STUDENT LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS:
A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Education
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Abstract 

This qualitative study investigates how the views of student leaders (and some of their staff advisors) illuminate the discussion in the broader literature around issues of student leadership, conflict, diversity and social justice in secondary schools. Eighteen one-hour, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve student leaders and six teachers from six provinces across Canada. This study contributes to educational research by considering the ways student leaders (rather than adult administrators) can impact social justice. While students envision their leadership role in terms of social justice with the goals of inclusion and societal change in mind, the present schooling structure, established expectations and strategies chosen for initiatives often hinder the realization of such a role. Schools also seem to avoid local controversial issues by encouraging student leaders to focus on international concerns. This study explores opportunities for schools to address equity issues through reconceptualizing student leadership and its goals.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the many educators that have continually inspired me to push the boundaries of my mind, heart and spirit:

My models were the people who stepped outside of the conventional mind and who could actually stop my mind and completely open it up and free it, even for a moment, from a conventional, habitual way of looking at things…. If you are really preparing for groundlessness, preparing for the reality of human existence, you are living on the razor’s edge, and you must become used to the fact that things shift and change. Things are not certain and they do not last and you do not know what is going to happen. My teachers have always pushed me over the cliff… (Pema Chodron in hooks, 1994, pp. 206-207)

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. John Portelli, whose classroom is a testament to what hooks (1994) calls ‘education as the practice of freedom.’ His passion and dedication to interrogating inequitable educational practices encourages students to have the courage to galvanize a path forward despite resistance towards a more humane education system. I would also like to express gratitude to Dr. Ben Levin, whose influence truly changed my life’s trajectory. I sincerely believe because of this meeting, “I am who I am instead of being somebody else” (Alden Nowlan, ‘What happened when he went to the store for bread’).

As well, I would like to extend my warmest appreciation for colleagues who have proved instrumental in this journey. To Joelle Rodway, our daily conversations have challenged me and shaped my thinking in so many ways; your friendship has been invaluable to me throughout this period of my life. I look forward to many more heated debates throughout our doctoral studies. To Kirsten Corson, a kindred spirit, whose friendship and support during my initial teaching experiences gave me hope and continually opened possibilities. Thank-you for taking the time to offer your perspectives
on this work; it is better for your efforts. There are many other friendships that have been indispensable to me throughout life’s many peaks and valleys – you all know who you are – thank-you for allowing me the freedom to be my uncensored self.

Last, but certainly not least, my family. To my parents, Anne and John, words cannot express my gratitude. Thank-you to my grandmother Patricia, who modeled independence, compassion and faith as far back as I can remember. Thank-you to my big brothers, Chuck, Kevin and Tim, whose love and support (especially in the past year) gave me strength to endure the loss of our father. To their wives, Jenn, Sarah and Ryoko – it is a privilege to call such remarkable women my sisters. There is family you are born into and family that you make – to Megan, my sister – thank-you for your love and support (and arguing with me incessantly!). To my cousins, thank-you for always listening. You have all inspired me to be my best self through your unconditional love. I offer thanks also to my heavenly Father who has blessed me beyond belief: ‘My cup runneth over’ (Psalms 23: 5).
“…to begin always anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to not spoil, to refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live life as a process – live to become…” – Paulo Freire
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Dedication

For my Mother, the most formidable woman I have ever met, who continually sacrificed so that I could be afforded every opportunity.

For my Father, a man who taught me the meaning of passion and integrity and … Not a day goes by without me missing crashing into your arms, my shelter from the storm.
CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF STUDY

The essence of the demand for freedom is the need of conditions which will enable an individual to make his own special contribution to a group interest, and to partake of its activities in such ways that social guidance shall be a matter of his own mental attitude, and not a mere authoritative dictation of his acts.

-John Dewey, Democracy and Education

Introduction: A Personal Narrative

My initial experience teaching in Canadian secondary schools was one filled with contradictions: my early keenness and passion was quickly tempered by disillusionment as I attempted to foster creativity in the face of standardized curriculum and testing -- that suited none but the existing dominant group -- and as I sought to promote autonomy in a system that espoused principles of freedom of expression while an institutionally sanctioned silence actually served to curtail innovation and reinforce the status quo. On the surface, I was encouraged to challenge students to think critically about the world around them, while prescribed resources emphasized traditional, conservative values that taught students not to question even teachers’ authority. The mantra of schools professed student success for all, while deficit mentalities\(^1\) were evidenced through expulsions and zero tolerance policies that were exclusionary (overwhelmingly applied to groups categorized by low socio-economic and minority status). The public secondary school in which I worked prided itself on being “student-centered” and “democratic” – but students’ voices and opinions were, in practice, tangential or ignored completely. My students often articulated frustration with their perceived lack of influence over their own educations. Even the organization of the day and the physical space of the building,

\(^1\) Portelli, Shields and Vibert (2007) explain that “deficit discourses place educational failure in individual and family shortcomings rather than in institutional or structural practices and power relations” (p. 8).
itself, demanded obedience and conformity. One student’s poignant question about why schools operated similarly to prisons would echo as I passed through hallways of silent classrooms where students sat in perfect rows, copying archaic facts from blackboards while repeatedly asking “How is this relevant to my life?” The layout of classrooms -- with one seat of power overlooking the rows-- inadvertently disclosed the oppressive nature of a schooling system that conflicted with my own pedagogical views and practices.

While in classrooms, controversial topics were avoided, in the staffrooms, debate was limited. Disagreement was a dirty word. We rarely discussed how we were teaching, why and to what effect. The lack of dialogue often prevented reflective practice, and thus growth. In attempts to open a dialogue that would, I hoped, change the ways we were dealing with students ‘at risk²’, for example, I shared with colleagues empirical evidence that illustrated the ineffectiveness of some traditional pedagogical methods, suggesting that we put to the test alternative practices -- such as team teaching and constructing curriculum and programs in partnership with the students -- that may be more conducive to our goals as educators. My challenges to traditional approaches, however, were ultimately deemed ‘a teacher’s worst nightmare’. As I questioned conventional pedagogy while proposing possible solutions to our problems with the ‘hard-to-teach’, I was quickly labeled an aggressive, confrontational militant rather than the innovative advocate for students I was trying to be -- an interesting nuance that reveals the true priorities of our education system. On multiple occasions by various people – department heads and administrators alike – I was asked to discontinue any open

² I am hesitant to utilize this highly contested term which often locates blame for failure in students’ own shortcomings rather than inadequacies within the system itself (See Portelli et al, 2007).
discussion of “certain” issues, namely those related to current pedagogical methods dealing with learners ‘at risk’. Like that of the students in our school, my own voice was silenced; now I, too, had to cope with the frustration of being disempowered. “Focus on your own classroom,” I was told, “not other people’s,” and, indeed, it felt like a prison.

Other issues I was told to avoid included racism, homosexuality, religious conflict, and sexism. I began to wonder how substantive societal concerns and dilemmas could be dismissed as though they were trivial considerations pursued only as brainteaser ‘fillers.’ I began to wonder if I had a place in this kind of restrictive system. As a teacher, I felt overwhelmingly constricted by an educational bureaucracy that seemed most concerned with legalities and the preservation of the status quo. Platitudes and tokenism reigned supreme, lacking action and prohibiting dialogue, an incongruity that laid bare institutional interests that clashed with my world view. A colleague quoted Audre Lorde to me: “Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat." I wondered whether this was true or whether, conversely, we needed to confront the contradictions between the spoken and unspoken values of our educational system by fighting to change ineffective policies and practices, in order to allow students to become partners in the educational process.

What stands out most in my mind about my teaching experience is the overwhelming fear that seemed to reside at every level of the system – among students, parents, teachers, administrators and boards. It permeated everything. Fear of difference. Fear of innovation. Fear of the unknown. Fear of others. Fear of pushing boundaries. Fear of leaving comfort zones. Fear of controversy. Fear of conversation. Fear of
exposure. Fear of change. Fear of losing control. This fear manifested itself in curriculum, assessments, streaming, disciplinary practices, policies, funding allocations, pedagogical practices, student outcomes, and representation within positions of power. The result of these fears: conformity, complacency, apathy and systemic inequity. To transform this fear into a positive and constructive force, we must openly acknowledge and address important issues (no matter how controversial). We must, as educators, open our classrooms to each other and be willing to experiment and transform teaching and learning to reflect the challenges of the twenty-first century. We must model practices and a meaningful dialogue that will help our students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to participate as actors on the global stage. We can move forward together in our discordance.

I became a teacher to be a radical contrast to the apathy so frequently found in classrooms today. This is how I have begun to ask questions of the education system and my role within it. Critical analysis of a system is not synonymous with condemnation of that system. My critique of the education system does not come from pessimism, and it is not meant to discourage educators or undermine public faith in our system; rather, my perspective and critical analysis is deeply rooted in optimism, hope, and a strong belief that change is possible and will result in a better (and more equitable) education system and, in turn, a better society. I do believe that Canada has a strong public education system; this study is meant to illustrate areas that can be improved. It is with an open mind and a spirit of inquiry that I enter into this research in the hopes of igniting and participating in dialogues about substantive educational issues that seek to lay the foundation for change through action.
Identification of the Problem: Student (Dis) Engagement & Inequities

Not all students enjoy or complete their secondary school education. In 2005, a report investigating secondary school leavers brought the issue of student disengagement to the forefront of the educational agenda in Ontario (Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005). In 2001, 18.4 % of Canadians between the ages of 20-24 did not have a high school degree, certificate or diploma (Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 3). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) outlines that in all participating OECD countries, one in four students are unhappy with their school experience (Willms, 2000, p. 25). The majority of disengaged students have low socio-economic status and minority group status (Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 14). School factors related to disengagement include an “ineffective discipline system; lack of adequate counseling /referral; negative school climate; lack of relevant curriculum; passive instructional strategies; disregard of student learning styles; retentions or suspensions; streaming; and lack of assessment and support for students with disabilities” (Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 14). Another major factor for student disengagement is discrimination based upon identity in relation to race, gender, sexuality and socio-economic status (Dei, 1997).

As a response to the growing problem of disengagement, an increasing amount of educational research is focusing on various aspects of student engagement and participation, including its purposes, its different forms in schools, the benefits and barriers to engagement, the importance of relationships between teachers and students as a prerequisite for student engagement, policy surrounding student participation, and the importance and effects of student voice (Critchley, 2003; Fielding, 2004; Kohn, 1993; Levin, 2000; McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Mitra, 2003, 2004; Shields & Vibert, 2003).
The exclusion of student participation in policy and decision making constructs students as passive recipients of knowledge and calls into question the popular assertion that schools are democratic institutions. Presently, in many regions, when students are included (even in school councils or as trustees), the power they possess in a merely advisory capacity represents tokenism, rather than meaningful participation. Education has been something done to students, rather than with them in a co-operative partnership.

In recent years, this increase of literature on student engagement has emerged as a plea to improve schooling by allowing students to have an authentic voice in their education. Stakeholders’ opinions (including parents, community members, administrators and teachers) are often contradictory in terms of the extent of student involvement that they deem appropriate. Opposition from educators, in relation to student leadership, is predicated on the belief “that students are not capable of making sound educational decisions, lack confidence, cannot handle the heavy workload associated with this sort of involvement, and are only around for a few years” (Ryan, 2006, p. 79). Kohn (1993) maintains that student disengagement is a product of “powerlessness – a lack of control over what one is doing” (p. 8). In the last decade, the sudden increase in educational research examining student (dis)engagement within the educational enterprise has polarized the field, as some valorize consulting students as the most plausible way to improve education (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), while others remain resistant to these initiatives as Ryan (2006) and others outline.

I cannot speak of education without simultaneously acknowledging the societal context within which it occurs. An influential trend currently shaping the world is the increasing interconnectedness of societies through globalization, immigration and other
transnational forces (Arnove, 1999). The forces contributing to this trend create unique problems for education systems across the world and, in turn, within Canada. Rapid demographic shifts are posing unprecedented challenges to schools (Harvey & Houle, 2006). As Canadian society and schools become increasingly pluralistic, the needs of students and communities increase correspondingly:

Each year, the country welcomes about 250,000 immigrants, with the vast majority (75 percent) settling in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. In total about 18 percent of Canada’s population consists of immigrants. We can expect Canada to continue to rely on immigrants to bolster the population and fill labour shortages. By 2017, approximately 7.6 million immigrants are expected to live in Canada, representing about 22 percent, or one in five, of the total population (Harvey & Houle, 2006, p. 1).

As a result, more demands and pressure are being placed on schools to be able to meet the needs of a diverse range of students. As the education system fails to meet the needs of these new groups, more students slip through the cracks.

Unfortunately, the education system is not evolving quickly enough to meet new challenges arising from globalization. Even if it could, the question remains which direction and changes adequately reflect the democratic nature of Canada. In a democratic country, freedom and equity among differently situated social groups must be a central pursuit. Currently, school outcomes, educational attainment and labour market success are largely correlated to ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, and gender⁴; some immigrant and visible minority groups are on the bottom of the achievement gap (Harvey & Houle, 2006). These inequities are unacceptable in a democratic society, especially for those who experience an educational system that fails them. Democracy

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⁴Among other categories not outlined here.
remains contingent upon active citizenship which, in turn, relies on engagement. Disengaged students, who later become disengaged adults, stand in direct opposition to the claim that our schools, and country for that matter, are just and democratic. Education is imperative for the achievement of social justice:

The educational system of a given society reflects that society, and, at the same time, it is the main force perpetuating it. It may be perceived as the most powerful means of social control to which individuals must submit, and as one of the most universal models of social relationships to which they will refer later (quote by Michael Crozier in Francie, 1992, p. 13).

It is imperative for Canada to confront issues arising from diversity in order to find strategies and interventions that will ensure the equity required for our democratic country. The justification to prioritize the correction of these inequities is one founded on human rights. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees equity for its citizens, Section 15 (Equality Rights), clearly outlines that:

15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. (2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability (Canada, 1982).

Our education system must reflect these inalienable rights by ensuring that all students have an equitable education.

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4 I recognize that action and engagement in themselves do not guarantee democracy, the purpose and direction of engagement in what and for what purpose must also be considered.

5 The distinction between equity and equality will be addressed more fully later.
**Research Design**

I investigated student leadership in Canadian secondary schools by conducting a study of student leaders and teachers affiliated with the Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA). CASAA, established in 1985, is a registered not-for profit educational association dedicated to fostering student leadership within secondary schools nationally. The goals of CASAA include the following:

- to facilitate the professional growth of Student Activity Advisors\(^6\) by helping to equip them with the resources, ideas, and support to become effective trainers of student leaders;
- to encourage across Canada the sharing and exchange of ideas pertaining to student activities;
- to support the organization and growth of provincial associations of Student Activity Advisors;
- to promote actively the concept of student leadership (CASAA, n.d.).

CASAA holds a national conference each year, the Canadian Student Leadership Conference (CSLC), hosted by different provinces and territories, bringing together and training student leaders and teachers from all over Canada. Provincial student leadership conferences have also emerged under the organizational leadership provided by CASAA.

I conducted this research at the CSLC (held September, 2007) in London, Ontario. Figure 1 shows the national representation of student leaders and teachers at CSLC 2007 by province. I interviewed 18 members of CASAA (2 administrators, 4 teachers and 12 student leaders) to explore their perceptions of student leadership and to determine to what extent student leadership addresses social justice issues in their

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\(^6\) Student Activity Advisors are teachers from secondary schools across Canada that support and train student leaders. In some provinces, where leadership curriculum exist, these are teachers that teach leadership courses. In other provinces, Student Activity Advisors are teachers who run student councils.
respective secondary schools. CASAA and CSLC were ideal for this study for two reasons. Firstly, the national scope of the organization and CSLC conference allowed access to student leaders from across the country in one location at the same time. Secondly, and most importantly, the theme of CSLC 2007, “LEAD ON – Lead with Enthusiasm, Acceptance, Diversity and Optimism Now”, was conducive to examining student leadership for social justice. The primary focus of the conference was training student leaders to deal with equity issues locally and internationally in the face of increasing diversity, in order to develop student leaders who have the capacity cope with the complex challenges arising from rapid globalization; consequently, it was an ideal setting in which to examine student leadership for social justice.

Figure 1. CSLC 2007 National representation by province.
Critical Orientation: Critical-Theory Research in Education

This study is conducted from a critical-theory research perspective; arguably, this is the most important aspect of its design and purpose. Critical-theory research is aimed at “uncovering the detrimental effects of unequal power relationships in cultures and in the global community. Through critical inquiry it seeks to emancipate individuals from the many forms of oppression that exist in the world” (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005, p. 381). It is a form of anti-oppressive education. By examining student leadership in relation to issues of diversity and social justice, I hope to explore avenues leading to more equitable education in Canada (and beyond). This critical orientation “involves constantly looking beyond what we teach and learn. It thereby serves the critical purpose of troubling education and educational research by exposing the assumptions underlying widely accepted but oppressive cultural practices that traditional educational practices help maintain” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 381). Questioning the world around us is essential in creating change.

I consider myself to be a criticalist, which Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) define as “a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism” (p. 139). Criticism is to be distinguished from condemnation. Criticism attempts to explore an issue with the purpose of finding solutions or strategies to improve a system. Gall et al. (2005) paraphrase seven basic assumptions that are accepted by a criticalist (outlined originally by Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994):

1. Every society systematically gives privileges to certain cultural groups and oppresses other cultural groups (p. 382).

2. The oppression experienced by an individual is an interactive combination of the various oppressions generated in response to all that individual’s non-privileged identities (p. 382).
3. Cultural texts (including but not limited to language) are probably the most powerful means of expressing and maintaining differences in privilege. Criticalists view any discourse, object, or event as having communicative value and thus able to be analyzed as a “text” (p. 383).

4. Every human act, creation, or communication can be interpreted in relation to the cultural context of capitalist production and consumption (p. 383).

5. All thought is mediated by socially and historically constructed power relations (p. 384).

6. Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values and prevailing assumptions about what is valued (p. 385).

7. Mainstream research practices help reproduce systems of oppression that are based on class, race, gender, and other cultural categories (p. 385).

These are assumptions under which I operate from conception to completion of this study. Schools reproduce inequities through hegemony⁷ as individuals accept hierarchal structures as the natural order of things when, conversely, these structures are deliberate and socially constructed to maintain the status quo (which benefits the dominant group).

The goal of critical theory is emancipation, “a process of generating actions and changes in consciousness of and toward the members of oppressed cultural groups that help free them from their oppression” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 382). Central to my analysis (and typical for criticalists) is the conception of student voice: “Voice refers to the degree to which individuals occupying particular social categories or identities are privileged, silenced, muted, or empowered through the operations of discourses that maintain or contest dominant and subordinate cultures in a society” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 382). This study aims, by predominantly selecting student leaders in its sample, to create space for students’ perspectives to be heard.

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⁷ Hegemony “refers to the ways in which privileged cultural groups maintain domination over other groups through various cultural agencies that exert power, in particular the political, criminal justice, and education systems” (Gall et al, 2005, p. 382).
As a criticalist, I also believe that neutrality is a myth\(^8\). My research does not claim to be value-free; conversely, I openly acknowledge that the world, in addition to my views of it, is socially constructed. This founds my belief that change is possible, that nothing is a given. Like other criticalists, I seek “to balance [my] criticism with hope, and a deep belief that the emancipation of nonprivileged groups will improve the life conditions of all groups and individuals” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 386). In my inquiry, in order to make invisible systemic structures explicit, I will take heed of the aspect of the hidden curriculum, “the implicit instruction in attitudes and habits that schools continually transmit by their structure and the way that they organize activities” (Gall et al., 2005), embedded in student leadership training and the education system itself. My critical analysis orientation, that of critical-theory research, has wide-reaching implications for the questions I ask in an attempt to determine how student leadership is contributing to or detracting from social justice and equity in schools across Canada.

**Research Question**

This study responds to the following major research question: How do the views of a group of student leaders (and some of their staff advisors) illuminate the discussion in the broader literature around issues of student leadership, conflict, diversity and social justice in Canadian secondary schools?

**Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Schools are microcosms of larger (pluralistic) society; consequently, inevitable tensions arise as disparate values, conflicting political agendas and divergent views of

desirable outcomes compete for legitimacy. Educational institutions often reflect hierarchal structures and hegemonic ideologies that produce systemic inequities which privilege the dominant group to the detriment of “others” through marginalization and exclusion of various social groups (Adams et al, 2007; Dei, 1997; Ferguson et al., 2005). While these conflicts make education extremely difficult, they also represent opportunities for communities and educators to utilize secondary schools and student leadership to acknowledge and deal with complex, and often controversial, societal issues.

Predominantly, studies of educational leadership for social justice center on adult educational administration (Bell et al, 2008; Brown, 2004, 2006; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall, 2004; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). My study contributes to the dearth in literature and research on student leadership for social justice through examining the ways in which student leaders are being trained nationally in Canada to cope with equity issues arising from diversity. Students have a significant contribution to make to school improvement (Critchley, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Kohn, 1993; Levin, 2000; Mitra 2003, 2004). This research is important because student leadership for social justice is another field in which to confront and combat inequities in our education system, thereby improving schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the many opportunities available to schools to address equity concerns (both locally and globally) through reconceptualizing student leadership and its goals. This study makes a contribution to the educational milieu in that it considers the ways student leaders can positively influence the struggle for social justice. This endeavor is imperative in the global societal context of the twenty-first century, as increasing pluralism and
interconnectedness of societies from globalization are posing unparalleled challenges to education systems and schools (Harvey & Houle, 2006); thus, an explicit focus on acknowledging and dealing with diversity and conflict in secondary schools is crucial to achieving equity.

Students will inevitably have to confront issues of difference in society; accordingly, schools should not attempt to shelter them from the realities of adult life. Rather, schools must prepare students to deal with the substantive issues of their social world. Addressing these issues in schools is imperative for democratic and global citizenry. Education does not occur in a vacuum; consequently, schools are testing grounds for democratic practices. I believe it is the responsibility of educated citizens within a democratic society to create awareness and act towards a more equitable future for all. The educational arena is a powerful site to begin this process; consequently, the system must prioritize training student leaders for social justice, in order to ensure their ability to co-operate and participate productively in local, regional and global communities.

**Conceptual Framework: Linking the Literature to the Study**

I am interested in the ways in which different versions of 1) the purpose of education, 2) democracy, 3) student engagement and 4) diversity and social justice affect schools; more specifically, I examine student leadership with these overarching influences. My analysis incorporates the interaction among various contexts (namely local, regional and global forces) and acknowledges that these exchanges drive change. Drivers of change “are those large scale forces that produce change at lower levels of system organization. Typically, these change drivers consist of global, demographic,
economic, technological information and other factors that create a changing environment to which organizations must adapt” (Swenson, 2002). My conceptual framework includes, but is not limited to, the following drivers of change:

- Demographic (e.g. immigration, pluralism, diversity)
- Economic (e.g. globalization, trade, market, neoliberalism, policy frameworks)
- Sociopolitical (e.g. governance, institutional and legal frameworks)
- Science & Technology (e.g. increasing communication across vast geographical expanses, knowledge of other countries readily available through electronic media)
- Cultural and Religious (e.g. beliefs, values, consumption choices)

My conceptual framework (Figure 2) guides the literature review as each of the themes mentioned is explored in more detail. Throughout Chapter two, I provide various tables that directly link the literature to the conceptual framework in order to present a detailed account of each component in relation to the implications for schools and/ or student leadership.

**Organization of Thesis**

In this chapter, I have set the stage outlining the background and rationale for the study, the research design, the critical orientation and the main research question. I have also introduced the conceptual framework which guides the literature review in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter two reviews relevant literature across the major themes considered in the thesis including the purpose of education, democracy, diversity, social justice, student leadership and engagement. The first two chapters combine to provide an organizational framework to contextualize the study. Moreover, this study is framed within the trend of increasing interconnectedness of societies, outlining and examining interactions among local, regional and global contexts.
Increasing Interdependence between all 3 contexts above results in the following **Drivers of Change** that exert pressure on schools creating conflict:

- **Demographic** (e.g. immigration, pluralism, diversity)
- **Economic** (e.g. globalization, trade, market, neoliberalism, policy frameworks)
- **Sociopolitical** (e.g. governance, institutional and legal frameworks)
- **Science & Technological Advancement**
- **Cultural and Religions** (beliefs, values, consumption choices)

Figure 2. Conceptual framework
Chapter three outlines the chosen methodology. Chapter four, five and six integrate findings and discussion based on the major themes of the research. Interview excerpts are included throughout for the participants to present their own views. I attempt, in all areas, to provide an authentic depiction of the phenomenon of student leadership as I understood it from listening to interviews, participating in and observing the Canadian Student Leadership Conference (CSLC) and interacting with both teachers and students.

Chapter four focuses on student leadership and is comprised of a rich description of participants’ views of skills, dispositions, values, underlying beliefs, and goals necessary for effective student leadership. Student leaders also outline the roles they occupy in their respective schools. CSLC training for student leaders is also explored.

