LEADING DIVERSE SCHOOLS: TEMPERING ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

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2012

This qualitative research examines how school principals perceive social justice and accountability, the actions they take, and the reasoning process they use in their attempt to satisfy accountability mandates while simultaneously tackling the various causes of social injustices in their schools.

This constructive study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world. It employs semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions guided by the conceptual framework developed from review of literature on social justice, educational leadership, and accountability policy. Twenty-two school principals and vice-principals from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) were interviewed.

The findings show that some participants define social justice as equity, which goes from the economic and political dimensions of resource distribution and equality of opportunity and access, to the cultural aspect of social representation and inclusion. Some view public education as a social justice endeavour with a particular reference to the purpose of public education. Others construe social justice by focusing on its end goal – the academic and social outcomes of students and the impact on their lives.

Study participants implement their social justice beliefs and values in praxis by engaging all stakeholders and catalyzing them to be the new force for the social justice movement. Evident in this study is that participants enacted their social justice practices by putting students at the centre,
positioning themselves as social justice leaders, developing people for social justice, building school climate through justice, and fostering positive relationship with families and communities.

Under current accountability context, principals in this study responded to the current reform by going beyond its narrow focus through instilling a sense of moral responsibility in their perceptions of accountability itself. As social justice activists, they are proactively engaged in expanding its parameters by encompassing the moral, social, and professional aspects of their accountability. Leading for social justice thus becomes a process of constantly confronting and tearing down such obstacles and barriers by leveraging the politics of accountability and social justice to move towards what is best for students.
Acknowledgement

There are many people to whom I owe an immense debt of gratitude for their assistance in this great endeavour. Without their encouragement, support, inspiration, and motivation, I would not have been able to make it to the end of this long journey and accomplish this goal that I have always been dreaming of.

I am deeply indebted to all of the principals and vice-principals who participated in this research project. I would like to acknowledge not only their passion and integrity for social justice and their commitment to make a change in education, but also their insightful reflections of their values and beliefs and their inputs on their educational practices and leadership. They have contributed enormously to my own learning and the completion of my doctoral dissertation, and hopefully to that of other educational administrators who share a similar commitment for justice and equity in education.

With their erudition, professionalism, and dedication, working with my supervisor and my committee members not only made the pursuit of my doctoral degree a pleasant journey, but also a substantially beneficial experience to me, professionally and personally. I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Jim Ryan, for his seasoned guidance, unwavering support, and utmost encouragement from the initial to the final level of my doctoral studies. His academic challenge pushed my thinking to a higher level and his dedication to academic excellence and depth led to my success in completing my dissertation. I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my committee members Dr. John Portelli and Dr. Coleen Stewart. Words alone cannot express what I owe them for their encouragement, professional efforts, and constructive criticism. I would like to express my sincere thanks to John for his unflinching support, valuable feedback and insightful suggestions which have led to a significantly improved manuscript of my dissertation. I am heartily thankful to Coleen for her friendly helpfulness, insightful inputs, and immense contribution which tremendously enhanced the successful completion of my dissertation.

My most heartfelt thanks go to my mother, Yaofeng Zhang for her love, sacrifice, and tolerance for my absence away from home, and my brother Hong, who was always there cheering me up and standing by me through the good times and bad. I am also deeply grateful to my brothers Ping, Fu, and Jian, my sisters, Xiaoqing, Liqing, and Xiuqing, and all the members of my family for allowing me to be who I am and be as ambitious as I wanted. Without their unselfish love and unending support, morally
and materially, during the long years of my education, I would not have been able to gain so much drive and an ability to tackle challenges and fulfil my dreams. I offer my regards and blessings to my dear friends Scott Elliott, Kerry Johnson, Rony Bassoul, Christian Richard, Michael Grit, and all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of my doctoral studies.

Last but not least, I owe my deepest gratitude to my love Howard Goldberg for his support, encouragement, quiet patience and unwavering love. His tolerance of my occasional absence and being apart is a testament in itself of his unyielding devotion and love.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

*We are saved not by what we can do or accomplish but by our fealty to revolt, our steadfastness to the weak, the poor, the marginalized, and those who endure oppression.*

– Chris Hedges (2010)

**Rationale and Research Questions**

My doctoral research is conceived and initiated at a time when educational accountability policies in both Canada and the United States have had and are still having a significant impact on principals’ daily operations and actions in schools. There is little doubt that “accountability is not just another task added to the already formidable list of the principal's responsibilities. It requires new roles and new forms of leadership carried out under careful public scrutiny while simultaneously trying to keep day-to-day management on an even keel” (Lashway, 2000, p. 13). The focus on high-stakes testing and accountability was supposed to help close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and minority students and their peers. Instead, it led to the practical effect of further marginalizing lower socio-economic groups as well as racially diverse schools (Sunderman, 2006). This poses a challenge to principals who must prioritize among many programs and tasks that promote progress in demonstrating measurable academic achievement and those aimed at social justice. The public may be keenly focused on the test results they deliver, but principals can no longer avoid the greater level of educational accountability involved in providing disenfranchised individuals and groups a more equitable, responsive, and culturally sensitive learning experience (Carr, 2007).
It is within this context that I situate my research which links practical problems to the theoretical basis of the educational field and covers four major strands: social diversity, leadership, social justice, and accountability policy. Specifically, my research examines how the impact that the accountability movement brings to school settings shapes and holds sway over principals’ perceptions of and commitment to social justice, and how school principals perceive the issues of social justice and accountability, the actions they take, and the reasoning process they use in their attempt to satisfy accountability mandates while simultaneously tackling the various causes of social injustices in their schools. The following questions guide my research process:

- How do school principals perceive social justice?
- What do school principals do to promote social justice in schools?
- How do school principals perceive accountability and accountability policies?
- What do school principals do to meet the accountability requirements administered by the Ministry of Education?
- How does accountability hinder or facilitate the pursuit of social justice in schools according to the principals?
- How do school principals temper accountability policy with social justice in their efforts to address the problems prevalent among students who are identifiable by race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical and mental ability?

**Research Background**

Decades after the publication of *A Nation at Risk: the Imperative for Educational Reform* in the United States (NCEE, 1983), in 2004, the Ontario Ministry of Education announced its
commitment to improve the reading, writing and math skills of its students as part of its Literacy and Numeracy strategy. Since then, the focus of educational reform in Ontario has also shifted from school inputs to student outcome and from minimum competency to high proficiency standards. The shift has culminated in the results-driven accountability policy that holds school principals accountable for student academic performance. This shift in policy has also contributed to a change in the normative definition of educational equity and social justice. As a result, the notion of social justice tends to be more rooted in the distribution of outcomes rather than that of access (Opfer, 2006).

Regardless of the consistency of the multiple meanings or purposes of accountability, or its policy legitimacy, the compatibility of accountability with social justice has now become contentious both within and outside the school context. Social justice is the never-ending quest to enhance educational equity across multiple social identity groups in schools rather than reflect the more narrow requirements of accountability policies. It involves “a focus on the human condition, equity and difference, and thence on discrimination and other forms of oppression” (Carr, 2007, p. 2). However, there is some controversy about whether external, outcome-driven accountability policy enhances or hinders educational equity and social justice. Some scholars argue that raising performance standards and measuring the results with high-stakes testing can enhance equity and social justice by narrowing the achievement gaps (Covaleski, 2002; Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koshorek, 2001). Through motivating lower-achieving, less advantaged minoritized students and their schools, the standardized testing programs can improve academic achievement more than they can for their higher-achieving, less disadvantaged counterparts (Lee & Wong, 2004).
Other scholars contend that the test-driven programs curtail educational opportunities, and reinforce and extend social inequalities (Black & Valenzuela, 2004; Haney, 2004; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001). Without equity in educational resources and opportunities, accountability policy may widen the achievement gaps by rewarding advantaged, high-performing students and their schools and punishing less advantaged ones (Lee & Wong, 2004; Ryan, 2004). These two entirely opposite views ultimately centre on one question: Is enhancing social equity merely reducing the student’s achievement gap?

Obviously, this “view of social justice as synonymous with school achievement” (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004, p. 51) simplifies the issue of accountability and its associated issues and neglects its social and moral complexity. Evidence gathered from research thus far shows that this emphasis upon student achievement can lead to “forgetting the faces behind the data” (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007), obscuring the rich diversity in schools (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006), and disregarding the challenges associated with diversity. Moreover, some scholars even see the “standards” movement as both “amoral and narrow” (Blacker, 2003), because it seeks to curry favour with things amenable to quantitative measurement, but ignores social and moral factors. The implementation of accountability mandates even renders the “perverse incentives for administrators to act in profoundly unjust ways” (Lugg & Shoho, 2006, p. 203) and contribute to wrongful practices and negative behaviours, such as exempting the poor performing students from the tests by labelling them as “special education students” (Ryan, 2012), or even cheating on standardized tests.

In the midst of unyielding cries for accountability, the role of principals carries enormous moral and ethical challenges. They are critical players in “helping elevate and orchestrate higher purposes for the good of all” (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2011, p. 10). They constantly interact
with the key stakeholders that are involved in schooling, which makes their position as complex as it is critical in the life of schools. Principals “make the decisions that affect people’s lives, direct considerable sums of money, create a climate that impacts the community, and project the appropriate philosophy and practical vision that propels a school forward” (Dubin, 2006, p. xiii). Particularly, when they are held accountable for the performance of many others such as teachers and students, it makes their daily activities as arduous as they are dangerously stressful. The scarcity of time, the vulnerability to interruption, custodial responsibilities in maintaining order and safety, and the encumbrance of paperwork (Lortie, 2009) have long been identified as contributing factors to the stress that principals endure. Fuelled by the accountability initiatives, the pressure from school reform efforts further complicates the principals’ position and adds more anxiety to their day-to-day work.

Over the years, school principals seem to have been anchoring their leadership skills and capacities on innovative approaches to improve student learning to comply with the accountability measures. The approaches, whether they are managerial, instructional, or transformational, to name a few, appear to have vast variability in results for school improvement given the complexity of organisational contexts. With limited resources, an increasingly diverse student population, and a legacy of managerialism (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006), the goal for academic progress of all students poses a great challenge to principals, in particular, those in schools serving diverse communities. Principals who neglect to address increasing diversity systematically or do so in insufficient or cavalier ways risk missing a root cause of low achievement. Thus, principals’ work has inevitably become more than an issue of reducing the achievement gap between mainstream and minoritized students. Irrespective of the mounting pressure from accountability policy, today’s school leaders face formidable issues.
These issues include, but are not limited to, school underachievement (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Shields & Oberg, 2000), persistent under-representation (Marshall, 2004), high failure and dropout rates (Adams et al., 2000; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Shields, 2004), over-identification of behaviour problems (McBride & McKee, 2001), and placement in low-level academic programs (Nieto, 1999; Shields, 2004).

These problems are particularly prevalent among diverse populations in schools. Students from minority ethnic groups (Barton, 2003; Pearce, 2006; Ramirez & Carpenter, 2005), students of low socioeconomic status (Natriell, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; Ryan, 2006a), gay and lesbian students (Adams et al., 2000; Shapiro, Sewell, & Ducette, 2001), and students with disabilities consistently experience significantly lower achievement test scores, low teacher expectations (Lunenburg, 2003b; Valencia, 1997), and the inadequate allocation of resources (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Banks, 1997; Brown, 2006a; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). In addition to the pervasive achievement gap that affects minoritized students’ life outcomes, ethnic minorities, girls and women, physically disabled, and gay and lesbian students not only have to endure being socially marginalized, but also experience many forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and heterosexism in schools (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 2000; Lugg, 2003; Ryan, 2006a). As a result, the disadvantaged students, “without realizing it, fall into a predetermined mould designed for school failure and social inequity.” (Brown, 2006a, p. 701)

The injustices that exist in our education system should not surprise anyone. They are ingrained in every aspect of education and place the challenge of, and demand for, change on the backs of school principals. It would be unfortunate if principals turn a blind eye to or are complacent in maintaining, if not protecting, the status quo without questioning or challenging the social, economic, and political structure that sustains injustices across the school system. It
would also be unfortunate if principals ignore the fact that “the kinds of institutional and cultural arrangements which control us were built by us. They can be rebuilt as well” (Apple, 1990, p. 13). Such a deliberate intervention requires “the moral use of power” (Bogotch, 2005, p. 2) to critically examine how institutional norms and practices in schools and society lead to educational inequities. Rather than focus on high academic standards, it becomes imperative for principals to connect accountability with social justice to “address and redress marginalization, inequity, and divisive action” (Carr, 2007, p. 3) that are prevalent in the education system.

Accountability will not be meaningful if school leaders cannot immerse themselves in their school-systems in such a way as to “facilitate the social and emotional development of all students regardless of age, race, creed, or intellectual capacity” (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2011, p. 3) and develop targets and measures to reverse injustices in schools so as to advance an equitable education system. To temper accountability with social justice is to work toward a higher level of moral commitment. It requires critical awareness and rethinking of the purpose of education, an unwavering commitment to justice and equity, and a genuine concern for the welfare of all students. It also requires principals’ willingness to take risks and test innovative approaches to social change that embraces the value of democracy, inclusion, representation, empowerment, and difference.

**Significance of the Study**

The growing body of literature on educational leadership theories tends to be concerned with models and approaches to various leadership functions and behaviours. Some of the models and contributions offer important views and ideas that aim to critique societal inequities from different perspectives and attempt to deconstruct the privileged social dimensions. However, in
reality, it still remains unclear how social justice leaders promote justice while facing resistance to their work, and how they continue their pursuit of equity and justice while simultaneously tackling the various causes of social injustices under the accountability context. To strengthen the extent of the empirical research on leadership for social justice, I hope, through this study, to deepen the understanding of social justice leadership and to inform and enhance leadership practices for the promotion of social justice in schools. Specifically, this study may contribute to and extend our understanding of the ways school principals interpret social justice and accountability policy, and the practices and strategies they employ in supporting or challenging the current educational reform agenda.

In addition, given the fact that many studies in the area of social justice and leadership remain either theoretical or confined to the American context, this study supplements the limited pool of current literature by presenting empirical evidence about the practices of social justice leadership in a Canadian context, with particular reference to the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Ontario.

**Organisation of the Study**

The overall organisation of the study is designed to look into the ways principals perceive and respond to social justice and accountability, the actions and practices they take to promote social justice and satisfy the mandates of accountability policies, and the barriers and obstacles they encounter in their endeavours to temper accountability with social justice. The overall study is organized into eight chapters.

The introductory chapter presents the rationale of the study, research questions, current research background, and the significance of the study. Chapter two provides a review of
literature which outlines the ways in which social justice is interpreted and understood in sociology and education and highlights its theoretical dimensions and historical development. It also presents theories and practices on educational leadership that are associated with improving student achievement and school performance and the various understandings and interpretations of accountability in previous research. More importantly, a theoretical and conceptual framework is presented in this chapter to provide a lens to look into the research problems.

Chapter three delineates the methodology employed in conducting this study and the rationale for the methods that are used in participation selection and data collection and analysis. Chapters four through six are dedicated to presenting findings of this study.

Through the analysis and synthesis of interview data, chapter four examines how principals’ perceptions of social justice contribute to the discourse surrounding social justice and how their perceptions are impacted by their personal values and beliefs, their present circumstances, and the moral purpose of their organisational context.

Chapter five looks at ways that principals tackle the causes of social injustices and the sentiments that principals express about their work in addressing social injustices in their schools. It also explores the challenges and obstacles principals face in an attempt to promote social justice.

Chapter six explores how principals anchor their leadership skills and capacities on innovative approaches to improve student learning to comply with accountability measures. Particular attention is focused on how principals respond to accountability and accountability policies and how they work to promote justice and equity while seeking to improve student achievements that reflect the requirements of accountability mechanisms.
Chapter seven further teases out the findings from the previous three chapters and illuminates them by drawing on the available relevant literature. The final chapter summarizes the overall study with a brief overview and offers some theoretical and practical implications as well as potentiality for further research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

*The first requisite of civilization is that of justice.* – Sigmund Freud

**Introduction**

Social justice has long ago taken root in educational disciplines such as curriculum and pedagogy (Apple, 1996; Freire, 1998, 1996), but it is a relatively new concern in the field of educational leadership and administration. With accountability initiatives and high-stakes testing transforming thinking about education, social justice comes to the foreground and is being invoked with increasing frequency. However, social justice is a highly contested term that generates a lot of discussion and controversy about its very meaning, how it is manifested and enacted, and what effects it has on education. This becomes one of the major quests in my study which aims to tease out different conceptualizations surrounding social justice, with a particular focus on its conceptualization under the accountability context.

In this chapter, I first outline the ways in which social justice is interpreted and understood in sociology and education, and continue the discussion of its theoretical dimensions and historical development. Secondly, I focus on the practices and strategies that are employed by educational administrators in pursuing social justice. Thirdly, I probe the meaning and definition of accountability and the leadership practices that are used by school leaders in meeting accountability requirements. Finally, I connect social justice leadership and accountability by looking at the ways that accountability hinders or facilitates the pursuit of social justice.
The Meaning of Social Justice

The increasing cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious diversity in most nations, particularly in Western societies, has contributed enormously to the discourse surrounding social justice issues. Today, as our understanding of diversity is further expanded, the meaning of social justice becomes even more complicated, if not confusing. The difficulty of making sense of social justice starts with the term itself (Novak, 2000). However, given that the notion of social justice is constantly subject to various constructions by the members of any given community based upon their understandings of the historical context, their present circumstances, and the moral purpose of their organisational contexts, it does not have a single essential meaning. Instead, it is “embedded within discourses that are historically constituted and that are sites of conflicting and divergent political endeavors” (Rizvi, 1998, p. 47). This is also reflected in a wide range of literature on the topic.

Since its origin from religious teachings, the term and modern concept of “social justice” emerges mainly in philosophical writings and gains its popularity in the political arena. Until recently, it found its way into contemporary educational situations drawing upon traditional philosophical discussions of justice. Rizvi (1998) categorizes the social justice discussions into three main philosophical traditions: liberal individualism, market individualism and social democratic (p. 48). The liberal individualist view, drawn from Rawls, originally concerns the struggles for economic equality and egalitarian redistribution (Horkheimer, 1982) and emphasizes justice as fairness. This philosophical projection led to the social democratic movement such as affirmative action and some redistributive policies during the 1960s and ’70s.
(Rizvi, 1998). The market individualism is advocated by Nozick (1976), who attempts to describe justice in the end distribution of holdings without paying much attention to the processes in which holdings were acquired (Rizvi, 1998). Nozick’s (1976) entitlement theory implies that “a distribution is just if everyone is entitled to the holdings they possess under the distribution” (p. 151). The social democratic perspective, drawn from Marxism, advocates the creation of economic redistribution programs to eliminate class disparities and the promotion of a welfare state and economic democracy as a means to secure workers’ rights. It considers justice in relationship to the needs of various individuals (Rizvi, 1998) without challenging the fundamental structure of the social and economic systems.

Unlike Rizvi’s categorization, which focuses on philosophical notions of social justice, Hytten and Bettez (2011) sort through a wider range of literature on the topic and synthesize them into works that are “primarily philosophical/conceptual, practical, ethnographic/narrative, theoretically specific, and democratically grounded” (p. 10). The philosophical/conceptual strand greatly overlaps Rizvi’s categorization and “relies heavily on offering broad criteria, principles, and constructs for thinking about justice” (Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 11). This strand is also concerned with contemporary social movements (feminism, LGBTQ rights, etc.) and adopts a broader notion of justice. Hytten and Bettez cite Iris Marion Young's (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference* to support this perspective which envisions a shift from struggles for power redistribution within hierarchical systems to struggles for recognition over identity and difference (Brown, 2006a; McClellan & Dominguez, 2006). This philosophical approach aims at changing institutionalized hierarchies of cultural value and empowering the subjugated groups in such a way as to shift hegemony and privilege in order to provide equal participation in social life for the disadvantaged (Brown, 2006a; Marshall, 2004).
The practical strand offers “criteria for what socially just practice in education would look like” (Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 12) and outlines some experiential principles, conditions/action plans, and skills, practices and dispositions in social justice education. To supplement the practical strand which is sometimes “decontextualized and under theorized” (Hytten & Bettez, 2011, p. 14), the ethnographic/narrative strand offers “portraits of injustice related to schools and education, reflections by educators committed to social justice, and narratives about personal experiences of lived injustice” (p. 14). The theoretically specific strand of social justice work involves theoretical positions that are connected directly or indirectly to specific leftist and/or radical movements within academia, such as critical pedagogy, Whiteness studies, anti-oppressive education, multiculturalism, women's studies, sociology, and ethnic studies (Hytten & Bettez, 2011). Although the democratically grounded strand of work has roots in the philosophical one, Hytten and Bettez put them in a separate category by focusing on the purpose of education, that is, to promote the knowledge and skills needed for democratic citizens.

In addition to all of the discussion about and categorization of social justice, there is one more strand of work that should not be neglected, namely, the critical humanistic view of social justice. Critical humanists view social structures as “human social constructions that are inherently value-laden, critique existing social constructions for inequities that result from unequal power relationships, and call for (often radical) social change to overcome these inequities.” (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004, p. 50) To humanist critics, social justice is “a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power.” (Bogotch, 2002, p. 138) Thus, social justice not only requires a respect for individuals, but also emphasizes their practice of virtue and the exercise of civic responsibilities (McClellan & Dominguez, 2006).
The notion of social justice is contextually amorphous and conceptually loose. Therefore, the purpose of my study is not to provide an exact definition of social justice, but rather, through extensive discussion with principals, to unfold dimensions and components of social justice in the educational setting. In doing so, it aims to explore the ways that social justice is related to educational leadership, and how educational leadership approaches may contribute to the achievement of social justice in schools.

**Theoretical Dimensions of Social Justice**

Since the conceptual dimensions of social justice are far from settled, theories underlying its application also appear varied. Extensive discussion on, and inquiries about social justice first embark on the appraisal of its socio-economic, cultural, and political significance and then the dialogue continues by taking the diversity issue into account, striving to further inform our understanding. Major paradigms for understanding social justice are well illustrated in Trevor Gale’s (2000) work, in which he categorizes social justice in terms of redistribution, retribution and recognition. The following discussion will center on the implications of these theoretical dimensions of social justice for education. By introducing various theoretical approaches underlying social justice, I intend to explore how social justice is related to educational leadership and how leadership roles and practices can reverse injustice associated with the diversity of students based on ethnicity, race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and mental and physical ability.
**Social justice as redistribution.**

For the past 150 years, the conception of a social justice model was based on the redistribution of resources, goods, wealth, and services, whether material or symbolic. Redistributive claims were primarily attributed to the liberal traditions, and extended subsequently by key modern philosophers such as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin in the 1970s and 80s.

In *A Theory of Justice* (1971), Rawls attempts to solve the intractable problem of distributive justice by utilizing the social contract ideas of Locke, which leads to the theory known as *justice as fairness*. From justice as fairness, Rawls (1971) derives two principles of justice, which address two different aspects of the basic social structure: liberty, or individual freedom, and the equal distribution of materials and social goods (except where the unequal distribution is to the advantage of those who are less well-off). These two principles of justice involve both the equality as sameness, which is also referred to as ontological equality (Joshee, 2003, 2007), and the equality of opportunity. The fundamental value of the former has long been embedded in the constitutions of many Western democracies, for instance, the United States Constitution, as well as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. The latter extends the notion of access to material goods to encompass access to opportunity to participate in the society (also referred to as equality of access, in correspondence with equality of outcome).

It is noteworthy that justice as fairness is not exclusively equated with the notion of equality. It also has a clear inter-relationship with the concept of inequality (Craig, 2007), which recognises that different groups have different starting points and require different treatment (also referred to as equality of treatment). From a Rawlsian perspective, the primary subject of
social justice is mainly concerned with the “basic structure of society”, through which “primary goods” are distributed. These goods not only include social and material goods such as rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth, but also such goods as self-respect, access to employment, educational and decision-making opportunities (Brighouse, 2004). All the above social values are to be distributed equally “unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls, 1971, p. 62). The difference principle, founded on the notion of equality of opportunity, directs extra attention to those who find themselves being socially stratified into layers of advantage and disadvantage, with the inevitable consequences of privilege and exclusion, for instance, due to group membership.

This difference model of social justice is also characterized by “complex equality” (Walzer, 1983), which, as Gale (2000) indicated, has also given rise to the adoption of the concept of equity. Complex equality, corresponding to the multiple spheres of society, demands that each good be distributed according to its social meaning, and that no good be allowed to dominate or distort the distribution of goods in other spheres. Unlike liberal democracies, the social democratic argues that justice is primarily a moral standard and cannot be developed in a universalized abstraction.

Although Rawls recognises the difference of the social group, his distributive justice primarily focuses on the economic aspect and the distribution of social goods. It overly accentuates the development of individual liberty and the egalitarianism of social democracy (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; North, 2006) without taking into account identity issues and cultural politics. Moreover, the individualistic emphasis on redistribution draws the attention away from established structures or social forms through which the distribution occurs (Gewirtz, 2002; Ryan, 2006a). Rawls fails to examine social structures and intuitional contexts, in which the
taken-for-granted norms and rules regulating the distribution process frequently remain unchallenged (North, 2006; Young, 1990).

Espoused by a variety of egalitarian philosophers, distributive justice is also featured in equality of resources by Ronald Dworkin (1977). His theory attempts to remove some of the shortcomings of Rawls' theory, that is, to remove impacts (on the distribution of social goods) that are not under control of individuals and to allow influence only of such ones that are under personal control. Dworkin maintains that human beings are responsible for the life choices they make, and natural endowments of intelligence or talent ought not to affect the distribution of resources in society since they are morally arbitrary. As Dworkin’s theory has its origin in Rawls’ thought, not surprisingly, both philosophers address socioeconomic injustice rooted in legal and economic structure of society and ignore the cultural injustice prevalent in all social spheres.

**Social justice as retribution.**

Retributive justice has its origin in the legal sphere. It is adopted to balance an injustice by rectifying wrongdoing to regain an equality that the injustice overturned. In ethics and law, it is grounded in the principle that the severity of penalty for a wrongdoing or an offense should be reasonable and proportional to the severity of the act punished. Simply put, it is the principle of ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’ retaliation. Retributive justice typically requires a punishment to involve a deprivation of a good, such as individual liberty or property rights, but it aims to strike a balance between the extremes of severity and leniency (MacFarlane, 2001).

In an educational context, retributive justice is not merely associated with the implementation of the zero tolerance policy or other issues apropos school safety. It also
addresses social justice issues by privileging “liberty and freedom in social interactions over the distribution of social goods” (Gale, 2000, p. 256). According to Nozick (1976), laws and regulations that protect the individual’s property and liberty should gain support. This is likewise applicable to the school context, where not only individuals’ freedoms in exercising their talents and efforts should be protected, students’ excellence in academic performance should also be equally rewarded without any unfair restrictions.

The reality, however, appears very different. Gale (2000) argues that if talent and efforts are truly the criteria in assessing individuals’ achievement, their success should be found evenly distributed across different social groups, and their talent and efforts should be fairly rewarded in schools. Nevertheless, the relationship between their talent and efforts and academic achievement appears constantly inverse. It is worth noting that this inverse relationship also occurs at the school level. As the accountability pressure mounts, the retributive justice often induces negative influence and perpetuates social injustice that goes contrary to one’s will. As Ryan (2004) has specified:

Disadvantaged students tend to do worse on standardized tests than do their more affluent counterparts. An accountability system that rewards and punishes schools based on absolute achievement levels will thus reward relatively affluent schools and punish relatively poor ones. Moreover, given that minorities are disproportionately poor, and that all schools are held responsible for the performance of their minority and poor students, this accountability system will tend to punish those schools that are racially and economically diverse. All of this will make racial and socioeconomic integration even more difficult to achieve than it is already, and it will provide even more incentives for good teachers to choose relatively affluent schools. (p. 934-935)
Ryan’s (2004) argument suggests there is a theoretical deficiency in the work of both John Rawls and Nozick. Both of their theories have addressed socioeconomic injustice rooted in the legal and political-economic structure of society. However, their discussion of justice is confined to “the disparate distribution of goods and services and/or the social structures that enable such material inequality” (North, 2006, p. 508), and fails to go beyond legal and economic spheres to encompass social injustice due to cultural difference.

**Social justice as recognition.**

Cultural injustice is prominently pervasive in contemporary societies. As opposed to socioeconomic injustice, which encompasses exploitation, marginalization, and deprivation, cultural injustice arises in the forms of cultural domination, non-recognition/misrecognition, and disrespect (Fraser, 1997). As a consequence, the understanding of social justice must also be adjusted in such a way as to be based on three separate and yet interrelated dimensions: distribution (of resources), recognition (of the varying contributions of different groups), and representation.

Drawing on Hegelian philosophy and recent insights of feminist, critical and queer theories, and post-structuralism, Nancy Fraser (1997) argues that the term of recognition “designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it ” (p. 10). Thus, the goal of recognition is to foster a “difference-friendly world” (Fraser & Honneth, 2003) that assures justice for difference along the dimensions of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Recognition of difference calls for cultural or symbolic change prompted by revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups, recognizing and positively appraising cultural
diversity, or “transforming wholesale societal patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication in ways that would change everyone’s social identity” (Fraser, 1995, p. 73; Fraser, 1997).

Since socioeconomic and cultural injustices are intricately intertwined in practice, Fraser (1997, 1998) proposes a new social justice framework which integrates politics of both redistribution and recognition by synthesizing elements of critical theory and post-structuralism. This social justice framework “evaluates social arrangements and institutions by the extent to which they enable parity of participation in society” (Brown, 2006b, p. 511). The overarching norm of participatory parity aims to encompass both socio-economic and cultural injustice that Fraser claims are faultily decoupled from each other in philosophical and social-theoretical terms. Under this guiding principle of parity of participation, social justice “requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers.” (Fraser, 2001, p. 6)

Fraser’s general thesis is that “justice today requires both redistribution and recognition. Neither alone is sufficient.” (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 9) However, as recognition claims tend to promote group differentiation whereas redistribution claims tend to promote group dedifferentiation (Fraser, 1995), this bi-dimensional model reveals the tension between issues of redistribution and recognition, which have been translated into the “distribution-recognition dilemma” (p. 74). To deal with this dilemma, Fraser introduces affirmative and transformative remedial actions for social injustice which features socioeconomic mal-distribution and cultural misrecognition (Figure 1). Affirmative remedies include those aimed at “correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates
them”, while transformative remedies purport to redress “inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework” (p. 82).

Figure 1. Redistribution, Recognition, and Remedies

By integrating politics of redistribution with that of recognition in one single comprehensive framework, Fraser presents a rather pragmatic approach for a democratic analysis of societal institutions and social movements. This viable approach to social justice would not be possible without a massive restructuring of socio-economic constructs and a new form of identity politics that can remedy misrecognition without encouraging displacement of redistribution and reification of group identities (Fraser, 2000).

Leadership for Social Justice – from Theory to Practice

Leadership is as much contested as the notion of social justice. However, “there is no escape from grappling with the conceptual difficulties involved” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 49) if we
are to gain a better understanding of leadership. Even though there is no universal definition of leadership, certain views prevail which see leadership as the nature of influencing process (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004) or power that dictates who gets to decide what and for whom (Ryan, 2005). Contests over the meaning of leadership also manifest by the different positions that leadership theorists and scholars take with regard to where leadership power emerges. Such positions see leadership as either an individual or a collective practice, or a collective process (Ryan, 2005).

It is difficult to sort through the educational leadership literature with any real comprehensiveness given an infinite number of dimensions and theories from both an historical and current research perspective. These perspectives reveal evolving schools of thought which attempt to explain what leaders are (great man and trait theory) or do (behaviourist theory), how leaders respond to specific situations or circumstances (situational leadership, contingency theory), and why and by whom they are shaped into what they are (transactional and transformational theory). Each of these schools approaches leadership from a rather individualistic perspective, focusing upon either the characteristics and behaviours of successful leaders or leader-member relations and the contextual nature of leadership. Traits theory for example, identifies certain traits that are associated with leaders, such as intelligence, dominance, self-confidence, ambition, will, and optimism (Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1974; Maccoby, 1981). Although literature abounds with theories and dimensions, essentially, as Schweiger and Leana (1986) argue, “no single approach, whether autocratic, consultative, or totally participatory, can be effectively employed with all subordinates for all types of activities” (p. 159).

Currently, however, there emerge a growing number of leadership theories with a social justice orientation which sees leadership as either a collective practice or process. These social
justice approaches call for leaders to reflect critically about educational arrangements that are rife with inequity (Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002) and to critique existing educational systems that perpetuate the unequal distribution of power. They shed new light on “how institutionalized theories, norms, and practices in schools and society lead to social, economic, and educational inequities” (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 17). Analyzing educational leadership and social justice literatures, Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009) identify four dominant issues with regard to leadership and social justice. They are “(a) conceptualizing social justice and a new social order in leadership preparation, (b) beyond traditional leadership preparation to leadership for social justice, (c) moving toward critical pedagogy: leadership for liberation and commitment to social justice, and (d) making connections between local and global research to extend leadership for social justice” (p. 3). Their emergence witnesses “a paradigmatic shift from indifference or ignorance toward issues of social justice by practitioners and scholars to an embrace of said issues” (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009, p. 5).

Recent educational leadership with a social justice perspective even embraces a broader concept of social justice, which includes not only fairness, equity, equality, participation, and empowerment, but also democracy (Alsbury & Shaw, 2005; Furman & Shields, 2003; Lunenburg, 2003a; Marshall, 2004; Woods, 2005), social transformation (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2004), inclusion (Ryan, 2006b), dialogue (Shields, 2004), ethical/moral care (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998), to name a few. In order to support social justice advocacy in schools, Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) suggest five discrete leadership perspectives: critical pluralist, transformative, moral/ethical, feminist, and spiritual/cultural (pp. 268-271). These practical models (Table 1) “emphasize the care, relationships, emotional connections, and even spiritual mission of educators’ work” (Beatty, 2000, as cited in Marshall
& Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, p. 268) and present “a new way of viewing leadership that incorporates advocacy and social justice” (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005, p. 268).

Table 1

**Social Justice Advocacy Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice Advocacy Leadership</th>
<th>Claims</th>
<th>Insufficiencies</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Pluralist</td>
<td>Encourage democratic participation</td>
<td>Cannot ensure an equitable process or outcome</td>
<td>Scheurich &amp; Imber (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>Seek to share power</td>
<td>Can be confused with transformational leadership</td>
<td>Shields (2004; 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage dialogue about inequities and silences</td>
<td></td>
<td>Astin &amp; Astin (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rooted in moral ethical values in a social context</td>
<td>Rely on leaders to be the activists</td>
<td>MacKinnon (2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral and Ethical</td>
<td>Seek to ask ethical and moral questions in decision making</td>
<td>Require sustainability in difficult or challenging times</td>
<td>Fullan &amp; Hargreaves (1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on moral purposes of schools: to love and care, to empower, to serve, and to learn</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hargreaves &amp; Fullan (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>Being inclusive and facilitative</td>
<td>Challenged by inflexible policies, homogenous standards, zero tolerance rules and penalties</td>
<td>Noddings (1984)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promote a sense of family and community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grounded on ethic of care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual/Cultural</td>
<td>Rely on “godtalk” and “womanist” orientations</td>
<td>Obsession with the achievement gap and test scores</td>
<td>Hooks (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on coalition and network building designed to nurture collective critical resistance</td>
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The critical pluralist model accentuates the need for authentic democratic participation in decision making and policy formation in order to ensure all voices are heard and valued. Such
leadership perspective that assumes a democratic value is of great importance in pursuit of social justice in schools. However, the notion of democracy has considerably expanded since its emergence. Historically and contemporarily, notions and norms corresponding to the democratic values have deeply permeated the prevailing visions and beliefs of thinkers. Traditionally, democracy emerges as a form of political government that operates under the principles of equality and freedom. Over time, other cultures, historical movements, and social and political change each have significantly contributed to the evolution of democracy, which is well reflected in numerous adjectives prefixed to democracy. The various forms of democracy include liberal democracy, social democracy, direct democracy, deliberative democracy, radical democracy and critical democracy, to name a few. As a result, democracy has become more than a form of government. It is also regarded as a mode of associated living (Dewey, 1966), or a social process in which people seek to define their roles (critical democracy).

Although there is no single interpretation of democracy as represented by various nation states (Starratt, 2001), undoubtedly, the concept of democracy and social justice is believed to be integrally interconnected and should not be considered apart when applied to the school setting (Furman & Shields, 2003). In the educational field, there are three competing theories of democracy (liberal, social and participatory democracy), each of which is embedded in national cultures and beliefs (Riley, 2003). These theories hold different expectations for the composition of school communities and practices of school leadership. The varied scholarly discussions on democratic leadership practice have culminated in Woods’s (2005) thinking in which he outlines a broader conception of democracy, namely, developmental democracy. This developmental model of democracy places democratic leadership in “a substantive conception of the person as a
social and creative being” (p. 27). It revolves around four rationalities – ethical, decisional, discursive, and therapeutic (see Table 2) with ethical rationality at its core.

Table 2

*Developmental Democracy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationality</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Rationality</td>
<td>It is concerned with supporting and enabling aspirations for truth, and the widest engagement of people in this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisional Rationality</td>
<td>It is about power and freedom from arbitrary and imposed rule by others and imposition of others’ values. It concerns rights to participate, including rights to select representatives and to be involved in decision-making and hold power holders to account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discursive Rationality</td>
<td>It is about open debate and the operation of dialogic and deliberative democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic Rationality</td>
<td>It concerns the creation of well-being, social cohesion and positive feelings of involvement through participation and shared leadership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ethical rationality underlines the view that educational leadership should promote liberty, equality, and social justice. According to Woods (2005), social justice includes three components – distributive, cultural, and associational. They are the ultimate criteria used to determine if social justice or injustice is present in any educational settings. Woods (2006) pays particular attention to ethical rationality, arguing that

the primary point of a democratic order is not solely to enable participation by all in the decisions that affect them, but to strive towards a way of living which is orientated towards the values that ultimately represent human progress and goodness. (p. 329)

To move towards this goal, democratic leadership purports to be “engaged in re-centering the culture of schools so as to encompass a shared vision and values oriented towards democratic ideals and practice” (p. 331). Given the rich dimensions of diversity contained in each individual within contemporary schools, democratic leadership needs to take seriously the diverse needs of
each interest group and to promote the notion of democracy in such a way as to assist these different groups to “seek recognition as unique and excellent, while concomitantly exercising the desire for equality of place and opportunity” (Maxcy, 1998, p. 219).

Transformative leadership is a form of leadership with a more collaborative, ethical-value base. It influences, promotes, and leads changes in personal growth, real-life experience, institutional arrangements, and educational communities. Transformative leadership is “deeply rooted in moral and ethical values in a social context” (Shields, 2004, p. 113). It assumes that “leadership involves relationship, influence, and some notions of virtue or rectitude” (Dantley, 2003, p. 3). The ethical dimension to transformative leadership has been particularly emphasized by Astin and Astin (2000) who claimed that the goal of such leadership is to promote harmony and sustainability, and enhance equity, social justice, and quality of life. To move towards this goal, transformative leaders assume an agenda that takes critical reflection, dialogue, trust, and interaction as the essential ingredients of their leadership practices. Through these practices, the transformative leaders essentially commit themselves to create conditions that enable the less advantaged groups to have equal access to the new knowledge and opportunities.

In reality, there are situations where the asymmetry of power and access to resources makes some the majority and others the minority. These patterns of social inequality, which are occurring at all levels of society, marginalize and/or exclude minoritized populations. In schools, social exclusion deprives people of their right to fully participate in school and community practices and activities (Ryan, 2006b). As a result, social inclusion has become one of the core concepts of the social justice agenda.

Built around this challenge, Ryan (2006a, 2006b) introduces a new approach to social justice by laying out a vision of inclusive leadership. He views leadership as inclusive in two
aspects: to include all stakeholders such as school administrators, teachers, parents, and students in policy and decision making, and to promote inclusive practices to address their diverse values, beliefs, and cultures in schools. According to Ryan (2006b), inclusive leadership promotes not only a dialogical, collaborative, reciprocal and horizontal relationship, but also an equitable, caring and fluid relationship among various individuals in which the leadership resides.

Ryan (2006b) examines and unveils the complexity of inclusive leadership in diverse schools and provides a number of distinct inclusive practices. These practices include advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches (Ryan, 2006a, 2006b). He also illustrates and analyzes how inclusive leadership can work effectively by moving away from seeing leadership in terms of individuals, or as a form of hierarchy amongst people. He provides a framework for educators on how to emphasize all cultures and types of students in a school through the promotion of inclusive leadership approaches.

Studies and research have not only provided an increasingly sophisticated analysis of social injustice in education, but have also encouraged intellectual and academic society to seek new approaches to leadership which may better encompass the new challenges occurring within and outside schools. These studies (Furman & Shields, 2003; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2004) focus explicitly and centrally on those issues concerned with the needs of diverse groups, and have had a positive influence for change at both educational and societal levels. To strengthen the empirical research on the enactment of these social justice leadership practices, which can address the impact that race, ethnicity, culture, religion and gender create within the school setting, Theoharis (2007) defines and discusses some leadership practices
centered on enacting social justice (see Table 3) by presenting distinctions between a good leader and a social justice leader.

**Table 3**

*Social Justice Leadership Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Justice Leader</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Places significant value on diversity, deeply learns about and understands that diversity, and extends cultural respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ends segregated and pull-out programs that prohibit both emotional and academic success for marginalized children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Strengthens core teaching and curriculum and ensures that diverse students have access to that core</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Embeds professional development in collaborative structures and a context that tries to make sense of race, class, gender, and disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Knows that school cannot be great until the students with the greatest struggles are given the same rich opportunities both academically and socially as their more privileged peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Demands that every child will be successful but collaboratively addresses the problems of how to achieve that success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Seeks out other activist administrators who can and will sustain her or him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sees all data through a lens of equity</td>
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Theoharis’ work highlights the many ways that social justice practices are enacted in schools. These significant advances, whether they are in theory or practice, are essentially oriented to social change. To make changes happen, education reforms should seize upon
leadership as a vehicle to translate the democratic ideals and inclusive notions into concrete practices in order to make schools better places.

