SPRITUAL AFRICAN AND AFRICENTRIC
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE:
UNDERSTANDINGS, EXPERIENCES AND SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES

by

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University of Toronto

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Abstract

The imprint of spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership is deeply entwined in the struggle over education and educational spaces. Despite this robust and contentious history, research pertaining specifically to spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders is noticeably miniscule within the field of educational leadership. This discrepancy is alarming when one considers how spiritual African and Africentric leaders have been actively involved in shaping the nature and quality of education within various contexts.

This dissertation explores the conceptions and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric leaders and the function of spirituality within leaders’ practices toward social justice. Based on qualitative interviews with 10 school- and community-based participants, this research deliberately centres the perspectives of individuals who proclaim the spiritual as a natural and transformative force within their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, the present research study offers an informed understanding of African and Africentric spiritualities within the context of educational leadership for social justice and outlines the meanings, influences and tensions which participants believe to entwine the task of leading.

The practice of spiritual African and Africentric leadership arises in opposition to the threat of racialization and against barriers which restrict a more inclusive understanding of
education. Narratives construct leadership for social justice as an indigenous and embattled endeavour imbued with tensions, risks and prohibition. Spiritual African and Africentric leaders understand and experience their practice beyond the rudiments of functionality as leaders respectfully enter into the arena of leadership with a concern towards instituting individual, communal and systemic change. Leadership endeavours contest marginalization, initiate inclusive engagement and strategically reconstruct education within a more democratically just space. Moreover, participants depict spiritual African and Africentric leadership as a hopeful and relationally influential undertaking.
Acknowledgements

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My humblest thanks to the brave spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders who work tirelessly to implement meaningful manifestations acts of justice.

I honour my grandparents the late Wesley and Eunice (James) Roett; George and Ada (Inniss) Ruck and my parents Hazel and the Late Winston Ruck. I am because you were. You challenged me to get something “under my belt” and to remember that there is always strength in kneeling. Thank you for your sacrifices and the exemplars of leading through spirit. To my Aunt Ruby, whose wisdom strengthened me to “not go under”. I will forever remember what her actions taught and showed. To my siblings Joyce, Kenny, Dina, Monique and Sheila I am warmed by your expressions of love and encouragement. Thank you for your prayers and for walking with me.

I wish to acknowledge the care and concern extended to me by Mommy and Daddy Simmonds, Mommy Coward and the many aunties and uncles in my West Indian Community of Whitney Pier, Sydney, Nova Scotia. Through their lives I witnessed enactments of spiritual leadership that were overflowing with love and communal regard.

I am truly thankful for each member that sat on my doctoral committee. Dr. Jim Ryan, your scholarship on the intersections between diversity and leadership were refreshingly groundbreaking yet, practical. Thank you for your critical advice which helped me to become more exact in expressing my thoughts. Chief, Dr. George Dei, thank you for inviting me to participate in a community of colleagues at a time that was most redemptive.

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To Pannel, our paths crossed and our spirits united. I remain sincerely yours.

Finally, to the Spirit which neither slumbers nor sleeps, to the One who gives strength to the weary and increases the might of the weak. To Him who trains my hands for the war before me Amen and Amen.
Dedication

I began this journey with my best friend, my husband,
Pastor Ernest Earle Simmonds III, he was my inspiration and
The reason why I mustered the fortitude and tenacity to begin this work

He was a leader, not in the sense of world-changing feats of honour
And display.
Most have not heard of his legacy of self-denial and sacrifice,
For he was not someone who would ever speak of such truths,
Those who know him, remember that his leadership was
found in time, presence,
And the wisdom to remember that silence is golden.

His strength was not through brute demonstrations, or intellectual feats,
But in the quietness of acceptance and love.
Through example, Ernie taught me that leadership
Allows for mistakes,
That real leaders are known less by their words,
And more by their service,
Praxis of heart and conviction.
Leaders lead with and through difficult
Situations by fore fronting the spiritual
And remembering that leadership is about ministry
And ministry is about healing, wholeness and life.

Through it all, you were there,
Carefully encouraging, nudging me to “run the race”
With vigour, tenacity and an uncompromising assurance
That my living and working were not in vain.

So, at this time, I look to you and thank you once again
for your demonstration of love, peace and sacrifice.
For seeing the finish line before I had even started
and
For pouring out the “oil and the wine” over and over again.

You remain with me and before me as it was your walk and leading which demonstrated
most strongly that spirituality is and must be a very present ingredient in the way in which
we live, learn and progress towards justice.
In the miracle of life’s changing meanings, I offer this work as a gift of hope. Hope that
there may be beauty in the darkness, in an educational world that
Often overlooks the moments of spirit,
The precious interludes in which chaos is soothed and hope is restored.
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Chapter One
Introduction

The Problem

Spirituality, however inspires creativity, inquiry and transformative conduct. This occurs because our spirits enable us to connect with other human beings, our spirits underpin our ability to take steps to dismantle marginalizing conditions while at the same time create strategies to bring about radical changes, and finally, our spirits are the core of who we are. (Dantley, 2008, p. 454)

Introduction

The imprint of spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership is deeply embedded in the struggle over education and educational spaces. Despite this robust and contentious history, research pertaining specifically to spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders is noticeably miniscule within the field of educational leadership. This discrepancy is alarming when one considers how spiritual African and Africentric leaders have been actively involved in shaping the nature and quality of education within various contexts. Existing reports documenting an African and Africentric spiritual presence within North American, vividly recount the experiences of clergy or the efforts of institutional organizations (Brown Spencer, 2009; Este & Thomas Bernard, 2006; Gillard, 1997; Smith & Harris, 2005) in working towards more equitable outcomes. However, less is known about the legacy of African and Africentric individuals who simply identify as being spiritual. This absence may in part be understood by examining for distinct occurrences. First, from a historical sense, conceptions of educational leadership are largely dominated by Eurocentric ideologies that engender and racialize leading as a White and masculinized endeavour (Shakeshaft, 1995). Scholarship by Grint (1997) and Ryan (2003) further expose that
traditional models are to a great extent, complicit in sanctioning practices that further subjugate and discriminate against the most vulnerable. Moreover, we are reminded by Blount (1994) that educational leadership as enacted within Western models is typically exclusionary and designed with the intention of maintaining privilege and fostering marginalization. Blount (1994) explains:

The initiators of and participants in discussion of educational leadership can be seen operating from privileged positions in a rigidly hierarchical system. These actors have sought to define the rules by which the structures of public education operate. Further, they have worked to normalize not only the practice, but also the selection of educational administrators in their own images. By setting the discourse parameters, these powerful persons have also determined the practices deemed undesirable, the voices to be silenced, and the persons to be oppressed. (p. 57)

Secondly, Eurocentric models construct individuals as recipients rather than agents, and educational institutions as regimented monuments rather than communal spaces. As such, understandings of leadership run contrary to African and Africentric understandings that value agency, community and collaborative decision-making. Thirdly, traditional models characteristically exclude community-based endeavours and presume leadership to be a function of what occurs within the boundaries of schooling. As such, African and Africentric models such as those implemented by individuals from community organizations, (BLAC, 1994) and communal leadership bodies (Evans & Tynes, 1995; Smith & Harris, 2005) remain typically underresearched and ignored. Finally, it is also possible to find answers to the apparent invisibility of spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership practice by exploring the formalized despiritualization that exists within the field of education. During the 19th century the configuration of education within North America was drastically altered from being religiously infused towards a predominantly spiritually prohibitive and
isolating conception (Strange, 2000). Under such constraints, spirituality and religion were consequently deemed contrary to the purposes of schooling and counterintuitive to the pursuit of intellectual advancement (Strange, 2000). Opponents further asserted that whereas educational settings were publically shared and secularized, any attempt to spiritualize such domains represented an affront to the democratic ideals espoused by schools and a violation of the separation of church and state (Blake, 1996; Haynes, 1999). The following account by Dei (2002) speaks to the current predicament:

   To the skeptic spirituality has no place in education. In North America public and academic discourses, the mention of spirituality and education is countered with a reminder of the separation of church and stage. (p. 123)

   Despite the dominance of Eurocentrism, mechanistic understandings of leadership, and an educational culture that restricts the expression of spirituality, there continues to be renewed interest in the study of spirituality in education within academia (Dantley, 2003a; Dei, James, Karumanchery, Wilson, & Zine, 2000; Gay, 2000; Haynes, 1999; Hoppe, 2005; Shahjahan, 2004; Strange, 2000). Scholars championing the inclusion of spirit consistently denounce the secularization of education and the essentialized conscriptions of spirituality. Resultantly, they argue that spirituality is both a central and fundamental organizing phenomenon for many individuals. Moreover, they assert that the failure to acknowledge the same is hegemonic and counter-productive to critical notions of education (Palmer, 1983, 1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2003).

   As tensions over the inclusion of spirit persist, theorists within the field of educational leadership continue to focus their efforts on documenting the saliency of spirituality. Current literature reveals that African and Africentric spiritualities provide consenting individuals
with an overarching worldview from which to understand life as an interconnected and agency-oriented endeavour (Brown, 2005; Dantley, 2005a; Dillard, 1995, 2000; C. Stewart, 1999; Wane, 2008). As such, a spiritual African and Africentric leadership practice would seemingly refute essentializing conscriptions by reportedly inhabiting both sacred and secular domains.

Furthermore, within the North American context, Dantley (2003a) and C. Stewart (1999) report that spirituality is empowering as it has historically enabled individuals of African descent to oppose hostile racial assaults and reclaim their inherent freedoms with optimism and expectancy.

Emerging literature has provoked my interest in exploring how spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders practice leadership as a form of social justice. Finding answers to this central question will serve to advance the indigenous knowledge base within the field of educational leadership, disrupt notions of leadership as an aspiritual landscape and broaden understandings around leadership as social justice. I am also inspired by theorists’ call for more authentic conceptions of leadership that are community-oriented and focused on nurturing diversity, inclusion and justice (Blackmore, 1989, 1999, 2002; Blount, 1994; Dantley, 2002; Dillard, 2000; Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Ryan, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1995). Consequently, the current research adopts a purposeful gaze upon the leadership practices of African and Africentric leaders who self-identify as spiritual and are committed to social justice praxis.
Purpose and Aims of Study

This dissertation explores the conceptions and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric leaders and the function of spirituality on leaders’ practices toward social justice. Based on qualitative interviews with school- and community-based participants, this research deliberately centres the perspectives of individuals who proclaim the spiritual as a natural and transformative force within their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, the present research study offers an informed understanding of African and Africentric spiritualities within the context of educational leadership for social justice and outlines the meanings, influences and tensions which participants believe to entwine the task of leading. To accomplish the former, one central research question directs this study: How do spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders practice leadership as a form of social justice? In addition to the former, the study is also guided by four subquestions:

1. How do spiritual African and Africentric leaders understand their spirituality?
2. How do these leaders construct and experience their leadership?
3. How does spirituality influence leaders’ social justice practices?
4. What issues and challenges influence the practice of leading?

The task of identifying and affirming an African and Africentric spiritualized presence within the terrain of educational leadership is three-fold. Primarily, it represents a deliberative act of resistance to counter the marginalization of indigenous African and Africentric perspectives. Centering the experiences of participants of African descent erases the obscurity of an African and Africentric leadership praxis and illuminates its potency within the realm of educational leadership. Secondly, the study serves as an intentional commitment to unveil
and reclaim the spirit in education. Finally, I aim to understand what justice-making entails within the context of spiritual African and Africentric practice.