Chapter five investigates participants’ views on diversity. This leads to a discussion on conflict, recognizing difference and controversial issues. It explores participants’ views on what topics are controversial, whether controversial issues should be dealt with in Canadian secondary schools, what role teachers should occupy during controversial discussions, and how different groups experience controversial issues.

Chapter six generates discussion and analysis around issues the study raises for social justice and examines participants’ views of impediments to equity efforts. It also addresses power, privilege and oppression and explores why inequities persist. This chapter closes by considering possible ways forward to challenge inequities.

Chapter seven summarizes the findings in relation to other studies and identifies the implications of the research for policy, student leadership, curriculum, and educators. It examines the limitations of the study, the challenges of studying student leadership for
social justice and suggests ideas for future research. Overall, this chapter attempts to provide future direction for our education system with the primary goal being a more equitable experience for all regardless of gender, race, socio-economic status, and sexual-orientation; consequently, paving the way for a radical vision of student leadership, democratic education and global citizenry.
CHAPTER 2: RELATED LITERATURE

One of the most important functions of a vibrant democratic culture is to provide the institutional and symbolic resources necessary for young people and adults to develop their capacity to think critically, to participate in power relations and policy decisions that affect their lives, and to transform those racial, social and economic inequities that impede democratic social relations (Giroux, 2000, pp. 37-38).

My literature review focuses on four related areas that I believe are instrumental in understanding and evaluating the current reality of our education system: the purpose of education, democracy, social justice and diversity and student leadership and engagement. This review attempts to illustrate linkages between these concepts in relation to their implications for student leadership.

Purpose of Education

First and foremost, I delineate what I believe the major purpose of education ought to be. Education, above all else, should aim for equity and social justice. It has the potential to be the great equalizer among individuals, since schooling is mandatory for all societal members. Education has the potential to transform ideology, individuals and, in turn, society through a collective experience in which each individual is valued and respected, having equal access to knowledge and opportunity. It is a means for humanity to create a common vision of life (‘common’ should not be confused with synonymous9) that values and respects difference. Smith (2005) highlights education as “a process that frees the learner from the contingencies of the world that he or she happens to have been born into, opening up a realm of wider ideas and values” (p. 2). Education is society’s

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9 The difference between equity and equality is important. Equality means the same – an equal amount of money per student for instance. Equity, however, focuses on what is fair. More money for students with disabilities (although not equal and the same) is equitable and fair for what those students require. Of course there is considerable argument about what is ‘fair’.
first line of defense in combating inequities, to create autonomous individuals who act collaboratively for the good of all societal members.

Historically, the purpose of education has been continually debated and revisited; consequently, there are different views based on diverse economic, social, cultural, individual and political goals. Portelli and Solomon (2001) delineate three overarching and popular conceptions of the purpose of education: education as cultural capital, education for individual growth, and education for democratic transformation (pp. 18-21). Table 1 (based on Portelli & Solomon, 2001, pp. 18-21) summarizes the distinctive principles of each conception of the purpose of education and the corresponding implications for schools10. These viewpoints have wide reaching implications for all aspects of education including its basic organizational structure (hierarchal vs. flattened), teaching and learning, curriculum, assessment and evaluation, investment of stakeholders and relationships between students and teachers. In fact, these views become the impetus, engine and driving force behind political pressure for societal reform initiatives. For instance, if the aim of education is to produce skilled workers versus to empower individuals as agents of change, very different lessons and skill sets need to be developed.

In the end,

Our system of public education is – apart from the family – the major institutional setting in which young people acquire values and understandings about citizenship and the dynamics of living in society. In short, public education is central to the development and maintenance of social cohesion. This is of special importance in a multicultural society such as Canada where there are real risks of social and cultural polarizations developing (Harvey & Houle, 2006, p. 1).

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10 There are other authors who discuss tensions surrounding the purposes and goals of education (See Hare & Portelli, 2001; Smith, 2005; Young, Levin & Wallin, 2007).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Education</th>
<th>Distinctive Principles</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education as Cultural Capital</strong></td>
<td>Schools value, reward, reproduce and transmit certain knowledge forms, skills, aptitudes and experiences that are deemed to be required to function in predetermined social and economic structures.</td>
<td>- certain groups inherently possess more cultural capital than others (dominant group); therefore, schools reproduce inequities of a class-stratified society (exclusion from economic power and privileged positions based on gender, SES, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) - school knowledge as static, thereby preparing future citizens to fit in world as it is, not for the world as it might become - purpose of education as reflecting technical functionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education for Individual Growth</strong></td>
<td>A child centered pedagogy where curriculum and pedagogy cater to students’ particular needs and experiences; therefore, students engage actively in exploration of ideas and knowledge that are relevant to them.</td>
<td>- potentially limiting - focus on individual autonomy is often to the detriment of social cohesion (as an individual’s wants and needs supersede understanding of others’ needs and experiences) - against democratic principal of collective (because of a primary focus on the individual versus all societal members)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education for Democratic Transformation</strong></td>
<td>“Preparing students not to fit into a given world so much as to understand and transform the world as given” (Emancipatory education such as inclusive education, feminist pedagogy and antiracism)</td>
<td>- designed and implemented to achieve equity, social justice and social transformation - communal and social concerns are crucial (The relationship between individuals and the community is seen as a symbiotic relationship) - knowledge as socially co-constructed and fluid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Canada is characterized as a democratic country; therefore, the purpose of our education system should reflect democratic goals. No one, at face value, is likely to disagree with
this. The question, however, becomes which version of democracy and, accordingly, which goals?

**Democracy and Education**

In my opinion, one should not [clearly one ‘can’] conceive of education without, simultaneously, addressing democracy. As Dewey (1916) states, “It is obvious that the relation between democracy and education is a reciprocal one, a mutual one, and vitally so. Democracy is itself an educational principle, an educational measure and policy” (In Hare & Portelli, 2001, p. 291). I believe that democracy is a collective process carried out among individuals that is inclusive and based on mutual tolerance and respect. Levin (1998) reminds us that “democracy is a characteristic of communities or societies, not of individuals” (p. 61). This highlights that democracy is not “I” but “we” –it cannot be an individual pursuit; rather, it is collective by its very nature. In addition, democracy is not only a form of government, but a way of life (Portelli, 2001) that should facilitate educational goals. Education and democracy are inextricably joined.

**Democracy and education** are terms which often elicit strong emotive reactions from people. Canadians likely share the view that we should educate students for our democratic society, but the problem arises from the fact that this ‘simple truth’ means different things to different people. Utilizing generalities such as ‘democracy’ and ‘education’, without defining what we mean by them, is insufficient, because many different (and often conflicting) conceptions of each exist: “‘Education’ is like ‘democracy’ or ‘culture’ in being what some have called ‘an essentially contested concept’” (Smith, 2005, p. 1). Divergent views, however, can be brought together in the spirit of inquiry and a critical discourse that become an expression of the democratic
process itself. As Levin (1998) asserts, “the reconciliation of education and democracy rests not on an organization chart which shows who is superior to whom, but on a vision of society in which reflection, dialogue, critical thinking and mutual care are central” (p. 73). Different versions of democracy and education place different demands on societal institutions at different times; consequently, it is imperative that individuals engage in an ongoing critical dialogue about which conceptions of democracy and purposes of education are (and should be) reflected in our schools.

**Democracy**

The varying conceptions of democracy are important to consider for my study, because each has different implications for student leadership. Stokes (2002) outlines four popular models of democracy: liberal minimalism, civic republicanism, deliberative democracy and developmental democracy. Stokes (2002) describes the tenets of liberal minimalism:

> The main internal aim and justification of theories of protective democracy is to protect individual citizens from arbitrary rule and oppression by government, as well as from infringements upon individual liberty from other citizens. Democracy is an institutional instrument, based upon actual or implied contracts, for protecting the legal and political rights of individuals. In addition, all are united by their understanding of democracy as a procedure for choosing governments, and a preference for a minimal role for citizen participation (p. 28).

This form of democracy focuses on the political ends and the procedural elements of elections; therefore, it is limiting and restricted to the protection of individual interests. Civic republicanism shifts its focus to the cohesion of the community. Stokes (2002) emphasizes that, within civic republicanism, “the importance [is] given to the public interest or the common good… and [the] key role given to citizen participation” (p. 31). The deliberative democracy model has arisen within the past two decades, as theorists
have attempted to address diversity. Deliberative democracy is founded on the premise that other forms of democracy “do not address sufficiently the various problems, including those of pluralism, inequality and complexity, that are a condition of contemporary society” (Stokes, 2002, pp. 39-40). This model attempts to acknowledge and address conflicts arising from diversity through deliberation among all societal groups, in order to work towards unity despite differences.

The final model of democracy, outlined by Stokes (2002), is developmental democracy. Stokes maintains that a concern “for the common good lies at the heart of developmental democracy. As citizens pursue the common good, they also transform themselves and become more autonomous” (p. 35). This model emphasizes the positive aspects of political participation in creating autonomous citizens aware of their own agency. A focus on equity is also prioritized in recognition of the potential within every individual.

Conceptions of democracy are influential in our institutions or, at least, they should be. Schools are entrusted with the task of preparing students for citizenship beyond the classroom and, in Canada, this citizenship formally aims toward democracy:

As the cornerstone of our civil and democratic society, our public education systems are charged with the responsibility of educating our young people to take their place in society as productive citizens within the context of Canada’s rich diversity….It is therefore crucial at this time for extraordinary efforts to be made to ensure that all of our young people, including those who are most vulnerable, have the opportunity to succeed in school. To do this, however, we need an informed, open and broad-based discussion on the nature of these changes and how the needs of all students can be addressed (Harvey & Houle, 2006, p. ii).

Because I attach great importance to democracy’s potential to promote open, critical dialogue that can transform society for the better, the interruptive and critical-model of
democracy is also worthy of examination. Critical-democracy is closely aligned to my view of the purpose of education:

Critical democracy implies a significant expansion of democratic participation in the multiple realms of social life in which one takes part...[It] also implies a moral commitment to promote ‘public good’ over any individual’s right to accumulate privilege and power. In this sense it suggests strong values for equality and social justice. As a result, critical democracy presupposes that social arrangements will be developed within a socio-historical context (Goodman, 1992, pp. 7-8).

This type of democracy does not attempt to conceal or bury difference; rather, the inevitable conflict arising within communities is embraced as a central mechanism for constructive change. Ongoing debate through questioning, reflecting and analyzing the world is valued. This process is infinitely unfolding and continually revisited, thereby negotiating and addressing constantly changing power differentials and societal problems. Similarly, interruptive democracy is “based on the disposition to challenge. It is founded on the principle of positive conflict” (Davies, 2007, p. 78). It becomes “the process whereby people are enabled to intervene in practices which continue injustice. Democracy by definition contains the seeds of conflict, as it is not an end-state but a process whereby people hold leaders accountable and argue for rights for themselves and others” (Davies, 2007, p. 72). In short, democracy requires defiance, especially against inequitable societal structures. Equity is the goal of this conception of democracy.

Democracy is a fluid concept that reflects itself and encourages opposition through its constant struggle, even against its own effects and inadequacies dealing with new problems, towards its own ideal:

The irreducible distance, the always irrecusable between the ‘idea of democracy’ and that which presents itself in its name remains forever ambiguous...It commands the most concrete urgency, here and now. If I keep its old name of ‘democracy’ nevertheless, and often speak of a
‘democracy to come’, it is because that is the only name for a political regime which declares its historicity and perfectibility, in that it carries in its concept the dimensions of inadequation and of that which is to come. Democracy allows us in all liberty to invoke these two openings publicly in order to criticize the current state of all so-called democracy (Derrida, 2000).

It thus becomes our democratic duty to critique, continually yet fairly, our institutions and to strive perpetually to better them in an ever-changing society and world. Social justice is central to democracy, and democracy is required to achieve social justice.

**Linking the Literature to the Conceptual Framework: Democracy and Leadership**

Woods (2005) succinctly summarizes the distinctive principles of the four popular models of democracy (outlined by Stokes, 2002) in relation to their implications for leadership. Building on Woods (2005) and Stokes (2002), Table 2 (Background Literature for conceptual framework: Models of Democracy and Implications for Leadership) summarizes the different conceptions of democracy and their resulting implications for leadership. I argue that student leadership should reflect the aims of critical-democratic and interruptive conceptions of democracy, thereby prioritizing equity and social justice above all else.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Democracy</th>
<th>Distinctive principles (Based on Stokes 2002)</th>
<th>Implications for leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Liberal Minimalism                       |  - Protection of individual from arbitrary rule  
  - Procedural focus: process for choosing governments  
  - Equal formal political rights  
  - Calculation/promotion of own self-interest                                                                                                                                  |  ...is restricted to small minority  
  ...articulates and represents interests                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Civic Republicanism                      |  - Civic virtue, prioritizing public good over own interests  
  - Obligation to active political participation  
  - Commitment to political community                                                                                                                                                |  ... encourages political participation and dialogue  
  ... entails search for public good                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Deliberative Democracy                   |  - Enhancement of quality and use of deliberative reasoning  
  - Recognition of contemporary pluralism, inequality and complexity  
  - Regulative ideal for managing difference and conflict                                                                                                                             |  ... facilitates deliberation  
  ... is dispersed amongst participants in deliberative activity  
  ... respects diversity and acts against inequalities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Developmental Democracy                  |  - Extensive political participation  
  - Enhancement of individuals’ human capacities through political participation and collective state action  
  - Social justice  
  - Democratization of civil society                                                                                                                                                |  ... is encouraged in dispersed sites  
  ... entails search for common human good  
  ... contributes to own and others’ growth towards human potential                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Critical Democracy                       |  - Expansion of democratic participation in multiple rounds of social life (Goodman, 1992)  
  - Moral commitment to ‘public good’ over individual’s right to accumulate privilege and power (Goodman, 1992)  
                                                                                                |  ... strong values for equality and social justice  
  ... presupposes that social arrangements will be developed within socio-historical context  
  ...purpose is democratic transformation.  
  ...learning for democratic reconstruction transpires                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Interruptive Democracy                   |  - Deliberate intervention in practices that perpetuate injustice  
  - Conflict as necessary process to hold leaders accountable                                                                                                                            |  ... conflict as productive and necessary  
  ... human rights prioritized  
  ... social justice is the primary goal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
**Social Justice**

Intimately related to conversations about Canadian pluralism are those involving the pursuit of equity in the face of diversity. There is a distinction to be made between the terms *equity* and *equality*: “Equity refers to social justice or fairness. It involves a subjective moral or ethical judgment. Equality deals with the actual patterns in which something (e.g. income or years of schooling) is distributed among members of a particular group” (Farrell, 1999, p. 158). This means that something that is equal may not be equitable. For instance, a monetary, government-granted baby bonus for each child of a certain age in each Canadian family may be equal; however, if one family’s needs are fulfilled without it, while for another family it is an insufficient income supplement to provide the necessary food and shelter (due to differing socio-economic statuses), such a program may not be considered equitable. Conversely, an argument can be made that providing the family with lower socio-economic status more money for each child, while not being equal per se, may be more equitable. In this study, I utilize Adams, Bell and Griffin’s (2007) definition of social justice:

We believe that social justice is both a process and a goal. The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. We envision a society in which individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others). Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live. These are conditions we wish not only for our own society but also for every society in our interdependent global community. The process for attaining the goal of social justice, we believe, should also be democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change (pp. 1-2).
Social justice is thus a conscious way of being, an awareness of others and an active philosophy deeply rooted in openness, caring, compassion, and respect.

The ability to consider another’s perspective and reality is an important step in trying to understand differences among social groups. I acknowledge that a body of literature exists exploring the tensions of anyone understanding another’s position (One example is hooks, 1994). The argument is that I (as a white, Christian woman) could never understand, for instance, the reality of a black woman or man, or a Muslim and so on. Furthermore, based on differing economic and social situations and so forth, two women with the same race and ethnicity could still have very different life experiences that preclude their ability to wholly identify with one another. While I believe there is some merit to this, in that people should not assume that they can fully understand, for example, the lived conditions of racism without experiencing them, I also think there are valuable lessons to be learned in the process of trying to understand and empathize with another person’s experience.

John Rawls’ (1971) theory of justice is based on the premise of putting yourself in another’s position. Rawls encourages individuals to imagine themselves in the “original position” where we are all self-interested rational people preparing to establish a society that is just. He asks us to ignore our present condition by invoking what he calls a “veil of ignorance.” We imagine that we are all unaware of our identities in terms of gender, race, socio-economic status, and so on. Under these circumstances, how do we organize society if we do not know where our place within it will be? The answer is simple: we strive to create a fair society, because we do not want to find ourselves on the bottom of a hierarchy where even basic needs (such as food and shelter) are not met. Rawls arrives
at two principles of what he calls “justice as fairness”. First, the principal of Equal Liberty maintains that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others” (p. 53). Secondly, Rawls (1971) proposes the Difference Principle: “Social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they are both a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons, and b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity” (p. 107). Rawls’ theory of justice is highly contested; however, it is introduced here as a mental exercise in which I think everyone should engage as we seek an equitable society because it forces individuals to consider what a fair social order may look like.

A Model of Educational Inequality Coupled with our Current Educational Reality

Education is central to social justice because, in our society, education is correlated to a better standard of life in all areas including health, economically and politically (Vila, 2005). The equitability of our education system is thus a mechanism of and avenue towards social justice. In order to achieve social justice by attaining equity in education, we must first consider a framework that allows us to assess the current situation accurately and to set goals for areas of improvement. Farrell (1999) outlines a useful model for determining levels of education equality\(^{11}\) (or inequality as the case may be):

1. Equality of access – the probabilities of children from different social groupings getting into the school system, or some particular level or portion of it;

\(^{11}\) I have made the distinction earlier between equity and equality. This model focuses on sameness, rather than the possibility of achieving different, yet possibly equally valuable ends; however it is included, because I think it provides some benchmarks from which to examine and compare equity among different societal groups.
2. Equality of survival – the probabilities of children from various social groupings staying in the school system to some defined level, usually the end of a complete cycle (primary, secondary, higher);

3. Equality of output – the probabilities that children from various social groupings will learn the same things to the same levels at a defined point in the schooling system;

4. Equality of outcome – the probabilities that children from various social groupings will live relatively similar lives subsequent to and as a result of schooling (have equal incomes, have jobs of roughly the same status, have equal access to sites of political power (p. 159).

The first three categories address the internal workings of the school system, while the fourth category acts as a conduit between schools and the labour market (Farrell, 1999, p. 159). The first category (Equality of access) could measure streaming in relation to ethnicity and socio-economic status, for instance, or it could be used to track levels of primary, secondary or tertiary education. The second (Equality of survival) could evaluate the post-secondary pathways of students. The third (Equality of output) might question whether students of a different race in the same class are treated equally. The fourth category (Equality of outcome) assesses students’ eventual positions in the labour hierarchy. Inequity is common to all countries; in all nations, rich or poor, there are some points at which schooling “is a scarce good that not all can acquire” (Farrell, 1999, p.161). When thinking about educational equality, Farrell (1999) poses the following questions when considering an educational program: “Which people from which social categories have access to it? Which learners from which social categories ‘stay the course’ to the end of the program? Which do not? Which learners from which social categories learn more or less of what is being made available to them? Which learners are more or less able thereafter to use their newly acquired knowledge/skills to improve their lives and to what degree?” (p. 160). These questions should be asked in schools
across Canada—and, for that matter, globally. It is worth considering whether schools even have this data readily available; in itself, the existence, or lack thereof, of such records would speak volumes about the levels of concern for and awareness of educational equity.

In order to assess what we know about educational equity, I utilize Farrell’s model to compare these four elements of equality in Canada and globally (Table 3).

Table 3

*Comparing Educational Equality Locally and Globally*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CANADIAN CONTEXT</th>
<th>GLOBAL CONTEXT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Educational Measure: Equality of Access**

- All Canadians have access to free primary and secondary education (Young et al, 2007)
- Not all Canadians have access to tertiary institutions for a variety of reasons; the most commonly cited is including socio-economic status and financial barriers (Malatest, 2007, p. 30)
- A vast majority of children in developing countries do not have access to even primary education (Farrell, 1999, p. 160)
- Based on enrolment data, about 72 million children of primary school age were not in school in 2005; 57 per cent of them were girls. As high as this number seems, surveys show that it underestimates the actual number of children who, though enrolled, are not attending school (United Nations, 2007)

**Educational Measure: Equality of Survival**

- Most complete primary cycle
- High School dropout rates 30%; but most ‘drop back in’ by using alternative tracks therefore by age 25 85% have attained a secondary diploma or equivalent (Farrell, 1999, p. 162-163)
- Survival rates at post-secondary level are very low (Farrell, 1999, p. 162)
- 70-80 % complete primary cycle in middle-income developing nations (Farrell, 1999, p. 162)
- 50% complete primary cycle in low-income nations and have been declining in the past 15 years (Farrell, 1999, p. 162)
- Far below 50% complete primary cycle in poorest nations (Farrell, 1999, p. 162)
- Regardless of academic ability, 15-year-olds from lower socio-economic
Educational Measure: Equality of Output

- Among those who have reached the same level in the nation’s school system, children who are poor, rural, female, or from any other socially marginalized group learn less (Farrell, 1999, p. 165)

- It is important to note the variations among the quality of education. Although students from a wealthy country and a poor country may have completed primary school, they may not have acquired equal education. The poorer country likely had access to fewer resources (textbooks etc.) and teachers might have much lower levels of education than in developed nations (Farrell, 1999, p. 166)

Educational Measure: Equality of Outcome

- Empirical and theoretical evidence is confusing in this area; the general pattern seems to be that education can have very little effect on occupational mobility in poor societies because there are very few accessible occupational destinations (Farrell, 1999, pp. 168-169)

Clearly, developed nations, including Canada, fare better than poorer nations in virtually all areas of educational equality. In the Canadian context, however, there are still major discrepancies and achievement gaps between various social groups (Ferguson et al, 2007). The current educational systems, both locally and globally, are failing to meet the needs of society’s most marginalized social groups. This needs to be the primary focus of educational improvement plans locally and globally if the world is to become more equitable for all its citizens.

**Neoliberalism: An Impediment to Democracy, Education and Social Justice**

Discussions of education and social justice in increasingly pluralistic communities are incomplete without a discussion of globalization, in terms of global economic markets. Neoliberalism is a term often associated with the negative ramifications of
individual economic aspirations. Its definition in this discussion “is to denote the unique characteristics of modern capitalism that distinguish it from previous models of development…. the waning or disappearance of alternatives to the free market model” (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2007, p. 38). Neoliberalism is an impediment to education for the purpose of democratic transformation. It champions competitive individualism, profit, and education for economic employment, rather than co-operative unity despite differences, mutual care, and education for the transformation of a just society. The free market model continues to increase socio-economic disparities. Giroux (2005) lists many of the negative effects of neoliberalism:

Wedded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions, neoliberalism wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values. Under neoliberalism everything either is for sale or is plundered for profit….public services are gutted in order to lower the taxes of major corporations; schools more closely resemble either malls or jails, and teachers, forced to get revenue for their school by adopting market values, increasingly function as circus barkers hawking everything from hamburgers to pizza parties – that is, when they are not reduced to prepping students to take standardized tests (p. 2).

The vision of democracy I have supported – a collective pursuit for equity and social justice achieved through critical dialogue, reflection and mutual respect – is incompatible with neoliberalism. While democracy and social justice call for communal co-operation and equitable distribution of wealth and resources, neoliberalism dismantles communities and pushes person against person as individual profits become the primary concern. Apple (2006) highlights:

To support a market economy we need to encourage everyone to think of themselves as individuals who always act in ways that maximize their own interests…. People also need to be encouraged to accept that it is entirely ‘appropriate’ to have winners or losers in the system. If everyone acted in such an ‘economically rational’ way, the common good would somehow take care of itself (p. 23).
This romanticized notion of free markets, that they are fair and that they inevitably produce ‘deserved’ outcomes, is one that blames the victims of societal injustices. A product of this type of neoliberal thinking contributes to countless stereotypes about poverty stricken people as lazy and at fault for their losses, while rich people are valorized as praiseworthy and entitled to their gains. In a critical democracy, it is up to all individuals to attempt to right societal inequities based on the premise that it is the morally right thing to do, although people may differ in how best to do it. Freire’s universal ethic coupled with his conception of critical education practices are diametrically opposed to the tenets of neoliberalism. While discerning the “dictatorship of the marketplace, founded as it is on the perverse ethic of profit”, Freire (1998) catalyzes a sense of urgency “that people unite against the threat that looms over us. The threat, namely, to our own identity as human persons caught up in the ferocity of the ethics of the marketplace” (p. 115). This battle-cry against neo-liberalism serves as a call-for-action in the critical-democratic pursuit of social justice, a “defense of the legitimate interests of the human person” (p. 115). Each human being is ontologically free and, consequently, entitled to live a life without pestilence, hunger and poverty, unwarrantable afflictions with readily available remedies—remedies that will not be administered within a neoliberal, capitalistic framework.