**The Meaning of Accountability and its Dimensions**

The meaning of accountability appears as fluid and pervasive as that of social justice. Sometimes, it is used synonymously with “responsibility”, but in some cases, particularly in the accountability discourse, these two terms are not interchangeable. Accountability is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, products, decisions, and policies. In leadership roles, accountability usually encompasses the obligation to report, explain and be answerable for resulting consequences. In contrast, responsibility can be self-driven, legally or morally obliged. Responsibility can be shared, but accountability may not be. One can be accountable for something, but may not be acting responsibly. At the extremes of responsibility, there normally exists accountability.

Accountability is originally based on the premise that the institutional-level accountability has the potential in improving the school organisation, instructional delivery, and student performance (Rorrer & Skrla, 2005). It is located more in a “hierarchical practices of bureaucracy” (Moller, 2009; Ranson, 2003). Its primary goal is to respond to the implicit social contract between society and the public school system. Therefore, it bears a myriad of meanings for political leaders, educational administrators, teachers, parents and communities. Its interpretation is subject to who uses it and in what context. Essentially, accountability centres on the relationship between knowledge and control. Specifically speaking, accountability is about the ways in which control shall be exercised over education and the selection,
organisation, and transmission of knowledge. It is about access to, and control and justification of, particular structures of educational administration. It is about whose interests shall be served through the processes of education. (Bates, 1980, pp. 16-17)

The understanding of accountability lies on one basic question: “Who is accountable for what to whom?” (Forsyth & Tallerico, 1998; Heim, 1996; Mazzarella, 1975) The “Who is accountable?” and “To whom?” components concern both accountability providers and recipients. They can be policymakers, educational administrators, teachers, parents, students and other interest groups. The component “Accountable for what?” is the focus of accountability, which can be on input, process, or outcomes. The societal responses to the what, how, and to whom questions have never been static. These changes are constantly shaped and mediated through a long and complicated series of stages in the policy enactment which features successes and setbacks. Currently, the focus of accountability (“For what”) is more on outcomes than input or process.

Accountability has a mixture of several forms. Some scholars categorize accountability as procedural and consequential accountability (Heim, 1996). Others theorize it as internal and external accountability (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003; Heim, 1996; Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997), or even further break down the concept to encompass political, public, managerial, professional and personal domains (Moller, 2009). The distinction between these five forms of accountability offers a detailed lens in examining manifestations of accountability. However, in different accountability systems, the procedural-consequential accountability and internal-external accountability discussion dominates the accountability discourse.

Procedural accountability requires a person to engage in and conduct some activity in accordance with the expectations that guide the activity. These expectations can be bureaucratic,
legal, professional, political, and market-based, deriving from different philosophical bases, traditions, and settings (Heim, 1996). The component of procedural accountability is often a part of the required hierarchical framework of accountability which focuses on justification of the procedure used to arrive at an action, regardless of the outcome. In contrast, consequential accountability mainly focuses on the quality of the outcomes or results of that action, with no or little evaluation of the decision process. It holds schools accountable for improving their students’ learning outcomes and uses test scores as evidence to show how well schools are doing at an aggregate level. In current education reform, the policy interest (from procedural to consequential accountability) witnesses a shift from how something is done to what results are accomplished, from providing educational inputs and processes to a focus on measurable outcomes (for instance, the EQAO and OSSLT tests in Ontario).

In terms of accountability relationships among providers and recipients, there is also an internal-external dimension to accountability (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003; Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007; Heim, 1996, Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997). Internal accountability occurs among accountability providers and recipients located within the organisation itself. It encompasses the individual’s sense of responsibility within the school community and the school community’s collective expectations (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003). It is the set of processes necessary for an organisation to direct its human and financial resources efficiently towards the shared expectations of the collective work. The conceptualization of internal accountability reflects the relationship between individual actions and collective results in schools.

External accountability refers to the constraints and demands placed upon schools and school districts (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003; Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007). Generally, the strength of internal accountability has a great impact on organisational capacity. In responding to
the pressures of external accountability, internal accountability constitutes a contributing factor in school success and high organisational capacity. In particular, if efforts to increase external accountability are closely coupled with those that attempt to enhance school organisational capacity, schools are more likely to be successful. Otherwise, it may undermine school organisational capacity (Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997). However, the implementation of internal and external accountability is “loosely coupled” since internal accountability may exist in relation to, or even in opposition to, external accountability.

**Leadership Response to Accountability**

With increased attention towards the standards for curriculum, instruction, student performance, and assessment, the recent accountability discussions tend to polarize between two extremes. Some scholars contend that accountability has negatively affected educators’ professionalism (Guskey, 2007; Chester, 2005) and created problems (Levin, 2001; Smith, Heinecke, & Noble, 1999). Others (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & William, 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2004) argue that accountability can increase educational equity by reducing the achievement gap among student groups — especially gaps between advantaged and disadvantaged students — through the establishment of standards and performance-based assessment. Regardless of the merits of the above arguments, this policy debate centres on the critical part of accountability, that is, standardized tests.

Originally, when standardized testing was chosen as the large-scale measure of effectiveness of schools, it incorporated two main concepts: alignment of curriculum and instruction practices with standards and capacity building of schools (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Smith, O'Day, & Cohen, 1990; O'Day & Smith, 1993). School leaders who serve as policy
mediators are expected to facilitate the integration of accountability policies to support student achievement. On the one hand, they need to respond to the incentives and the sanctions in ways that can lead to increased alignment between the curriculum and instruction offered to students and the standards that reflect the requirements of accountability mechanisms. On the other hand, they need to improve the capacity of teachers and administrators to deliver better education to all students.

As the education reform agenda appears to continually reflect an increasing interest in improving student achievement, effective leadership has become the subject of a considerable amount of literature. Through extensive review of literature on educational leadership, Leithwood and Riehl (2003) identified a number of “core practices” which constitute the essence of transformational leadership. It focuses on “transforming” others to create valuable and positive change among them. In this type of leadership, the leader enhances the motivation and performance of his followers to meet the expectations related to accountability. In addition, given that current reform pays great attention to curriculum and instruction, instructional leadership (Leithwood & Duke, 1999) has also dominated the discourse on accountability. It is a leadership style that influences the work of teachers in a way to improve student achievement. Leithwood and Duke (1999) have also identified other distinct leadership models, for instance, managerial leadership which situates leadership in a hierarchical bureaucracy. The efforts made by managerial leaders tend to be more directed to the requirements of “managerial accountability” (Moller, 2009).
Social Justice within an Accountability Context

Currently, given the mounting accountability pressures, an increasingly diverse student population, and limited educational resources and service, the practice of leadership is fraught with tensions, contradictions, moral dilemmas, and political struggles. As educators and scholars in education call for school leadership based on the moral use of power (Bogotch, 2000), trenchant forces of the accountability movement tend to thrust schools and their leaders into more bureaucratic, more top-down, and more alienating forms of control (Gross, 2006). School leaders are apt to be “a generation of obedient functionaries serving a bureaucratic accountability regime” (p. 3). As a result, leadership practices are inclined to focus more on inducing specific means to close the achievement gaps rather than engaging in an analysis and critique of the origins of social and educational injustice.

For social justice leaders, they may have to live and work with other conflicting positions and even risk-taking situations. When school leaders “challenge the fairness and pedagogical efficacy of curriculum tracking; support all student groups including Gay-Straight Alliances, provide broad material support for undocumented immigrants” (Lugg & Shoho, 2006, p. 205), speak out against testing fraud, openly criticize board policy or school officials (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006), or question the legitimacy of accountability policy, they may encounter fierce hostility both within and outside the school community, even if their intention is for the benefit of the disadvantaged.

Moreover, the risk may be aggravated if the educational leaders endeavour to advocate on behalf of the minoritized student groups, for instance, the LGBTQ students. In this case, they could well violate their employment contract, or even risk breaking the law (Karpinski & Lugg,
Without any doubt, in a contemporary educational context with varied faces of oppression (Young, 2000), social justice advocates may put themselves in complex and uncertain situations. Prerequisite and fundamental requirements for educational leaders who hold a social justice agenda are to be aware of, acknowledge, and recognise the issues of diversity and difference, and to find ways to overcome the substantial constraints and legal and social obstacles.

**Summary of Literature Review**

Educational leadership has much to contribute to the implementation and maintenance of social justice practices in institutions of learning. On the one hand, social justice leadership today must have the capacity and skills to craft the politics of both redistribution and recognition to diminish both economic and cultural injustices. On the other, it also has to avoid any leadership practices which may ride roughshod over transformative, democratic, and inclusive principles and ideals. Moreover, social justice leadership also requires school leaders not merely to find the best available means of managing the tensions, moral dilemmas, and political struggles within and outside schools, but to focus on concrete attempts at implementing social justice through leadership practices day after day. These practices should be able to embrace the plural and contested constructions of justice which can have direct effect or impact on the achievement of social justice in educational institutions.

**Theoretical Framework**

The review of literature has shed light on how the notions of social justice and accountability (even the notion of democracy) were and have been understood, assessed, and constructed differently from time to time and from context to context. In particular, the notion of
social justice (or democracy) has been hijacked, manipulated, and appropriated by certain interest groups, with its meaning and purpose changed to meet their needs and desires (De Angelis et al., 2007). In order to understand the social structure that defines social justice under current accountability context, one must go beyond the surface to question how the construction of reality occurs in different times and places among different social groups, and one must approach the fundamental questions concerning social justice and accountability reform with a critical perspective.

Therefore, critical social theory is more likely to provide a solid political and theoretical basis to investigate social justice leadership approaches that support the diversity issues raised in schools and communities under current accountability context. Critical theory aims to critique societal inequities from different perspectives and attempts to deconstruct the privileged social dimensions. It focuses on the fundamental question of power relationships that exists between structures of knowledge and control (Bates, 1980). In this sense, critical social theory can also provide the normative basis for a comprehensive analysis of the accountability reform that concerns political issues of power, knowledge and control.

Power is based on knowledge, and at the same time power reproduces knowledge by shaping it in accordance with its varied intentions. Power, if possessed by individuals and groups who exert it upon others through oppressive truth claims, will put others in frustrating and unsatisfying circumstances that give rise to the daily events of human life. The imbalance of power between the advantaged and less advantaged as manifested under these circumstances not only hinders the disadvantaged from reflecting upon and analysing the world in which they live, but also undermines their efforts to reform it. In order to put themselves in a better position to fully participate in the affairs of their life, the disadvantaged need to acquire knowledge to be
enlightened of their disadvantages and to empower themselves to alter the unjust social arrangements (Ryan, 1998).

Critical theorists contend that for educational communities to work towards altering the unjust patterns in schools, educational leadership needs to focus on vision and ideas with the ultimate goal of emancipation. To work towards this goal, educational leadership practices should provide the means to uncover which group has the advantage over the others, how things got to be the way they are, and to expose how situations are structured and language used so as to maintain the legitimacy of social arrangements (Starratt, 2003, p. 141)

This is both political and practical struggle which aims to reject the colonization of minority experiences by dominant modes of thoughts and actions, particularly, in the context of diversity.

**Conceptual Framework**

Through synthesizing the literature that I have reviewed in the previous section, I present the ensuing analytical framework (see Figure 2) which forms the scaffolding or underlying structure of my research. This conceptual framework connects to all aspects of my inquiry, in particular, the notions of social justice and accountability, the social justice leadership (transformative, inclusive, and democratic) and the effective school leadership in response to accountability (transformational, instructional and managerial). What I believe to be new about this framework is that it synthesizes a range of key concepts from many scholars who have preceded me in a manner that effectively approaches social justice, educational leadership, and accountability from various perspectives.
First of all, I situate my study within the general accountability context. Within this context, I draw the links between and among each of the concepts that I have synthesized from extensive literature review. The conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 2 acts like the scale of justice with leadership as a fulcrum. On both ends of the beam are social justice and accountability policy, which at some time are on opposing sides, but at other times share the same side of the fulcrum. Therefore, my diagram is not meant to rule out the cases where social justice and accountability are complementary, but only to show cases in which they need to be balanced. My study draws upon the understanding of the philosophical dimensions of both social justice and accountability. Through the lens of social justice dimensions such as redistribution, retribution and recognition, I intend to explore how principals perceive social justice in their schools. Similarly, I will also examine how they understand and respond to accountability based.
on the theorizing of accountability dimensions in the literature review. At the core of my investigation are leadership practices which are used by principals to promote social justice as their moral obligation and to meet the requirements of accountability as political mandates. Figure 2 shows the leadership approaches and practices (under leadership triangle) that are employed to either pursue social justice (democratic, transformative, inclusive, ethical/moral, and dialogue) or improve student achievements in responses to current accountability policy (transformational, instructional, managerial, and transactional). However, the diagram is not intended to indicate that only certain kinds of leadership are consistent with social justice or can be effectively employed in response to accountability mandates. Nor does it suggest that leadership with social justice orientation does not contribute to the improvement of student achievement. Instead, the diagram aims to capture major leadership approaches identified in the literature that either have a social justice orientation or are significantly conducive to student performance. The central part of my study will be focused on these two different categories of approaches to see if they are mutually exclusive or complementary or conducive to one another in leveraging between social justice and accountability requirements in schools.

As the theoretical framework serves as a lens for me to frame the debate and inquiry, the conceptual framework offers a mold, from which a system of concepts, assumptions, theories, and beliefs grow in such a way as to support and inform my research.

**The Meaning of Social Justice**

School leaders’ professional responsibility centres not merely on the improvement of students’ achievement to meet the requirement of accountability policy. They have additional important mandates, that is, to serve as change agents to promote social and economic justice in
increasingly culturally diverse schools. Although social justice is an important value to live by, the explanations of what it means can vary widely, depending on the view one has of the nature and goals of human existence and of the rest of the environment. It is true for the school leaders serving schools with diverse groups of students.

So far, social justice has been approached in terms of legal, economic and cultural dimensions, focusing primarily on redistribution and recognition. As a lens to guide inquiry into principals and vice-principals’ understanding of the meaning of social justice in schools, my study will revolve around the social justice as economic distribution, social recognition and the remedies to social injustice as illuminated by Nancy Fraser (please refer to Figure 1). The values and philosophical ideas underlying the notion of both distribution and recognition will provide a solid theoretical and practical basis for the understanding and construction of social justice under the current accountability context. In addition, through this lens, I hope that my study can provide some empirical data on how school administrators understand the meaning of social justice; specifically, how they approach those questions such as: Who should social justice benefit? What should social justice deliver? How should social justice be achieved? The answers to these questions may shed light on diversity issues raised in schools.

**Social Justice Leadership Practices**

Educators and scholars have so far presented a variety of leadership theories to tackle the sources and dynamics of injustice and oppression that are interwoven with social diversity. The following framework (Figure 3) synthesizes the essential elements of social justice leadership practices as evidenced in the literature review section, in particular, the literature on transformative, democratic and inclusive leadership. The framework presents a comprehensive
repertoire of actions, skills and practices that can be employed by schools administrators to advance social justice. Additionally, trait theory has much to recommend as “certain dispositional characteristics (i.e., stable characteristics or traits) differentiated leaders from non-leaders” (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004, p. 6). Although individual traits and personal values may be associated with some leaders and not others, the importance of the characteristics should not be denied if we are to present a holistic view of what social justice leadership is.

Figure 3. Elements of Social Justice Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Values</th>
<th>Functional Practices</th>
<th>Institutional Behaviour</th>
<th>Vision &amp; Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fairness</td>
<td>• Educating</td>
<td>• Transformative</td>
<td>• Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Democracy</td>
<td>• Being Dialogic</td>
<td>• Democratic</td>
<td>• Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Justice</td>
<td>• Being Critical</td>
<td>• Inclusive</td>
<td>• Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsibility</td>
<td>• Communicating</td>
<td>• Participatory</td>
<td>• Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Truth</td>
<td>• Advocating</td>
<td>• Respectful</td>
<td>• Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respect</td>
<td>• Problem-solving</td>
<td>• Accountable</td>
<td>• Shared responsibility, \ Well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Future-oriented</td>
<td>• Listening</td>
<td>• Transparent</td>
<td>• Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empowering</td>
<td>• Responsive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through this framework, my study will explore how school administrators enact and promote social justice to meet the requirements of the students from diverse backgrounds. The arrows in the above figure do not mean to indicate a linear direction, but rather an interrelated process towards the goal of social justice in schools. Theoretically, educational values, assumptions, and approaches to social justice may differ significantly from one another. However, in practice, educational leadership must “continuously confront the issue of social justice in all its guises and to deliberately make social justice a central part of educational leadership discourse and actions” (Bogotch, 2000, p. 2). By using this framework, I hope that my study will elicit some robust data from which connections can be drawn to best illustrate how
each of the elements of the social justice leadership is enacted in reality, particularly under current standardized testing context.

The Meaning of Accountability

Accountability in education has multiple meanings and forms. Sometimes, accountability is used synonymously with a limited concept as responsibility or answerability (to answer for one’s actions). Other times, it bears a broader meaning that defines a social relationship of control between different parties (Ranson, 2003). Critical to the understanding of accountability are three questions: who is accountable? Accountable to whom? Accountable for what? The societal responses to these three questions are subject to changes over time and location. One has to answer these questions within his own area of responsibility and provide an account for his action, which will be evaluated by a superior based on some pre-set standards and expectations.

Accountability also appears as a mixture of different dimensions which encompasses internal-external accountability, procedural-consequential accountability, managerial, professional, government-based accountability, etc. These different dimensions delineate different social relationships among accountability providers and recipients and the dynamics that feature the evaluative and control aspects of accountability.

In education, accountability is the acknowledgment and assumption of responsibility for actions, decisions, and policies and the obligation to report, explain and be answerable for resulting consequences. All the efforts are made towards achieving the educational goals concerning student performance. Essentially, the accountability expectations are subsumed in the standards. I begin here by examining how the principals respond to and understand
accountability during their daily operation of schools and if their interpretation of accountability encompasses or differs from above concepts or dimensions of accountability.

**Leadership in Response to Accountability**

The new understanding of accountability includes holding student achievement results as the unit for evaluating school performance. This has placed intensifying demands on principals for increasing achievement of all students. Given the significant demands, it is imperative for school leaders to find the best practices to integrate accountability policies to support the achievement of all children.

Research (Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) has identified some effective leadership practices which are found successful in integrating accountability policies to support the achievement of all students. These effective leadership models such as transformational, instructional, and managerial leadership are not only widely accepted as being a key constituent in achieving school improvement, but also have a powerful impact in securing school development and change (Harris & Chapman, 2002). For example, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) synthesize four categories of transformational leadership practices that are specifically related to accountability: “setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional program”. These core practices aim to enhance the motivation, morale and performance of the followers and to incite a valuable and positive change among them. Eventually it seeks to transform the organisational functions of the school.

Likewise, the instructional and managerial approaches are accepted as being key elements in mediating accountability policies and improving student achievements. Instructional leaders make the instructional quality the top priority of the school by setting school-wide goals.
To bring this goal to realization, they provide the necessary resources for learning and create new learning opportunities for students and staff. Managerial leadership focuses on functions, tasks, or behaviours (Leithwood & Duke, 1998). It characterizes management as a form of leadership with leadership practices inevitably focusing on standardized test and measurable outcomes.

Through the lens of these leadership styles, my study will look into the ways that principals re-conceptualize and integrate accountability policies to meet the policy mandates.

**Accountability versus Social Justice**

As the discussion on accountability continues, the controversies emerge about whether accountability facilitates or hinders the pursuit of social justice. Some argue that accountability provides a great opportunity to advance goals of social justice and equity (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Others contend that accountability policy per say is “flawed as an equity-producing initiative, lacking adequate consideration of power relations, democratic participation, and rich, diverse philosophies of education” (Gunzenhauser & Hyde, 2007, p. 490).

Without doubt, this poses great challenges to school leaders who advocate social justice as their moral obligations. One of their challenges is to seize the tools and language of accountability to serve the ends of social justice in their daily practices. Given the complex reality, for social justice leadership, there is an ongoing challenge to create social and political spaces for advocates, as well as outlaws, to function inside and out of schools and, deliberately to encourage activists and radical intellectuals to make explicit the connections to their subjective means of social justice. (Bogotch, 2000, p. 9)
To meet this challenge, it is imperative to have a compelling body of knowledge in order to help social justice leaders to “recognise how our habitus restricts equity and social justice and then to find ways to overcome these constraints” (Shields, 2004, p. 113).

Despite the significant advances, in both theory and practice, which are oriented to social change, educators who seek solutions to social injustice by addressing root causes of those problems, not just their symptoms, still continue to confront unacceptable resistance or obstacles in their leadership practices. This is evidenced in their daily professional lives: the mounting pressure from accountability mandates and the conflicts and complexity existing in schools and the related communities. On the one hand they have to cope with a host of statutes, regulations, court decisions which might be hostile to the well-being of disadvantaged students (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Lugg, 2003; Ryan, 2004). On the other hand, they have to continue to negotiate and maneuver the demands from accountability mandates and disparities and injustices among diverse groups of a student population.

The resistance and/or obstacles to administrators’ work can be both vertical and horizontal. Vertical resistance/obstacles can refer to the mandates from top-down and bureaucratic regimes, or the statutes, regulations and court decisions from administrative and legal institutions. Horizontal resistance/obstacle may emanate from within and outside schools and communities, such as traditional values, moral beliefs, and religious faith. The horizontal resistance can become salient when it ascends to the political level, for instance, the issues concerning undocumented immigrant and LGBTQ students. School administrators may face formidable pressure and risk of violating law or employment contract when both vertical and horizontal resistances meet at a particular situation. As a result, defining and applying social justice in education mean determining the extent to which disparities and injustices exist among
the less advantaged students, evaluating their fundamental causes and the distributive and moral ramifications, and then proposing what can be done.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Scientific method includes, in short, all the processes by which the observing and amassing of data are regulated with a view to facilitating the formation of explanatory conceptions and theories. – John Dewey (1933)

Research methodology is not simply a set of methods or procedures. It is also associated with a philosophical rationale that underlies a particular study. It is determined by the nature of the study, entailed to be aligned to its theoretical framework, and be appropriate to its objective. The nature of my research is to understand the world through the eyes of the participants, the world as it is to live, be lived, to feel, and be felt. Thus, a qualitative method may be the most appropriate for this research as it implies a direct concern with the lived experiences of the participants. In this chapter, I provide the research design and rationale in detail and also explain my data collection and analysis methods.

Research Methodology and its Rationale

Choosing a study design not only depends entirely on the purpose and nature of the inquiry, but also requires understanding the philosophical foundations underlying the type of research (Merriam, 1998). The attention of my research is focused upon looking into principals’ views and perceptions that aim to critique societal inequities from different perspectives and the various leadership functions and behaviours that they employ to leverage the justice issues and accountability mandates. Thus, I believe that a qualitative, interpretive, or naturalistic research paradigm is most suitable for the purpose of my study. According to Marshall and Rossman
(1995), qualitative research serves four purposes: exploration, explanation, description, and prediction. Through exploring the principals’ views and perceptions, my study attempts to explain the forces and agents that cause and shape, socially or politically, their process and formulation of reasoning. In describing the phenomenon, my study may render the reader a holistic understanding of the experiences of the participants, thus forecasting the functions and behaviours in principals’ leadership practice.

Qualitative research is based on the view that “reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). It focuses on “building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell, 1994, p. 2). Given the contextual and complex nature of leadership, qualitative studies will be “the methodology of choice for topics as contextually rich as leadership” (Conger, 1998, p. 107). Therefore, my study is designed as a constructive study using a qualitative method that aims to gain an in-depth understanding of principals’ leadership behaviours and practices and the reasons that govern such behaviours and practices. Specifically speaking, the qualitative method, which focuses on “what people experience and how they interpret the world” (Patton, 2002, p. 70), can provide rich, detailed information and unexpected insights into daily leadership practices of principals and vice-principals (VPs). It also has the key advantage of probing for elaboration, examples, and anecdotes from the participants.

**Participants Selection**

School is an unusual organisation as it is composed primarily of children and secondarily of adults. However, this does not make the work easier for the person who is responsible for the day-to-day workings of the school building and the performance of all others. Instead, today’s
climate of accountability renders more complexity to the work of school principals. In addition, being a principal is among those lines of work where one has to endure the mounting pressures from various roles. On one hand, they need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, and expert overseers on school budget, facility management, special programs, and legal and policy mandates and initiatives (Davis et al., 2005). On the other hand, they have to maintain high levels of student achievement consistently year after year to meet the accountability mandates. Therefore, principals not only become the focal point in the life of schools (Lortie, 2009), but also come to the centre of educational research. For these reasons, I chose principals as the study unit.

Given the nature of my research, I employed purposeful sampling strategy (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) which I believe is the most appropriate for the participant selection of my study. The power of purposeful sampling lies in “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 169) and allowing me to select participants from whom I can gain insight into the issues of central importance to my research. I purposefully selected principals who had a social justice commitment in their leadership practice. This purpose reflects the particular characteristics and qualities of the participants and their relevance to the topic. In order to gather credible and rich information, I selected participants who have at least two years of experience in diverse schools. This selection criterion ensures that principals selected have at least a two-year leadership impact on the school and they are negotiating the same terrain of the accountability reform and in similar school contexts. Additionally, I took into consideration participants’ gender, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, levels of the school, and school district to try to represent varied perceptions, perspectives and practices of the school principals.
I specifically used snowball or network sampling (Merriam, 1998) through discussions with my colleagues at OISE/UT, People for Education, and other work-related contacts. Through recommendations and extended associations, I generated a list of principals from both elementary and secondary schools and contacted them primarily by email and secondarily by phone or in person. The emails and phone scripts (Appendix D) were prepared in advance, detailing the purpose of the study, qualifications for participation, and the participants’ rights and interests for research interviews. The primary contact left it to the discretion of the participants to decide if they would like to be part of the research. More importantly, it allowed me to focus on principals who are social justice advocates, which is critical for the research. The majority of the principals responded to the primary contact with interest and consented to be part of the research to share their experiences and views on the research issues outlined in my invitations. I followed up with these principals through emails with a list of suggested times and dates and set up interview appointments at a time and a place that met their convenience. At some point, some principals had to cancel their appointments due to unexpected work-related issues, but they rescheduled the interviews for a later date.

The process of the interviews was as productive as it was informative. It not only helped to uncover the meaning of principals’ experience in their own words, but also became a great learning experience for me. At the end of each interview, I also asked some participants to refer me to their friends and colleagues and gained more connections and contacts. Through this networking technique, I selected and interviewed twenty-two participants for this research in five weeks from late April to the end of May 2010.

Although school principals are the focus of this study, vice principals (VPs) and staff members were also brought in by their principals during some of the interviews. Specifically,
twenty principals, two VPs and one staff member from twenty schools participated in the interviews. The first interview is not included in the data analysis, but treated as a trial to refine interview questions so as to solicit better responses from the participants and enhance the credibility of the study. The interview with the staff member is not included in analysis as the study focuses on school principals. However, the data from two VPs are incorporated for analysis, given that the data collected from the two VPs may ameliorate the validity of this study by gaining insight into different perspectives from the VPs.

**Research Setting and Sample**

Thanks to the rich diversity in schools of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), I have chosen the GTA, the most populous metropolitan area in Canada, as the setting of this study. According to Statistics Canada Census of 2006, almost 47% of residents in GTA are foreign born and around 30 percent of the residents in GTA speak a language other than English or French at home. This demographic feature is also reflected in schools in GTA and contributes to the increasing diversity of the student population.

Participants in this study are school principals and VPs from both elementary and secondary schools of four different school boards in GTA. Of the schools selected for this study, there are five elementary schools, one of which is a Roman Catholic school, and 12 secondary schools with one special education school. There is also one junior high school with students from grades 7 to 9 and one middle school with students from grades 6 to 8. This selection of different school structures contributes to rich and multifaceted views on social justice and accountability from principals working in different school contexts.
The need for confidentiality prevents me mentioning the participants by name and presenting individual profiles of each participant. Therefore, I will provide a general introduction of all the participants by using the pseudonyms (Table 4). Eight male principals will be referred to as Andy, Dan, Dean, John, Roderick, Ron, Sean, and Dirk, and eleven female principals will be given pseudonyms as Dora, Elaine, Ella, Freda, Hilda, Ida, Lily, Molly, Paula, Sara, and Sonia. Two VPs will be referred to as Paul and Kate. Although I took into consideration participants’ ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds as one of the selection criteria, one principal is from Hispanic background and two principals self-identified as part of a “visible minority”\(^1\). This constitutes one of the limitations of this study that the participants are not highly diverse from a racial and/or cultural perspective.

The professional experience that the participants bring to their administrative positions varies considerably. They had experience as classroom teachers, head teachers, and VPs before they took the principal position. Some participants worked for more than one district school board. At the time of interview, the professional experience of participants ranges from three years up to ten years.

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\(^1\) The *Canadian Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. 
Table 4

Profiles of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>DSB</th>
<th># of Students</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dora</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>1,450</td>
<td>International baccalaureate programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaine*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>Academic applied; *visible minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Junior High School</td>
<td>G 7-9</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>Inner city school, model school for inner city project; Transient/mobile school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>YCDSB</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>Catholic school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>G 6-8</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>Promoted to be superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>Public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate (VP)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>K-6</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>School Effectiveness Leader at the DSB; *visible minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-11</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>International students included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Non-semestered school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul (VP)</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>Three track school: high performance program, the international baccalaureate program, regular high school program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>Self-contained special needs school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>K-5</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>Worked as principal at GTA schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 7-10</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
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<td>Semester school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>JK-8</td>
<td>HWDSB</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Three track school: high performance program, the international baccalaureate program, regular high school program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>Three track school: high performance program, the international baccalaureate program, regular high school program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>Peel</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>Academic collegiate; *Hispanic descendant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roderick*</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>Collegiate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ron</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>Inner city school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>G 9-12</td>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>490</td>
<td>Composite school</td>
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Note: This table is generated at the time of data analysis and some participants are no longer holding the same position or at the same school as they were during my research interviews.
Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) were employed to collect the data for my study. This type of interview is a “one-with-one interaction” (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006) which increases the likelihood of receiving unexpected and insightful comments and open-ended input from the respondents. The significance of this qualitative interview lies in understanding the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world (Kvale, 1996).

Interviews guided by general interview questions (Appendix A) were conducted to elicit rich and detailed thoughts and comments from each participant. Each interview lasted for 40 to 60 minutes and was carried out at a place of convenience to the participants. Some interviews were conducted at the participants’ places of employment and others at the OISE/UT library. The interview was also negotiated to work around the schedules of the participants. Each participant was given an information letter (Appendix B) and an informed consent letter (Appendix C) detailing the nature of the study, data collection and usage, and issues concerning confidentiality and privacy.

The general interview questions were developed from the conceptual framework that synthesizes the research areas on educational leadership, social justice, and accountability. The interview guide was slightly revised after the test interview and occasionally modified to accommodate new issues that emerged during earlier interviews. Participants were asked about their perceptions of social justice and current accountability policy, what they do in light of these perceptions, and the strategies they develop in promoting social justice while meeting the accountability mandates. I commenced each interview with a conversational preamble in order to create an informal and comfortable atmosphere for the participants, and then I endeavored to
keep the entire interview process as informal and conversational as possible. This allowed the participants to take the conversation in directions that may evoke some unexpected and insightful thoughts and comments which may not occur in a formal situation.

All interviews were audio-taped upon the consent of the participants except one who did not feel comfortable to have the interview audio-taped, but allowed me to take interview notes. I transcribed each recorded interview in full by using the software NVivo which not only gave me the chance to familiarize myself with the data but also guaranteed the confidentiality as outlined in the consent letter. Copies of transcripts were emailed to participants with an invitation to add or delete any information or to verify any unclear responses and correct any misinterpretation that may result from my transcribing. Six participants have made revisions on the interview transcripts and one revised twice.

Data collected consisted of audio files (audio-taped interviews), interview transcripts, and field notes. I employed a physical filing system to manage hard copies of interviews and field notes, and NVivo to assist me in storing, sorting, indexing, and analyzing the rich, extensive data derived from the interview transcripts.

Data Analysis

I used the constant comparative method of data analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with an inductive component. In the constant comparative method, the data analysis focuses on the identification of regularities or patterns in interview transcripts and interview notes through an interactive process during which the data are constantly compared. I used this method because “the basic strategy of the constant comparative method is compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research” (Merriam, 1998, p.
Specifically, the constant comparative method involves categorization, comparison, inductive analysis, and refinement of data bits and categories which illustrates the exact process that I went through during the data analysis.

The data analysis is an on-going and iterative process. In order to articulate the major themes that emerge from the data, I manually reviewed all of the interview transcripts that are stored in the research project folder in the NVivo software. With the aid of NVivo, I used free coding strategy with a combination of both analytic and topic coding. Coding is an interpretive data analysis technique that not only organizes the content of the data but also provides a means to interpret the data for different purposes. The analytical coding is a process of interpreting and reflecting on the meaning and content of the interview transcripts to arrive at new ideas and categories (codes). It entails multiple rounds of revisiting data, selecting source content, assigning or re-assigning it to a new or existing node (smallest themes in my case) as additional questions emerge, new connections are revealed, and more complex formulations develop along with a growing understanding of the categories in the data. The topic coding helps to assign references within my data to the topics, categories or concepts they relate to. It facilitates further analysis when the headings in my data sources reliably indicate the content to be coded.

Given that the conceptual framework might consciously or unconsciously inform researchers’ thought and practice by increasing personal sensitivity to notice particular occurrences (Mason & Waywood, 1996), thus reducing the potentiality for researchers to capture new emerging themes, I used free coding strategy. This is a basic, opening coding strategy in my data analysis to account for this possible drawback. This strategy is believed to ensure that any emerging themes can be captured and documented. Specifically, I start with “coding” interview transcripts by searching for meaningful patterns and similarities across and within cases.
(interviews) following the research questions as general analysis guidelines, and organize the patterns and similarities into particular concepts, which are called “nodes” in NVivo terminology. These free nodes are stand-alone subthemes that emerge out of data sharing similar content and information from within or across different interview transcripts but no clear logical connection with other nodes.

Secondly, all the free codes that are identified during the previous stage are revisited, reviewed, and modified to ensure their accuracy and credibility in capturing the meaning of the original content. The prevalence of the codes are summarized through comparing the relationship between one or more codes and are re-assigned and reorganized into “tree nodes” – the larger topics, categories or concepts – in correspondence to the research questions. This process involves refinement of the free nodes and rearrangement and restructuring of the tree nodes through constant comparison that “combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all social incidents observed” (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981, p. 58). The tree nodes which feature a hierarchical structure are general categories at the top (parent nodes) with more specific ones (child nodes) under each of them. Both the parent and child nodes are guided by the conceptual framework outlining the possible courses of the research and enhancing the coherence of the inquiry. More importantly, the conceptual framework also feeds back into the process of category coding and contributes to connecting all the nodes in a model that shapes the organisation of the dissertation.

Third, all the child nodes in each category (parent nodes) are reviewed and classified into subthemes, the parent nodes at the second level. The subthemes are organized in matrixes that reflect the connections and interactions between themes and cases under each category and are
employed to clarify and elaborate on the findings of my study. This highly reflective and interpretive process of data analysis continues throughout the dissertation writing.

To enhance internal validity of my study, I not only informally checked with participants for accuracy of the interview transcripts by asking them to review the transcripts and make clarifications on some interpretations and concepts, but also invited a colleague to review and comment on the codes I identified during data analysis. The code comparison process with my colleague further enhances the accuracy of interpretation of the source data content.

**Profile of the Researcher**

“The researcher is as much a part of the inquiry as the intent of the study and the inquiry process. In fact, *the researcher’s thinking* lies at the heart of the inquiry” ((Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p. 24). This argument makes explicit the notion of how I, as the researcher, influence my research interest and how my position in the inquiry impacts or limits production of knowledge. Although to stay “neutral” or “unbiased” in the research is of great importance in what constitutes acceptable research, given that the external reality is an inseparable part of what we already know based on our lives and experiences - our inner reality (Krieger, 1991, as cited in Mehra, 2002), there are always some personal connections, in one way or another, between the researcher and the researched. This is true, in my case, as to why I chose the research topic in the first place.

My interest in this particular topic is rooted in my personal and educational experience back in my home country. I was born and grew up in a region of China where Mongolians, Manchu, and Hui Muslim are a substantial minority, and being in the Han majority, I developed strong sensitivity to and appreciation of diverse culture. My undergraduate study and teaching
experience at the Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities, which caters to ethnic minorities, helped me develop a keen interest in equal access to postsecondary education. Later, it inspired me to conduct a research on postsecondary education of aboriginals in Canada and ethnic minorities in China.

My quest for educational equity continues throughout my graduate studies in Canada, where cultural diversity and educational inequity are even more salient. With great enthusiasm for making a difference in education, I successfully pursued Masters’ studies at Lakehead University, where the rigorous professional training broadened my international and interdisciplinary perspectives and helped me to build a solid academic foundation for my future work. The theoretical background and practical experience that I have acquired put me in a better position to be an advocate for justice and equity in visible minorities’ education in Canada.

In reflecting on my education in China, it conjures up memories of all the tests and exams that I had to take from the day I set my foot in primary school until I finished my university degree. The testing that evolved from the imperial examination system dating back to the Han Dynasty (206 B. C. – A. D. 220), has been and still is, hard and fast, the sole measurement of student performance in China. The examination system that features a persistent tendency to emphasize rote memorizing over critical thinking and creativity also contributes to inequity by neglecting the diversity and differences that exist among the students given the developmental discrepancy in different demographic regions and the multiethnic composition of the population in China.

It is painful to see that standardized testing is taking a dominant role and student achievement consequently coming to be the focus of education in Canada, particularly in Ontario, where the blight of injustice threatens the richness of diversity. It is with this concern that I
conduct this research to enhance our understanding of the ways in which school principals interpret social justice and accountability policy, and the practices and strategies principals may employ in supporting or challenging the current accountability agenda in pursuit of social justice in schools.

**Summary**

The study employed semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions guided by the conceptual framework developed from review of literature on social justice, educational leadership, and accountability policy. Twenty-two school principals and vice-principals from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) were interviewed about their perceptions of social justice and current accountability policy, what they do in light of these perceptions, and the strategies they develop to sustain their practices. The interview questions were designed to probe the way principals think and act, based on their experience as school leaders and their daily exercise of power. Responses were critically analyzed using NVivo in a search for recognizable patterns and tendencies.
Chapter 4

Conceptualizing Social Justice

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.* – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Social justice is no longer at the margins of education policy, research, and practice. It has become central to the pursuit of education and in particular, to the practice of educational administration (Bates, 2006). In this chapter, I first highlight some social injustices that appear to be the greatest concerns to school leaders. This brief discussion of the salient issues as identified by principals entails presenting various forms of injustices, and explaining how each relates, overlaps, and interacts to affect students’ lives. Essentially, it prompts us to rethink oppression and injustice in schools and the actions required in response.

Social justice can be broad enough to encompass an array of concerns and cultural, social, economic, ethnic, religious, and legal issues as well as those of gender, sexual orientation, and disability. “Surprisingly little attention has been devoted to exploring precisely what we mean, or ought to mean, when we talk about social justice” (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 139). Therefore, my discussion continues with the conceptualization of social justice based on principals’ accounts of their understanding of it. In doing so, it aims to present a better understanding of how social justice is perceived, defined, and developed in order to embrace a broader concept and expand it in different dimensions.

**Social Injustices in Schools**

The ensuing section sets out to probe the issues of injustices that impact on the learning of different social groups in schools. These social injustices are identified by the participants as
priorities to challenge and overcome. Through revealing the salient social problems in schools, I intend to draw attention to the central importance of awareness of the social injustices in schools – in structure, policy and practices – and open space for debate on what can be considered as leadership for social justice. This also provides a useful starting point in exploring how leadership roles and practices can be improved to reverse injustices associated with the diversity of students based on race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. I will explore injustice issues under the following subheadings: racism and racial problems, class and poverty, gender and its related issues, injustices in special education, and school safety.

**Racism and Racial Problems**

“Racism is a slippery subject, one which evades confrontation, yet one which overshadows every aspect of our lives” (Anzaldua, 1990, p. 19). As the site of social production (Dixson & Dingus, 2007), undoubtedly, schools are also blighted by the subtle or obvious forms of racism. These forms of racism operate at different levels, such as name-calling, harassment, interpersonal conflict, stereotyping (Ryan, 2003), bullying, prejudice and discrimination based on language, faith, and religion. In this light, racism ought to become a serious concern for some school principals. However, Ryan (2003) suggests that, in terms of racism, school principals are either reluctant to acknowledge its occurrence in their schools or inclined to emphasize its insignificant nature. He offers three explanations: first, administrators simply cannot see racism. Second, principals may feel that it is their obligation to convey a positive image of their schools. Third, principals may disavow racism because of the narrow way in which they view racism.

A few participants make short comments on racism in schools, but with opposing views. Four participants (Andy, Hilda, Molly, Paula) briefly acknowledge that the presence of racism is
one of the prominent issues in their schools and it behooves them to take actions against the ever-present racism. Andy points out: “You know, racism, big things. They're still happening. But we surely try to address them and we need to continue to do it. That's what I say: kick-the-ass-once-in-a-while.” Although Andy’s comments are brief, they indicate that racism pervades in schools and they also call for principals’ continued efforts to challenge and confront the problem of racism. In doing so, Parks (1999) argues that principals must be willing to examine unconscious, often deeply held assumptions; to acknowledge their own privilege or resentments; and to recognise how their own values, priorities, and attitudes, and those of others of different ethnic or cultural groups, are expressed in community life and in school. (p. 14)

Parks’ argument resonates in Hilda’s introspective comments. Hilda reflected,

So consider being a principal of a school that is exceptionally diverse. What you have is this middle class white lady who is the principal, and the middle class white lady who is the vice principal. When you are talking in terms of social justice, regardless of how we perceive ourselves in Ontario, or in Canada, we still have a long way to go in terms of race issues, in terms of equity, and the way that we treat each other and perceive each other. (Hilda)

Clearly, to challenge racism and lessen its effect in schools commences with principals questioning their own attitudes, beliefs, and actions. It is the first step to reconcile the moral challenges of articulations of racial equity with the hierarchical institutions of schooling.