**Significance of the Study**

In an effort to understand the significance of the present study, it is imperative to briefly outline what is recorded in the literature with respect to African and Africentric educational leadership. While recognizing that multiple conceptions exist within the literature including technocratic, interpretivist and critical orientations, researchers cumulatively reveal that African and Africentric leaders typically adopt critically spiritual leadership practices (Dantley, 2003a, 2005a) that are historically informed (L. Foster, 2005; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Portelli & Campbell-Stephens 2009) and facilitative of socially just and transformative changes within school and community (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Tureen, 2010). The former emphasis is crucial as we now know that schooling facilitates differential access to power and decision-making for minoritized students and their families (Apple & Bean, 1995; Ryan 2003), marginalizes and constrains students’ voice (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994, 2003; Palmer, 1998b) maintains structures and policies which inhibit the materialization of inclusion (Calliste, Dei, & Aguiar, 2000; Dei, James et al., 2000; James, 1992; Ryan, 2003) and ultimately sets up inconsistent outcomes for students based on their social currency across the identifiers of race, gender, sexual orientation and class. In light of the former, it is important to understand how leaders within the Canadian context work with and resist the various tensions in their educational sites. Furthermore, while current accounts of spiritual leadership within communities of African descent are successful in drawing our attention to the remarkable influence of clerical African and Africentric leaders (Este &
Thomas Bernard, 2006; Gillard, 1997) less documented are the perspectives of nonclerical individuals who are spiritual and as equally as concerned about issues of educational justice. The present study builds upon this wealth of information from several critical angles. First, this research responds to the call for diverse, communal and culturally-informed perspectives on leadership by offering specific and participant-informed understandings and experiences on what it means to operate from a spiritual African and Africentric perspective. New insights emerge which highlight how leadership is undertaken as communal acts of engagement and contextualized as relational endeavours. Secondly, interviewing spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders provides pragmatic insight into the practice of justice-making. Participants are exact in outlining that critically intentional movements are required to address the hidden factors of exclusion, underachievement, and disengagement. Narratives further denounce the hegemony of neoliberal agendas by exposing how Eurocentrism, racism and classism continue to restrict access to and engagement in schooling and simultaneously serve as silencing mechanisms for marginalized members. Thirdly, by eliciting the knowledges of African and Africentric leaders who self-identify this study affirms that critically oriented spiritualities strongly impact leaders’ behaviours towards transformative changes and their willingness to engage with the tensions in education and society. Critical spiritualities serve as foundational, inspirational and empowering catalysts. This finding critiques scientific and logical positivist approaches to leadership which essentialize spirituality and dismiss the relevance of indigenous spiritual knowledges. Moreover, this study’s purposed exploration of African and Africentric spiritual leadership intentionally recognizes that spirituality inhabits the realm of educational leadership. Participants’ accounts problematize conceptions of educational leadership as an aspiritual
terrain and provide further confirmation that critical approaches to spirituality are expedient in helping leaders to recognize and combat racism and other forms of oppression.

**Theoretical Stance**

This study focuses on spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders’ understandings and experiences of socially just leadership. I have chosen to explore this phenomenon through the lens of critical theory. The alignment with critical theory is intentionally undertaken for several reasons. Firstly, critical theoretical orientations have been instrumental in interrogating the hegemony within the field of educational leadership. In particular, theorists have drawn attention to the absence of racialized perspectives and have published meaningful scholarship in response to this invisibility. Secondly, critical theory situates meaning and meaning-making within the agency of individuals. As Foster (1986) remarks, this paradigm compels an “investigative” (p. 71) analysis towards greater accuracy and authenticity. Consequently, a critical framing affords me the opportunity to explore the voiced realities of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders and the meanings they ascribe to their experiences. Finally, I view critical theory as a transformative orientation that guides assenting individuals towards work that is emancipatory and just. Giroux (2003) poignantly explains that critical theory is “transcendental” and “transformative” in that it compels that individuals “take sides in the interest of a struggling world” (p. 37). Consequently, critical perspectives alert me to the reality that while accurate knowledge and critical thinking are essential, they are in and of themselves, insufficient in producing critical transformative change. Rather, critical theory discloses that authentic transformation occurs when dialogic engagement convenes with social action. In light of the former, a critical
stance provides me the opportunity to explore the intersections between spiritual African and Africentric leaders’ conceptions of and their agency towards fostering social justice within educational settings.

**Guiding Theories**

The present study is framed by an amalgamation of two theoretical frameworks: Dantley’s (2003a) theoretical framework on critical spirituality and Dei’s (1998) conceptualization of integrative antiracism. Together these theories serve to contextualize the work of spiritual educational leaders by framing the saliency of an Africanized spirituality, highlighting the prevalence of Eurocentrism, and identifying how issues around race and social differences are taken up and resisted within society and schools.

**Critical Spirituality**

In regards to the present project, I have drawn heavily upon Dantley’s (2003a) conception of critical spirituality to understand the meanings and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders. His scholarship is instrumental in that it offers an African and Africentric informed perspective on educational leadership. Dantley’s theory situates critical spirituality within the traditions of African peoples, the historical enslavement of African peoples and the Africanization of the Christian tradition. Furthermore, his work is significant in that it explicitly identifies the role of spirituality within the lives of African people and acknowledges how spirituality acts as a formidable catalyst of creativity and resistance in identity formation. In particular, Dantley records how spirituality assists African peoples in fostering authentic identities which transcend the hostile, horrific and disparaging limitations of society. Likewise his scholarship also
emphasizes that spirituality African peoples instills a sense of autonomy and agency and generates a resiliency within the Black community that enabled members to “bounce back from the acts of silencing and marginalization of the dominant culture” (Dantley, 2003, p. 7).

In addition to the former, Dantley’s (2003a) conceptualization regards educational leadership as a spiritual and communal endeavour. It recognizes that spiritual leaders ascribe to notions of leadership as a calling or often view their professional work as ministry. Moreover, his framework acknowledges the interconnection between the "sacred" and the "secular" and the relevance of the interrelatedness of individuals and community. Furthermore, Dantley’s (2003a) work is confirmative in declaring that even though spirituality is often overlooked in leadership contexts, it remains an integral component in the quest for more just and equitably effective practice. This conceptualization is further rooted in the realization that schools and society are heavily contested domains which organize the identities and relations according to prescribed notions of power. In particular, critical spirituality challenges leaders to:

- seriously reflect on their personal predisposition on race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation and other social/cultural issues, to understand the genesis of their perspectives, to create transforming strategies for institutional and ultimately society change, and finally to muster the courage to bring about this envisioned radical reconstruction. (Dantley, 2003a, p. 219)

Dantley’s (2010) framework sees leaders engaging in personal and communal efficacy according to four thematic markers: self-reflection, deconstructive interpretation, performative creativity and transformative action. Personal efficacy is comprised of critical self-reflection and deconstructive interpretation. The element of critical self-reflection challenges leaders to consciously consider the ethical and moral consequences of
professional practice in conjunction with their own personal belief systems and values. Educational leaders adopting a critically spiritual stance as Dantley (2005) suggests are said to “examine carefully the dissonance between what presently happens in schools that perpetuates the status quo and what could happen in schools that would bring about marked change in these institutions” (p. 14). Deconstructive interpretation is the second thematic marker and speaks to a purposeful interrogation of oneself and one’s role in mediating the transformative processes. In this regard, spiritual educational leaders regard equity issues in discussions of schooling and society as paramount and further believe that changes must be enacted within oneself or the external environment in order to align the practices of schooling towards a more equitable ends (Dantley, 2010). Moreover, such leaders are seen to engage in professional learning opportunities which focus on the intersections of justice and leadership.

In conjunction with the former, critically spiritual leaders adopt a pragmatic sensibility that entails communal responsibility and engagement, specifically referred to as communal efficacy. Under this component, Dantley (2010) identifies performative creativity as the third thematic activity. This component reflects an uncompromising optimism that directs leaders to develop practices capable of promoting transformative change even when confronted with challenging barriers. In effect, he exclaims that spiritual educational leaders develop pedagogical and leadership practices that move the school and the learning community from maintaining the status quo to envisioning a more democratic culture and a space where the legitimation of voices of difference can take places. Schools are not only perceived as spaces where the acquisition of academic achievement occurs but also become the sites where the radical reconstruction of society is conceived and thoughtfully strategized. (Dantley, 2010, p. 217)
Critical spirituality offers educational leaders a pathway toward hopefulness or the purposed and an unrelenting conviction that regards oppression as a challenge rather than a conclusive absolute. The fourth thematic marker and final component of communal efficacy is transformative action. From this perspective leaders seek to create educational spaces which encourage members of the school community to actively participate in the creation of more equitable social and institutional environments. According to Dantley (2003a), individuals demonstrate a commitment to challenge inequitable practices, foster a climate of inquiry on and implement practices which are inclusive. Dantley’s (2003a, 2010) theoretical framework affirms the relevance of African and Africentric epistemology and highlights spirituality as an instrumental catalyst within the professional realm of leading. More specifically, his scholarship conceptualizes critically spiritual leadership as multi-thematic process having the potential to assists spiritual educational leaders in the development of personal, communal and societal transformation.

**Integrative Antiracism**

This study is aimed at exploring the understandings and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders in facilitating social justice. In light of the former, it is expedient to utilize a theoretical lens that has the potential to analyze educational leadership as a racialized endeavour and also interrogate the various challenges to social change and transformative justice. Integrative antiracism as conceptualized by Dei (1998) provides the theoretical and practical tools necessary to undertake this task. This framework as described is a theoretical and political project that challenges individuals to consider how constructs, of race, gender, class, sexuality and religion are salient markers of identity which
are systemically mediated within society and educational spaces. Antiracism, as Dei (1998) asserts, draws linkages between one’s history, identity and place within the construct of school. This defining characteristic legitimizes the urgency of inviting African and Africentric educational leaders to self-identify and define how they construct and experience their leadership endeavours. Further, antiracism recognizes racism as a present and significant form of oppression that is predicated within educational spaces and therefore acknowledges that an antioppressive leadership stance will likely involve addressing those tensions which are most visible and problematic (Dei, 1998).

In addition to identifying systemic oppression, integrative antiracism names transformative change as an individual and collective responsibility that requires all individuals in society to recognize the saliency of their positional identity. As Dei (1998) contends,

Antiracism has social and political relevance and meaning to students, teachers and administrative staff, as well as to parents and local communities. Contemporary society is differentiated along many social lines; consequently, individuals and social groups are implicated differently in the politics of social change. Antiracism discourse argues that educators, students and community workers cannot claim to remain neutral in the provision and utilization of educational knowledge. (p. 26)

In this regard, an antiracism discourse adopts an inclusive educational leadership perspective that allows me to explore how leaders within and outside the boundaries of schooling, work through their various roles, responsibilities and multiple markers of identities to negotiate the process of leading. An antiracism paradigm also emphasizes the dominance of Eurocentrism within the Canadian educational contexts and the material realities which minoritized individuals experience as a result. In his critique, Dei (1998) specifically argues that “the
structural processes of schooling and education provide unequal opportunities, and create differential outcomes for students according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religious, culture, class and disability” (p. 20). Accordingly, this theory strategically calls upon educational leaders to lead the way by opening up spaces in which alternative, nonhegemonic viewpoints can flourish in the schools. Educators must interrogate (rather than cursorily dismiss) alternative ideals and viewpoints on schooling – particularly those emanating from subordinated groups in society- and identify sources of students’ cultural, political and intellectual empowerment and disempowerment. (Dei, 1998, p. 22)

Using this lens I am able to analyze the issues and challenges which leaders report as confronting the process of leading and the strategies which participants utilize to address and resist systemic barriers. Moreover this theory speaks directly to the power relations present in schooling and erects a platform to clearly hear the invisible realities of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders.

An additional feature of integrative antiracism is its stress upon the connection between globalization, new market economies and the oppression of subordinated peoples. Antiracism moves educational transformation beyond the discourse of at-risk towards centering the sociopolitical realities which structure disadvantage and entrench disparities. This principal helps to validate leaders’ efforts in countering the societal constraints and competing agendas in education. Likewise, this wholistic perspective contextualizes social justice work as a critical engagement beyond the parameters of schooling. The use of an antiracism framework is purposeful and expedient to the present study as this theoretical paradigm allows me to explore the understandings and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders with greater insight and clarity.
Conceptual Framework

In shaping the parameters of the research, I relied on several key concepts to forage linkages between the identified problem, research methodology and study findings namely, Understanding Spirituality, Constructing Educational Leadership, Strategies of Shaping Social Justice Leadership Practice, and Tensions and Issues Influencing Leadership practice. In the current section, I explore the aforementioned concepts because together, these constructs illuminate the factors which are important in uncovering the meanings which spiritual African and Africentric leaders assign to their spirituality and work towards social justice.

