productivity and social skills)*	• Focus group, (questions 6a - 6d and question 7) • Interview	Descriptive Analysis One-on-one interview

Results

The survey was structured in a manner which enabled the researchers to gather information about the students' experience of student centred learning and their understanding of the features of student centred learning. A total of 44 participants responded to the questions posed, of which 75% were female and 25% male. Majority

of the respondents originate from rural areas of Jamaica (58%), with the remaining 42% from urban areas. All participants surveyed were completing a bachelor's degree in education.

The purpose of the survey was to understand the students' experience of student centred learning in their studies. Therefore, the data were collected and presented in a manner which reflects the features of student centred learning approach. These features include students' learning experience, feedback, assessment, teacher/student interactions, responsibility and accountability, motivation, and teaching and learning processes (Lea, Stephenson, & Troy, 2003). Data collected from the second phase of the study were integrated through these features.

The final stage of the data collection process confirmed the increasing emphasis by employers for the identified critical employability skills (Brewer, 2013) to be more prevalent amongst the Jamaican workforce so as to enhance its effectiveness. This is expounded upon in discussion.

Students Learning Experience. Respondents overwhelmingly (83%) recognised their learning experience as diverse, creative, practical and interactive. This being consistent with recognised features of student centred learning, whilst also supporting the tenets of other researches (Cannon & Newbie, 2000; Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003; Chamorro-Premuzic, Furnham & Lewis, 2007), which assert that student centred learning emphasises interaction and activity in learning. Significantly, focus groups pointedly indicated an enhanced learning experience with the integrated use of smartphones into learning activities. The remaining 17% of the respondents stated that their experience was however, didactic,

regurgitative and repetitive; features more commonly associated with traditional, conventional teaching approaches.

Feedback. Feedback and guidance are very important elements of student centred learning (McCabe & O'Connor, 2014; Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003). The participants were asked about the frequency of feedback received from lecturers. The results indicated that 51% received feedback periodically, 47% received feedback continuously, 21% received summatively, and only 7% received no feedback at all. However, in a student centred learning approach, feedback should be from both students and teachers as opposed to conventional methods where feedback is limited and is only delivered by the teacher (Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003).

Assessment. When asked about assessment, the participants outlined that they received formative and summative assessment - 98% responded that they received formative assessment and 71% received summative assessment. The respondents therefore received a combination of both formative and summative assessment, which supports the tenets of student centred learning (Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003), that assessment should be both formative and summative within a student centred learning environment. Other researchers (Brown et al. 1997; Light & Cox, 2001) found that more formative assessment and feedback to students related to their learning would enhance student learning. They believe that formative assessment can help the students by highlighting their learning gaps and content knowledge that is in need of development. An emphasis on formative assessment, with less summative assessment supports and encourages a more student centred approach (O'Neill, Moore & McMullin), as opposed to conventional

teaching methodologies that emphasise summative assessment (Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003). The participants also stated that they regularly had an input into the assessment activities as sought by the facilitator. In conventional approaches, assessment emphasises the giving of marks and grades, while the giving of advice and learning function is less emphasised; also competition amongst students is highlighted, more so than personal improvement and competency (Black, 1999). This should not be the approach at the tertiary level, since students are being prepared to enter the workplace with the ability to take advice, learn from others and develop vital interpersonal skills.

Teacher/student Interaction. In a student centred learning environment the teacher/student interaction is respectful, their prior knowledge and experience are acknowledged, and learners are recognised as adults; versus the conventional approach where the teacher is paternalistic, the teacher is viewed as an expert, and the students are ignorant of the process and learning content (Lea, Stephenson & Troy, 2003). In investigating the student/teacher relationships, the results revealed that 88% of the participants thought their interactions were respectful, 57% stated that they were treated as adults and 67% stated that their prior knowledge and experience were acknowledged. A small number, 7% identified the facilitator as paternalistic, seeing themselves as the 'fountain of knowledge'.

Motivation. Respondents were motivated by their facilitators encouraging their own development of personal objectives. This encouraged respondents (43%) too wn their goals and strive toward these. Significantly, 83% of respondents recognised that their

facilitator enabled personal flexibility in learning interactions. Their learning experience was flexible, not rigid, which contributed to the development of deep learning skills (McCabe & O'Connor, 2014). Similarly, 52% of respondents indicated that they received inspired content and process in their learning. Facilitators also ensured that both content and process were stimulating. This motivated learners and contributed to their course success. Student participation, motivation and grades increased when student centred approaches were adopted (Lumpkin & Achen, 2015).

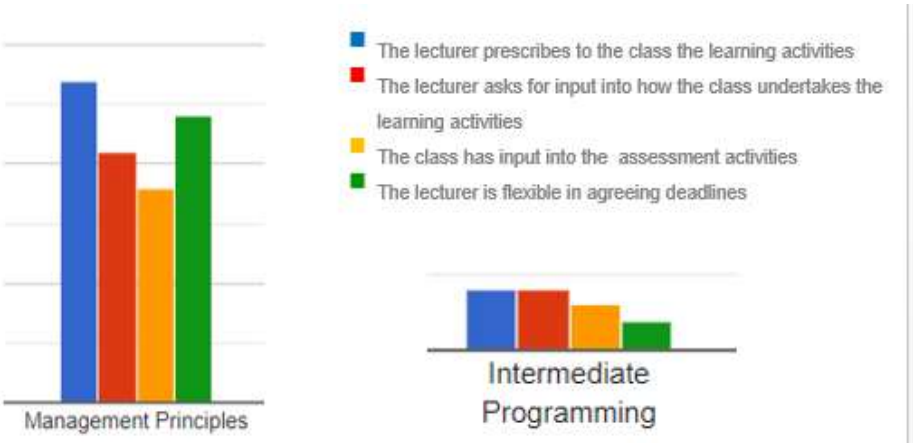
Responsibility and Accountability. Based on the results of the study, 77% of the students felt that they were empowered to own and plot their own learning pathway, with 55% feeling empowered and accountable for their learning. Prior research noted that student centred learning promotes increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student (Weimer, 2002). Likewise, in student centred learning there is a shift in responsibility from lecturer to students (Attard, DiLorio, Geven & Santa, 2010; Geven & Santa, 2010; McCabe et al, 2014; Maclellan 2008). Our results reflected similarly, with respondents advancing that they felt responsible and in control of their own learning. Learners have full responsibility for their learning when student centred approaches are adopted, the opportunity to become more independent as learners and more accountable for their learning, by being actively involved in the learning process rather than passively receiving information from a lecture advances learning outcomes (Slunt & Giancarlo, 2004).

Teaching and Learning. The study investigated the level of student centred learning integration into the delivery of fifteen different courses. The factors considered were: whether the lecturer

prescribes the learning activities, if student input was sought into how learning activities were undertaken, the student input into the assessment activities, and the lecturers flexibility in agreeing deadlines. The results indicated that different subjects appear to lend themselves to varying levels of student centred learning. For example, Figure 1 illustrates that although both of the courses reflected the use of student centred learning approaches, it would appear that one reflects a significantly higher level of such an approach. Is this because some courses lend themselves to such an approach more so than others?

Figure 1.

Student Centred Learning in Teaching and Learning



Discussion

All respondents had knowledge of student centred learning; this was expected as the respondents were all pursuing a degree in education. However, it is notable that the researchers, when discussing the features of student centred learning through the first two stages of the data collection process, found that these respondents were well versed in the key features of student centred learning and could extensively evaluate their own learning experience through the "lens" of student centred learning in the 15 courses reviewed. The level of insight was significant enough to cause such comment by both researchers.