Local to Global

The twenty-first century is often characterized by globalization. Technological advancements allow communication across vast geographical expanses, thus rapidly increasing our awareness of global and international issues. Held (1991) defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant
localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and *vice versa*” (p. 9). At the 2000 Millennium Summit, the United Nations (in conjunction with 189 Heads of State and government acting as representatives of their citizens) agreed upon eight Millennium Development Goals (Figure 3) that address equity issues across the world. These goals, to be achieved by the target date of 2015, “form a blueprint agreed to by all the world’s countries and all the world’s leading development institutions. They have galvanized unprecedented efforts to meet the needs of the world’s poorest” (United Nations, 2007). During the Summit, “there was a palpable sense of urgency. Urgency to ‘free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected’” (End Poverty 2015 Millennium Campaign, 2007).

![United Nations Millennium Development Goals](image)

*Figure 3. United Nations Millennium Development Goals*

The resolve to unite in these goals reflects a growing recognition that there are worldwide problems that sovereign states cannot address in isolation, some of which
include the following: “environmental destruction, the spread of disease, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as the increasing impoverishment of populations and the growing disparity of wealth among regions and within nations” (Farrell, 1999, p. 9). These global issues are complex and raise a multitude of controversial questions about hegemony, privilege and power as they relate to socio-economic status, racism, sexism, oppression and genocide.

Global forces are inciting new challenges for schools. As Starratt (2005) notes, the educational landscape is rapidly altering:

The world in which educational leaders operate is changing- from one dominated by national interests to one of a global community. In this transition, schools must prepare the present generation of young people to participate as active citizens of the global community, rather than as spectators or tourists. Schools face major challenges as they prepare their charges for a world which requires a) agreement among nations to share in managing the earth’s fragile ecology; b) sharing ideas on human, cultural, and economic capital and on manufacturing and medical technologies to improve the quality of life for all people; and c) guarantees of global peace and security (p. 124).

The awareness of international issues catalyzed by technological advances and rapid globalization make every individual more accountable, especially within democratic countries. Undeniably, “globalization has infused the ever-present need to learn about each other with an urgency and emphasis like no other in history” (Farrell, 1999, p. 16). In the past, many individuals may not have been aware of what was going on around the world; however, modern society cannot feign ignorance. Access to knowledge is readily available in developed countries and, undeniably, shows the vast societal inequities in and among developed and developing countries alike.
Linking the Literature to the Conceptual Framework: Diversity, Social Justice and Drivers of Change

Table 4 examines trends associated with diversity and social justice (another main component of the conceptual framework). These trends are considered in relation to the implications for schools and student leadership.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Trend</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Implications for Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Diversity**       | • 250,000 new immigrants in Canada each year, with the vast majority (75 percent) settling in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.  
• 18 percent of Canada’s population consists of immigrants.  
• By 2017, approximately 7.6 million immigrants are expected to live in Canada, representing about 22 percent, or one in five, of the total population (Harvey and Houle, 2006, p.1). | • Higher demands and increased pressure on schools to meet the needs of a diverse range of students; as the education system fails to meet the needs of these new groups, student disengagement increases.  
• increased conflict among groups                                                                                           |
| **Social Justice**  | • “various segments of our public school population experience negative and inequitable treatment on a daily basis” (Brown, 2006, p.701)  
• student disengagement major problem (Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005).  
• widespread discrimination in schools based upon identity politics in relation to race, gender, sexuality and socio-economic status (Dei, 1997, p. 64).  
• The majority of disengaged students have low socio-economic status and minority group status (Ferguson et al., 2005, p.14).  
• minority groups streamed into lower level classes, less likely to complete high school, lower employment and salary as adults | • schools are overwhelmingly failing certain groups  
• systemic inequities reproduced by Eurocentric curriculum, assessment, etc.  
• schools must actively address issues of discrimination (racism, heterosexism, sexism, etc.) in order to make a more equitable environment for all social groups |
| **Drivers of Change**| • By 2002, e-mail and related technology enables 15 million workers to telecommute; a 650% increase from 1992. (Swenson, 2002).  
• The amount of electronic information is doubling every 60 minutes (Swenson, 2002).  
• Neoliberalism increasing inequities (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2007) | • increasing global awareness  
• sovereign nations are increasingly dependent on each other  
• schools must attempt to prepare students for global societal context (earth’s shared environment, global peace and security) |
I believe it is the responsibility of educated citizens within a democratic society to create awareness and act towards a more equitable future for all. Education is a powerful site to begin this process; consequently, the system must prioritize social justice curriculum and training for student leaders, in order to ensure their ability to co-operate and participate productively in the global community. We must prepare future generations for the societal context within which they will operate. Student leadership represents a viable mechanism to do just that.

**Student Leadership and Engagement**

It is my assertion that authentic student participation and leadership are essential in preparing students for democratic citizenship. Student participation can improve schools in a number of areas including student outcomes, relationships among educational stakeholders, and community partnerships. Authentic student involvement is a way to increase students’ feelings of agency within the educational process; it thereby remains an avenue to combat disengagement and dropout rates. If schools are to be truly democratic, students will be consulted, listened to and acknowledged within all areas of the educational enterprise.

**Defining Student Voice, Participation and Involvement**

Student voice, participation and involvement are all interconnected terms utilized to describe the role of students within the education system; however, there are multiple interpretations and definitions associated with each concept. Some contend that student voice is an end in itself, because it fulfills the democratic requirement of consulting multiple voices (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Others problematize this position, arguing that the legitimization of student voice involves “more than simply listening to students.
Student voice is the individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education” (Fletcher, n.d.). The significant aspect of this definition is its direct correlation to action. Student voice and involvement is about empowerment, the ability to do something to achieve a purpose or goal. In a democratic society and institution, recognizing the diversity of multiple voices is the first step towards co-constructing a collaborative educational enterprise. Individuals must be respected and appreciated for the unique contributions they are capable of making within the school and surrounding community. For the purpose of this study, these terms (‘student involvement’, ‘voice’ and ‘participation’) will be utilized interchangeably.

Three Conceptions of Student Engagement

First, I would like to outline a framework of student engagement that will contribute to the conceptual framework for the study. Vibert and Shields (2003) examine student engagement conceptually as an inescapably ideological term, and thus assign differential meanings of student engagement according to three ideological lenses: 1) a techno-rational lens 2) an interpretive/ student-centered lens, and 3) a critical/ transformative lens. These different ideological lenses yield different educational and political consequences. I conceive of student engagement through the critical/ transformative lens; hence, I see student leadership as a means of providing possibilities for a just and equitable education system. Vibert and Shields’ (2003) identification of ideological lenses is complimented by McMahon and Portelli’s (2004) conception of three popular notions of student engagement: 1) The conservative or traditional conception; 2) The liberal or student oriented conception; and 3) critical-democratic conception of engagement. The conservative or traditional conception envisions student
engagement in “a hierarchical, narrow or limited way. Student Engagement is almost exclusively identified with a certain conception of academic achievement or a process identifiable by behavioral traits and/or observable psychological dispositions” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 65). The liberal or student oriented conception “broadens the meaning of engagement beyond traditional notions of the academic and focuses on the strengths of students, and hence does not overtly adopt a deficit model…. ‘the premise that the purpose of schooling is broader than individual experiences – intellectual, kinesthetic, artistic, social, personal, and vocational’” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 65).

The final category, a critical-democratic conception of engagement is a “result of the dialectical processes between teachers and students and the differing patterns that evolve out of transformational actions and interactions. As enacted, engagement is generated through the interactions of students and teachers, in a shared space, for the purpose of democratic reconstruction, through which personal transformation takes place” (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 70). This conception of engagement is one that recognizes the capacity of students and educators to co-construct the educational environment. Likewise, it values substantive student involvement. It is also predicated upon the important relationship between teachers and students; only through a positive and respectful rapport can genuine teaching and learning occur.

**Linking the Literature to the Conceptual Framework: Student Engagement and Purposes of Education**

These visions of student engagement correspond to different purposes of education and affect the varying ways in which student leadership is realized and enacted within schools. The conceptual framework is explained further by showing how
purposes of education correspond to forms of student engagement and, ultimately, highlights the implications for schools and student leadership (Table 5).

**Categorizing ‘Authentic’ Versus ‘Token’ Student Involvement**

In discussions about student participation, disagreements about what constitutes ‘meaningful’ or ‘authentic’ involvement often arise - ‘meaningful’ and ‘authentic’ to whom, by what standards? Levin (1998) succinctly addresses this issue: “Does participation mean having the opportunity to voice an opinion? Or does it mean an opinion that carries influence on a decision? And what would ‘influence’ on a decision mean?” (p. 59). The problem in even arriving at a single definition for participation highlights the complexity of the debate surrounding student involvement. Token student involvement is especially sinister, even when it is not intentional, in that it hides the true role (or lack thereof) of students:

Tokenism is a particularly difficult issue to deal with because it is often carried out by adults who are strongly concerned with giving children a voice but have not begun to think carefully and self-critically about doing so. The result is that they design projects in which children seem to have a voice but in fact have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it, or no time to formulate their own opportunities (Hart, 1997, p. 41).

This tokenism leads to a perception that student involvement is happening when, in actuality, it remains illusionary. Conversely, meaningful student participation is defined as “engaging students as partners in educational planning, research, teaching, evaluating, decision-making, advocacy, and more” (Fielding, 2001, p. 1).
### Table 5

**Background Literature for Conceptual Framework-Purpose of Education & Student Engagement**

|------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **A Techno-Rational Lens** (Vibert & Shields, 2003, p. 227) | **Education as Cultural Capital**
Schools value, reward, reproduce and transmit certain knowledge forms, skills, aptitudes and experiences that are deemed to be required to function in predetermined social and economic structures. | **Conservative or Traditional Conceptions:**
“interpret student engagement in a hierarchical, narrow or limited way. Student Engagement is almost exclusively identified with a certain conception of academic achievement or a process identifiable by behavioral traits and/or observable psychological dispositions” (pp. 61-62) | • certain groups inherently possess more cultural capital than others (dominant group); therefore, schools reproduce inequities of a class-stratified society (exclusion from economic power and privileged positions based on gender, SES, race, ethnicity, etc.)
• school knowledge as static, thereby preparing future citizens to fit in world *as it is*, not for the world as it might become
• purpose of education as reflecting technical functionalism |
| **An Interpretive/Student-Centered Lens** (Vibert & Shields) | **Education for Individual Growth**
A child centered pedagogy where curriculum and pedagogy cater to students particular needs and experiences; therefore, students engage actively in exploration of ideas and knowledge that are relevant to them. | **Liberal or Student Oriented Conception:**
“This conception broadens the meaning of engagement beyond traditional notions of the academic and focuses on the strengths of students, and hence does not overtly adopt a deficit model….’the premise that the purpose of schooling is broader than individual experiences – intellectual, kinesthetic, artistic, social, personal, and vocational’” (p. 65) | • potentially limiting
• focus on individual autonomy is often to the detriment of social cohesion (as an individual’s wants and needs supersedes understanding of others’ needs and experiences)
• against democratic principal of collective (because of a primary focus on the individual versus all societal members) |
| **A Critical/Transformative Lens** (Vibert & Shields, 2003, p. 228) | **Education for Democratic Transformation**
“Preparing students not to fit into a given world so much as to understand and transform the world as given” (p. 19) Includes emancipatory education such as inclusive education, feminist pedagogy and antiracism. | **Critical-democratic Conception:**
“A multifaceted phenomenon, engagement is present in the iterations that emerge as a result of the dialectical processes between teachers and students and the differing patterns that evolve out of transformational actions and interactions. As enacted, engagement is generated through the interactions of students and teachers, in a shared space, for the purpose of democratic reconstruction, through which personal transformation takes place” (p. 69) | • designed and implemented to achieve equity, social justice and social transformation
• communal and social concerns are crucial (The relationship between individuals and the community is seen as a symbiotic relationship).
• knowledge as socially co-constructed and fluid |
In this conception of engagement, student involvement occurs at various strata of education, including classroom, school, district and community levels. If student voice and leadership are going to flourish and succeed, the differences between tokenism and authentic involvement must be carefully mediated.

There is also a danger in championing student voice as an educational panacea. Student voice movements need to resist “the constant pull of either ‘faddism’ or manipulative incorporation” (Fielding, 2004, 296). Both of these forces diminish the process and undermine the democratic rationale that supports student participation.

Fielding (2004) maintains:

Faddism leads to unrealistic expectation, subsequent marginalization, and the unwitting corrosion of integrity; manipulative incorporation leads to the betrayal of hope, resigned exhaustion and the bolstering of an increasingly powerful status quo. To build a sustainable future we need intellectual tools to help us expose duplicity, forestall betrayal, and demystify the presumption and arrogance of an inevitably persistent managerialism (p. 296).

This middle ground will only be negotiated and realized through a candid examination and portrayal of both the positive and negative ramifications of student participation and leadership.

**The Rationale Underpinning Student Involvement**

Before considering the benefits or drawbacks of student participation, it is necessary to envision the way in which current educational practices marginalize students.
Ominous ramifications of non-involvement.

The construction of students as passive recipients of knowledge or empty vessels to be filled has wide-reaching implications. Coleman (1972) outlines the detrimental effects of not actively involving students in their own educations:

The student role of young persons has become enlarged to the point where that role constitutes the major portion of their youth. But the student role is not a role of taking action and experiencing consequences….It is a relatively passive role, always in preparation for action, but never acting…. The consequence of the expansion of the student role, and the action-poverty it implies for the young, has been an increased restiveness among the young. They are shielded from responsibility, and they become irresponsible; they are held in a dependent status, and they come to act as dependents; they are kept away from productive work, and they become unproductive (p. 434).

Coleman paints an alarming vision of the consequences of the hidden curriculum in schools. Hidden curriculum “has to do with all those things taught by the school (whether consciously or not) that are not part of the formal curriculum” (Young et al, 2007, p. 224). The message sent to students, through tokenism and non-involvement promotes conformity and complacency. It tells students that they are not in control of their own destinies - a message that transforms students into passive recipients of facts, rather than individuals who actively construct their lives and the world around them. A. S. Neill (1960) was concerned about the way in which traditional educational systems produced submissive students: “The function of the child is to live his own life – not the life that his anxious parents think he should live, nor a life according the purpose of the educator who thinks he knows what is best. All this interference and guidance on the part of adults only produces a generation of robots…. You fashion [students] into accepters of the status quo – a good thing for a society that needs obedient sitters at dreary desks, standers in shops, mechanical catchers of the 8.30 suburban train – a society, in short, that is carried on the shabby shoulders of the scared little man – the scared-to-death
conformist” (p. 15). Such a restrictive education system infantilizes and dehumanizes our students, resulting in dire consequences for our society as a whole.

**Arguments supporting and encouraging student involvement.**

The rationales underpinning student participation are expansive, but generally fall into categories of improving youth development, improving teaching and learning, improving civic engagement in terms of democratic citizenship and, in turn, overall school improvement (note that none explicitly deal with social justice, although a particular conception of democratic citizenship could imply it). Flutter and Rudduck (2004) recognize that, unlike other corporate sectors in society, “in education, providers and policy makers have been slower to realize the potential of consulting ‘consumers’” (p. xi). Student consultation is based on the premise that “to find new directions for improving schools we must take as our starting point the classroom itself and explore teaching and learning through the eyes of those most closely involved – teachers and young learners” (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 2). Authentic student participation is also firmly entrenched in democratic principles: “A well-developed critique of schooling asserts that schools are more concerned with inculcating in students the requirements of a capitalist economy and hierarchical workplace than they are with developing the skills of democratic living” (Levin, 1998, p. 63). By denying students an authentic role in their own educations, schools fail to meet the requirements of democracy; consequently, issues of unequal power, constrained freedom and coercive authority come to the forefront. As Ryan (2006) notes, “The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized that children not only have the right to protection and the right to educational
services but also the rights of participation and citizenship” (p. 79). Individuals should be recognized throughout schools regardless of their position or status:

The central requirement [for democracy] is that we develop institutions that attempt to make decisions by argumentative discourse as much as is practical and that invoke claims of sovereignty as rarely as possible. The principal aims are three: (a) to assert the merits of the better argument against power; (b) to assert the merits of equality and reciprocity against bureaucratic hierarchy; and (c) to assert the merits of autonomy and solidarity against domination and coercion (Strike, 1993, p. 266).

In order to realize the ideal of democratic institutions, students (and their opinions) must be taken seriously. Levin (2000) maintains that the justification to involve students “rests primarily on grounds of efficacy – that reform will be more successful if students are more involved or, even more strongly, that education reform cannot be successful unless students are more involved” (p. 156). This highlights the fact that reform and improvement are often best served from the ground-up. Most initiatives are designed to improve the lives of students; accordingly, student participation in the process is a logical step towards achieving various educational goals.

Two Schools Of Thought: Acknowledgement and Denial of Student Capabilities

Little empirical data exists measuring, in a quantifiable way, the effects of student voice; consequently, controversy surrounds the possible positive and negative outcomes of student participation and leadership in schools.

Acknowledging the benefits of increasing students’ roles.

The list of benefits outlined throughout the student involvement literature is extensive, and includes the following: improving learning (engaging students and enhancing outcomes), improving teaching (identifying diverse needs), improving schools (applying more relevant policies), increasing positive youth development (increasing
self-esteem and skill sets), improving school culture (building positive attitudes and a collaborative environment), embracing diversity (allowing representation of multiple groups), and improving civic engagement (Fletcher, n.d). Many of the benefits, such as feelings of efficacy, may prove difficult to measure; however, if even a few of the benefits are realized, student participation is a worthwhile endeavor.

*Denying the student role in educational leadership: Deficit mentality.*

A sense of skepticism also exists as a reaction to the idealized claims about the impact of authentic student participation. Like any initiative, there are inevitable barriers that arise through the process of increasing student voice. Whenever another stakeholder is consulted within the educational arena, conflict arises as differential values and perspectives compete for legitimacy. This can result in deepening tensions among colleagues as well as between staff members and students. Some teachers are also resistant even to consulting students about teaching and learning, let alone allowing them to assume an active role. There is a wide body of literature confirming that deficit mentalities concerning students are often prevalent in schools. As Portelli, Shields and Vibert (2007) outline, “deficit discourses place educational failure in individual and family shortcomings rather than in institutional or structural practices and power relations” (p. 8). Many educators (including administrators) feel threatened by a process which may challenge their sense of expertise and may require them to relinquish (or share) power, control and authority (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Critchley (2003) suggests that “adults have a mindset that they must do everything for young people and students are often not allowed to do thing[s] for themselves.[Similarly] some teachers
and administrators do not always have faith in the capabilities of students to make decisions” (p. 103).

There can also be student resistance to the process: “they may find consultation ‘uncomfortable’… might feel disappointed or frustrated when their views are sidelined and some may regard consultation with deep suspicion or a degree of anxiety because they are unaccustomed to having their views really listened to by adults” (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 23). Organizational structures can also create impediments to the process, such as practical concerns about the time and resources required to initiate and sustain successful student participation and leadership (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Fielding (2004) maintains that the valorization of student voice movements pays too little attention to the fact that the transformation of schools “demands as much of teachers as it does of students” (p. 296). Any successful initiative requires hard work and commitment on the part of all educational stakeholders. Certainly, however, hard work is not a justifiable reason to not attempt school improvement. Although the path towards authentic student involvement may be rocky, uncertain and uncharted, it still represents an avenue towards improving the quality of education in Canada and internationally.

**Defining Student Leadership**

It is widely accepted throughout the literature that, when it comes to schools, leadership matters (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007; Gronn, 2000; Leithwood et al, 2006; Ryan, 2006). The term leadership is applied on a continuum to various educational stakeholders – most often examined in terms of administrators, followed by teachers and, on the odd occasion, students. In fact, examples of student leadership are rarely cited in literature (Ryan, 2006). Student leadership is often relegated to menial tasks within
schools, such as planning dances and organizing fundraising events. While these experiences have some value, student leadership should go far beyond this type of procedural, peripheral involvement. Traditional conceptions of leadership assign the role to an individual; conversely, a new leadership theory “recognizes that effective leadership is dispersed or distributed through organizations rather than residing solely in an individual” (McGregor, 2007, p. 89). This vision of collective leadership is one that is consistent with the view of a truly democratic institution. The leadership role calls to mind a multitude of interconnected concepts:

Leadership is one of a family of terms in both academic and common usage which is invoked to designate modes of human conduct and engagement. Historically, other close family members have included power, authority, influence, manipulation, force and persuasion. Within this discursive family, leadership has always been the favorite offspring (Gronn, 2000, p. 60).

Leadership is intricately connected to power and influence. While leadership and power are not synonymous, it is essential to understand their relationship: “If power is construed as the ability to act (or the right to determine action) to achieve an effect, it can be positive as well as negative and, as suggested by the relational views of power emerging over the last decade, may be seen as ‘power to’ or ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’” (McGregor, 2007, p. 89). Student leadership is contingent upon students possessing the ‘power to’ effect change in their educational surroundings and sharing ‘power with’ teachers and administrators in collaborative partnerships. It is through a democratic process – which is both collective and inclusive – that educational leadership reaches its optimal potential:

Leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions through continuing conversations. It means generating ideas together, to seek to reflect upon and
make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to
create actions that grow out of these new understandings. Such is the core of
leadership. Leadership is about learning together (Harris and Lambert, 2003, p. 3).

This is the conception of leadership that will emancipate students from the current
constrictive educational realities. It is through leadership imagined as learning together
that sustainable and authentic school improvement will occur.

**The Educational Policy Surrounding Student Involvement in Canada**

Policy is an important instrument for catalyzing change within education. An
educational policy is defined as a broad framework that governs education in our society
(Young & Levin, 2007, p. 67). Policies often represent societal priorities: “Educational
policies are founded in the context of the objectives that are firmly established in society
and the cultural norms of society help shape educational policies” (Critchley, 2003, p. 97). It could be argued that for an initiative to be successful, it must be firmly entrenched
in policy. Critchley (2003) conducted a study across Canada examining the nature and
extent of educational policy in relation to student involvement. He surveyed a variety of
stakeholders including Ministers of education, directors of boards, administrators,
teachers and students across all provinces. Unfortunately, in terms of student
involvement, “all study participants agreed that there is a major lack of policies at all
levels” (p. 99). While some policies have integrated students in advisory capacities in
district boards and councils (including Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia), in
terms of student involvement in policy-making, “the nature and extent of their
participation is entirely left up to the whims of educational authorities” (p. 100). While
students have no direct power in making policy, many participants have maintained “that
the students’ concerns do influence policies. Students are commonly used as a database,
or a source of input, rather than as policy makers” (p. 101). One student laments, however, that “students are not given enough input into the policy-making process. While letting students be the sole contributor to policies is ludicrous. I feel that there are some problems that students should be consulted on” (Critchley, 2003, p. 103). Allowing students to co-construct the educational experience – from policy to pedagogy – is a democratic ideal worth pursuing and fighting for. Students should be more involved in the process of creating educational policy.

**Implications for Educational Stakeholders**

One of the primary ways for principals and educators to encourage student involvement is to recognize student contributions as significant. Different ways to acknowledge student voice include the following: releasing students from class to be involved during the school day, recognizing students publicly for their contributions, granting students credits for their involvement, and paying students for being involved (Fletcher, n.d.2). In the end, “principals play a key role in shaping the willingness of a school to give students a real voice” (Levin & Pekrul, 2007, p. 723). As leaders in education, principals should attempt to guide students through a process that encourages their autonomy and empowers them to be involved. It is disappointing that “despite the strong evidence so few secondary schools are seriously involved in developing student voice” (Levin & Pekrul, 2007, p. 725). Achieving truly democratic partnerships within schooling “requires a transformation of what it means to be a student; what it means to be a teacher. In effect, it requires the intermingling and interdependence of both. It requires an explicitly intended and joyfully felt mutuality, a radical collegiality” (Fielding, 2004, p. 296). It is only through all educational stakeholders being committed to this
transformation of teaching and learning that the initiatives will be successful and sustainable.

**A Plea for Authentic Democratic Education and Student Leadership**

Educational institutions must teach leadership skills to students; the future depends on it. Allowing for an authentic student voice “shows students that they can improve the way they learn, improve their self-esteem and feel more in control of the events around them” (McGregor, 2007, p. 96). Teaching students about their agency and capacity to influence their environment and, in turn, society for the better is imperative to achieving social justice and unfettered democracy. As one student, involved with a leadership program, commented about what she had learned:

One of our leadership activities was to think: ‘Is this the future we want?’ if it isn’t, we have to make another one and we have to lead it, not follow. If we like this vision, we have to be part of it so we can own it and make it ours. Leadership is about this. Being part of things. Not being a spectator, being a player, working with others and not being afraid to take control if it helps others (McGregor, 2007, p. 96).

In the end, schools should be sites of opportunity for students to foster the skills and dispositions necessary to be actively engaged in democratic citizenship both locally and in the global community. It is up to educators: “the future is ours to determine. We can either lead or be led. At the very least, we owe it to our students to give them the choice” (McGregor, 2007, p. 96). Educational institutions need to re-evaluate the way in which students are currently involved in the educational process. We must move beyond mere tokenism to a point in which students’ capacities and beliefs are valued and respected within a collaborative and inclusive educational environment. Neigel (2006) maintains that:
Truly successful schools are the product of diverse people investing their time and effort for the betterment of education for all students. For this to occur, leaders must develop and nurture leadership capacity in students. Great leadership cannot exist without an ardent belief in the goodness and dignity of people and the willingness to empower individuals with authority, independence, and choice (p. 24).