Understandings of Spirituality

Understandings of spirituality are diverse and deeply reflective of the social-cultural realities of adherents. Literature pertaining specifically to African and Africentric spiritualities are robust, identifying several specific themes including: the centrality of the divine, an ontological and existential sensibility, communal rhythms and interdependency, the influence of a “religious” framework and moral engagement. Concerning the centrality of the divine, researchers report that African and Africentric spiritualities emphasize the existence of a supreme being or spirit force which in varying ways engages with humanity (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Cone, 2004; C. Stewart, 1997). In conjunction with this finding is the notable influence of an ontological sensibility that recognizes the world as a created realm inhabited with spirited, human and animated beings. Along with the former, scholars also record that African and Africentric spiritualities compel individuals to view themselves in relationship with ancestral relatives both past and present. With respect to a religious
orientation, scholars report that African and Africentric religious spirituality represents a dynamic interplay of beliefs and interactions that positions individuals to morally engage in the visible and spirited realities. Connections to spirituality and social transformation are also reported by Este and Thomas Bernard (2006) along with the role of spirituality in forging proactive linkages to health and wellness. Moreover, it is further understood that spirituality fosters a sense of personal agency (C. Stewart, 1999), and serves as a central and empowering catalyst in the identity formation (Watt, 2003) and decision-making of people of African descent (Newlin, Knafl, & Melkus, 2002). Wane’s definition (2006) describes spirituality as “the vital life force that animates African peoples and connects them to the rhythms of the universe, nature, ancestors and the community” (p. 89) and therewith reiterates the interrelatedness and potency of spirituality for African peoples.

With regards to educational leadership, scholars have identified the potential influences that spirituality has on how leaders envision and undertake their work (Soder, 2002; Solomon, 2002; Wheatley, 2002). In particular, Wheatley (2002) notes that spirituality moves leaders to engage in their work from a vocational or spiritual calling. From this vantage point, Wheatley describes leaders as acknowledging a purposed reason for their existence that inspires commitment and resolve. Solomon’s (2002) work draws further attention to spirituality as a “meaning system” and provides further evidence of spirituality as a mediating influence in professional relationships and tasks. Additional insight is offered by Soder (2002) in noting that spirituality compels leaders to be more reflective, conscientious and open towards others.

In a recent study of 10 school leaders within the Ontario context, Dalia (2005) revealed that spirituality was intricately linked to leaders’ values and practices. Moreover,
participants identify spirituality as an influential catalyst which assists them in working out their leadership assignments in accordance with their values. Despite the former, it was also understood that discussions of spirituality were not openly received within their educational contexts as participants reported not feeling comfortable sharing aspects of their spirituality.

The aforementioned understandings of spirituality present a portrait. With respect to people of African descent, scholars have been able to identify specific themes characterizing African and Africentric spiritualities. Additionally, recent reports point to the role spirituality in shaping leaders’ belief systems about self, others and how one engages with the realities of life.

**Constructing Educational Leadership**

The field of educational leadership within Western society has been shaped by a host of differing theories. Each paradigm offers distinct viewpoints on the meaning of leading, the role of school-community members and purpose of education. The current segment discusses the various paradigms of practice by providing a historical overview of functionalists, interpretivists and critical orientations. Additionally, I also explore the more recent construction of educational leadership as a spiritual endeavour and outline current literature from the field. Having this understanding is crucial to gaining a sense of how leaders of African and Africentric descent may come to view their understanding of leadership.

Understandings of educational leadership are traditionally conceptualized from a technical, interpretivist or critical perspective. Each paradigm offers unique positions on the meaning and processes associated with educational leadership. Technical or functionalist perspectives view leadership as a scientific process of discovering and implementing
objective practices (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Hoy & Miskel, 1982; Parsons, 1959). Leadership theories emerging from this framework are interested in generating concepts and procedural guidelines that would hierarchically regulate behaviour within schools and produce the stratification necessary to fulfill the social order (Hoy & Miskel, 1982). Prescriptive measures are highly valued as a result, and seen the means through which organizational stability and growth may be achieved (Ryan, 2003). Ryan’s account of managerial and technical approaches to leadership helps to clarify this perspective. He writes, “Pioneers of technical approaches to leadership were motivated by a desire to provide leaders with sure-fire strategies for accomplishing organizational goals” that would provide uniformity and minimize interference” (Ryan, 2003, p. 46).

Consequently, educational leaders operating from a functional perspective are concerned with overseeing the business of schooling and ensuring that schools and their members achieve the predetermined educational outcomes (Ryan, 2003). Ultimately, good leadership represents the ability to control and implement system enforcing standards. Beyond the utilization of differences to reinforce social ordering and privilege, functional views are generally satisfied with the structure of schooling and are content with only tweaking processes to ensure greater achievement and success. Beyond the rudiment of task-oriented endeavours, technical leadership rarely includes critical interactions with students or the broader community as the business of education is believed best left to the experts and particularly, confined to the boundaries of schools. As Culbertson (1988) eloquently states, schools were “cardinal institutions” (p. 6) of the state and invested with power to ensure that students were prepared to assimilate and assume scripted roles which identified their place and function within society’s ordering.
During the 1960s, theorists like Greenfield (1978) rejected the notion of universal laws and put forward new understandings of leadership that are grounded within a subjectivist orientation. Rather than seeing the social reality as an objective entity that directs human behaviour, theorists recognize the role of individuals in constructing and organizing the world, and in this case education. Greenfield’s (1978, p. cvx) contentions serve to broaden the knowledge base of educational leadership by discounting the notion of an objective reality and emphasizing the agency of individuals in constructing society and leading its organizations. In contrast to functional models that sought to establish and explain causal relationships, leaders within this framework aim to “educate”, “deepen insight” and “enlighten” others (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 92). Beliefs no longer center on finding the correct or proper method to lead, rather, leaders concentrate on understanding the meanings which individuals assign to their experiences, histories and lived realities. Good leaders are seen to be reflective rather than regimented and intent on understanding the multiple viewpoints of participants and the ways in which individual meanings may be used to construct schooling into a supportive and fundamentally respectful process (Anderson, 1990; Ryan, 2003).

While interpretivist approaches recognize the multiplicity of identities that individuals have and the subsequent meanings that can ensue because of one’s location, they fail to acknowledge the power relations and sociocultural patterns that silence and obscure opposing meanings. As a result, racism, classism, sexism and their associated intersections are relegated to a negotiable and intrinsic illusion that is generally denied in the absence of consensus. Theorists’ discontented with this framing of leadership, and intimately aware of the historical subjugation, disempowerment and alienation that minoritized members
experience within society and its institutions, trouble the discourse of educational leadership and put forward critical theoretical orientations (Blackmore, 1989; Freire, 1998; Foster, 1989; Gemmill & Oakley, 1997; Portelli & Solomon, 2001). Critical leadership paradigms view traditional schooling as inherently flawed and oppressive. Leaders are committed to naming patterned exclusion and challenge social inequities as they unfold in education and community. Further, such individuals view themselves and others as agents and are committed to altering the current structure of education to ensure more equitable ownership, involvement and decision-making. Models from a critical orientation emphasize change and agency and are complexly conceptualized as being critically just and democratic (Blackmore, 2002; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007), spiritually invoked (Dantley, 2003a; Dillard, 2000) communally informed and empowering (Dillard, 1995; Evans & Tynes, 1995; Foster, 2005), student engaging (McMahon & Portelli, 2004) and equitably driven (Dantley, 2003b; Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009). Further, there is a dedicated effort towards critical inquiry and the centering of difficult conversations in opposition to “popularized discourses of globalized economies, market-drive economies and risk management (Blackmore, 1989, p. 208). In opposition to traditional conceptions, critical theorists like Sergiovanni (1994), Dillard (2000), Dantley (2003), and Hill-Collins (2000) recognize that leadership is not a phenomenon that is enacted solely by individuals within schools. Rather, from a historical standpoint, there is an enhanced awareness that educational transformation is often the result of community-based leaders persistently undertaking and advocating for meaningful change. In summary, critical theories therefore create space for the meaningful inclusion of alternate conceptions and paradigms of practice. Of particular interest to the present project are those
exploring the intersections between educational leadership, spirituality and African and Africentricity.

**Shaping Social Justice Leadership Practice**

In the context of the present study, the element of justice is a central and organizing construct. As such, it is advantageous to explore paradigms as reported in the literature. Libertarian models emphasize the aspect of merit and presume that social justice exists so long as the distribution of society’s goods is afforded according to what is earned and deserved (Nozick, 1974). From this perspective, it is assumed that everyone has the same opportunities in life and as such, obtains what is rightfully due. Further, inequities are expected and therefore, acceptable. In opposition to this approach, other theorists have argued for a reformist approach to justice which purports that individual opportunities for self-actualization are not equal. Consequently, it is believed that governmental intervention should be enacted to ensure fairness and the equal distribution of goods and opportunities in favour of those most disadvantaged, while at the same time preserving individual liberties and opportunities for attainment and success (Rawls, 1971).

In recent years, critical models of justice have been developed. These paradigms direct attention away from an outcome focus, namely the distribution of resources, towards a regard for the processes and structures which impede the materialization of justice (Young, 1999). Referred to as deliberative justice (Young, 1999) or communitarian justice (Vera & Speight, 2003), scholars have been diligent in exposing the patterned domination which create conditions of marginalization and oppression. Literature pertaining to critical notions of social justice has emerged in the examination of schooling and education (Brown, 2004;

Social justice encompasses freedom for all people, the fair and moral treatment of all people, and efforts to prevent and remedy socioeconomic and political inequity—especially when that inequity manifests via systemic forces (i.e., discriminatory hiring, schooling, and housing practices) and the civil and human rights violations of particular groups. (p. 697)

Collectively, critical theories expose the saliency of oppression across the multiple sites of social difference, namely race, class, gender, ability and sexual orientation and within the culture of schooling (Apple & Beane, 1995; Freire, 1998; hooks, 2003; Portelli & Solomon, 2001; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). These theories are instrumental to the research as they unearth the dimensions of power, domination, agency and resiliency that coexist within educational spaces and name the conditions through which educators lead in their attempts to facilitate socially just schooling. Moreover, such theories concretize justice beyond liberal notions and earmark participation, dialogue and critical reflection as approaches capable of facilitating education as a “shared” and communal space. The practice of shaping education towards a more socially just conception is undertaken from several perspectives. For instance, conceptions of education as a spiritual journey situate justice within the sacred needs of learners, communities and educational leaders (Miller, 2000; Palmer, 1983). As hooks (1994) asserts:

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)
Critical perspectives on student engagement offered by McMahon and Portelli (2004) contend that the quest for an equitable and just education must involve rupturing the structures of schooling so that nondominant student voices and diverse communities may have their voice listened to and enacted. Likewise, Portelli and Vibert (2002), and Vibert, Portelli, Shields, and Larocque (2002) unsettle common understandings about curriculum and propose a “curriculum of life” as a means of moving schools forward towards just and communal educational spaces. Social justice is also configured through the lens of inclusion. Dei (1996) explains that:

> Within the school system, inclusivity means dealing foremost with equity: The qualitative value of justice. It also means ensuring representation: a multiplicity of perspective in academic discourse, knowledge and texts....inclusivity requires pedagogies that respond to the social construction of difference in the school system, and also in society at large. (p. 176)

Finally, Portelli and Campbell-Stephens (2009) assert that the manifestation of greater justice in schools must be a strategically planned endeavour that equips global majority administrators with the skills to critically explore and engage with the inequitable dynamics of schooling. Elements of justice figure prominently within my conceptual framework and the aforementioned literature provides insight into current conceptions and necessary considerations. In the following segment, Educational Tensions: Issues and Influences, I review literature pertaining to the issues and influences that are reportedly known within the scope of education.