In contrast, Ida, the elementary school principal who takes pride in her students, acknowledges no presence of racism in her school. She said:

We have the most amazing children I've ever seen in my life. I would've guessed if I was
someone outside looking in and just looking across the assembly and seeing the myriad of cultures that are here, I would've guessed racism to be a social justice issue we might have. But we don't really have that. It's because I think these children are really founded in demonstrating respect. Their foundation is not in “if you're not my culture, then there is something wrong”. There are typical children things happening here with children (Ida)

For Ida, racism is of no concern because she believes that she cultivates a respectful school culture in which differences are accepted and valued among students.

Racism can also manifest in the form of racial stereotyping, the false assumption or judgement that distorts how people perceive an entire group based on an individual’s actions. These assumptions induce negativity and misunderstanding that are nothing but harmful and destructive. Hilda describes her struggle in dealing with the police with regards to her black students:

Well, I think it's not particular to my school, but it's the one that really comes to my attention of late. I had a couple of interesting encounters in dealing with the police of late where I have felt that, because we were dealing with young black males, the outcomes weren't what they should have been. So that's a piece that I am really struggling with because in terms of the bigger issue around social justice, one of the things for my boys, I think we just need to set out, you know, bluntly, especially for my black boys, to get them to choose this gang - the school, the community, and education - not the youth gang.

One of the pieces to that is that I need to get them to believe and trust in the authority structures in the community, and know that they're there for them. They're there to support them. They can believe them. When I have encounters where, in fact, I can see that they're not being treated in an equitable fashion, it makes work that much harder. It
makes me understand that we still have a long way to go. You know, you see a young boy. He's got his hood up. He's got his droopy pants that look like his diaper is full, striding along. You immediately make an assumption about that boy's character. You immediately make an assumption about who he is. And you haven't spoken to him. You know you don't know anything about his background. You don't know anything about him. You're judging him based upon how we appear. And we just have such a long way to go. I'm trying to talk to my boys about taking responsibility for the impression that they give. Pulling their hood up, smiling at people as they go by, saying “Hello”, asking them, how their day is. Right away, you can shift that image. But they are KIDS. You know, they're trying to be cool. They're trying to do their thing. We as adults are the ones that have the hang-up, have the problems. (Hilda)

Clearly, social stereotyping impacts the way society views certain groups of people and with enough exposure to a stereotype, the society may deem it as a reality rather than a mistaken representation. Although study (Ryan, 2003) of school administrators indicates that most administrators do not equate stereotype as a form of racism, the effects of stereotyping can be more devastating than the explicit forms of racism. Hilda’s account also implies the interplay between youth gangs, stereotypes, and self-esteem. Because of social stereotyping, racial minorities are likely to be viewed as related to youth gangs, become more susceptible to unfair treatment, and have lower levels of self-esteem. Prompted by the alarming effects of stereotyping, Hilda strives to build hope and trust among her students and educate them how to challenge stereotypes and present a positive image in public by influencing the way adults see themselves.

In addition to stereotyping, the language issue surrounding ESL has likewise posed great challenge to some participants (Ella, Lily, Sonia). Under current accountability mandates,
principals find their work on ESL becoming even more prominent as they are held accountable for the performance of English language learners both in their language acquisition and in core content. Both Sonia and Ella expressed a similar concern with ESL education:

In this school, English as second language is a challenge for a lot of our children. So currently we have 11 kindergarten classes, and in those classes we have children who only get two and half hours of English per day. And yet, the expectation of our school board is that those children achieve in reading, writing, oral language, and mathematics in English, so we have a big job. (Sonia)

The first one that is important to my school is being able to really help my ESL learners, my English learners and my immigrant population, really helping my students develop the language skills that are going to help them to be successful in the secondary school. So we spend a lot of time here working on ensuring that our language program is strong but also ensuring we have a language focus across the school that is not just English instruction inside the English class, but also working on vocabulary development specific to subject, such as math, such as science. We also talk a lot about instructional language because our students come in from places where, for example, in math, find sum-of is not necessarily a phrase my students come to school with an understanding of, because the language that is used in drama or math in another community of countries is different. So in terms of achievement from my students on the EQAO, for example, my students have to understand what the Canadian phrasing, or what the language of math is about so they can actually demonstrate they understand the concept. (Ella)

Both Ella and Sonia have to focus their efforts to expedite the transition of their ESL students to an all-English academic environment so that the students can meet the high expectations of the
accountability policy. This transitional framework tends to label ESL students as problems that need to be corrected (Black, 2006; Cummins & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1998). While seeking to fully incorporate the English language learners into accountability performance categories, they acknowledge, students’ language proficiency may invalidate the measures of language learners’ content knowledge and students’ own culture can also affect the way they achieve.

Social justice issues are not always discrete, but rather intersect or overlap in a way in various cause-and-effect relationships. This is the case in Paula’s school where religion, faith, language, and poverty all come into play and consequently generate social tensions among different cultural groups. She remarked:

The second one [social injustices] in the particular school that I was at would have been faith, because again, there were a hundred of students that were Christian background and the other 300 very prominent Islamic families who believe in Islamic faith. You know, I always found, fortunately, that class and faith also cut across racial lines because the group that was Christian, and that lived in the middle class neighbourhood were all white, Caucasian, where the group that was living in the lower social-economic group and were Muslim, were all South Asian, so mainly from Afghanistan and Pakistan. So all of them were the divide in the school, and the divide was very prominent. And within the community, when we originally have the boundaries change, that brought more of the kids from the lower social-economic group. There was a huge backlash from the working community. They did not want those kids in our school, because our EQAO scores were going to fall, because we would have too many English language learners. So there was definitely that. (Paula)
Faith-based differences do not entail social conflict per se. However, the discrimination on religious ground is problematic as it enhances social exclusion and fragmentation. Under the accountability political context, different faith groups tend to lock horns over issues such as educational opportunities and quality of education. Paula’s description reveals how the difference can be manipulated by certain religious communities to justify depriving others of equal educational opportunities. This harmful effect is accentuated by other social factors that are associated with different religious communities, such as poverty, social class and related socio-economic matters.

**Poverty and Social Class**

Paula raises the question of poverty and class and their social causes and effects on children from low income families. Whether it is absolute or relative, poverty continues to be a prevalent and complex issue in education. It not only creates new acute social needs for students who are experiencing poverty, but also poses a great challenge for school principals who attempt to close the achievement gaps and equalize educational outcomes. Several participants (Dan, Dean, Ella, John, Paula) acknowledge that poverty runs rampant in their schools and has become one of the prominent issues in addressing students’ overall social and intellectual needs. Both Dan’s and John’s schools are located in communities that are far from wealthy, so poverty and its concomitant problems are among their greatest concerns:

- The social justice issue in my school is mainly poverty, a lot of issues of poverty.
- Children and their families, just not having enough money, they’re struggling to eat.
- Poverty is a main issue that my school was facing. (Dan)
- But certainly in terms of society, there is poverty. That’s a social, society issue. How the
government...society works to address those particular issues. Do we deal with that here at the school? Absolutely! We have kids here not able to buy lunch, or have breakfast in the morning. So we provide some means that support those students. So the issue of poverty is a social justice issue. We have the haves and have-nots. School is just a reflection of society. It does play out in a school setting. (John)

When students come from families that face stresses from poverty and struggle to afford adequate nutrition, they enter schools with problems that affect their readiness to learn. A body of research shows that poverty affects children’s physical, emotional, and cognitive development (Books, 2004) and their academic performance at school (Offord, Boyle, & Jones, 1987; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). The life-altering consequence of poverty can even be exacerbated if the students are from visible minority families. In Canada, immigrants, particularly recent arrivals, are recognised as a group most likely to experience persistent poverty (Hatfield, 2004). The disparity in socio-economic status has steadily extended to schools surrounded by poor demographic areas. This is the situation of Dean’s school, where coping with poverty has reached the forefront of his daily practices. Dean sees that the struggles of neighbourhood families are not only affecting students’ academic achievement as an end result, but they are also contributing to physical and psychological issues with respect to students’ health and well-being.

I think the big one is money, and how that purveys a young person’s response to this institution. The fact of not having money, poor nutrition, probably poor sleeping habits, less organisation in their functioning level, then when they come to school, they have a shorter attention span. They may be crankier. They don't value some of the long term goals that you as a teacher value. Doesn't make them bad people. And traditional school
response to those kinds of things has been somewhat punitive. I think that's injustice to punish people, well, not punishing. No one would say we're punishing them for being poor, but we're punishing them sometimes for the unavoidable consequences of being poor. So at least be aware of that. (Dean)

Dean’s accounts substantiate the significant association between poverty and students’ health, behaviour problems, emotional well-being, and their academic achievement problems. A more destructive aspect of being poor is that students are more susceptible to punishment for their behaviours and school performances that are attributable to the devastating consequences of poverty. As a result, its cumulative effect reinforces the irreversible process that leads from vulnerability to the deterioration of individual and group situations (Bogard, 1991).

**Gender, Sexism and the Related Issues**

The notion of gender per se undergoes continuous social, if not biological, construction as its understanding is expanded. Its associated discourse concomitantly shapes the formation of gender identity that advances and dominates debates in feminist theory, gender studies, and queer theory. No matter how fluid and dynamic the view of gender and gender identity is, the issue of gender can be boiled down to the treatment of gender as an internal understanding of oneself as opposed to how one is recognised and perceived by others (Paechter, 2006).

Among gender issues, of particular concern has been the achievement gap between boys and girls in school. There has been a considerable amount of research on the underachievement of boys relative to girls (Arnot et al., 1998; Bouchard & St-Amant, 2000; Elwood & Gipps, 1999; Gilborn, 1997; Gorard et al., 2001; Matters et al., 1999; Murphy & Elwood, 1998). Despite the efforts and attention, the gender gap in school achievement continues to be a persistent problem.
In order to bridge the gap, Ella explained how she attempted to maximize the student achievement by creating a single-sex environment:

We did have a gender program here for five years. This is the first year we haven't had the gender program. And the gender program was single gender classes for grade 7 and 8. So families had a choice of enrolling their child in all boys class or all girls class or co-ed class. Very interesting. The project was put in place because there is a significant gap between boys and girls at this age. Girls tend to [score] 15% higher across the board in all subjects at this age. And the boys they tend to really hit a stall when they hit grade 7 and grade 8. So the gender project was put in here to see if we can close the achievement gap for boys and girls. We were able to bring the boys up, but the girls also went up in the single gender classes. So it was really interesting like that. (Ella)

Although the single-sex program commands and enables Ella and her staff to enhance the academic performance of both boys and girls, they have had to set the program aside. What they found was that the single-sex schooling cannot be a solution to the gender gap in achievement as the gap still exists even with the considerable improvement in students’ performance. On the other hand, the increase of ESL students also made it harder for the single-sex program to have a significant impact. In this light, they have had to direct their attention to whole school literacy.

Issues surrounding gender go far beyond the achievement gap and extend to the more sophisticated discussions, such as the relationship between gender, sex, sexism, and gender identity. Both Dan and Roderick are seriously concerned with gender issues in their respective schools. For example, Dan expressed his concern that there are gender issues in terms of how males and females interact and treat each other in his school. Although Dan does not provide a detailed account as to how power comes into play in terms of male and female interaction, he
recognises it is of great importance to create an environment not organized around sex roles so that every student can realize her or his potential regardless of their gender.

Salient issues around gender also emerge from a student survey and catch Roderick’s attention. He commented:

When a few years ago, we noticed that there hadn’t been a lot work on healthy relationships, on taking a look at gender identity. There wasn't a case of gay/straight alliance here. Nobody was looking at what does it mean to be “man”, “woman”. We saw the students...the students told us through our survey: They saw sexism. They saw homophobia. They saw unhealthy relationships. Those are the issues we're addressing at the school. (Roderick)

Roderick’s remarks foreground the issue of gender and gender identity and how they come into play in the school context. As the meaning of gender is bastardized and expanded in diverse and often new social contexts and discourses, Roderick noticed that his efforts in addressing gender issues appear far more complicated and thorny. There is a great need for sustained vigilance about all aspects of gender, such as the social construct of gender, sexism, homophobia, and other issues when gender intersects with power relations.

**School Safety**

One of the issues that stands out in Roderick’s comments is homophobia, which is among the greatest concerns related to school safety. It is a serious issue that has perpetually faced lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) students in schools. Studies (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009; Walton, 2004, 2006) indicate that the climate of U. S. and Canadian schools is in general unsupportive and unsafe for many of the LGBTQ students. Such a
homophobic school climate has long been shown to impact negatively on LGBTQ youth, manifesting itself in such outcomes as lower levels of school engagement and academic success (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Murdock & Bolch, 2005; Russell et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2005), depression and low self-esteem (Bontempo & D’Augelli, 2002; Wyss, 2004), substance abuse (Kosciw, Greystak, & Diaz, 2009), suicide (Morrison & L’Heureux, 2001), and negative psychological adjustment (Uribe & Harbeck, 1991).

As homophobia continues to flourish in school communities, principals have an important role to play in challenging and combating homophobia. Molly voiced her concern about homophobia and the associated challenge that she faces in her school:

One of the bigger issues we have right now is educating staff about homophobia. That's a really difficult one, and educating students, and helping kids feel comfortable to identify in whichever manner they are, lesbian, gay, transgendered, questioning - that whole range.

(Molly)

It is clearly evident that today’s school principals continue to struggle with how to improve the experience of LGBTQ students and to foster a safe and tolerant school environment for all. In order to fight against the negative feelings and hostile attitudes towards sexual minority students, Molly has to cope with all stakeholders as they react differently to the issue of homophobia. She added: “People are fine to talk about racism, sexism, ageism, but they're not fine to talk about homophobia. Staff are not comfortable. Kids are not comfortable. Parents don’t like it.” (Molly)

Apparently, promoting school safety has become largely a public relations exercise (Walton, 2004). It calls for great leadership and wisdom from the principals to respond actively to homophobic attitudes from students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. This poses a great
challenge to school principals who strive to win the battles of power and ideology (Walton, 2004) over the resistance and lack of awareness from their staff and parents.

In addition to homophobia, interracial tensions and conflicts in schools have also been identified by Lily as one of the factors that impact school safety. Based on her experience, Lily points out that the influx of new racial and ethnic students can give rise to some problems, such as intergroup tensions and conflicts. She recalled in her previous school,

There could arise issues between South Asian students and students that come from the Caribbean, northern Africa. That, in my experience from another school, can also be another kind of friction between … They are broad social justice issues. I think because they do represent inequity. That's usually the reason for the issues arising. (Lily)

As ethnic and racial diversity continues to increase in Canadian schools, principals play a pivotal role in cultivating a school environment that can provide conditions to facilitate positive interracial experiences and interactions. In order to improve racial and ethnic relations in schools, it is important to understand how interracial tensions and conflicts are occurring in schools and how students perceive the school environment. Lily implies that the interracial tension is fundamentally a function of social inequity, and relatively equitable levels of socioeconomic conditions should foster a cooperative and friendly intergroup relationship. Positive ethnic attitudes and interactions will contribute significantly to a safe school environment.

Among other potential school safety threats, bullying is undoubtedly one of the serious issues worthy of attention. Both Sara and Freda deem bullying to be a common problem in their schools and have made considerable attempts to mitigate such activity. Freda provided a detailed account of how bullying adversely impacts the safety of her school:

I think that there is an issue of power and who has it, who doesn't? Who wants it? Who
gets it? How do they get it? So I find, particularly with the intermediate students, we've
gone through a really nasty bullying problem and had to bring in quite a little bit of
external help. We had police in here. We had people from the board in here. I sent home
a letter and a big package to the parents. It really was in the area of cyber-bullying, an
effect of that, that was socially isolating and humiliating a number of students, and it was
so much easier to do it on the internet, or by means of texting, than to do it in a
confrontational way, in person to person. So as part of our learning, there were so many
students that engaged in that. What I took from that is that there were certain students
who are beginning to realize they have power with them. They are beginning to learn
what that power is. How they should use it? They are not yet interested in whether that
power is used for good. They are more interested in understanding the effects for either
good or bad. (Freda)

Freda’s comments indicate that bullying has become a potentially damaging form of aggression
that manifests an imbalance of power between the bullies and their victims. Thanks to the
increasingly interactive use of internet and cell phones among students, bullying goes beyond
campus and streets and comes home via electronic media. As such, forms of bullying have
become far more complicated and even harder to identify as cyberbullying allows the bullies to
assume perceived anonymity and feel less accountable for their actions and behaviours (Joinson
1998; Keith & Martin 2005; Price & Dalgleish, 2010; Sparling 2004). Whether it is “traditional”
bullying or cyberbullying, one thing in common is that any form of bullying will have
detrimental and long-lasting effects on both bullies and victims and impacts on the wellbeing,
schooling, and peer relationships of the young (Price & Dalgleish, 2010).
Special Education: No Child Left Behind?

Social injustices as they are outlined above are never exhaustive, and even appear more aggravated when it comes to the conundrum concerning special education. As the accountability movement that dictates achievement and success is gaining its full steam, debates on educational access and opportunities for special education students seem to fall out of the public’s attention and social justice issues surrounding special education are “rarely discussed openly” (Christensen & Dorn, 1997, p. 182). Aside from historical arguments about social justice and the right for special-needs students to be included in a local school, participants’ (Andy, Ella) accounts reveal that children with disabilities require something more than a set of inclusive education policy guidelines.

As a principal from a special education school, Andy expressed his discontent and concern with the current special education system. He commented with immense righteous indignation:

Most of the students have been in self-contained classes, which means with the same group of students for five hours a day, often five days a week, often multiple years. They do not have access to opportunities both curricular as well as social, as well as governmental, as well as co-curricular that students who are not facing the same challenges would have had. So starting from a curriculum point of view, there are no materials being developed by the ministry or by publishers for this particular groups of students. So they don't get the same access to the curriculum in the same way. In terms of the other things, because of their needs, they're often marginalized from the school, so they don't have access to school teams, student government, or to the activities that might be available to other students. Therefore, they're already, when they get here, they're
already facing those social injustices. What happens as well, this also disadvantages them, is that they develop a set of, they call them, School Survival Skills in those… The survival skills are often either inappropriate in terms of their behaviour or detrimental in terms of not having developed the skill set someone needs to fully interact in the school community. That disadvantages them. (Andy)

Although the scope of rights for special education students has been growing steadily, it is clearly evident that there still exists an imbalance of equity between regular education and special education. Students with special needs are receiving less than adequate curriculum instruction and less than a fair share of administrative and personal resources. Due to the insufficiency in curriculum construction and lack of support, it makes it even harder for learners with special needs to achieve a higher level of personal self-sufficiency and success in both schools and communities. The net result is that they are bound to be marginalized and disadvantaged. In addition to the injustices in curriculum, extra curriculum and other resource allocation, the students with special needs also have to face a social challenge when they graduate. Andy continues with other justice issues facing special needs students,

Destination is definitely an area that needs to be addressed, because the opportunities for these students obviously are not as nearly as great as it would be for someone else. But what worries me is that not even proportional [opportunity] is great. I don't expect them to be at any number, but I do expect them to be proportional number of opportunities.

Another post secondary issue, graduation issue, is that we have spent, you know, these kids are in the system until they are 21 years old. For some of them from the time they're like 3 or 4 years old, and throughout that time, we provide supports, and programming, and everything, and when they graduate, it's all gone. So how the heck are they
transitioning at the post secondary? I don't say this is necessarily board responsibility. I think it's a societal responsibility. I think it's a Ministry responsibility, whichever Ministry wants to take on. Again, I think there needs to be cooperation among various ministries to do that. But it all disappears. So we're just going to graduate them. They're going to go off ... because who’s helping them in that transition? There is only one organisation that connects for these guys. The other place that social injustice is current is the curriculum. There is no one other than classroom teachers who are developing curriculum for those students. That is grossly unfair. It's grossly unfair because teachers don't have the time. They don't have the support outside of my knowledge, the VP's knowledge, you know. I mean, even our instructional leaders of the board, they don't know this population. (Andy)

Andy’s accounts show that the problem concerning special education students rests not only with the curriculum and resource allocation, but also with the opportunities that are available for special education students upon their graduation. There apparently exists a disconnection in transition between schools and social services to help these students to be able to function properly in society. Andy reiterates how inadequacy in curriculum construction and lack of support to teachers and students impact special education. Teachers are required to complete overwhelming amounts of work, all with less time and too little support. Under these conditions, special education teachers cannot give their students the best of their instruction and time. Instead, special education, as Andy implies in his comments, calls on schools, districts, ministries, parents, and teachers to take action collectively and recommend steps each can take one at a time to provide special-needs children a future bright with promises and opportunities.
Conceptualizing Social Justice

Social justice is important enough to merit the attention of those working in education. Unfortunately, this catchphrase, however frequently employed by educators, scholars, and policy-makers, has not arrived at a commonly accepted definition. Its conceptualization is largely based on personal values and beliefs, religious backgrounds, historical context, and political and social philosophy. As long as its conceptual underpinning remains inexplicit or contested, individuals and groups have latitude to design and execute policies and practices under the big umbrella of social justice.

This holds true for the principals striving for social justice. Principals play a pivotal role in creating schools that promote and deliver social justice. Understanding the nature of their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions towards social justice is essential to understanding their choices, decisions and practices in delivering social justice in their schools. Research (Dewey, 1933; Rokeach, 1968; Bandura, 1986) suggests that beliefs and perceptions mediate actions and practices. In this section, I present data that illustrate how principals perceive and understand social justice and its related issues under the headings of equity, my job is social justice, outcome and impact on students’ life, and humour.

Equity

It is not surprising that equity is a major theme of principals’ perceptions on social justice. The concepts of social justice and equity are inextricably linked, and overlap in their moral connotations. They are frequently used interchangeably or concurrently, which renders both concepts more circumlocution than clarity. However, clarity will not be problematic so long as these concepts are defined in a context as to how they are being used. These two concepts are
more context-bound and they take on different meanings among different populations in different settings. In practice, different contexts, whether they are social, political or economic, undoubtedly suggest the need for different approaches in defining and explaining both social justice and equity. This leaves school principals with far more latitude in discussing the theories underlying social justice and equity and their desired application to the school setting.

Using equity to define social justice poses similar challenges as the notion of equity is as complex and elusive as that of social justice. This study suggests that the notion of equity is being used by principals to justify different positions while skirting diverse points of view on them. Participants generally understand equity as a principle, an action, a process, and an end goal. As a principle, equity itself concerns what a school believes at all levels and encompasses all social justice issues. It is used by vice principal Paul as an umbrella term for both school success and social justice. Sean’s perception of equity is mainly concerned with overall leadership practice which endorses and reinforces equity. His concept of social justice as equity is “[first] recognizing my own practice, because you teach what you believe, if you believe that all students come with a range of abilities, needs, contexts, then you’d better be able to program for those needs and contexts” (Sean).

Participants recognise that equity is a principle that is both ethical and value-laden. It is inextricably connected to social justice, but essentially both are geared towards what is good for everybody. Paula, for example, commented:

When you look at equity, equity is looking at not equality, but looking at what's good for everybody. It might be more of this, more of that, depending on who the group is. But I think equity and social justice go together. I see them as, not one and the same, but one feeding into the other, then the other feeding into the other. I don't see one is more
important than the other. I think equity needs to be there in order for social justice to occur. (Paula)

Paula’s comment implies that although equity and social justice are wedded, social justice is built upon the significant pillar of equity. The ultimate goal of equity is for everyone’s wellbeing, which is the fundamental level of the quest for equity.

The definition of equity also operates at the political level which intends to guide action. Elaine acknowledges that equity is a lens she employs to deliver education. However, there is a distinction between “what” and “how”. Elaine remarked: “There are documents that tell us ‘what’. It doesn't tell us ‘how’. It’s getting the ‘how’, that thread of ‘how’ through all the students for the understanding.” (Elaine)

Based on principals’ understanding of social justice as equity, I unravel the notion of equity by focusing on “what” and “how” under the following headings: equity of resources and access, and equity with respect to diversity.

**Equity of resources and access.**

Because of its fundamental values of fairness and equal opportunity, several participants (Dean, Dora, Elaine, Freda, Lily, John, Roderick, Ron) identify equity of resources and access as central to their school mission. Their accounts convey their considerable sensitivity to fairness, which they have taken as the central focus of their leadership practice in addressing social injustices in schools. Their concern with fairness extends from the overall school policies and practices with regards to instruction, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, student discipline and service to the participation and treatment of the students who are members of disadvantaged groups. With a profound commitment to seeking social justice and equity in his school, Roderick
reflected how he embedded his belief of fairness in the instructional practice in his school:

I believe that any subject in the school can have a social justice component, even mathematics. So we looked at our curriculum. We looked at our teaching habits. We looked at our teaching pedagogy. We looked at our assessment, evaluation. As staff, we look and see: Are we being fair? Are we being equitable? (Roderick)

Through self-contemplation over their work, Roderick and his staff seek to meet the varying needs of all students in his school and ensure that social justice is reflected and radiated in all their efforts. Fairness also occupies centre stage in John’s and Lily’s daily practices and deliberation. They regard fairness as a key ingredient in their leadership practice and in creating an educational environment in which everyone is treated with respect and acknowledgement (John) and are accommodated regardless of their gender, age, ethnic or racial belonging, or social status (Lily).

Fairness plays a crucial role in student discipline. As a principal of a school that is located in a high crime area, Ron voiced his concern about fairness regarding student suspension and discipline: “I think the very word ‘justice’ isn't necessarily just about what is right and what is wrong. I think there is an element in there of ‘fair’”. Ron believes that being fair, either in procedure or decision-making is incredibly important. Fairness should be implemented in such a way as to reassure students that, whatever the consequence, the decision is made with respect and out of social responsibility.

Fairness is also inextricably related to the principle of distributive justice, on which equity of resources and access is grounded. This principle, which plays a central role in a variety of social justice issues, becomes a means to pursue equity in terms of resources for, and access to, education. The principle implies two important but different considerations: “what one is
concerned about the distribution of, and how one decides what constitutes the most fair or desirable distribution” (Sleeter, 2007, p. 7).

Distributive justice concerns, first and foremost, the fair and equitable distribution of resources or “primary goods” (Rawls, 1971). The concept of “primary goods” spans all dimensions of social life, encompassing both social and material goods and intangible and incorporeal goods such as self-respect, access to employment and social opportunities, to name a few. Four principals (Elaine, Freda, Dora, and Dean) identified several related understandings of equality of opportunity. Dean expressed his understanding of social justice as a moral commitment to provide equal opportunities to all students:

I understand it [social justice] as providing opportunities that are as equal as possible to all the people whom we try to serve. Sometimes to provide equal opportunities we must modify the way we're providing those opportunities, because if we provide them in the same way, there is a natural slant of the system towards certain groups. It's not necessarily the groups that I have in this school. So to try to level the playing field in all the many and better ways that are out there and to balance that. This is not just my perception of social justice that matters; this is the perception of my staff that they have social justice. (Dean)

Dean’s comments reveal that in solving the intractable problem of distributive justice, equal distribution of social goods may reinforce the structural inequity and perpetuate the existing status quo which results in an imbalance of power. Noticeably, Dean is exceptionally concerned with the equality as sameness, or ontological equality (Joshee, 2003, 2007), the fundamental value of which is to treat everyone equally. However, Dean also recognises that different groups have different starting points and require different treatment (equality of
treatment). Equality of sameness or access should be compromised by unequal distribution geared towards the advantage of those who are less well-off (Rawls, 1971). Freda shared similar concerns:

I understand it [social justice] as generally speaking as a way in which all of us have fair access to opportunities, but more importantly where there is inequity and lack of justice that those of us with more have obligation to help equalize and balance opportunities, even if that means that those of us with more have less. So it [redistribution] sounds somewhat mathematical, but I think it's inherent in it [social justice], maybe not always made explicit. (Freda)

It is evident that assuring fairness in resource distribution and equitable access to education for all students are two highly articulated concerns among some principals. Although participants place significant value on the equality of opportunity or access, they carry their understanding of justice to a higher level which reflects the difference principle derived from Rawls’ (1971) *justice as fairness*. It claims that social and economic inequalities should be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society. In doing so, they need to work proactively to “level the playing field” (Dean) and make learning opportunities equally accessible to all.

**Equity with respect to diversity.**

Educational equity is first and foremost concerned with diversity, which has become a ubiquitous buzzword within education. In a narrower sense, diversity is often associated with ethnicity or race, from which stems the conception of cultural diversity. Historically, the philosophical positions underlying cultural diversity have shifted from assimilation/Anglo
conformity, amalgamation (the “melting pot” in America), to cultural pluralism or multiculturalism (the “multicultural mosaic” in Canada) (Gordon, 1964, as cited in Phelan & Davidson, 1993). Over the years, the concept of diversity has evolved as complex, layered, and fluid as to signify the issues that arise pertaining to a much wider range of human characteristics, such as class, gender, ability, and sexual orientation. Diversity itself is often harnessed with the notion of inclusion (or its derivatives such as inclusive and inclusivity) that frequently occurs in educational policy and practice discourses (Lumby & Morrison, 2010).

Inclusion is traditionally thought of as an approach to address the special needs of the challenged students who remain marginalized by existing educational arrangements (Ainscow, 1999; Ryan, 2006). Nevertheless, as special education practices were “integrated” into the mainstream, inclusive practices in education have been broadened to support and embrace the diversity of all learners.

Several participants (Dan, Dean, Dora, Elaine, Hilda, Ida, John, and Paula) endorse the value of inclusion as one of the elements of social justice and equity. Dan remarked that social justice requires that “they [students] are democratically included in schools. Not democracy in the sense of majority wins, but that they are afforded every possibility to be included and to participate”. Dan accentuates “democratic inclusion”, an inherently normative concept which “encompasses the panoply of ways that institutions hinder or enable the incorporation and representation of the voices and interests of a democratic policy” (Lee, 2007, p. 590). On this account, democratic inclusion is an assumption of a status of inclusion which either promotes or limits meaningful participatory access of the disadvantaged groups into mainstream society.

Dan is also concerned with the majority rules in the process of democratic inclusion as it may lead to a “tyranny of the majority”. He pays particular attention to the minority’s voice:
But inclusion, because it takes work. Right? I can get a majority of people on and hear their voices but I'm still not being equitable. Inclusion means all voices, but especially those who are not usually included. People whose first language is not English; people who had bad experiences in school; could be people who are poor; could be people who are working four jobs, right? We never often hear from them: What do they want from schools? (Dan)

Dan’s tendency to focus on less advantaged groups is also reflected in Raffo and Gunter’s (2008) discussion on social inclusion and education. They argue:

Equity issues about social inclusion with regard to education therefore suggest the need to focus specifically on the extent to which educational policy and practice can ameliorate both the recognition given to disadvantaged groups and at the same time provide representation and participatory access – socially, economically and culturally. (p. 399)

By implementing practices that endorse values for inclusion, participants seek to create an inclusive school environment to meet the learning needs of all students. (See next chapter for a further discussion.)

**My Job is Social Justice**

Theoharis (2008) asserts that “social justice in schools is not just educational theory or rhetoric but actually practiced by leaders and indeed possible” (p. 4). This is clearly articulated by some participants who regard social justice as their “job”. They keep social justice at the centre of their practice and vision and actively engage in advocating, sustaining and advancing social justice in their schools. Dora offered her insight:
I think my job is social justice. I truly believe it. If you work in public education, if you don't have a strong belief in social justice issues, then maybe it's ... I think that's part of what public education is. I think part of public education IS social justice. The notion that we're educating all children to the best of our abilities, to the best of their abilities in terms of reaching their highest potential, in terms of having higher expectations for every student regardless of whether they have an IEP, whether their first language is English or they’ve arrived Canada two weeks ago, whether they were born in Canada, whether they come from low-income families, or single-parent families, or families with same-sex parents, regardless of what they bring to the building. Everybody brings a story, and everybody brings a background: religious, cultural, familial, a combination of all of these things. So our job is to believe in social justice issues, and to try and create a more just Toronto, a more just Canada, or a more just global community because ultimately these kids will be global citizens. There is no other option in my mind. (Dora)

Dora’s accounts indicate that public education plays an important role in shaping or transforming students’ lives. On one hand, public education is committed to enhancing the ability of students and helping them develop the knowledge and skills that are required to actively participate in, understand and contribute to their communities large and small. On the other hand, public education serves to promote the common good (Klenowski, 2009), that is, preparing students to become responsible citizens who themselves will contribute to creating a more just and prosperous society. Dora sees public education as a vehicle to live up to her belief that in the face of increasing diversity, public education serves its civic, cultural and social well-being for all.

The view that social justice and equity is the work of education is also illustrated in Paula’s response,
I would say, first and foremost, I see climate as the most important. So as a principal, I always start work with climate. For me, climate was not about the character education creates. Climate was about equity and social justice. So looking at the “isms”, classism, racism, heterosexism, faith-ism we use here at [district school board name], and also looking at the notion of power and privilege, and how they play out in the classrooms, and how they play out in the school. So for me, equity and social justice is the work of education. If you could get to the work, THAT work, then I think student achievement will come afterwards. (Paula)

The foregrounding of school climate is evident in Paula’s comments. In her view, the work of a principal is, first and foremost, to create a school climate that embraces equity and social justice and constantly challenges the notion of power and privilege. Although school climate is usually associated with school achievement (Hoy & Hannum, 1997) or academic outcomes (Griffith, 2000; Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006; Worrell, 2000), it also encourages and supports inclusion (Ryan, 2006b). Paula believes that student achievement is second to social justice in a principal’s work and she accentuates that student achievement is the result of social justice, rather than the means to realize social justice.

Molly echoes Paula’s response. She also expresses her commitment to creating a safe and positive school climate,

I guess for me it [social justice] means about creating an environment for kids where they're safe, they're happy and all the differences are...People are educated about their differences, that we celebrate differences. People are free to feel different, be different, be accepted because of that. Social justice is for a lot of kids who want to change the
world. You know, the ones we want to provide opportunities for them who make a real
mark in the world (Molly)

Molly stresses the importance of fostering and maintaining an atmosphere in which everyone is
valued, respected and accepted regardless of their differences. Molly’s description implies one
aspect of school life that is summarized by Cohen and his colleagues (2009) as one of the
essential dimensions of school climate, that is, the physical and social-emotional safety.
Specifically, it refers to the level of safety a school provides and the attitudes that people hold
towards individual differences. Notably, a climate of insecurity and disrespect may impede
students’ motivation and limit the extent to which students may achieve. In order to improve the
quality and character of school life for their students, both Molly and Paula strive to exercise
their climate-related leadership by integrating social justice into their work.

As participants aspire to assemble the elements for a positive learning environment in
which they anticipate social justice to prevail, it leads to the next critical step, the question of
“How”. Several participants illustrate the approaches they take to nurture a safe and positive
school climate. They either focus on tackling issues surrounding “isms” (Paula, Sara), work on
the attitudes that people take towards each other (Hilda), or tend to various issues that
meticulously reach all aspects of students’ life (Roderick). Based on Paula’s previous comments,
part of her responsibility as a principal is to look into the various issues surrounding “isms”. This
is also illustrated by Sara who views social justice as “isms”:

I see social justice in terms of all the “isms”. So there is that component to it. There is
probably social justice to the element of just dealing with kids even in terms of at-risk
students, I would think. There is that element that comes in to play with these kids, their
lives, and how do we make sure they are successful at the school. I think there is an
understanding of social justice from the point of poverty, from the point of environment for the students. (Sara)

Sara acknowledges the importance of being alert to the concepts of “isms” which signify a political or a belief system or attitude in favour of or against a given social group. Any principal cannot be effective in their role without having an opportunity to personally explore their values and beliefs (Terry, 1996). Being able to understand “isms” will be conducive to identifying the process that allows society to maintain such unfair structures. Sean agrees with Sara in that social justice should address the issue of isms. However, he believes that tackling “isms” is not adequate as a principal’s work is more than just dealing with outward manifestations. He observes:

Social justice should not only address the obvious outward manifestation, such as age or race, but should look at learning styles, readiness, parents’ educational background. Even the fact of the students who we might take for granted come to school ready to learn, but [students] not have slept before, don't get breakfast on a regular basis, they are not at the position to learn. So social justice in [school name] like a lot of our schools requires us to put a premium on whatever we can affect in the students life. That's often beyond the classroom. (Sean)

Sean’s comments imply the need to call for safe and caring schools. In addition to “isms”, he pays particular attention to students’ health, their emotional and psychological aspects, which are rooted in isms. Sean points out that work on social justice is not just confined to the classroom. It is a collective effort geared towards the wellbeing of all students. This is also congruent with Hilda’s view. She opines that social justice is a community-wide effort:

Social justice means to me that we work together as a community to treat each other with
respect and value, and that we don't allow issues of race, issues of poverty, issues of sex, gender, any of those things impact the way we treat another person. (Hilda)

Hilda believes that social justice in education not only aims to shape students’ lives with regard to their aspirations. It has a much greater likelihood of actually transforming schools as everyone treats each other with respect and value.

Principals’ responsibilities are not just to provide a learning environment that affords all students the opportunity to achieve their full potential. They also have to respond to the specific and various needs of students and deliver every possible opportunity to enhance students’ learning experience. Roderick acknowledges that his work can be as meticulous as to take into account all the aspects of the school, no matter what decisions he has to make. He explained:

I think that I am constantly reminding people when we make decisions about school trips, about examinations, about anything, the question that we always ask is: Have we looked at all aspects of this? How would this impact kids who don't have money? How would this impact… you know? They want to bring a speaker in. OK, that's great. They bring a speaker in. Would this be a norm by presentation? I think social justice comes with social responsibility. You know, unlike the media, unlike what happens outside our walls, we are expected to give students a balanced view of this. My job is to make sure that kids are not being exposed to a biased view of this. (Roderick)

Roderick also believes that social justice starts small and goes big, which echoes Dora’s comments that schools are miniature facsimiles of society. He added,

To me personally, social justice means trying to do something, in fact the very least to create awareness for issues that involve people that are in some ways disadvantaged. I believe that it starts at home. It starts in Toronto, looking at injustices in Toronto, then
moving to Canada, then moving internationally. The school has taken an approach to look at all aspects of social justice. (Roderick)

In fighting against the social injustices, schools are not the only battlefield, but they are the frontline for the principal. This is the case for Roderick who acknowledges that there is an established link between the school, the community, the city and even the entire country when it comes to the social justice issues. As a principal, having a vision and awareness of the big picture is a fundamental step in tackling all the social injustices that marginalize the disadvantaged.

**Outcome and Impact on Students’ Lives**

Student outcome is the most critical issue in education, particularly under the current accountability context. It stands at the centre of debate involving all stakeholders in school effectiveness, leadership, teacher performance, and accountability. It is not unusual that participants identify the substantive educational outcomes as one of their greatest concerns in social justice discourse. Their understanding of social justice as student outcome is not in its simplest form as improving low-achieving students, bridging the gap between students of colour and their mainstream counterparts, or increasing public confidence in publicly funded education. Participants’ view of social justice as educational outcome goes beyond the narrow understanding which defines student learning outcomes in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students have attained as a result of their involvement in a particular set of educational experiences. A majority of the participants (Kate, Ida, Dan, Hilda, Elaine, Roderick, Dean, Molly, Dora, John, Sonia, Andy, Sara) perceive social justice as outcome or impact on students’ lives. This takes different forms, such as cultivating students’ higher order thinking
skills, critical thinking, academic and social achievement/success, and prospective social impact on students’ life.

Higher order thinking is the essential component of current education. It requires students to weigh competing perspectives through critical thinking and analysis in order to solve problems, acquire understanding, and discover new meaning. Higher order thinking skills not only impacts students’ lives, but the future of the world. Ida embraces the importance of cultivating higher order thinking skills among students:

If children have higher order thinking skills, then they can synthesize; they can analyze; they can explain; then they can manage the social justice issues. You know, it's lovely to say: “I am a member of the Tree Huggers.” And there are pieces of garbage we were putting in the garbage every day, but that's not meaningful! We have to get children to ask: Why are we doing this? Why do we care about our environment? What is the big idea? If children aren’t aware of that, then it's useless because you are just picking up garbage and you're counting it. So it’s a one-to-one correspondence grade one activity, such as “there are three things on the table, three things that weren't recyclable”. It becomes more powerful when higher order thinking is used. That helps a child identify that putting in the garbage is adding to the landfills which affects the environment for many years to come. You want them to know why they recycle and minimize waste.