Respondents perceived traditional didactic models of teaching to be less inspiring, less motivating and less effective than student centred approaches to learning. This is in line with studies which have found that student centred approaches may improve student motivation and academic success, whilst literature reviewed (Brown-Wright, 2011) supports the notion that many teachers strive to utilise student centred learning approaches in the classroom. However, respondents *en masse* expressed concern that too much of a lack of structure (on the part of how the facilitator manages the class) may negatively impact appropriate, robust and quality assured assessment practices. Such a concern was expressed primarily due to the emphasis upon course success in summative examination assessment.

With significant interest, our study found that the use of information technology (particularly through smartphones) assisted in enriching learning experience. This is consistent with findings by

Kemm and Dantas (2007) and Lu et al, (2007) who found that the use of information technology in tertiary level programmes not only accommodated many learning styles and enhanced student interest and engagement, but contributed to improved performance in desirable course outcomes in, amongst other things, written reports and examinations.

Findings further revealed that many of the competencies developed through practising student centred learning approaches are complimentary to desirable and indeed identified characteristics that the 21st century worker should be ideally equipped with (Brewer, 2013). Significantly, respondents themselves recognise the benefits of learning through this approach as it is viewed as both positive for their current learning experience, whilst also being beneficial in the workplace, either currently or for the future. The third component of the data collection exercise was an interview with a senior representative from the leadership of the Jamaica Employers' Federation who pointed towards its membership, over a number of years, increasingly expressing the need to develop critical employability skills (including inter-personal and communication soft skills) amongst graduates entering the workforce (Jamaica Gleaner, 2009; 2014). Further, noting that the development of these critical employability skills, as identified both locally and through the International Labour Organisation (Brewer, 2013) are indeed integral to the desired features of the workforce and its entrants, as sought by its membership. The federation interestingly points to these deficiencies affording opportunities for entrepreneurs to develop interventions so as to address such skills gaps; thereby, assisting young people to become more employable as they seek to overcome

their lack of experience in the workplace (Hewitt, Owens & Stewart, 2018). The Jamaica Employers' Federation is the employers representative body in the tripartite relationship between employers, workers (trade unions) and the government. As such, it is the local representative for the interests of employers at the International Labour Organisation. Further, it is the only trade union in Jamaica representing the views of employers in the workplace and thus its voice is significant.

In deliberations over the research and the literature reviewed so as to inform our own discussions, it became apparent that the research globally in student centred learning reaches into many facets of the teaching and learning experience; whilst it also penetrates and impacts policies toward and behaviour of stakeholders, whether institutions, individuals or government. The facilitator, for example, is often referred to in this paper. However, the impact of student centred learning approaches upon their workload and/or personal and professional practice, which is likely considerable is not considered. While this paper is not designed to study this relationship, as a result of our findings, it is pertinent to comment. Student centred learning transforms teacher orientation, changing the focus of the tasks teachers must do. Salter et al (2009) reviewed how through giving facilitators and students new roles, course redesign may, for example, better support students through ensuring that students would be more actively engaged and not just be lectured. In planning classroom activities, focus was upon identifying tasks students needed to do in order to learn the material, rather than upon the tasks teachers needed to do in order to prepare a learning session. This fundamentally changes planning in classroom preparation

activities for facilitators, particularly so for those accustomed to teaching through more traditional approaches. This has implications for facilitators as they professionally develop, making the change from "sage on the stage" to being the "guide on the side" (Weimer, 2002). This may not be an easy transition! However, such development is crucial if improvements in developing the quality and consistency of student centred learning approaches are to evolve. It is the facilitator that ensures that the skills, attitude and knowledge are developed by learners so as to better equip them with critical employability skills, as sought by the workplace; thus, expanding the utilisation of student centred learning approaches amongst facilitators is imperative.

Our research also garnered information pertaining to a study by George, Craven, Williams-Myers and Bonnick (2003). Conducted at the University of Technology, Jamaica, it indicated that student centred learning, which was poorly utilised by facilitators at that time, could be advanced through an Action Research Programme approach, aligned to staff development. Adoption of this approach was slow amongst the then lecturers, due in part to a lack of incentive to do so. In making our contribution in this arena, through our study and findings at the same university some 15 years later, it seems apparent that the present academic staff cadre, certainly in the Business and Computer Studies programme of the Bachelors of Education, at least, act quite to the contrary in their classroom practice; our study substantiating the current, more prevalent use of student centred learning approaches. Further, such evidence of the incorporation of student centred learning approaches may reasonably infer that generally the university may have significantly enhanced

its own overall ability to better supply the Jamaican workplace with suitably trained graduates. A key component of the recently reformulated university's vision is: "We are the #1 University in the Caribbean for work-ready leaders…" (University of Technology, Jamaica, 2018), a clear signal to stakeholders that it recognises this role; and thus reinforcing Abraham and Karns' (2009) musings that preparing students for employment is the mission of schools.

Conclusions

Today's society, impacted significantly by globalisation worldwide, requires lifelong learners who are flexible problem solvers and who can select, organise and use information appropriately in new situations (Pinto & Sales, 2008). In Jamaica, as well as worldwide, as the 21st century progresses, mounting concerns have been raised with regard to the quality and competency of graduates entering the workforce. Employers seek workers with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will optimise performance and are "work ready"; as such, employers seek a set of critical employability skills (Brewer, 2013). These include, critical thinking, problem solving, adaptability, high level interpersonal skills and teamwork, amongst others - just such a set of attributes that are recognised as outcomes from the practice of student centred learning.

This study sought to identify whether practicing student centred learning in a tertiary education programme is likely to not only enhance learning outcomes in current studies, but also whether this practice would contribute to enhancing the capabilities and critical employability skills for graduates entering the Jamaican workforce. The results certainly point to such a conclusion. Clear

links and commonalities are apparent between not only the theoretical background that underpins the practice of student centred learning, but also the experience of our respondents, who clearly identified their own learning experience with developing competencies in problem solving, team working, interpersonal skills, responsibility and ethical reasoning, amongst others. Additionally, they were indeed cognisant of not just the impact of student centred learning upon their current learning, but pointed toward their own future workplace experience and their ability to contribute positively, due to their possession of critical employability attributes. This latter point being validated as crucial for employers when recruiting for the Jamaican workplace.

With these points, amongst others identified in this paper, we assert that our research advances the view that student centred learning approaches, as practised in tertiary institutions, can make a positive contribution to developing competencies in identified critical employability skills that will develop and benefit graduates upon entry into the workforce. Students tend to respond positively to this approach, they are motivated, particularly through using information technology to support learning activities. If more students experience student centred learning (which by implication means more lecturers must utilise student centred learning approaches!), this will directly impact and improve learning outcomes in higher education. We therefore posit that extending the practice of student centred learning across subject disciplines will likely, not only enhance student learning, but will better prepare graduates for the workplace as they will be better equipped with critical employability skills, thereby

addressing the weaknesses that many employers recognise as presently lacking amongst graduates.

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About the author

Stephen R. Wallder is currently pursuing a PhD in Education leadership at the University of Technology, Jamaica, focusing on strategic enrolment to advance student and institutional success. He holds an MBA from the University of Westminster, United Kingdom and has over 25 years experience working in education and human resource development. Stephen is currently a Lecturer in Business Education.