**Educational Tensions: Issues and Influences**

Research indicates that as primary institutions of knowledge production, schools are sites of conflict and confrontation; disharmonious spaces which are earmarked by
contentions and struggle over the right of knowledge production, ownership and belonging (Dei, 1996; Dei, James et al., 2000; Razack, 1995, 2002). Critical theorists have been astute in drawing attention to schools and schooling as being one of the formalized structures that have served to maintain, reproduce and legitimize oppression (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Dei, 1997; Dillard, 1995; Foster, 1990; McMahon & Portelli, 2012; Ooka Pang & Gibson, 2001). Scholarly research moreover documents the historical presence of racism and the marginalization of non-dominant members in society. Studies documenting the presence of racism and inequities have also identified the ways in which power relations in schools enact against students through differential practices of domination and exclusion (BLAC, 1994; Dei, James et al., 2000). These inequitable processes not only restrict the learning experiences of marginalized students but also ultimately foster academic outcomes that are substantively different from those students positioned within dominant ethnocultural locations (Dei, 1996, 1997, 1998; Ryan, 1998, 2003). Additional racist and oppressive educational cultures also pose tensions for educational staff including teachers and leaders. In discussions of racism and social justice it is also salient to discuss the resistance of African peoples and their efforts to oppose the multiple forms of oppression. The resulting tensions between oppression and resistance produce tangible pressures and dilemmas for educational leaders striving to lead more justly. Scholarship by Pollock, Deckman, Mira, and Shalaby (2010) discusses educational tensions with respect to preparing educators to address issues of race and inequity within their educational settings. These scholars identify three distinct forms of educational tensions in regards to antiracist work. Specifically, they note that educators experience tensions in knowing how to practically teach about racism. Secondly, individual teachers report tensions concerning their effectiveness in challenging societal and
systemic problems. The last reported tension reflects educators’ uncertainty around their professional competencies in dealing with racialized incidents within their life. With respect to leadership for social justice, Taylor (2003) writes that,

School leadership rooted in social justice has, at its center, tension...those who live in this intersection of tension are able to embrace the dis-junction between ideal and reality, privilege and oppression, surface change and the dismantling of structural barriers. I contend that school leaders who hold a social justice agenda embody the compassion that allows them to be both touched and moved and the capacity to touch and move others. (p. 4)

Taylor’s words portray leadership as a precarious balancing act. Jansen (2006) quite similarly affirms the former and states that leaders are always confronted with a series of pressures: “between redress and reconciliation, inspiration and instruction, coercion and compassion, and correction and community” (p. 47). Jansen’s (2006) further observations are noteworthy. In examining how White educational leaders work for transformative changes within the context of South Africa, he reports that leaders experience mounting tensions when attempting to respond to government directions, appease members of the status quo and simultaneously work as meaningful change agents. Jansen (2006) further reveals that the focus of leaders’ efforts is heavily influenced by their racialized histories and personal identities that both frame leaders’ understanding of self, school and the meanings of justice.

Reports by Walker and Quong (1998) describe tensions as an inherent part of education. More specifically, they contend that leaders are apt to experience professional tensions when attempting to institute processes in schooling that conflict with the status quo and respond to the diversity found within the school community. Tensions from this perspective push leaders to confirm to sameness rather than listen to the call for a responsive approach to schooling that values the diversity of the school community. In the opinion of
Walker and Quong, leaders often feel pressured to back down from the challenge of instituting change and lead in a manner that poses no threat to their professional profile. Consequently, these authors commend leaders to enter into the tensions by challenging uniformity and engaging differences to promote learning. Begley (1996) also recognizes the existence of educational tensions but unlike Walker and Quong (1998) attributes these tensions to the diversity of values held by members of the school-community as stated through the following:

Educational leaders are more and more working in environments where value conflicts are common. Racial, ethnic and religious groups increasingly intermingle, and educational stakeholders regularly disagree about what is desirable in policies, procedures and outcomes. (Begley, 1996, p. 407)

Despite these differences, Begley (1996) contends that leaders should use this existing tension as a catalyst to push for educational change. Educational tensions are further explored by Moller (2009) from the vantage point of accountability. In describing leaders’ attempts to mediate their professional and managerial responsibilities he asserts that pressures to achieve managerial accountability direct leaders to concern themselves with tasks that are assigned by their superiors. In contrast to the former, he also believes that leaders experience pressures associated with professional standards when they attempt to undertake leadership as a moral undertaking. In summary, educational tensions framing the practice of leadership are diversely understood as influencing the nature of leaders’ work. Knowing this information will help me to contextualize the work of African and Africentric educational leaders in their quest to lead towards social justice.
Summary

The conceptual framework as depicted in Figure 1 explores concepts that are related to spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership. While each of these constructs is discussed independently, they are interrelated and collectively they provide a general starting point for examining how spiritual leaders of African descent undertake a social justice orientation in their practice.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.
Definition of Terms

**African and Africentric:** The terms African and Africentric represent distinct yet interrelated understandings of what it means to be of African heritage. I employ African to represent individuals whose identity, culture, knowledge, and experience originate from an African continental perspective. As a descriptor, Africentric refers individuals whose identify, culture, knowledge, and experience emerge from a diasporic Africanized experience; meaning, while such individuals may possess the phenotypical characteristics of their African counterparts, their cultured identity as African peoples is filtered through non-African continental experiences.

**Strategic agency:** Reflects Dantley’s (2003b) conception of purposive and intentional leadership whereby leaders insightfully engage in challenging prohibitive structures.

**West Indian:** is a deliberate term that I employ as a descriptor of my personal identity. It is used in opposition to colonial connotations as within my community, West Indian connotes a rich ethnocultural heritage that is infused with generational legacies of resilience, empowerment and accomplishment.

**Libation:** Refers to the African tradition of paying homage to one’s ancestors through

**Endarkened:** In this study I utilize Dillard’s (2000) conception of endarkened to refer and reflect the understandings of spiritual African and Africentric leaders' leadership as raced and positioned peoples.
**Witnessing:** I draw upon Dillard, Abdur-Rashid, and Tyson’s (2000) conception of witnessing which embraces the autonomy of people of African descent to know, speak to and affirm their personal knowledges and experiences.

**Sacred:** In this context refers to the establishment of an inclusive space whereby members of the school-community are able to invoke their spirituality in meaningful and authentic ways.

**Chapter Summaries**

This study is organized into nine chapters and includes a bibliography of references and accompanying appendices. Chapter One introduces my research and outlines the purpose, aims of investigation and the significance of this study within the field of education leadership. It also explains the theoretical and conceptual frameworks anchoring my work. This chapter concludes with a section containing specific definitions that are used throughout the study.

Chapter Two examines literature that is pertinent to understanding spiritual African and Africentric leadership including relevant themes and issues. This chapter concludes with a review of African and Africentric spiritual worldviews, the function and impact of African and Africentric spiritualities and educational leadership as a spiritual and social justice endeavour. Chapter Three documents the methodology and methods utilized in the study. I purposefully acknowledge the adoption of a qualitative research design and specify in-depth reasons for its selection. A discussion of critical phenomenology is provided to situate the relevance of this approach to the study. I record how this method embraces African and Africentric spiritualities as phenomena of study, the perspectives of spiritual African and
Africentric leaders and the meanings which participants assign to their conceptions and experiences of leading. This chapter also explains why in-depth, semistructured interviews are utilized to collect data, how participants were accessed and the process I used to analyze the data. I also discuss limitations of the study as I understand them and provide a profile of each participant. This chapter concludes by explicitly stating my research stance and its influence on the research process.

Chapter Four begins a review of findings by highlighting participants’ spiritual worldview. Participants’ narratives invoke connections to literature reported in Chapter Two and illuminate predominant elements of African and Africentric spiritualities as being racialized, divinely inspired, unconventional, symbolic and relationally focused. Chapter Five documents participants’ perceptions of leadership and their understandings of leadership as a social justice endeavour. Leaders describe educational leadership through the use of change-oriented terminology, characteristics, communal descriptions and as an externally bestowed and invisible phenomenon. This chapter proceeds with a review of participants’ narratives concerning the nature of social justice within the context of spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership. The findings provide insight into the complex nature of socially just leadership within leaders’ individual sites. Narratives speak to traditional and critical conceptions of justice as found in the literature and reiterate the need for greater access, representation, rights and freedom and ownership. Chapter Six documents the experiences of educational leaders. Participants’ perspectives describe their leadership as encompassing administrative, educative and advocacy components. In addition, the chapter also outlines leaders’ beliefs around the function and role of spirituality within their practice and the tensions and issues which leaders believe influence their practice and are important to
the next generation of educational leaders. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the findings by illuminating how spiritual African and Africentric leadership practices offer a culturally-informed and communal perspective on leadership that simultaneously challenges neoliberal conceptions and affords practical measures for change. I also review the broader implications of the study and conclude with my recommendations for future practice, training and research.
Chapter Two
Literature Review

Introduction

The body of literature concerning spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership speaks to a robust legacy of agency and social transformation. What is currently agreed upon is that spiritual African and African and Africentric leaders are engaged in leading within and across schools and community on an individual and collective basis. Furthermore, the work of such leaders has been pivotal in establishing and advancing agendas for educational change, student achievement and community involvement. In the present chapter I draw upon scholarship from several disciplines namely, education, religion, spirituality, social work and psychology to illuminate the nature of this phenomenon as understood by experts in the field. I organize this literature according to five thematic yet, interrelated areas: African and Africentric Educational Leadership, African and Africentric Spiritual Worldviews, Function and Impact of African and Africentric spiritualities, Educational Leadership as a Spiritual Endeavour, and Social Justice Leadership as a means of teasing out what is known and helping me to move forward in the research process. In section I, focused attention is initially placed on highlighting what the literature says with respect to African and Africentric educational leadership. I also provide an in-depth discussion of issues that influence the practice of leading. Section II reviews what has been reported with respect to the spiritual worldviews of African and Africentric peoples in the hopes of educating the readership about the intricacies and broad commonalities which give rise Black/African people’s spiritual understandings. In Section III and IV respectively, I discuss the function and impact of African and Africentric spiritualities and notions of
educational leadership as a spiritual undertaking. Within the latter portion of Chapter Two I explore the salience of spirituality to African and Africentric leaders’ quest for justice. I conclude this chapter with a general overview of conceptions of social justice leadership as discussed within the field of education.

**African and Africentric Educational Leadership: Themes and Issues**

Over the last number of years, critical scholarship has enriched the knowledge base of education with diverse and inclusive models of leadership and leading (Dantley, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005b; Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009; Ryan, 2003, 2006; Shields, 2003). Accordingly, theorists have also been instrumental in identifying the unique aspects of African and Africentric leadership and framing the issues which contour leaders’ scope of practice. As a result of these investigations a rich and distinctive repository of information on African and Africentric leadership has been produced. In particular, scholarship records that African and Africentric educational leadership is historical, multi-faceted and embedded in the contextual complexities aspects of schooling, community and society. The present section explores the base of literature related to African and Africentric leadership including the associated themes and the influences.

African and Africentric educational leadership is historically grounded. Its root may be traced back to the continental empires of Africa as reports chronicle the legacy of African leadership and the involvement of African peoples in the establishment and operation of distinguished institutes of learning, centres of study and repositories of literatures for centuries (Diop & Cook, 1974; Diop & Negemi, 1991). Furthermore, there is also evidence that such institutions serve as the foundational basis of neighbouring societies and Western
civilization (Diop & Cook, 1974; Diop & Negemi, 1991). This history is highly significant to the present project in that it reveals that despite the conspicuous absence of such information within Westernized institutes of learning, people of African descent have been involved in theorizing about and implementing educational leadership practice for centuries.