It is to be hoped that student voice movements and student leadership will continue to gain momentum, and result in a transformation of the educational landscape that encourages the empowerment of students through democratic participation.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides details of methods and processes utilized within the study. Careful considerations are given to the qualitative study design, the critical orientation, ethical concerns, the procedures for data collection and data analysis.

Qualitative Research

This study compares the views on important issues of some student leaders and teachers with perspectives from the literature. I chose a qualitative research methodology, because I believe that it is the best way to substantively explore student leadership as it relates to educational issues of diversity and social justice. Miles and Huberman (1994) maintain:

Qualitative data are sexy. They are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. Then, too, good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations; they help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks. Finally, the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of ‘undeniability.’ Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner-than pages of summarized numbers (p. 1).

Qualitative interview excerpts from participants provide a powerful means of problematizing important educational issues (such as diversity and social justice) and promoting widespread dialogue among educational stakeholders. Student leadership, in this study, was evaluated as an opportunity to develop democratic citizenry in secondary schools across Canada. My data collection methods (and subsequent analysis) attempted to capture similarities, differences and interactions among student leaders and teachers in
relation to perspectives, activities, relationships and social structures occurring within their school communities as well as during the CSLC conference itself.

Participants

Participants were initially contacted through email (Appendix A: Email to Secure Participants for Study). Participants who responded were included. A second round of recruitment occurred onsite at the CSLC. Participants were asked if they would like to be involved with the study; those who met the requirements (student leaders over 16 years old, teachers and administrators) and showed interest were interviewed. Interview participants included Canadians from 6 different provinces (Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Newfoundland). Participants were recruited from three groups within CASAA: the board of directors (2 white male administrators), 4 secondary school teachers (1 white male, 1 black male, 1 white female, 1 aboriginal female teacher), and 12 student leaders (9 white females and 3 white males). Attributes of participants, including their roles, provinces, and ethnicity are taken into account (Table 6) in order to illustrate and discern connections between participants’ understandings of different topics, thereby providing readers with a more comprehensive representation of the interviewees. One female teacher was selected because of her aboriginal experience: “My father is Mohawk, my brother was adopted off of [a] reservation, my husband is Métis and I worked in a Cree school for 5 ½ years.” Different CASAA stakeholders were included in order to explore multiple perspectives, thereby providing a more thorough analysis of the student leadership in Canada. All participants are from public schools.
Table 6

*Data Table of Attributes for Participants*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Identified as</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. M.</td>
<td>CASAA Executive/Administrator</td>
<td>NB</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. C.</td>
<td>CASAA Executive/Administrator</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. B.</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ON</td>
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<tr>
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<td>PEI</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. M.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>E. G.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. S.</td>
<td>Student Leader</td>
<td>NL</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. D.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. S.</td>
<td>Student Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>V. P.</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. H.</td>
<td>Student Leader</td>
<td>NL</td>
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<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical protocols were submitted and approved by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office (ERO) prior to conducting the study.

*Possible risks versus possible benefits.*

This study was low risk to participants. There were no physical risks, psychological or social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and/or reputation). No deception was involved. There were, however, a number of possible benefits for participants. Through involvement in the project, participants were afforded the opportunity to voice their opinions about student leadership and educational experiences.
Participation in studies is usually seen as a rich form of professional development for teachers involved (Gall et al, 2005). In some cases, it helps teachers refine and enhance their professional practice. Likewise, it allows students to reflect and examine their beliefs and behaviors about student leadership and social justice.

**Informed consent.**

Informed consent was obtained with an Informed Consent letter that participants read and signed (Appendix B) as a testimony that they had understood the objectives and parameters of the research and that they were willing participants. Participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

**Confidentiality.**

To ensure anonymity of participants, the names of people, schools and school boards mentioned during interviews were kept confidential throughout the research process and changed in the final draft of the thesis. The national scope of the organization and its large number of members across Canada further ensured that participants likely could not be identified by their responses.

During data collection, analysis, and the writing of the thesis, the written records and audio files were kept in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home. All research data will be destroyed within five years of the completion of the research. Paper data will be shredded, and digital data will be deleted.

**Conflicts of interest.**

I have no pre-existing relationships with the organization that I am researching (The Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors). I recently became a member
of the organization in order to gain access to participants for the study and receive copies
of CASAA publications. I am not being compensated for this research.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data was collected from multiple sources including 1) documents from CASAA
and CSLC; 2) interviews; and 3) participant observation (including videotaped key note
speaker presentations and training sessions for teachers and student leaders).

Documents.

I collected secondary documents from the CASAA website
(http://www.casaaleadership.ca), including its mission and goals, governance structures,
constitution, history, alumni and membership information, newsletters, and leadership
awards. Primary and Secondary documents from the Canadian Student Leadership
Conference (CSLC) were also considered, including the following: documents distributed
in teacher advisor training sessions, documents distributed in student leader training
sessions, documents distributed about community outreach programs and resources for
teachers to train student leaders (books, magazines, etc).

Interviews.

I conducted a total of 18, one-hour, semi-structured interviews (Gall et al, 2005). Participants received a copy of the interview questions with the initial introductory e-mail
that asked for participation in the study (Appendix C: Interview Guide). In some cases,
the interview process was iterative – different interview probes elicited different
experiences (Appendix D: My Interview Guide with Probes). The interviews took
place at times that were convenient for the participants. I asked each participant’s
consent to digitally record the interview. The interviews were then transcribed. The
participants were asked if they would like to review a transcribed copy of the interview. If they chose to, they received a copy of the transcribed interview by e-mail. They were asked to return the interview transcript within two weeks with the changes they would like made.

**Participant observation.**

Participant observation was conducted of CASAA members (including student leaders and teachers) throughout the CSLC. I attended most events throughout the conference, consisting of the following: the opening and closing ceremonies, keynote speaker presentations, the community outreach project, special events (for example, a pow-wow); I also purposefully chose teacher and student leader training sessions that related to the research question including: Increasing Inter-cultural Communication, Culture Shock – Meet a Culture Expert, Hero Holidays, Events that Matter, Lead Now – Here’s How, and The Rules of Engagement. My informal interactions with both teachers and students (in addition to my observation of teacher-student, teacher-teacher, and student-student interactions) influenced my conception of their understanding of student leadership in Canada.

**Data Analysis**

Data were triangulated and analyzed to make connections and propositions about the patterns of student leadership in relation to diversity and social justice within secondary schools across Canada. The data was synthesized to determine commonalities and differences among the values, ways of thinking, beliefs, and practices of CASAA members.
Coding.

Qualitative analysis of interview data was conducted utilizing research software NVivo 7.0. Interview transcripts were coded using an initial coding framework developed from the conceptual framework and interview questions (Figure 4). New categories and nodes emerged in an iterative coding process. Once the transcripts were coded (in itself a primary stage of data analysis), individual nodes were copied and transferred into Microsoft Word. A second stage involved the reorganization of interview excerpts based on trends and findings. A third stage of data analysis occurred after the trends were identified as I made detailed comments on interview excerpts of particular interest.
Figure 4. Initial Coding Framework for Data Analysis
Participants listed a variety of qualities they considered essential for successful leadership. I categorize participants’ responses as skills, dispositions, values and underlying beliefs. Skills and dispositions need to be distinguished from one another. As Katz (1993) aptly recognizes: “the acquisition of knowledge and skills alone does not guarantee that they will be used and applied…. ‘having’ is not necessarily ‘doing.’ For example, it is likely that most children have the capacity to listen, usually referred to as listening skills, but they may or may not have the disposition to be listeners” (para. 1). Values and underlying beliefs are also important when considering participants’ perspectives on leadership. As Hicks and Holden (2007) articulate:

People have different views about what is important. Ways of life, behaviour and traditions vary. Our values and beliefs, our sex, social and cultural background, affect the way we perceive people and events, and the way other people see us. Finding out about the values and beliefs of other people can help us to understand them, and ourselves, better (p. 18).

Different views of the skills, dispositions and values necessary for leadership were outlined by participants.

**Participants’ Views on Skills, Dispositions and Values Necessary for Student Leadership**

Student participants listed many skills they deemed necessary for effective leadership, such as being “well-spoken” (M.C.) and having good “communication and organization skills” (M.L.). Students also articulated many values and dispositions necessary for leadership that went beyond procedural considerations: “I think they have to be humble, I think they have to be able to make tough decisions and be decisive, and I think that they also have to be resourceful” (E.G.). Many students’ notions of effective
student leadership were contingent upon productive communication: “There’s not only skills, there’s qualities. Someone who’s honest and positive, understanding, empathetic. You’re not going to always know how [other people] feel, but there’s going to be times you just want to let them feel that way and do that for them, and you can’t be right all the time. You have to know that there’s going to be times where you’re wrong, and you’re going to have to be able to admit that” (M.T). Being non-judgmental and permitting others space to have differing opinions was a common theme among students’ views of good leadership: “A person that comes to my mind when I think of leadership is like nonjudgmental, acceptance and things like that. I think it doesn’t even matter to me if you’re somebody who’s really smart, like the only thing that matters in my opinion is if you’re friendly and you’re a kind person who is just not going to judge anybody” (M.L.). Another student similarly saw openness as central to leadership: “You need a purpose and sense of direction because I mean if you’re just up there to become popular that’s not the right thing. You need to stick to your opinions but you also need to be open to other people’s opinions and I think that’s what makes a good leader” (P.S.). A moral component about doing what was right, even if it was difficult, was mentioned by many students: “It means taking action and not being afraid of what people are going to think if you do the right thing” (P.S.). Another student reiterated, “You have to stand up for what you believe in” (M.C.).

Many students talked about leadership in terms of others, “leading people in the right direction, and showing people how to do things” (A.M.). Another student spoke of the ability of leaders to incite engagement: “I think enthusiasm is really important too because if you don’t make it sound exciting what you’re trying to get these people to do
then I don’t think anyone’s going to do it. So you show enthusiasm” (M.C.). An interesting definition of leadership was its relation to risk taking: “Leadership means to be able or have the ability to take a risk, quite literally, and some sort of ability to get people to rally around behind you” (E.G.). An administrator describes a guiding principle of where to focus leadership energy:

There’s the 20-60-20 rule in a school. 20% of [students] are positive leaders in this school, there’s 20% out in the parking lot (they’re going to look to sell drugs and do whatever else they can to survive) and then there’s going to be the 60% of the middle looking for which of the two paths to take. So you’re not going to get those guys down in the parking lot, but there’s the 60% in between you can get to, and if you walk down a hall way and you see a kid sitting by themselves, say hi, engage them and include them in what’s going on and then they’ll… they’re more likely to bond with you then. If you ignore them, their next place to go and get some attention is the smoking pit. So I tell my [student leaders] that they have a responsibility to go out there and engage that other 60% of the school [and] make them feel included (D.M).

Student leaders, similarly, discussed the 20:60:20 rule in terms of engagement. It helped them from getting discouraged about a lack of participation from certain groups in their respective schools as they attempted to engage the students that they could rather than worrying about the students that would not participate. An aboriginal teacher also saw leadership in terms of others:

I think humility is certainly necessary. To have a good sense of self, know what your limitations are. To know how to draw out other people’s strengths and weaknesses. You’ve got to find the strengths and weaknesses of people around you and find something that they can do and to recognize that is a skill, but you’ve got to do that. And to be able to draw out the best in others I think is such a leadership skill and to let other people have the opportunity to lead. Do you always have to be the one that leads the assembly? No, a good leader will give other people opportunities. So I think that’s part of leadership as well, to know when not to lead (C.B.).
There was a strong recognition among participants that effective leadership has to go beyond procedural skills (organization etc.) and is contingent upon a disposition of openness. Participants envisioned leadership as the capability to interact with others in a meaningful way.

Many student leaders and teachers discussed student leadership in terms of whether or not leaders were born or made. Participants overwhelmingly agreed that, rather than being innate, leadership “skill sets can be taught …communication, organizational and goal setting skills” (D.M.). Most agreed that everyone had the capacity for leadership: “I think people can be born with the capacity, but if it’s not fostered it’s never going to flourish… or if [students] don’t have the opportunities. They may have some inherent skill, but if it doesn’t have that opportunity or the right soil and the right nutrients to foster it, it may never be realized” (C.B.). The profiles of student leaders illustrated that academic students often occupied the student leadership roles: “most of the student leaders at our school are university geared students” (L.C.G.). In many cases, the selection process itself only allowed academically streamed students to participate: “You’ve got to have and maintain at least a 75% average to stay on” (B.C.). Participants also explained various screening parameters considered during student elections to leadership roles: “[Students] had to have their teacher recommendations, we looked at their attendance, marks, outside references and then we interviewed them” (C.B.). Students from the dominant group were usually the ones who had the opportunity to develop leadership skills.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^\text{12}\) Participants identified themselves as members of the dominant group through interview responses.
Participants’ Views of the Goals of Student Leadership

Participants differed in their conceptions of the purpose of student leadership. One administrator reflected a traditional notion of student leadership, in terms of academics: “The number one reason that we’re doing a lot of these things is so that these kids will enhance their academic things” (D.M.). He saw student leadership as a means of strengthening applications for post-secondary education; in fact, both administrators spoke of leadership as an opportunity to enhance academic endeavours, while educators and students spoke of leadership in terms of making the school and world a better place. Students consistently associated student leadership with social justice and equity with two goals in mind: 1) Inclusion and 2) Societal change.

Inclusion

Student participants were acutely aware of the diversity in their respective schools. Consequently, they emphasized inclusion as a primary goal of student leadership: “If there are different races, different cultures, different religions, don’t leave them out. You should learn how to work together as a team” (C.S.). In many cases participants saw approaching and involving students who did not fit in to certain groups as a primary function of a student leader:

There’s another side of leadership that is also identifying individuals who need some support, and we have kids who are what we call friends of student council or friends or a particular group who really in isolation are quite alone and don’t have a whole lot of friends perhaps, but we try to bring them in and find something that they can connect with (D.M.).

One student unequivocally stated that the goal of leadership is: “Inclusion. I think that’s a big thing and partially, there’s no way of getting around this, but the fact is that schools are really cliquey, and I think that bringing people together, sharing ideas and including
everyone is a major thing” (E.G.). Many students thought that focus should be directed
towards commonalities rather than difference (this issue will be taken up more fully
later): “Don’t focus on like religion or race or culture; focus on them as people and their
needs and stuff” (V.P.). Participants often framed discussions of inclusion and diversity
in terms of human rights:

We need to accept everybody with open arms no matter their race, sexual
orientation and that doesn’t matter because we are all human, so we all
have the same rights. And not just leaders (P.S.).

Everybody’s equal. I guess that’s how you’ve got to look at things. And
you’ve got to treat them appropriately (J.H.).

Inclusion was a recurrent goal of student leadership in virtually all participant responses.

**Societal Change**

Student participants also spoke of the goal of student leadership in terms of action
for societal change. They felt they had a responsibility to make the world better. A
central tenet to this point of view was equality: “[The goal of student leadership is] to do
something. That’s what it means. Because you know you get people sitting around and
being apathetic about everything in life, and the fact is that if we don’t become more
decisive and take more action when is it going to be equal?” (E.G.). Students were
determined to influence the world around them: “I think the overall message is to make a
difference and make an impact” (C.H.). Many participants saw consciousness-raising as
the primary mechanism to promoting societal change: “You can’t act on something
unless you know what it is. Like I mean before anyone can even get apathetic they need
to know what they’re getting apathetic about” (E.G.). The first step for students was to
actually learn more about a problem and talk to others about it, thereby increasing the
awareness that certain problems exist. Prioritizing different causes in schools provided
opportunities for students to expose the realities of inequities in the world. Figure 5 summarizes participants’ views on the skills, dispositions, values and underlying beliefs necessary for student leadership.
Figure 5. Participants' Views on the Skills, Dispositions, Values and Underlying Beliefs Necessary for Student Leadership
Participants’ Views On Student Leadership Roles

I asked participants about the student leadership roles they assumed within their respective schools in order to see how their views on student leadership were reflected in their practice. Students talked about student leadership roles locally and globally.

Local Student Leadership Roles

Participants outlined various student leadership responsibilities within their schools including the organization of school dances, the promotion of athletics, and contributions to special assemblies and spirit/pride events (often this involved recognizing of the arts – for instance a battle of bands within the school). All participants (including teachers, students and teachers) saw charitable aid as a major activity of student leaders. Examples of local causes in Canadian schools included fundraising for local shelters, food banks, autism and cancer research. One student was from the school that holds the record in Ontario for Relay for Life (a charity that raises money for cancer). This school raised a hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars for the cause. A student from Alberta described their cause for this year:

It’s building hope in youth in central Alberta. We wanted a cause coming from youth and going to youth and we thought that way we could get all the kids involved. So it’s not that all of our money is going towards one specific agency, but we are going to try to help the women’s shelter as well as Street Ties (it’s a youth drug awareness program in central Alberta) and we’re just going to try to get as many kids, because we find that a lot of kids aren’t passionate about our causes, and so we thought maybe we could have more than one place where our money was going, if it was youth going to youth and it’s basic needs, right. It’s safety and clothing and food and housing (M.T.).

Most participants emphasized that student leaders were also actively involved in volunteering at multiple sites; these initiatives often took the form of community service
projects. One teacher explained that the student leaders with whom she works remain deeply committed to activities that promote equity by helping disadvantaged groups:

They all see a higher calling, and it’s not about getting credit for it. It’s not about it’s going to be my name beside who raised the most money. It’s what can we do together, and what can we do to make a difference for somebody else? I am just in awe of this group, because it’s not about the fame or the accolades it’s what can we do to help another group (C.B.).

Student leaders across Canada were actively engaged in trying to improve conditions in their local communities.

**Global Student Leadership Roles**

While some students mentioned local leadership roles, overwhelmingly, social justice aims of student leadership were associated with global considerations. Many students talked about the importance of student leadership in confronting global equity issues:

We are the future and if we don’t know what we need to do in the future, then it’s just going to end badly (P.S.).

Globally, we’ve learned a lot about what we need to do and also what we need to do in our school to be leaders (M.C.).

Student leaders across Canada were participating within international relief efforts. Examples from secondary schools in the study included the following: starting a peace and justice committee that fundraises to buy goats and sheep for families in Africa, collecting shoe boxes of supplies to send to children in developing countries, raising money to build schools in Africa, and organizing two week expeditions to confront poverty by helping to build homes, schools, and pipelines that carry clean water into villages in many different countries (such as Mexico, Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica). Students were involved in fundraising for a variety of global causes including
Hurricane Katrina relief. A Shoebox drive targeted to providing children from third world countries with items to improve their quality of life:

> Basically, [students] collect supplies to send to a child in a developing country. There’d be toothpaste, toothbrush, a small toy for a boy or a small toy for a girl, there’s pens, pencils, writing paper, little things like that (B.B.).

Students also led various events that recognized and focused on the increasing interconnectedness of society. An example is outlined by a female student:

> Last year we had a gala for global warming as our cause so we had, it was a community event and we had speakers come from all across the country, we had Bob Mills come and it was a big deal. So that was like our major event for last year (M.T.).

The forty-hour famine, which raises money for families in countries with food shortages, was another annual event in many schools. In this activity, students are sponsored and complete forty hours straight with no food; often, this involves sleeping overnight together in the school gymnasium. One student outlined this event as consciousness-raising in that it allowed her to experience hunger, a perspective that opened her eyes to the suffering of others around the world.

> One student had formed a peace and justice committee at her school that was involved in global projects. The previous year, this committee had bought goats for families in Africa. She explained that by buying animals (rather than sending food), students were helping families in a sustainable way. Likewise, she saw this as a way to make people more aware of some of the global challenges facing certain communities: “They really need it, and I think it makes people in school aware of what’s actually going on when you have people fundraising to actually do it” (M.C.). A few student participants had travelled to third world countries to participate in humanitarian efforts.
These students seemed more acutely aware of the extent of inequities and spoke with a sense of urgency for action:

We’re really sheltered. There’s only so much you can see. I was even talking to my friends that aren’t even from Canada. A couple of them are in Venezuela right now doing volunteer work and she was saying to me, “You have no idea how sheltered you are.” And I went to Costa Rica for two weeks and did volunteer work this past March and when we left the town we were in, building the kitchen and putting up the fences and all sort of manual labour, it was just this little town just needed it for survival. Like we saw a group of kids that were there in Costa Rica just to hang out on the beaches and all I could think, how are you here and not doing anything when there is so much poverty? Even in the tourist district of San Jose there was poverty everywhere you looked and I was just confused. Like why are you there not doing anything (A.D.).

One student elaborated on the impact of participating in an international relief effort:

It’s part of an international studies class…we went down to this little town of Santa Elena which was created 16 years ago by the government of Costa Rica for farmers that didn’t have farmland and that was essentially hurting their economy because Costa Rica’s pretty poor, and we just went down there it was baffling. We were walking down the streets of Pital, and it’s a town 45 minutes away where we you have to go to get food because there’s nothing in this town, and there’s like a bunch of kids and they were actually in rags. I’ve never seen anything like it before. Me and a whole bunch of the guys, we took the shirts off our backs literally and gave them to these kids. I don’t know, it’s really eye opening (A.D.).

In some cases recognition of global problems led to recognition of similar local problems (or vice versa). Views of student leadership and its goals did seem to be linked to practices within schools, in that causes that were important to the students (virtually all relating to making the world more equitable) were pursued.

**CSLC Training**

A primary aim of CSLC, and CASAA, was to train student leaders about equity issues both locally and globally in the face of increasing diversity. Social justice and inclusion were primary themes throughout the conference. While some might
problematize the notion of inclusion presented at the conference (to be addressed further in the discussion), I think that the focus on social justice at CSLC was undeniably positive and is encouraging for the future of student leadership in Canada. There were many presentations explicitly confronting important societal issues in a truthful way. While some training sessions could be considered tokenism\(^\text{13}\). I was overwhelmingly impressed with the nature of conference, keynote speakers and training sessions for both teachers and students. The training accomplished three aims: 1) Consciousness-raising 2) Providing opportunities to mobilize and act 3) Teaching students about their own agency. I include some examples of presentations, training sessions and initiatives to provide a snapshot of the student leadership training.

**Consciousness-Raising: A Critical Incident**

A Major from the Canadian forces, with firsthand experience in the Rwandan Genocide, was invited to CSLC as a keynote speaker for student leaders across Canada. His presentation was entitled: “Leadership lessons from the Rwandan Genocide of 1994.” Throughout this presentation, students were exposed to a first-hand account of a global equity issue. The Major, who participated in the United Nations Assistance Mission In Rwanda (UNAMIR), opened his presentation with the following power point slide to put privilege in perspective for students:

\[^{13}\text{For example, a cultural fair that showcased cultures from around the world – these have been heavily criticized in literature (See Meyer & Rhoades, 2006).}\]
The Global Village

If the earth’s population were to shrink to a village of precisely 100 people, it would look like this:

– 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 Western Hemisphere (north and south) and 8 Africans.
– 70 non-white, 30 white
– 70 non-Christian, 30 Christian
– 50% of the wealth in the hands of 6 people (all from the US)
– 70 are unable to read
– 50 suffer from malnutrition
– 80 live in sub-standard housing
– 1 has a university/college education

I checked the statistics on this slide and found that they are inaccurate. The accurate ‘global village’ of one hundred people with a variety of ratios (economic, racial, etc) applied is depicted in Table 7. Each section of the table cites a source substantiating the origin of the ratio in the original source; although these references are not included in my references, they can be retrieved from the original source.
Table 7

**The Global Village of 100**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origins</th>
<th>60 would be from Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 would be European in origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 would have come from the Western Hemisphere (9 Latin Americans, 5 North Americans, and 1 from Oceania)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 would be from Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex / Gender</td>
<td>50 would be female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 would be male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin color</td>
<td>80 would be non-white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 would be white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>67 would be non-Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33 would label themselves as &quot;Christian&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>20 people would be receiving almost 90% of the village's total income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>25 would live in substandard housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>17 would not be able to read at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>13 would be malnourished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life and death</td>
<td>1 would die within the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 would give birth within the year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2 would have a college education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>4 would own a computer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Balu, Engelken and Grosso, http://www.davidpbrown.co.uk/nota-bene/the-global-village.html)

Balu, Engelken and Grosso state the point of envisioning the global village of one hundred: “When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the need for both [sic] acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent” (http://www.davidpbrown.co.uk/nota-bene/the-global-village.html). By putting North American spending in perspective, the Major illustrated the biases of North American society’s priorities (B= Billions of dollars):
SINCE 9/11 500,000 PEOPLE KILLED EACH YEAR IN ARMED VIOLENCE

- 1 PERSON PER MINUTE DIES WHILE 15 NEW GUNS AND 30,000 BULLETS ARE PRODUCING

WHAT WE SPEND:
- $6B on education for the world
- $8B on cosmetics in the North America
- $9B on water and sanitation for the world
- $11B on ice cream in North America
- $13 B on basic health and nutrition for the world
- $17B on pet food in North America

1.3 B PEOPLE LIVE ON LESS THAN $1 A DAY
3 B PEOPLE LIVE ON LESS THAN $2 A DAY
1.3 B PEOPLE HAVE NO ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER
3 B PEOPLE HAVE NO ACCESS TO SANITATION
2 B PEOPLE HAVE NO ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY
THIRD WORLD PAYS $13 ON DEBT REPAYMENT FOR EVERY $1 IT RECEIVES IN AID
THE RICHEST 50M IN US AND EUR WEALTH IS EQUAL TO THE POOREST 2.7B PEOPLE.
TOP 1% WEALTH = POOREST 57%.