Email: bambisteve@hotmail.com

Nardia J. Brown is a lecturer in Business and Computer Studies in Education, who is currently pursuing a PhD in Information Systems at the University of Technology, Jamaica. She has over 15 years of experience working in education. She holds a Bachelor in Education

degree from University of Technology, Jamaica and a Master of Science degree in Computer-Based Management Information Systems from the University of the West Indies, Mona.

Email: julianda1980@gmail.com

Appendices

Appendix 1.

Research Survey

Is Learning Really Student Centred? The Experience of Business Education Students at a University in Jamaica.

As a student undertaking the Bachelor's Degree in Education you are being asked to assist and contribute to the compilation of data so as to inform the researchers and supplement the validity of their findings.

The research is to focus upon current cohorts and is intended to assist us in evaluating your learning experience so that we may enhance research findings in relation to how student centred your learning experience is so that we may make recommendations so as to enhance the learning experience of students in Jamaica.

The few short questions asked are focused upon your experience in relation to the courses you are currently undertaking and your learning experience in these.

The researchers are not asking for any personal data, other than for you to supply your gender, your home region and confirm that you are a student on the above Degree Programme.

We hope that you will assist us so that we may better inform both current and future educators (including yourselves) as to how to better deliver learning programmes so that we may continue to enhance the quality of our Jamaican education process.

Our thanks in advance, Stephen Wallder & Nardia Brown

Lecturers & PhD Candidates

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1. I am Male: ( ) Female: ( ) *Please indicate your gender with a tick (√)*

2. Indicate your home region.
   - Urban ( )
   - Rural ( ) *Please tick as appropriate*

3. I am a student undertaking the Degree in Education. ( ) *Please confirm with a tick*

4. Upon entry to the aforementioned degree programme did you hold passes in the following CXC (or equivalent) qualifications.

   Please tick as appropriate

   - English ( )
   - Mathematics ( ) *If you ticked both please go to question 6*

5. If you did not hold either or both of these subjects when starting the programme did you gain the qualification(s) whilst undertaking your degree?

   Yes ( ) No ( ) *Please tick as appropriate*

6. Thinking generally, is your learning experience one that you recognise as:

   - diverse, creative, practical and interactive ( ) or one that is
   - didactic, regurgitative and individual ( ) *Please tick as appropriate*

7. Do you receive feedback from your lecturers/facilitators
   - continuously ( )
   - periodically ( )
   - summatively ( )
   - not at all ( ) *Please tick all that apply*

8. How are you assessed?

   - through coursework, formatively ( )
   - summatively through a final (sit down) examination ( )

   Please tick all that apply

9. Learning outcomes, are these discussed with you?

- with feedback and input sought from you ( )
- told the knowledge you will gain with little emphasis upon developing skills ( )

Please tick all that apply

10. Your learning experience and relationship with your lecturer/facilitator.

- is it respectful? ( )
- is prior knowledge/experience acknowledged? ( )
- Are you recognised as an adult? ( )

- is the facilitator paternalistic and sees self as the "fountain of knowledge?" ( )
  Please tick all that apply

11. Does your facilitator motivate, excite, inspire confidence and interest in you through:
    - Assisting you in formulating personal learning objectives ( )
    - Enabling personal flexibility in your learning experience ( )
    - Inspirational content and process in learning ( )

12. Who holds responsibility for your learning?
    - you are encouraged to own and plot your own pathway ( )
    - you are empowered and accountable ( )
      Please tick all that apply

13. Below is a list of courses that you may have undertaken as part of your Programme of Study. Please indicate with a tick the statement that applies to each course you have undertaken.

Course title:	**Assessment for each course:**			
	The lecturer prescribes to the class the learning activities	**Lecturer asks for input into how the class undertakes learning activities**	**The class has input into the assessment activities**	**The lecturer is flexible in agreeing deadlines**
Caribbean Economic Growth & Development				
Company Law				
Computing Essentials for Educators				
Cost & Management Accounting				
Electronic Accounting				
Financial Accounting 1				
Financial Accounting 2				
Intermediate Programming				
Introduction to				

Macroeconomics				
Introduction to Marketing				
Introduction to Microeconomics				
Legal Environment of Business				
Management Principles				
Production & Operations Management				
Programming Essentials				

We really appreciate your input, thank you.

Note: Upon completion of this research it will be available for review, please indicate whether you would like a copy sent to you. ( ) *please tick if yes?.*

Appendix 2.

Focus Group Research Survey

Is Learning Really Student Centred? The Experience of Business Education Students at a University in Jamaica.

Focus Group Date and Location…… Administered by ……

1. Number of Males: ( ) Number of Females: ( )

2. Home region.

   - Urban ( )
   - Rural ( )

3. Are you aware of the term – Student Centred Learning? Yes ( ) No ( )

4. What does the term Student Centred Learning mean to you?
   ……
   ……
   ……

5. In considering what you now understand Student Centred Learning to be, how does it differ from "traditional" learning and teaching modes?
   ……
   ……
   ……

6. a. In considering your experience of student centred learning, what would you identify as the prime benefits, skills and competencies that have been developed and/or enhanced for you?
   ……
   ……
   ……

b. How does student-centred learning facilitate independent learning and foster lifelong learning?

……
……
……

c. To what extent does student-centred learning contribute to your critical thinking and real-world problem solving skills?

……
……
……

d. Would you support the view that technology literacy plays a vital role in utilising student-centred learning approaches? Explain.

……
……
……

7. Thinking of your experience in the workplace, please identify key attributes and competencies that are required of you?

……
……
……

Other comments:……

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Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Social Justice Pedagogical Knowledge: Re-Envisioning A Model for Teacher Practice

Hope Mayne

University of Technology, Jamaica

Abstract

The nature of teacher knowledge and preparation has incited many significant debates over the years. The major point of contention being what knowledge do teachers need for effective practice? Research have presented arguments distinguishing between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. A key study on teacher knowledge is Shulman's (1987) study on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) where he defines teacher knowledge as knowledge which integrates the knowledge of a specific subject and the pedagogical knowledge for teaching that particular subject. I question however what other knowledge component can contribute to effective teaching? Shulman's model has been criticized for its non-inclusion of social justice knowledge. I argue Social Justice Knowledge can support Pedagogical Content Knowledge especially for teacher preparation practices in postcolonial Jamaica. Social Justice Pedagogical Content Knowledge empowers teachers to illuminate their voices inside and outside of the classroom. Hence, the purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore the relationship between Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and Social Justice Knowledge as a model for teacher practice in the Jamaican context. What are the benefits to teacher practice? And how can it inform a stronger model

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Introduction

One major goal of education is to shape an individual and by extension the nation. It is therefore important that teacher preparation be viewed as the conduit to equipping teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavior required to effectively impact change in behavior. What then is required of the teacher? Essentially, what knowledge is needed for effective teaching? And what is effective teaching? To answer these questions, we must reflect on what counts as effective teaching. Therefore, the pedagogical and epistemological foundations of teacher education must be examined. According to Kaplan and Owing (2002), effective preparation of teachers should include a focus on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) development.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) is a knowledge base for teaching that exists at the juncture of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Teachers who possess PCK can effectively create representations for concepts, recognize student preconceptions and misconceptions of content, and sequence curriculum to enhance student learning (Shulman, 1986). Albeit

Shulman's model significantly shifting the landscape for thirty years, the model is interrogated for its lack of inclusivity of a social justice agenda. Dyches and Boyd (2017) note that the paradigm fails to delineate a space for social justice teaching. Hence, they propose a teacher preparation model which segments three knowledge domains: Social Justice Knowledge, Social Justice Pedagogical Knowledge, and Social Justice Content Knowledge (SJPACK). This knowledge shapes the practice of PCK in the teaching and learning environment.