In accordance with research, African and Africentric educational leadership is also multifaceted, occurring within and across the school-community boundary. In this regard, school-based studies like Dillard (1995) typically describe the efforts of classroom teachers, principals and educators in administrative posts and chronicle the path undertaken by each leader. The scope of African and Africentric educational leadership in this respect is further uniquely situated as leaders reportedly reinterpret the purpose education beyond the rudiments of academics and achievement to include engagement in the wider sociopolitical realities of their school-community and society (Allen et al., 1995; Dillard, 1995). In contrast to the former, other scholars such as Este and Thomas Bernard (2006) intentionally focus their efforts on African and Africentric leadership in communities and carefully document the actions of clergy, community members and other individuals of influence in facilitating educational change. Further, there is also a body of literature on African and Africentric educational leadership that documents how leaders work within and across their positional assignments to effect proactive change in school or community. African and Africentric leadership is also expressed as a function of collective agency. In this sense I refer to such community-based organizations as the Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC, 1994), Canadian Alliance of Black Educators and the Quebec School of Black Educators (Bayne & Williams, 2008), and their efforts to create greater opportunities for children, youth and adults to access and achieve academic and cultural advancement.
We are now learning that while African and Africentric educational leadership does mirror a foremost emphasis on educational advancement, its expression is also contextualized by the various issues which pervade the educational landscape. One of the more prominent issues discussed in the literature as capturing the attention of leaders of African descent is that of social justice (F. Brown, 2005; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Hopson et al., 2010). Scholarship is also exact in noting that African and Africentric leaders often find themselves in professionally complex situations that call for strategic negotiations amidst tense and oftentimes conflicting mandates (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Wilson Cooper, 2009; Dillard, 2000; Gaetane, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Likewise, educational leaders of African descent frequently resist oppressive systems by reclaiming and reframing their own cultural identities (Dei, 2012; Lee, 1990), centering their indigenous knowledges and protesting differential treatment when leading and working within and with their environments. In a recent comparative study by Wilson Cooper (2009), the findings further suggest that accomplishing the task of leading for social justice is not as straightforward as it seems. In particular, Wilson Cooper noted a disconnect between an African American educational leader’s quest for justice and the actions undertaken within the leadership role.

In more recent times, research conducted by, with and for people of African descent also reveals several pervading issues. In particular, studies report that leaders’ practice is enacted within environments of Eurocentrism and marginalization (Brown, 2005; Gaetane et al., 2009; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010). Further, theorists highlight the ongoing tensions fostered by raced, classed and multi-oppressive environments. Studies reveal that African and Africentric educational leaders are more often placed within traditionally underfunded schools sites that are characterized by underachievement and resource
disparities. Furthermore, theorists report the continued prevalence of racism as a contouring and determining factor that maintains reproduces and legitimizes differential outcomes for people of African descent (Allen et al., 1995; Dillard, 1995; Foster, 1990; Ooka Pang & Gibson, 2001). More precisely, these researchers document how power relations in schools enact against members to foster marginalization and underachievement (Dei, 1997; Ryan, 1998, 2003). Additionally, several studies speak to the potential harm which leaders of African descent experience most notably in the form of professional barriers (Gaetane et al., 2009).

Within the North American context, evidence abounds concerning the role of racism in the creation of segregated schooling and the actualization of oppression prohibiting people of African descent from accessing educational opportunities in comparison to their Eurocentric counterparts (BLAC, 1994; Evans & Tynes, 1995; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). In such contexts, African educational leadership has been pivotal to the emergence of more just systems of education. For instance, community-based initiatives pioneered the development of Black and African-centered schools that addressed the cultural interests of individuals and the broader community (BLAC 1994; Franklin, 1990; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Murtadha and Watts’s (2005) biographical analysis of the leadership experiences of five African American women during the early 20th century clearly speaks to this crucial function of African and Africentric educational leadership by identifying that, “From the elementary to collegiate levels, Black leadership drove the process of institution building” (p. 594). Further, Siddle Walker’s (2003) biographical case study of Ulysses Byas, a former African American principal during the formal segregation era, outlines the deliberative acts of resistance undertaken to expose and rectify inherent
practices of discrimination. In particular, Siddle Walkers’ account emphasizes how leaders assume action research, relational nurturance, community development, and strategic management to circumvent ineffective policies and practices. In the same manner, Gaetane et al.’s (2009) study involving Black female educational leaders documents how leaders work to equip disempowered members through collaboration, inclusion and consensus building.

Beyond the schools, scholarship reports that leaders are also attuned to issues within society and note their longstanding involvement in effecting social transformation (Brown, 2005; Franklin, 2000; Hopson et al., 2010). Johnson and Campbell-Stephens’s (2010) scholarship attributes leaders’ tendency to engage the wider societal issues to their cultural insight. Hopson et al. (2010) agree that African and Africentric educational leaders are influenced by the sociopolitical contexts in which they work. Accordingly, they report that educational leaders continue to be seen as instrumental agents in forming alliances to collectively achieve radical changes in society. Quite similarly, reports reveal that minoritized leaders such as those involved in Johnson and Campbell-Stephens (2010) study of Black and global majority educational leaders demonstrate a purposed agency to lead in ways that facilitate communal advancement.

African and Africentric educational leaders working in schools are actively engaged in activities that affirm the identities and interests of students, families and community. More precisely, the role of educational leader in such cases is focused towards advocacy and presenting students with accurate portrait of themselves or as Foster (2005) asserts a counter narrative to the prevailing depictions. In this case, educational leadership was seen as encompassing talking back to the negative portrayals, and reframing the experiences of children and their families towards a more empowering and accurate representation. Beyond
the classroom, African and Africentric educational leadership is influential in the areas of child-centred pedagogy, suffrage, parent education, politics, social welfare and adult education. Further to this, the scope of leaders’ work often entails participating on existing communal organizations and the creation of associations in response to the quest for economic independence and self and community actualization. The actions of educational leaders who work with community-focused initiatives are also markedly instrumental and multi-dimensional. Studies reporting on such occurrences have over the last number of years unearthed the strategic and proactive critique, which African and Africentric educational leaders have enacted to analyze and alter the parameters of schooling and society towards a more inclusive, equitable and affirmative ends (Hill-Collins, 2000; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Murtadha and Watts (2005) report on the influence of community-based educational leaders and state that, “women through service in churches, service organizations, and women’s clubs, acted as forces of educational movements, and without them, those movements could not have been sustained” (p. 593). Conclusively they assert that educational leadership meant:

Fighting a larger more complex battle for moral imperative to overcome the social barriers of poverty and institutionalized racism’ inequities within a democratic society. It meant getting resources where not or few were provided, and it meant creating opportunities for Black children and adults to learn where many had given up hope. Moreover, because the issues were not only about formal education structures, access and quality, community engagement was central to Black educational leadership. (Murtadha & Watt, 2005, p. 593)

The critical role that individual community-based educational leaders play in the quest for educational justice is also documented in the scholarship of Hill-Collins (2000). Hill-Collins reports that the title of educator was chiefly assigned to men and women who were
committed to community development. As educators, community leaders were heavily involved in motherwork or the care of other children within their communities. Within the Canadian context, collective efforts have also been implemented throughout the years by African and Africentric educational leaders in community to protest differential treatment (BLAC, 1994) lobby for equitable representation and access (Braithwaite & James, 1996; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010) and interrogate educational practices (BLAC, 1994).

**African and Africentric Spiritual Worldviews: A Closer Look**

This research explores the meanings which spiritual African and Africentric leaders assign to their practice of leadership and the impact of spirituality within their professional practice of democracy and social justice. Accordingly, a review of African and Africentric spiritual worldviews was advantageous in delineating the guiding principles which are thought to shape current understandings. Conceptions of spirituality within the lives of African peoples have been explored from indigenous and continental standpoints. Researchers report that the spiritual worldviews of African peoples reflect an interwoven tapestry of beliefs and practices that are diversely understood and intricately tied to their sociocultural uniqueness (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Booth, 1977; Cone, 1997; Mazama, 2002; C. Stewart, 1997). Stewart (1997) also confirms the former and states that “the structure and content of these [belief] various systems are highly differentiated” (p. 7). She further contends that “while the expressive forms of religious beliefs are very similar...great diversity exists within and between African and African American spiritualities. The philosophical and theological suppositions also vary greatly according to the religious texts, classes, and cultural contests” (p. 8).
In light of this complexity, researchers have devoted much attention towards exploring the multiple worldviews associated with the spirituality of African peoples. For example, continental perspectives of African spirituality have produced a wealth of literature that tangibly distinguishes the cultural sensitivities present within and across traditional belief systems (Booth, 1977; Ephirim-Donkor, 1997; Kamara, 2000). Within the North American context, theorists report that the spiritual worldviews of African peoples are deeply embedded within a historical and lived experience that is informed, by but not limited to, African traditions, the enslavement of African peoples and the Africanization of the Christian tradition (Dantley, 2003; West, 1988). While diversity of expressions exist, scholars like C. Stewart (1997) note that African American spirituality is largely differentiated by denominational affiliation rather than by religious orientation and is reportedly “one of the most significant elements shaping the character, culture, identity and destiny of African Americans…a people who are and always have been…deeply spiritual” (p. 1).

Amidst the distinctiveness of African spiritual worldviews, scholars contend that it is also appropriate to talk of a collective African spiritual consciousness as there are central features which are common and identifiable (Booth, 1977; Bridges, 2001; Dantley, 2005; Idowu, 1975; Kamara, 2000; Mazama, 2002; Mbiti, 1970, 1971). In particular, researchers draw attention to several unifying themes which are believed to characterize African and Africentric spiritualities namely, the centrality of the theism, the influence of ‘religion’, a “densely populated” and interdependent cosmos, the presence of evil and malevolency, freedom and agency and the relevance of cultural symbols (Booth, 1977; Cone, 2004; Mazama, 2000). Following is a detailed overview of each thematic area.
Centrality of the Divine

The spiritual worldviews of African peoples boast a historically shared heritage that recognizes spirituality as a divinely inspired and potently influential phenomenon (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Cone, 2004; Newlin et al., 2002; C. Stewart, 1997). Asante and Nwadiora (2007) in their efforts to identify the spiritual themes common within African religions report that, “most Africans believe in a Supreme God who creates the universe or causes it to be created although it is believed that this entity may remain distant from the creation” (p. 3). Similar reports are echoed by Kamara (2000) who notes that, “what is certain is that this religious thought system unequivocally recognizes the existence of God, or Pa Kuru, to whom everything is subordinated” (p. 508). C. Stewart (1997) observes a similar worldview and states:

Despite these multiplicities of spiritual belief, practices, and expression, a firm cosmology undergirds and informs the practice of African and African American spirituality at all levels. This cosmology transcends the nuances and complexities of various religious beliefs and practices and is the unifying thread of African and African American spiritual beliefs systems particularly as it relates to the cultural and theological beliefs that inform the practice of freedom. This cosmology holds that God, the Divine Spirit, or Nature is the absolute, hegemonic, supreme, primordial reality, which orchestrates, governs, empowers, transforms, and infuses creation with a creative soul force that is the basis and power of life. (p. 8)

The acknowledgement of theism is further echoed in Cone’s (2004) commentary on black theology. Cone declares that black spirituality is anchored in the existence of the Divine, and the Divine’s committed resolve to restore the disenfranchised.

As expected, varying perspectives are held with respect to the role of God or Supreme Being. Asante and Nwadiora (2007) report that traditional African beliefs view the divine
solely as creator and as such, is seen as distant “from any direct involvement in the affairs of humans” (p. 2). Consequently, these researchers state that.

He or she plays almost no role in the daily activities of the people. No one would even think of knowing this being or trying to know him or her’s “a personal saviour.”...[As] only in the most critical moment when it seems the entire universe is topsy-turvy or the cosmos may fail, will the African appeal to the creator God. (p. 2)

In contrast to the above, African Americanized or North American conceptions of the divine while concurring that “God is the God of Nature and Spirit, the God of creativity” also hold that God intervenes in humanity and “imbues black people with a creative soul force that sustains their survival and validates their existence” (C. Stewart, 1997, p. 9). This perspective is noted by C. Stewart (1997):

God is still in charge of creation, that God makes a way out of no way, that the outsiders will be transformed into insiders and the oppressed will be set free. Because God specializes in changing the conditions of African Americans into a positive reality, African American spirituality praxis has succeeded in promulgating and instilling in them this important belief. [that] God will transform the lives of the oppressed and the oppressed will transform their peculiar condition into a meaningful litany of praise and thanksgiving for human empowerment and existence. (p. 25)

Cone (2004) confirms the former and states, that “Without romanticizing or oversimplifying here, there remains within the ethos of African American life a fundamental recognition that neither black life itself nor the community that sustains black life could exist without the power of God” (p. 53). Cone further (2004) asserts that God is creative, immanent, transcendent and providential and argues that within the liberatory framework of Black spiritual consciousness, the divine represents a present and dynamic force. Cone (2004)
states, God is not a symbol referring to the interior religious experiences of humankind. Nor is

God to be thought of in the manner of the deist philosophers, who pictured God as performing the initial act of creation but refraining from any further involvement in the world. God is involved in the concrete affairs of human history, liberating the oppressed. Therefore to ask, “Who is God?” is to focus on what God is doing; and to look at what god is doing is to center on human events as they pertain to the liberation of suffering humanity. (p. 76)

Although beliefs surrounding the nature of the divine differ, cumulatively, they serve to illuminate a worldview which acknowledges the cosmos as a created sphere of activity.