Then it's truly the higher order thinking skills that are being taught and thus social justice -- what is right for our world and student achievement that become linked. (Ida)

Ida endorses the concept that higher order skill serves as a fundamental tool for students to look at the world critically. She encourages students to use higher order thinking in solving problems, such as, the environmental problems that are related to the public interest and social justice. Ida
also sees higher order thinking and social justice as inextricable and mutually supportive: While higher order thinking can be instrumental in promoting social justice, social justice per se lends a sense of meaningfulness to higher order thinking. She added: “So truly from an academic point, we want higher order thinking. Social justice provides an opportunity for a meaningful task. It's a big idea. So we just take the two and put them together. One is a part of the other.” (Ida)

Higher order thinking also involves critical thinking, which is extolled in educational programs as a pillar of knowledge mastery. Ennis (1991) defines critical thinking as “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do” (p. 6). This definition underpins the traditional philosophical investigation. However, Dan adopts a pragmatic view of critical thinking by explicitly focusing on social justice:

Social justice in schools means that children began to understand the world is not fair so they develop a critical understanding of how to see the world. So they learn that if you are white; and you are male; and you are straight; and you are 5 foot 9; you don't have an accent, OK, you have advantages. (Dan)

Dan stresses the bonds between developing students’ ability to think critically and an articulated understanding of social justice. His description implies that to give students an accurate view of the world, education must enable students to discover and be aware of who they are and what advantages or privileges they exercise. This is a critical step as social injustice “can’t be solved unless people who are heterosexual or male or Anglo or White or economically comfortable feel obligated to make the problem of privilege their problem and to do something about it” (Johnson, 2000, p. 10). Genuinely knowing themselves will be conducive for them to understand others. Thus, developing such empathy in school may prepare students to contribute towards the development of a just and fair society. Dan continues by reiterating the notion of democratic
inclusion and the importance of developing students’ self-esteem:

So critically understand the world, democratically included as well as going extra miles with students and their families to let them know there is hope, and to fight against all the messages they get outside the school that they are not smart, or not as good. That is, by believing in them, by seeing who they are as individuals. Democratic inclusion, critically understand [the world], develop some self-esteem so that they can challenge these inequities. (Dan)

In addition to democratic inclusion, one of the important components of his understanding of social justice (See section entitled *Equity with Respect to Diversity* for a detailed discussion), Dan raises the question of developing students’ self-esteem and its relationship to social justice. Dan recognises that some undeserved inequalities may arise from cultural differences, social positioning, sexuality, or from stereotyping not controlled by anybody at any given time. In seeking to correct these injustices, the school community has to work together to build hope, confidence and self-esteem among students which will place students in a better position to contribute to the development of a society free from biases and discriminations. Chetcuti and Griffiths (2002) maintain that personal identity, which is central to social justice, is related to group membership, whether it is defined by the individual concerned or whether it is ascribed to them by others. Dan’s comments suggest that developing self-esteem and reconstructing personal identity play an important role in addressing social justice issues.

With the remarkable rise of public interest in measurement of education recently, the discourse surrounding educational outcome will inevitably settle on student achievement or success, the important aspect of student outcomes. Several participants (John, Hilda, Sara) have identified student achievement or success as part of their social justice commitment. Their
concept of student achievement or success is not simply defined in terms of academic performance. They view student achievement or success more through the lens of social justice, as such, in terms of personal fulfillment or social attainment. The descriptions below illustrate how Sara embraces a broader definition of students’ success:

We can define success in a variety of different ways. I am not looking at student success as being all a bunch of 80 [score] or average students. Student success could be that the child who is gay can come out of my school and feel comfortable with themselves. We work with them through it so they can become functioning out in their own world. That's student success. Or student success is the child who is in poverty learns that they don't have to stay in poverty because their parents are from poverty. And that if we give them education, the courage, the strength, the self-esteem, they then get themselves out of poverty. They don't have to follow the same footsteps. I think of a young girl, for instance, her mother was pregnant when she was 16. We don't want them to become a 16-year-old who gets pregnant too, right? So success I think has a variety of different looks to it.

(Sara)

Sara’s concept of students’ success has varied dimensions as to encompass the diverse aspects of students’ social and emotional life. The focus of her daily efforts and practice is not only on quality and content of learning and skills that students have to achieve academically, but also on affecting change on students’ life.

The great concern with students’ health, safety, and relevant social issues is also reflected in Hilda’s comments:

You know what, for me success comes in a number of different ways. Successful for me means not one more of my little girls is going to go to high school and get pregnant.
Success for me means that I am not going to lose one more boy to a gang. Success for me means that I am going to go to the high school in four years from now… I want every single kid that I send to high school to walk across that stage and get their high school diploma. And what is success going to look like for them? Depends on the talents and the passion that they have. They may be a successful carpenter. They may be a successful grad student. They may be a successful journalist. That’s one of the problems that we have in school with EQAO is that it is set up to value a certain kind of success. One of the things we don't do well in the school is provide an opportunity to really enhance all of the talents that kids bring into the building. And we need to figure out a way to get better at that. (Hilda)

Both Sara and Hilda focus explicitly and centrally on the issues concerned with the social needs of the diverse groups, and they are working proactively towards creating a safe and healthy learning environment for their students. The core of their social justice commitment is to have a positive impact on their students at both educational and societal levels. Hilda suggests that success should not be simply measured by how well students can do in reading, writing and arithmetic, the key areas as assessed by EQAO. It has to be viewed in light of how to seek and adopt new approaches to enhance the development of the students’ skills and talents so that the students can have essential knowledge and life skills to build their own life and define their success in the future.

It is noteworthy that participants’ view of student success is more future-oriented and goes beyond school to take into account all aspects of students’ lives. John’s comments best summarize the significant values principals place on students’ social success:

I think when we talk about student success, we're talking about students succeeding in all
aspects of their life, not necessarily get the kid to graduate. That's it. That's where we're responsible. It's more preparing kids for life. The academic preparation is one component of that. Are we giving them life skills as well? Are we making them critical learners? Are we making them aware of social issues in society, social justice we see and what can we do about it? So we're talking about preparation for life, not just about the academic piece.

(John)

Hilda, Sara and John are all oriented to the view of student achievement or success as social justice which remains the central part of their leadership discourse and action. The general thesis of their discussion is that educational outcome should be student centred and principals’ responsibility is to ensure both their visions and actions are geared towards the educational goal, that is, preparing students for life and helping them become contributing members of the society. Bogotch (2000) refers to this aspect as viewing social justice as both an ideal process and end. He argues that one of the consequences of integrating social justice into schools is that social justice not only transcends school boundaries, but those of society as well. His argument is also evident in Ella’s observation:

The other component [of social justice] that I see is how you not only actively engage students in developing an understanding for themselves of what social justice is and what social justice means for their specific community, but also what it means for them in the future, helping them to develop a global perspective beyond just themselves and beyond their community itself. (Ella)

In Ella’s view, social justice is actualized and planted among the students by nurturing their understanding and awareness of its meaning, its significance for themselves and their community. The seeds of justice consciousness will then take its root among students who themselves will
become social justice advocates.

Social justice is perceived by participants as either a process or an act, through which education not only imparts general knowledge, skills and disposition to students, but also develops their powers of critical judgement and thinking, prepares them intellectually and socially for a quality life.

**Humour**

Humour, if properly used, can “promote flexibility, facilitate communication, provide alternative perspectives, and create a feeling of goodwill” (Ziegler, Boardman, & Thomas, 1985, p. 346). In Edmonson, Combs, and Harris’ work (2008), humour is identified as one of the strategies for school leaders in conflict management. Ron sees humour as a safe place to play with social justice:

One of the things in social justice is sense of humour. I really believe that. I think having the ability to laugh about things, and to laugh at yourself and find humour in yourself gives us the ability to share that with other people. And it's one of the things we'd say...Sometimes I ask people ... When I'm talking to another principal: “Does your school have a sense of humour?” And they looked at me and they said: “What are you talking about?” I said: “Do you laugh at your school? Do your staff laugh with the kids? Do the kids laugh with each other? Is it a general feeling in the school to be one and you can laugh and joke with each other?” You know. Maybe some people would say “It's terrible”. But my Somalia kids are notoriously late. So I would sometimes say to them, if I need to see them, I'll say: “I need to see you tomorrow 12:30. That would be Canadian time, not Somalia time”. And the kids think it's hysterical. And they laugh and they laugh, you
know. We laugh about it. And the same thing is they'll come back to me at some point and make a comment about Canadians. And that's OK. We all have a good laugh. But it's that sense of humour and that really helps with kids.

With the sense of humour, Ron manifests the lighter side of his leadership which has meaning not only in his professional and institutional life, but also the life of the students. In his case, humour functions as a social lubricant where friendly teasing has had a positive effect on staff, the students, and the entire school environment. While it is possible to make sense with humour, humour itself may serve a subversive purpose as it carries a cue that is non-serious (Ziegler, Boardman, & Thomas, 1985). The joking behaviours among staff and students may encourage levity and negligence in their work. To avoid this, Ron focuses on creating a sense of community where there is a fine balance between seriousness of the work and non-seriousness about themselves. He added:

You know, I think it goes toward that sense of community. I mean my staff here takes what they do seriously and I do too. We all take it very seriously of what we are doing as educators, very seriously. We put in incredibly long hours. A lot of them, I mean, I have 52 teachers, 47 of them do extra curriculum outside the classroom. You don't find that in any school, anywhere, I don't think. But that's their commitment to the kids in the school and the community. We try not to take ourselves too seriously, you know what I mean? There is a difference! Take what you do seriously, but you know what? I am not the be-all, end-all in education, never have been, never will be. When I walk out of here one day, they will replace me with somebody else. We are all replaceable. Let's not get too caught up on how great we are. You know, as soon as we do, someone is going to prove we're not. But I think that sense of humour is a really important element in that, that sense of
social fairness, justice. Sometimes you just need to laugh about things, you know. That's the best way to demonstrate to kids that it's OK. You know what? It’s OK not to be OK all the time. It's OK not to be OK, to mess up. That's part of growing-up and learning. We can laugh about those. You know. So I think that sense of humour piece is an important piece. It seems to work for us here. (Ron)

Clearly, Ron wields humour as a motivational tool in engaging in social justice in his school. The keen sense of humour may put individuals at ease by breaking down the barriers, misunderstandings, and inappropriate and inflexible behaviours. It may also help build teamwork, facilitate communication, and create a sense of community where social justice prevails.

Dimensions of Social Justice

The aim of this section is further to unfold dimensions and components of social justice in the educational setting. I demonstrate how social justice incorporates and extends to other theoretical dimensions by engaging existing research with the findings in my study. The discussion is organized around the identification of four dimensions that underlie social justice – redistibution, recognition, inclusion, and representation. These dimensions have either been identified in the wider literature, for instance, the distributive justice and analytical framework on cultural recognition, or arise from the possible implications of social justice approach underlying the views of the participants. I expand my discussion in the sections below.

The Dimension of Redistribution

The socioeconomic injustice derives from maldistribution. It encompasses exploitation, marginalization, and deprivation (Fraser, 1997), all of which bear a relational statement.
Exploitation arises when the fruits of one’s labour are appropriated for the benefit of others (Power & Frandji, 2010). Marginalization is the social process by which particular social groups become or are made marginal, having no or less access to social goods. If particular social groups lack or are denied adequate social goods to play their roles as expected of them by the society, deprivation occurs.

To correct the inequitable outcome that originates in exploitation, marginalization, or deprivation, Rawls (1971) introduces *A Theory of Justice*, from which he derives two principles – the liberty principle and the difference principle. These two principles of justice determine how social goods are distributed based on the common criteria of equality, equity, and need. These criteria typically have been taken into account by several participants (Dan, Dean, Dora, Elaine, John, Ron) in their allocation of school resources. Their comments and actions substantiate how total amounts of goods are distributed, what the distributing procedure is, and the pattern of distribution that results. For example, Ron emphasizes the fair access to opportunity which suggests that every student should be given the same opportunity or access to participate in school programs:

Yeah, I guess another big one for us is when you look at resources. I can look at that from two different ways. When we run programs in our school as you have mentioned, I think the normal model that is existing in schools is that if you want to run a program, peer mediation program, whatever. Generally what schools do is they take their 20 or 30 best kids. They do the training with them. We don't work from that aspect here. For example, every grade 9 in our building in September does a two-day workshop on conflict resolution. EVERYONE, whether we got 100 or 200 grade 9s over two days, all out of
their classes, out of their class time, because we want the kids to understand it's important.

As important, I believe, as academic work. (Ron)

Equality of opportunity requires that no individual should be arbitrarily prohibited from participating in any social activity, but if there is a limited or inadequate amount of resource available, a question arises as to how those benefits ought to be distributed. This is the question that John has been struggling with. His concern revolves around procedural justice which refers to the notion of fairness in the process of resource allocation. Taking specialized programs as an example, he reflected:

They are all important. You talk about accessibility to programs. That's an example. We had to review our mission practices of some of the programs, the specialized programs that I was talking about. Who was getting admitted? Who was not getting admitted into those programs? Were the students admitted to these programs reflective of all those groups? (John)

He adds:

That kind of sensitivity that got to the redistribution of resources. That got to the admission practices into the programs. In terms of the evaluation and assessment policies, were they fair across the board? Well, similar practice is applied to everybody. (John)

John’s comments reveal two aspects of procedural justice. One is related to the justice in administration or proceedings. It requires that any decisions made have to go through “due process”, the regulatory basis on which a formal set of policies and procedures are to be implemented by schools or districts. The second aspect concerns the transparency of the process by which the decisions are made, in John’s case, the decisions on the admission to the specialized programs.
It is noteworthy that John’s critical reflection has also uncovered the difference problem that Ron does not capture. Because of group difference, an equal initial distribution may not result in an equal outcome. Thus, the difference principle (Rawls, 1971) is introduced to rectify the inequality of outcome. This principle is concerned with the fair allocation of resources or social goods among diverse members of society. It permits inequalities in the distribution of goods by directing extra attention to those who are at a disadvantaged social position. This is illustrated in Elaine’s remarks:

I think the big one to my heart is in terms of equity, equity of outcome and equity of access. It's not giving each group of students a 10%, 10%, 10% of the resources. There are out there factors that need to be taken into consideration. Some students may need more or different types of resources so that the equity of the outcome is what they need. Some people may need just a little bit more of a push, or extra help along the way or something taught differently or repeatedly different opportunities so they can get the equity outcome. (Elaine)

Elaine acknowledges that it is important to incorporate the students’ difference into the design of allocation formula. The difference exists in both social and cultural aspects of the group and their special needs. In order to achieve equity outcomes, the difference among students, in her view, should be kept to the minimum by tilting the scales to benefit the worst-off members of the student groups. Elaine’s comments further indicate that to strive for an equal outcome, distribution of goods should also be based on need. This principle of need is reflected in Dora’s remark:

I would say that allocation of resources based on need is hugely important to me. Because I think if there is a lack of resources, you’re going on individual teachers’ and
administrators’ good will to make a difference, and there are so many factors involved in that. That may not happen to the degree that I want to see it happen. So to me, that’s a starting spot. It’s the allocation of resources based on the need of the community, input of the community into what kind of school, what kind of programs they want their students to have. (Dora)

Resource distribution decisions made by principals are critical as they determine the resource adequacy and the equity of its distribution for educational programs and individual students. Dora acknowledges the significance of resource reallocation in addressing the most pressing needs of her school and its unique circumstances:

It’s the support of student programs. It's the idea that you allocate resources where your neediest are. And it happens every day in your daily interactions with kids, with staff. I've mentioned the different programs that we have in the school, but achievement-wise, our special-ed population is not achieving to the level I'd like to see, so we are going to look at staff changes for next year—putting some of our best teachers with this group of kids. Because it's an allocation of resources in a different way: People resources! But let's allocate them in a different way. (Dora)

Dora implies that resource allocation does not just encompass the alignment of material or monetary resources. It also includes the allocation of people, the human resources. As a school principal, she has to constantly find new and creative ways to effectively utilize personnel and allocate resources that maximize the benefits. One of the benefits from equitable resource allocation is that it builds hope among students and creates opportunities for positive change that go beyond the school community:

Resources and allocation to meet the opportunities must be there for everyone’s
betterment. It needs to be there to give kids hope, a hope that their lives and family’s lives would be better. One thing I often say to staff is you cannot give up on Joey, Ahmed or Ray, whatever the kid’s name is, because they are somebody, they are somebody’s son or daughter. Well, whether the parents haven’t given up and continue to try their best, or have given up and say: “They don't care. They have tried everything”. It is OUR jobs not to give up. Because Joey, Ahmed, Joanna, whoever the kids are, are going be somebody's boy friend, girl friend, wife, sister, cousin, neighbour. Do you want them to live beside you? Do you want them to live beside your son or daughter? You can make them a better person. That’s our job. So all of those things are important. (Dora)

Dora stresses that it is the equitable resource allocation that creates more opportunities and access for everyone. In this regard, equity-based resource allocation becomes a drive for building hope.

Her view is also endorsed by Dan who sees the link between fair allocations of resources and building hope. In his opinion, “redistributing the school resources is action to achieve the end [goal] of student achievement” (Dan), and the improvement of student achievement is conducive to building hope and confidence among students. Their comments imply that building hope not only inspires teachers and students and revitalizes the school community but also helps foster active change and transform school and parent communities so children will thrive, thus, having a ripple effect of hope.

**From Recognition to Representation and Inclusion**

Distributive justice is not the only discourse that dominates the social justice discussion. Participants (Dan, Dora, Dean, Dirk) have also probed recognition justice as an alternative to
distributive approaches to social justice. The recognitive model presents an expanded
understanding of justice with a positive regard for social difference (Gale, 2000). Dan
emphasizes the importance of recognizing the difference of the students:

Sometimes it's just me telling them [students], because if you're white, you might have
not gone through [their experiences]. You might have not suffered discrimination. So you
might not be aware of the experiences the children and their parents had, but we need to
discuss these experiences. So for me, [it] would be recognizing the difference of the
students based on class,… But also how can we support, how can school support each
child as opposed to a child changing to meet the school's needs? The school must change
to meet the students' needs. (Dan)

Dan’s accounts reflect the fundamental issues of power and privilege that exist in schools and
communities. In order to deconstruct the privileged social dimensions, Dan points out that the
dominant group needs to raise the consciousness of its privilege over the less advantaged, and
openly discuss the interplay between power and control. According to Dan, learning to recognise
and have a better understanding of group difference is an important step for the socially
advantaged group to extend its culturally installed power and privilege and to reduce the overall
negative impact over the less advantaged. He also endorses that change should be made on the
unjust social arrangements or institutional inequities to meet the needs of students, not the other
way around.

Dean also expresses his view that recognizing difference is an important component of
his leadership practice. His remarks reveal the difficulties involved in the evolving complexity of
difference celebration:
Yeah, recognition. To some degree celebration of the differences as well. And I think there are implicit and explicit ways that you do that. I think that as a leader, I do that by the kinds of interaction that I have on the daily basis with all students that I believe I model for people because I think... It's not just a question of having an Asian Week, a Black Month or Spanish Month and so on. That's on a big level. It's OK to have those. They are very meaningful to some people. And if you start having some, you'd better make sure you have the others because they come....If you're the one that gets left out, the other one says it's meaningful, how come you have Asian, Spanish and Black [Month], you didn't have my group. So there is that. But I really do think the stuff [implicit recognition] happens. I have to be conscious in all my interactions. I have to be conscious. And when we talk about being diverse and honouring diversity, part of that is recognizing that some groups would take a little bit longer to move to the point where the traditional styles of teaching are going to be effective. Some groups won't. You have to move far away in their direction, so the styles you use are inclusive of their way of learning. It's tricky though, because you get teachers from a variety of different cultures too. Some of our teachers are adjusting what we might think as Toronto norms. I don't know what they are. So it's complicated. (Dean)

Dean implies that recognition through celebration of difference, to a certain degree, is fraught with difficulties as it may encourage indulgence and acceptance of some group into dominant culture and creates tensions and disaffection between different cultural groups. He emphasizes that cultural celebration should embrace the concept of equality with a significant reference to social justice. In doing so, it helps him to reach the political equilibrium. Dean indicates that
recognition can also be manifested in the daily practices by being sensitive and conscious in social interactions and being inclusive of the particulars.

Dora echoes Dean’s concern that recognition should be taken into account as one of the main components to social justice. She realizes that the concept of difference is deeply ingrained in society and it thus necessitates the recognition of cultural differences as a critical part of her practice. She also raises the issue of representation and inclusion as alternative approaches to social justice. Living and working in an increasingly diverse community, Dora realizes it is more important than ever to expose her students to a variety of cultures and perspectives either through staffing or curriculum construction:

In that way, I think we’re lucky we’re living in Toronto because we have kids of every background. And teachers are [from] every background. Do I have teachers of all background? Would I like it better represented? Yes. You can’t hire somebody that's not there though. So sometimes, we make choices, you know. I would rather hire a more diverse reflection of the student population. It doesn’t always happen. Ultimately I want excellent teachers and I would need teachers that fit, have so many skills in so many areas. That's what I'm going to look for. And ideally they would reflect the diverse community. They don't right now though. But we don't have applicants from the diverse community. What we do is try to reflect the diverse community back through the curriculum, back through our co-curricular activities. So at the school, for example, it's important for me that all of our kids see themselves in the staff and curriculum. (Dora)

Dora’s accounts reflect the commitment she made to diversify her staff to reflect the underrepresented groups and the challenge she encounters in fostering a diverse community.

Such community with a proportionate representation of diverse cultures among staff, in her view,
would spur intellectual and creative work and learning. Dora articulates her struggle with the relative difficulty of recruiting qualified teachers from diverse backgrounds. In lieu of the inadequately diverse staff, she endeavours to hire teachers with great competence and excellence in instructional skills and knowledge. Moreover, Dora emphasizes the inclusive curriculum which recognises and values rich diversity of school population and reflects and accommodates the experience and needs of all students. She added:

We have a group for our lesbian, gay, transgender kids and those that support them in our school community. They're a part of the ...we call the Anti-Homophobia Alliance at this school. Every school has some name for a similar group, I am sure. You know, the transgendered kids are welcomed into that. So there are teachers that are out in the school community, and there are teachers that are not out, maybe to me, maybe not to their colleagues, maybe not to students. So there are really many different ways we're trying to reflect back the diversity to our kids, not only staff. We're trying to have staff that is reflective, but it doesn’t always happen. But certainly within the curriculum you can make it happen, and through literature, through the history, through the stories, through any subject. I think you can have the diversity. If you're doing phys-ed, it could be sports from different parts of the globe. It can be where the sports originally come from. Like they're a lot of different pieces. There is an importance of digging deep and not just doing it superficially. (Dora)

The notion of inclusion has been extended from the traditional understanding that reflects the ethical consideration in culturally complex communities to a broader concept that takes into account a range of people who are excluded from the mainstream society (Mertens, 2007). Dora’s comments take up this broad understanding of inclusion; however, she focuses
particularly on culturally responsive curriculum, which Dei (1996) associates with equity, justice and representation. Dei (1996) maintains that “inclusivity requires pedagogies that respond to the social construction of difference in the school system, and also in society at large” (p. 176). His assertion strikes a chord with both Ida and Ella’s remarks on inclusive curriculum and inclusion:

The inclusive curriculum I think goes together with that. Everything that we have to do has to match and respect what their culture says they have to do. And if we can align those two, the kids have a really good shot at understanding, making connections, and being respectful of their own culture, rather than going home and having a dichotomy between what the family is saying they shall do, and what the school is saying they shall do. The two are in sync. They'll go deeper, because they can get it. They can see that we're all saying the same message. (Ida)

So in my school, it's understanding that our kids are coming from these places. Our kids are coming with this type of experience, their journey to us here, [school name]. And that means for us in our classroom, how is it that we bridge the experience that they had with the experience that they are going to need to be successful, moving forward. We've talked a lot about, as well, making sure that the materials the students work with respect and portray of the country that they come from in an equitable way, but also help the students understand the Canadian perspective on equity. (Ella)

Ida and Ella’s concern with inclusive curriculum and inclusion rests with the alignment between students’ culture and experience and the curricular offerings and pedagogic practices. In lieu of dichotomizing these two, they strive to establish the bond by deconstructing a monocultural system and entailing a diversity-centric approach in curriculum construction and instructional practice.
The participants outline the dominant approaches for understanding and framing the debate about social justice in education and present an alternative rationale for social justice commitments. Their social justice efforts not only centre on the nature and input of current education but also go beyond the school community to look into the future. Their discussion draws attention to the access and outcomes of different groups of learners and provides a normative basis for rethinking social justice in relation to the educational goal. The inquiry about social justice reveals the overall reasoning process of the principals and their understanding of how social justice should be approached and incorporated into their daily actions and practice.

Summary

Participants in this study come to the educational field with a strong moral commitment to social justice. Thanks to their immediate experience and intimate knowledge as school leaders, more often than not, they have a sound grip of the problems and a better understanding of social justice than others who do not share this commitment. Grounded in the daily realities of their educational practice, their perceptions of social justice render more authenticity, concreteness, and profoundy.

Data presented in this chapter made evident that the participants perceive and define social justice in terms of “not only what it is, but also what it is not, namely injustice” (Lee & McKerrow, 2005, p. 1). As advocates for social justice, their accounts reveal not only their beliefs and perspectives in approaching social justice, but also their struggles and concerns that figure prominently in their attempts to make issues surrounding diversity central to their social justice advocacy. By exploring social justice and questioning injustices, they challenge social,
political, and economic structures that undergird unequal power relationships that marginalize the students of diverse backgrounds.

Therefore, it is critical to understand how principals perceive and conceptualize the notion of social justice. In the next chapter, I will explore how principals translate their beliefs and perceptions into action to promote social justice in schools and the barriers and challenges they face.
Chapter 5
Social Justice Leadership: An Anatomy of Theory and Practice

*It is not so much what you believe in that matters, as the way in which you believe it and proceed to translate that belief into action.* – Lin (1941, p. 8)

The perceptions of and perspectives on social justice will undoubtedly affect, if not determine, the action of the principals in their leadership role, sometimes becoming norms or criteria that guide their actions. Thus it becomes equally important to investigate what actions and practices principals undertake to fulfill their commitment to social justice and how they integrate justice and equity into their school culture in order to embrace changes for the wellbeing of their students.

In this chapter, I will unravel social justice leadership by exploring its different components such as leadership traits, personal values, functional practices, and vision and commitment, but with a central focus on leadership practices. I will also discuss issues that are related to leadership practice, such as leaders’ resilience to thrive in the face of adversities and obstacles and their political struggle in navigating through existing school structures in order to place justice and equity at the centre of their leadership.

**Leadership Traits**

Many factors interact to constitute or contribute to leadership and its development, including the traits or qualities associated with leadership. The list of traits or qualities not only describes some positive or virtuous leadership attributes, but is also important elements for understanding leadership. In order to present a conceptually holistic view of social justice
leadership, I tap into core leadership traits by highlighting some commonalities in dispositional characteristics and inner inclinations with the intent to uncover the traits or qualities that characterize social justice leaders. Through presenting the data that illustrate leadership traits, by no means do I intend to encode these components into a leadership traits prototype, rather to lay the groundwork for a better understanding of social justice leadership practice.

Literature (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004; Bass, 1990; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1974; Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004) is rife with leadership trait theories that tend to identify individual differences that differentiate leaders from followers. Such dispositional differences reside in leaders and are believed to either have significant contribution to leadership success or promote great increase in school productivity. Studies have identified certain traits that play a major role in the developmental process of any leader, such as intelligence (Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986), self-confidence (Schiller, 1961), honesty/integrity (Middleton, 1941), and stable characteristics (Kenny & Zaccaro, 1983; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991), to name a few. However, an exact list is impossible to come up with as personal traits, though potentially lasting, are ever changing under different social situations and circumstances.

Data presented in this study indicate that there are some commonly noted characteristics among principals who have a strong commitment to social justice. These distinguishing qualities or traits are crucial in understanding how principals come to the position as social justice leaders. Several participants (Elaine, Ella, Dora, Hilda, John, Paula, Roderick, Sean, Sara, and Sonia) display or reveal through their accounts a series of common characteristics that are central to their social justice practice. These personality traits include passion, integrity, courage, and positive attitude.
Strong messages conveyed in participants’ (Elaine, Ella, Hilda, John, Roderick, Sonia) accounts reveal that a core part of their leadership is having passion. It is the passion for their work that fuels principals with energy for the social justice commitment and becomes a burning drive to make a difference. Passion and love are mentioned as essential to being a social justice leader:

I think we have to have a passion for what we do. We have to like kids as school leaders, as educators. Then I think when we have the passion for others, we're able to make it work. (John)

It's a passion of mine. It's one of things that I value as an educator. It always will. (Roderick)

I am very passionate about this job. I LOVE my job. (Sonia)

I love what I do. I have a passion for what I do. I have real deep commitment to my community, to issues of poverty especially. (Ella)

It is evident that these principals share the intense passion that provides motivation and enthusiasm necessary to their leadership roles. Because of their deep passion for and commitment to their work, their position as principals is tightly interwoven with the person doing the job (Theoharis, 2008). Through sustaining their passion and enthusiasm, they are able to tune up their day-to-day leadership practice and translate their passion into reality. To some principals, the individual passion has become a driving force that operates to inspire students’ success and transform their lives. As Hilda put it:

The most significant piece of accountability for a school principal is that I need to demonstrate that my kids are successful. For me, that's a passion. I want my kids to be able to compete and kick the butt of anybody else’s kids in any situation and in any place.
The deep passion that Hilda maintains enables her to confront the increasing challenge under current accountability mandates and elevates her optimism to meet this challenge. By virtue of her tenacity and persistence fuelled by her passion, Hilda sets the objectives, constantly pushes the limits, and strives to help her students excel.

Being passionate about the job is more than just do-what-you-love. It's looking forward to going to work and having fun at work. This holds true for Sonia who not only has a great passion about her work, but also acts passionately:

I feel if you love your job, let's say: you never work a day in your life. If you love your job, you're not working. You're having fun! You HAVE to have fun. For me, it's fun. I like to be out in the school and involved with the children. I like to go to classrooms, read to kids, go out on the playground, and skip with kids. I remember when my former superintendent came by last year, and I had a secretary… She [Superintendent] came in -- sort of a surprise visit-- and my secretary said: “She is outside skipping on the playground”. I was really worried, because I was brand new to this superintendent, the new superintendent. I thought: hmmmm… She came back and she said: “I loved that”. She said: “I have never been at a school where the principal was outside skipping on the playground”. (Sonia)

Being passionate generates obsession in people (Day, 2004). In Sonia’s case, it is her students. Because of her passion for the students, she finds that hard work becomes enjoyable. Sonia’s comments illustrate that passion is also associated with care - caring for students, socializing with them, and providing support to them.
In addition to passion, integrity (Middleton, 1941; Stogdill, 1974) has long been identified as one of the important leadership traits. Integrity begins with “consciously aligning one’s attitudes and beliefs with one’s actions and behaviours” (Dufresne & McKenzie, 2009, p. 37) and eventually reaches to the coherence and consistency of thoughts, words, and actions. It also implies a sense of honesty or truthfulness pertaining to the motivations or moral responsibilities for one’s action. To Paula, integrity is her inner consistency that espouses her values with her action in a way that holds her accountable both for herself and her students:

Then you are accountable to yourself. To me, it's my integrity. That I look at myself in the mirror every night, and say: “Did I do the best job for the kids and their families today?” OK. So my notion of accountability is that. So that's what drove me to focus on climate, on social justice, on equity, because I knew that was morally the right thing to do. (Paula)

Paula is constantly questioning herself about whether she is doing the right thing for the kids. Through introspection, she evaluates and adjusts her own value system, striving to maintain or enhance its consistency with her actions. In the process of this, integrity serves as a measure through which she gauges her accountability and moral responsibility with the intent of striking a balance. Integrity is not merely to be true to oneself, rather, it functions as the primary impetus for Paula to walk the talk: “Why do we do what we do? I do what I do in a school as a leader because of my integrity, because I am responsible for the kids.” (Paula)

Walking the talk requires unflinching courage, which is also one of the fundamental traits for leaders. It is courage that makes many actions possible. Courage is the quality of spirit that enables one to stand up against social injustices and take risks to get through challenging
circumstances. Sara, for example, explains how she needs the courage to tread into uncharted territory dealing with LGBTQ issues:

You have to have the courage to put the elephant on the table. Like when I arrived, there was a big gap here at [the school]. We don't deal with our gay children. They have no opportunity here to feel safe or to talk about things. So I think you always have to put these issues on the forefront. (Sara)

Leading for social justice calls for courage to stand in the midst of controversy and the willingness to accept any consequences. In the face of risk and failure, Sara chooses to step up and act with responsibility rather than eschew the risk.

It is evident that passion, integrity, and courage function as foundations for social justice leaders. However, there may be nothing more important than a positive attitude. Maintaining a positive attitude is an important key to effective leadership (Schulte, Slate, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010) as it prompts leaders to focus more on solutions and opportunities rather than obstacles:

Taking a small step is a big deal. These are all ways that you get around barriers. I don't think there are too many barriers that we can't get around if we try. If we put our minds together, we put our energy towards it. I think we can do it. (Dora)

Dora’s accounts imply that a positive attitude brings out creativity, resourcefulness, and constructive changes. When leaders are positive, they tend to know how to make the best of every situation. Leadership is not just about skills and knowledge. It is also about having a strong positive attitude to cope with daily affairs. By embracing a good attitude towards her work, Sara demonstrates a greater inner power and strength:

We make assumptions all the time: Because we are teachers, we have all those skills; that we knew how to be collaborative; that we knew we’re all master teachers. That's just not
true. Right? As leaders, we understand that. So you need always be sort of facilitating that part of it to make sure that... So I am not that cynical: “God, I can't do it!” You throw anything at me, I go: “No problem! I'll figure out.” That's my staff: “We don't have time.” “No problem, I’ll make sure you have time.” (Sara)

Sara believes that uttering the lament: “I can’t do it” will undermine her efforts and pull her down, rather than lift her up out of the mired problems. This positive state of mind builds up Sara’s self-esteem and confidence to deal with the inevitable day-to-day challenges and strengthens her ability to confront and surmount the difficulties. It also motivates her to achieve her goals and make a difference in her work.

**Personal Values**

“Leadership has less to do with position than it does disposition.” (Maxwell, 1993, p. 98)

Gaining insight into leadership traits undoubtedly gives more information about how these dispositional qualities such as passion, integrity, courage, and positive attitude are going to affect leadership practices. However, there are other components that need to be taken into account in understanding leadership, namely the personal values. A few participants (Ella, Sonia, Roderick, John, Lily, Ron, Hilda) have expressed their values that underpin their leadership practices in promoting social justice. Such values shape their practices and constitute their leadership. Values identified in this study include fairness (John, Lily, Roderick, Ron), respect (Hilda), and being future-oriented (Ella, Sonia), to name a few. Since fairness (please see *Equity of resources and access* in Chapter 4) and responsibility (please see *Conceptualizing accountability* in Chapter 6) have been and will be touched upon in other sections, I will focus particularly on the future-oriented dimension in the following discussion.
Leading involves learning from the past, acting in the present, and looking into the future. Particularly, in leading towards social justice, principals’ work is far above day-to-day operations. It calls for future-oriented leadership to challenge the status quo and lead for change. In summarizing her social justice leadership, Ella stresses the need to have a future-oriented frame of mind: “I would say forward thinking. I would say determined not to stay with the status quo.” (Ella)

Her future-oriented thinking is illustrated in her following comments:

The other component [of social justice] that I see is how you not only actively engage students in developing an understanding of themselves what social justice is and what social justice means for their specific community, but also what it means for them in the future, helping them to develop a global perspective beyond just themselves and beyond their community itself. (Ella)

Ella’s comments reflect her insight that future-oriented leaders need to think beyond, rather than within, by connecting their students with the world outside the school. Instead of merely focusing on justice issues within the school, she encourages her students to adopt a broader perspective looking at social justice at a global level. As a visionary leader, Ella sees her students not only as the future, but the builders of the future. This view is also shared by Sonia who reiterates the importance of being an educator:

We’re shaping the future, the legacy. You know, we're touching the future all the time.

We want bright kids who are capable, who can get great jobs, who are global learners, global thinkers. You know, we want all of those things. We also want them to be nice people. (Sonia)

Sonia articulates her feeling that education has a moral purpose as her job is not just to lead but to shape the future. Schools become the chief agency for the accomplishment of their
responsibility to make for a better future society (Dewey, 1916).

Participants in this study possess a wide range of personality traits and values which give them certain characteristics as social justice leaders. Through highlighting some of their leadership attributes, such as passion, integrity, courage, positive attitude, and future-orientedness, I approach social justice leadership in terms of who they are. This approach clearly demonstrates what personal traits and values are usually associated with leaders that have a social justice commitment. However, leaders exhibit their traits and values in their daily actions and behaviours. To have a better understanding of social justice leaders, it is not sufficient to just gain insight into the leadership traits and values. Although personal attributes underpin leadership actions and behaviours and may provide some information about the reasons underlying them, it is essential to look at how social justice leaders live up to their traits and values and what they do to promote justice.

**Social Justice Leadership Practices**

“The way in which people envision leadership will dictate how it is put into practice in their institutions” (Ryan, 2005, p. 22). Among the contested meanings of leadership, the prevailing perspective sees leadership as power that leaders exercise to influence others. Power can be exercised individually or collectively by leaders to influence subordinates or peers. Through examining the source of power, Montana and Charnov (2000) distinguish seven types of individual power: legitimate (e.g. professional or authoritative positions), reward (e.g. raises and promotions), coercive (e.g. punishments: suspension or termination), expert (e.g. skills, knowledge, abilities, and experience), charisma (e.g. positive influence), referent (e.g. association), and information (e.g. possession of important information). However, power also
resides with a group of people (Ryan, 2005), collegially shared or collectively exercised. Through shared or facilitative power (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991), leadership disperses throughout the school. Educational leaders with a social justice orientation use power not as domination, rather, for the collegial operation of schools to promote democracy, justice and equity.

In educational administration, the use of power implies a unique blend of what principals do and what is considered leadership. This management/leadership blend is of great importance as it defines principals’ administrative style (Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999). The terms management and leadership, though sometimes used interchangeably, are different in nature. Management encompasses productive efforts to manage a status quo in which people can work comfortably, but leadership embraces activities related to change and dynamism (Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999, p. 28). Management has its focus on system or structure, while leadership centres on people. Foster (1989) argues that:

Leadership, in the final analysis, is the ability of humans to relate deeply to each other in the search for a more perfect union. Leadership is a consensual task, a sharing of ideas and a sharing of responsibilities, where a “leader” is a leader for the moment only, where the leadership exerted must be validated by the consent of followers, and where leadership lies in the struggles of a community to find meaning for itself. (p. 61)

In the ensuing section, I present evidence on how social justice leaders exercise their influence by focusing on people in an effort to build a community which finds meaning for itself. Their leadership practice is based upon four criteria: critical, transformative, educative, and ethical (Foster, 1989), which underlies their commitment to justice and equity. I approach social justice leadership in the following subheadings: students at the centre, positioning as a social
Students at the Centre

Schools are organisations where a few people – principals, teachers, and staff – are serving a larger population, namely the students. Knowing what the students think and what they need is a critical step in providing them with a better service. It is this first step that makes a difference between “effective” leaders who keep their focus on student achievement and social justice leaders who put students’ needs front and centre. Data presented in this section show that social justice leaders always put the needs of students first, proactively taking various approaches to reach out to students, solicit their input, educate them on issues of justice, empower them, and work together as a team to reverse inequitable tendencies.

Students are the forefront stakeholders who are cognizant of and experience what injustices and problems exist among themselves and within the school. Working to learn their stories and gather feedback from them is the only way to find out the issues that exist in schools. For example, Sara embraces the importance of learning from students by listening to their voices:

My first two or three years, I wasn’t thinking about social justice issues. It was in my head because I’ve done lots of work with girls in [district name]. And as I got more comfortable with my role, I start to understand my culture in my school, and hear what my kids are saying. I realize the importance of really getting feedback from the students. The bottom-line is the kids need to be telling you what’s happening in the school. You need to hear what the social justice issues are for them. Then you need to act on those. But that’s my learning as a new principal. As I am going through, I begin to see what the
gaps are in my own school, figure out how to use data more effectively. (Sara)
Driven by the need for a change in the school culture, Sara learns how to have the power moved from herself to the students and let the students be the facilitators. Hilda also endorses the approach by focusing on the needs of the students in the educational process and encourages students to become the active and engaged participants rather than passive and apathetic receivers:

The other thing too is that kids need to have voice in the process. They need to be a participant in their education, not a receiver. They need to have voice in what they do and how they do it. Because then they love coming to school every day. They love what they're learning and what they're doing. (Hilda)

Participants (Dora, Freda, Lily, Sara) employ various ways of soliciting students’ input, such as meetings, surveys, student government/council, focus groups, and workshops. Lily gives an example of using focus groups to bring students in to talk about issues that they care about at school or in their lives:

Bring it out on the table. Bring the kids to talk about the stuff. We are just in a process now setting up a focus group for the kids coming from various schools to come to talk. These are the leadership students who would be either the one who wants to be in the student government, that kind of thing, or being involved in a number of ways. But also those other kind of leaders: they are what we call “natural leaders”. They'll command respect for other reasons. We also want to bring them together. (Lily)

Rather than making decisions for students, Freda calls meetings:

I got contacted quite a bit from fundraising groups. What I do is I have meetings with our students’ parliament and the [name] group. And I'll ask them: “What do you think about
this?” In that, I am still teaching. I am still asking questions that are probing their thinking, but quite willing to always accept whatever outcomes they have chosen. (Freda)

It is noteworthy that Freda not only uses meetings to secure students’ input, but also seizes the opportunity to make it a teachable moment to develop students’ critical thinking skills. Most importantly, she values students’ inputs and endorses any decisions they make.

Conducting surveys is another effective way to open up opportunities for students to express their opinions and concerns. As Sara puts it:

Well, I think what you do is to bring them to forefront. That’s one of the things you do.
You try to collect data, right? We put up the surveys on character education. We used the board surveys to collect the data. Surveys go to the teachers, to the parents, and to the students. That brings back all the data. From the data, once you get that information, then you have concrete data. That sort of says to you that THESE are the issues in the school. Kids were saying that bullying is an issue. So therefore, you put the program in place to support and work on that. So you have surveys that could do that. You have information that you gather from teachers about kids that tells you what the priorities need to be. You have kids themselves that come in and talk to you about things. You find out what those priorities are. You have parents and communities. Through parent councils, they tell you what they think the priorities are. So there are a variety of different data that you collect.
(Sara)

Through surveys, Sara is able to allow students to legitimately voice issues and concerns arising from their learning and personal experiences. She also opens the door for their ideas and suggestions. Moreover, Sara solicits inputs from both teachers and parents contributing to a better understanding of her students and their experiences and allowing her to mould programs
and seek solutions.