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore the relationship between Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and Social Justice Knowledge as a model for teacher practice in the Jamaican context. What are the benefits to teacher practice? And how can it inform a stronger model for teacher preparation; essentially supporting a teacher preparation model which is not siloed from social justice knowledge.

Background

Shulman's (1986) PCK model has been predominantly critical to classroom teaching and learning. The model requires an amalgamation of content and pedagogy required for the enactment of teaching. The PCK model embodies:

> *the personal attribute of a teacher and is considred both a knowledge base and an action… [it is the] knowledge of reasoning behind, planning for, and enactment of teaching a particular topic in a particular way for a particular reason to particular students for enhanced student outcomes. (Gess-Newsome & Carlson, 2015, p. 36)*

PCK is one of the most basic forms of knowledge used in teacher preparation. Albeit its importance, there are critical elements to teacher preparation that should be addressed. I argue that in addition to academic instruction Social Justice Pedagogical Knowledge should be a complement. The teacher's role is not only content driven but also to guide students to develop the skills necessary to foster a better society. Delivering content knowledge should not be the only focus, there must be a space for enabling conversations about social justice knowledge. Social Justice Knowledge empowers students to voice their concerns and question unjust situations in their lives or in the lives of those around them. Ultimately, social justice can't be taught in one lesson. It should be integrated into the teaching philosophies and actions of teachers. Teachers can lead students to ask questions that are meaningful and purposeful which will lead to productive classrooms. Social Justice Pedagogical knowledge is framed on the use of activist strategies (active learning) which can raise awareness of an issue and build support for positive change. This is particularly important to the education context of Jamaica.

Historically, education in Jamaica is framed on a British model which is teacher centred, content driven, and requires high stake testing, and recall. The curriculum maintained an academic curriculum conception. This model fostered an ideology of the 'haves and have not' those students who could pass the test and matriculate from primary school to secondary high school; thus, perpetuating an ideology of inequity. This created a hegemonic construct of power and dominance within the school community. Some schools are categorized as elite while others are non-elite. Within these power

constructs, schools on the far end of the spectrum contend with behavioural issues, low performance and low self-esteem. This issue undoubtedly negatively affects the teacher's delivery of PCK. I posit PCK and social justice knowledge must frame the practice of teacher preparation in Jamaica given its colonial past. In light of how the country has evolved from slavery and colonialism, it is still impacted by an education system fashioned after the British model which is teacher-centered, and fosters inequity and a division of class. It now begs the question; how do we situate or resituate an education system framed on an ideology of oppression?

Cesaire (1972) described colonization as being equal to "thingification". This is where the colonizing man is depicted as a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver (superior), and the indigenous man (colonized) is an instrument of production. He stated: "I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out" (Cesaire, 1972, p. 21).

What then do our teachers need to do for effective practice? Whose knowledge becomes important in the status quo? The ability to organise content knowledge around key concepts is an essential component of what teachers need to learn in order to teach effectively. This however must be supported by knowledge which informs the teachers' understanding of social justice. This is particularly important to the Jamaican education system as they seek to embrace inclusivity and diversity in the education system. The Ministry of Education Youth and Information seeks to implement a

curriculum that prepares all children for 21st century learning. Therefore, teaching and learning must reflect real life situations and a problem based methodology.

Literature Review

Social Justice Knowledge

Dover (2013) notes teaching for social justice draws on five conceptual and pedagogical philosophies which include: democratic education, critical pedagogy, multicultural education, culturally responsive education, and social justice education. Each has its own contribution, he notes, teaching for social justice stems from these conceptions. Democratic education is framed in Dewey's (1916) participatory pedagogy which draws on experiential learning. Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy model aims to develop critical consciousness through co-investigation and problem posing dialogue. Multicultural Education, emerged during the black civil rights movements of the 1960's (Sleeter & Grant 1999). Banks (1995) describes this movement as the restructuring of school structure to facilitate equity and empowerment. Culturally responsive education, allows for teachers to give much attention to hegemonic classroom practices and reflect upon their own social, educational and political identities (Irvine & Armento, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Social justice education, integrates democratic education, critical pedagogy, multicultural education and culturally responsive education (Adams, Bell & Griffin 1997).

Dover (2009) in his research on a multistate study examined how English Language Arts teachers conceptualized social justice in a

standard's base context. The findings revealed that English language Arts teachers described social justice as education which meets the needs for all students, celebrates diversity and multiculturalism and is culturally responsive. Others noted that social justice curriculum should be locally designed to meet the needs of local students in each classroom; content should reflect community concerns, and children's lives.

Giroux (1985) notes that one major threat facing prospective and existing teachers is the increasing development of instrumental ideologies that emphasize a technocratic approach to both teacher preparation and classroom pedagogy. He further notes that teachers are preoccupied with mastering how to teach a body of knowledge, managing and controlling classroom and organizing day to day activities. He argues for a rethinking and a restructuring of the teachers' work where they are viewed as transformative intellectuals. The teachers' work should be seen as intellectual labour rather than purely instrumental and technical. Teachers must take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving (Giroux 1985). Essentially, he contends teachers must take a responsible role in shaping the purpose of schooling.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Shulman (1999) notes that "Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) should frame the knowledge base of teachers. This is blending content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, and should be represented and adopted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners"

(Shulman 1999, p. 64). He notes, the teacher should conceptualize the subject matter knowledge with the ability to adapt information that enables him/her to transform knowledge into "forms that are pedagogically powerful and adaptive to the various backgrounds of students" (Shulman 1987, p. 15). Therefore, PCK should focus on strategies which fosters the best experiences suitable for the learners.

Veal (1999) notes however, that making the transition from personal beliefs about content to thinking about how to organize and represent the content of a discipline in ways that will facilitate student understanding is one of the most difficult aspects of learning to teach. This is demonstrated in a study by Ballantyne and Packer (2004) who investigated the content knowledge of pre-service music education teachers. The study revealed that despite having a strong background in music content, many of the pre-service teachers were unable to apply that content knowledge and related skills to their classroom instruction. Thus, as Hashweh (2005) and Nilsson (2008) suggested, experience in the field is one of the most effective ways to develop content knowledge. They further noted that without a framework for continuous guidance however, teachers may not be equipped to continually develop and refine this knowledge.

Effective Preparation of Teachers

Effective preparation of teachers should include a focus on PCK development. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, CAEP (2015), list PCK as the first standard teacher candidates should attain:

> *Teacher candidates are expected to develop foundational content knowledge in their particular discipline and cultivate ways to best present that knowledge to*

> *their students, which includes knowledge of instructional strategies, learner development, learner differences, assessment, and application of content, among others. (CAEP, 2015, para. 2)*

In a quantitative study of elementary teachers, conducted in Peru, teachers' mathematical content knowledge positively predicted student achievement in mathematics (Hill, Rowan, & Ball, 2005), demonstrating the importance of a strong content knowledge base for mathematics teachers. Content knowledge while recognized as an imperative knowledge base by researchers, is not the only type of knowledge teachers need to be effective (Baumert, Kunter, Blum, Brunner, Voss, Jordan, & Tsai, 2010). Transforming content knowledge for student understanding requires teachers to use their PCK (Halim & Meerah, 2002).