**Influence of “Religion”**

In conjunction with the centrality of theism, scholars emphasize religion as an essential cultural element of African and Africentric spiritualities (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Booth, 1977; Du Toit, 1998; Kamara, 2000). In opposition to Westernized connotations, African and Africentric framings situate religion and its institutions as critically distinctive catalysts within Black communities (Cone, 2004; Este & Bernard, 2006; Spencer, 2010).

Within African society, religious spirituality is a natural part of one’s humanity. Mbiti (1970) explains:

Religion in African societies is written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages like the priests, rainmakers, officiating elders, and even kings. Everybody is a religious carrier. Therefore, we have to study not only the beliefs concerning God and the spirits but also the religious journey of the individual from birth to after physical death; and we have to study the person responsible for formal rituals and ceremonies. What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated; they belong to a single whole. (p. 5)
In the aforementioned, Mbiti (1970) weaves together the strands typically associated with African religiosity and in doing so illuminates the dynamic aspects of the sacred. African spirituality embodies religion as a natural, connective and an inherent mechanism whereby individuals engage with the divine towards critical communal praxis. Kamara (2000) provides further evidence of this wholistic point of reference and states, that “to be African is to be religious, to be alive is to be religious, and to be religious is to work toward the enhancement of the community to please the Supreme Creator” (p. 504).

Within the sociological terrain of the diaspora, Africentric spirituality also entails a “religious” influence. However, as Dantley (2003a) notes that while “organized religious experiences” (p. 655) serve as platform for spiritual expression, African American spirituality surpasses the institutionalized demarcations of religion and creatively unfolds within the realities of the everyday. Mattis (2000) affirms this distinguishing and defines religion as a prescriptive tool that enables individuals to become spiritual.

As one might expect, African and Africentric spiritualities encompass a variety of religious expressions (C. Stewart, 1999; P. Stewart, 2004). However, as the majority signify adherence to a Christian basis, theorists continue to point to the “black church” as the most prominent institution for black/African community members within the North American context (Cone, 2004; C. Stewart, 1999). Walker (1995) explains that in regards to African Canadian communities, “[beyond] the family itself, for the Black pioneers and for generations of their descendants, the core of the community was the church. Church membership defined community, provided opportunities to participate in community affairs and created networks for cooperative endeavours” (p. 146). Furthermore, C. Stewart (1997) reveals that:
As institution, the black church models economic resourcefulness and development, vocational and educational empowerment through corporate praxis of spirituality. As cultural force, it has preserved the norms and forms of black culture institutionally. As spiritual reality, it has instilled in black people the imperatives for human dignity and freedom. (p. 105)

Thomas Jones (2001) describes that pivotal role of the church by stating that “the church in the African American community has been a source of physical, emotion, and financial support, serves as an extension of the family, and provides role models for youth” (p. 4). Furthermore, Eugene’s (1995) work outlines the proactive role of the church in facilitating African American women’s mental health while Este and Thomas Bernard (2006) document the critical links which the Black church assumed within the sociopolitical life of the African Nova Scotian community. Most recently, Brown Spencer (2009) documents the sociopolitical prowess of the Black Oneness Church in Toronto as an organizing dynamic within Black life. Consequently, religion and religious institutions in particular, within the North American context are viewed as the arena in which African peoples, enact, engage and invoke the spiritual towards self, community actualization and empowerment.

“A Densely Populated” and Interdependent World

In addition to honouring the centrality of the divine and the acknowledgment of a “religious” orientation, African and Africentric spiritual worldviews collectively embrace the existence of spiritual beings namely ancestors, deities and other spirits and a belief that the living and dead cohabit the “densely populated” (Mazama, 2002, p. 222) world as interdependent members (Asante & Nwardiora, 2007; Du Toit, 1998; Kamara, 2000; Mazama, 2000; P. Stewart, 2004). Mazama (2000) refers to this phenomenon as “ontological unity” (p. 221), and states that what distinguishes earth’s inhabitants is “the degree of
visibility, the spiritual world being largely invisible but nonetheless quite real”. In this regard, “people do not conceive of themselves as separated from the cosmos but as being completely integrated into a universe that is much larger than any of them and yet is centered around them” (Mazama, 2000 p. 220). Du Toit (1998) explains:

African spirituality, unlike Western spirituality, depends entirely on the other to be realised. Any act of separating oneself (through prayer, meditation, fasting or silence) from the other negates the spiritual force. One's spirituality can come to the full only when one is linked in the causal chain that binds the living, the ancestors, nature and God together in one holistic field of force. (p. 51)

As a result, Du Toit (1998) further explains that an African and Africentric spiritual worldview:

Does not know the strict division that Westerners make between the holy and the secular. Life is much more integrated, with reality as a network of interrelated spiritual forces. These forces do not restrict themselves to some special terrain. Ancestors are experienced in everyday situations, interweaving social, psychological, religious, political and cultural aspects with the religious and the secular. (p. 51)

In conjunction with the emphasis on the spirited world, African and Africentric spiritualities also recognize the fundamental significance of community. For instance, in African societies, one’s communal relationships define the parameters of identity and it is therefore expected that individuals participate in the advancement of community. Booth (1977), for example, claims that

Individuals find fulfilment not as a separate individual but as a participant in a family and a community. Relationships with other people are of utmost significance. Troubles of almost all kinds are due to breakdowns in human relationships; the well-being of each individual depends on the preservation or restoration of these relationships. (p. 7)
Myers (1988, as cited Watt, 2003, p. 56) asserts that “the spirit and matter are interconnected and self-worth is intrinsic. The self….is seen as multidimensional, encompassing the ancestor, those yet unborn, nature and community” For P. Stewart (2004), this orientation towards collective responsibility transcends genealogical ties and serves to facilitate hopefulness, minimize estrangement, and nurture communal support amongst community members. P. Stewart (2004) writes:

A significant aspect of African American spirituality as a practice of human freedom is the establishment of cooperative and harmonious relations as the basis of black community. The individual is a community unto himself or herself but also participates in a larger community of other selves. For black people being part of a larger social aggregate gives collective strength and vitality. (p. 53)

Within the confines of relational interdependence, African and Africentric spiritualities direct individuals to act in ways that strengthen and cultivate community life. Research by Mattis (2000) documents this dynamic in their accounting that African American women describe the self and an individual’s relationship to others and God as being prominent components of spirituality. In summarizing the role of spirituality within the African Nova Scotian experience, Este and Thomas Bernard (2006) define spirituality as “an individual’s connection with a sense of higher power or supreme… [and] all elements in the universe” (p. 1). Likewise, Schiele (1996) defines spirituality as “that invisible universal substance that connects all human beings to each other and the creator” (p. 287). From an African and Africentric spiritual worldview, humanity is therefore, uniquely positioned in relation to the Divine, community and against the backdrop of a spirited and tenuous cosmos.
The Presence of Evil / Malevolency

African and Africentric spiritualities acknowledge the presence of evil and malevolent forces. Asante and Nwadiora (2007) contend that while the expression of evil may reflect regional and cultural beliefs, there is a unified consensus that within African societies, evil arises from deliberate intent. Asante and Nwadiora (2007) further claim that:

Within each society, there are ethical and moral codes of behavior to which the community adheres. Anyone who deviates from these norms creates chaos in the village….When these violations occur, equilibrium is disrupted, thus causing disintegration and destruction of community life. (p. 36)

In the context of African spirituality, evil is therefore viewed a present phenomena that is enacted consciously by individuals or spirits, and invoked through magic, spells and various incantations (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007). Unexplained mishaps, physical, and emotional illness and suffering may be attributed to an evil intent and are described as being significant antecedents of spirituality (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Newlin et al., 2002).

The existence of evil, “life adversities” (Newlin et al., 2002, p. 61) or oppression is also acknowledged within African American spirituality (Cone, 2004; Newlin et al., 2002). Similarly to traditional belief systems, evil represents a deliberative suppression of freedom and the denial of rights which were divinely afforded to community members (Cone, 2004; C. Stewart, 1997). Racism, oppression, dehumanization are commonly reported as the manifestations of evil and spiritual affliction which continually impact and cause injury. In effect, C. Stewart (1999) contends:

An insidious effect of racism and oppression is the manner in which black have been denigrated, devaluated, and virtually delegitimized as human being in American society….To be European was to have value, to be African was to be without personal worth. (p. 52)
African and Africentric spiritualities provide individuals with a more confirmatory and authentic lens from which to view their existence, purpose and capabilities. Moreover, African and Africentric spiritualities move individuals beyond the denigration of society’s labels and actualizations and in effect, reinforce a more accurate reality as noted by C. Stewart (1999) in the following:

Being a child of God means that one’s psychological analysis is about who one is as a personal will always be larger than the debilitating, social labels forced upon him. It means that my range of thinking about my personal worth will always exceed the social and racial limits that are designed to stagnate my potential. (p. 65)

**Freedom and Agency**

African and Africentric spiritualities regard individuals as human agents who are divinely empowered to enter into the arena of life, fully prepared to become embattled in the reclaiming of their sovereign freedoms, subjectivity and the restoration of ontological unity (Duncan & McCoy, 2007; C. Stewart, 1999; Watt, 2003). In the context of African and Africentricity, individuals are seen as possessing what Booth (1977) refers to as “vitality” and “life power”, that is the belief that individuals possess the ability to intervene and engage freely in life (p. 6). From this perspective, humans are not only equipped but are capable of accomplishing and achieving change. Schiele (2000) explains:

The African concept of humanism does not sever the relationship between God and humans. Human’s ability to be moral and caring is viewed as the core of the human being in African philosophy; it is the invisible, spiritual nexus between God and humans that generates the potential of human beings to behave morally. (p. 26)

Consequently, while African American spirituality recognizes the presence of a supreme being, and the Divine’s active concern for humanity, there is also a realization that
individuals have the divine right, ability and duty to exercise agency and act morally (C. Stewart, 1999). Furthermore, human existence and development is viewed as a multifaceted, mediated and spiritualized process that entails collective interdependence, negotiation and resistance (Cone, 2004; Cross, 1991; Du Toit, 2002; C. Stewart, 1999; Thomas Jones, 2001).

**Cultural Symbolism**

According to Du Toit (1998), “symbols play a tremendously important role in world-views and contribute to the carving-out of a human identity and a place to stand” (p. 52). Notable cultural symbols within and across African spirituality, reportedly include oral and textual accountings, religious rites and rituals, and healing (Du Toit, 1998; C. Stewart, 1999). Oral and textual accountings are described in the literature as being essential codes which members utilize to define and transcend their circumstances and life events (Cone, 2004; C. Stewart, 1997). For example, Thomas Jones (2001) notes that the Africentric worldviews utilize stories and proverbial sayings and oral traditions to “provide comfort” and “promote acceptance” of adversarial situations (p. 4). Booth (1977) suggests that African traditional spirituality is primarily understood by listening to members “attitudes toward life” and not through the perusal of documents (p. 10). In this sense, the spoken word is seen as the mechanisms by which African peoples communicate their cultural and spiritual worldview. Ephirim-Donkor (1997) in his exploration of African spirituality within the Akan culture also emphasizes the role of orality, namely prayers, supplications and call-and-responses as examples of accountings which infuse the cultural realities of African peoples. Likewise, Eugene (1995) mentions songs while C. Stewart (1997) identifies “testifyin”, “signifyin”, call and response, praise and other affective responses as examples of orality which have
powerfully given shape to the cultural expression of African spirituality within the American context. The act of orality or vocalizing is alternately three-fold. As stated above, vocalizations have served as the vehicle through which African peoples have responded to their life conditions. Synonymously, orality has served to enhance conditions of intimacy in community whereby members have the opportunity to communicate and respond to the interests of others.