No matter what approaches principals undertake to bring social justice issues to the forefront, principals recognise the importance of soliciting information from the students. Dora, who takes students’ input through the student council of her school, expounds her belief that students’ cooperation and involvement can produce constructive and positive results in school climate-building:

So there is a positive way that students are contributing to make a school a better place, and being active citizens and active voices, being able to tell what they like and what they don't like, and opening those dialogues. (Dora)

To that effect, participants pay great attention to students’ inputs which they use to advance their commitment to justice and equity. Meanwhile, helping students to understand these justice issues is also vital. Participants recognise that information that comes from students needs to be used constructively to serve the wellbeing of all students. Through obtaining multiple student inputs, principals are able to be well-informed of the issues and concerns of the students and ready to take a step further to address them.

Three participants (Kate, Paul, and Molly) accentuate the importance of educating students on issues of social justice. In order to meet the challenges associated with injustices, there is a need for students to acquire new understandings and attitudes, and eventually assume greater responsibilities:

My understanding with regard to how we're addressing social justice in our school is that we want students to understand and appreciate the variety of the cultures, background, and differences that all of our students have. We want them to also understand that social justice goes beyond just our own community and school. We want them to understand
that they are part of the global community and there are vast differences across the world in terms of education, poverty, languages they speak, religions they celebrate, etc. We want them to understand these differences, and then know that they have a moral responsibility to act in a way that would help to improve the conditions in all parts of the world, whether it's within their community by helping out with a food bank or whether it's helping to build a school in another country. So our goal is to help them understand the differences, appreciate the differences, and act to make the world a better place. (Kate)

Vice principal Kate’s comments suggest that the educators’ job is not just to provide skills and knowledge to students. They have a moral obligation to help students understand what is happening in the world, how it affects their lives and the lives of others, and more importantly, how to actively participate to create a better world for all. Her view resonates with vice principal Paul, who also vests his hope for the future by educating students on homophobia and other social justice issues:

Part of the social justice push in the school is to educate the students. It's not just the school role. In this school we don't want you using homophobic slurs. It has to go beyond that. We tried to educate them to be citizens of the world, not just to follow rules within the school. It's a much bigger issue than school rules. It's an issue of society. (Paul)

Participants Kate, Paul, and Molly have gone to great lengths to educate their students and raise their awareness of justice issues within and beyond schools. In doing so, they are transforming their attitudes and behaviours in a positive way, preparing them to be global citizens.

However, education goes beyond the need to simply educate students. Four participants (Hilda, Ida, Roderick, and Paula) agree that education also needs to empower students by
inspiring a sense of ownership. According to Ida, “as a principal, if you own it, then others don’t. But if you give some of it away, then they will own it.” In Ida’s view, empowerment means letting go of the control and allowing others to take the ownership so that they can reach their potential in making better decisions and creating a positive school environment.

An empowering style of leadership is also adopted by Paula in fostering an inclusive community. When asked to summarize her practice as a social justice leader, she responded:

Somebody that empowers and promotes inclusive practices, inclusive and equitable practices. So “empower”, that's the democracy piece. And “promote”, so sometimes it's about saying and doing - inclusive equitable practices. When I think of practices, I think of beyond just teaching itself. I think the way we interact with folks. So practices in a broad way. [Researcher: You’ve mentioned empowering, so empowering whom?] Empower kids. I think our clientele is kids. So it's going to be empowering the kids. Usually we do a very good job as leaders empowering teachers, but I think we didn't empower kids to become part of the inclusive equitable practices. (Paula)

Paula embraces inclusive practices, through which she endeavours to empower her students to become informed and engaged democratic citizens and to take collective actions to make the inclusivity and sharing of power an integral part of the school culture. Paul also emphasizes that empowering students is equally important as empowering teachers. Scott (2009) contends that to empower students to take the ownership of education, there is a need for a fundamental shift, a shift from the concept of education as a service provided for students to the concept of education belonging to students. By empowering students, participants are able to encourage students to take the initiative to fight against various faces of “isms” and improve the environment around them. Hilda describes how she empowers her female students to confront
gender issues:

So in terms of social justice issues, which go beyond just education is that we're trying to work with our young women to empower them and get them to see themselves beyond a relationship with a boy. Just see themselves as a young woman, with potential, with a future, with power that they are in control of their own destiny. Really what we're trying to do is give them an old fashioned injection of feminism. (Hilda)

Hilda’s focus of empowerment is to help her students to honour and preserve valued traditions and increase their coping skills and knowledge in social interactions. It is imperative for school leaders to empower their students to work towards what is good for students through shared and collective endeavour:

We are succeeding in building a sense of empowerment for students. For any of them to say: you know, I think this is an issue that we need to look at. They create an action plan that may help. If you walk around our building, especially around the time when the civic students, around 10 students, are doing their accommodating activities as their final projects. That's when you see a real sense of all of the different issues that they take on: clean water. It could be violence against women, gender inequities. It really runs the gamut of what's out there. It's really broad. (Roderick)

Clearly, empowering students to contribute to and take ownership of their schools has become an important part of principals’ leadership practices in implementing social justice. However, social justice can also be implemented in curriculum and pedagogy. Three participants (Dora, Ella, and Molly) support efforts to embed social justice into curricula. Particularly in Ella’s school, she has done a lot of work on culturally responsive pedagogy as part of model school work. So does Molly. However, Molly finds it somewhat challenging to infuse the elements of social justice
into the curriculum without failing to meet the mandates by the ministry. Dora encounters a similar challenge but she is very strategic in interpreting the curriculum:

There is a social justice unit in that course that we created. There is a ministry curriculum. It does follow the ministry curriculum. But there is a lot of leeway on how you interpret that curriculum. So if you're talking literacy and numeracy, can you teach it using a social justice unit on food banks in Toronto? You could take them [students] to a food bank. They could write a letter. They could do the mathematical piece on what it is like to live on welfare in Toronto. So you can take all the skills that belong to ministry expectations of curriculum and we turned into a social justice unit. We pulled in a technology piece. Now you're going to blog about this experience. So, there are different ways to engage kids to include the literacy and numeracy components into a course. We teach the skills in a traditional manner and ask them to apply them in a real-world manner in a social justice unit. (Dora)

Dora’s comments imply that there is a disconnection between the curriculum and social justice education. In order to keep social justice away from the margins of the curriculum, she fits it in creatively. By being strategic, Dora successfully finds a balance in integrating social justice components into the curriculum without deviating from the ministry’s curriculum requirements.

In addition to the implementation of social justice curriculum, participants (Dean, Roderick, Sean) also look to differentiated instruction to promote social justice. The differentiated instruction allows proactive modification of the instructional practice to meet the needs and interests of the different students. It is also regarded by Roderick as an important tool to promote social justice:
One of our leading initiatives right now is to look at the differentiated instruction and
differentiated evaluation, because I think that will reach social justice and equity within
the school for all our learners. So we're discussing all those issues such as not everyone
learns the same, not everyone succeeds in a test, not everyone succeeds in an essay.

(Roderick)

Roderick recognises that differentiated instruction takes into account students’ individual
differences and responds to their needs differently. Therefore, it attains justice by meeting a
diverse range of students’ learning needs. However, Sean sees differentiated instruction as an
important tool to improve student achievement:

Next logical step addressing student achievement is to ensure differentiated instruction.
So well, you might be ready today to write that test. It might be weeks or months away.
And if we are all ready, maybe we need it in different forms because you are more a
static learner. I am more a visual learner. Someone else is musical and rhythmical. As
long as we all meet the same curriculum expectations, we get the opportunity to acquire
and demonstrate the achievement. (Sean)

It seems that differentiated instruction is in harmony with standards-based education, which is
g geared toward improving students’ performance. However, Sean’s comments also reveal that
overemphasizing differentiated instruction may increase the tendency for educators to direct
more attention to the differences in students’ learning styles and habits, thus neglecting the
complexity of students’ social needs that result from various injustices.

**Positioning as a Leader**

Holding a leadership position, in this case, principalship, does not make one a leader.
Rather, it only provides an occupational platform, from which to work. How to position themselves internally and externally to be a true leader is a crucial step in establishing their professional identity. This may ring true for the new principals or principals being placed in a new school as they may need to brand themselves for acceptance and recognition. However, a principal’s work is boundary-less (Gronn & Lacey, 2004) and full of uncertainties which makes positioning of leadership more fluid and exploratory.

For social justice leaders, positioning themselves, specifically in what they say, the mode they express, the way they act, has to be carefully scrutinized and properly delivered. The significance of positioning lies in the fact that it may significantly affect or even determine the way that teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders approach and interact with them, and eventually impact whether they can successfully address social justice issues. Given the complexity of the various socializations, participants (Dan, John, Roderick, Hilda, Lily, and Dora) reveal that they have to constantly constitute or position themselves in different roles and manners, such as being an initiator, a cheerleader, a facilitator, or simply, a leader.

In addressing gender issues, participant Dan emphasizes that “the principal has to be the starter, doesn't have to be the finisher or the doer”. Instead of waiting for things to happen, Dan starts the ball rolling by generating programs and clubs for girls in his school. John also assists and works with his student leaders by initiating some programs and events on social justice issues:

We have very engaging students, very focused students that have had a strong sense of others, and working towards helping others. My role in that is really being a cheerleader on the side: Yeah, you know. We're doing that in a school community. I had to initiate a lot of that. I think it's come from the goodwill of the student leaders we have in the
building. (John)

In addition to being an initiator, John also positions himself as a cheerleader, encouraging and influencing his students to be committed to their goals. Likewise, Roderick expresses his contentment with being a cheerleader:

I think that you need to be a cheerleader. You need to say: “You know what? Look, maybe nothing came of this, but at least you got it kicked out together”. You didn't stand by without...with just letting this go. (Roderick)

Both John and Roderick recognise that cheering from the sideline contributes to galvanizing students to action and fighting against injustices.

Being an initiator or cheerleader may be situational. Most often, principals have to decide whether they should be leading or managing. Dora expresses her struggle of positioning herself as a leader as opposed to a manager:

I've been a principal for five years. And I think I've learned over the last two years it's easier to spend your time managing than it is to spend your time leading. So we say we value what happens in the classrooms. If I am not in the classrooms, how much do I really value it? I do! I say: “I do”. I believe I do. But if I spend more of my time doing paperwork and reports and seeing people individually in my office, what message am I really sending? I am visiting classrooms. I can't do it all the time, can't do anything all the time now. But you know, I've made it part of my schedule to visit classrooms: X number of classrooms per week, X number of times per week that I want to be in a classroom. Am I doing enough yet? No. Am I where I want to be? No. Is it better than it was a year ago? Absolutely! Do I ask my Vice Principals to do the same? Yes. Because if we say we value that work goes on in the classroom, then we have to show we value it. How do we
show we value it? By being part of it. So as a leader, you're there all the time to support individuals. You're there to manage the building, for sure. But sometimes you are going to make choices whether to manage or lead. Social justice is leadership. That's not management. Right? Managing is making sure my budget is getting in on time. Managing means...Management is the building, you know, the hole on the wall gets fixed.

Management is that I have this staff that I need to have. I do the interviews I need to do. You need to manage to make sure the institution functions, the building functions, but ultimately it's about the leadership. If you don't have the vision of what you want your school to be, who you want your kids to be, helping them to be the husband, wife, partner, neighbour of your child or of yourself, then that's more important work. It's harder work. You don't always see success right away. It might take years to reach every kid and be a success. (Dora)

Dora’s accounts reveal the struggle she has in leading and managing. According to Dora, managing focuses on the resources and their allocation while leading is to influence and look outward. Social justice promotion calls for a leader who is visionary, strategic, and active.

Positioning as a leader is an on-going process during which one has to constantly reinforce the concept of being a leader. In doing so, participants (Dan, Dean, Hilda, Ida, Molly, Paul, Paula, Sara) acknowledge that they have to build up their leadership skills and knowledge through continual self-learning, and lead by modelling, educating, and problem-solving using various techniques. They also point out that leading is more of a collective effort than an individual’s work. Sharing the leadership is a critical step in earning the acceptance and respect from their teachers, students and staff members, and thus influencing and directing their behaviours and efforts to accomplish the common goals.
A few participants (Dan, Ida, Sara) say they are conscious that one’s skills and knowledge are limited and one needs to feed on every opportunity and approach to learn in order to advance professionally. This self-learning process not only produces new knowledge but also contributes to “a personal *phronesis* made up of experience, tacit knowledge and practitioner wisdom, forming the bed-rock of an individual’s educational professionality” (Rayner, 2009, p. 436). Sara describes her learning process in the following way:

There is also, I think, your personal education as a principal. I am constantly reading current information that is on the subject of gender, equity, class, and dealing with the “isms”. As you read more about that information, you again begin to sort of see things, and thought about this perspective. Are you bringing that back to your school? I think you feed off resources. (Sara)

Sara’s description implies two important points: first, leadership can contribute to good management in a continuing process of learning (Rayner, 2009). Second, as social justice educators, their job is not merely to educate others, but first to educate themselves to achieve personal and professional growth. As an active learner with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and information, Sara learns not only through targeted reading, but also by attending the professional development workshops offered by the district school board. Sara views professional development not just for herself, but also as an integral part of school improvement. In seeking to increase the school capacity, she integrates her own learning into school relationships by establishing a “constant learning cycle” with her team.

An active learning leader will take every social interaction as an opportunity for learning, professionally or personally. Ida, for example, is gathering information from her daily interaction with the students and the parents:
We will always have much to learn. I am just thinking of different families who come in and they say: “In my culture, it's not respectful for you to shake my hand. You know, a woman does not shake a man's hand, but because you're the principal, it’s the status of your role that you could shake my hand.” There are all these rules of what respect looks like. And it takes year after year after year to learn about the different perceptions of respect, until you meet the family, until they feel comfortable to tell you. You have to meet the people. Meeting those people takes time. So you wonder how many people am I offending along the way, unintentionally, until I learn it. I mean I've been here, well in education, for 26 years. What are the teachers that are just getting to know all these families, all these cultures, the rules, etc. When do they learn things like: it isn’t intentional when a child that's being disciplined, looks down? You hear teachers saying: “Don't be disrespectful. Look at me when I'm talking to you.” Well, looking at you IS disrespectful in some cultures. So they need to understand all of these things too so that they don't put requirements on children that are contrary to the forms of respect taught at home. I mean their intentions are good, but their actions might not be. And it takes time to learn all that, it takes experience. We spend all day with children. We don't spend all day with their families learning about their cultures. (Ida)

Ida never slacks off learning. As a principal from a diverse school community, Ida has made learning indispensable to her leadership. It is through constantly taking in new information that she develops a strong sense of cultural sensibility which enables her to better serve the community.

Learning can also be achieved through listening, through which principals can make the connection with students without necessarily speaking themselves. Studies show that listening is
not only an essential skill to survive as a principal (McEwan, 2003b; Mustafa, 2010) but also characterizes effective school principals (Schulte, Slate, & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). As such, Dan accentuates the importance of learning and knowing his students through listening:

It's never too late to learn if you listen. A vice principal I worked with when I was a principal in [city] told me that everyone has a life story. Right? How often do we sit down and listen to each other's life story? How often do I listen to our students’ life stories so we know who they are as people, to our parents, and to everyone? That's one of the keys for us to put on that critical lens, that is, to listen, spend more time listening and learning about the lives of others. So when we talk about social justice, you can't build it if you're always working from your own experience, because your own experiences are limited based on all the script, you know like your age, your height, or your [sexual] orientation, blah, blah, blah, all those things, right? (Dan)

It is apparent that listening is one of the important approaches that Dan undertakes to solicit students’ inputs (please also see the section Students at the Centre). Lalas and Valle (2007) point out that “critical information could be gleaned from listening to the authentic voices of students by using a social justice lens.” (p. 76) Through this listening, Dan is able to know who they are and what they need, thus taking a step further to address the various issues as identified by students.

It is noteworthy that no matter what paths or strategies participants employ in learning on their own, the fundamental goal of learning is to expand their consciousness (Kegan, 2000), and eventually to make a change. This transformational learning is defined as “the social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of meaning of one’s experience as a guide to action” (Mezirow, 1994, pp. 222-223). Through learning from the work itself and from
others such as parents and students, principals have equipped themselves with necessary knowledge and skills to be able to take actions to solve problems.

Problem-solving is a fundamental skill for school leaders. They exercise the skill in varying degrees on a daily basis. However, it is the effective use of the problem-solving skills that makes the difference. Participants (Dan, Dean, Hilda, Sara) describe how they establish themselves as leaders by applying various problem-solving skills such as prioritizing or triage, creating a sense of urgency, and employing dynamic strategic approaches to problem-solving, to name a few. Overloaded with various issues in the working environment, Sara describes how she tackles the problems in her daily exercise of power:

I think your job as a principal is to decipher what's important, what you can do for your school. So all that stuff that comes in, you have to say: I cannot do all 20 issues, but based on the survey and the data and what the kids are telling me, these are the three primary issues. So I sort of screen things as a principal. There is no way you can get everything done. You don't want to do 20 things, not do a very good job. You'd rather do three really important ones to do a good job. So you have to prioritize. But you prioritize by using the information that you get from your staff, your parents and your kids. (Sara)

Sometimes leaders need a sense of urgency to make things happen. This is the case with Dan who has to initiate a program to help his students:

I think it's a good cause if you make it urgent. But you have to do a good job. You have to sell it. You have to say: “We got a big problem here. This is urgent. What's going to happen to these girls if we don't do something. Here is what we need to do.” (Dan)

Dan places his emphasis on the need for intentional urgency when it comes to certain problems. By creating this level of urgency, he is able to solve problems strategically and proactively
improve his community.

Many of the social justice issues principals face may appear beyond the scope of their immediate influence. This is the case with Hilda who is struggling to find a better solution to help her students with an issue in which the board and the police are involved:

I also think that how you approach it is going to make a difference to how it's received, and how people look at it. If you approach the issues of equity and social justice by making people defensive, it takes a long time to tear down that wall to really get to the crux of the issue. So I think that even though I am really angry right now, I tell you that quite honestly, I am extremely protective of my kids. I want to make it better. I don't want to make it worse. So I need to give it a lot of thought to how I'm going to move the issue forward and really shed some light on it. (Hilda)

Hilda expresses her anger and frustration, but she is persistently seeking alternatives to handle the thorny situation. Hilda raises an important issue here: how to properly approach a problem is a critical step to resolve it. Faced with the dilemma, Hilda strives to leverage her thinking to explore innovative alternatives for solving the problems.

Unlike Hilda who stresses the way she approaches a problem, Dean’s concern rests upon how students should be approached differently:

I have to be conscious in all my interactions. I have to be conscious. So when I stop and have a conversation with a gay student, have that conversation in the hall and students see me having a conversation with that student as with anyone else. That sends them a message when you do that. When I approach a group of black students, you don't approach them as if there is a problem already and approach them in an inquisitive manner, [but] in a manner of comradeship. That sends a message to them and to other
students as well. (Dean)

Dean’s comments allude to an authentic union of consciousness and action. Such union also reflects a sense of caring and connectedness which are attentive to the backgrounds and conditions of his students. By incorporating equity in approaching his students, he also models his beliefs and values.

As the saying goes: actions speak louder than words. The modeling practice also characterizes the leadership of Dean, Dora, Sara, and Sonia, who recognise the critical importance of the principals’ exemplification in schools. On one hand, modelling may concern the ways people should be treated and the goals that should be pursued. “If you show you value everyone equally, and if you model that, then people will do that as well.” (Sonia) On the other hand, modelling is also a dynamic and on-going process sustained by the value system of the leader. Sara, for instance, offers her insight on how she walks the talk with some suggestion of transparency:

I think you have to model it. All the time, you have to model: the language that you use. You have to model the philosophy, the belief. You have to always be talking and bringing those issues to the forefront. You cannot hide behind them. (Sara)

Dean echoes Sara by detailing how he leads by examples:

I think I have to model it in my day to day behaviour, and use the teachable mode. I can explain it to other staff and I do, but it’s not like I am going to give a lecture on social justice at the staff meeting. That's not going to work. But if something happened recently, I like to use an anecdote. So when I'm talking to my curriculum leaders, to my staff, just mention something that happened recently that illustrates injustices that we might be able to remedy. Or illustrate a good example of how we took social justice issues to our
awareness and did something good for a young person, to continuously make staff aware of the challenges that students face. I just had a stack of applications for a bursary. In each of those application things, we ask the students what's the challenge you faced in your life. I can’t read them all along. It's too heart-breaking. So I am thinking I could turn that into a teaching moment. I am going to find a way to share, without naming names, breaking confidentiality, to share some of those challenges ‘cause teachers...It's not something that you can learn once, and then you've learned it. You have to be conscious in your practice on a regular basis, ‘cause it's conscious... The kid who had to work until two o'clock at night to feed the family or the kid who's experiencing a big argument in their house the night before, or the police were there....It's not in the back in their mind. It's THERE. They're coming into your class, so you're going to think about the possibility of that, being conscious of the students. (Dean)

Dean raises an important point in addressing injustices: that is, to exhort to staff members and teachers by simply promoting the ideas may ring hollow or even run against the intended goals. Instead, leaders should walk the talk and ensure their action in congruence with their core beliefs and values. It is the leading by modeling that sends out the message and inspires people’s awareness of the injustices. The reality as perceived by staff and teachers can be deceiving. Through modeling, Dean ensures that the reality concerning his students is properly acknowledged by his staff and teachers so that they know where they stand, and how they should begin to help their students.

Modeling is also a form of implicit education carried out through daily actions. On one hand, Dean seizes each chance to turn that into a teachable moment. On the other hand, he educates people through modeling his practice for justice. However, participants (Dan, Hilda,
Molly, Paula, Paul, Sara) have also identified other approaches to educating their teachers, students and parents on social justice issues.

As a part of leadership practice, educating plays a very important role in addressing social justice issues. As Paul puts it:

I think if you can educate people that a person is a person regardless skin colour, or gender, or sexual orientation, if you level out how they treat everybody, then you're dealing with a lot of those social justice issues. (Paul)

In order to educate their students and teachers on justice issues, participants are employing a repertoire of strategies, such as bringing in guest speakers, holding staff meetings, working together with facilitators, and telling tales based on their own experiences. For example, Dan educates his students by inviting guest speakers to share their life experiences:

I brought in guest speakers who talk about their experiences being marginalized, being excluded. How they dealt with racism. So that children start saying: “OK. OK.” It's not just for the children who are excluded. For all: “Wow!” You have to bring the outside people as well who are going through the experiences. You're not to make them jaded. You just make them aware that the world is not a fair place, and to let them know that there is hope for them, understand how the system works as much you can. So they become advocates for themselves. They'll speak out for themselves. (Dan)

By inviting guest speakers to share their personal experiences and encounters with justice issues such as racism, Dan is able to address topics specific to social or economic justices, raise the awareness of his students on social justice issues, and encourage them to become advocates for justice.
Developing People for Social Justice

Developing people is among the most studied set of school leadership practices. Hallinger and Heck (1999) categorize leadership practices as “purpose, people, and structures and social system”. Conger and Kanungo (1998) label these categories “visioning strategies, efficacy-building strategies, and context changing strategies”. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) category labels are “setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional program”. However, these categories are identified by scholars whose focus is more on leadership practice and its contributions to student achievement and school success rather than to social justice.

Participants recognise that leading for social justice cannot be a one-person task; instead, it calls for collective efforts, particularly from teachers. A majority of the participants acknowledge that teachers are their most appreciable assets and are greatly valued for their importance in assisting principals with their commitment to social justice. In light of this, participants place great importance in developing people - the human resources - for equity and social justice. In order to develop people to work towards the social justice vision, participants employ various strategies, such as building equity in hiring practices, encouraging staff to take risk, educating and communicating with staff on justice issues, and empowering staff and work collaboratively towards school goals.

Building a team for social justice commences with hiring practices. Both Dean and Sonia agree that it is crucial for principals to have hiring powers to recruit staff who share their social justice values. Having like-minded teachers and staff that reflect student population can be a great facilitator (vice versa, an obstacle: please see Facilitators for social justice) to their social
justice work. Sonia recalled how she managed to diversify her staff in her previous school in order to reflect the multicultural student population:

I mean, my staff in my last school: When I went there, there were very Caucasian staff. Then I hired very multicultural staff when I was there. And it's a very Caucasian local environment, and a very multicultural bussed environment. So I was trying to build equity in my hiring practice which was really an interesting thing. Because here I have a country school and have all Caucasian, and all of sudden I had Muslim women with hijabs, people of colour. You know, it was an interesting thing for the community. (Sonia)

What Sonia does is to increase the recruitment of staff of colour to create an equitable working environment. Eventually she believes it will serve the purpose of achieving equity for her students. Other than hiring new staff and teachers, principals also need the savvy to know and identify the talent and capacity of their staff and put them in the right position so that their skills and expertise can come into full play. As Andy puts it:

Then it's trying to identify staff in the building. I am talking about the teaching, special care professional staff, so you support your staff as well as your teachers, trying to identify people who are going to bring a specific skill set in the building. That skill set is attitude as well, 'cause attitude is skill, in my opinion. It IS something. Besides, it is something you're born with. You know, I am born to help these kids. (Andy)

Andy raises a very important point that staff attitude is also part of their skills. How staff convey their attitude would affect what they do and how they approach challenges from their work (please see Obstacles and facilitators to social justice commitment). Managing staff attitude can be more complex than dealing with their behaviours. In a school where the entire student population needs special assistance, staff attitude towards their work and students plays a critical
role. In order to reap the best outcome, Andy indicates that “I want people who are thinking with their heads about what're going to be the best for those students and they are going to be able to have an emotional stand, to be able to do it.”

Clearly, a positive attitude, stable emotion, and teamwork are the most valuable resources that a principal can tap into. However, in order to accomplish certain goals, participants (Dora, Ella, and Roderick) find it imperative to develop leadership skills within their staffs and teachers by encouraging them to conceive ideas and take risks to execute them. Roderick offers an example of how he encourages his teacher to take the responsibility to initiate a gay/straight alliance:

That was very, very surprising for me when this teacher said to me that he [sic] is going to start a gay/straight alliance. We knew that we needed to do something in this area, but the teacher said: “Listen, I am going to do this. I am going to take a group of students to a workshop on sexual identity.” I said: “Great, go for it. Thank you for doing that.” Where I think I make a difference is to really encourage staff to take a risk, because up to that point, nothing has been done. I said to him: “You know, don’t feel bad if no one shows up. Don't feel bad, if only two show up. Even if two show up, that's a success.” I was pleasantly surprised that about 40 students showed up. That showed us that you know what, there was a need here. Students are ready to discuss issues like this. We just need to be able to give them forums and support to do that. (Roderick)

Implementing the conceived idea may risk failure. Roderick endeavours to dispel such misgivings by showing his support to his teacher. He also tries to convey to the teacher that it is the effort that matters more than the results. At times, other than having their own ideas, staff may tend to resist the idea put forward by the principal and are unwilling to make the efforts to
achieve it. In this case, the principal needs to encourage staff to take the initiative. Dora describes how she encourages her staff to help a visually impaired student on a field trip:

So you know, good examples that I am able to say to staff: “Look, look at this student. Look at what we've accomplished with that one student by now letting them in participation”. Last year, I had a group of kids that go to Quebec, first time that kids of the school have gone to Quebec for an extended field trip, which is pretty common in affluent communities. And I sent a visually impaired student on the trip. He wanted to go, completely blind, absolutely completely blind, visually impaired student. And my staff didn't want him to go. Again, the same, there is no reason at all that you can't go. NONE! He is the same as every other child. He just happens to be blind. And he is not getting into an accident. He is not getting hit by a bus. He is not going to be a problem. But this is what we have to do to make sure that it is a successful experience for him. We had to do this. We had to do that [making sure his chaperon was in the next room]. You know all these types of steps to make sure. Five years ago, that student would have been excluded. Yeah, big difference. I am really proud of it. (Ella)

Ella successfully talks her staff into taking the adventure. In order to help them to get out of their comfort zones, she encourages them to take the chance by having conversation with them. A few other participants (Paula, John) have also mentioned having difficult conversations with their staff to facilitate their work. For example, Paula commented:

The other piece is having some of those courageous conversations. I have one teacher say: "Well, the reason that our kids can't learn is because they don't have the experiences." So it was about saying: "What do you mean by that?" And really looking at what, whose experiences do you want them to have? They have experiences. But they don't have OUR
experiences. And I always found, for me as a principal, it helped to be part of THEM. I never made myself separate. (Paula)

Through such conversation with her staff, Paula challenges their implicit biases and deficit thinking that negatively impact student performance. It also raises teachers’ awareness and prompts them to adopt pedagogies that are culturally relevant and responsive to the students with diverse backgrounds. The courageous conversation can be broad enough to cover a variety of justice issues and it aims to effect change by providing solutions. John summarizes:

Well, we shouldn't be afraid to be talking about some of the real issues that we deal with.
I shouldn't be afraid to talk about poverty that exists with some of our students. It's real.
There is no sense of me pretending that doesn't exist. It's more about let's talk about and let's find solutions, and engaging staff, engaging the school community as a way of addressing that. We can't ignore. This is what I say about courageous conversation. We need to talk about it, talk about solutions to move our agendas forward. (John)

Courageous conversation can give people new understanding and spirit needed to move the agenda forward to reach the common goals.

To put the resolution into action, empowering teachers to take the lead is equally important as empowering the students (please see Students at the Centre). Maxwell (1993) argues that “the one who influences others to lead is a leader without limitations” (p. 116). Rather than sitting at the top of the hierarchical pyramid, participants (Dora, Ron, Sonia) demonstrate their leadership by empowering and developing leadership in teachers. Ron expresses his view of teacher empowerment by using an analogy:

You know the jigsaw puzzle. My father loved it before he died. He loved to do it. When he retired, he really loved to do jigsaw puzzles, but he always taught us as kid: It's always
best to do the outside puzzle first, because those are the easiest pieces to find because they all have one square edge on them. So my job is, when I look at a school as a puzzle, is to provide the framework, the outside frame for it. And then my job is to encourage and empower and enable my staff to bring the pieces when you need to the puzzle, and to be aware when...You know, because sometimes as a school hopefully if you're growing and evolving, something you did three years ago may have run its course.. And we've done that. We have couple of programs that we used to do and we no longer do, because we don't need them any more here. OK, so my job is to always be aware of that and help focus on the picture, but we build that picture together. (Ron)

Two things emerge from Ron’s “jigsaw puzzle theory”. First, as a visionary leader, Ron not only sees the big picture, but also knows where he stands in it. More importantly, he is able to communicate to and share it with his team, in other words, empower his staff to take the responsibilities. Second, to work their way towards his vision, he encourages collaborative work which has become part of his school culture. Empowerment also adds value to sustainable leadership. As Dora puts it:

Well, we've moved from that model to teachers running it now without me, which is great. Because that means to me that they have adopted and are able to carry that on if I walk out the door tomorrow. ‘Cause that to me is real social justice. It shouldn't be one person doing it all. You're trying to give that leadership, that ability to others to follow that vision when you're gone ‘cause one person can't do it. So I am glad I’ve empowered staff to do that. I believe more importantly, we moved from bringing in outsiders to run those workshops, non-school staff to school staff offering those workshops in part. (Dora)

Dora’s comments imply that through empowerment, she creates an environment in which
teachers have adopted shared leadership and spirit of collaboration as a way of life and are able to carry on her legacy to work toward the social justice vision.

**Building a Positive School Community through Social Justice**

As one of the keywords in education, “community” can be as physically unconfined as it is rhetorically amorphous. This makes it harder to define unless it is preceded by a modifier, such as classroom community, school community, professional learning community, parent community, to name a few. No matter how community is defined, one unquestioned idea is that schools per se are communities of some sort as well as a part of the larger community to which they belong.

Building a positive school community is as important as fostering an equitable school climate (Please see *My job is social justice* of Chapter 4). It is to bring together all stakeholders to create a school environment that can ensure success socially and academically for every student. To build community, participants (Dan, Dean, Hilda, Paula, Sean, Sonia) find that they need not only welcome the parents in by showing their care and respect but also get out of the school and reach out to the community. This is particularly true in the neediest communities where family may not have the means to engage effectively in school activities.

This is the case at Dean’s school which is located in a low-income neighbourhood:

For example, with another teacher, we went to the [name] community centre, that's a housing project. We actually filled out course selection sheets for students. So go to the community! Actually I am trying to build that strategy more strongly. Couple of weeks ago, we went to [name] and had a meeting with families and students in their community, because it's not enough to say: “You never show up for our parents and teachers night.
You never show up.” Well, if you don't, what we're going to do about it? We're going to complain about it? No, we're going to go OUT there to YOUR territory. (Dean)

In order to support student learning, Dean takes the initiative to get to know its needs by reaching out to the external school community. It is a first step conducive to establishing relationships with the parent community. Nevertheless, fostering good community relations commences with building trust. Dan explains at length:

It's [building trust] day by day thing. Non-judgmental. Caring. Spending as much time as I can listening to the people when they need me, helping them, caring about their children and in genuine, not phony, and spending time outside the office when welcoming them, and making sure that they feel welcome in the school. When they walk in, you're smiling: “How can I help you?” So they feel they are being treated with the respect they should be. Their children, they go home from the school, should feel like they are valued, they are cared for and loved. They will tell their parents: “This is the school where I count. I am an important person at the school.” If you don't have that, they won't trust you to allow you then to help. When parents need help and kids need help, then you can try to get other community organisations in to help you, get the social worker in to see if they can find funding to help this person get food, things like that. (Dan)

Dan points out that building trust is to break it down on a daily basis, which requires patience, caring, respect, and love. Dan’s comments also reveal another interesting point that parents are unwilling to accept any goodwill from the school unless there exists mutual trust. It is the bond of trust that dispels the misgivings of the parents and empowers them with a sense of acceptance. Sonia expresses a similar view that the only way to win people’s trust is to accept them with genuine care and respect for who they are:
We put families in touch with social services if they need social support. We've done that. I can tell you, we have a family where the parent told us it was Easter. They said they didn't have any money for Easter eggs and baskets for their kids. I had a secretary leave all that on the front step. So we're trying to touch people's lives in a positive way and I don't know, if you do all those things, things are going well for you. It's not your fault, you know. If you are positive with people, when you talk about social justices, you know, it's how we treat people every day. It doesn't matter what colour somebody is, or culture, or faith, or age, or gender or sexual orientation. It's how you treat people. Celebrate people for who they are. Somebody once said to me: “Oh, I am colour blind.” No, you're not colour blind. Celebrate people's colour. You know, that's a silly expression. I hate that. But I don't know. I think we do a good job here with that. I think this school does a good job with celebrating everybody, making people feel valued from a social justice standpoint. (Sonia)

Building community is not only to accept but also to celebrate the difference. In terms of racial difference, Sonia upholds colour consciousness rather than colour blindness.

Additionally, building community also means breaking down the barriers that impede the establishment of a positive relationship between schools and parents. In doing so, Paula manages to marshal supports in bringing in the parents:

What I did was I reduced the barriers that existed. So I took away the language [barrier] because I had interpreters. I made sure that there was child care provided. I made sure there was bussing from the community that lived a little far, farther away in the apartment [building] because they didn't have cars. So we took away all the barriers. Then we brought both groups together. And the conversation that went cross cultural, cross race,
cross faith. They soon realized the walk-in community: "Wait a minute, these people care just as much as we do". So what happened is that allowed for that community building to happen. And next thing you know, I see kids all of a sudden going out to each other's houses, before they wouldn't, because there was a comfort level that parents set. It's unknown. They don't know who they are. So that was the way I dealt with the parents. Slowly all three things were happening at the same time. And you could then see some changes happening. (Paula)

What Paula accomplishes is not merely a caring community within and around the school, but a community that draws everyone closer by creating a congenial social interaction among students and families. Such a community is seen by Hilda as a means to increase social justice:

I would say that if I was to tell you what I've accomplished in this community, I think that what we've accomplished, we had a true partnership and a mutually trusting relationship between the parents, the community, the kids and the staff and that we are all really clear about the fact that everything we do is to help our kids be as successful as possible, regardless of their race, their religion, their ableism, whatever it is that they bring to school. Our job is to put all of the supports and structures in place to equalize the playing field for them. (Hilda)

It is clearly evident that building a caring community is not only conducive to individual well-being of the students, but also creates a sense of ownership, thus enhancing the overall equity for all.

Social Justice Vision and Commitment

Foresight is the “lead” that the leader has. Once he [sic] loses this lead and events start to
force his hand, he is leader in name only. He is not leading; he is reacting to immediate events and he probably will not long be a leader. There are abundant current examples of loss of leadership which stem from a failure to foresee what reasonably could have been foreseen, and from failure to act on that knowledge while the leader has freedom to act. (Greenleaf, 1991, p. 18)

Greenleaf’s comments reveal the very essence of leadership, that is, having a vision. Vision is the objective or direction manifested in the beliefs, values and actions of leaders and shared and followed by their staff. More than half of the participants (Andy, Dan, Dora, Elaine, Hilda, Ida, John, Kate, Paula, Sara) emphasize the importance of building a consensus among their staff about long- and short-term goals. What one sees is what one can be. Dora reiterates that having a vision is knowing where you want to be:

If you don't have the vision of what you want your school to be, who you want your kids to be, helping them to be the husband, wife, partner, neighbour of your child or of yourself, then that's more important work. It's harder work. You don't always see success right away. It might take years to reach every kid and be a success. The kids walk away or graduate, some of them don't come back. Some of them do come back and say "thank you". So those pieces take time. And you see a cultural change in the building where the staff and students own the building. That's a social justice issue to me. (Dora)

Dora’s remarks imply that developing a vision that cares for social justice may take time and efforts, particularly when the vision is to shape students’ lives. Vision is palpable, but the future of students may appear intangible in the short term. Therefore, the next step in vision is to commit to the picture being envisioned. As such, Elaine points out that it is essential to clearly articulate the vision, get people to see the possibilities, and enlist them into the mission:
Successful leader is having goals in mind, having a vision in mind based on students, student learning, trying to fulfill a vision for students and learning in a way that respects and honours people in the building, students, people in the building. Trying to get people to come there to buy into your vision to get them through consensus. But if you have an idea where you want to go, you're not going do a big announcement that... You'll announce what the vision is and work with the people. As you move on and continue for the vision. You need to have a clear articulated vision. You need to be aware of people's emotions and feelings, and get them buy-in through that as well. (Elaine)

Elaine expresses that two important elements for being a successful leader are to know where you are going and to be able to persuade others to follow. Moreover, Paula indicates that instilling a social justice vision requires collective efforts to make it happen:

> With the staff, we focus a lot on mission and vision, and looking at "what do we believe as educators?" So we worked towards our mission and vision and worked collaboratively together so that piece was happening. But once we had that established, we did a lot of training in my second year of the school, because the first year the boundary change hadn't happened. The second year, we did the mission and vision at the beginning. Then we worked pretty much all year. One staff meeting a month, which was dedicated to issues of social justice. And so we started with stereotypes and biases that we hold as individuals. We moved into the notions of power and privilege. And then eventually over the course of the year, we moved into inclusive curriculum. So that was the way I worked with staff. (Paula)

Paula is working hard to engage with her staff and provides them with various opportunities and resources to build their knowledge and the tools they need to deliver and achieve the vision. In
addition, three participants (Andy, Dora, and Sonia) imply that it is significant to build sustainability into the vision to have a positive impact on their schools, thus allowing them to thrive. Dora expresses how she anticipates her legacy if one day she steps out of her current school:

That’s important to me, that things are going to continue when I walk out of the door, if I get moved to a new school tomorrow or retire or whatever. I am a little bit young for that. So, for whatever reason I leave this building, I think that programs will continue to be here. So you have to balance that piece out. So that’s leadership. (Dora)

According to Dora, having a vision of sustainability is to incorporate her values, beliefs, and equitable actions into her daily practices and aspire for them to take hold at the operating level.

**Obstacles to Social Justice Commitment**

While tackling the complex issue of social justice, participants are constantly faced with alarming challenges and obstacles that impede their efforts and commitment toward their goals. Such challenges and obstacles pertain to all interest groups and touch upon various important aspects of school community. Central to these challenging issues are resources, which comprise physical materials, money, time, and personnel.

Nevertheless, the obstacles that prohibit participants from successfully achieving their goals for justice and equity come from principals themselves. Ron presents a good example of how principals’ mindset affects their social justice endeavours:

There are always obstacles. I think the biggest obstacle I face is thinking outside the box. I think education exists in a box and your thinking 90% of the time is within that box. I don't believe educators really triumph except those who are willing to step out the box.
That's unfortunate, I know, because people will come to me and say: “We see phenomenal changes in behaviour, academics and the whole thing,” and they will say to me that “You must be busy giving talks on this.” You know, talking to other principals, “Your board must be driving you crazy getting you to do this and do that.” I say: “No, they are not. They don't.” I think the biggest obstacle is, when I do talk to people, is the mindset that the general response I get is: “Well, that's truly nice. That will work in your school, but won't work in my school.” And my responses become: “It won't work or you're not prepared to try to see if it will work? Because there is a vast difference between these two. Because anything you do in a positive vein will make things better. It's not about ‘it won't’. It's about ‘you won't’.” The other one I get is: “Well you know, you must get all kinds of funding.” “No, we don't. Everything we've done in the school, all the programs, everything else are out there. They are free to anybody. You just got to look for it.” (Ron)

Ron’s description points out that being a leader basically requires a mindset that is open to expand thinking and embrace potential growth professionally and intellectually. Failing to do so will result in a leader who remains stagnant and loses the momentum for change. Dan shares the similar view that belief drives performance and contribution:

A barrier can be as well that equity and social justice is so big. You don't know where to start. So we pick what do our children need in this school, not system wide. What do our kids need and what are we going to do to help them? Don't pick 500 things, one or two and do them well. It's so big. People say: “It's too big, I can't do it. Equity? I don't even know what that means. It's so big. I got a million things to know.” One or two things. Pick what you're going to do and do them well. (Dan)
The very existence of these large numbers of issues establishes that principals, for the most part, have to act strategically in support of the most urgent and important problems that occur in schools. Therefore, as Dan suggests, principals need the skills and knowledge to triage and prioritize (please see *Positioning as a leader*) in the face of a broad spectrum of social justice issues. However, Dan’s comments also imply that success is all about one as a leader. If one believes it, one can do it.