The rest of the presentation shared graphic photographs taken by the Major and statistics about the Rwandan genocide. He also included a slide outlining the aftermath of these crimes against humanity:

- TOP 1% WEALTH = POOREST 57%.

3 B PEOPLE HAVE NO ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY
THIRD WORLD PAYS $13 ON DEBT REPAYMENT FOR EVERY $1 IT RECEIVES IN AID
THE RICHEST 50M IN US AND EUR WEALTH IS EQUAL TO THE POOREST 2.7B PEOPLE.
TOP 1% WEALTH = POOREST 57%.
THE AFTERMATH

- SHORT-TERM AFTERMATH
  - HOW MANY KILLED? 500k or 800k or 1.1M?
  - 2 MILLION REFUGEES/1 MILLION DPs
  - INFRASTRUCTURE DESTROYED ($1B)
  - SURVIVORS, PERPETRATORS, DIASPORA
  - POVERTY
  - RAPE AND AIDS
  - DEBT

- LONG-TERM AFTERMATH
  - DENIAL OF ETHNICITY
  - THE VICTIM SYNDROME
  - CONGO CIVIL WAR 4M DEAD 96-PRESENT
  - CIVIL WAR IN BURUNDI AND UGANDA

Both the presenter and his captive audience were palpably emotional during the presentation. Student responses to this presentation included:

You need to stand up for what you believe in. [CSLC] shows you how to be a leader, how to stand up for your beliefs and not only your community but your global community, because we’re all very sheltered here in Canada. I mean, other than [the keynote speaker] that was here this morning, I don’t think anyone has ever experienced [genocide] in the audience, so for us to just hear first hand that was really eye opening for all of us. [the keynote speaker] was involved in the military and he was one of the 450 that stayed in Rwanda and actually, he was saying that he had nine bullets left in his pistol and they had no extra equipment and they were all there just doing their best to get as many Rwandans out as they could before they all died essentially (A.D.).

I mean we need to be educated about what’s going on in our world (P.S.).

I think there needs to be more education on even the conflicts like overseas and stuff like that. When he was talking about Rwanda, I had heard of it and stuff, but I didn’t really know the details of what actually went on there. I think we need to learn more about that (M.C.).

The Major concluded by reminding students that such atrocities are currently occurring in the Congo civil war (from 1996 until now over 4 million people are dead), the civil wars
in Burundi and Uganda as well as in Darfur (where 400 000 are already dead and 2.5 million are now displaced refugees as a result of genocide). He also spoke of what their mission achieved:

"WHAT DID UNAMIR ACHIEVE?"

- Built an effective diverse team of 450 people from 22 nations.
- Remained on the ground and directly saved at least 25,000-40,000 and indirectly (provision of medical supplies and humanitarian aid to displaced and refugees) saved tens if not hundreds of thousands.
- Witnessed the Genocide
- The only response to the Genocide
- The Conscience of humanity

Many student leaders were not aware of the Rwandan genocide or that genocide is still occurring in the world today; this presentation was thus consciousness-raising for many, exposing them to crises they did not even know existed. Likewise, it served as a source of inspiration, showing that there are people who the courage to stand up and act against this type of atrocity.

*Opportunities to Mobilize and Act*

Another presentation at the conference exposed students to a not-for profit organization, Absolute Leadership (http://www.absolute.org), involved in various social justice initiatives. Absolute’s goal is: “changing the world and allowing ourselves to be changed in the process.” The organization runs a leadership school in Hamilton, Ontario
that teaches social justice curriculum (including units on Global Citizenship, Poverty, Health, Education, Politics & Advocacy). The organization also organizes “Hero holidays” for secondary school students across Canada, which encourages students to gain first-hand experience in international relief efforts. Some student leaders have already begun planning their involvement in these relief efforts:

We saw a presentation that they had on the hero holiday in one of our workshops and we decided we definitely wanted to do this and so we have a teacher sponsor that’s going to help us fundraise and organize and stuff for us and we all definitely are going to go on this trip (M.C.).

Two student leaders expressed their perception of the catch-22 within certain aspects of Hero Holidays, while explaining the reasons for their destination of choice:

M.C.: To build houses … in Dominican you’re staying on a resort which I think is kind of contradicting why you’re down there, because you go and work all day in the dumps with the children and you go back and swim in a pool, have a cooked meal at the resort and stuff. But, in Mexico there’s a bunkhouse you can either tent or sleep on the beach or in the bunkhouse, and you have one cook that’s there and you have all kinds of Mexican food and stuff, and I think it’s more you’re actually by the site.

P.S.: And you live their culture.

M. C.: Yeah, you’re learning their culture as opposed to seeing it in the day and going to the resort and having a pool party at night.

Many students questioned the authenticity of some relief efforts; for instance, many investigated how much of their donations went to administrative costs (versus the people they were trying to help) before choosing the charity for which to raise money.

**Teaching Students About Their Own Agency**

Another important function of student leadership training was the lesson that one person can, in fact, make a difference. Many students talked about the impact of the conference in terms of raising their awareness about their own agency:
I found that this week was an eye opener to see they need help so much in these third world countries, and I really want to feel like I can do something. It made me feel like I can help doing just small things. I will be able to help and I have the opportunity to (M.C.).

A teacher participant framed agency in terms of conscious choices; freedom is contingent upon choices. He maintained that student leaders must make a conscious choice to fight for equity:

Every morning you have a choice. Get out of bed or stay in bed? What am I going to wear? You know, that’s going to make me look good today. You know, what will I have for lunch? What will I do after school? What will I do for supper? What will I do after supper? What will I watch on TV? Choices all day long. Make one of your choices, well I’m going to help somebody somewhere else, you can do that. It’s there… [students] can make a difference (B.B.).

Student leadership training taught students about where priorities are versus where they should be:

Last year, for example, according to Steven Lewis that the world spends something like eight, nine billion on AIDS research, but the United States spent a hundred and twenty [billion] dollars on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Imagine if it was the other way around. What do you think a hundred and twenty could do towards aids? The leadership in the world today [mobilizing] the fight in AIDS is not done by government, it’s done by Brad Pitt and Hollywood stars and so forth. That says something doesn’t it? You know? So who’s going to do something about it? It’s got to start with you (B.B.).

The concept of agency came up continually as the conference and CASAA taught student leaders of their own power. One teacher highlighted that the purpose of the conference is to teach students that:

There’s nothing good they can’t do. I mean, you go into most of the sessions here and talk to the students and most of the message is out there. There’s nothing that you can’t do… as student leaders, you know? You are limited only by the width and breadth of your imagination (C.B.).

One student highlighted the benefit of the national conference as a means of connecting student leaders with similar interests, thereby collectively increasing agency:
It’s also about making connections, so I met [another student] who also wants to help Habitat for Humanity, and she apparently is from Waterloo Region. So now we have a connection and now our schools can work together to create a better Habitat for Humanity campaign (K.L.).

Undeniably, CSLC national training of student leaders has the potential to make a positive contribution to promoting and achieving equity and social justice in Canadian secondary schools and abroad.

**Discussion: Student Leadership**

Student leadership for social justice represents another viable avenue to combat hegemony and inequities in our schools. Brown (2006) emphasizes “that although leadership expectations for conditions relative to social justice and equity have increased significantly in recent years, leadership preparation programs persist in training for traditional education environments” (p. 704). Leadership for social justice is often discussed in terms of adult leadership in educational administration; however, I believe that student leadership represents another viable opportunity to engage with equity issues. Student leaders must be trained to interrogate dominant ideologies and inequitable bureaucratic structures. It is difficult to speak of diversity, difference and education for social justice without acknowledging Freire’s contribution to the field as a teacher, philosopher and activist. He reminds us “that respect for diversity entails advocacy, solidarity, an awareness of societal structures of oppression, and critical social consciousness” (In Brown, 2006, p. 703). Freire’s conception of teaching is deeply rooted in activism and emancipation from oppression. He coined the term *praxis* to highlight that theory must be wedded to action in order for change to occur. His
conception of a universal ethic and critical-consciousness demand an active effort to root
out oppression in the pursuit a more equitable society. Greene (1988) echoes Freire:

If we are seriously interested in education for freedom as well as for the
opening of cognitive perspectives, it is also important to find a way of
developing a *praxis* of educational consequence that opens the spaces
necessary for the remaking of a democratic community. For this to happen
there must... be a new commitment to intelligence, a new fidelity in
communication, a new regard for imagination. It would mean fresh and
sometimes startling winds blowing through the classrooms of the nation. It
would mean the granting of audibility to numerous voices seldom heard
before and, at once, an involvement with all sorts of young people being
provoked to make their own multilinguality needed for structuring of
contemporary experience and thematizing lived worlds (pp. 126-127).

Schools must not fear the radical transformation that is necessary to remake a democratic
community; rather, it is an exhilarating prospect. Educational leadership has an
important part to play in the pursuit of social justice. I adopt Bogotch’s (2000)
conception of educational leadership in terms of social justice as a “deliberate
intervention that requires the moral use of power” (p. 2). Student leadership must
actively interrupt inequities by informing individuals and empowering them to refuse to
accept the status quo as given.

Student leadership has to go beyond the organization of school activities; while
there is no doubt that these activities enrich the school experience for some students,
leaders must be encouraged to address other issues as well -- such as conflict,
controversy, dialogue, and beyond. This is necessary because schools must prepare
students for what they will face in society and, inevitably, conflict and controversy are
part of daily life in a pluralistic society. In addition, more students need to be given the
opportunity to become leaders. The noticeable lack of minority representation at the
national student leadership conference illustrates that there are systemic barriers to some
students’ involvement in leadership roles. All students, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, socio-economic status, and ability can learn from and contribute to the experiences of leading change for social justice.

As evidenced in the prior account of students’ views, students envision their leadership role in terms of social justice with the goals of inclusion and societal change in mind, which is positive. It is good to see that student leaders are thinking about and discussing equity. However, there are many barriers that prevent student leaders from engaging in substantive social justice work including: 1) the present schooling structure, 2) established expectations, and 3) strategies chosen for initiatives.

First, the structure of schooling itself restricts student leaders. Teachers and students mentioned the following barriers to student leadership: “class time release” (D.M.), “logistics” (B.B.), and “being out of the school” (L.C-G). While one recognizes that there has to be system wide regulations, educators need to realize that reasonable exceptions could and should be made. In other words, while guidelines are needed, there should also be room for flexibility.

Second, the established expectations of what administrators and educators will allow student leaders to pursue also hindered progress. When student leaders try something unconventional they often meet the resistance of administrators. As one Principal highlights:

I’ve had other teachers tell me that in certain cases some school administrations become a little bit threatened by what they perceive as losing control of their school to the students. You know where the students aren’t seeing it that way, they’re seeing it as being able to make a difference in their daily lives and taking some responsibility, but it’s a kind of a paradigm shift in values there. So there’s been, and there’ll be many advisors here that would tell you that they fight a struggle in their schools with their administration to, you know, give the kids the room to
grow and to move and to make mistakes and learn from them and that sort of thing. So that’d be one of the sort of blocks student leaders run into (B.C.).

Another teacher, similarly, notes:

> The obstacles to student leadership can be in the administration with the school of students wanting to do things and bumping into rules and regulations set up by the bureaucrats, you know. Well we’ll have to check on that, see if you can do this. You know, and then making it difficult for them when they should be working more with them, you know? Situations where they want to go, but have you got all these forms signed? And have you got this? And do you have permission to do that? They need to be open to any ideas students have, and I find a lot of times administrations sometimes have a tendency to say no, you can’t do that instead of saying that’s a good idea, I’m not sure we can do it the way you presented it but let’s look at it (B.B.).

Another administrator reinforces the fact that teachers can, in some instances, stand in the way of student leadership: “[students] try to get things going and they run into road blocks of a conflicting value with one of the teachers that doesn’t figure they should be allowed to do whatever the event… a teacher that thinks kids should be learning math and math only - those dynamics and politics in a school [pose] road blocks for student leadership” (D.M.). Student leaders also recognized the lack of support from some teachers: “My teachers aren’t against leadership but they’re not supportive of it either” (M.T.). These participant excerpts highlight some of the difficulties students face when trying to be agents of change in their schools, communities and abroad.

A third barrier which conflicts with the goals of student leadership (articulated by participants) is the strategies chosen to accomplish equity work. The majority of activities which address ‘social justice’ in secondary schools centers on fundraising. Fundraising should not be the sole pursuit of student leaders. As one educator notes:

> Student leadership has to get away from just being about raising money. Student leadership has to be more than pom-poms and pep rallies. Student
leaders’ roles have got to change. This change means administrators have to change or teacher advisors have to change, because if you’ve been a money machine for 20 years and all of a sudden you want to start delving into issues, that’s going to be a little bit of a paradigm shift. And it might not be one that you’re capable of making without support (C.B.).

Students often understood social justice in terms of fundraising for charities. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Charity and social justice are not synonymous. In fact, an argument can be made for charity obscuring and distracting attention away from social justice work. Charity is a temporary, band-aid solution that masks the real issue – poverty is not simply a function of money, but often a result of systemic discrimination against particular social groups. In short, throwing money at the problem will not fix it. Charity allows privileged groups to alleviate guilt and feel like ‘they are at least doing something’ when, in actuality, many people in society benefit from inequity. The struggle for social justice, in part, becomes how to make the dominant group work against their own advantage. Social justice, unlike charity, is about changing institutions that perpetuate inequities and, in turn, society. Social justice addresses long-term needs (not short term charitable solutions). Social justice aims at eliminating the need for charity which simply addresses the effects of inequities rather than the root causes. The fact that participants often conflate social justice with charity exemplifies that social justice is not a clear and self-evident proposition. Rather, it is misunderstood by many individuals; social justice initiatives must explicitly address this.

When participants’ thought of social justice, they primarily mentioned international equity issues (hunger, poverty, genocide). In fact, local causes (while outlined briefly) were not prioritized or thought of as ‘social justice’ issues. This is interesting, given how many domestic issues of injustice might also have been raised.
Students’ seemed to think of social justice as a distant, overseas problem – not one that they understood in local terms or that directly related to them. In fact, secondary schools in general (as evidenced by participants’ responses) seemed to avoid local controversial issues14 (such as sexual orientation and racism) by encouraging student leaders to focus on international concerns. International equity, in many cases, seemed to be a diversion which allowed schools to avoid looking in their own backyards. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious move by schools, it is one that must be addressed. Equity is an issue locally and globally that should not be ignored by schools or student leadership.

14 To be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5: DIVERSITY

Discussing issues of diversity in schools with interview participants (especially in the pluralistic Canadian context) led to conversations about conflict and controversial issues. This chapter examines the themes relating to controversy, conflict, dialogue and the recognition of differences.

Diversity as Conflict

Student leaders understood diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, rather than gender or (dis)ability (or other identity categories). In other words, when I asked them to comment about diversity, most of the examples they gave were in relation to race and ethnicity. One student leader also described that she often didn’t know how to act when interacting with students of another ethnicity or race:

I didn’t feel uncomfortable, but I didn’t know what it was like because I’ve never been to school with a black person, I’ve never… do you know what I mean? So I don’t know it was just a really different experience for me, and it was cool because I didn’t know what I was allowed to say and what I wasn’t allowed to say and things like that, but I love being exposed to different people (K.L.).

Diversity was described positively by many students:

Exploring different diversities and everything gives [students] a sense of acceptance that everyone is one; it’s not all separate. And I think diversity really opens your eyes to what other people’s lives are like, and that they are different. There’s so many people in the world that don’t live like us, and I think [students] seeing some different diversities are awesome for it, because that will maybe help [students] want to do something different (C.H.).

Students often talked about commonalities among groups rather than differences:

15 While ‘diversity’ is not necessarily synonymous with ‘conflict’ or ‘controversial issues’, they are all intricately connected. How we address diversity, for instance, is often controversial which is why it may sometimes seem like I am using the two terms interchangeably.
I think one person can only do so much but you can help other people to understand that they’re just the same as you even if they drive a different car or they’re not on the hockey team. They still have thoughts and feelings and they need to be treated like humans and everyone likes to laugh no matter where you are or what language you speak, everyone likes to laugh (A.D).

Predominantly, student leaders discussed diversity in terms of conflict. Conflict was seen by many student leaders as an inevitable result of diversity. A student leader succinctly stated: “You can’t avoid conflict, because everyone has a different background and different opinions (M.C.). One student conceived of diversity and conflict in schools as mirroring international issues:

There will always be opposing views and as long as these views are kept going, like I mean if you just even look once again going back to the Middle East, between Israel and pretty much all the Arab nations they hate each other, and as long as that keeps happening it’s going to be a real tough cycle to break. So, what has to happen is it needs to start slow and it’s a really tough thing to deal with because there are going to be people that just don’t like each other. And to deal with that, you need to find something that is profound for both sides, and what that is I don’t know but until that something is found, something profound that can be agreed upon and that can help unite people, there will always be opposers. (P.S.).

Because conflict was seen as unavoidable, many participants discussed the importance of addressing disagreements. As one student expressed:

We have to address conflict, because we can’t just run around pretending things that aren’t. There are issues in the school. When you get people from different countries coming together with different views, with different perspectives with different upbringings there will be conflicts and if these are not addressed then they’re just going to escalate and get worse so yeah, I think that’s a must (E.G.).

Students also discussed that conflict among groups often resulted in positive changes:

I think some of it can also be good to have some conflict because if you have someone who doesn’t agree with your opinion, they might have an excellent idea of what to do then you could have two things on the go and it could be doubly as effective (A.D.).
Conflict is good in some ways because people are different and people have different opinions (P.S.).

Student leaders saw advantages and disadvantages to the diversity in their schools.

**Participants’ Views on Controversial Issues**

Issues that interview participants listed as controversial included religion, racism, aboriginal education, homosexuality, violence, socio-economic status, substance abuse and sexism. Some issues were considered more controversial than others. All participants cited homosexuality as the most controversial issue within their schools and, likewise, categorized it as the most difficult to confront. One student also pointed out that different groups find different issues to be more controversial: “I don’t mean to be sexist, but there are more guys that are uncomfortable [with homosexuality]. They’re more homophobic than women” (M.T.). This section focuses on participants’ perspectives on student leadership in relation to controversial issues.

**Should Controversial Issues be Dealt with in Secondary schools?**

Emerging from data were three perspectives on whether or not controversial issues should be discussed in schools: 1. Avoidance of controversial issues 2. Denial of the existence of controversial issues and 3. Head on confrontation with controversial issues.

**1. Avoidance of controversial issues.**

Only a few participants thought that controversial issues should be avoided in schools and that it was inappropriate to discuss these issues. These participants usually expressed that some issues are more controversial than others, maintaining that the most controversial should be avoided: “Religion shouldn’t even be discussed in schools”
Some student leaders recognized, and disagreed with, the fact that aspects of their school cultures actually curtailed discussion of these issues:

C.S.: At our school we have, especially our science class, a lot of hardcore Christians.

V.P.: Evolution versus Christianity.

C.S.: Yes. And our school is probably thinking that we shouldn’t talk about ideas.

V.P.: Religion is a really big not-talk about it in our school, like in the public school, and I don’t think that’s right. I think every person should be able to say what they think about their religion and then if there’s a problem you deal with it.

Students’ perceptions that ‘ideas’ are dangerous or not permitted to be discussed are problematic, because they illustrate a reluctance (on the part of schools) to acknowledge and address ‘certain’ issues. An aboriginal teacher reinforced the accuracy of these perceptions when she described the public school in which she teaches; similarly, this school does not endorse the discussion of controversial issues:

When I talk about HIV and Aids, we talk about alternative families and alternative lifestyles. We’re not allowed to... God love this poor student-they’ve been trying to do a sociology project, and it was about gay and lesbian issues. Our principal squashed that so friggen fast that your head would spin. We’re not allowed to talk about gay/lesbian issues. I still do because we have some students that are in crisis, and if they’re seeing their administrator say that it’s a taboo subject how are they going to feel about themselves? I’m a taboo subject is how. They’re going leave school thinking this school doesn’t represent me, and this school doesn’t welcome me (C.B.).

The hidden lesson in schools not addressing certain issues (for instance, sexual orientation) alienates certain groups of students. The aboriginal teacher highlights the reluctance of her colleagues to confront controversial issues:

Some of the teachers aren’t prepared [to talk about controversial issues]. You have some teachers that won’t put themselves out there to take a risk either and how sad, because teaching is taking a risk everyday when you
get up in front of the class, because you have no control over what you’ve got in front of you. You don’t know what [students] just came from or how last night went or anything (C.B.).

Teachers’ ability to navigate these important issues influences the way in which students understand and approach diversity and difference. This aboriginal teacher also underscores the dire consequences of not dealing with topics of controversy by illustrating the ramifications of misinformation:

If not in a school with education resources and people willing to talk about it, where are [students] going to learn about these subjects? Some girls think they can’t get pregnant if they’re on their period, because they’re learning about sex in the bathroom. If teachers aren’t willing to do it, get out of the way and let somebody that is. I’m sorry, but these kids they can’t go to their parents (C.B.).

Some participants held school administrations responsible for sideling controversial issues:

I think far too often, the people that have the power (the administrators) bring their own personal views in, and their view is the only view (which makes them a very poor administrator when they have the only view). So, if they don’t agree with homosexuality, then it’s wrong, it’s evil, and we’re not going to discuss it. That’s certainly what’s going on with our school is that [the administrator’s] own personal views are clouding the judgment of everything, and I think their own fear, or their own associations with it, may cloud it as well. If they’re not comfortable, personally I think that they feel intimidated by someone that can discuss it. I think that that’s their own failing. If you can’t discuss it, that’s fine, but don’t squash other people that are talking about it and educating about it. We’re not making it salacious and dirty, we’re talking about in an intellectual form. And why would you fear knowledge as an educator? (C.B.)

Positions of power can easily be abused in a hierarchal system. That is why it is important to have different groups represented in leadership roles. Key questions arising from this perspective of avoiding controversial issues include the following: What do school systems gain by trivializing, silencing and preventing controversial issues from
being discussed? What are the ramifications of this position for schools, educators, students, different social groups and society at large?

2. Denial of existence of controversial issues.

This group of participants (including students and teachers) denied the existence of controversial issues in their schools. A white female student leader explains: “We’ve never really had, in all my years in school, problems with anything like that” (A.M.). Similarly, other students also denied the existence of certain issues within their schools: “I really don’t feel like racism is an issue at all in my school. Not that we have an overly large diversity in my school, but from what there is, I don’t think there’s a problem with that at all; whereas, I guess heterosexual/homosexuality, I think that’s more of an issue if anything” (M.L.). White participants (students and teachers included) were less likely to recognize racism as an issue in their schools; however, minority participants often described racism as ubiquitous in their daily experiences. This finding suggests that, in many schools, oppression is masked by privilege, and also shows reluctance on the part of schools to take responsibility in acknowledging their role in reproducing systemic inequities.

3. Head on confrontation of controversial issues.

Most participants (students and teachers included) believed that controversial issues should be confronted head on in schools. Many explained their perspectives:

Well, I think the fact is you can’t sort of dance around the issue. You’ve got to get right in and just say what the problem is and why it’s there. Then, you need to look back and see how it started because, with most controversial issues, they have historical problems or historically inciting incidents that cause some sort of controversial issue. Until you look back at the history of the issue, you can’t really solve it (E.G.).
We’re the perfect institution for [controversial issues] to be brought up in, because we’re educators. I was telling the kids today no subject is taboo if you use the correct terminology, if you’re willing to do some research on it and you’re willing to listen to others and to form an educated opinion. I said don’t be spouting off on something if you don’t know anything about it, and you’ve gone to redneck.com to get your information. And that’s the thing, so I totally believe in discussing taboo subjects…. because I think the kids need to talk about these things (C.B.).

I know for sure, in public schools anyway, you’re educating so many different kinds of people coming from all different kinds of backgrounds, cultures and everything, so I think that they should educate on all these controversial issues and allow these kids to make their own choices if anything (M.L.).