Scriptural symbols, refer to documented texts of spiritual relevance. Kamara (2000) notes that although the Bible was introduced during the colonization period of Africa and subsequently used to expropriate traditional African belief systems, it later also became a vehicle through which African peoples incorporated their traditional teachings. Du Toit (1998) explains its appeal: “With its miracles, blessings and curses, divine interventions, casting-out of devils, resurrection from the dead, sharing of the means of living and so on, the Bible fits remarkably well into an African primal world-view” (p. 53). Quite similarly, for many people of African American descent, the Bible is regarded as an empowering and libratory testament with “textual and contextual” relevancy (C. Stewart, 1997, p. 10). Accordingly, it is seen to provide insight in the principles for daily living and guidelines on the attainment of human freedom and actualization (C. Stewart, 1997).

As symbols, religious rituals and rites are described as sites in which community members collectively celebrate and commemorate important occasions and life events (Asante & Kwadiora, 2007; Du Toit, 1998). In conjunction with the former, C. Stewart (1999) writes:

Ritual is essential to African-American spirituality and was especially critical in the formative phases of black life and culture in America....These
ceremonies not only brought order, relief, and understanding to black suffering but also consistently connected them with divine reality amid the absurdities and atrocities of their existence. (p. 23)

Healing within the African context bears symbolic relevance because it is often viewed as a process whereby individuals may regain spiritual wholeness as illness are frequently interpreted as reflecting a spiritual imbalance or disconnect (Du Toit, 1998). Quite similarly, in the context of African American spirituality healing is symbolic of restoration and redemption; necessary steps given that suffering, oppression and spiritual wounding are experienced elements of their existence.

The need for healing and wholeness has always been a central element in African American life. ...Spiritual, physical, psychological, and relational healing have been realized in the lives of black believers....Healing comes in response to the troubles and sorrows of this life. It is affirmed through prayer, preaching, counselling, laying on of hands, anointing with oil. (C. Stewart, 1997, p. 118)

The tenets of African and African spirituality provide a starting point for appreciating the worldviews of African peoples. As I am interested in understanding how spirituality influences leaders’ practices it is also beneficial to explore what the literature reports concerning its function and impact.

Function and Impact of African and Africentric spiritualities

This study explores the impact of African and Africentric leaders’ spirituality in their quest for social justice. It is therefore important to examine relevant literature which outlines the recorded function of spirituality within the lives of African and Africentric peoples. In the following I discuss the influence of spirituality with respect to identity formation and
mediation, the role of spirituality in fostering empowerment and social change, and the impact of spirituality on the health and wellness of African peoples.

Identify Formation and Mediation

Dominant theories on identity development such as Erikson’s (1980) eight-stages of psychosocial development and Kegan’s (1982) six-stage theory on psychological development postulate that one’s sense of self develops socially as one moves through different stages of development and engages in interpersonal interaction with others (Erikson, 1980). These theories are generally accepted as providing information concerning the critical dimensions of identity development as it pertains to “intrapsychic sense of self, interpersonal recognition by another (interidentity), identification with a group or groups of other and an integral orientation to humanity” (Green, 2009, pp. 53–54). In this context, identity development is understood to be fluid rather than linear and to involve tense moments or crises in individuals’ lives as they attempt to work out the meanings of selfhood in relationships to others (Green, 2009). Notions of “I am” are therefore seen as dynamically intertwining with perceptions of self as an individual or as a member of a collective (Green, 2009, p. 54). Resultantly, identity’s fluidity takes shape and is constrained in reference to the dominant relations in one’s life. As such, identity development is seen as a socially constructed and “looping” process (Green, 2009). Quite similarly, Bates (1986) writes that, “It is the culture that gives meaning to life. The beliefs, languages, rituals, knowledge, convention, courtesies, and artifacts – in short the cultural baggage of any group, are the resources from which the individual and social identities are constructed” (p. 262).
While the former theories provide a foundation from which to consider the development of identity, critical theorists argue that a more authentic depiction is needed to truly understand the social-political realities of identity formation for minoritized populations (Bannerji, 1996, 2000; Collins, 2000; Cross, 1991; Fernandes, 2002; hooks, 1994; Lorde, 1984; Ogbu, 1992, 2004; Restoule, 2000; Schutte, 1998). More precisely, scholars contend that a critical interrogation is highly beneficial in challenging notions of identity development as a peaceful and nonviolent occurrence (Bannerji, 2000; Cesaire, 1972; Hill-Collins, 2000; hooks, 1999; Ogbu, 2004; Shohat, 1995; Smith, 1999; Wane, 2004). In contrast, researchers’ interrogations recognize identity making as a complexly intertwined process that unfolds with and in opposition to dominant portraits of humaneness and normalcy. Critical accounts situate the process of identity making as a political and heavily contestable arena that is imbued with resistance, struggle and reconstruction. For instance Giroux (1997) asserts that “how we understand come to know ourselves cannot be separated from how we are represented and how we imagine ourselves” (p. 14). In lieu of current scholarship we are learning that one’s identity is not a static nor a predictive entity, but rather a semipermeable and fluid construction that moves with and against the peculiarities of life and living. Accessing authentic formulations means redefining the grand narratives that are typically associated with marginalized populations and willingly embracing the unimagined or as Taubman (1993) suggests, identity constructions that are more autobiographical and authentic.

Within the Canadian landscape, the identity of African peoples is often conscripted through discourses of “visibility” to “minority” to connote a particularized static identity for “non-White” individuals. This demarcation was reportedly devised during the 1970s era as a
way of distinguishing “coloureds” and other “non-White” individuals living in Canada (Synnott & Howes, 1996, p. 137). Since its conception, scholars have been exposing how this language constructs and reproduces tangible disparities by covertly defining who and how one may inhabit public spaces. More specifically, as Bannerji (2000) explains, these terms positions minoritized bodies into precarious and telling locations.

The state and the “visible” minorities,” (the non-White people living in Canada) have a complex relationship with each other. There is a fundamental unease with how our difference is construed and constructed by the state, how our otherness in relation to Canada is projected and objectified. We cannot be successfully ingested, or assimilated, or made to vanish from where we are not wanted. We remain an ambiguous presence, our existence a question mark in the side of the nation, with the potential to disclose much about the political unconscious and consciousness of Canada as an “imagined community.” (p. 2)

So entrenched is the conception of visible minority as being reflective of Africanized populations within Canada that it is enshrined within public discourses such as the Multiculturalism Act, and Employment Equity Act and heavily operationalized such programs as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity and Immigration (Synnott & Howes, 1996). This “outsider” status says Bannerji (1996) positions individuals as existing within Canada but never truly living or experiencing the privilege of belonging. Of this she states:

We have the awareness that we have arrived in somebody’s state, but what kind of state; whose imagined community or community of imagination does it embody? And what are the terms and conditions of our “belonging” to this state of a nation? (Bannerji, 1996, p. 2)

While recognizing the contexts in which many people of African descent exist, scholars have undertaken the task of exploring that process of identity formation. (Cross, 1991; Duncan & McCoy, 2007; Ogbu, 2004). Cross’s (1991) three-stage model and Ogbu’s
(2004) theories are instrumental in contextualizing identity formation as a precarious process. Quite similarly, Forde and Dillard (1996) together with hooks (1999) offer an in-depth analysis of the contestation that ensues and assert that identity making in the context of an African and Africentric worldview is an engendered and deliberative process of struggle and deconstruction to renounce essentializing images, reclaim cultural meanings and fashion accurate portrayals of themselves as subjects of their histories and knowledges (Ford & Dillard, 1996, p. 234). Further to this, Thomas Jones (2001) exposes the contentions of identity formation for African American woman and documents how “aggressive, dominant, sexually promiscuous, rebellious, rude and loud” (p. 5) images which are used to stereotypically portray them within society. Consequently, Watt (2003) reports that in opposition to these characterizations, African American women must, “wrestle with the questions “Who am I within a society that devalues my race and gender?” (p. 34). Collins (2000) reveals that this process occurs in contexts involving family, community and opportunities for community work that allow women to throw off deviant images of themselves. In achieving one’ identity Lorde (1984) moreover contends that Black women must possess a determination to voice one’s truth “even at the risk of being injured or misinterpreted” (p. 13). The situation for Black males is equally as contentious in that Turner (1977) describes identity development in males of African descent as being fraught with violence and injury and writes:

White society has placed the black man in a tenuous position where manhood has been difficult to achieve. Black men have been lynched and brutalized in their attempts to retain their manhood. They have suffered from the cruellest assault on mankind that the world has ever known. For black men in this society it is not so much a matter of acquiring manhood as it is a struggle to feel it their own. (p. 136)
The literature as presented above is clear in depicting identity development as a litigious process for people of African descent. Researchers record that spirituality and spiritual practices are prominent influences which assist African peoples in mediating this process successfully. African and Africentric spiritualities recognize that tensions exist between malevolent and sacred forces in life. Moreover, such spiritualities expose the roots of violence as having a humane and spirited origin that runs counter to the divinely-inspired plan. As a liberatory catalysts, African and Africentric spiritualities unfold as a formidable force of creativity and resistance that enables people of African descent make sense of their experience and craft an identity that is authentic and humane (Cone, 1997; Dantley, 2005; C. Stewart, 1997, 1999; Wilson-Bridges, 2001). Furthermore, African and Africentric spiritualities simultaneously position individuals to rightly transcend depictions of selfhood as static and inhuman. In effect, C. Stewart (1999) argues that spirituality mediates members’ identity development and empowers African peoples to create a consciousness that is aligned with and more nurturing of authentic representations of self, others and community. Her assertions are captured below:

Black spirituality, thus, has had psychological and ontological value in helping African-Americans to define themselves cognitively as persons of infinite and intrinsic worth ....A formative function of African-American spirituality, then, is its capacity to empower black people to form alternative consciousness, community and culture which intrinsically establishes itself by refuting all attempts by the larger and inner culture at psychological devaluation and infantilization. (C. Stewart, 1999, pp. 29–30)

Watt’s (2003) study also revealed spirituality as a critical element in the development of African American women’s self-knowledge and understanding while Newlin et al. (2002) report personal growth as being a direct consequence of African American spirituality.
Literature pertaining to African and Africentric peoples is crucial in naming spirituality as a mediating catalyst in one’s development and maintenance of identity. Spirituality’s influence is also recorded in terms of fostering social action and change and will be discussed below.

**Fostering Empowerment and Change**

Several theorists have identified the role of spirituality in fostering and empowering change (Dantley, 2005; Du Toit, 1998; Mattis, 2000; Newlin et al., 2002; C. Stewart, 1997, 1999; West, 1999). To begin, direct connections have also been found between spirituality and efforts towards more socially just practice as West (1999) contends that spirituality propels African American people to work towards the elimination of social injustices. In conjunction with the former, C. Stewart (1997, 1999) reports that spirituality instills a sense of autonomy and agency within African peoples that challenges individuals to confront negatively differential experiences with creativity and resistance. C. Stewart’s (1999) report rests in concert with Du Toit’s (1998) who claims that African spirituality is intricately tied to notions of freedom and transformation that is, “to the existential need of a people struggling to overcome oppression, poverty, exploitation and dehumanization (p. 47). In a recent analysis, Newlin et al. (2002) conclude below that spirituality is an empowering agent that facilitates optimism and strength during times of adversity and challenge.