Shulman (1986) noted that when a teachers' pedagogical content knowledge is weak then it will be hard to address any misconceptions and errors derived by the students. It is also imperative for teachers to understand their students' thinking. The transformation of subject matter knowledge (SMK) into pedagogical content knowledge should be a significant focus in teacher education (Graeber, 1999; Leinhardt, Putnam, Stein, & Baxter, 1991). In New Zealand, a report from the Education Review Office claims that 23% of the teachers have low pedagogical content knowledge (Education Review Office, 2006). The findings show the importance PCK among teachers and that a lack of PCK will influence teachers' effectiveness in carrying out the teaching and learning process within the classroom environment.

The Professionalization Agenda

Liston and Zeichner (1991) in their critique of teacher reform in the United States, describe the professionalization agenda, formerly known as the social efficiency teacher tradition, as grounded in producing high quality education for all children. The objective of the tradition is to establish a profession of teaching through the articulation of a knowledge base, centred on educational research. The goal is to raise the status of the teaching profession and generate higher quality teachers through standards. Some problems with this agenda, however, are that it ignores what is known about research on teacher education; for example, culturally responsive teaching and social justice. Standards do not adequately incorporate a curriculum which emphasizes equitable teaching.

Teaching in the professionalization agenda rests on the following criteria: the teachers' abilities to demonstrate required competencies, as this will determine their teaching ability; strategies and processes of teaching determined by scientific study of the nature of teachers' work; and teacher education courses designed around teacher competencies. Teachers are prepared for the realities of the teaching world. This is clearly stated through outcomes or objectives of a teacher education program. Those outcomes related to teacher learning are the skills needed to be an effective teacher, while student learning is achieved through test scores. Quality teaching is then judged on the effectiveness of the teacher and student outcomes.

Social Justice and Teacher Preparation

Kilpatrick (1933) as cited in Liston and Zeichner (1991) argued that education should prepare individuals to take part intelligently in

the management of the conditions in which they live; thus, they should be provided with the tools that will lead them in this direction. Teachers should foster cooperation, not competition, by developing critical thinking and becoming transformative intellectuals, in an effort to advocate for counter hegemonic teaching and a democratic ideal in the teaching and learning environment.

The major debate in this tradition was the extent to which teacher educators should indoctrinate students with socialist or collective values or emphasize experimentalism and reflective inquiry to lead to social improvements. Social Reconstructionist criticized traditional forms of teacher education for not emphasizing the broad purposes of education, and they insisted the role of teachers is to cultivate leaders for societal reconstruction. Dewey was also critical of a traditional form of teacher education, and felt that education should emphasize broader purposes (Liston & Zeichner, 1991).

Re-envisioning a Model for Teacher Preparation

Re-envisioning a model for teacher preparation in the Jamaican context should be responsive to preparing teachers to become transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1985). "Transformative intellectuals develop a language of critique which enables them to speak out against social injustices within and outside of school; essentially leading students to view the world through the democratic ideal. The practice of critical pedagogy should also be included as it does not transfer knowledge but rather create the possibility for its production." (Giroux, 1985, p. 4).

The traditional teacher preparation paradigm prepares teachers to emphasize content knowledge in their delivery. What is observed as good teaching is the teachers' ability to deliver content. This is observed by the high demand for immediate academic performance outputs. The major problem associated with delivering pedagogical content knowledge however is the teachers' own understanding of the content knowledge and finding appropriate strategies to deliver. Teachers must find a balance where they advocate content knowledge delivery while promoting a social justice agenda. Knowledge in the classroom should create an environment where students' voices, opinions and ideas are valued and respected by their teacher and peers. The teacher must teach students to share their ideas and respond to the ideas of others in a way that allows for disagreement and at the same time valuing each other's perspective (Giroux, 1995).

Giroux (1988) stated that a major threat to education reform is teachers' inability to provide intellectual growth. Current reform debates ignore preparing teachers to become critical citizens. They limit teachers to the status of high-level technicians, who execute a required set of objectives decided upon by experts rather than on the realities of classroom life. This way of thinking about teacher preparation disempowers teachers in that it deskills the teacher in the classroom (Mayne, 2014).

A deliberate attempt must be made to include social justice practice as this prepares teachers to take part intelligently in the management of the conditions in which they live, foster cooperation not competition, develop critical thinking, and become transformative intellectuals, in an effort to advocate for counter

hegemonic teaching and a democratic ideal in the teaching and learning environment (Giroux, 1988).

There is the call for a new paradigm of teacher preparation where teachers are not slaves to any one method which forces them to be submissive to any one framework; they should be able to question what is given to them. The culture of the "modernist" positivist paradigm, which shaped the field of teacher education, cannot answer questions about the realities teachers now encounter in their classroom. The positivist perspective focuses only on test scores and ignores the classroom environment. It views teachers as transmitters of knowledge and not creators of knowledge. It devalues teachers and positions them as surrendering to institutional arrangements (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998).

Conclusion

Pedagogical Content knowledge, while recognized as an imperative is not the only knowledge teachers need for classroom practice. Both pedagogical content knowledge and social justice knowledge are essential for effective and efficient teaching. How we define good teaching must not only be instrumental and technical but also transformational. To become a transformative teacher, practice must be embedded in a social justice agenda. Social Justice teaching includes social justice knowledge, critical pedagogy, multicultural learning, cultural responsiveness, and democratic education (Dover, 2013).

The practice of social justice in the classroom is not prescriptive but rather must come from a philosophical orientation of the teacher. Social justice thinking must be deliberate and intentional therefore a

third space should be explored in the teacher preparation model. How teachers perceive and incorporate social justice practices in the classroom should be explored in the Jamaican context. Regrettably, not much research has been done on teachers' understanding of pedagogical content knowledge and social justice knowledge.

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About the author

Hope Mayne is an Associate Professor and Graduate Studies Coordinator at the University of Technology, Jamaica. She has contributed to research in the field of Teacher Education and Curriculum Planning and Instruction. Dr. Mayne's research interest focuses on twenty first century teaching and Learning with an emphasis on STEM education. She is also a research fellowship recipient of the Canada-CARICOM Faculty Leadership Exchange Programme 2019 at Brock University.

Email: hmaynester@gmail.com

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Expanding Leadership Capacity toward Social Justice

Nola P. Hill-Berry

University of Technology, Jamaica
&
Institute for Educational Administration & Leadership- Jamaica

Abstract

Educational administrators are consistently challenged to find the right mix of leaders and to identify potentials that can be harnessed to expand the cadre. In both the academic and research communities, there has been much dialogue surrounding the way in which leadership is developed in organisations. These discourses continue to provide avenues for researchers to identify and recommend best practices for leadership development. Varied types of leadership could be explored as a means of expanding leadership capacity and sustaining a cadre of leaders suited to meet the growing needs in educational communities and other spheres. This study investigated perceptions of staff concerning distributed leadership as a possible strategy for enhancing succession planning, expanding leadership capacities, and ensuring that social justice is practiced within their organisation. Two main questions were explored in this study to uncover participants' perceptions of current leadership practices and distributed leadership; and to have them suggest how distributed leadership could be used within their academic unit to expand leadership capacity and to practise social justice. This research provides valuable information regarding how distributed leadership can be used to augment leadership capacities, enhance succession planning, and expand leadership capacity to ensure social justice is practised within the specified context.

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Introduction

Important to every stakeholder in the educational landscape is the leadership of its educational institutions. Miller (2015) noted that educational leadership experiences can be gratifying and stimulating but these experiences are not without challenges. According to Smith (2013), it requires a collaborative effort of sharing leadership. In Jamaica, particularly since the founding of the Institute for Educational Administration and Leadership- Jamaica (IEAL-J) seven years ago, there has been increased attention and investigations into educational leadership and management. This paper is an output of the third international conference led by the IEAL-J.