Overwhelmingly, participants (both teachers and students alike) asserted that issues of controversy are to be expected within the school system; consequently, they need to be fully addressed. Most participants indicated that knowledge about a topic is integral to understanding the issue. Numerous participants also mentioned the importance of learning the historical context of controversial issues - many regarded learning the history of a problem as the first step in the process of tackling it. A majority of the participants emphasized that not only should these issues be confronted, but schools have a responsibility to inform students on matters that will affect their lives. Most participants acknowledged that controversial issues, when dealt with, need to be dealt with in a particular way. Participants qualified their stance with various conditions, including the readiness of the students (age, maturity), the expertise of the teachers (knowledge, training), research of the issue’s history, and the presentation of multiple perspectives; ultimately, participants listed many skills and dispositions necessary to engage in a critical dialogue on a particular issue (including respect, tolerance, open-mindedness, listening, compassion, empathy, and so on).
What Role Should the Teacher Occupy During Controversial Discussions?

There were different perspectives on what role the teacher should occupy during the discussion of controversial issues: 1. Teacher as Neutral facilitator (does not share personal opinions on issues); 2. Teacher as authentic (shares personal opinions on issues); 3. Teacher as Devil’s advocate (purposely questioning and providing alternate opinions).

Many participants thought that teachers should not introduce their personal perspective on a controversy; often, this perspective was based on the concern that students are easily influenced by educators. Others thought that teachers should authentically share their points of view with their classes. A conversation between two students about the role of a teacher in discussing controversial issues illustrates the tension between these varying views:

M.T.: I don’t think teachers can be biased at all and can be teaching more one way or anything like that.

M.L.: That’s never going to happen because teachers, they’re people too. There’s good ones that won’t do that, and then there’s some teachers that do do that, so that’s why I think it’s almost better to not even go there [discuss controversial issues] because I don’t think there’s ever going to be a way that it’s going to be unbiased. Maybe one day, but I just think it’s just too hard to keep it neutral.

M.T.: And it’s definitely not fair to put a teacher in that position to make them have to talk about something that they don’t believe in either. I don’t mean to be sexist, but there’s more guys that are uncomfortable [with homosexuality]. They’re more homophobic than women. So, you have a male teacher trying to talk about sexuality who isn’t comfortable with the topic himself. It’s not fair to put him in the situation where he’s saying, just like not even saying one way or the other just informing, because you’re going to see somehow the fear in it which makes that really, really hard. So I don’t know if it’s fair when a teacher is in that position.

M.L.: And you were just finished saying how people at that age were so easily influenced, so it’s just so hard to, I don’t know, but at the same time
I totally think it’s so important to educate people about that while you can, you know in schools, because once they leave school how are they going to learn all the sides of the story? But, it’s just so hard.

Many participants thought that if controversial issues were to be dealt with in classrooms, that teachers should be trained in how to deal with them.

**Discussion: Diversity**

*Controversy is the basis of change and, hopefully, improvement. Its lack signifies the presence of complacency, the authoritarian limitation of viewpoint expression, or the absence of realistic alternatives to the existing circumstances. An articulate presentation of a point of view on a controversial matter breathes new life into abiding human and social concerns. Controversy prompts re-examination and, perhaps, renewal. Education is controversial (Noll, 1989, p. i).*

A wide body of literature examines the nature of controversy and what constitutes a controversial issue. McLaughlin (2005) outlines three general categories in relation to dictionary definitions of controversy: “(i) ‘argument,’ ‘debate,’ (ii) ‘disagreement,’ ‘dispute,’ ‘contention,’ ‘contradiction,’ ‘opposition,’ and (iii) ‘prolonged,’ ‘involving many people,’ ‘arousing strong views,’ ‘on a matter of opinion which is open to serious disagreement,’” (p. 62). Crick (1998) highlights controversy as “an issue about which there is no one fixed or universally held point of view. Such issues are those which commonly divide society and for which significant groups offer conflicting explanations and solutions” (p. 56). Stradling’s (1985) definition adds that these conflicting explanations and solutions are based on “alternative values” (p. 9). Because different viewpoints on matters of controversy are often value-based, it becomes virtually impossible to reach consensus on many of these issues. Oulton, Dillon and Grace (2004) maintain that teaching about controversial issues must explicitly take their nature into account, emphasizing in particular that:
1. Groups within society hold differing views about them.
2. Groups base their views on either different sets of information or they interpret the same information in different ways.
3. The interpretations may occur because of the different way that individuals or groups understand or ‘see’ the world (i.e. their worldview).
4. Differing worldviews can occur because the individuals adhere to different value systems.
5. Controversial issues cannot always be resolved by recourse to reason, logic or experiment.
6. Controversial issues may be resolved as more information becomes available (p. 412).

Understanding that consensus may not be possible becomes crucial in the process of addressing controversial issues. The goal is not to engage in a search for a universal truth, but to understand a different perspective, respect differences and learn to live together peacefully in spite of these differences.

Controversy is embedded in human interaction and the social nature of our society. It is my contention that controversial issues are inevitable within a system comprised of many different groups who, by definition, hold many different values, beliefs and perceptions about the world and the nature of education. Different views often correspond to membership within a particular social group (for example, white participants were more likely to think racism was minimal or non-existent, whereas minority participants recognized racism as ubiquitous and severe). Identity politics further complicate controversy and conflict, because they give the illusion of an individual as one-dimensional. Humans, conversely, are multifaceted. My identity is a compilation of various social, economic and political dimensions. My awareness of specific facets of my identity is dependent on the context of a particular situation: at one moment I identify as a woman, at the next as middle-class, as a heterosexual or as Caucasian. In each instance these alignments either help or hinder social interaction. In
most cases, my gender hinders, whereas my economic, sexual orientation and race often advantage me. That being said, my mother is West Indian (from Trinidad), and her father (my grandfather) is Lebanese. Thus, while on the surface, I look “white”, culturally I consider myself West Indian. This reinforces the age old adage, ‘Don’t judge a book by its cover.’ Oppression manifests in various forms and is more intense for different identity groupings; for instance, participants showed that sexual orientation and race were far more stigmatized than gender. Schools must find a way to evolve above one-dimensional discussions of issues – the reality is that humans and human interactions are complicated, and should be addressed accordingly.

**Recognizing Difference?**

Based on an analysis of participants’ responses, it seems as though privilege affects an individual’s conception of a particular issue. For instance, take the issue of recognizing difference. Participants from the dominant group (white, middle to upper-class) contended that we should not see difference, but concentrate on similarities. Minority participants, however, saw recognition of difference as a central tenet to equity.

Racism was consistently cited as controversial by all participants in my study; however, there was a tension surrounding different viewpoints on whether to acknowledge race. Two participants’ contrasting views illustrate the range of opinions that existed among those interviewed. A white male teacher took a stance of colour-blindness concerning race:

> A student leader at my school was Muslim and black and I mean, I don’t think the kids saw her as black or as Muslim in the school. I know when I see her, I don’t see colour, race or religion. You know, because she’s just such an outgoing person. She was an outstanding student president; kids loved her. You know? And one of the very few times that they had
somebody of a different color, you know, running the school council, but I mean the kids loved her. When we talked about discrimination and things like that, she said ‘Well, I see it every day, and I feel it every day.’ Because, there were certain elements [and people] in the school that would make disparaging comments, but- for the most part- I’d say ninety eight, ninety nine percent of the students, were totally, perfectly, one hundred percent accepting. She said [about how racist comments made her feel] ‘I put a lot of it to the fact that they just don’t know me, and their lack of education, their ignorance in a sense.’ [As a teacher], if you see it, you try and say that’s bad (B.B.).

An analysis of the statement reveals many contradictions. If the teacher did not see colour, race or religion, why is this the way in which the student was described? If other students did not ‘see her as black or Muslim,’ there would not have been disparaging comments made based on these categories of belonging. Likewise, the student’s disclosure that she sees and feels discrimination every day stands in opposition to the teacher’s assumption that ninety-nine percent of students are accepting. What would it mean to be ‘totally, perfectly, one hundred percent accepting’? Another interesting nuance of this interview excerpt, one evidenced by the lack of minority representation at the CSLC, was the fact that minority student leaders are rare. The same is true for representation of minority groups in educational administration leadership roles (Dei, 1997). This is no coincidence. The reality is that social division happens early, even before high school, and these divisions are intensified as the dominant group is given opportunities that allow for the development of skills that ensure even more chances to assume leadership positions in adult life; meanwhile, marginalized groups do not have the same opportunities to cultivate these skills for future leadership roles even at the secondary school level.
A black educator stood in direct opposition to the white educator on the issue of whether or not to acknowledge difference. He, conversely, problematized the position of colour-blindness, and its implications for his social group:

Number one: understand that people are physically different. There’s no such thing as being colour blind. [Society needs] to recognize somebody in their difference. When you [consider] a person, no matter what race they are, the colour comes with them, just like if you ask for water - You can’t ask for water and say please hold the wet, because the wet is a characteristic of the water. What we try to do, is we try to let people know that it’s not bad to acknowledge the fact that people are different as a starting point. You can’t just say that everybody basically is the same….Some of the challenges that people face are communities can be marginalized and their voices are not necessarily heard. So providing them with an opportunity to speak… not just with their friends, but also with people that are in leadership and decision making capabilities, is critical (L.H.).

To this educator, not recognizing race means disavowing the identity of an entire social group, and consequently marginalizes their experiences in the process. Creating opportunities for marginalized groups to influence people in positions of power becomes integral to disrupting oppression and building agency to become self-determining. These excerpts illustrate the tension surrounding different controversial issues. In this case, one educator champions the focus on commonalities between groups, while the other insists that a recognition of differences is necessary in order to tackle racism. These viewpoints are influenced by the position each educator holds in different social groups – a values based difference that is not easy to overcome. This results in different groups experiencing controversial issues in very different ways based on their position within (or outside) the dominant group.
Experiences of Controversial Issues Based on Societal Group Membership

The societal group to which individuals belong or with which they identify determines their experience of controversial issues. Figure 6 is a model I have created that illustrates the way in which controversial issues are experienced by members of the dominant group (White, middle-class, men) versus marginalized groups. The center depicts the status quo (normative values, societal institutions etc.), which remains the central driving force behind social, economic and political arrangements within society. The status quo is protected and insulated by disparate structures of power and privilege. Often the gatekeepers of privilege and power are members of the dominant group as they often occupy more positions of power within society. The status quo creates a comfort zone for the dominant group, where their culture, knowledge and worldview are rewarded with better educational outcomes and employment. Conversely, the status quo is a source of exclusion and alienation for marginalized groups as it trades with a cultural capital that is not natural to many of the groups because of different values, opinions and worldviews. The middle section of the figure (the red area) represents the feelings experienced by each group as they address and engage with controversial issues. These issues (often manifested in terms of inequities) incite emotive conflict. The arrows between the controversial issues and the conflict circle represent differing values, beliefs, traditions, ways of thinking, histories, and perspectives. There is a constant struggle and pressure between the normative values of the status quo and the ‘other’ points of view that threaten its unearned privilege and power. The reality is that engaging with controversial issues is often uncomfortable (in fact, it can incite many negative
Figure 6. Model of Dominant Versus Marginalized Experience of Controversial Issues
emotions); however, it is necessary due to an increasingly pluralistic societal context (locally and globally) as well as the ongoing struggle towards a more equitable society and world.

In order to reconceptualise controversy and difference in a productive and positive way, we must begin constructing a multi-stage process which moves schools closer to equity. I have proposed some possible mechanisms for achieving this goal (Figure 7). First, schools must raise awareness of existing and continuing inequities. This is achieved through teaching history, conducting research and hearing critical incidents. Next, members of school communities must be trained to deal with issues of controversy: it is essential that processes of conflict resolution be introduced to both teachers and students (through the curriculum, professional development, conferences and workshops). Dialogue also has a major role to play in openly confronting controversy. It must include multiple voices, engender support and insure respect by all parties throughout the process. Action is, of course, the final goal so that a tangible change can be realized. The possibilities for action are contingent on resources, funding and policy. The ultimate goal of this process is to move from a stage where differences are seen as deficits and controversy is conceptualized as negative, to a place where differences are seen as assets and controversy as a mechanism for constructive change. An intermediate step is, of course, tolerance of differences, which can only arise from the recognition that controversy based on different opinions is inevitable.
Figure 7. Model for addressing Controversial issues

AWARENESS OF INEQUITY

• RESEARCH
• HISTORY
• CRITICAL INCIDENTS

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

• CURRICULUM
• CONFERENCES
• WORKSHOPS

OPENLY CONFRONT CONTROVERSY

• MULTIPLE VOICES
• SUPPORT
• RESPECT

TANGIBLE CHANGE

• RESOURCES
• POLICY
• MONEY

DIFFERENCES SEEN AS DEFICITS (Controversy and Conflict Negative)

==> TOLERANCE OF DIFFERENCES (Controversy as Inevitable)

==> DIFFERENCES SEEN AS ASSETS
(Controversy as Productive Mechanism for Change)
CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Discussion about issues of inequity have been raging since the 1960s and, unfortunately, little progress has been made: our schools are laden with disconcerting realities including racism, violence against groups because of religious choice or sexual orientation, and rampant intolerance of difference (Adams et al, 2007; Dei, 1997; Ferguson et al, 2005). While, in some places, policies concerning equity and equality have been established, tensions lie just beneath the political veneer of our education system.

Impediments to Action

Student leaders mentioned a variety of barriers to social justice and equity. I have interpreted from participants’ responses, three broad categories that may help to explain why inequities persist (which I summarize in Figure 8).

LACK OF A WILL
• International, National, Public, Media

LACK OF A WAY
• Knowledge, Legal, Policy, Strategy, Mandate

LACK OF A MEANS
• A Plan, Funds, Resource Allocation

Figure 8. Impediments to Equity
First and foremost there is often a lack of will to act on equity issues publicly, in the media, politically, locally, nationally and internationally. As one participant highlighted: “People can effect incredible change if they just have the will and the fortitude to do it. If they don’t have the will, they won’t make a change. If they think that they can’t make a change, it’s a self fulfilling prophecy” (C.B.). This lack of will manifests itself within various groups from the public and private sector. Possible explanations include: lack of information, apathy, lack of agency (or feeling that one person has limited power), the sheer immensity of the problems (i.e. world hunger) and, of course, because some individuals tend to ignore societal problems that do not directly affect them. One student, while recognizing the need for humans to change, commented on inequalities as a permanent fixture within the human condition:

I think by and large [people] need to change. Humans are greedy in nature, and that is something that biologically we may never overcome and the fact is we may never actually solve this problem [of inequality]. It may end up becoming very violent (P.S.).

This is the type of view that naturalizes hegemonic inequity to the detriment of various societal groups. The perspective that, due to human nature, equity is not possible is prevalent. It is also a tough barrier to change and the pursuit of social justice. It becomes an excuse for inaction that masquerades as rationality when, in reality, it represents fatalism and a learned mechanism to protect privilege and the status quo. The thinking goes like this: If inequality is inevitable within societal structures, then there is nothing I or anyone else can do to change it--so, I will do nothing, since nothing can be done to rectify this situation. This argument is valid but not sound since the premise is simply assumed to be the case and hence begs the question, if each individual contributed what they could to the pursuit of equity, what would the collective societal result look like?
A second impediment, even if there is will on the part of various groups, is a lack of a way. One black educator summarizes his role in training student leaders:

My focus is on multiculturalism and race relations. And knowing the context in which we’re working this country’s changing drastically as far as the people so I think what happens is we need some skills and tools on how we deal with situations when they arise because culture is something that’s not just based on race but also affects other areas, values and beliefs and traditions. So what we’re trying to do here at the conference is provide the students with some reality-based information so they can go back to their schools and communities and make a positive impact on the students that they’re working with (L.H.).

This means that even when people can and do recognize and acknowledge the problem, they often do not know where or how to begin to deal with it. This impediment to inequity may involve a lack of information, legal recourses, policies, strategies and mandates. Teaching skills and tools of how to approach different societal problems is essential to improving them. The aboriginal educator identified this limitation, explaining that even when student leaders want to do something, they do not always know the way to proceed:

They’ve got to know process is everything and going through the right channels at the right time, with the right people, that’s what you have to do to make change. Unfortunately, they’re still bound by those structural bureaucracies, but if they’re willing and if they’re passionate about something they’ll jump through those hoops, I think. If they’re passionate about something and they know that they can make a difference, they will try. So, student leadership represents tremendous opportunity (C.B.).

Teaching student leaders about the avenues that can be pursued is critical to successful initiatives; likewise, knowing how to overcome obstacles that arise throughout the process is also important. Another challenge, inherent to all complex systems, is that even if structures do exist addressing the problem, they do not always have the intended effect. For instance, in various boards of education, various policies that encourage
equity and social justice already exist (for example TDSB, 1999); however, on the
frontlines of education, these policies are often symbolic rather than instrumental due to
their general nature. In short, in order to gain full support, these types of documents have
to satisfy a number of different groups, which often prompts the use of very general
language, upon which everyone can “agree.” There do not seem to be reliable measures
and end-checks in place to ensure that these policies are implemented effectively.

A third impediment to equity is a lack of means. This assumes many forms, from
a lack of a plan, to insufficient funds to enact a plan or policy, as well as a lack of
resources (or perhaps even misallocation of resources). As a black educator notes,
student leaders must be supported in order to be able to make change, information alone
is not enough:

[Student leaders] right now, compared to times past, they’re a little more
open minded, they have more information, more knowledge, they’re wise,
their intelligence is never to be insulted, and I think they have a concrete
idea of what they want to do and the direction that they want to go and
they need to support from us. This generation is not the future, they are
the present reality so I think there’s a wonderful opportunity as long as we
continue to support their initiatives because in this room here [CSLC],
Black, White or Chinese, could be the cure for AIDS, you know, but they
need the opportunity to do those kinds of things and the resources and
support. From a cultural diversity perspective, information is powerful,
but that information has to be shared, implemented and supported, and if
it’s not then nothing will actually change (L.H.).

These three impediments, combined, result is a lack of action: the problems are thus
perceived as too daunting or the effective co-ordination between and among many groups
and agencies breaks down. Another impediment to progress is misuse of will, ways, and
means along various continuums: political will may be aimed in the wrong direction, the
wrong way may be chosen, and misallocation of means often prevents meaningful change
from occurring.
Discussion: Power, Privilege and Oppression

When considering diversity and social justice in education and society at large it is important to explicitly acknowledge webs of power, privilege and oppression that influence societal structures and interactions. Certain groups in society have access to more opportunities than others. Oppression “encapsulates the fusion of institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that shade most aspects of life in our society” (Adams et al, 2007, p. 3). The salient aspect of oppression is that it is pervasive, and reflects a hierarchal society in which the dominant group experiences and seeks to protect their privilege in various ways. Privilege is defined in terms of “unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership” (Adams et al, 2007, p. 59). I conceive of privilege in terms of economic, social and political opportunity. One black participant outlines the consequences of oppression: “Some of the challenges that people face are communities can be marginalized, and their voices are not necessarily heard. So providing them with an opportunity to speak because in the context, not just with their friends, but also with people that are in leadership and decision making capabilities so that they can get some things taken care of” (L.H.). Understanding power and privilege within the education system is a prerequisite for engendering change in that system because it allows an evaluation of which avenues to pursue to express differing values, attitudes, and ideas. A recognition of these structures also illuminates where partnerships can be formed to combat hegemonic structures and practices.
Inequities Persist: Why?

Research confirms that across education systems, inequities persist for various societal groups (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Bishop & Glenn, 1999; McBride & McKee, 2001; Shields, 2004). The question remains: Why?

Resistance to Change

Complex systems, such as our education system, have notoriously been resistant to change (Fullan, 2007). Theorists advance a number of explanations for persisting inequities: deficit mentalities of teachers (Valencia, 1997), educational leadership in crisis (Maxcy, 1994), the rise in standardization and high stakes testing (Amrein & Berliner, 2002) and the list goes on. It seems all of the explanations, however, serve to reveal practices and beliefs that remain entrenched in a systematic way. Shields (2004) outlines Bourdieu’s habitus (“a system of circular relations that unite [sic] structures and practices; objective structures tend to produce structured subjective dispositions that produce structured actions which, in turn, tend to reproduce objective structure” (p.112)) as a reason that the status quo endures. Because human belief systems, and resultant behaviors, often function “below the level of consciousness and language” (Swartz, 1997, p. 105), they are incredibly difficult to challenge or change. Consequently, “habitus thus constructs the persistence of deficit thinking not simply as an individual problem but as a structural and societal one, requiring new approaches and enduring change if it is to be overcome” (Shields, 2004, p. 112). Changing structural and systematic inequity is not a straight-forward process; conversely, it must be approached by a variety of angles, utilizing a plethora of strategies to make progress. Shields (2004) maintains that an integral stage to this process is “learn[ing] to acknowledge and validate difference
without reifying it or pathologizing it” (p. 113). It is only through the active pursuit of a collective (yet autonomous) understanding of difference that equity can be achieved. Although the negotiation of difference poses an enormous challenge to schools, it is a challenge that must be continually revisited and perpetually tackled (this is paramount to democracy).

**Silencing and Sidelining Issues that Matter**

The interview participants’ common perception that schools often curtail, sideline and silence conversations about controversial issues and inequities (including dialogues about race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, among others) is troubling at the turn of the 21st century in a country that claims to be free and democratic. Silence around these issues is prevalent in our current educational system. Shields (2004) aptly recognizes that:

Educational practices that ignore such inequities, either by essentializing difference or attempting to ignore it, are manifestations of firmly rooted and pervasive attitudes that may best be described as pathologizing the lived experiences of students. I use the term pathologizing to denote a process of treating differences as deficits, a process that locates the responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of children (home life, home culture, SES) rather than situating responsibility in the education system itself. In large part because educators implicitly assign blame for school failure to children and to their families, many students come to believe they are incapable of high-level academic performance. Pathologizing may be overt when, for example, policies, statements, or practices use discriminatory language. However, it is equally common for pathologizing to be covert and silent, engendering in students and their families feelings that, somehow, they and their lived experiences are abnormal and unacceptable within the boundaries of the school community and their abilities subnormal within the tightly prescribed bounds of core curriculum or transmissive pedagogy still too common in many schools and classrooms (p. 112).
It is precisely this silence that perpetuates inequities in our society. Participants from my study highlighted that discussion of certain issues was not encouraged by their schools; in fact, in many cases, it was actively discouraged. The perplexing corollary of this position is that it in no way attempts to solve the problem. Simply ignoring the situation often exacerbates it. As an aboriginal teacher notes, her school’s administration enacts the “See no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil” philosophy. The strategy here is to “just separate the groups, kick them out of school for a while and [the administrator] thinks that’s going to solve the problems. It doesn’t, the conflict just builds more” (C.B.). Not only does this type of thinking (to close one’s eyes, ears and mouth to controversial issues and conflict) not help the situation, it actually worsens it considerably. In another example, a course specifically aimed at global equity issues was discontinued:

Teaching is trying to make students aware that there’s a world outside their own - a lot of kids don’t realize that. I teach history and I used to teach a course called global issues, it was world problems then it became global issues then they took it out of the curriculum because kids were learning something. That’s my negativity towards government officials, but this course taught kids about the plight of child soldiers, child poverty, child labor, alright, the honor killings in the middle east and in Islamic countries against women who are raped but then become a dishonor to their families, therefore they’re killed by the father or the brother or the boyfriend. For what we in North America, would deem to be a victim of a crime, over there regardless, they brought dishonor. You know, and all the other kinds of issues and a lot of the times the kids are saying is that really happening? Is that going on? Is this happening in the world? Yes. How can I stop it? What can I do to help? I said you can stop it. How? By doing this, first of all, by knowing about it, knowing there’s a problem (B.B.).

It is only through breaking these silences and generating open awareness that we can move forward to correct injustices. The first step is to acknowledge openly that these obstructions to equity (e.g. racism and heterosexism) are, in fact, persisting and evolving in our schools.
Denial and Passive Evil

White participants (students and teachers included) were less likely to recognize racism as an issue in their schools; minority participants\textsuperscript{16}, however, were acquainted with its offenses as a lived condition. One student, in fact, conflated diverse student populations with decreased conflict rather than the reverse:

The world is changing now. Racism is coming to an end, and I think that this school [the school hosting CSLC] especially shows that. This is the most diverse school that I have ever been to. I don’t know if you got a chance to see what kids are here during school, but there’s 2000 and students from] every different race and every different culture. And I think it’s great for these kids to see [diversity] and to be able to embrace that, and to be able to experience that especially to learn a lot more from other people and their experiences in their culture (K.L.).

While this view is optimistic, it is also a dangerous perspective-- dangerous in that a lack of recognition of racism (in both active and passive forms) allows it to persist. McIntosh (1990) asserts that these invisible systems must be brought to light:

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant groups one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth….To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo (p. 2-3).

It is important to acknowledge that hegemonic socialization often results in the dominant group’s blindness to oppressive systemic structures, though it is by no means a justification to ignore them. This naturalization of oppression is a mechanism of privilege and power. A conception of racism is emerging from the literature that

\textsuperscript{16} This claim is based on only two minority participants and is far from generalizable
emphasizes its subtle forms, called “democratic racism” (Henry et al., 2000; Henry & Tator, 2002). This new term attempts “to stress the oblique and covert nature of racism, as distinct from its conventional blatant manifestation” (Li, 2003, p. 6). Historically, schools and society strongly equate racism with its obvious forms (e.g. racial epithets, segregation), rather than considering its more subtle nuances. Li (2003) maintains that “codified racist discourse assumes a gentle appearance in order to claim its legitimacy in a democratic society” (p. 6). Schools and education must uncompromisingly focus on making ‘invisible’ structures of oppression visible.