In addition to the barriers that concern principals themselves, issues surrounding staff and teachers pose another great challenge to principals. A majority of participants have identified disbelief and lack of understanding from staff, their attitude, mentality, and values, change of staff, and other related issues as hindering their social justice work.

Of barriers from staff, Paula, for example, asserts: “Number one I think is people's belief that kids can learn. You need to believe that all kids can learn. We just need to unlock that. So that's deficit thinking. Deficit thinking number one!” Based on her training experience from the Ministry of Education, Paula presents an example of what deficit thinking is and how it affects leadership and teaching practices as well as students’ learning:

For example, in one of our ministry sessions, my ministry colleague showed them Mona Lisa, the picture of Mona Lisa and said: "The kids should be able to answer how and why questions, critical questions about this text." So here is my opportunity. I said: "Great! We are using media text, visual text. We are getting away from just written text. Love it! Actually kids could critically think!" I go back. "Look at our population in [District School Board]! Are you really going to show them Mona Lisa?" And one of the ministry folks said: "Yeah. Everybody knows Mona Lisa!" I said: "No! You know the Mona Lisa as a European Caucasian person." I go: "I grew up here. I know Mona Lisa. The chances
are our south Asian and black children don't know who the Mona Lisa is”. So if you start with Mona Lisa and ask how and why questions, and you ask them to critically think. And they can't do it. What do we as teachers say? ‘They CAN’T think!’” I go back: "If you start with something from their experiences so that you can teach them how to critically think. Then you could move to the Mona Lisa later. But if you start with Mona Lisa right away, it's deficit thinking. They can't do it! Then we say: ‘What’d we do?’ We dumbed down the curriculum for these kids. We gave them worksheets. We say: ‘Go do your vocabulary. You know, you don't ...you are not ready to think!’ Yet, the problem is not the kids. It's the teachers and these resources that we selected”. In that respect, I try to bring in the knowledge, the whereabouts, in terms of, like real consciousness in terms of what we are selecting for the kids, what we as teachers can do to move that. (Paula)

In Paula’s view, this type of deficit thinking induces teachers to attribute students’ academic and social struggles to their “inability” rather than their life experience. Teachers who practice deficit thinking thus become barriers to both students and the principal, preventing them from moving forward successfully. However, when it comes to the central focus of deficit thinking, Garcia and Guerra (2004) argue that it is important not to problematize the situation by merely centering on teachers, as it may “detract from the critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students” (p. 154).

Deficit thinking is endogenous. It also manifests itself in teachers’ awareness of social justice issues. Such deficit thinking hinders principal leadership for equity and social justice. Dan indicates how conventional thinking or deficit mentality that prevails among teachers affects his social justice efforts:

There're always obstacles. The obstacle one is people who don't believe. Staff members
don't believe in the cause. Don't believe! “There is nothing wrong! The world is fair. Dan, you're nuts!” They don't believe you: “They're just not working hard enough. The poor deserve it. They are not as good as I am. I am middle class. I haven't gone through discrimination. I haven't been discriminated against. I haven't!” But I've talked with enough people in the last thirty years to know what's real, and it's every day and it exists. So you got people who aren't aware that there is discrimination. There're all these different things at work. So they don't see: “What? There is no need for that! I'll do it but I am not going to do a good job about it. I'm not going to work hard at it. Yeah, we just do it, ’cause we're told we have to do it.” So you’ll have to do a good job as a principal really saying why? Look, let's look what happens. We know that one of the biggest reasons why a woman goes into poverty is the age which she has her first child. She has it really young. She is more likely to be in poverty. So things like that, you have to educate the people you’re with. (Dan)

Dan’s comments are illustrative of the deficit mentality that is embedded in teachers’ values and belief systems and manifested in their daily practice. Likewise, Dean echoes his belief that “The obstacles are fairly deeply embedded middle class values. The middle class values are of conformity, of compliance, of blind acknowledgement of hierarchy. Those values are deeply embedded in some of the teachers.” Such mentality is indubitably incompatible with both Dan’s and Dean’s equity commitment. To overcome the barriers inflicted by deficit mentality from teachers, Dan acknowledges it is important to take the time to educate teachers about what’s best for students.

Dean also adds the sentiment that lack of creativity or imagination can become a barrier to social justice work. He comments:
I also think it's kind of just a lack of creativity sometimes, just [lack] of imagination [lack] of so much creativity, lack of imagination to be able to put yourself into someone else's shoes, to think the world could run a little bit differently than it does sometimes, to see that the world won't fall apart if we relax, because there is real intolerances some people have for ambiguity. Even some people who are very strong social justice advocates don't have much of tolerance for ambiguity. I don't think you can make progress unless you have a tolerance for ambiguity. But it is that lack of tolerance for ambiguity that locks some teachers in to a place where..., I think they even want to be doing a better job, but they can't. They see education as such a structured process. When we have such a diverse group of learners, they have trouble with that. That's a huge obstacle. (Dean)

Dean sees lack of creativity and imagination as contributing to reluctance to think outside the box. To overcome such discomfort and act innovatively, one must develop openness to uncertainty and ambiguity. Dean’s comments on intolerance of ambiguity is reminiscent of Wilkinson’s (2006) work which argues that what makes a great leader is the ability to recognise, explore, and profit from ambiguous and chaotic situations and lead others in a manner that creates opportunity, innovation, and competitive advantage. Dean implies that teachers and social justice leaders need to work on their attitudes to and tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty that impede the ability to spark new ideas and reach great breakthroughs in their social justice practice.

In addition to staff attitude and mentality that impinges on principals’ social justice efforts, a few participants (Ella, John, Ida) acknowledge staff changes and collective agreement may also restrict and disrupt the flow of their work. Ella expresses her concern with how staff turnover impacts her work:
The other thing that really hinders sort of working together as staff is the changes to your team that happen. So staff that leave, staff that are retiring. I experience a lot here. So you hit a critical mass, and then a key player that you have moves on to another position, gets promoted, or moved to another school. I am a small school. So my staff is very small. So when one member leaves, that person takes their own professional knowledge with them and the whole group dynamics also changes. (Ella)

Ella’s remarks raise the persistent issue of teacher retention. According to Ella, unplanned teacher changes affect the overall capacity of the school and create new staffing problems that may disrupt the efforts to achieve educational equity.

Unlike Ella, John and Ida express their discomfort with respect to contracts that define most of the working conditions of teachers. As Ida points out:

The other thing that hinders us is the collective agreement of teachers that limits our staff meetings to once a month, for only 75 minutes. There are other things you have to do. This is not our only initiative. So truly we don't have a lot of time to work with the staff to really get them passionate. We have some people here that have taken a run with it. It would be better if we could make it a little broader so that we could really support what the program looks like in the classrooms. There is only that once a month. (Ida)

The resistance or barriers may vary from principals, particularly for those who are from minority backgrounds. For example, Paula recalls how she encountered the resistance from her teachers when she was striving to diversify her teaching staff in order to reflect the diversity of her students:

Sometimes what happens was when principals become social justice leaders, they become type cast. They say: for example, “All she cares about is equity and diversity
because she is black, because she is mad at the world.” But as a South Asian person, I heard people say about other South Asian principals: “All she cares about equity and diversity because she is brown.” But nobody said that about me, because I think I've learned how to play the game. I learned how to negotiate that space and walk that tightrope. So that people still take me seriously on student achievement, but still see me as advocating for social justice. (Researcher: How about a Caucasian principal who also has a commitment to social justice?) Then he is gay! That's what they would say. In my own school, when I hired whole bunch of South Asian staff, because my students, 300 were South Asians. The comment by some of the teachers was: “I think they are all related somehow!” And I had a courageous conversation with the whole staff, in front of the whole staff, I said: “My predecessor was white. She hired a lot of white staff. Did anybody make a comment that they were all related? ” (Paula)

It is noteworthy that challenges and difficulties that minority administrators encounter in their social justice efforts may appear unique and challenging. In Paula’s case, how to turn the negative challenging work experience into positive factors has become an important part of her administrative work.

Many participants (Dan, Dora, Ella, Freda, Ida, Molly, Sara, Sean, Sonia) refer to the scarcity of time as a constraint in their every day work. Although participants struggle to allocate time across leadership domains through prioritizing or triage (please see *Positioning as a leader*), they still find it challenging to bear numerous demands for the limited time and ensure a wise investment of it in building their school capacity. The following comments are illustrative:

The time is the thing that's most critical. I am sure you heard that over and over again.

And the competing demands of the time you have. Your flow gets interrupted. You can
find yourself on a path with the teachers, but your flow gets interrupted by something like reporting period where you have to write report cards, or when there is a break. There is Christmas break, or there is spring break, or there is a summer break. The flow gets interrupted. (Ella)

I would like more time because this job is very busy. I would like time to be able to walk through the neighbourhoods and just spend time with families. I would like that opportunity. The thing is that often I get mired in paperwork, you know, just running the school. (Sonia)

And time is a problem because teachers are booked. They are solid. They are in their classrooms. To pull them out is difficult. (Molly)

Ella, Sonia, and Molly reveal some common issues faced by principals: disruption of their work is curtailing the opportunities to continuously engage teachers; the overloading of paperwork is sapping their time and strength to fulfill other tasks; and the busyness of teachers is precluding the amount of time that could be spent on the collaborative work of teachers and principals to accomplish social justice missions.

Time allocations bear directly upon the performance of principals’ leadership activities. Regardless of the overall responsibilities, Sean presents an example of how one particular incident could dominate time and energy:

So there are more tasks for the administrator than there is time to address these tasks. The people, the kids always come first. Before you came, I have two students... Each investigation is time-consuming because you have to go through ELSR to understand the student's background. You have to interview the victim, the witnesses. You have to look at the surveillance cameras which we have. But that takes time. Of course, you need to
speak to the parents of the victim. Once all that is done, the perpetrator himself needs the opportunity. But they are barred from being on the property because the police have placed conditions preventing them from being where the victim is. That means I do it on the phone or out in the community. Once that happens, I still have to speak to the parent of the alleged perpetrator. Time consuming, because it needs to be. While that's happening, I am sure people are emailing me, wondering: “Where is the principal? I need to see the principal! Why isn't the principal responding?” So when you pull all that together, it's lots of work. So you always feel you are 12 steps behind. (Sean)

Sean’s account reveals the problems of time management and “putting out fires”. He indicates that spending too much time dealing with the daily emergency in and about the school puts urgency and stress in his days and distracts him from thinking and attending to other work that really matters. Such distractions may discourage the heartiest of principals.

In addition to the lack of time, Sara adds another sentiment that the way time is allocated for different events and celebrations can be problematic in achieving social justice:

No, the real issue is the time thing. Schools are built on old archaic models. If you really work hard trying to deal with those social justice issues, you don't want to have them where it’s just like this month we are going to look at respect; next month we are going to look at being caring; next month.... Those are the piecemeal Band-Aid solutions. That’s what I would say is an issue. It's really finding the time, as administrator to get those social justice issues to become part of the culture of the school, where they stick. You don't want it to be a one-time deal. Like I hate that I deal with black history month. It's A MONTH. Why are we only talking about it: it's A month! Like, those things don't make sense to me anymore. It seems to me that we evolve beyond that. All those things should
just be weaved into the culture. So that's really probably the only issue. How do you do so it's sustainable? And again, becomes part of the culture, not a one-shot deal. (Sara)

Sara questions the continued usefulness of a month dedicated to a particular theme or the history of one race. She contends that simply apportioning the time to commemorate or promote different events or values undermines the general social justice ethos. Rather than build a patchwork from different pieces, it renders more significance to tie in all pieces and incorporate them into the school culture.

Furthermore, money matters as much as time does. A few participants (Andy, Dan, Dean, Dora, John, Molly) say that one of the biggest barriers can be having sufficient money to defray expenses necessary for social justice work. The following is illustrative of their comments about limited funding and its restrictions on effective performance of their work:

Barrier can be money too, because a lot of times you want to take whatever you're doing, you want to bring in resources. If I want to bring people to speak, if I want to take them to places, so they see outside of here, or get different things, you need money. You need money! That can be a big barrier if you're looking at promoting social justices. You're looking at all the...You need to have resources that support not just whites, but everyone. So what are the supports? This could be books. This could be excursions. This could be guest speakers. This could be a whole bunch of things, but everything costs money. (Dan)

Sometimes funding. Making sure funds are...we come back to that funding issue, reprioritize certain things. We have to make money available in our budget for those kinds of initiatives. If we don't put money aside, it's not going to happen that easily. (John)

There is not enough money. I don't have enough money to do what I need to do. You know about funding inequities. That's certainly a challenge. Merely enough money!
Clearly, money is directly or indirectly wrapped up in some way with any decisions that participants make with respect to their social justice work. Bound by such restraints, Dan, John and Molly have to find new and creative ways to allocate resources that maximize the benefits and address the most pressing needs of their schools.

Other than the barriers that originate from the resources with regard to personnel, time, and money, paradoxically, the formidable obstacle that lies across the road to equity is social injustice per se (please see Social injustices in schools, Chapter 4), for example, students’ poverty. Five participants (Ella, Dan, Dean, Hilda, John) express their concerns about the poverty issue, which poses tremendous challenge to their work. As Dan puts it:

Poverty brings its own issues, because kids who're living in poverty here are just as smart as every other kid. But their parents are working two, or three jobs. They don't have as much time. They are under a lot of pressure at home. And so that's why poverty itself is a barrier unless you get more resources, more staffing, more opportunities for the children to experience things outside the classroom, because if they just go home, they have to help their mom out, or dad out who are working three jobs. They're not going to be able to go out, or to dialogue, to have these experiences that help them grow. So that we have to do that during school. That's a barrier too. (Dan)

There is an implication in Dan’s comments that poverty’s impact on students’ social and academic performance and life chances is intertwined with the complex organisational, ethical, and professional challenges facing leaders who serve high-poverty schools.
Facilitators for Social Justice

What has been identified as hindrances to principals’ social justice work can possibly transform into facilitators. Both challenges and obstacles, no matter how formidable they appear, if channelled with sagacity and savvy, can create great opportunities to advance social justice commitment and enhance the potential for success. Interestingly, a majority of the participants acknowledges that it is the teachers, the students, and the parents who facilitate school change and contribute to the advancement of social justice. When participants offer their complete support and trust, everything becomes possible; the scarcity of time and the shortage of money, funding and other resources become relatively insignificant and surmountable.

Several participants (Elaine, Dan, Dora, John, Paula, Roderick, Sara, Sonia) credit teachers with being great facilitators, not only in students’ learning, but also in the social justice cause. Roderick, for instance, indicates that having supportive teachers who are active proponents of social justice contributes significantly to his ongoing efforts in creating actions around social justice issues in education:

I think we have an amazing staff who also have a real commitment to doing what they feel is right in the areas of social justice and equity. That's very helpful. A lot of our initiatives have been facilitated by the staff. (Roderick)

Teachers play a very important role in recognizing and combating inequities in schools and promoting social justice in their teaching. However, first and foremost, in order to garner their support and get them on board, Dan asserts that principals need to inspire and educate teachers to grow into that role:

[Facilitators are] Definitely staff members. This is where you have to convince others, if they're not aware of it, that this is an important cause, this is an important thing, so it
becomes part of who they are. It's in their belly! They want to fight for those kids! But you have to TELL them! You have to... If they're not aware of, we have to open their eyes. You get the staff members going. The teachers are more important than a principal. Every school! Teachers are always more important to the children, NOT the principal! The principal has to really work and educate and teach the staff members about this, because you can't always hire. There're no jobs now in education. There's none! You're not hiring these teachers who you can teach this to. All the jobs are gone for the next number of years. There's no hiring. So you've got to deal with the staff we've got. So teachers, staff members are your biggest, biggest facilitators. (Dan)

Dan’s comments underscore the thesis that teachers are the most critical group in education and the more efforts are made in developing teachers, the greater possibility goals will be fulfilled. Understanding the impact of teachers on equity and social justice is vital, and teachers who are critically conscious of diversity in education will be great assets for principals with a social justice commitment. Dora expresses a similar view:

As a principal, you need to understand what people's lives are like and balance that all out. You need staff who are able to give to kids outside the classroom, you need staff who feel confident in their ability to do their contractual job and then give the other things. 'Cause the other things are all optional, right? You don't get paid extra for running the sports team or running the chess club, or coming in on Sundays and Saturdays to run the chess tournament. They don't get paid extra for that. (Dora)

Dora points out that teachers can be great facilitators for change if they are personally committed to the success of the students and are willing to assume the responsibility to contribute to the social justice cause.
Additionally, Paula believes that bringing teachers who reflect the diversity of the students can also facilitate the deliberative practice of engaging teachers and staff in fostering justice for all:

The other piece that I have to say is out of a staff of sixteen that I started with ended up with twenty-four. When I went in, there was one person of colour. And now when I left, there's twelve. So it also helped to bring in staff that were from diverse backgrounds and that represented the kids. So right away, the conversation changes in the staff room, because there's "other" there. Some of that was strategically done. Some of that what I believe was good for kids. (Paula)

Moreover, several participants (Andy, John, Paul, Roderick) expound the belief that students themselves are great facilitators in changing the system of oppression. Roderick, for example, indicates that the biggest facilitator is the energy of his students:

Kids are just so energized, so excited, so enthusiastic about doing things. That definitely facilitates. Be able to take the energy! I see my role not so much as trying to build energy but to take that already existing energy in the students, as I said earlier, focus it in different ways so that we're not working against each other. (Roderick)

Roderick’s comments illustrate that students are passionate about learning and active in taking on responsibilities. A principal’s job is to identify students’ capacities and strengths and channel their energy in ways which aim to promote social justice as a fundamental mandate.

Additionally, both John and Paul echo Roderick’s view that students’ engagement contributes towards setting a social justice agenda as a moral imperative for their work:

I like to say that it's easy when you have wonderful students that come up with ideas.

And I just give the blessing. That's what my experience here and my previous school has
been about that. Very positive student leaders that we've had. I've come across with that, have been so in tune with, really help out, so giving. That is just speaks of the quality of our students we have in our school. So makes our job a lot easier. That's the case. Certainly here in my present school. My three years here, this is my third year. We have very engaging students, very focused students that had a strong sense of others, and working towards helping others. (John)

What facilitates as well is... I think now much more than ten or fifteen years ago, students are wanting to take on those issues. It doesn't have to be initiated by staff members, but it's students who often come forward and say: “Here is a problem that we'd like to address. Here is an issue that we want to work on.” We have staff members who support that, and sponsor them, and help them along, but a lot of the initiatives come from the students. (Paul)

It is evident in John’s and Paul’s comments that through their participation, students not only demonstrate and further develop their social and problem-solving skills, but also prepare themselves for their civic roles as social justice advocates.

At times, external support from parents and the board can also act as facilitators. In Dan’s experience, having parents to share their lived experiences can help to infuse the social justice values into all major components of the school: “Another facilitator would be parents in the community who would come in and educate you the principal, educate your kids, educate your staff about their life experiences. You bring them in” (Dan).

Substantive support, however, whether it comes from teachers, students, parents or boards, is never sufficient to facilitate a principal’s daily operation if principals themselves are not supportive of any of the social justice efforts by different interest groups. Participants (Dean,
Dora, Freda, Hilda, Ida, Roderick, Sara, Sonia) agree that support from principals matters as much as it does from teachers, students, parents and boards. Dora reflects how she supports her teachers to take on new responsibilities:

I need to be offering them the supports, the resources, the money, whatever it is they need, nodding my head: “Yes, let's see how we can make this work. OK! That day doesn't work. What about this? Let's plan in advance.” I need to work with staff, talk to them. For example, “What else can I do to support this?” I want them to be able to answer those types of questions I want to give people the ability to say: “I want to take the risk and if I fail, that the principal will be there to pick up the pieces with me. Then we'll try it again, different way next time. That's important to me.” I want people to try new things. They can ask themselves, and me, what do I need? (Dora)

Dora’s account reveals that principals’ leadership is a key component in ensuring that a culture of support is embedded within their schools. Such support embodies not only material resources but also a sense of empowerment and caring, which in turn will motivate teachers to provide care for their students. As Ida points out: “It takes the team. Obviously the teachers teach these kids all day every day. Administrators support the teacher so that the teacher can support the children, so the children will be successful. That's our job.” Clearly, the principal plays a key role in creating a collaborative learning environment that contributes to nurturing teachers who can dedicate themselves to students’ success.

Principals’ support also is exhibited in their care for their students:

And if you make a really big mistake, it might be hard for me to stuff it back into the box and there may be consequences for that mistake. But when you come back, we're really happy that you're back and we're going to do everything we can to figure out how we can
move forward and put that behind us. So that's a fundamental piece in social justice. And I think that when you have all of the pieces in place, the most important is being trust and a sense of hope, and you get into that place where the child has made a really big mistake, then the parents, and the school, and the child go together in partnership to deal with that consequence and then to support the child to come back and move forward. (Hilda)

Hilda’s comments reveal that it is principals’ responsibility to ferret out the structure and politics of the school to assist their students to surmount the impediments and gain new opportunities to be successful.

**Summary**

It is evident from the data presented in this chapter that social justice leadership manifests itself in terms of being, becoming, knowing, and doing. Being social justice leaders, participants demonstrate their care, passion, integrity, courage, and optimism in striving to usher in the transformation to an equitable education for all. Meanwhile, they also undergo an inner journey, thinking and reflecting about themselves, their values and beliefs, and their positioning as social justice advocates in relation to their interaction with others. In the course of their moral quest for justice and equity, they learn and grow, personally and professionally, tenaciously striving for a better position to challenge economic, political, and social structures that privilege some over others. Notwithstanding the formidable barriers from different interest groups, they hold out their vision which embraces an education that is “not only just, democratic, emphatic, and optimistic, but also academically excellent” (Furman & Shields, 2005, p. 123).
In the next chapter, I look into principals’ perceptions of accountability and accountability policies and their political struggle in juggling between promoting social justice and equity and meeting the mandates of the accountability movement.
Chapter 6
Tempering Accountability Policy with Social Justice

*Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.* – Martin Luther King, Jr.

School leaders increasingly bear the brunt of the accountability reform movement, epitomized in the United States by *No Child Left Behind* and in Canada by standardized tests, such as EQAO mandates in Ontario. Such political pressure shapes contours of their daily practice and directs their attention towards improving teaching and learning with an ultimate goal of enhancing the overall performance of their schools. However, there is a compelling need to be clear about what accountability means and what new insights should be brought into accountability reform that claims commitment to equity and excellence. This chapter will look into what accountability means to school principals, how they perceive, understand, and respond thoughtfully and sagaciously to the mounting demands for accountability in education, and the actions they take to temper accountability mandates with justice and equity.

**Conceptualizing Accountability**

With increasing emphasis on accountability in education policy, accountability has become an educational watchword that bears multiple meanings. However, a majority of participants agree that accountability, first and foremost, concerns the students’ achievement or its assessment. Ella reckons student academic achievement as the bottom-line of accountability:

My accountability is student achievement. How well are my students doing? Academic
achievement, No. 1. My other accountability piece is to the parents. Are the parents satisfied with the experience the kids are getting at school? Is the experience in school varied enough to support social and emotional development of their kids? Am I supporting families in the community? (Ella)

The view of student achievement or success as preparing students for life also evokes the question about the aims and ends of education. In tackling the question of purpose, there is a need to distinguish the ways in which education can contribute to qualification, socialisation and subjectification – becoming a subject (Biesta, 2009). Dora voices her concern that current accountability expectations have placed more attention on the issue of qualification than the function of socialisation and subjectification. There is a great need to call for actions and decisions on the direction of education. She believes that education can do more than just provide students with knowledge and skills. It also contains a socialisation dimension to cultivate good citizens. Dora said,

You know, the accountability piece is focused on academic achievement, but it also needs to be about helping kids be better people, better global citizens. I guess we’ll know in twenty years whether they'll be better citizens. I just won’t necessarily see it. I don’t know. I want kids who are ready to solve world problems in the future. Yet, in the present, I see kids who care every day. We see kids that do a thousand hours of community service before they graduate. That's social justice. That's accountability. Does that mean that they've got the academic piece, for most: Yes. If they got all 70s, does that mean they aren't great students? To me, they are great students. They got 70s and thousand hours of community services outside the school, or inside schools. They're helping neighbours or saying “Good morning” to somebody in the morning. “Can I give you a hand with that?”
All that is good. You need the academic achievement and the personal piece as well.

That's who I want our kids to be. That's who I want to be. That's who I want my staff to be. That's who I want my kids to be. (Dora)

Dora’s comments reveal a segment of current debate that the accountability reform tends to dictate student achievement and school performance and narrowly defines principals’ accountability. Apart from the emphasis on the political dimensions of the accountability, Dora responds to the reform by going beyond its narrow focus and imparting moral responsibilities to her students.

This ethical view of accountability is also echoed by Andy and Dan. Andy views accountability as a form of assessment, not in terms of assessment of student achievement, rather the assessment of making a difference for students. Dan shares a similar view:

I understand accountability in terms of the whole child. I am accountable for, one, is the child able to read and write? Have they met their potential for academic…? Do they believe in themselves? Do they have developed a belief they can overcome obstacles, that they are a valued person? So we're accountable for all the variables and themselves. How they see themselves in the future for hope as well as how they achieve in school. (Dan)

Clearly, Andy, Dan and Dora’s concern with the notion of accountability does not rest with its quantitative constraints with regard to student achievement, but rather with the ways they engage to broaden the parameters of the accountability per se. Their perceptions of accountability imply that school leaders need to rethink current reforms and view accountability through the lens of justice and equity.

It is clearly evident from the comments of the participants above that the notion of accountability implies a mutual relationship between providers and recipients. It is insufficient
therefore to use the term accountability without specifying precisely accountability to whom and for what. A majority of the participants acknowledge that they are accountable for all stakeholders at various levels, such as students, parents, teachers, school councils, superintendents, trustees, school boards. Most of these can be further detailed. For example, Andy’s account illustrates whose interests he endeavours to serve:

Who am I accountable to? Primarily, students! Practically, I am accountable to those who come through the job. I am accountable to my superintendent who wants to see that I've got a school plan, who wants to know that I've made a plan and we are going to make a difference for students, going to see my data to support that differences are occurring. So there is that kind of accountability. There is accountability to the teachers who want to know they're being supported by the administration and the administration is taking a leadership role, inevitably leadership in terms of guiding to the directions that they are going to be again creating success. Accountability to my parents who want to know their children are learning, who want to know their children are going to have…, there's going to be destinations for them that they're going to be able to take, and that they're being given the right information to make the decisions for their children. We are providing the appropriate supports to their children. Many of our parents want to know that their children are valued. That's a big thing in my community. I am accountable to the students who wanted to know I am going to create a safe environment for them. I am going to create an environment to challenge them, but not overwhelm them. I am going to give them the knowledge beyond just the skill set that allows them to cope and to find that happiness that I've talked about earlier. My accountability is to basically everybody who walks into the door. (Andy)
Apparently, Andy, as many other principals, is engaged in multiple accountability relationships involving numerous accountability recipients. Some relationships occur within the school (internal), others outside (external). Inherent in the internal-external accountability is the relationship between knowledge and control (Bates, 1980), which also appears as a social justice challenge. Given the relative nature in the role of providers and recipients, some participants (John, Paula, and Ron) are seeking a more balanced model of accountability that encourages commitment to justice and equity. John reflects that he is holding himself accountable for the wellbeing of his students:

I think any responsible and ethical person would say I am accountable to myself first. Obviously, we're accountable...I am accountable to my employer. I am accountable to my parent community, but also I am accountable to myself. I have to be very ethical, just in my approaches to make the decisions. There is a process. I can't come to work and simply say...you know make a decision that impacts 500 kids. So I've got to have a process that I approach in my decision making because in the end, it's going to come back to me. So I have to be accountable to myself as well, because if I can't go to sleep at night, oh boy, so it's part of that approach you were asking earlier. It has to be part of the consideration every single day. We are accountable to something or somebody. But often I think if we don't say we are accountable to ourselves. I don't know we would take every decision we make with...It needs to... I think it brings to another level when we add that we're accountable to ourselves. Like I said I can't go to sleep if I unjustly suspend a kid. (John)

To John, holding himself accountable is being professionally and morally accountable for others, particularly, his students. The inner-directed accountability serves as a penchant for democratic decisions and equitable practices. Such a moral quest makes accountability no longer an
additional entry to the already formidable list of his responsibilities, but rather a path to social justice and equity. Ron expresses a similar view of self-imposed accountability:

My belief, kind of, accountability is I am accountable to my students first, my staff second, my parents and community third, and my board and my bosses, they are somewhere around fourth. And ultimately, I know it sounds really corny, but my father was a very wise man. I have to look at my face every day in the mirror when I shave. So I am accountable to myself. I hold myself accountable. But I think too often we get caught up on the accountability piece that has nothing to do to the paper work and the computer work, all of those things. I think the accountability is on a person-to-person level. Somebody asked me because I've been around forever as an educator. OK, so you are wise, with wisdom which I don't have a lot necessarily, but what is the nut of education? What is the very core of the education? What have you decided after 34 years? I said: That's easy, I said, core of the education is the one-to-one relationship that we build, whether it's teacher to student, teacher to administrator, student to administrator, administrator to parent, agency, bring in anybody you want to that equation. It's about one-on-one relationships. If you build strong trusting one-on-one relationships and you deal with respect and dignity. And then the rest, you got the most solid foundation in the world to educate children, but without that, it's moon in mirrors. It's like building sand castles. One strong wave, they are gone. But if you have that trust, you have that respect, and everybody is treated with dignity. Then you can endure a lot of hardship and get through a lot of difficult times. One-on-one as a class, as a school, as a community, you could endure, you know, but if you don't have that strength of the one-on-one relationship, it's all very fleeting. (Ron)
Ron sees accountability as a positive one-on-one relationship which equally involves all stakeholders within and outside the school. Such a relationship, which exemplifies trust, dignity, and respect, is built around a fundamental premise that requires principals hold themselves morally accountable for their practice. The significance of such a relationship is that it not only provides a normative framework for Ron’s leadership practice and action, but also serves as a solid foundation that advances his commitment to equity and justice.

It is clearly evident that in terms of accountability, the central focus of the participants is on their students. However, in response to the question of “accountable for what”, participants (Andy, Dan, Hilda, Ida, John, Ron, Paula, Sonia) acknowledge that such focus is not simply results-driven and an effort to comply with the policy regulations. It has its moral extensions that embody personal values and aspirations. As Hilda explains what she is accountable for:

So I want to set my kids up so that if they want to be the next black prime minister, then we’ve done everything to give them the tools that they can do that. So there is that piece. But the other piece in terms of accountability is that I need my kids to come here, feel safe, feel valued, and feel respected. So I am accountable for the climate, and for how my teachers engage the kids and how they work together with them. So walking the talk is a piece of accountability for us. I need the community to know this is a safe place to send their kids and that they can depend on us to do all the things that are necessary. I tell the kids and their parents when they're here, I am their mother. And it's my job to make sure while they're here that all of their basic needs are being met as well as their educational needs. That's a piece of accountability. I am accountable as a principal to make sure that I hire the very best staff possible. You know what? One of the questions I ask people when they apply here is that I want to know why they want to work at this school, 'cause if you
don't like, how, to serve kids, kids that are at risk, you don't really enjoy trying to connect
with them and work with them, this is a wrong place to be. And I don't want you. It
doesn't mean you're not a great teacher. It just means you're not a good teacher for my
kids and my school. My accountability goes in a whole pile of different directions to
make this school a good place to be. (Hilda)

In Hilda’s view, accountability is a radiating concept that encompasses moral,
professional and social aspects within and outside the school. Her moral and social
accountability prompts her to focus on the individual students, their learning experience, their
schooling environment, and their social development for the future. Whereas, her professional
accountability is to ensure that she is able to create and cultivate a inclusive learning
environment, a safe community and a professional team to enhance students’ learning experience
which eventually leads to their success. Such social accountability is also reflected in Ida’s
comments:

I am accountable to the children to make sure that they're getting every skill they possibly
can that they can apply so they can be successful in life. And they need to define the
success. I don't define successes by money or employment. I define it as what do YOU
want to define it as, it might be happiness. It might be that you want to stay home and
have 27 children and that brings you enjoyment. Maybe you're the best loving mother,
and you create these fabulous children. That's great. You might want to be the new Bill
Gates. That's great. You might be an Olympian. That's great. You have to decide what
you want to do. At the end of the day when you die, do you say you're respectful to other
people, that you made the world a better place because you were here, that you didn't hurt
anyone? You didn't offend anyone knowingly. To me, that's success. In order to do that, I
believe that knowledge is power. If they can read and write, then they have access to
more information. That's how they can continue to learn. That's how they make better
choices. But I want to open all the doors and they can decide which door they want to
walk through. That is what I am accountable for, facilitating student success as it can be
defined in many ways. (Ida)

Ida’s perception of accountability is simple and direct: accountability for student’s success,
academically and socially (Please see Chapter 4: Outcome and impact on students’ life).
Although she puts students’ social development at the top of her leadership agenda, Ida agrees
that a broad set of skills and knowledge are essential for their social success.

It’s noteworthy that participants’ perceptions of accountability allude to a sense of social
responsibility. When it comes to leadership, there is an important, fundamental difference
between accountability and responsibility. In leadership practice, the structure of accountability
may mitigate the sense of ownership that self-defined responsibility brings, thus affecting the
expected outcomes or results of the action:

I think in, certainly, my role, I think there's been separation of those two concepts. I think
they should be together. If I am accountable for my budget, then I should be responsible
for spending it. It's really quite unfair to remove the freedom of operating and hold me
accountable for it. So am I or am I not responsible for what’s in my budget and if the
answer is YES, I'm happy to be accountable for it. But if you separate those two, I think
you're setting people up for failure. Who is accountable and what tools you've given them
to be accountable? How can they do the job? It's like saying: “I give you a year to build
the house across the street.” “Well, OK! Where is the equipment?” “Well, good luck to
you. Well, you're going to be accountable for that.” How can I be accountable?! I have
nothing to do... I don't want to be responsible for that. You haven't even given me any tools. But if I have what I need to do the job, then I am happy to be held responsible, and held accountable. I think that's not always the case. (Freda)

Freda’s discontent reveals that clearly defined responsibility is certainly essential, and coupling accountability with responsibility is somehow more important in securing the better results. They are inseparable. As Paul puts it:

I think they're tied together. I think responsibility is this is what I should do, or these are the results that I should achieve or at least be working towards. Accountability is this is what I am doing, or this is what I have done in order to meet that responsibility. So they are tied together. One is about the process. One is about product, the goal you're aiming for. (Paul)

Paul’s interpretation implies a power relationship underlying the two concepts: taking responsibility is to exercise the power for the intended purpose (accountability), while holding accountable is to ensure the power is exercised responsibly during its course to achieve the desired goals. However, a similar question arises: responsible for what? Hilda offers her explanations:

I guess you know, one of the people that I enjoy listening to in terms of school success and student improvement is Larry Lazar. Larry Lazar says that parents send the very best kids they have to the school every day. They don't keep the good ones at home. So if you look at my responsibility: Is it my responsibility to just make the kids successful, who come to school with all of the pieces that we think are necessary to have in place in order to be successful? Or is it my responsibility, if I've been given this responsibility, because the community believes that I have knowledge and skills in order to make a difference for
whatever child walks in the door. I am going to be able… because really that's what social justice and equity is really, isn't it? [Social justice and equity] is that no matter what that child brings when they walk through the door, that I am going to exercise all of my professional expertise to ensure that that child becomes just as successful as the one that has been given all those advantages before they came in the door. My responsibility as a principal is to make sure it happens. Absolutely! (Hilda)

Hilda’s remarks illuminate the social justice dimensions of a principal’s responsibility which she places at the centre of her practice. She demonstrates ownership by making sure that every student has been given the opportunity for an equitable education. Her comments echo Bates (2006) who argues that social justice should be central to the practice of educational administration. Likewise, Ida shares her view by accentuating the significance of creating a culture of accountability with a moral imperative and taking a proactive stance to assume responsibility. She observes:

Moral imperative. They [accountability and responsibility] both go with moral imperative. To be in education is a calling. You certainly don't do it for the money and perks because you work 24/7 and you can't control all of the facets. We're going to try all these things and we're going to find the one that works for each child because every child is different and every day is different. You've never two days the same here. It's our responsibility to follow our moral purpose that we want to make a difference in the life of children. Education is about improving what children can do and giving them a foundation for the future. If you don't have that moral calling, you're in the wrong business. They need to do something else. They cannot be working with children. I think when you have that moral purpose, you find your responsibility. Because you're empowered to find what you can do
to help that child. And at the end of the day, that child gives back to you more than you ever give to that child. Accountability is about doing what you are told you should do, based on some plan and some standards that are often externally imposed. We are accountable to follow the mandates given to us in our roles. But I feel we are responsible to make sure that we do it the best way we can and that we adopt the concept of being responsible to serve the needs of our clients – our children, because it is the right thing to do. (Ida)

It is worthy to be mentioned that the “moral imperative” that Ida reiterates has a slightly different connotation than Michael Fullan’s. Fullan (2003) introduces the concept with a greater emphasis on student achievement. However, Ida interprets the moral imperative more in terms of what is the right thing for the students, their families, and is the moral responsibility for school leaders. Her account illustrates that underlying accountability is her willingness to take responsibility for her actions and practices in the hopes that her students cannot only achieve academically, but also grow up to be contributing members of a just society.

**Accountability Policies and EQAO Tests**

Participants place considerable emphasis on students’ academic and social achievement. Nevertheless, their commitment to and efforts for social justice are facing a formidable challenge from the marked shift in educational policy focusing on outcomes as measured by test performance rather than on the process and inputs. Such a shift is also reflected in the heated discussions over “accountability policies” which produced the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States and the standards-based tests as mandated by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) in Ontario, Canada. Accordingly, accountability has become a
structure shaping individual or group perceptions of what is and is not plausible (Bolman & Deal, 2003, as cited in Adler-Kassner & Harrington, 2010).

Perceptions of the accountability mandates and performance-based tests such as EQAO are strikingly diversified among study participants, revealing mixed emotions. Some participants show grudging acceptance but are acting pragmatically by focusing on the instrumental function of the tests. Some acknowledge the necessity of having standards, but are not satisfied with performance tests per se in terms of the curriculum alignment, the context, and the language they use. Others argue against the mandates while working strategically towards what is best for students.

For example, John views the testing as an evaluation tool which provides useful information for further action. He pays more attention to the evaluative function and the practical results of the testing:

You know, we can talk about standardized tests. It is what it is. It is a tool. It's an indicator. Do I believe in standardized tests? That is another social justice question, because it has certain injustices to it. We know the pros and cons of the standardized tests. I've been there. I've never liked them. But they do provide a tool for us at least to gauge our practices. If those resources are used within the framework of being critical and evaluative about schools, that's where that injustice is. But let's use them as a tool for us to improve our practices. That's fair. But it is a tool. And I think that is how we learn to use that. (John)

John does not negate the practicality of the performance-based testing. Instead, he acknowledges that it is necessary to have the “standards” as they provide schools with a sense of directionality. He continues:
So we need targets. The ministry gives us these targets. I personally don't see anything wrong with us working towards these targets. To say that I have to get there next year though, it's... because I want to be able to engage my staff, the students, the parent community, and the community at large to work towards these targets. It might take me five years as opposed to one. That's OK. But we must work towards targets. That's not bad. That's good. Because that will give us some of the motivation, because we're striving for something, right? So it's a way of, the way we look at it. Certainly the ministry sometimes wants to get to places faster. We can't, because some of the challenges we face, whether it's the collective agreements, the challenges we have with the staff. You know, they are huge. (John)

When the government sets goals, in John’s view, it is the rationality and feasibility that matter most. If the goals set are unattainable, it might discourage rather than motivate. Lily echoes similar concerns:

I see the point, in terms of where they are going, but I don't understand the quickness of what they want to achieve things, I suppose. But I do agree with helping kids to achieve better and put those things in place. And by and large, I think the Ministry has put in some good measures; funding has been there. It's not ALWAYS there, it's not there for everything you might individually want to do, but they have some goals...It's just the pressure that puts on individual school, teachers, students. I mean we try to keep the pressure off the kids. Kids have their own pressure from their parents in terms of their achievement. But the pressure on the school … can be quite hard. The board identified eight schools in our district that are underachieving, as they call it, for no good reason. So they put in all kinds of help for those schools. … There's a lot of money being thrown in
to get those schools' achievement scores up through the professional development of teachers, which is a good place to do it. Just the timeline is very, very short. ... So you get overloaded on teachers, on administrators. People get tired and probably cynical too... I speak with my colleagues. Lots do talk to me and tell me things about the pressure they feel. They feel they're being held personally responsible for [lagging test scores]. (Lily)

Lily said it was human nature for a principal targeted with extra help and money to feel anxious about meeting accountability requirements that she implied might be too ambitious for the sake of student success. But the hasty timetable for improvement causes stress and anxiety on students, teachers, and in particular, puts principals under the pressure of a punishment-based measurement system (Fullan, 2008), which is hardly conducive to generating meaningful change.