Effectiveness of educational processes and their outputs all reflect on leadership. In today's educational spaces, with the ever-growing challenges and dynamic processes in our institutions, educational leaders and administrators need to be shifting gears to meet the changing needs while performing effectively. This requires having the right number of individuals with appropriate talents and leadership competencies to meet those growing needs. But, in educational organisations there are challenges to leadership and the distribution of leadership roles. This requires building an academic leadership community of which two pillars are succession planning and capacity building. In one academic unit, there is an intervening issue in that succession planning is challenged by the hand-picking of leaders and/or the lack of such planning. The situation begs the question – Could distributed leadership be used to expand leadership

capacity within that academic unit and to ensure social justice is practised? This study explores distributed leadership as a tool to expand leadership capacity in that academic community as a means to practising social justice.

Statement of the Problem

There is an ever present need to expand the community of leaders who are equipped to lead Jamaica's educational institutions. However, identifying leadership interests is at times challenging because on the one hand, some people resist leadership to avert accountability; and on the other, there is the widely known practice of subjectively selecting leaders. Notwithstanding the underlying statement, there is need for leadership succession planning and in particular, capacity building to distribute leadership in order to build a community of leaders, to ensure that everyone gets an opportunity to participate in leadership development, to have an appropriate cadre to draw from (through an equitable and competitive process) when appropriate, and to share leadership to ensure social justice is practised, which is the essence of this paper.

Purpose of the Study

This study serves three main purposes: to better understand the leadership practices in an academic unit, to determine how academic and administrative staff in that setting perceive distributed leadership, and to identify means by which distributed leadership can be used for succession planning and expanding leadership capacity to ensure social justice.

The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do staff members in the select academic unit perceive current leadership practices and distributed leadership?
2. How could the select academic unit use distributed leadership to expand leadership capacity and to ensure that social justice is practised?

Literature Review

In educational institutions, effective leadership is a "high priority issue" (Miller, 2013, p. 13) for a number of stakeholders. A critical component of this is effective people leadership which according to Miller (2016) requires educational leaders and administrators to "show commitment to organisational learning, understanding and empathy towards diversity and ambiguity, and to be forward thinking and creative in relation to how best to meet the needs" (p. 99) of those they serve. This literature review investigates distributed leadership as a tool that educational leaders and administrators may employ to enhance succession planning, expand leadership capacity, and ultimately exercise social justice – a practice which is at the heart of effective people leadership.

Distributed Leadership

Described by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004), distributed leadership is a feature within an organisation where leadership is practised through multiple interactions of individuals and situations. This is a horizontal form of leadership where the practice is shared among individuals within the organisation and, instead of individual judgement, decision-making is administered through the interactions of several individuals. In a distributed leadership environment, a group of individuals with specific qualities

merge those qualities and talents to make leadership available to others (Harris, 2008). Here, according to Greenfield, Braithwaite, Pawsey, Johnson, and Robinson (2009), parties are interacting and sharing expertise which lead to learning while building leadership capacity and fostering synergy. Spillane, et al. noted that distributed leadership has the potential to improve self-determination through work experiences, enrich leadership development experiences, and, through equipped staff, position the organisation to aptly respond to leadership demands from the educational environment.

Bolden (2011) opined that distributed leadership could produce substantial growth and enhance organisational effectiveness. According to Southworth (2009), when educational leadership is widely distributed, it has greater impact on those it serves as well as on the organisation. This happens because distributed leadership helps to share the leadership load, expand leadership capacity at every level, and increase the institution's leadership and its impact. Practising distributed leadership enables the institution to nurture others and produce leaders for tomorrow. Southworth expanded that, among other benefits, distributed leadership builds self-confidence and self-efficacy, causes the organisation to invest in leadership, drives specific actions toward leadership, and helps to create a culture of boldness, co-operation, and trust.

Notwithstanding the foregoing statements, according to Harris (2009), there are arguments that distributed leadership is merely a newly accepted belief that helps to strengthen some ideologies in management. Other limitations and complexities of distributed leadership have also been highlighted. For example, Harris (2009) noted that "distributed leadership can result in conflicting priorities, targets, and timescales" (p. 179). Likewise, Spillane et al. (2004) noted

that distributed leadership is not a cure-all solution and in order to realise success from distributed leadership, it must link with leaders' situations and desires in meaningful ways.

Harris (2011) noted that while the evidence base around distributed leadership is still developing, as part of their educational restructuring, a number of countries (such as USA and the UK) have already embraced distributed leadership. Bolden (2011) further informed that distributed leadership is growing, it continues to make inroads into organisational life, and there is enough evidence to indicate that distributed leadership could produce considerable growth. Distributed leadership can also be effectively used as a leadership development tool for organisational effectiveness (Harris, 2009; Hill-Berry, 2015). In addition, as Huggins (2017) posited, when carefully initiated and sustained, distributed leadership can burgeon into increased organisational and personal capacities.

Succession Planning

Succession planning can generally be defined as the strategic implementation of effective and purposeful initiatives to develop an organisation's human resources and to ensure the availability of talents to meet its needs over time. Defined by Rothwell (2010), succession planning is "a deliberate and systematic effort" (p. 6) that is aimed at equipping others and must be executed to ensure a smooth transition when key people are ready to separate from an organisation. This process involves capacity building and professional development.

Capacity building, according to Potter and Brough (2004) is "the creation, expansion or upgrading of a stock of desired qualities and features called capabilities that could be continually drawn upon

over time" (p. 337). The word *stock* here implies that these capabilities are consistently being used and must be replenished such that the supply does not run out. However, there is a need for commitment to creating, upgrading, expanding these capabilities. Furthermore, there is need for engagement and commitment of multiple individuals since as put forward by Huggins (2017), leadership capacity building is a process that requires commitment of all parties involved.

Professional development is a systematic and sustained process used by institutions to "ensure that [employees] continue to strengthen their practice throughout their career" (Hirsh, 2010, p. 1). Professional development should be purposeful and intentional in nature and, as suggested by Public Impact for the Chicago Public Education Fund (2008), it should be done to increase others' short and long-term levels of effectiveness, which means it is a lot more than just expecting that people will pursue training. According to Mizell (2010), professional development is effective only when "it causes teachers to improve their instruction or causes administrators to become better school leaders" (p. 10). Therefore, the process should involve communicating positive expectations, providing requisite instructions, providing timely feedback, deciding on training and work assignments that will develop the intended capacities, delegating and coaching, and allowing others to reflect on and learn from their failures and successes (Public Impact for the Chicago Public Education Fund, 2008), and as Mizell advanced, to "put their new knowledge and skills to work" (p. 10).

In the select academic unit, succession planning and capacity building are not done on a wide and transparent scale. In some instances, the *modus operandi* could at best be described as a

replacement planning where the manager or department head identifies a specific individual, or two, to groom for possible replacement (Rothwell, 2010). However, this has implications for capacity building which is critical to expanding the community of leaders for equitable and effective succession planning and for practicing social justice.

