

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	Article Info
<p>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 multifaceted, 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.</p>	<p>Article History: Received September, 30, 2018 Accepted August, 30, 2019</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Trinidad and Tobago, Phenomenography, Understanding social justice, Roles, Leadership practices, Equity, Marginalized, De-privileging.</p>



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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 (S JL) 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

Participant information: Convenience sampling

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 11 principals ◆ 5 males; 6 females ◆ Ages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 40-50 yrs (8) ◆ 51-57 yrs (3) ◆ Highest qualifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ PhD (2) ◆ MEd (5) ◆ PG Dip in Education (4) ◆ Years' experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ x<5 yrs (3) ◆ 5<x<10 yrs (5) ◆ 10<x<15 yrs (2) ◆ 18 yrs (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ School level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 5 Secondary ◆ 5 primary ◆ 1 ECCE ◆ School type: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 4 Gov't ◆ 6 Gov't Assisted / denomination ◆ 1 Private ◆ School size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ y<300 (3) ◆ 300<y<600 (5) ◆ 600<y<900 (3)
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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