A few participants (Molly, Paula, Ron, Sonia) also reflect on the validity and drawbacks of standards-based measurement. Ron suggests that the EQAO testing is context related and therefore it is important to focus on the trends:

I think that any data that we use we have to understand the context of that data. For example, for somebody to take my school which is 70% ESL kids, where English is the second language, and compare our literacy scores to theirs where 90% of their kids are Canadian British descendants who spoke the language their whole life, that's an apples-and-oranges comparison. So I think we have to be very careful of what we're using data for when it comes to comparison. I talk in terms of my staff, that we're going to use data as our guide. It's going help guide our decisions. It’s not a goal. It's not ultimate. My goal ultimately is not to raise my EQAO scores by 6.3%. My goal is to raise my literacy level of my kids in the building. If that reflects my EQAO scores, that's wonderful. I will look
at the data to see: Well, OK. Is it going up? Is that the trend? I think the trends shown by data are far more important than snapshots of data. It's like when you're looking at a kid's behaviour. OK! You say: OK, Johnny goes along for three weeks as a model student. And one day, he [sic] comes in and he is a nut bar. He’s jumping on the desk. He’s running around and he's this and he's that, and he's the other thing. OK, the next day, he's right back to the way he was. You talked to Johnny and you find out that he was up till 3 in the morning the night before. Blah, blah, blah. There is a reason for his behaviour. That’s good. OK. Let's move on. But if Johnny comes in and he is a star student for three weeks, and all of a sudden he starts behaving in a really strange way and that continues over a period of time. You need to do probably more, than have that little conversation with him. You know, there's probably something significant happening in his life. Maybe his parents are sick. Maybe his parents are separating or something like that. It's a huge event. I think the data is the same. You can take a snapshot of data and that's nice and everything. That's OK, but what's the trend? Are your EQAO scores going up or going down? Or it’s stagnant and stays the same. I think that's a much more important piece when you look at data, it’s the trend of your data. (Ron)

Ron recognises that the standards-based measurement makes itself rigidly uniform without taking into account the variations of the school context. Although the purpose of the testing system is to ultimately improve the learning environment for all kids, the differences in school context make the standardized test system more likely to fall short of its objective (Willis, 2010).

Sonia is more concerned with clarity and coherence of the measurement with the curriculum. She remarks:

So I think definitely we need standards. I struggled a little bit, I have to say, with the
warning of EQAO testing. Now, here is a prime example: Down in the States, they have standardized tests in each state, all right? They were having problems in Louisiana because children were scoring very poorly on the state exams. They were standardized across several states, these exams. So someone went into Louisiana, into the Bayou and different parts of the Louisiana where the children are using Cajun talk, they’re using dialects from their area. And they rewrote the content of the tests, but they wrote them using their dialect and the words they use for things. So if a South Asian, East Indian child has just come from India and you say to him [sic]: “Go and turn off the faucet!” He'll say: “That's the pipe!” ’Cause in India, that would be a communal pipe. So it's the language that we use on the tests sometimes. For example, the Grade One read Wayne Gretzky. How many children who just come from India are going to know anything about Wayne Gretzky? So I think the testing has to really look at what the curriculum has been taught during the year. So if you’re teaching, for example, in Grade Three, they teach pioneers. So one of those questions should be based upon exactly the curriculum of pioneers with the language, with the word walls that kids are learning in class about pioneers, because that is something now they had some experience with. If you give them a random question, like: life on a farm, and these kids have come from some huge cosmopolitan city in India, they’re not going to know life on a farm. I think they have to be really careful that the content of.... The questioning is fine, like numbers, pictures, words from math. You know: retell, relate, reflect, justify your answer, predict, all of those words are fine. We teach those words. But when you put a little story on there, you need to be aware there are children from different countries who've not had experience with those. That's a Canadian, Caucasian experience of people who've written this test,
who were born and raised in Canada. I think you have to be very cognizant of the fact Canada is not like that anymore, and certainly not the GTA. So looking at a Grade Three EQAO test or Grade Six test, is it relative to our children? Are they experiences we know we can be assured that they had? … So how do you find that? How do you find common experience? Well, it has to be solely curriculum based. (Sonia)

Sonia’s accounts indicate that the students’ success on the standards-based test depends in part on how well the test is aligned to the curriculum. If the test is strongly aligned and clearly articulated in such way as to reflect the content of the curriculum, it can help the students to improve their learning and meet the expectations. This reinforces the significance of expanding the curriculum to mirror the lived experiences of students from different backgrounds.

No participant is more critical of the standardized testing system than Dean, who calls it “horrendous,” but even he sees some value:

I am not a big fan of standardized testing. If it was a philosophical discussion about it, I would probably argue against it. Such a high-stakes test, when it comes to my staff, we have of course some staff members, often people who are very committed to social justice, who argue against the test. And I said two things: One is, it matters to our kids. It matters to their future. So we have an obligation, whether we philosophically agree with it or not. We can go outside and all night go lobby the politicians about our personal beliefs. When we're in this building, we do the best we can for the students. Secondarily, I say: “Are there any skills that test measures that you would rather your students not have?” And no one says: “No.” We want them to have the skills. OK, What I'm going to do is I’ll give you the resources if you need some work books, textbooks, if you need some class time covered, if you need snacks for the students, bus tickets for the students,
a literacy coach, I'm going to give you them! So we do the best we can! If, at the end of
day, we do poorly because one of our students was in the hospital for depression, another
one got arrested two nights before the test, three others used marijuana in the morning
and went somewhere else, couple others had jobs they had to do, some of them....Well, if
we do poorly because of that, then that's life. Somebody wants to say somebody else
could've got that person out of the jail, could've got that person out of the hospital,
could've stopped those three guys from using marijuana? Well, OK, if they can, we're
proud of them for doing that. I know that I did the best I could to prepare the students... I
do think that a common purpose does sometimes mobilize and energize. So our staff
worked so well to try to get the students prepared. Part of me hates the standardized tests,
but part of me said: You know what? We wouldn't have worked so hard on writing a
paragraph if the only goal is to write a paragraph. We worked harder on writing a
paragraph because somebody is giving us a mark on it. Ha, I guess that human nature is
human nature. The standardized test is a horrendous thing for young people who do not
have the intellectual capacity to be successful on that test. It's humiliating and destructive
to them. So they are the ones…, not about rich or poor. That test is designed so that only
people with certain intellectual capacity can be successful on that. That's a cruel part of
that. (Dean)

Dean’s comments are of two minds. On one hand, he begrudgingly bears the pressure and
directives from the EQAO. On the other hand, he adheres to his belief of what is best for his
students. His dichotomous remarks reveal that the effects of standardized tests may leave
administrators more frustrated at having to concentrate more on ‘playing the game’ than on what
they truly believe will make a difference in students’ lives (Bottery, 2007; Willis, 2010).
Establishing Accountability through Leadership

When a climate of accountability exists, it becomes imperative for school leaders to attune their best practices to the mandates in order to support the overall achievement of their students. Effective leadership practices that are found successful in attaining such goals have emerged as promising approaches that are used by participants in response to the increasing demands of the policies. Such approaches are transformational, instructional, sustainable, and shared, to name a few.

The transformational leadership approach causes change in followers by focusing on practices such as setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional program (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). Leaders help set directions by developing, articulating, and inspiring others with their vision of the future. Several participants (Dora, Elaine, Hilda, Ida, John, Sara) consider a consistent vision an important part of their leadership approach (please also see Social Justice Vision and Commitment, Chapter 5). For example, John accentuates having a clear view of where the school needs to be and how best it can get there, when he talked about his approach to successful leadership:

It's a loaded question that I can take in any way or form, but really it is about student success and the principal who focuses his energy and helps to develop that vision to make sure that the kids are prepared for life. I could talk to you about the skill set, but it's all about making sure we do all we can to make sure kids succeed. That's what makes successful leaders, or principals, or educators. (John)

John’s comments imply that a critical aspect of leadership is to help his staff to develop a shared understanding of the school and set goals that can frame a sense of purpose (Leithwood & Riehl,
To foster the acceptance of group goals, participants, for example, Ella, placed great emphasis on the communication among school staff:

It's in the professional conversations with the staff to help the staff arrive at an understanding of where it is that the improvement needs to be focused. So we focused on word problems, and the language of math. We focused on that, based on the EQAO data. The teachers then modified the long range plans that they are working on, and they increase the amount of the instructional time on certain things. All of that is the guided conversation that I have with the team. We are also able to open up a conversation about how it is the marks arrived at, and talk about differences in marking teacher to teacher, and have those conversations about developing a shared understanding of what is level one answer, what is level two answer, what is level three answer, what is level four answer. And what is the standard that each teacher sets for the school marks, for report cards, and for earning the credits. So you know, my perspective is that EQAO is a useful tool if you use it in a very concrete way that connects back to what's happening, to the classroom. (Ella)

Through professional conversations, all get connected which in turn facilitates the change process.

More importantly, such group goals can be a starting point in “enlarging the staff’s capacity to imagine what might be achieved, and increase their sense of accountability for bringing this about” (West, Ainscow, & Stanford, 2005, p. 89). As Molly puts it:

I guess the first one is clear expectations. Some of the staff know they have to own part of these as well. There are always staff who want to do it. And we do it and go beyond what you could hope for. There are others who need nudges. But I have to have clear
expectations. (Molly)

Clearly, to energize teachers to take responsibility for change and development, it is important to set clear expectations. In some cases, however, such expectations need to be realistic and attainable:

Well, I think I am very lucky to be at a school that meets the standards. If I wasn't, I think that we would need to create realistic goals that help to attain the standard, not necessarily be AT the standard right away. If your school literacy rate is 55% meeting standard, and you need to improve 15%, well, it's unrealistic to go [for that]. I will go to this part of my school improvement plan, and take short steps and saying: Next year, we’ll improve by 3%, and so forth. I think that’s our job to make it manageable for the staff. I think it's our job to not make it seem like an unattainable goal. Like everything else, you need to take it one step at a time, small increments. (Roderick)

School leaders’ expectations for quality and high performance from staff are based on a shared belief and optimism that people have untapped potential for growth and development (Harris, 2002).

In addition to setting the directions for their schools, participants (Andy, Ella, Dean, Dora, Freda, Hilda, Paula, Roderick, Sara, Sean) reveal that it is also important to provide professional support and encouragement for their staff’s personal growth, in particular when they are facing the immediate challenges of the provincial accountability-driven demands. Such support includes providing individualized considerations, offering staff intellectual stimulations such as professional development opportunities and in-service training, influencing their beliefs on their professional ability, and encouraging collaborative work through building a professional learning community:
What I do is really run with the strength of my staff. In this school, I had six or seven staff on a literacy committee. I just ask them: What do you want ME to do? They tell me what to do. Give them what they need: give them time when they need it, give them praise when they need it. And find a couple of resources they haven't thought of. It's not something that a principal can do on his own. (Dean)

We're trying to get them support to become better teachers. We offer them PD. We offer them coaching. We mentor our young new teachers, not age wise, but young in terms of their experience to the profession. We run monthly meetings for them. They come and have lunch together. They ask questions. We talk about learning/teaching situations. You want to have all those types of programs in place in your school. (Dora)

And I use it [data] to assist teachers in having some of the healthy professional dialogue that really does get them thinking differently about what more could be done? And how could it be done? Who's going to help? So, in generating more of a professional learning community, I don't have a problem with that at all. But I keep it very much in the context of literacy and numeracy. It's a moment of time. (Freda)

And I think the other piece about really building a professional learning community is that there is a relationship that gets established between the teachers. Every kid becomes a responsibility of every teacher, and every teacher becomes a responsibility of the rest. So we are always working together as a team to make the collective better. So you don't have a place where you have individual stars that are rising to the top and the rest are sort of about the bottom. But rather everybody is moving forward collaboratively. That's when you really get a power momentum. (Hilda)
Participants’ accounts reveal that the teacher-collegial groups (Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999) are one strategy that principals use to professionalize the teacher workplace. In order to develop people, principals provide various opportunities for collegiality, staff development, and capacity building. They act more as facilitators, mentors, and coaches than as middle managers who are “merely carrying out orders from their superiors in a hierarchical chain” (Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999, p. 33). Studies (Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999; Keedy, 1982) identify four most important norm-setting behaviours of principals: human relations, resource provider, authority of position, and modeling. The most potential for developing teacher leadership is the resource provider technique, which “fulfills teachers’ psychic and work needs, so that teachers can produce the effort required for good teaching” (Lortie, 1975, as cited in Achilles, Keedy, & High, 1999, pp. 35-36).

A few participants (Elaine, Hilda, Roderick, Sara, Sonia) also consider it critical to generate a collaborative culture in schools that is conducive to strengthening teaching practice and improving students’ learning. Studies (Billman, 2004; Lambert, 2006; Ross & Glaze, 2005) show that to successfully create a strong culture, leaders need to be more collaborative and inclusive. For example, Sonia values team work as the prime means to support the development of the school:

One of other things that I try to do is make things team based. When we do the budget, we do it as a committee. We're planning something, another committee. People sign up for what their passions are, the committee they want to be on. We do that! (Sonia)

Like Sonia who invites teachers to participate in practical decisions and shares the responsibility for improvement, Sara strives to build a collegial relationship with her staff by tearing down the
boundaries among personal and professional roles (Lambert, 2006). She maintains, regarding EQAO testing:

It's not an issue for me, because that is not a one person thing. Everybody says “the principal”. My perspective: when you say “the principal”, that means everybody in my school. Right? So I just have to make sure that we all of us are working on that mandate together. Right? That becomes my job. If I took it from the perception: I AM the one person at the top of the kingdom, trying to get it all done. It’s not going to work. Those things don't really... That doesn't intimidate me. My role is to make sure that I am filtering other expectations of me. I filter that down. Then I make sure that bottom-line is about students' success. I'm making sure that in my building we are doing everything we possibly can. Like we do a great job here at getting students success, no matter what the social justice issue is. (Sara)

It is evident that a strong emphasis on team work, opportunities for shared decision making, and a collegial and collaborative relationship between principals and teachers characterize both Sonia and Sara’s leadership practices.

Transformational leaders also spend time managing instructional programs, such as by using data to monitor students’ achievement. However, John indicates that monitoring overall school activities is more important as it can be conducive to the improvement of the culture and image of the school. He says:

There can be [a conflict between promoting social justice and improving student achievement]. This is where, again, we as principals have to be careful, when, in making sure that we monitor everything that's happening in our buildings. Because sometimes, if we don't monitor what goes on in the building, then potentially, it could lead to injustices
rather than justices. And it goes back to that social responsibility, that we have the accountability to all, we have to make sure that in our practices we monitor what goes on in our classrooms, what goes on with our kids, what goes with our staff members, what they teach, what they deliver, what resource they use. We have to monitor! That's a big piece of our job! Because if we don't, we're not being accountable, not holding others accountable as well. (John)

John’s account implies an intuitive link between his leadership and the school environment: monitoring and improving school environment is expected to have an impact on students’ learning. Interestingly, studies have suggested that by improving the tone or learning environment of a school, principals have indirect effect on student achievement (Johnson, Livingston, Schwartz, & Slate, 2000).

Whilst some participants seek overtly to transform the organisation by setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional program, there are also participants (Hilda, Sonia, John) who embrace alternative ways of leading, namely, a shift from a formal and managerial leader to shared, sustainable, or instructional leadership models. As Hilda puts it:

I think that in terms of leadership piece, it is more complex, because I think if you try to be a micro-manager, if you try always to be out front of the pride, there are lots of times you are going to be down the road and look around and no one is behind you. I think one of the things that is really important as successful leadership is that you need to have a cooperative, collaborative environment. You need to invite shared leadership. The official leader needs to understand that you may not always have the best idea. What you sometimes have to become is the facilitator of the growth, not the leader of the growth.
Because when you empower people to take the leadership, when you empower them to take risks and to really get into development of new ideas, you build ownership, and you build pride, and you build a real connection. (Hilda)

Hilda suggests letting go of the expectation of the traditional school leadership which features a top-down approach and endorses the leadership model within which group members take on the responsibility for leadership. Lambert (2000) argues that leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school. Tapping the resource of teacher leadership can provide quality learning for all students, thus creating promising change in schools.

Sonia takes a different leadership approach which centres more on the sustainable development of the school. Such an approach requires leadership to be embedded in a culture that focuses on moral purpose and the educational success of all students (Davies, 2007). Nevertheless, Sonia found that there are challenges from policy and practice related to such leadership development:

As a principal, that's what you want: you want the things you're doing to stay, your legacy to be one that stays. They change so fast. They change principals. They change people around here. … There is lot of change, but we learned through change, but not too much. You know that. You learn through change. It moves you forward, but if you have too much change, then you never get to be good at anything, because you need rehearsal time too, right? (Sonia)

Sonia points out that the role of the principal has expanded substantially over the years. The ever-increasing amount of managerial and administrative work and the responsibilities to respond to a number of mandatory initiatives can jeopardize their efforts and commitment for the continuous improvement of their schools before they are fully developed to foster and generate
the intended change in the future.

Instructional leadership has been identified by participants as the most useful tool in creating a student-centred learning environment. For example, in responding to the facilitators in improving school performance, John remarks:

I like to say maybe that we need ten of us, ten of me to be in a school, but that's not realistic. What would help, and now based on the fact that, because I've enjoyed being the instructional leader, instructional leaders that we’re meant to be as principals in our school, the master instructional leader, I've been allowed to play that in the past year and a half to two years. And it's been a good journey! That, with a lot of add-ons that come on our way, both from the society as well as the ministry, sometimes we're not allowed to and I say not-allowed-to with intentionality, focus our attention on sustaining our role as instructional leader. So when we remove ourselves from that role, because we have to become managers, I think the practices inside the classroom can suffer. Then how do we monitor that to ensure they don't become an issue of... you know the time piece, right? We're good at prioritizing. We're good at decision making. We're good at all these, but I think if we're not allowed to have a critical role when it comes to being that instructional leader in our schools. I don't know that we would have that kind of success that I was talking about earlier, because that has been one of the reasons why we've achieved that 10%, because I sat at the table with the teachers. We did moderate the marking together. We did planning together. But if I am not an instructional leader, then I can't do that. Teachers don't see the modeling. They don't see me being involved. Then I don't know they would be as motivated. So that's a key piece I think principals need to continue being to allow us to address the needs of the kids. (John)
John maintains that being an instructional leader is critical in the realization of effective schools. On one hand, he needs to exhibit a clear sense of direction and make the improvement of student learning the objectives. On the other hand, he works with teachers creating a collaborative learning environment.

**Obstacles and Facilitators in Establishing Accountability**

Participants acknowledge that it is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill a vast array of responsibilities. In particular under the current accountability context, they find they have inadequate time to work with students and staff (Dean, Ida, Molly, Roderick, Sean), limited availability and inflexibility of resources and funding (Elaine, Ella, Dan, Ida, Molly), inadequate in-school staff support (Dora, Paula, Roderick, Sara), and insufficient parent engagement to support students’ learning (Sonia). Such complex challenges have had a significant impact on both their commitment to social justice (Please see *Obstacles to social justice commitment* in Chapter 5) and their efforts towards improving school performance. In fact, part of their role has become building their skills and capacities to embrace the conflicting demands and to expand their thinking in order to turn these obstacles and challenges into opportunities.

Of all the obstacles, participants say staff competency and attitude play a critical role in improving overall school performance. Dora provides an example:

There were obstacles in delivering the GLS course. I had kids say: “Well, the teacher doesn't want to teach me!” That's an obstacle. The kids said: “The teacher says you made her teach this course.” That's an obstacle, because clearly if teachers don’t want to be there, and I'm forcing them to be there, it’s a problem. But do I think it's a right thing for kids? Yes. It didn't just come from me. (Dora)
Dora’s example reveals that certain leader-imposed and/or leader-directed activities may be conducive to student learning, however, if they are delivered without garnering teachers’ support, they may run the risk of undermining the teacher’s perception of the principal and generating a negative effect on teacher-principal relationships which in turn will likely have an impact on student learning.

McEwan (2003a) observes that teachers who see principals as supporters are far more likely to be personally accountable for student learning and more effective in the classroom. When teachers enter into the realm of accountability, it becomes essential for principals to develop and sustain a positive relationship with teachers through their communicative and supportive behaviours. Through building healthy principal-teacher relationships, teachers themselves will become great facilitators of the principal’s work. Dan reflects that “On EQAO test, the one [facilitator] is going to be the teacher, always going to be your teacher, the most important person educationally in that kid’s life, even more than the parent.”

Without material and emotional support of the principal, teachers are not likely to become facilitators. Principals need to fulfill the role to model, to empower teachers to be part of the mission for student success. As Dora describes:

The staffing is always the key. So I think that was just a good brainstorm that we thought we would try it. So, my willingness to take risks contributes. I don't know if other people have done that. Thinking outside the box! I like thinking outside the box, encouraging staff to think outside the box, encouraging staff to take risks. So those teachers were like: “What do I do in this role? I don't have a class.” We talked about it. I said “Well, OK. What do you think you would do, could do?” Allowing them to grow into the role and shape the role is important to me. And maybe they're kind of successful, maybe it won't
work, but philosophically, logically, I know that it should work. You're giving extra support to kids using trained individuals, extra time within class time so they're not buying into an after-school program. Logically in my head it should work. But if it doesn't work this year, what do we need to fine tune it so that it can work? In my mind, it should work. (Dora)

Central to Dora’s comments are the strong supports and guidance for teachers. Such support is not simply to arrange time and resources for teachers. It is more about creating an effective collaboration by inspiring personal and professional growth and seeking better alternatives to bring about improvements in student learning.

**Tempering Accountability Demands with Social Justice**

As the participants undertake to align their practice and efforts with the accountability expectations that continue to drive the education agenda, they also recognise the imperative to connect their work to social justice issues. However, their understanding of the relationship between social justice and accountability is remarkably dichotomized. Some participants (Dan, Dean, and Paula) argue that their social justice endeavours are being compromised or undermined by the pressure from the accountability mandates. In response to how he understands the relationship between promoting social justice and meeting the accountability mandates, Dan points out:

Yes, well, there is a conflict: there is more pressure on you if your EQAO scores go down, so you're...There is a lot of pressure! You are obviously not a good school or you need to change. You're not teaching well enough. You're not doing a good job. So yes! There IS
pressure! But within my definition of social justice, we need to help children learn to read and write well. (Dan)

The anxiety that Dan reveals is also common among other participants, such as Dean who expresses how he struggles to promote social justice without succumbing to the same pressure:

There is [a conflict], because you tried to balance it, but the teachers would say: “We're not going to do it! We’ve got EQAO Grade Nine math which we are also dealing with at the end of the year.” And if a teacher would say: “There are two students in my class who are not attending and haven't shown up since….” I can keep them on the roll. Maybe I know one of them is going through some difficult times. I am tempted that if I am getting them off the rolls, then the success percentage would be higher. That's a challenge, because the success percentage matters, because it helps in terms of the self-esteem of the school and the students would stay. It helps attracting more students to have that higher or more successful percentage… [But] I don't want to do anything unethical to achieve that number. (Dean)

Dean’s account uncovers how the EQAO mandates impact the teachers’ and principals’ agenda of their professional interests and practices. Such impact may heighten the anxiety for principals if teachers’ and principals’ interpretations of the policy measures are running the opposite. Additionally, Dean raises the ethical concerns that the mounting pressure from EQAO may have some destructive effect such as the temptation to skew the “numbers”.

The negative effect of the accountability mandates also manifests in principals’ efforts to promote social justice. Taking account of the two at the same time has made struggling jugglers of principals. Lily expresses her frustration over the time pressure:
Not easy! Never easy! Social justice means addressing inequities is on-going. The ideal would be that it would lead to a higher achievement level for students if those inequities are addressed. The difficulty becomes the timing everything. They are grade ten when they take the tests. They take it now in April for this year [2010]. A lot to address in a short time! (Lily)

Clearly, the perception of a chronic lack of time plagues the principals. It not only appears to be a great impediment in promoting social justice but also inflicts stress on principals.

The accountability pressure can even lead to a feeling of uncertainty among principals about their own idealism and how to balance it with reality. This emotional discord, if it is prolonged, may dampen their courage and dedication in promoting social justice. Dan acknowledges that finding a fine balance between promoting social justice and meeting the accountability mandates can be a moral struggle:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I am always looking for.... I am like a scale: I'm never sure where I am. Am I doing enough social justice? Am I doing enough to support? It's like a state of I-never-know, because I need to make sure that our students can do as well as they can on that test. Then I worry: are we doing enough to help them in all the other areas of social justice? I worried the other way. It's always like I-really-never-know. I don't want to sacrifice one thing for the other, because I know, one we have to do, one we need to do.

We need to do social justice. We have to do EQAO. So for me, it's a state: I-never-really-know. It's a balancing act. I'm never really sure what the scale looks like, if it's level or it's weighted on the wrong side. So it's always constantly thinking, thinking: OK, we got to make sure...We got this teaching, and ready for that. OK, what about the other components? Are we getting their voices, their experiences into our classrooms? We
don't have time for this. Get ready for the test. OK, let's see if we can... It's a lot of manoeuvring, a lot of thinking. How can we kind of put them together, if we can?
Sometimes we can, sometimes we can't. Yeah. Yeah. Of course it is a big challenge!

(Dan)

Dan’s account reveals the challenge that social justice leaders face when they negotiate the accountability movement with social justice. However, some participants (Elaine, Ida, Kate) see meeting the accountability mandates in congruity with justice promotion. For example, vice-principal Kate says: “Social justice is the vehicle through which we are improving student achievement.” They are addressing both together. Elaine expresses a similar view:

No. I think those are two lenses that could run congruously, that could support one or the other. I think when you're looking for social justice, you're looking for improvement!
You're looking for better! You're looking for equality! And it's the same thing with achievement. You're looking for ways for improvement, for better, for equalities. I think they're congruous, hand in hand. (Elaine)

It is noteworthy that whether there exists a conflict in promoting social justice and meeting the accountability expectations depends on how principals look at the two: whether one is part of or independent of the other or one is the end or means to the other. Ron’s remarks shed some light on the relationship between the two:

I don't know one is one, one is the other. I mean that's sort of the chicken and the egg.
You know what I mean, what comes first? Kids who are being successful, achieving, and all of that, tend to have a better feeling of social justice and equal treatment. Kids, who have those values, tend to achieve better academically. To me it's a moot argument. I think what we need to look at instead is: what is the relationship between the two? How
do the two relate? Especially in a school, when a school has a strong sense of moral character, strong culture of social justice and fairness and equality, equity within ...I think it's inevitable the academic area would be improved. I think because it goes back to what I say the key is the engagement piece. If you believe in social justice and you promote that, by its nature, you're also promoting one-on-one relationships because they have to be good and they have to be strong. So in my mind, all of the things I believe important in the area of social justice are also important in education. The fairness, the one-on-one relationships, the equity issues, the commonalities, all of those things are important to education. Education in a way is about social justice, or should be about social justice for kids. And my experience says when those are in place, those are working, they are valuable, they are valued by the school community. Everybody loves a level of production and achievement increase. And so...I don't think one is the other, the other is that. I think there is a very strong tie between these. That's very important. (Ron)

The thesis of Ron’s argument reveals that education is grounded on a commitment to justice. The promotion of social justice in schools influences educational discourse and changes the landscape of the educational terrain. Paula shares similar view:

If you believe student achievement is at the centre, yes [there is conflict], because then you don't care who the kids are, you just want the end goal. You want the end result! But if you put social justice at the centre, there is no conflict. I think the student achievement will come as a result of social justice. … If you are driven by student achievement, you don't have time for social justice, because social justice takes time. It takes work. It takes emotion. It's hard work. Student achievement: people are focusing on getting there, quick, fast, finding the magic bullet, the quick fix! Where social justice, if you are oriented to
social justice, you take the time to do the work. You take the time to get to know the players. You get time to get to know who the kids are. You get time to look at your own stereotypes and biases, and you start critically looking at curriculum. When I define “curriculum”, it's a very holistic definition of curriculum: Who is in the building? What's on the wall? The resources! What we're choosing to teach? What we're not choosing to teach? How we teach it? … People don't GET social justice, because they are driven by accountabilities, standardization. (Paula)

Paula’s comments imply that the issues concerning student achievement paint both the foreground and the background of current accountability reform, which makes addressing social injustice counter-intuitive or irrelevant to the dominant political ideology embodied by the accountability movement. In order to temper the accountability with social justice, it is imperative to put social justice at the centre of the principals’ agenda and make it stated rather than implied.

In doing so, it starts with invoking a vision of social justice by developing a more nuanced and critical understanding of what social justice is and how principals prepare themselves to connect social justice to accountability. Sara reflected:

As an administrator you grow and learn about the social justice piece. You recognise its connection to the students' success, meeting those provincial standards. You're just always working on your own professional development. You have to develop yourself to understand those issues. So in [district of school board], our Principal Association, Superintendent Association, we have workshops learning about culture proficiency, those social justice issues. I learn about them first. I come back to my school, work with a small group who works out with a bigger group to spread it out. I think it's just a constant
learning cycle. You got a new social justice issue come into play, right? If I leave this school and go to another school, the social justice issue up in [city] is going to be very different from the one in most part of secondary school where I was at. I think you always have to be fluid through that process. (Sara)

Sara’s reflective comments reveal the importance of developing the ability to perceive social injustice and oppression through professional development and self-learning. Constantly attending to such issues and being critical of the social structure and institutional context where they originate is the preliminary step to take action against the oppressive elements that are illuminated by that understanding. Sara also implies that it is as important as it is difficult to translate and convey her own learning and understanding to her staff:

I am always doing my own personal reading on it [social justice], trying to get the awareness of what it really means, what people are talking about it, how that looks in schools, what the things I can do, working on my own biases, my staff’s biases, all those things. But those are big. What I call these put-the-elephant-on-the-table conversations. They are courageous topics and fierce conversation. You have to have the courage and skills to do and facilitate those dialogues. (Sara)

In order to put everyone on the same page, it is crucial to work on people’s biases and have courageous conversations. This requires leadership knowledge and skills in conflict management and negotiation, but through constructive dialogues and educative coaching, such conversation serves to transform staff’s attitude and beliefs on social justice issues.

It is important to be aware that social justice work is not one person’s job. It calls for collective efforts. Taking the example of bridging the achievement gap, Dan states:

[Bridging] achievement gap is a result of all other effort, not just a result of better
teaching. It's a result of making sure that non-whites, marginalized communities feel they have something to offer, feel they're valued, feel their voice counts, feel powerful to go out and demand respect and seek respect, and an awareness of the world. Plus, food, resources are there to those schools whose families are struggling economically. Plus community liaisons with schools to connect those parents, so the messages are at home also: your kid is just as important as any other kid in this country. Then more culturally inclusive curriculum! (Dan)

Lack of respect and recognition is one of the main inequalities that many groups experience in education (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Social justice efforts that support respect, care, recognition and representation will result in equitable student outcomes. Dan’s comments imply that principals should not be obsessed with bridging the achievement gap itself, rather, should go beyond that to attend to its social, economic, and political causes. Such efforts are grounded in the daily practices of their educational leadership. However, John warns that principals must be careful how they go about promoting justice:

We can't promote social justice at the expense of others. If we're talking about the Middle East conflict as an example, we have to approach from a balanced perspective. It can't be done at the expense of one group versus the other. So we want to promote social justices but we must be careful how we do it in our approaches. Things cannot be done at the expense of anybody. Everybody must be considered. So I am interested in, as a principal here, making sure it is promoted but not at the expense of anybody. We talk about poverty. Absolutely, let's talk about poverty, but let's not play the game. Right? Let's talk about solutions to poverty. That's how we promote it. (John)

John’s accounts imply that inequitable outcomes may result from leadership practices and
principals should act with critical awareness of the impact they have on diverse students. However, Young (1990) argues that oppression is built into policies, procedures and institutions, not simply the result of individual actions.

Practices of denial and depreciation (Fraser, 2000) over the status-related inequalities (e.g. poverty) are expressed not only within and between schools, but also within and between texts, syllabi, and subjects (Lynch & Baker, 2005). A few participants (Dan, Roderick, Molly) emphasize that it is important to look into curriculum that can reflect and deliver inclusion and social justice. Roderick, for example, argues that curriculum, in its content or methodology, should recognise and value the rich diversity of school population, and social justice elements can be validated in any, not just particular subjects and programs:

I believe also that all that we do of social justice and equity, our work can become part of the curriculum, can become part of what you're reading, can become part of what you're discussing, can become part of your projects. So I think that if a school sees social justice and equity separate from the curriculum I think it will not be as effective as a school that looks at social justice as a part of the curriculum. That they are the same thing. Things we discuss in our classes are riddled with opportunities to discuss social justice and equity. In all of our courses! In sciences, we're discussing bioethics, we're discussing genetic cloning. In law, in politics, world issues. In English, what we read, why we read it. If we read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and we just read it, someone would say: just reading it because it's a classic. It's enough. I agree with that. I add that: Yeah, it's a classic, but we need to tie it to today's racial issues! Today's “the movie that matters” is *Prom Night in Mississippi*. It's a movie that was produced by Morgan Freeman. His old high school has always had segregation problems, problems for African American students with white
students. … The movie is about racism segregation. That's still alive today! … I still challenge anybody to show me something they are teaching and is not relevant in some social way to what's going on today. In mathematics for instance, are we given credit for all the wonderful mathematic inventions that were brought to us by Chinese, Islamic countries. Do we look at the origins of zero or the origins of ....where are all these stuff come from? … It doesn't get in the way in the curriculum. It augments the curriculum. It makes it so much richer. That's what I think.

(Roderick)

In Roderick’s view, such curriculum provides students the opportunity to actively participate in learning social justice, its history, and implication for today. Embedding social justice into curriculum does not go against accountability mandates. Instead, they complement each other:

If you incorporate those social justice issues into the curriculum, the curriculum that teaches literacy and numeracy skills, and then you deal with both issues at the same time.

(Kate)

Vice principal Kate’s comments point the way to a resolution that can achieve two things at one stroke. However, her colleague Molly finds it difficult to see how these beliefs translate into their actions:

But it's difficult. Instructional strategies, differentiated assessment, assessment for learning, my ideal would be that staff know about social justice. And they do. They scaffold and embed it. So using this particular instructional strategy or assessment, embedding social justice into it, that would help that. So if we could intertwine them, Perfect! But if we can't or some staff don't want to, or unable to, then I think that social justice piece would fall a little bit off the wayside. (Molly)
It is no surprise that Molly encounters such difficulty as “school management is fundamentally interactive in nature” (Lortie, 2009, p. 124). It makes it intrinsically more complex, particularly, when it is concerned with relationships with other people, in Molly’s case, teachers. Dealing with teacher resistance appears to be more difficult than sustaining teacher morale in principals’ work (Lortie, 2009). Ron echoes Molly:

Staff here is phenomenal. They are an incredible group of people. I think the thing is not everybody… the vast majority are on the same page as to what we're doing is the right thing to do. Some people taking longer to buy into. Some people, to be honest, have never bought into it, have left and gone to other schools because they don't believe in sort of that...our approach of consequences. They're still, what I call “stuck in punishment age where you punish children”. That's OK. I am not going to judge them and say: that's right and that's wrong! But it's not right for our kids in our school. And if they want to go somewhere else that's more practical. That's their business too. The only thing I ask for staff here is, in the beginning, was whether you believe in what we're going to embark upon, or if you don't, please don't try to ... If you don't want to be part of it, that's OK. But don't sabotage what the rest of us are trying to do. Let us move ahead. And at some point, if you change your mind, you're welcome! You know, you can get on board with us! Be part of the merry crew, and have some fun! (Ron)

Social justice is a collegial work, which involves all stakeholders, particularly teachers. Both Molly and Ron’s comments reveal that teachers play a crucial role in principals’ social justice endeavours. With regard to teacher resistance, McKenzie and Scheurich (2008) recommend that principals should not treat it as meaningless or simply negative, instead, they should assist
Participants (Dan, Paula, Roderick, Sara, Sonia) acknowledge that having the right person, building the trust, and weaving social justice into the school culture are very important strategies that they employ to lead down the path of greater social justice. For example, Sonia reiterates the importance of hiring the right teachers for her school:

So I always think too when I interview teachers. I know in the first five seconds if I am going to hire them. I know right away, if I am going to hire them, because you could teach anybody to be a good teacher, but you can't teach somebody to be a good person. So when they come through the door, I know they are a good person. They win the battle with me. You know, you can teach people programming, you can teach them how to assess, and you can teach teamwork to a point. But you can't teach people to be good people. So when you're hiring: good people who care about kids, who care in their sleep.

(Sonia)

In addition to staff recruitment as emphasized by Sonia, Roderick points out the importance of building the trust with his teachers. He recalls how his teachers react to his work in balancing social justice and accountability:

I think that some staff sometimes take it personally that they feel maybe it's an attack on them. So you need to work on building that trust. That's not about anybody being singled out. That's about a moral responsibility that we have, which goes again to equity, goes again to social justice. There is no more social justice than having your own students succeed. ..[Equity requires] looking at what are the reasons why these students may not be succeeding, how can we equalize or level the playing field. Our equity and social justice
starts with taking a look at why our students are failing. So first step is to get the staff to trust the process. This is about the bottom-line. (Roderick)

Roderick recognises that the perception of accountability can have a robust impact on staff attitudes which in turn creates resistance to his social justice agenda. To break down such barriers, Roderick is actively engaging in reclaiming and advancing equity and justice and helps his staff to develop a social justice lens for their work.

More importantly, to make social justice a reality in schools where accountability dominates, participants (Dan, Kate, Ida, Paula, Paul) emphasize that leaders need to change their way of thinking by looking at student achievement differently. For example, Paula reiterates the importance of seeing student achievement through the lens of social justice:

Yes. That's why I never talked about student achievement. The only time we talked about student achievement was when kids: OK, Fei is working at level two, let's talk about Fei. What are we going to do to help Fei move forward? What is it Fei is not getting? Technically, are we talking about student achievement? Sure. But we're talking about it through the lens of social justice. So we're putting your needs first, not why is Fei learning the way we're teaching them? It's what do we need to do differently to help Fei learn? It's putting social justice first, seeing through that lens when we look at kids, and not looking at the lens of student achievement. (Paula)

In Paula’s view, seeing student achievement through the lens of social justice is to take into consideration the unequal initial starting points for different students and treat the inequities as a cause for concern (Hammersley, 2001). Such concern should be an on-going process as sustaining a social justice agenda needs time and continuous dedication. To make issues of social
justice central to their advocacy, school leaders need to embed their commitment into the school culture and ground their social justice practice and vision in the daily realities. As Ella observes:

It's all about making visible where our equity issues are and where we need to be able to understand that student achievement work connects with my newcomer students, with my English language learners, with my special-ed kids, with my boys, with my kids that come from circumstances where there is not enough food, there is not enough clothing, where the families are in distress. That is my top priority. That is my purpose. That is my purpose personally. That is my purpose as a leader. That is my conversation with my staff. It's all about this. This is what it is about. The rest of it is not central towards what we talk about. (Ella)

Clearly, social justice cannot be a reality in schools if school leaders cannot make status-related injustices, relating to race/ethnicity, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, etc. a top priority to their belief, practice, and vision.

**Summary**

Data presented in this chapter outline the debates by participants who either question or challenge the very core of the accountability reform. Their understanding of the accountability system is entangled with their moral struggle for achieving social justice and their questioning of the legitimacy and validity of the mandates. On one hand, participants begrudgingly accept the mandatory policies and focus their efforts on meeting their requirements; on the other hand, they put social justice at the centre of their agenda and are striving to address the various causes for inequities.
In establishing their accountability, participants demonstrate their transformational, shared, sustainable and instructional leadership skills in raising student achievement. Meanwhile, they have developed a social justice lens to gauge their work and guide their practices. By employing such a lens, they manage to temper the accountability with social justice by making issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other socially and economically disadvantaged conditions central to their advocacy and commitment.

In the next chapter, I engage in an in-depth discussion by illuminating salient findings as presented in Chapter 4, 5 and 6.
Chapter 7

Discussion

*In matters of truth and justice, there is no difference between large and small problems, for issues concerning the treatment of people are all the same.* – Albert Einstein

Participants in this study are school principals who are living their professional lives in a manner that is dedicated to promoting and delivering justice in schools. They first tapped into the question of what social justice means, and continue to ponder and rethink ways that social injustices are present and prevalent in schools.

Participants’ accounts of social justice reveal that the concept per se embraces an array of concerns and issues, cultural, social, and/or economic. As such, it shapes their perceptions and formulations of social justice in a variety of ways, and impacts how they translate and integrate their beliefs and perceptions into actions and practices central to their leadership, vision, and commitment. In particular, as they are contending with paradoxes and dilemmas associated with current accountability reform, they acknowledge that their moral commitment to social justice is under constant challenge, within and beyond schools. In order to work towards what’s best for children, participants point out that they have to juggle social justice and accountability by giving full play to their skills, knowledge, and political savvy.

In the following discussion, I will illuminate some salient findings with regard to social justice, its theory and practice, social justice leadership, and social justice advocacy under the accountability context.
A Moral Quest for Social Justice – from Macro to Micro

Evidence presented from this study shows participants' diverse points of view on what constitutes or formulates social justice. Some define social justice as equity, which goes from the economic and political dimensions of equity as resource distribution and equality of opportunity and access, to the cultural aspect of social representation and inclusion. Some view public education as a social justice endeavour with a particular reference to the purpose of public education. This view of social justice emphasizes the fact that public education will enable students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and ability to alter the social order, thus creating socially just communities, nationally or globally. Others construe social justice by focusing on its end goal – the academic and social outcomes of students and the impact on their lives. This understanding not only reflects the cultural shift as a result of the accountability movement which places greater emphasis on student outcomes, but is also grounded on the premise that education can reverse the reproduction of inequities and that social justice can enable social equity, namely, equity of outcomes.