Social Justice

Social justice has been termed by Vogel (2011) as the "full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs, including an equitable distribution of resources where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure, self-determining, [and] interdependent" (p. 71). In education, social justice has been described by Miller, Hill-Berry, Hylton-Fraser, and Powell (2019) as activism that seeks to build individuals through combined efforts of all parties and at all levels of the education system. They expanded that the process involves the equitable distribution of benefits, privileges, resources and opportunities among stakeholders in those organisations and communities; and is intended to stimulate positive motives and changes. Social justice emphasises inclusion and has activism at its core since it challenges the status quo and breaks barriers. Additionally, according to Szeto and Cheng (2018), it addresses differences and promotes equity in organisations, communities and cultures.

Social justice embraces "familiarity with the culture and commitment to improve the lives of people" (Silva et al., 2017, p. 329). As expanded by Szeto and Cheng, leadership for social justice involves a battery of strategies adopted by educational leaders and administrators to ensure inclusion is practised in their academic communities and related cultures. Further, as Furman (2012) puts

forward, social justice has a community focus and it cannot be realised in the absence of democratic participation. Therefore, in the select academic unit, facilitating that democratic participation could help to share leadership and build an academic leadership community where social justice is practised.

To summarize the literature reviewed, distributed leadership has the potential to build personal and organisational capacities; effective succession planning could help to expand leadership capacities to enhance the practice of social justice; and the practice of social justice could ensure that leadership is shared and developed.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in a large faculty in a tertiary institution in Jamaica. This faculty is one of six in the institution and the second largest; offering over 20 courses of study. Hereafter, this faculty is referred to as the select academic unit. The researcher contemplated conducting the study in the wider academic community but being closely aligned to this unit, there was some ease at which the participants could be accessed. Hence this is where the study began. As a means of ensuring impartiality and broadening representativeness for the population in this study, a quantitative approach was used. Through a cross-sectional survey, responses were solicited across a select academic unit. The population size was 86 (N = 86) staff members, 18 in the administrative and 68 in the academic category. As a means of ensuring representativeness, the researcher targeted 50% of the population. However, making allowance for non-response, instead of 43, the researcher increased that figure to 50 participants (n= 50); 15 administrative, 35 academic staff members.

To collect the data, the researcher met participants, explained the study and its purpose to them, clarified that there were no foreseeable ethical issues, and explained the concepts of distributed leadership and social justice. Following, the researcher handed the questionnaires to participants who agreed to participate in the study, and made arrangements to collect them after completion.

Ideas for the questionnaire items were gleaned from various discussions surrounding leadership capacity building, succession planning, and social justice; and a similar study that the researcher had conducted (Hill-Berry, 2015). To test the instrument, a few colleagues were asked to respond to the items and provide feedback further to which a decision was made to use the questionnaire in this study. An 11-item questionnaire was developed and presented as 10 closed-ended and one open-ended item. Questions 1 – 10 were Likert-type items with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For question 11, participants were at liberty to write their responses in the space provided. A restriction to the responses for this question was that participants were to summarise their responses in one or two sentences. The chosen research methodology enabled each of the research questions to be appropriately addressed. The strength of using both types of questions was that where responses were limited because of the nature of the Likert-type questions, the open-ended question provided detailed responses to expand and clarify some of the responses provided in the Likert-type questions.

As a delimitation, this study was not extended to all the staff in the select academic unit. It was concentrated only on the full-time academic and administrative staff. There were two limitations to this study. First, the data collection clashed with staff members' busy

schedules so the activity lasted longer than was anticipated. Second, because the study was delimited to academic and administrative staff, others in the technical group within that academic unit who would have wanted to, did not have an opportunity to participate in the study.

Results

To assist with clarity and presentation, participants in the study were numbered according to their categories - administrative or academic; for example, Administrative staff 1. A total of 45 questionnaires were completed and returned; a response rate of 90%. Participants were 18% male and 82% female. Responses provided by the males were similar to those returned by the females. See Table 1 for a summary of the 10 questionnaire items.

Research question 1 asked: How do staff members in the select academic unit view current leadership practices and distributed leadership? A total of almost 76% of participants agreed to some level that within this academic unit, staff members often fuse abilities to achieve established goals, 62% cumulatively agreed that transforming into a learning organisation was one of the goals for their academic unit, and 89% agreed that through distributed leadership their academic unit can become a learning organisation where people continue to expand their capacities. While 53% reported that staff members were customarily offered opportunities to generate new ideas, 49% reported that staff members frequently got opportunities to participate in leadership.

In terms of whether their academic unit can use distributed leadership to expand leadership capacities, almost all participants (98%) agreed. However, a mere 47% reported that senior leaders

valued staff ideas and facilitated their contribution to leadership; and 51% were in some level of agreement that staff members were encouraged to build leadership capacities by participating in leadership.

Table 1.

Participants' level of agreement with statements regarding leadership in their academic unit

Item	A	SA
	%	
In this academic unit, staff members merge abilities to achieve established goals.	64	11
Transforming into a learning organization is a goal of this academic unit.	53	9
Through distributed leadership, this unit can become a learning organization.	58	31
Staff members are offered opportunities to generate new ideas.	51	2
Staff members frequently have opportunities to participate in leadership.	42	7
This academic unit can use distributed leadership to build leadership capacities.	42	56
Senior leaders value staff ideas and contribution to the leadership.	38	9
Staff members are encouraged to build capacities by participating in leadership.	47	4
Distributed leadership could help to enhance the succession planning process.	29	69
Enhanced succession planning can augment social justice in this academic unit.	29	69

A: Agree *SA: Strongly agree*

These responses indicated that, although there was the view that distributed leadership could enhance leadership capacity building, over 50% felt their ideas were not valued and senior leaders were not facilitating their contribution to leadership initiatives. Only half of the number of participants was reportedly encouraged to participate in leadership. Ninety-eight per cent of participants agreed that distributed leadership could help to enhance the succession planning process, and that enhanced succession planning can augment social justice in the select academic unit.

Research question 2 asked**:** How could the select academic unit use distributed leadership to expand leadership capacity and to ensure that social justice is practiced? Similar responses to this question were offered by both sexes and both categories of staff – administrative and academic. Participants did not all provide a response to this open-ended question and some of the responses did not provide clarity. Some reportedly did not think of specific ways in which distributed leadership could be used but said that, based on the definition, distributed leadership could be used for all three purposes - to expand leadership capacities, to enhance succession planning, and to practise social justice. However, the main responses to this question are captured below.

Participants reported that in the select academic unit, staff members were not well-rounded and aware of the different areas and activities that were taking place, at times even within their department. Therefore, particularly in their discipline and in administration, it would be beneficial to do "staff rotation to expose the staff to different leadership roles" (Administrative staff 9) and expand leadership capacities.

Staff members felt that they were at times being micro-managed and were thus hindered from using their initiatives or judgement, and that one way this could be addressed is to allow the staff to "make certain types of decisions without consulting their heads" (Academic staff 13). However, since this has implications for accountability, there was mutual understanding (by the researcher and participant) that this suggestion was only in relation to those decisions for which the staff members in particular could be held accountable. While stated differently, another participant expressed that academic leaders should embrace new initiatives and new ideas.

According to this participant, senior leaders and managers were fixed in their old ways and were reluctant to embrace new ideas. Therefore, for the academic unit to use distributed leadership to expand leadership capacities, it would require a new orientation by senior management such that they would "be accepting of and responsive to new ideas" (Academic staff 27).

Staff members reportedly were at times limited or even timid because they did not have enough leadership exposure. To address this challenge, the academic unit could have the staff participating in activities within that academic unit or even outside of that academic unit as a means of "exposing staff to varied leadership cultures and practices" (Academic staff 24). Then upon completion, or on their return, use distributed leadership to have them participating in different leadership roles. One suggested means of providing this exposure is "planning a staff conference with particular focus on leadership" (Academic staff 33). This would allow exposure to different practices in educational leadership and for building a network of stakeholders with educational interests who could share information and ideas with them in the future.