While white participants were often largely unaware of racism in schools, minority participants emphasized racism in schools as pervasive. One black educator described the invisible institutional forces at work in our education system and society:

There are some unseen barriers that are there, and I think it’s based on policies and procedures. It’s just systemic racism, systemic discrimination and although this is a democratic country sometimes people talk about common sense, sometimes sense is not always common. So what we try to do is eliminate some of those barriers because one of the first questions, I’ll just use this as an example, and people may not look at it as something that’s very critical and crucial, but it’s still there. Some people that come from out of town to come to university maybe here, one of the questions especially Black males that ask me one simple question is, “Where can I go do my haircut?” You know, and that kind of service should not be asked, that information should already be present, so that they can go anywhere. But, if they have to deal with that, can you imagine the pressures going into post secondary facility, dealing with all the other things that they have to deal with on a regular basis. I think this is one reason why people of colour always go to themselves to talk about these particular issues, because they don’t have to justify the problem, because the people they are talking to are already going through it. So they get some sense of safety in that and they’re not being targeted or being accused of maybe saying something for people to do those kinds of things to them. So, you know, there are barriers in education, and I think those decision makers need to be involved (because this is a small boys’ club and it’s very difficult to break into a sector no matter what sector that is). So, what we try to do is we try to give student leaders the tools and open up the door and also change policies and procedures that will be more
inclusive and not let people be discriminated against based on different things (L.H.).

A stance that does not acknowledge a problem or issue is one that perpetuates it. As the black educator from my study stated, his main message to student leaders is: “do something about it, because racism can be used also as a form of bullying. Don’t just be a bystander because saying nothing is still saying something - it’s just nothing. So, we need to do something that will help eliminate the jokes, the stereotyping, the prejudices and also the name calling because those terms affect people and that will take you a lifetime to take care of” (L.H.). A white participant similarly highlighted the importance of student leaders identifying and challenging inequities: “If there was no challenge out there then the world would be ruled by dictatorial regimes, and it’s that complacency that allows things to happen. Like I mean the only thing worse than committing evil is to allow people to commit it” (E.G.). A body of literature on ‘passive evil’ is categorized in terms of “individual and organizational conditions conducive to moral passivity, in other words, the factors that either inhibit moral agency or legitimate inaction” (Samier, 2008, p.2). I am arguing for an active interrogation and search for embedded forms of institutionalized oppression. The example about ‘racism coming to an end’ reinforces the high probability of privilege masking oppression. The similar stances taken by administrators, that ‘racism’ is not a problem in their schools, shows reluctance on the part of schools to take responsibility for their own role in the reproduction of systemic inequities. As June Callwood stated: “If any of you happens to see an injustice, you are no longer a spectator, you are a participant. And you have an obligation to do something” (“June Callwood,” 2007).
Lack of Representation of Diversity in Positions of Power

Another mechanism that perpetuates inequity is a lack of representation of diverse groups in positions of power. As the black participant in this study stated, there must be opportunities for different groups to influence decision-makers so that their needs and views are represented in schools. An aboriginal educator similarly saw a lack of representation as an impediment to equity; when asked how to improve equity, she responded: “Have some native role models in our school please” (C.B.). One white student maintained that recognizing a problem is not enough, due to the fact that diverse interests are not represented within decision-making bodies: “The problem is when you come up with a conflict and you take it to the boardroom, chances are everyone on that boardroom has the same mentality. They think the same, they learn the same, so getting something solved there isn’t necessarily the way to do it, because you don’t have perspective from someone from the other side, which is too bad” (C.L.). Affirmative action was created to combat this problem, but to many it is still a highly contested practice. For example, a white participant argued that the recognition of diversity in our education system and society has already gone too far in some respects:

I think that in many ways there has been almost much towards making this diversity happen - that everybody must be equal like where you get in textbooks. I look in a textbook, and there’s names I can’t even pronounce, and it’s just almost so far that people have turned it into a farce, and they just ridicule it. But, I think generally speaking most people have relatively good code of ethics and they know to respect people of different groups, whether it be socioeconomics, or whether it be a different race or gender or whatever. I think most people at heart tend to be good with that. But at the same time, because it has gone so far in many ways, it has just become ludicrous. Like I mean with all this affirmative action - it’s so ridiculous to the point that people are getting hired not based on their skill but based on the colour of their skin. It’s dumb. And, because of that, there is a tremendous amount of criticism. I’m one of them. I don’t feel bad saying it at all. But as far as major issues are concerned with accommodating
diversity, I think the nation of Canada, generally speaking, has a tendency
to go overboard - saying everybody’s equal and then making a few
examples of a few people, making them like super equal. To quote
Orwell, “Some are equal but some are more equal than others.” That can’t
be allowed to pervade. Even, as much as I am against some of the
ludicrousness of the educational system and diversity, I think that because
of Canada’s whole modus operandi, and just the fact that the only reason
that Canada is growing as a nation is because of immigrant populations,
we have no choice whether you like it or not, we have to accommodate
because there are people that are diverse in Canada, so we don’t have a
choice. It has to happen otherwise there will be anarchy (J.H.).

There are many aspects of this response that are problematic. For instance, the fact that
textbooks were changing to reflect different cultures (indicated in this case by ‘names’
the student could not pronounce) is perceived as ludicrous by this student. He is
unapologetic for his opinion on affirmative action which, in my opinion, is inflammatory
in many respects. Namely, a crucial distinction must be made between affirmative action
(which implies competence) and his view of minorities ‘being hired not based on their
skill but on the colour of their skin.’ The fact that he ‘doesn’t feel bad saying it’ indicates
a lack of understanding on the issue as well as a lack of empathy in how his words and
views may trigger a negative response in others. The reason affirmative action exists is
because inequity was so entrenched in our societal structures that it became the most
viable means to begin a hiring process that allowed for equal representation of various
societal groups. Discussions on these issues in classrooms are critical, so that students
will understand the historical significance of various movements for equity throughout
the last century, and likewise, to enlighten this student and others of how such positions
can be construed as a perpetuation of racism. The representation of Canada’s diversity in
positions of power is critical to achieving equity, and its lack bolsters the barriers (both
visible and tacit) that still exist for various social groups to gain access to positions of power.

**Challenging Inequities: Possible Ways forward**

There are many different approaches to challenging the status quo in order to reduce societal inequities. In this section, I focus on three approaches: 1) Pedagogy for the Privileged; 2) A model for student leadership for social justice; and 3) Dialogue as a form of Conflict Resolution.

**Pedagogy for the Privileged**

Most student leaders and teacher participants were members of the dominant group. At first, I understood this as a limitation of the study; however, after exposure to a growing body of literature that targets the dominant group for equity training, I believe that this study’s most valuable contribution is to this emergent field. Equity training for advantaged groups is known by many names, including ‘pedagogy for privilege’ (Curry-Stevens, 2007), ‘whiteness studies’ (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997; Katz, 2003), ‘pedagogy for the non-poor’ (Evans, Evans, & Kennedy, 1995), ‘pedagogy of the oppressor’ (Schapiro, 2001) and ‘education for the privileged’ (Goodman, 2001) and so on. The rationale behind targeting the dominant group rests in the understanding that its members already have power and a cultural capital that allows an understanding of how to negotiate the system. Consequently, these individuals may be able to bring about more change by using their political prowess and their power and privilege. Participants’ interview responses in my study identified their positions of privilege as they referred to themselves as ‘white bred’ and talked about social justice in terms of how lucky they are
to be sheltered from poverty. Most student participants from the dominant group recognized their position of privilege in relation to other social groups. Consequently, this recognition often catalyzed a sense of responsibility to take action:

I feel it is [my] duty as a rich White guy- for me, I feel that I have to give back because the fact is that, as of right now, society values my life more than most of the others. Otherwise, they wouldn’t be starving, they wouldn’t, you know, be kicking it in the slums. So, it’s definitely the responsibility of every North America to do something [emphasis added to represent tone] (E.G.).

This perspective was reiterated by many other white participants.

The other side of the argument is, of course, that the oppressed groups must be the ones to mobilize and unite for change (Freire, 1970). This was the point of view represented by the aboriginal participant:

When I say things about natives, I feel that I can from my perspective of having a Mohawk father, a Metes husband, so it’s not some white girl talking about racism. Have some pride, pick yourselves up by the bootstraps and be an example for your culture instead of… why would you fall into a stereotype, and that’s what I get so frustrated with. When they fall into the stereotype, I say do you want to prove the white people right by not showing up to class or by picking a fight, or smoking dope? If you want to make a change for our people, it starts with you and that’s when I get really frustrated when they don’t come to school. And they’re so bright and they’ve got so much potential I say be a teacher, take my job please. Have some native role models in our school please (C.B.).

While this is desirable, it is often unrealistic in terms of what will be most effective short-term. For instance, ‘at-risk’ students\(^\text{17}\) are often already out of the system or difficult to gain access to by virtue of non-attendance. The same thinking could be applied for marginalized groups – people struggling with poverty and unemployment may not be in a position to exert energy and time to build awareness and coalitions to address their situation. Even if they did, it is not guaranteed that they would have access to

\(^{17}\) I am hesitant to use this term for a variety of reasons that label students (See Portelli et al, 2007); however, it is useful here to identify students who are not engaged.
information about the most effective ways to advocate for themselves. For this reason, once we accept the urgency of inequitable situations, focusing energy on mobilizing the dominant group to advocate and pursue the cause may be the avenue to affect the greatest amount of change. This is not to say that resources and education should not also be targeted at marginalized groups – I also think this is paramount to achieving equity. I am simply saying that I do not think that either strategy should exclude the other. The dominant group, for instance, may act as allies to exert power and privilege in order to assist a marginalized group to mobilize, build support and gain access to venues that allow their voices to be heard. Adams et al (2007) describe allies as “members of the advantaged group who act against the oppression (s) from which they derive power privilege and acceptance” and maintain that allies’ “role as change agents, working with other privileged group members or in coalition with targeted group members to challenge systems of oppression, is an essential aspect of eliminating inequality” (p. 47). Only when all groups (both dominant and marginalized) work together can we achieve equity.

**A Model of Student Leadership for Social Justice**

Earlier, I outlined three impediments to action (Lack of a will, a way and a means). Each of these barriers to equity must be explicitly targeted by student leadership. Figure 9 proposes possible avenues to build will and motivation, galvanize a way, and secure and mobilize means.
Figure 9. A Model for Student Leadership for Social Justice

A large part of building will is to increase awareness on issues of hegemony, power, privilege, oppression and ‘isms’ (racism, heterosexism, sexism, and so on). In order to increase motivation, people must also feel that their participation matters; consequently, teaching about agency is also important. Rallying public support through use of the media is often an effective mechanism for building political will (it should, however, be noted that media coverage of issues is rarely impartial). The next step to confront inequities is to build knowledge surrounding the issue through information, curriculum, conferences, workshops and research so that people who want to do something know what they can do. The last phase is, of course, putting political will and knowledge into action. This can take many forms, including the creation of collaborative networks and partnerships that mobilize groups to work together towards a particular goal. Advocacy is also important to action (and often builds will and motivation). Social protest is...
another way in which to confront societal inequities. Last, but certainly not least, is policy. There has to be a plan to influence decision-makers on the correct course of action. Policy can act as a springboard to legitimize and disseminate practices that combat inequity (Smith et al, 2004).

**Dialogue as Conflict Resolution**

Dialogue was mentioned repeatedly by participants as the primary avenue to deal with conflict and equity issues in education and society at large. Participants listed many qualities and dispositions necessary to have meaningful dialogue about issues, including the following: respect, empathy, listening, critical thinking, openness, knowledge and information. Bakhtin (1984) asserts that “to live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree….In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters in to the dialogic fabric of human life” (p. 263). This robust notion of dialogue goes far beyond procedural matters (such as raising a hand before you speak); rather, it defines dialogue as instrumental in constructing, understanding and changing society. It was also clear that participants had a substantive conception of what dialogue should entail; as one educator states:

> When there is conflict, there has to be a willingness to come together first of all. A willingness to actually listen and hear the other side, not just give lip service to it, but actually to internalize and be empathic listener, and that’s something that we don’t teach students- to be empathic listeners. And they’ve got to be willing to see the other side of things. If you’ve got such a narrow focus (and blinders on) that there is no other way but your way, how will you ever get empathy or an understanding for someone else’s point of view. Openness to new ideas is integral to it working…you’ve got to be open to it. The school setting- what a great place to teach
kids empathic listening skills and open dialogue and healthy debate on controversial issues. School is the place to do it, a controlled setting, and it just seems like such a no-brainer, and yet there’s so many educators that are afraid of it. They also don’t know how to do a healthy debate either. There’s an education process with teachers on how to do a proper debate or how to discuss these issues. When things get heated, do you just shut the book and say okay tomorrow we’re going to be talking about the amoeba? No, you’ve got to be able to handle that within your classroom as well. So it’s willingness to have an open heart and an open mind and an open spirit. School is where you’ve got to get them from, because when they’re in their 20’s they’ve already made up their minds, and it’s a little harder to change them. They’re more malleable at the school level in that they have the willingness to listen (C.B.).

Most participants from my study claimed that their schools were not engaging in dialogue over conflict (racism, sexism, homosexuality, among other topics). Instead, many participants indicated that conflict on controversial issues was usually addressed through student punishments (suspensions, etc.). One teacher participant outlines the ineffectiveness of punishment for solving conflict:

We’ve got to start making the kids more responsible for what they say, what they do, how they do it. If somebody uses a derogatory term, they’re going to be held accountable for that and we’ve got to find out why are you using a term like that. Words hurt - why would you choose a word that would hurt somebody? We must be willing to have these dialogues, not just throw out a punishment. Because that kid is just going to come back, use the word again and be more angry because he got suspended for using the word before. So he’s going to be really pissed with that kid now [that he used the derogatory term about] and he is. So if we’re not going to have meaningful dialogue, don’t expect to have harmony in your school, don’t expect to have students that want to come to school. Right now, we have very much a factory model for kids. You are expected to come to school, get in, get out, don’t ask any questions, don’t question me the authoritative figure. School has become you’re going to work you’re not coming to school anymore, and it’s not a welcoming atmosphere (C.B.).

The only way to resolve conflict productively is to attempt to get to the root of the problem. Encouraging and supporting groups that are in conflict to engage in meaningful dialogue is a mechanism for teaching students about alternate views and perspectives.
Differing opinions are inevitable in a pluralistic context and one of the many challenges of dealing with conflict through dialogue. A conversation between two students illustrates the tension that can evolve from differing opinions:

M.L.: I believe respect is the key to everything in life, because if everybody respected each other so many problems would be solved. I think you can discuss whatever, as long as you have respect for the other person and the other thing. I guess empathy in a way too, because if you can see where the other person is coming from you kind of see or feel how they feel about the situation. Maybe it’s something that they personally have experienced or something that and they’re going to have a totally different view on it than you are.

M.T.: I think she’s very right. Respect is huge because you know what? No matter what your opinion you are allowed to have it. Whether another person is right or wrong, it doesn’t matter because you live in a free country- it’s your opinion. It makes it really hard because then you’re into the rights of people and which way you’re going because you may be using your freedom of speech, you may be…

M.L.: Where do you draw the line kind of thing?

M.T.: Yes, where does free speech end and somebody else’s right start? It’s so true.

The issue of rights is important when dealing with conflict among groups. While individuals are entitled their own opinions, should opinion be allowed to impinge on the rights of another? For instance, should the KKK really be entitled to march publicly and disseminate messages of racism and hate? Or, should limits be placed on speech and ‘freedom’? We must also ask ourselves where to draw the line? If limits are placed on freedom of speech, whose limits and for what purpose?

Student leaders talked about many different roles they occupied during discussions. Some participants envisioned their role as voicing ideas to a group. Others saw their role as questioning and challenging the opinions that were voiced: “I challenge when things are being said, because I’m not afraid to tell people that I don’t believe in
what they’re saying or that I don’t agree with what’s going on, and I have no problem letting them know that. But, at the same time, if I’m for something and I agree with it or I can reach some sort of compromise I’ll make it happen” (E.G.). Participants often spoke of knowledge and information as critical to a meaningful dialogue for change. As one black educator aptly pointed out, there is not always a ‘one size fits all’ solution to a problem: “I think information is critical, but making information applicable to the situation that you’re working with in a social context” (L.H.). All participants recognized that without the necessary dispositions (for example listening and respecting differing opinions) dialogue would inevitably break down and be unproductive. Burbules (1993) defines dialogue as the following:

as symbiotic, communicative relationship between equals that requires emotional as well as cognitive involvement. Genuine dialogue, if it is to have a chance at success, rides on the participants’ mutual feelings of concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope as well as on cognitive understanding. As a human practice with a long tradition, it also embodies and requires a set of virtues that include tolerance, patience, openness, restraint, and the willingness to listen, thereby empowering the other to speak (vii).

The skills and dispositions needed to facilitate genuine dialogue are not inherent in individuals (quite the opposite it seems). They must be taught, developed, practiced and cultivated to reach fruition. Likewise, it is through experiencing conflict and attempting dialogue that growth, both individually and collectively, occurs.

Dialogue is not about consensus in a pluralistic context (for I believe that consensus in many cases is impossible); rather, it is about trying to find a compromise that is reasonable for both groups. Why not explore avenues which allow different views to be operating simultaneously? Derived from participant perspectives of the prerequisites of dialogue, I propose a four-prong approach to this endeavor (Figure 10).
Figure 10. Dialogue as a form of Conflict Resolution: A Four Prong Approach
The stages to this four prong approach are not linear and sequential; rather, they are iterative and continually revisited and reconstructed throughout the dialogue process. Distinguishing the purpose and goals in relation to the issue is important for contextualizing the problem in a specific context. This involves an identification of the gap between where we are and where we need to be. This stage introduces information, evidence and knowledge that can be utilized to outline the parameter of the problem. For example, when considering the issue of underachievement for black students, this stage may involve the introduction of statistics of how black students are performing at a particular school. Another stage in the process is allowing those involved in the dialogue contribute examples of their experiences. This is predicated on sharing and providing a historical backdrop as well as contemporary interpretations of the problem that are entrenched in individuals’ concrete experiences. In the case of black students underachieving, this may entail an invitation to members of this community to speak about the impact and consequences of racism in their daily lives. Such sharing requires openness, empathy and respect on the part of all parties involved. If these conditions are not present, individuals will likely not feel comfortable expressing their lived realities. A challenging and questioning stage is also imperative to providing alternate viewpoints and to increase understanding between groups on differing perspectives. The challenging and questioning stage is one that must be negotiated carefully in order to keep the path of communication open – it requires restraint, listening, critical thinking and tolerance to ensure that questions are not constructed (and perceived) as personal attacks on belief systems. This stage also involves an active search for contrary information which can broaden and enrich the scope of the dialogue.
The final stage of dialogue as conflict resolution and, arguably, the most important, is that of advocacy and action. This involves linking arguments to concrete action, including benchmarks to check progress. In the example of black students’ underachievement, this may involve setting a goal (as far as credit completion) to revisit in a semester. It may also involve (if racism is cited as an explanation for underachievement) the creation of a space for teachers and students to be trained on the issue, or perhaps action would demand the creation of a group that actively addresses these issues. Support and intention are integral to this stage: resources and plans must be provided and established in order to follow through on proposed solutions. As one aboriginal participant realizes: “Dialogue isn’t just dialogue - you have to be willing to make a change and willing to effect change. And all sides of the table have to come together on that. I mean you can have all the kids that want the graffiti stopped on our walls, but if the people that are doing the graffiti aren’t there at the table, I’m guessing the graffiti will continue” (C.B.). This perspective raises another important issue – who is involved in the dialogue is absolutely critical. Without action, dialogue is meaningless. Simply increasing understanding on an issue is an insufficient means of resolving conflict; measures to improve the situation also must be implemented.
CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This study responded to the following major research question: How do the views of a group of student leaders (and some of their staff advisors) illuminate the discussion in the broader literature around issues of student leadership, conflict, diversity and social justice in Canadian secondary schools?

Participants outlined a variety of skills and dispositions as necessary for effective leadership, such as communication, organizational skills as well as openness to listening and incorporating differing opinions. Participants often spoke of leadership in terms that extended beyond procedural matters (for instance, talking about leadership in terms of vision, the ability to inspire others and so on). These views are generally consistent with other leadership studies that attempt to summarize similar characteristics and claims about effective leaders (Darling-Hammond et al. 2007; Leithwood et al., 2006; Mitgang, 2008). While a few of the teacher participants saw the goal of student leadership in terms of academic achievement, all of the student leaders described student leadership in terms of social justice18. Student leaders believed that the major goal of student leadership was inclusion (involving students from a variety of groups in their schools). Ryan (2006) also proposes inclusive leadership as an essential element to coping with diverse school communities.

A second major goal of student leadership was discussed in terms of societal change and making a difference by attempting to improve inequitable conditions in society, a goal that was, notably, articulated in global terms. This emerging trend from

18 There could be a lengthy discussion of whether student leadership for academic achievement and social justice can be consistent; it should be noted that these aims are mutually exclusive.
the study (of raising awareness and interest in global issues) is consistent with current educational research and literature (Hicks & Holden, 2007). Schools also seem to avoid local controversial issues by encouraging student leaders to focus on international concerns. Due to a dearth in literature on student leaders’ perspectives on the goals of student leadership; I cannot claim with certainty whether these views (goals of inclusion and societal change) are unique or not. I do, however, believe that the articulation of these goals was heavily influenced by the theme and training of the conference which focused on inclusion, equity, and how to initiate and enact positive change in the world. Likewise, I think that these views are likely becoming more prevalent in younger generations of students due to the increased connectedness of societies through international business ventures and technological advancements (though more research would have to be conducted to fully substantiate this claim). While students envisioned their leadership role in terms of social justice with the goals of inclusion and societal change in mind, the present schooling structure, established expectations and strategies chosen for initiatives often hindered the realization of such a role.

All student leaders organized many different events in their schools (dances, athletic events, assemblies and so on), confirming that long-established, traditional conceptions of student leadership roles are still common in secondary schools (Ryan, 2006; McMahon & Portelli, 2004). Student leaders also participated in many activities which, arguably, reflected equity goals (inclusion and societal change). These activities often took the form of fundraising for various causes, including fundraising for cancer research, homeless shelters, third-world countries and so on. While perhaps such initiatives contribute positively to equity, charity drives are insufficient in dealing with
equity issues in a sustainable, long-term way. In short, throwing money at these complex problems will not solve them—and nor will giving youth the impression that money is the ultimate panacea.

In some cases, student leaders were involved in actually travelling to impoverished countries and villages in order to volunteer their services to build schools and pipelines for clean water. Student leaders often mentioned their positions of privilege and felt a responsibility to act on behalf of those who could not act for themselves. Adams et al. (2007) confirm that recognizing privilege often motivates action. The training at CSLC focused on preparing students to take action against inequities\textsuperscript{19} in their schools and abroad. This training accomplished three objectives: 1) Raising student leaders’ awareness about atrocities occurring in the world (for example, the Rwandan genocide); 2) teaching students about their own agency (that one person can make a difference); and 3) offering student leaders opportunities to mobilize and take action in local and global communities. Students often cited the conference training (including that of past conferences) as the driving force behind their involvement in equity projects. This demonstrates that targeting privileged learners can positively influence the pursuit for social justice in secondary schools.

Participants strongly associated diversity with conflict among different groups based on sexual orientation, culture, religion, ethnicity and gender. These discussions were framed in terms of controversial issues. Three trends emerged from participant responses about whether or not controversial issues should be addressed in schools. First, some participants thought that controversial issues should be avoided in schools; others

\textsuperscript{19} It should be noted that CASAA did not explicitly define their conception of equity and social justice in organizational documents
recognized that school culture, teachers and administrators often curtailed discussions on controversial issues. Secondly, some participants denied the existence of controversial issues in their schools. The third view, and the most prevalent, was that controversial issues should be confronted head on in schools. This perspective was often founded in a belief that conflict and controversy are inevitable, and so teachers and students should gain experience in negotiating them in school before facing them in adult life.

Participants thought that certain issues were more controversial than others; for instance, they viewed racism as less controversial than homosexuality. Participants also had different views on the role the teacher should occupy when handling controversial issues in the classroom: 1) Teacher as a neutral facilitator (does not express an opinion on the issue; 2) Teacher as authentic (expresses their viewpoint on the issue); and 3) Teacher as devil’s advocate or risk-taker (expresses different views than those of the students in order to challenge pre-conceived notions and constructs). These findings are generally consistent with other studies that address controversial issues; for instance, many studies discuss different roles that teachers occupy or the benefits of addressing these issues (Holden, 2007; Oulton et al., 2004; Soley, 1996). As an extension of these studies, I focus on the explicit construction of controversial issues as an avenue for social justice work.