This wide spectrum of interpretations is in part ascribed to the ubiquitous presence of social injustices in the various aspects of education, such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, student discipline, and the related educational policies and practices, to name a few. Accordingly, participants’ perceptions of social justice mirror the injustices at various forms and levels and uncover the micro-macro problem pervasive throughout the social sciences (Coleman, 1990). At the macro level, participants expressed their concerns with systemic (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992) or institutional injustice (Rawls, 1971) which creates an uneven distribution of resources and opportunities and inequities in cultural recognition and inclusion.
In the quest to reverse the oppressive social and economic patterns as a result of systemic/institutional injustice, principals in this study came to understand social justice as equity, which emerges as equity of resources, equity of access and outcomes, and equity with regards to representation and inclusion. It is noteworthy that participants’ interpretation of equity reflects the theoretical arguments in redistribution and recognition by Rawls (1971) and Fraser (1997). In terms of resource distribution, study participants critically substantiated what composes resources, what procedures are deemed equitable, what needs and aspects of the students should be incorporated in the distribution formula, and what results they are expected to reach. According to some participants, resources include not only money or physical materials, but also programs and services, and even personnel. The equitable distribution of resources requires fairness in the distribution process which accentuates both “due process” and transparency. More importantly, participants recognised that there exists group difference in the needs of the students and strived to take that into consideration by directing extra attention to those who are in a disadvantaged position. Nevertheless, recognition of group difference in resource distribution may lead to tensions and conflicts among and between groups, which, as some participants pointed out, becomes one of their biggest concerns. Particularly when there are limited or inadequate resources available, the procedural justice and transparency appear to be significantly important in solving disputes and conflicts arising from allocating resources and dividing benefits or burdens.

The morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among society's members tends to restrict the meaning of social justice (Young, 1990), thus playing down the injustices in the various forms of cultural domination, non-recognition/misrecognition, and disrespect (Fraser, 1997). To rectify the unequal outcomes, study participants have also explored recognitive justice
(Fraser, 1997) as an alternative approach to social justice. They acknowledged that assuring justice for cultural difference is also an important part of their social justice agenda. Yet, participants implied that cultural recognition is fraught with challenges and difficulties. One of the challenges concerns fundamental issues of power and privilege that underlie unjust social arrangements and institutional inequities. To engender change in the status quo, participant Dan, for example, maintained that it is important to instil a sense of critical awareness/consciousness (Freire, 1973) into the social justice practices of principals. In particular, when the principals are members of the dominant cultural group, it becomes even more crucial to foster a critical social awareness/consciousness of the self, others, school communities, and even the society. Critical consciousness is the motor of cultural emancipation (Freire, 1973). Developing critical consciousness requires principals to reflect on their own ideas and practices and constantly nurture and engage in dialogue in a safe environment (Ryan, 2006).

Additionally, some participants (e.g. Dean and Sara) pointed out that, given the existence of social, political, economic, and cultural disparities among different minority groups, cultural recognition through celebration of difference may unwittingly reduce the totality of human experience to the dimension that endows particular cultural groups with more power and influence than others. As a result, it not only causes intergroup or intragroup disaffection but also divides people when they need to unite to fight for social justice (Barry, 2001). In lieu of compartmentalized and periodic cultural celebration such as Black History Month or Asian Heritage Month, participants maintained that cultural recognition should be integrated into the daily practice and manifested in every aspect of education. This not only requires principals to be able to critically analyze and develop ideas for problems/issues with respect to injustices both
inside and outside the school, but also necessitates the reconsideration of the foundations of current culture and practice, as such, multiculturalism.

Within the recognition framework, representation and inclusion have also been embraced as a salient part of study participants’ remedial actions to tackle underrepresentation and marginalization. One of the prominent issues regarding underrepresentation is minority teacher recruitment, increasing of which, as some studies (D'Amato, 1993; Irvine, 1989) show, has some advantages, such as the sensitivity that minority teachers show to the past experiences and challenges of their minority students by virtue of their own experiences and life negotiations (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Su, 1997). In order to reflect the student diversity which appears in stark contrast to that in teaching staff, some study participants endeavoured to create a balanced instructional experience for all students by enrolling teachers from minority backgrounds. Such efforts which prioritize the importance of diversity in education are either out of the equity consideration or for the purpose of increasing student performance.

The issue of underrepresentation is also manifested in other aspects of education, such as curriculum, which, as some participants remarked, should reflect a commitment to the diversity of cultures and social constructions in the school system. This brings forward the culturally responsive curriculum and other inclusive practices that participants endorsed and actualized to “affirm the different knowledge, experiences, cultures, and histories of the students that attend their schools” (Ryan, 2006, p. 16). In some participants’ view, inclusion is not merely a goal but also a process through which they are able to entail a diversity-centric approach and eventually ensure the best possible educational experience for all students.

By and large, participants in this study outlined some dominant approaches for understanding and formulating social justice at the macro level. In altering the inequitable
systemic/institutional arrangements, they actively engage themselves in framing the rhetoric surrounding social justice by translating their own beliefs and perceptions into practice. Their social justice efforts not only centre on the theories and philosophies as outlined in distribution (Rawls, 1971) and recognition (Fraser, 1995) framework, but even move beyond the preoccupation with the “distribution-recognition dilemma” (Fraser, 1995, p. 74) by cultivating social justice outcomes at social and individual levels and in short and long terms.

Given that the current accountability discourse dominates school administration, principals’ commitment to social justice is somewhat limited, if not constrained. Their social justice efforts eventually and inevitably come down to student outcomes, which divert much of their attention to student achievement and success, but away from concerns with “equalizing where people end up rather than where and how they begin” (Philips, 2004, p. 1). Noticeably, their understanding of student achievement/success does not simply stay at the level of academic performance, which places great focus on students’ cognitive (knowledge), behavioural (skills), and affective (attitudes) outcomes. Study participants are not only concerned with creating all the possibilities for students to fulfill their potential, but also have some vision in mind as to how to support their students to go beyond the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge so that the students can become contributing members of a society, making independent and responsible choices and decisions about their own lives and pursuing their happiness in a way that meets their own expectations. Such understanding of student outcomes as outlined by the participants raises the question as to “what we are seeking to equalize” (Philips, 2004, p. 1) in terms of equity of outcome and how the outcome can or should be measured when it comes to the social achievement or success of the students.
It is noteworthy that study participants’ perceptions of social justice also unfold at two levels: in both their daily practice and their vision for the future. Participants see social justice as a vital component of their daily practice and action. They hold school as a strategic site for addressing social injustices associated with the disadvantaged students and striving to help students to understand and appreciate the variety of cultures, backgrounds and differences that the students bring to the school. In doing so, they anticipate their students will become critical citizens who can actively engage in forms of social learning and expand their capacity for empathy, compassion, respect, and solidarity. Eventually/prospectively, social justice goes beyond the school and its community. Participants look to efforts that will in the long run bear fruit in terms of students’ place in society. Ultimately the students themselves become social justice agents contributing to creating a socially just world that embraces, celebrates, and respects social diversity.

Participants’ perceptions and awareness of equity remain at various levels and different dimensions. Some showed considerable sensitivity to fairness in resource distribution. Some placed great emphasis on fairness with regard to student discipline. Others devoted much attention to democratic inclusion. However, in general, participants tended to lay great emphasis on re-distribution over recognition/inclusion. Such a narrow focus is conducive to gaining economic rights for individuals but ignores the social structure and institutional practices that contribute to or determine the distributive patterns of the rights. Additionally, their commitment to cultural recognition/inclusion is not only diluted in practice, but also appears to be more rhetorical than practical. Such discrepancy reflects how their personal values, beliefs, social philosophies and experience come into play in their understanding and construction of social justice.
More importantly, when it comes to social justice and its related issues, it is imperative to take schools’ highly distinctive contexts seriously (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). This is not because the variation in the feature of schools and their communities affects school process and student achievement (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006), but because it also, to a certain degree, accounts for the variations in principals’ perception of social justice. Given that social justice issues are a complex web of overlapping and interacting relationships and some may appear more prominent in certain schools than others, it would significantly impact participants’ view of social justice in terms of what it is and what it is not and lead to the various perspectives they come to in approaching and addressing the issues and problems of justice and equity. This also explains why certain justice issues and concerns appear salient on some principals’ agenda, but may not be on the others’.

**Leadership for Social Justice**

The efforts to better understand the nature of social justice leadership would do well to begin with a focus on the characteristics and the specific actions leaders take to accomplish their social justice goals. Such is the case of this study which reveals in detail the values, the traits, the vision, and more importantly, the practices of social justice leaders. Given that recent studies that address social justice and leadership tend to be either theoretical (Theoharis, 2007) or confined to the American context, the findings of this study surpass such limitation by outlining a holistic view of who they are as social justice leaders and what they do and bring to enact social justice.

Principals in this study are educational leaders who have a commitment to reversing the persistent injustices in schools that revolve around various “isms” and related issues. This immediately raises the question of what brings them to be social justice advocates. Gaining
insight into traits and qualities associated with leadership and personal values that reside in leaders undoubtedly provides some information about why principals come into the position as social justice leaders. Many studies (Middleton, 1941; Schiller, 1961; Stogdill, 1974; Zaccaro, Foti, & Kenny, 1991) have identified traits and personal values that characterize educational leaders. It is evident in this study that social justice leaders likewise tend to share some common character traits such as passion, integrity, courage, and positive attitude. Moreover, in terms of their personal values, study participants implied how such values as fairness, respect, and future-oriented frame of mind shape their reflective practices and actions and help usher in the transformation to their school culture.

“Leadership is concerned with the transformation of values” (Foster, 1989, p. 41) and is accomplished through a collective enterprise. What matters is how principals put their identities and values into practice in order to address basic social end values such as democracy, justice and equity. Marshall and Oliva (2010) maintain that Leaders cannot make social justice happen by their passion and will alone. The huge shifts in cultural understandings and societal and school expectations will happen only with the shared values, coalitions, networking, and mutual support that come with the power of engaging groups of people in social movements, which results in the building of social capital and, eventually, political power. (p. 14)

Findings of this study indicate that common to all participants, they implement their social justice beliefs and values in praxis by engaging all stakeholders and catalyzing them to be the new force for the social justice movement. Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) argue that “one finding to emerge repeatedly in studies of leaders, including studies of educational leaders, is that leaders are people oriented” (p. 16). Evident in this study is that participants enacted their social
justice practices by putting students at the centre, positioning themselves as a social justice leader, developing people for social justice, building school climate through justice, and fostering positive relationships with families and communities. Such efforts, though well-intentioned, are somewhat limited and fragmented. They contextually prioritize justice issues and focus on delivering justice and equity each in their own way, but with less awareness of how institutional norms and practices in schools and systemic structure lead to social, political, economic, and educational inequities. They endeavour to create a road map for others to follow, however, their commitment and efforts stay mostly at the institutional level without making them a system priority.

Social justice in schools, first and foremost, is concerned with students as they are the focus of the education system. Study participants observed that social justice commences with soliciting students’ input and encouraging them to articulate their experiences and concerns. In addressing students’ identified issues with subsequent action, participants stressed the importance of taking each opportunity for a teachable moment to “help students discover and wield their own power as critical and knowledgeable people” (Chapman, Hobbel, & Alvarado, 2011, p. 541). Freire (1970) contends that teaching is itself a political act. By developing students’ critical thinking skills and educating them to critique the world, participants aspired to prepare their students eventually as not only engaged citizens committed to justice and equity, but also social justice activists/advocates themselves.

Ashcroft (1987) argues that empowering is a philosophy of education which must balance its commitments to personal growth and to society. In order to make students social justice agents, some participants also emphasized the need to empower students to take responsibility for their academic and social lives and develop a sense of ownership of the education. It is
noteworthy that empowering students does not always appear to be a part of teacher education (Duhon-Haynes, 1996; Sullivan & King, 1999) or work of school counsellors (Portman & Portman, 2002). But it does become an important component of principals’ leadership practices in delivering social justice. More importantly, student empowerment is not merely confined to the classroom setting, but occurs in every aspect of students’ school life. Through empowering students, participants aimed to instil a sense of power and belonging in their students, which would in turn lead to positive change in both their personal and social spheres.

Joiner (1987) asserts that “to lead change the leader must believe without question that people are the most important asset of an organisation” (p. 2). Social justice cannot be a reality without like-minded teachers and staff who are willing to work collaboratively with the principals. Study participants contended that teachers and staff are important assets not only in students’ learning, but also in enacting social justice and advancing equity and fairness in various dimensions of students’ lives. In order to create a team that shares similar social justice values and commitment, principals in this study stressed the importance of ongoing staff development. Data show that various strategies have been employed in developing people – the human resources, which include practicing equitable hiring, getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, changing staff attitude and behaviours towards social justice, and empowering them to take risks and responsibilities.

Hiring for social justice and empowering staff have also been confirmed by Theoharis (2007) as part of social justice leadership practice in recentering and enhancing staff capacity. To empower staff is to provide them with professional freedom (Theoharis, 2007), validate them as people, and allow them to take the responsibilities in the running of the school. As part of this process, the principals’ role is what participant Ron described in the “jigsaw puzzle theory”, a
visionary leader who has a vision of a bigger picture, is able to communicate to and share his vision with his team, and empower his staff to piece together the puzzle to reach their common goals toward equity and justice.

Additionally, principals in this study find it more imperative to invest in the transformation of staff’s mindsets and attitudes which, now and then, pose great challenges to their social justice practice. Studies (Elliot, 2008; Ross-Hill, 2009) show that teachers with a positive attitude toward inclusion (as such with regard to special needs students) are more likely to provide their students with significantly more practice attempts. This rings true to the social justice work. Study participants observed that teachers who are like-minded and share similar values and beliefs with principals are more likely to be facilitators in assisting principals to promote social justice. In order to reap the best outcome, study participants contended that it is important to invest in transforming staff’s attitude, get them on board, and create a sense of collectiveness in their social justice cause.

As social justice leaders, it is also critical to apply a system thinking approach (Forrester, 1973; Senge et al., 1994) to look beyond individuals to the group and beyond the parts to the whole by taking into account the structural or institutional climate. As an important part of their social justice agenda, study participants made concerted efforts in creating and fostering a positive school climate, which, as some scholars (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Hart & Bredeson, 1996; Hoy & Hannum, 1997) argue, is a necessary component to school improvement and student academic learning. However, principals in this study are more inclined to build a school climate that embraces social justice and equity for all stakeholders associated with schools rather than simply for the sake of student achievement, which, as participant Paula believed, is the result of social justice.
For students, study participants stressed the importance of a healthy and safe environment in which every student is valued, respected, and accepted regardless of their differences and, more importantly, they made sure that students’ physical, social, and emotional safety is tended to. In terms of teaching professionals, participants endeavoured to set the tone that they are respected, appreciated, and empowered in the running of the school (Theoharis, 2010). Such endeavours, notably, are geared more towards transforming teachers’ mindset and attitude and developing their capacity for social justice. In order to support learning, study participants also showed their patience, care, and respect to the parent community and made advances in building a trust relationship with them. Various strategies are employed by the study participants in building a relationship with the community, such as “by understanding (not judging) families’ lives and beliefs, by committing to reaching out and listening to families, and by using persistent, diverse, and native language communication” (Theoharis, 2010, p. 369). No matter what stakeholders are involved, and in what ways, creating a positive school climate in which everyone feels valued, respected, accepted, and secure has been recognised by study participants as a critical component of their social justice practice.

Underlying their actions and practices are the vision and commitment that study participants have developed in the course of their moral quest for social justice. Study participants shared a common view that developing a vision is “another means by which principals can move their schools toward social justice” (Kose, 2011, p. 132). A vision that gears towards social justice can not only provide a sense of direction for their on-going commitment but also direct positive impact on their schools (Fullan, 2001a, 2001b, as cited in Kose, 2011). Notably, some participants accentuated the importance of infusing sustainability into their vision so that their social justice efforts will continue beyond their stay.
Principals in this study implied that they need to constantly position themselves in different roles in order to propel their vision for equity and justice. But even though study participants’ goals and vision are the same, their social construction of a public self can be quite different (Moller, Presthus, & Vedoy, 2009). How they position themselves or are positioned may affect or is affected by the way they interact with students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Principals in this study described themselves as initiator, cheerleader, facilitator, active learner, and other social constructs of who they are. However, it is these various positionings -- the result of the function of their individual ability, skills, knowledge, and charisma -- that constitutes what a social justice leader is.

**Social Justice Advocacy in the Era of the Accountability Movement**

The enactment of standards and accountability policies significantly impacts the daily operations of schools and potentially affects how school principals respond and react to the increasing demand for accountability within and outside schools. Participants in this study pointed out that current accountability reform tends to dictate educational measurement and outcomes and narrowly defines principals’ accountability in education in such a way as to confine their accountability solely to its quantitative dimension. As a result, it not only constrains the influence of school principals (Marks & Nance, 2007), but potentially diverts much of their attention away from the socialisation and subjectification functions of education (Biesta, 2009) by focusing more on the qualification.

Nevertheless, principals in this study responded to the current reform by going beyond its narrow focus by instilling a sense of moral responsibility in their perceptions of accountability itself. Such responsibility derives from a strongly held value position rather than mandated
targets (MacBeath, 2007). As social justice activists, they are proactively engaged in expanding its parameters by encompassing the moral, social, and professional aspects of their accountability. According to participant John, accountability, first and foremost, is principals holding themselves accountable. Such inner-directed accountability is associated with integrity, passion, and moral responsibility with a strong sense of equity and justice. The self-imposed accountability is the starting point from which a positive one-on-one relationship should be built in order to advance equity and social justice. Although such a relationship involves all stakeholders, it is evident in the comments of study participants that their central focus is on their students and their commitment is to do the right thing for their students as a whole child, not merely in terms of their academic achievement to be compliant with the policy mandates, but in terms of the moral extensions that can enhance both students’ learning experience and their social development for the future.

Although study participants made concerted efforts to couple accountability with moral responsibility, their efforts have been constantly under the challenge of the accountability mandates and the standardized tests. The findings in this study reveal that principals responded to the accountability policies with strikingly mixed emotions. Some grudgingly accepted the mandates and reluctantly sought to accommodate directives in their agenda. They took a pragmatic stance turning the pressure into an opportunity to assess their instruction and gauge their school performance. Some embraced the reform with a critical position by highlighting the inequities and drawbacks that exist in the performance-based tests. Others showed significant resistance to the reform implementation, but were using their power to strategically navigate towards what is best for their students. Such mixed sentiments among principals are a reflection of a distorted picture of a “totalitarian impulse toward absolute conformity” (Phelps, 2003, p. 5,
as cited in Wang, Beckett, & Brown, 2006) and reveal a deeper struggle among school leaders in navigating the path between compliance and subversion (MacBeath, 2008) under the current accountability policy environment. With institutional constraints and political mandates, such subversive leadership appears to be rather indirect and implicit, but is deeply grounded in moral values and beliefs that become the rationale for principals’ leadership behaviour and practice.

Being subversive calls for principals’ political savvy to know when to work or short-circuit the system, when to ignore or challenge the implicit rules of the game when necessary (Hughes, 1999), and to what extent they disrupt or subvert within and beyond the educational system exploitative relationships, processes of marginalization and exclusion, and practices of culture imperialism (Gewirtz, 1998).

No matter what attitude and positions the principals take towards the policy directives, they have to, grudgingly or willingly, attune their routine practices to meet the mandates. Evident in this study are various approaches such as transformational, instructional, sustainable, and shared leadership that participants employed to attain their accountability expectations. It is important to note that these leadership approaches are also connected to their moral commitment in promoting social justice. In aligning their social justice imperative with accountability expectations, study participants showed diversified views. Some see student achievement as part of or a by-product of social justice by taking into consideration the social and moral complexity of the accountability. They remarked that meeting the accountability mandates is in congruity with promoting justice and equity in schools as both share the same purpose, the wellbeing of the students. Others look at student achievement through the lens of social justice by making social justice central to their advocacy. Study participants who hold such a view maintain that student achievement is the goal of social justice, the realisation of which will eventually lead to equitable
student outcomes, academically and socially. Therefore, principals should anchor their practices and actions more on the social causes of student achievement rather than the achievement itself.

Often times, when tackling the complex social justice issues and meeting the accountabilities mandates, study participants revealed that they are continuously encountering obstacles and barriers with multiple constituencies, such as resources, money, time, personnel, and even themselves. Such obstacles and barriers become even more formidable under the mounting pressure from the accountability directives at the system level. One of the big obstacles comes from principals themselves. As participant Ron pointed out, school leaders need to develop a mindset that is open to expand thinking and prepared to act courageously for social justice. Such a mindset also plays a significant role in shaping the school culture, which is “in large part determined by the overarching values exhibited by the school’s leadership and faculty, and the educational practice that they implement” (Alemán, 2009, p. 12).

Additionally, a majority of study participants indicated that disbelief and lack of understanding from staff, their attitude, mentality, and values also have a significant impact on their social justice work. In particular, when staff’s values and understanding of social justice and equity run at odds with principals’, it tends to generate barriers and conflicts which may either taint school culture or sabotage change strategies (Alemán, 2009). How to stifle the conflict, manage the micropolitics (Alemán, 2009; Gerzon, 2006; Ryan, 2010), and overcome the barriers has become an important component of social justice leadership. Leading for social justice thus becomes a process of constantly confronting and tearing down such obstacles and barriers by leveraging the politics of accountability and social justice to move towards what is best for students.
In the next chapter, I present a summarizing overview of the study on the politics of social justice and accountability and social justice leadership in the era of accountability reform. Additionally, I propose the implications of this study for theory and practice and move forward to provide some suggestions and recommendations for potential future research.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

*The rules of life are found within yourself. Ask yourself constantly, “What is the right thing to do?”* – Confucius, *The Analects*

In this final chapter, I commence with an overview of this study on social justice leadership in the era of accountability reform, and continue to suggest some implications of the study, and then make recommendations for future research.

**Overview**

Theoharis (2007) argues that thus far, there is no shortage of theoretical work in social justice and leadership. However, absent are the empirical studies that specifically look into “the ways in which leaders enact justice, the resistance they face in that work, and how leaders maintain themselves to continue their pursuit of equity and justice” (p. 222). This study served such purpose by providing some empirical evidence on the ways social justice leaders perceive and enact social justice to fulfill their moral vision and commitment. More significantly, the study is situated in the context of the current accountability movement, particularly looking into the ways school leaders perceive and respond to both social justice and accountability reform and the various approaches they use to promote social justice while simultaneously enacting accountability policies to meet the mandated requirements. In doing so, this study also tapped into the obstacles and facilitators school leaders face in tempering accountability with social justice in order to do what is the best for students.
Issues of injustice figure prominently among students of diversity, relating to their social status such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and other existing social and political constructs. Such issues as identified by study participants manifest in various forms of “isms”, of which the list of prefixes is getting as long as it is complex. Among the prevailing “isms” that school leaders encounter and grapple with, racism, poverty/classism, sexism/gender-related issues, school safety, and special education are of particular concern to the participants. Although faces of injustices that are identified by study participants appear in various forms and change over time, essentially they come down to two disabling constraints, oppression and domination (Young, 1990). Both concepts are embedded in relationships that exist between and within social groups and individuals. Oppression refers to structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a social group through exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990). In order to move forward for social justice, it becomes imperative for school leaders to examine the complex ways “isms” impact students’ lives and confront and reverse social oppression and domination for a more equitable and social justice learning environment for students.

The divergent views of social justice from participants reveal that they approach the notion by focusing either on individual, institutional, or social responsibility. Each of these lenses provides a way to conceptualize social justice. Through an individual lens which is formed by their own beliefs and moral commitments, they look at their own profession per se as a tool for realizing valued social ends. Social justice is also regarded as creating an institution where professional practices are based on the principle of justice and equity, where difference and diversity are understood and valued, and where collective work is to build hope and dignity among students, impact students’ lives, and help them to succeed academically and socially.
Essentially, social justice is to strive for a more equitable society. In doing so, Young (1990) asserts that justice is not simply about distribution, but also refers to “the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation” (p. 39).

Nevertheless, accountability reform has not only impacted “the central organizing principles of democratic public schooling in significant and disturbing ways” (Hoover & Shook, 2003, p. 81), but also shifted views of social justice, which, for some becomes synonymous with school achievement (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004). As a result, school principals are inevitably caught in the chicken-and-egg debate surrounding promoting social justice in schools and improving student achievement in meeting the accountability mandates. However, participants in this study did not cede their ground in fighting for the very essence of public schooling. Instead, they ground their conception of social justice in the daily realities and in the operations and actions of their leadership. Bogotch (2002) asserts that “there are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in educational leadership practices” (p. 153). Evident in this study is that participants embody a series of common traits and values that allows them to assemble the elements for a new model of social justice in schools. These positive traits and values such as passion, integrity, courage, positive attitude, fairness, respect, and future-oriented are either based on or invoked by their own perception and understanding of justice and equity. These are personal philosophies and beliefs that guide their actions and shape the direction of their leadership. Ubben, Hughes and Norris (2011) argue that “the impact of the principal’s leadership is felt, and is dependent on, what the principal values, and the clarity and commitment the principal displays toward those values.” (p. 13) In terms of the actual work of
implementing social justice, these traits and values become participants’ momentum to engage in the collective enterprise of promoting justice and equity.

Theoharis (2007) defines social justice leadership with a reference to these principals who “make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223). His definition has a central focus on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. However, social injustices do not appear simply in the form of marginalization. Instead, they emanate under different guises as to include exploitation, deprivation, domination, non-recognition, and disrespect (Fraser, 1995). In order to alter or eliminate these arrangements, institutional or systemic, social justice leaders bear a moral imperative (Fullan, 2003), not merely in the sense of simply improving student achievement, but in terms of an active engagement in “reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 162). Such efforts as evident in this study are people oriented, involving stakeholders within and beyond the school with principals as agents of change. By focusing on people, study participants demonstrate the praxis of the social justice agenda. Specifically, their justice-oriented leadership centres on five core practices: putting students at the centre, positioning as a social justice leader, developing people for social justice, building school climate through social justice, and fostering positive relationships with families and communities. Underlying these social justice practices are a perspective towards social transformation, democracy, empowerment, and inclusion which are achieved through collective actions.

Collective commitment to any social justice endeavour is strengthened greatly when leaders foster a shared vision to engage others in the cause. Having a social justice vision is a
common perception as identified by study participants as it outlines an ideal state of what leaders want their schools to be in the future. A shared vision induces commitment, provides direction, and motivates actions towards common goals.

Unfortunately, ever since the dominant political ideology culminated in accountability reform, social justice commitment and practices have been driven to the background and “democratic philosophy as it embodies the ideals of equality, freedom, and justice for all tend to be lost or supplanted” (Hoover & Kindsvatter, 1997, p. 50). Reviving the principles of justice and democratic ideals has become a formidable task for social justice leaders. In order to change the rhetoric of accountability reform that tends to simplify the notion of accountability and ignore the diversity of the school communities (Hoover & Shook, 2003), study participants instil a sense of moral responsibility by conceptualizing accountability that embodies their personal values and aspirations.

Living in the intersection between hegemony of the accountability movement and moral pursuit of social justice, principals in this study are able to wield their positional power to embrace the reality while acting on their social and moral responsibility. Although study participants showed mixed sentiments in response to the accountability policies, the political and public pressure from the directives did not shake their tenacity in their moral responsibilities for justice and equity. Rather, it catalyzes them to embrace the dismantling of structural barriers and the challenges within and beyond the school. In doing so, they are able to temper the accountability requirement with a strong sense of justice and equity.
Implications of the Study

Bogotch (2002) argues that “all social justice/education reform efforts must be deliberately and continuously reinvented and critiqued – again and again” (p. 153). In concurrence with his argument, this study seeks to enhance our understanding of what social justice is and what it is not in schools through the lens of social justice leaders who are at the front lines of education. It is my hope that by examining their perceptions and understandings of social justice, this study first of all contributes to the current dialogue and discourse surrounding social justice by providing some empirical evidence on reality versus ideal, practice versus theory. Bogotch (2002) states that

the ongoing leadership challenge is to create social and political spaces for advocates, as well as outlaws, to function inside and out of schools and, deliberately to encourage activists and radical intellectuals to make explicit the connections to the subjective meanings of social justice. (p. 152)

Thus, through the discussion and sharing of the views of social justice, this study might heighten among all stakeholders the awareness of social injustices that exist in schools, prompting them to reflect, question, and challenge the status quo and rethink and conceptualize the meaning of social justice. Most importantly, I hope through disseminating the findings, that more practicing principals engage in the dialogue and join the force to become social justice advocates addressing equity and social justice concerns and work towards what is good for all children.

This study also has some implications for leadership preparation programs. Quite often, the leadership programs either focus “primarily on the effectiveness and efficiency of the schools” (Zembylas, 2010, p. 621) or reflect “a culture that has marginalized issues and concerns
of social justice” (Marshall, 2002, p. 4). This narrow emphasis and the marginalization of social justice, as Marshall (2002) asserts:

- not only affects those with unequal social, educational, and professional capital because they are poor, immigrant, female, gay, or different in race, abilities, ethnicity, religion, language, or culture but also limits the voices of allies within educational administration that would confront issues of inequality and injustice in our field. (p. 4)

In the era of accountability reform, in particular, the difficulty of leadership programs focusing on social justice becomes more obvious (Zembylas, 2010). This study recognises that there is a compelling need to prepare leaders to “engage in new ways that promote a broader and deeper understanding of issues such as social justice, democracy, and equity” (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009, p. 19). School principals play a vital role in delivering and enacting social justice as they are involved in every aspect of the school operation. It is equally important to help practicing principals to raise their consciousness of social justice and its related issues and assist them to look at their daily practices and actions through a lens of justice and equity.

In response to Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks (2009), Oplatka (2009) rebuts that leadership programs are unlikely to enable the newly appointed leaders to implement the revolutionary changes and lead for social justice, due to their lack of “sufficient expertise to lead people and initiate change” (p. 4) as they are busying themselves in garnering acceptance, transforming the school culture, and building their experience at their very early leadership stage. However, I would argue that Oplatka holds less confidence in the new practitioners, and ignores the fact that they may be head teachers or department leaders with great experience, knowledge, and skills. Second, if they truly lack experience in being a leader (which is not necessarily the case), that is something the leadership programs can address. Most importantly, you lead what
you believe. Social justice is not merely about practices and actions, it is also about attitude and a sense of awareness. One may not anticipate the social justice issues, but one needs to be prepared for them, which is what leadership preparation programs should work towards.

Moreover, I hope this study will help inform programs and policies that seek to achieve justice and equity in education and form the basis of educational policy formation, implementation, and evaluation. Thrupp and Tomlinson (2005) argue that social justice in many academic discussions of education policy tends to “suffer from the charge of utopianism or idealism, as well as accusation of vagueness and oversimplification” (p. 549). It seems that social justice is more of a utopian ideal than reality, in particular, under the current accountability movement, in which “school reform is moving rapidly toward test-driven policies that have detrimental effects on equal opportunity” (St. John, 2007, p. 77). However, evident from this study is the passion, integrity, and dedication that study participants hold in addressing injustices for diverse student populations and the transformation and change that they bring to their own schools. Their substantial work reaffirms the notion of justice and equity. This research recognises the compelling need for education policies to intervene by realigning values of social justice with curriculum, instruction, and assessment, diverting more attention to equity than excellence, and providing positive support to school leaders to strive for social justice.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The focus of this study is on theorizing social justice leadership and looking into the equity and justice practices and actions of school principals in the context of accountability reform. During the research analysis several other ideas turned up that could be of interest and worthwhile to investigate more thoroughly.
First, from a methodological point of view, this study employs a qualitative method looking into school principals’ perceptions and understandings of social justice and injustices that are particular to their own schools. This line of research could benefit from surveys that investigate on a larger scale principals’ perceptions and views on social justice and its related issues. By gaining an adequate representation of principals, such a study would allow comparative interpretations by taking into account other variables such as demographic distribution, gender, and work experience of participants, and how such variations affect their views and perceptions.

Another central and important issue for further study is to conduct follow-up research with the same group of principals to examine if the justice they value is taking place in their schools, and what changes or impact they have made by implementing what they believe and value.

One of the salient findings in this study is that minority principals encounter different, if not more, obstacles and barriers in their social justice work. For instance, participant Paula who is from a minority background was challenged by her staff on her rationale to diversify the teaching staff. It would be interesting to investigate further how principals from diverse backgrounds navigate tensions and barriers in leading for social justice in comparison with their peers.

Conclusion

Where there are social interactions, relationships, interests, and benefits, there is social justice. Social justice is historical and cannot be gauged with a constant scale. In different historical conditions, people’s understanding of justice is reflective of, if not confined and
subject to, particular social, cultural, political, religious, and economic conditions and practices. What is deemed justice in particular historic period may not be justice at all in the contemporary society, and vice versa. Social justice is also contextually specific and its meaning does not stay the same in different contexts. Even justice itself contains differences and distinctions, which manifests its nature of relativity.

This sheds light on why principals differ in their values, beliefs, and philosophies when approaching social justice. Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2011) argue, “The impact of the principal’s leadership is felt, and is dependent on, what the principal values, and the clarity and commitment the principal displays toward those values” (p. 13). What principals value, believe, and cherish gives form and substance to their behaviours, actions, practices, and in particular, their commitment toward social justice. However, no matter what efforts principals make to actualize social justice in their schools, the essence of social justice stays the same, to create a better learning environment for all students and help them to build a life for success and happiness.

In the circumscribed environment of accountability mandates, there seems a smaller scope for leaders to exercise their power and influence as social justice advocates. However, “schools are by their very nature subversive places” (MacBeath, 2007, p. 244), which allows leaders to foster a climate in which students, teachers, parents, and communities can pro/actively engage themselves in the collective enterprise toward social justice. With deeply grounded, moral - but sometime subversive - leadership, school leaders are able to temper the accountability system with social justice for the wellbeing of all students.
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Appendix A

General Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about your school. (School profile, students’ background, and community)

2. How do YOU understand social justice in schools?

3. I’m going to read you some terms often associated with social justice in schools. Tell me which ones are important to you and why.
   - Student achievement
   - Redistribute school resources to meet the needs of different student groups
   - Recognise the difference of students based on race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability
   - Equality of opportunity
   - Equality of access

4. Tell me about the social justice issues that are particular to your school?

5. How does your leadership practice address social justice in your school? (personal value, leadership practice, school vision)

6. How do you respond to current education reform which holds schools accountable for school performance?

7. How do YOU perceive accountability mandates?

8. What is your opinion about the achievement tests/standardized tests as a measure of achievement for your students?

9. Do you think principal’s accountability is just to improve student achievements on the standardized tests? Why?
10. Do you have any impression that the standardized test has a different impact on different groups of students in your school? (e.g. race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability)

11. In what ways do you find that the standardized test affects those disadvantaged students differently?

12. What do you do to meet the requirements of the accountability policy?

13. Do you find there is any conflict in promoting social justice and meeting standardized test requirements? What are they? How do you keep a balance between promoting social justice and improving student achievement in your school?

14. Do you find meeting the requirements of accountability facilitates/hinders your promotion of social justice in your school? In what ways?

   A) Instruction and curriculum

   B) Students and teachers

   C) The community

   D) School organisation and structure

   E) District level administrative issues

15. Are there other things you would like to share with me that will help me to understand your leadership practice?
Appendix B

Information Letter

(To be put on OISE/UT Letterhead)

March xx, 2010

Dear Mr./Ms. (potential participant’s name),

I am a Ph.D student from the Theory and Policy Studies in Education Department at OISE, University of Toronto. I am currently conducting a research project, entitled Leading Diverse Schools: Tempering Accountability Policy with Social Justice. The research project will involve school principals from the school boards of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The data being collected from face-to-face interviews will be used for the completion of a doctoral dissertation and possibly for ensuing publications and conference presentations. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor James Ryan from OISE/ UT.

The overall purpose of my study is to explore how school principals temper accountability policy with social justice. Specifically, it investigates how school principals perceive issues of social justice and accountability, the actions they take with regard to them, and the reasoning process they use in their attempt to satisfy accountability mandates while simultaneously tackling social injustices in their schools.

You are being invited to participate in this study to be carried out from March to May, 2010. Your participation in this research would involve a 30- to 60-minute face-to-face interview with open-ended questions guided by the conceptual framework developed from review of literature on social justice, educational leadership, and accountability policy. During the interview, you would be asked questions about your perceptions of social justice and current accountability policy, what you do in light of these perceptions, and the strategies you develop to sustain your daily practices. The interview date and location would be negotiated to work around your schedule and for your convenience. During and after the interview, I would take some brief notes on the interview sites and surroundings. I would also likely ask follow-up questions for further clarification of some aspects of the interview via email or in person.

The interview would be audiotaped and transcribed. You have the option of declining to have your interview audiotaped, or at any time refuse to answer a certain question or withdraw
from the interview. The transcribed interview script would be emailed to you in a Word
document for you to add any further information or make any correction on any misinterpretation
that may result. You would be asked to email the transcripts back to me within ten days upon
receiving them. Meanwhile, you are free to ask any questions with regard to the study and you
may also request to eliminate any information from the project or receive a copy of the summary
of the research.

Responses to this study will be held in strictest confidence. You will be assured of the
anonymity with all research writing, publication and conference presentation. At no time will
you be judged or evaluate, nor will value judgment be placed on your responses. All the
transcription records will be marked numerically to assure the anonymity of participants. In the
case that you would like to be informed of the results of the study, your contact information will
be kept separate from the data. Should you name specific institutions or work-related persons in
the interview, they will be given a fictional title or name in the final transcription of the data and
not mentioned by real name or title in the dissertation, in any publication or in any conference
presentation. The primary data will be stored at a filing cabinet in my home for five years after
the completion of the study and then be destroyed. Only the researcher and supervisor will have
the access to the data.

I would be grateful if you could participate in my research. I will also be grateful if you
would grant me any further request for follow-up information during my research. If you have
any questions, please feel free to contact me or Professor James Ryan.
Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Fei Wang

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Appendix C

Informed Consent
(To be put on OISE/UT Letterhead)

March xx, 2010
To the potential participants,

The overall purpose of this study is to investigate how school principals perceive issues of social justice and accountability, the actions they take with regard to them, and the reasoning process they use in their attempt to satisfy accountability mandates while simultaneously tackling social injustices in their schools. This study may contribute to extend our understanding of the ways school principals interpret social justice and accountability policy, and the practices and strategies they employ in supporting or challenging the current educational reform agenda. Approximately fifteen school principals will be interviewed from the school boards of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The data being collected from face-to-face interviews will be used for the completion of a doctoral thesis and possibly for ensuing publications and conference presentations. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Professor James Ryan from Theory and Policy Studies in Education, OISE/UT.

Your participation in this research would involve a 30- to 60-minute face-to-face interview. During the interview, you would be asked questions about your perceptions of social justice and current accountability policy, what you do in light of these perceptions, and the strategies you develop to sustain your daily practices. Participants will be obtained through suggestion or recommendation of my colleagues at OISE/UT, other participants and other work-related places. The interview dates and locations would be negotiated for your convenience and to work around your schedules. During or after the interview, I would take some brief notes on the interview sites and surroundings. I would also likely ask follow-up questions for further clarification of some aspects of the interview via email or in person.

The interviews would be audiotaped with your permission and subsequently transcribed. You have the option of declining to have your interview audiotaped, or at any time refuse to answer a certain question or withdraw from the interview. After the interview, the transcribed interview script would be emailed to you in a Word document for you to add any further information or to make any correction on any misinterpretation that may result. You would be asked to email the transcripts back to me within ten days upon receiving them. Meanwhile, you
are free to ask any questions with regard to the study and you may also request to eliminate any information from the project or receive a copy of the summary of the research.

Responses to this study will be held in strictest confidence. You will be assured of the anonymity with all research writing, publication and conference presentation. At no time will you be judged or evaluated nor will value judgments be placed on your responses. All the transcription records will be marked numerically to assure the anonymity of participants. In the case that you would like to be informed of the results of the study, your contact information will be kept separate from the data. Should you name specific institutions or work-related persons in the interview, they will be given a fictional title or name in the final transcription of the data and not mentioned by real name or title in the dissertation, in any publication or in any conference presentation. The primary data will be stored at a filing cabinet in my home for five years after the completion of the study and then be destroyed. Only the researcher and supervisor will have the access to the data.

You will receive a summary of the results upon request following the completion of the research. A copy of the completed study will also be available for consultation in the University of Toronto OISE library.

The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Boards of the University of Toronto. If you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you are agreeable, please read and sign the consent form below. Thank you in advance for your participation.
By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in this study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions as outlined above.

___________________________  _____________________________
Name                                    School

___________________________  _____________________________
Signature                              Date

Please sign here if you agree to have the interview audiotaped: ______________________
Please sign here if you would like a summary of the research findings upon completion: ______
Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.
Appendix D

Email/Phone Script

Dear Mr./Ms. (potential participant’s name),

I am Fei Wang, a Ph.D student from the Theory and Policy Studies in Education Department at OISE, University of Toronto. I got your name from Mr/Ms. xxx. They informed me that you would be a good person to talk to because your leadership practice demonstrates a commitment to social justice which fits into my research. I am writing regarding my research project, Leading Diverse Schools: Tempering Accountability Policy with Social Justice. This is a study conducted as for the purposes of my Ph.D thesis and possible publications and presentations. It is being supervised by Dr. Jim Ryan.

In my study, I am investigating how school principals perceive issues of social justice and accountability, the actions they take with regards to them, and the reasoning process they use in their attempt to satisfy accountability mandates while simultaneously tackling social injustices in their schools.

Can you help? Your participation in this research would involve a 30- to 60-minute face-to-face interview with open-ended questions. You would be asked questions about your perceptions of social justice and current accountability policy, what you do in light of these perceptions, and the strategies you develop to sustain your daily practices. If you are interested I would email you more information about the study. After you review it, you can contact me to let me know if you would like to participate. If I don’t hear from you, I will follow up in two weeks to see if you have any further questions. When we are in touch, we can set up an appointment for the interview at a time and location that meets your convenience.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Fei Wang

Ph.D Candidate
Dept. of Theory & Policy Studies in Education
OISE, University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, ON
M5S 1V6
Certificate of Completion

This is to certify that

________________________
Fei Wang

has completed the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics' Introductory Tutorial for the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)

Issued On: November 2, 2005