According to one participant, staff members were often times lacking recognition for the work they were doing and this can be a deterrent. Therefore, as a means of recognising their efforts, department heads could "assign leadership roles to their supervisees and reward those who are high performers" (Administrative staff 5). Another participant proposed that the academic unit should have a "Leadership Day" (Administrative staff 12) where the junior employees would be allowed to sit in the offices of their academic leaders (president, deans, college administrators) for a few days to

gain a first-hand experience of executing the functions of these academic leaders.

One participant suggested that the educational leaders within that unit should "use distributed leadership as means of succession planning" (Administrative staff 14). Another shared that, although not described as distributed leadership, "the practice is already in use" (Administrative staff 15). She added that benefits were already being realised from distributed leadership as it had created a number of opportunities for idea generating and sharing, and it had resulted in job enrichment and increased levels motivation within that academic unit. While not providing much detail, the other participant suggested that this academic unit could use distributed leadership to "coach, mentor, and train prospective leaders" (Academic staff 8) to expand leadership capacities.

To summarise the responses, participants would embrace distributed leadership and related initiatives to expand leadership capacity and to ensure that social justice is practised in that academic unit. An anticipatable benefit could be a community where there would be adequate numbers of personnel who are equipped to assume leadership roles. In addition, since leadership would not be left to a select one or two individuals, there would be fewer biases in the leadership assignment processes – ultimately, a community in which social justice would be practised.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyse how distributed leadership could be used in a select academic unit to expand leadership capacity in order to achieve social justice. The research attempted to address questions related to how staff members in the

select academic unit perceive current leadership practices and distributed leadership; and how staff perceive that the select academic unit could use distributed leadership to expand leadership capacity and to ensure that social justice is practised.

Participants' responses indicated no particular effort to practice distributed leadership or social justice; and for one participant, distributed leadership just happened throughout their operations, even without having such thoughts (Administrative staff 15). According to this participant, that was an effortless activity that was executed unintentionally. However, that is somewhat different from what was found in the literature positioning distributed leadership as an effort that involves interacting, sharing expertise and merging qualities to build leadership capacities (Harris, 2008; Spillane et al., 2004). Over 75% of the participants reported that there was some merging of capabilities with the intent to achieve set goals of their academic unit. One could also suppose that within that academic environment there were some efforts toward professional development as over 60% shared the goal of transforming into a learning organisation (Senge, 1990) where capacity building is continuous.

Some of the findings were akin to what was found in the literature in that almost 90% felt that distributed leadership can be the fuel in the engine required to move that academic unit into a learning organisation. This was similar to the suggestion advanced by Spillane et al. (2004) that distributed leadership has the potential to expand capacities through work experiences. However, this requires idea generating and sharing and it was only about half of the participants who reportedly were provided with opportunities to generate and share new ideas.

There seemed to be a divide among study participants' perception of whether their academic unit could use distributed leadership to build capacities and whether staff members were given such opportunities. While almost all participants agreed that their academic unit can use distributed leadership to build leadership capacities, just below 50% of participants reported that staff members frequently got opportunities to participate in leadership and that senior academic leaders valued staff ideas and facilitated them contributing to leadership. In the same vein, just over 50% reportedly were encouraged to build capacities by participating in leadership. This could be interpreted as participants identifying certain gaps but did not think of distributed leadership as a tool that could have helped to bridge those gaps. Therefore, since participants admitted that this academic unit could use distributed leadership to coach, mentor, and train prospective leaders, like Southworth (2009) advanced, it could also be embraced to help to propel specific actions toward leadership; and allow the staff to incorporate their new knowledge and competencies into their practice (Mizell, 2010) as a means of continuously strengthening their practice (Hirsh, 2010), and increasing their levels of effectiveness (Public Impact for the Chicago Public Education Fund, 2008).

These responses indicated that although there was the view that distributed leadership could expand leadership capacity, over 50% felt their ideas were not valued and facilitated by senior academic leaders as the staff would have desired. Further, they were not being encouraged to participate in leadership initiatives. Greenfield et al. (2009) noted that, in a distributed leadership environment, parties are interacting and sharing expertise which both help to foster learning while building capacity and nurturing synergy. The findings suggested a similar view as almost 100% of

participants were in some level of agreement that distributed leadership could help to expand leadership capacity. Furthermore, distributed leadership could be the machinery to enhance succession planning and no doubt this could further help to expand social justice in the select academic unit.

Based on participants' responses, one could reasonably assume that, within the select academic unit, distributed leadership was not thought of or explored as a leadership development tool. But, this was contrary to what one participant reported. She reported that distributed leadership was already being utilised in the academic unit with several benefits realised from it such as increased motivation for the staff and job enrichment. These were similar to the benefits mentioned by Spillane et al. (2004); and this may be an indication that the senior academic leaders within that academic unit may need more information about distributed leadership, as with such information they could easily buy into distributed leadership and use it as a tool to expand leadership capacity.

Silva et al. (2017) advanced social justice through "familiarity with the culture" (p. 329), and Szeto and Cheng (2018) underscored inclusion, addressing differences, and promoting equity in organisations, communities and cultures. Similarly, from the results of the study, as means of using distributed leadership for capacity building and social justice, participants suggested exposing staff to diverse leadership cultures and practices. This would ensure that social justice is practised resulting in two main advantages. On the one hand, one or two individuals are not burdened with leadership (Smith, 2013), and on the other hand, leadership capacity is expanded and a wider net is created from which the organisation could draw. Further, in the select academic unit, as a means of ensuring that social

justice is practised, this exposure to various cultures could help to break down barriers, build up individuals, and spread the resources, benefits, privileges and opportunities (Miller et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The research has reasonably addressed each of the research questions in that it provided insight into how staff members in the select academic unit perceived the existing leadership practices and distributed leadership; and it suggested how the select academic unit could use distributed leadership to expand leadership capacity and to ensure that social justice is practised.

Based on the responses from the participants, it is safe to conclude that the staff would welcome the introduction of distributed leadership, that distributed leadership would help to expand leadership capacity, and the select academic unit could use distributed leadership as a tool to practise social justice. Rather than focusing on just senior academic managers, this academic unit would benefit from distributing leadership and appropriating its resources to develop internal talents and build leadership capacities to enhance succession planning. Such initiatives would create a leadership community where employees have equal opportunities to vie for vacant positions so that social justice is practised. This would also create a learning organisation (Senge, 1990), where leadership capacity building is perennial and individuals are learning leadership through multiple interactions (Harris, 2008). In such a situation, the outcome is likely to be leadership sustainability in an environment where social justice resides (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004).

Notwithstanding the stated limitations and reserves about distributed leadership (Harris, 2009), participants perceive that the

select academic unit should incorporate distributed leadership as a tool to enhance succession planning, build a leadership community, mitigate leadership distribution biases, and expand leadership capacity toward social justice. The researcher believes it may be beneficial to replicate this study in other academic units or in the wider academic community within that tertiary institution.

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About the author

Nola P. Hill-Berry is a lecturer and Programme Director for the health information management courses of study at the University of Technology, Jamaica. She serves the IEAL-J as Secretary, Director of Branding, and Conference Chair**.** Nola has special interests in leadership in health information management education and practice.

Email: chuckberry.nhb@gmail.com