Participant perspectives on certain issues were different depending on the societal group of which they were members. For instance, white participants spoke of focusing on commonalities among groups rather than identifying difference; minority participants, however, took the opposite viewpoint that recognizing difference is essential for equity. The sample was not nearly large enough to generalize this finding; however, it does
suggest that tensions arise between different groups’ different understanding of certain issues. Participants thought that a primary mechanism for acknowledging and dealing with conflict is dialogue. They also highlighted that action must be taken as a result of that dialogue in order for change to occur. All participants thought that education is a powerful agent of for equity, although their views of what equity means differed in many cases.

This study examines how student leaders and educators from Canadian Secondary schools understand, encounter and engage with diversity and social justice. These conceptions were explored in terms of both local and global equity issues. I argue, throughout this thesis, that schools should actively and explicitly address issues of social justice and equity through student leadership. I also briefly suggest other areas in which social justice work can occur (through, for example, policy, addressing controversial issues in classrooms, training educators, creating curriculum, involving students in research for school change and so on). Many other studies (which focus on adult educators and administrators) also argue for the need of schools to address social justice through various mechanisms, including the following: leadership (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2004), training teachers (Ayers, Hunt, & Quinn, 1998; Cochran-Smith, 1998; Oakes & Lipton, 1999), and pedagogy (Coates, 2007).

Evidenced in participant accounts of activities occurring within their respective schools, this study points to the importance that working with privileged groups can produce positive gains towards achieving equity in secondary schools through consciousness-raising, teaching students about their agency, and providing opportunities for student leaders to engage in the struggle for social justice; consequently, targeting
privileged groups is an important aspect of achieving social justice. This view is consistent with other studies directed at privileged populations (Curry-Stevens, 2007; Evans, Evans, & Kennedy, 1995; Katz, 2003; Goodman, 2001).

**Implications**

The findings of this research carry several implications for schools in various areas including policy, student leadership, curriculum and educators.

**For Policy**

Policy provides the framework that illustrates and governs educational priorities; consequently, it has an important role to play in creating change in education systems. As Smith et al. (2004) recognize: “Educational policies reflect the politics of the times and illustrate, at any particular time and place, which groups have more power to influence the state in its allocation of values” (p. 8). Policies surrounding equity, even when established, are often insufficient or ineffective in many areas and boards. For example, consider the largest and most diverse school board in Canada, Toronto District School Board (TDSB) where more than 80 languages are represented, more than 80,000 (30%) of students were born outside of Canada in more than 175 different countries, and in which more than 27,000 (10%) of students have been in Canada for three years or less.

The equity policy for this board (TDSB, 1999, P.037 CUR), in one and a half pages, outlines that the board will ensure equity in various matters including curriculum, student opportunities, hiring practices, parental and community involvement, and more; however, this document does not give direction on how to tangibly achieve these aims or how progress will be measured. There seems, in many areas, to be a disconnection
between the policies surrounding equity and the actual practice of equity in schools (Dei, 1997). First of all, we need to ensure that equity policies for every board of education in Canada are established by our Ministries of Education; we also need to make sure that these policies are comprehensive, in order to provide concrete directives for schools. Lastly, we need to institute measures that evaluate the extent to which equity policies are actually influencing decisions and actions on the front lines of education – in schools and classrooms with teachers and students.

**For Student Leadership**

First and foremost, the conception of student leadership should evolve beyond traditional notions of student leadership in which students simply organize social events such as dances and athletic banquets; conversely, student leadership has to allow students to influence educational decision makers, so that policy and practice will incorporate their needs and views. Student leadership has to be restructured with the goal of social justice in mind. Moreover, social justice projects must extend beyond fundraising. Goals of student leadership must focus on recognizing difference and learning what is necessary to acknowledge and deal with controversial issues and conflict. At the most basic level, a move towards equity would require student leadership roles to become more accessible to marginalized groups, so that they too have the opportunity to develop skill sets and dispositions that will benefit them in future endeavors.

The CSLC provided student leaders with a wealth of information about becoming agents of change. More opportunities are needed for students from across Canada to join together to discuss important societal issues. Geographical location need not be a limitation; various networking and electronic conferencing software can allow
individuals to meet and train together from around the country, or the world for that matter! Training programs for student leaders must be developed and implemented that explicitly acknowledge and address issues arising from diversity and pertaining to social justice.

For Curriculum

Curriculum is another viable means of improving student leadership training. In some provinces in Canada, leadership courses and curriculum already exist. These courses should be introduced in all of the provinces. The course content of the leadership courses should also include training on how to deal with controversial equity issues. Courses and curriculum on social justice and global issues should be developed, due to the increasingly pluralistic nature of our country and society. Some topics of study could include global citizenship, poverty, health, human rights, politics and advocacy.

For Educators

Both teachers and administrators require professional development opportunities that assist them in coping with the challenges arising from diverse school contexts. One area that could improve practice for educators is conflict resolution training. Educators also need to be taught about controversial issues. Faculties of education are viable sites to train new teachers on equity issues arising from race, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and other identity categories. Training teachers before they enter schools could provide a venue to improve practice when dealing with controversial issues in classrooms and schools. Upon entry to schools, mentorship programs could also guide
new teachers on how to deal with conflict among students, teachers and parents for the benefit of the entire school community.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Participants**

The group of participants for the study was originally designed to be purposeful in order “to select individuals…who are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the researchers’ purposes” (Gall et al, 2005, p. 310). My strategy was a critical case strategy\(^\text{20}\) which reflected my conceptual rationale. I attempted to select as many visible minorities as possible due to the nature of critical-theory research and my desire to create spaces for the most marginalized groups’ voices. Unfortunately, due to a lack of representation of minorities among administrators, teachers and student leaders at the conference, my sample was not diverse – a major limitation to what this study attempts to accomplish, but a significant finding in and of itself. While many participants spoke of minority student experiences (of friends, colleagues, and so on), they were not themselves part of minority groups. I was constrained by the demographic of those in attendance and available at the conference; consequently, my participants were chosen based on availability. This limitation (due to the characteristics of the participants) can be seen as a strength, ultimately, for it serves to contribute to the growing body of research that targets privileged groups, encouraging their active involvement in the pursuit of social justice-- what Curry-Stevens (2007) has referred to as pedagogy for the privileged.

\(^{20}\) Cases selected “that provide a crucial text of a theory, program, or other phenomenon” (Gall et al., 2005, p. 311)
**Data Collection**

The primary source of data for this study was the open-ended interview. Participants’ responses to questions about what activities they do in their own schools or how diversity and social justice are approached in their respective schools may not offer a complete picture of student leadership in Canadian secondary schools. There are likely discrepancies between how people *say they behave* versus how they *actually behave*. It is quite possible to study what people say as an illustration of their thinking, but their actions are something quite different because the link between people’s beliefs and actions can range from close to non-existent. To increase the reliability of the findings in this study, on-site observation (at each of the participants’ schools) would be necessary to substantiate the participants’ perceptions and accounts of student leadership in relation to actual behaviour at their respective schools.

**Findings**

The size and composition of the sample in this study limits the ability to generalize its findings. For instance, the report of one student from one school in a particular province is not enough to draw concrete conclusions about practices of student leadership across that province. Likewise, although participants representing six provinces were included in the study, I cannot assume that this adequately represents the diversity of Canadian culture or the differing perspectives that exist among and between various societal groups. The two minority participants, one black male educator and one aboriginal female educator, cannot possibly represent what black educators or aboriginal educators think on the whole. These perspectives, however, do provide insight into the
tensions and challenges surrounding diversity and equity in Canadian secondary schools, thus offering suggestions for future research.

**Challenges of Studying Student Leadership for Social Justice**

Social justice is a complex issue wrought with many obstacles and challenges, one of the most difficult being that oppression and inequity are not always readily visible. Schools are complex systems; likewise, the competing agendas of various societal groups often result in conflicting ideas about the purpose of education (and in this case student leadership). While different societal groups will likely have different perspectives on issues, relativism is a pitfall that must be avoided. All are entitled to their own opinions; however, there are various areas in education where empirical evidence is available that supports certain strategies and ways forward for schools (for example literacy strategies, see Alden, Anderson, & Perry, 2000). It is often difficult to create and implement training programs for student leaders and teachers due to time constraints, a lack of resources, and a lack of ease or willingness on the part of various groups to address issues of social justice. In many cases, a further complication is that students and educators may articulate certain beliefs about equity, while their actions may not be consistent with those views (whether this is unconscious or not). Changing actual behaviour is the ultimate goal, not changing how we talk about social justice and equity (although this is arguably an important pre-requisite for change). Another major challenge is the misunderstanding of what equity and social justice mean and entail. Consider, for instance, the challenge that some believe that racism or other forms of inequities do not exist (as evidenced by participant responses in this study). These challenges, while complex, are not insurmountable; rather, they provide starting points for policy-makers,
educators and student leaders to begin the important task of achieving a more equitable education system for all.

Suggestions for Future Research

A variety of future studies could be conducted as a result of this research; however, I think the most important would be a series of ethnographic studies of the educators and student leaders in various schools. These studies should focus on areas of social justice; therefore, site selection should reflect this aim (the school where the Peace and Justice committee was formed would be one example of a school that may be included). This would allow a comparison between what participants say is happening with student leadership for social justice to what is actually happening in schools.

A study on how controversial issues are being dealt with in classrooms and in schools would provide fertile ground for examining conflict in schools; this may be approached by analyzing critical incidents that educators and students have had in relation to these issues. Another study on the role of educational administration in acknowledging and addressing controversial issues would also contribute valuable insight to the field.

Further research needs to target minority voices (both educators and students) to account for more diverse perspectives and insights, as it is these groups that are often affected most by inequitable societal structures. Likewise, future research needs to access disengaged students and explore ways to involve these groups in student leadership opportunities in Canadian secondary schools. Research also needs to be done exploring and training student councils as possible vehicles of equity and social justice. All studies conducted on student leadership should include the voice of students.
Another area to investigate is dialogue in schools. These studies might examine available opportunities (or the lack thereof) for various groups to voice their educational concerns. A study like this might also analyze the way in which dialogues in education are occurring through discourse analysis.

Student leaders should be involved in more substantive educational roles (Critchley, 2003; Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Kohn, 1993; Levin, 2000; Mitra 2003, 2004). Engaging students in research of educational issues as they relate to diversity and social justice presents one viable opportunity. Students could select a problem, conduct investigations, suggest changes and present findings to teachers, principals, boards (trustees) or community. A research study could be designed for this type of student research project, thereby assisting in training and providing the resources necessary for students to complete this process and, hopefully, contribute in a meaningful way to constructive changes in their schools.

**Revisiting the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework proved to be far too ambitious for the scope of a Master’s thesis. In fact, each of the four spheres of the original conceptual framework (student leadership and engagement, the purpose of education, democracy, and social justice and equity) could easily constitute a doctoral thesis or more. In the end, educators’ and student leaders’ understanding of the purpose of education (and a particular version of democracy) did influence how they conceived of goals and activities of student leadership. Likewise, local and global forces and the subsequent drivers of change all contributed to the context within which schools operate. Interview responses tended to center on student leadership in relation to the diversity and social justice sphere
from the original conceptual framework. A more appropriate conceptual framework outlining what the study was actually able to cover is shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11. Revised Conceptual Framework**

### Conclusion

Schools must encourage student leaders to discuss cultural assumptions and biases implicitly embedded within societal institutions. Education, above all else, is for equity and social justice. Schools (and student leadership) remain the most viable site to confront and dismantle hegemonic ideologies that reproduce societal inequities:

“Education at its best – this profound human transaction called teaching and learning – is not just about getting information or getting a job. Education is about healing and
wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world” (Parker in hooks, 2003). Social justice will only be achieved if everyone becomes actively involved in its pursuit. Student leadership must actively confront substantive issues arising from diversity and difference in order to create a more equitable future for all citizens regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status, ability, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Email to Secure Participants for Study

Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Participants

Appendix D: Researcher’s Interview Guide with Probes
Dear CASAA member:

My name is Amanda-Mae Cooper. I am a graduate student in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto), pursuing a Master’s of Education in Educational administration. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research for my thesis on the Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA) focusing on student leadership in relation to developing democratic citizenship. The thesis title is *Student Leadership for Social Justice in Secondary Schools: A Canadian Perspective*.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between skills, dispositions, values, underlying beliefs and actions of the CASAA members in relation to student leadership. I hope to conduct 12 interviews from three groups within the organization: 2 members of the Executive Board of directors (including provincial directors), 3 teacher advisors, and 7 student leaders (*Student leaders must be 16 years or older to participate in the study*). CASAA members have been chosen as participants for this study because of their interest and active involvement in student leadership within Canadian secondary schools.

The data will be collected through a one hour length interview. During the interview, you will be asked questions about the purposes and necessary skills required for student leadership and how both the Canadian Student Leadership Conference and provincial student leadership conferences contribute to student leadership training across Canada. Please see attached interview questions. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen well to develop my own understanding.

I may also take notes before, during, and after the interview to help me in my analysis. I also ask for your permission to digitally record each interview session. You may decline to have the interview recorded if you so choose. I will transcribe the audio file from the interview. You can choose to receive a copy of the interview transcript, so that you may omit or change sections of your responses. If you choose to receive a copy of the interview transcript, I will send it to you within 2 weeks of the interview, and I will ask you to return the transcript within 2 weeks with the changes you would like made. The interview information (including audio files and transcripts) will be kept in a secure place and destroyed within five years after the completion of the study. I will provide a
summary of the results to you upon completion of the project, so that you may read what other participants said about student leadership.

Participation in the study is voluntary. There will be no value judgments placed on your responses. You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process. You may request that any information, whether in written form or audio file, be eliminated from the project before, during or after the interview process.

All participant interviews are anonymous and confidential; individual participants, schools, and school boards will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for all names. Only my thesis supervisor, Dr. John Portelli, and I will have access to the data collected. Themes, concepts and information from interviews will be used in my thesis, and in the future for potential reports, presentations at conferences or other venues, journal papers and book chapters; in all cases, the participant’s identity will remain confidential. The research paper will be on file at the University of Toronto as a Master’s thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact myself, my supervisor Dr. John Portelli (jportelli@oise.utoronto.ca), or the Office of Research Ethics (ethics.review@utoronto.ca; 416-946-3273)

If you are willing to participate in this study, please e-mail me at acooper@oise.utoronto.ca. If you choose to participate in this study, at the time of the interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form that reiterates the information in this e-mail. There will be two copies of the consent form; one will be yours for future reference. I look forward to your response.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Amanda-Mae Cooper
Appendix B: Informed Consent Letter

University of Toronto/OISE-UT

Theory and Policy Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto
Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6
Fax: 416-926-4741
www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/tps

August 30, 2007

Dear participant in this study,

My name is Amanda-Mae Cooper. I am a graduate student in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto), pursuing a Master’s of Education in Educational administration. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research for my thesis on the Canadian Association of Student Activity Advisors (CASAA) focusing on student leadership in relation to developing democratic citizenry. The thesis title is **Student Leadership for Social Justice in Secondary Schools: A Canadian Perspective.**

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between skills, dispositions, values, underlying beliefs and actions of the CASAA members in relation to student leadership. I hope to conduct 12 interviews from three groups within the organization: 2 members of the Executive Board of directors (including provincial directors), 3 teacher advisors, and 7 student leaders (**Student leaders must be 16 years or older to participate in the study**). CASAA members have been chosen as participants for this study because of their interest and active involvement in student leadership within Canadian secondary schools.

The data will be collected through a one hour length interview. During the interview, you will be asked questions about the purposes and necessary skills required for student leadership and how both the Canadian Student Leadership Conference and provincial student leadership conferences contribute to student leadership training across Canada. Please see attached interview questions. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen well to develop my own understanding.

I may also take notes before, during, and after the interview to help me in my analysis. I also ask for your permission to digitally record each interview session. You may decline to have the interview recorded if you so choose. I will transcribe the audio file from the interview. You can choose to receive a copy of the interview transcript, so that you may omit or change sections of your responses. If you choose to receive a copy of the interview transcript, I will send it to you within 2 weeks of the interview, and I will ask you to return the transcript within 2 weeks with the changes you would like made. The interview information (including audio files and transcripts) will be kept in a secure place and destroyed within five years after the completion of the study. I will provide a summary of the results to you upon completion of the project, so that you may read what other participants said about student leadership.

Participation in the study is voluntary. There will be no value judgments placed on your responses. You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process. You may request that any information, whether in written form or audio file, be eliminated from the project before, during or after the interview process.
University of Toronto/OISE-UT

Theory and Policy Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto
Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6
Fax: 416-926-4741
www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/tps

All participant interviews are anonymous and confidential; individual participants, schools, and school boards will not be identified. Pseudonyms will be used for all names. Only my thesis supervisor, Dr. John Portelli, and I will have access to the data collected. Themes, concepts and information from interviews will be used in my thesis, and in the future for potential reports, presentations at conferences or other venues, journal papers and book chapters; in all cases, the participant’s identity will remain confidential. The research paper will be on file at the University of Toronto as a Master’s thesis.

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, please feel free to contact myself, my supervisor Dr. John Portelli, or the Office of Research Ethics (ethics.review@utoronto.ca; 416-946-3273).

By signing the consent form, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above. There are two copies of this consent form; one will be yours for future reference.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Amanda-Mae Cooper    Supervisor:  Dr. John Portelli
M.Ed. Candidate    Professor
OISE/UT    OISE/UT
(416) 951-0424    (416) 923-6641 x2401
acooper@oise.utoronto.ca    jportelli@oise.utoronto.ca

ACKNOWLEDGE AND CONSENT

I have had the study “Student Leadership for Democratic Citizenry in Secondary Schools: A Canadian Perspective” explained to me. I have had the chance to have my questions about the study answered, and

I _______________________________ (please print your name), agree to begin participation in the study.

_______________________________ Signature of Participant    ___________________________ Date

_______________________________ Signature of Investigator (Amanda-Mae Cooper)    ___________________________ Date

Please initial if you agree to have your interview digitally recorded: _____

Please initial if you would like to receive a copy of the interview transcript to review: _____

Please initial if you would like to receive a summary of the results: _____
Interview Guide - CASAA Executive, Teacher Advisors and Student Leaders

The following questions will be used as a basis for the interview with you in your current or past role in CASAA.

Setting the Stage

1. Briefly discuss your educational background and your experience with CASAA and/or student leadership. Is there a particular experience or moment that you remember that made you want to be involved with student leadership?

Leadership

2. What does the term leadership mean to you?

3. Why do you think student leadership is important?

4. Can you please describe some of the roles of student leaders in your school?

CSLC Conference

5. What does CASAA prioritize in leadership training for teacher advisors and student leaders at CSLC and provincial student leadership conferences?

6. How does the training from the CSLC (or other provincial student leadership conferences) translate into practice at the school level?

Diversity and Equity

7. The theme for this conference is LEAD ON – “Lead with Enthusiasm, Acceptance, Diversity and Optimism Now”. What does this theme mean to you?

8. The theme of dealing with diversity in a multicultural Canadian context is definitely an important issue in schools today. How does your school (and student leadership) approach and deal with social justice and equity issues?

9. To what extent can student leadership confront issues of diversity and difference? Please explain.

Controversial Issues

10. Dealing with issues of diversity, difference and acceptance in schools can often lead to controversial issues. Should controversial issues be discussed and confronted in schools? Why or why not?

11. Does conflict have a place in schools/education? Why or why not?
Appendix C: Interview Guide for Participants

University of Toronto/OISE-UT

Theory and Policy Studies in Education

252 Bloor Street West, Toronto
Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6

Dialogue

12. Dialogue is often utilized to negotiate conflict within schools. What does dialogue require? (What roles are involved or most important?)

Democracy

13. What does democracy mean to you?

14. In your opinion, are Canadian schools democratic? Why or why not?

The Role of Education

15. What role does/should education play in the topics we have discussed (Leadership, Diversity & Equity, Controversial Issues, Dialogue and Democracy)?

16. What changes, if any, need to be made for student involvement and leadership within schools? What changes, if any, need to be made to confront issues of diversity and acceptance within schools?
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<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTION</th>
<th>PROBES</th>
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| Introduction  | 1. Briefly discuss your educational background and your experience with CASAA and/or student leadership. Is there a particular experience or moment that you remember that made you want to be involved with student leadership? | • How do elections for student councils run (application, speeches etc.)?  
• Is there a screening process?  
• Are student decisions/ ideas ever vetoed? – provide examples                                                                                                                                  |
| Leadership    | 2. What does the term leadership mean to you?                                                                                                                                                                        | • Can leadership be taught or is a natural quality that a person possesses?  
• Please describe a leader that stands out in your mind.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|               | 3. Why do you think student leadership is important?                                                                                                                                                                 | • Please list skills and dispositions important for Student leadership?  
• What is the goal of student leadership?  
• What are some of the barriers/ limitations of student leadership?  
• What expectations are there for student leaders?                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|               | 4. Can you please describe some of the roles of student leaders in your school?                                                                                                                                     | • At what levels (and in what areas) is student leadership appropriate?  
(school, community, district, provincial federal)  
• Give one example of a student led initiative – what made it “student led”                                                                                                                                                                               |
## Appendix D: Researcher’s Interview Guide with Probes

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<th>THEME</th>
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| CSLC Conference     | 5. What does CASAA prioritize in leadership training for teacher advisors and student leaders (at CSLC and provincial student leadership conferences)? | • What are the goals of CASAA and the CSLC? How are these goals accomplished? How do you know that they are being accomplished?  
• What are the benefits of a national focus of CASSA and CSLC? What are some of the challenges faced by the national scope of the organization?  
• Please provide examples from conferences (training sessions, activities etc. that demonstrate this |
|                     | 6. How does the training from the CSLC (or other provincial student leadership conferences) translate into practice at the school level? | • Do you keep in contact with people you meet through CASAA and CSLC? If so, please describe these relationships (resource sharing, emailing)?  
• Lessons learned and demonstrated from training? |
| Diversity and Equity| 7. The theme for this conference is LEAD ON – “Lead with Enthusiasm, Acceptance, Diversity and Optimism Now. What does this theme mean to you? | • What does each of those concepts mean to you?  
• How is it accomplished? How does someone Lead with enthusiasm, acceptance diversity and optimism? |
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<tr>
<td>Diversity and Equity (continued)</td>
<td>8. The theme of dealing with diversity in a multicultural Canadian context is definitely an important issue in schools today. How does your school (and student leadership) approach and deal with social justice and equity issues?</td>
<td>- Have you ever heard of the terms social justice and equity? What do they mean to you?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Can you give me some examples from your school of where social justice and equity were or were not happening?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- How do you conceive of the words acceptance, openness, negotiating difference, respect and tolerance?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Can you describe any examples within your experiences at school where these qualities were or were not demonstrated?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. To what extent can student leadership confront issues of diversity and difference? Please explain.</td>
<td>- How much power or influence do you think student leaders actually have? Who decides (for instance) student council applications etc?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Is the goal of student leadership equity and dealing with diversity?</td>
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</table>
| Controversial Issues | 10. Dealing with issues of diversity, difference and acceptance in schools can often lead to controversial issues. Should controversial issues be discussed and confronted in schools? Why or why not? | • List some issues that you think are controversial (ones that should vs. ones that shouldn’t be discussed).  
• Can you think of any instances where controversial issues were dealt with well in schools?  
• Can you think of any instances where controversial issues were dealt with poorly in schools? |
|                     | 11. Does conflict have a place in schools/ education? Why or why not?                                                                                                                                                    | • Please describe some examples of conflict in your school and, where possible, how it was resolved  
• How should conflict be dealt with in school                                                                                                                     |
| Dialogue            | 12. Dialogue is often utilized to negotiate conflict within schools. What does dialogue require? (What roles are involved or most important?)                                                                                               | • What qualities are necessary (respect, openness, etc)  
• What is your conception of dialogue and its role in negotiating difference?                                                                                  |
<p>|                     | <strong>Diagram (Dialogic Leadership).</strong> Where would you situate yourself in the following diagram? What percentage of time do individuals spend in each role (do people switch between these roles)? Can the skills required for these roles be taught or are they natural? |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |</p>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td>13. What does democracy mean to you?</td>
<td>• How do you conceive of the term? Is it important?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• What would it mean to be a “good” citizen?</td>
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<td>14. In your opinion, are Canadian schools democratic? Why or why not?</td>
<td>• Please provide examples from your school proving or disproving that they are democratic</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• To what extent is student voice recognized?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Is it important for education to reflect democratic values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Education</td>
<td>15. What role does/ should education play in the topics we have discussed (Leadership, Diversity &amp; Equity, Controversial Issues, Dialogue and Democracy)?</td>
<td>• What is the goal of education?</td>
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<td>• How is our achievement in these areas measured?</td>
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<td>• Do you see a relationship between Democracy, Leadership, Social Justice and Dialogue? If so, please explain how you think they are connected?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>16. What changes, if any, need to be made for student involvement and leadership within schools? What changes, if any, need to be made to confront issues of diversity and acceptance within schools?</td>
<td>• How would you describe the relationship between student leaders and teachers/administrators?</td>
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<td>• What changes, if any, should happen within these relationships to improve communications?</td>
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References