African-American spirituality is faith in an omnipresent, transcendent force; experienced internally and/or externally as caring, interconnectedness with others, God or a higher power; manifested as empowering transformation and liberating consolation for life’s adversities; and thereby inspiring fortified belief in and reliance on the benevolent source of unlimited potential. (p. 65)

Furthermore, studies demonstrate evidence of spirituality’s proactive influence on individuals’ strategies of resistance (Newlin et al., 2002; Thomas Jones, 2001; Watt, 2003)
and decisions surrounding civic engagement and responsibility (Mattis, 2000). Manning, Cornelius, and Okunday (2004) also allude to the aspect of empowerment and state that people of African descent have relied on their spirituality to foster hope and assurance during hostile circumstances. Literature also highlights spirituality’s influence on interpersonal learning, enhancing relations and increasing a concern for others. Its role is also significant in facilitating members’ well-being as described in the next segment.

**Facilitating Health and Wellness**

In addition to serving as an empowering force, theorists discuss spirituality as a critically influential agent in the wellness of African American peoples. For instance, Este and Thomas Bernard (2006) affirm that African centered spiritualities operate as a “form of resistance” and advance its role as a “tool for coping and healing” and a “strategy for promoting health and well-being” (p. 2). Thomas Jones (2001) correspondingly reports that the spiritual belief systems and religious experiences have been instrumental in supporting the mental health of African American women while Eugene (1995) records the critical role of African and Africentric spiritualities as sources of therapeutic agency. Mattis (2000) conclusively states that spirituality and religiosity also influence psychological and physical wellness. Findings by Wallace and Parks’s (2004) report a tendency for African American women to delineate spirituality as a central component of wellness; in particular spirituality is shown to assist women in responding to “health crisis”, maintaining a healthy outlook, facilitating healing and fostering a healthy resolve within interpersonal relationships. In addition, Newlin et al. (2002) report on the function of spirituality in the maintenance of emotional equilibrium and more precisely state that African peoples perceive spirituality as
fostering support, peace of mind, the attenuation of stress and divine protection. Newlin et al. further demonstrate that spirituality strengthens faith, enhances devotion and an appreciation and love towards God.

The reviewed studies characterize spirituality as a potently influential force within the personal and communal lives of African peoples. Not only does spirituality help nurture an authentic sense of identity, but it has proven to be integral in fostering empowerment and wellness. The interest in spirituality has recently been taken up by scholars within the field of education. Their work has been instrumental in identifying spirituality as a valuable factor in the process of leading. The next section explores this aspect in greater detail.

**Educational Leadership as a Spiritual Endeavour**

Within the field of educational leadership, conceptions of leadership as a spiritual endeavour are arising as theorists continue to provide evidence of spirituality’s growing significance. (Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2008, 2010; Dillard, 2000; Klenke, 2003; Rogers, 2003; Rogers & Dantley, 2001; Stokley, 2002; Thompson, 2004; Wheatley, 2002). Wheatley (2002) for example, discusses spirituality as a relevant factor that assists leaders in making sense of the complexity found in their educational arenas. Houston (2002) views leadership as a spiritual endeavor and notes that spirituality equips leaders to understand and affirm the lives of individuals in a manner that is meaningful and supportive. Likewise, Solomon and Hunter (2002) argue that spirituality is a foundational meaning system which leaders employ to affirm others, encourage an awareness of life’s interconnections and nurture a reflective spirit within the lives of others. Soder (2002) also sees the congruency between spirituality and leadership and asserts that spirituality enables leaders to cognitively,
ethically, and methodically undertake the process of leading in a manner that promotes wisdom and calculated action. Furthermore, spiritually infused leadership according to Soder challenges individuals to engage thoughtfully with others and view themselves as agents in this journey of life. The relationship between educational leadership and spirituality is also explored by Sokolow (2002) in his conceptualization of enlightened leadership. Sokolow defines enlightened leadership as a wisdom-infused and divinely inspired approach which encourages leaders to adopt an optimistic and learning-focused orientation. Grounded within eight fundamental spiritual truths, Sokolow states that spirituality enables leaders to be purposeful in intention and action. Similarly, Hoppe (2005) acknowledges the role of spirituality within educational leadership and conceptualizes spiritual leadership as entailing personal journey, meaning making, wholeness and connection. To Hoppe, spiritual leadership appreciates the human condition as imperfect, and therefore demands that leaders walk humbly, being always mindful of one’s duty to extend forgiveness and encouragement.

The relationship between spirituality and leadership is also being examined at the postsecondary level. Rogers’ (2003) study for example, declares that exceptional leaders incorporate spirituality and reports that invoking the spiritual within educational leadership is challenging but necessary task for leaders. Rogers (2003) explains:

We have to welcome mind, body, heart, and soul into the learning process. If we as educators open and nurture a place for talking about this critical dimension of the self, we can provide students with a profoundly meaningful learning experience. (p. 26)

From a community standpoint, the history of African and Africentric educational leadership for social justice is rich with descriptions documenting the significance of spirituality within community groups and organizations. Franklin’s (1990) review of
prominent African American educators chronicles the significant contributions of ministers during the 18th century in establishing schools and other community enterprises that were linked to social change, political action and empowerment. Smith and Harris (2005) report on the saliency of Black church membership as political agents and further document the influential significance of clergy and church congregations in the struggle for democratic citizenship in the United States. Other scholars like Brown Spencer (2009), Este and Thomas Bernard (2006), Eugene (1995), Hill (1981), Pachai (1997), and Walker (1995) provide stellar overviews of the church as a spiritual catalyst in democratic transformation within the Canadian context. Notable endeavours include advocacy for socioeconomic change, lobbying for equitable educational outcomes and serving as the vehicle through which individuals affirm and assert their right of citizenship. While numerous accounts chronicle the educational role of such leading spiritual organizations in fostering greater empowerment and engagement, less is known about the individual efforts of spiritual African and Africentric leaders who work within and alongside schools. Moreover, there are even fewer studies which speak specifically to linkages between spirituality, social justice and the leadership practices of African peoples. Dantley’s (2003a, 2005a) scholarship boldly undertakes the task of responding to this absence by laying the groundwork needed to understand spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership. In concert with Dillard (2000) who charges individuals constructed as “people of color”, to not forget the crucial intersections between life and work, Dantley (2003a, 2005a) reveals that leadership and spirituality are foremost complimentary and foundational to an African and Africentric experience. In marrying leadership with the historically spiritual experiences of African people, Dantley’s offers a unique account of African and Africentric leadership that affirms the identities, histories and
knowledges of African peoples. Additionally, Dantley (2003a) troubles racially neutral readings of educational leadership, by offering an African and Africentric-informed conception of leadership that illuminates the pivotal role that spiritual African and Africentric leaders have played in transforming education (Dantley, 2005a). Moreover, by refuting essentialized descriptions of spirituality as negative and inconsequential and likewise, perceptions of leadership as an aspiritual terrain, Dantley’s (2003a) work poignantly articulates the distinctiveness of spiritual African and Africentric leadership as an ever-present reality. As a result it is learned that spiritual African and Africentric leaders are critically spiritual and positioned to experience and reflect upon sociocultural hierarchies of dominance with renewed insight and purposeful engagement in an effort to reconcile the “absurd” with what “ought to be” (p. 11). Furthermore, critically spiritualized leadership is seen to compel African and Africentric leaders to proactively enter into, mediate and expand the boundaries of educational spaces towards more just and democratic orientations. Dantley (2003a) also records how critical spirituality fuels an external gaze in African and Africentric leaders that advocates for the presence and voices of marginalized members to be heard and meaningfully validated within the project of educational reconstruction. Likewise, African and Africentric spiritualities reportedly challenge leaders to consider decision-making, pedagogy, policies and curriculum in light of a more inclusive agenda (Dantley, 2003a). In portraying African and Africentric spiritualities as transformative catalysts within the lives of African peoples, Dantley’s (2003a, 2003b, 2005a, 2005b) voice resounds alongside scholars who record the various ways spirituality equips and enables resistance and liberation (Constantine, Wilson, Gainor, & Lewis, 2002; Mbiti, 1970; C. Stewart, 1999; Watt, 2003; West, 1988).
Walker’s (2009) personal narrative provides a firsthand account of the interplay of spirituality with the domain of educational leadership. As an African American professor, Walker shares the distinctiveness of her engendered experiences through the following. “Because African American women leaders experience the world through a different lens than the dominant group, our perspectives and experiences often challenge the knowledge and assumptions about leadership contained in the literature” (p. 648). As a result of these differential experiences, Walker (2009) contends that her spirituality has been a pivotal catalyst that has inspired resilience and strength. She writes:

As an African American woman who has held various leadership positions over the years, my faith and fellowship with God has sustained me and helped me to endure experiences that might have otherwise discouraged me. Although experiences in life can be painful, if we are fortunate, we can arrive at a place where the healing process can begin and where we can use these experiences as tools for leadership....African American’s tendency to draw on faith and spirituality emerges from the quest for justice against the everyday injustices and inequalities emerging from the sociocultural realities such as race and gender. (Walker, 2009, pp. 648–649)

Walker’s narrative is tellingly informative on several levels. Foremost, it highlights spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership as existing within a contestable realm. Moreover, African and Africentric spiritualities are revealed to be an empowering vehicle that facilitates endurance and success in the presence of opposing circumstances. Lastly, Walker’s description draws connective linkages between spiritual African and Africentric leadership, community development and social action. Ultimately, through Walker’s (2009) and Dantley’s (2003a, 2005a) eyes we learn that a spiritualized African and Africentric educational perspective reportedly compels a demonstrative commitment to educational
change that is neither abandoned nor deserted in the midst of conflict, contradictions and tensions.

This literature review underscores the relevancy of spirituality to the field educational leadership and highlights the ongoing connections that are currently being discussed with respect to leaders of African descent. In the section that follows, I look to the literature once again to explore the element of social justice, a construct which is of primary interest to my research.

**Social Justice Leadership**

In the present study, the understandings and efforts of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders towards socially just schooling are central. Consequently, it is advantageous to explore the literature on social justice leadership as a means of situating participants’ viewpoints. Following is a review of various models of justice and in addition, how discourses of social justice are being taken up within the field of educational leadership.

Movement towards the materialization of justice has also been a consideration for theorists within the field of educational leadership. Cumulatively, such scholarship has powerfully problematized current leadership practices by naming the sociopolitical dynamics and grand narratives which structure inequities and reinforce privilege (Freire, 1998; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Ryan, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1995; Shields, 2004b; Young, 1994; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003). Larson and Murtadha (2002) for example, provide a detailed overview of current scholarship and focus attention on the theoretical constraints and pragmatic gaps within educational leadership. In conjunction with exposing the hazards of a functionalist foundation, these scholars also illuminate alternate leadership
approaches, namely feminist, African and Africentric and spiritual as evidence of
researchers’ resistance and proactive efforts to invoke leadership as a more just and
inclusionary domain. Larson and Murtadha (2002) conclude with an exploration of literature
that forefront an emphasis on liberatory pedagogy and state that in defense of justice leaders
must:

Seek to define the theories and practices of leadership that are vital to creating
greater freedom, opportunity, and justice for all citizens- citizens who,
through public education, are better able to participate in and sustain a free,
civil, multicultural and democratic society. (p. 136)

Shields (2003, 2004a, 2004b) likewise recognizes the ineptness of current leadership
practices and argues for transformative approaches that enable schools to become
democratic, just, empathetic and optimistic places of learning that build rather than fracture
communities. Additionally, Shield’s (2004b) conception of social justice further underscores
the importance of equity from the perspective of creating opportunities whereby
disenfranchised members may access, experience and achieve educational outcomes and
success. Coupled with the former, Shields (2004b) insists that socially just leadership must
move beyond pathologizing difference towards an inclusive orientation that actualizes the
valuing of diversity. Moreover Van Soest and Garcia (2003) contend that leaders engaged in
social justice action must assume a wholistic discernment that critically acknowledges the
relationship between power, privilege and one’s social identity. Concurrently, these scholars
assert that leaders must willingly promote inclusion, critique and an awareness surrounding
the historical and intergenerational effects of marginalization are impactful. Furthermore,
Van Soest and Garcia invoke a purposed intentionality towards indigenous knowledges as a
means of fostering empowerment and change within educational contexts. In conjunction
with the former, Furman and Gruenewald (2004) caution leaders to assume a mindful gaze that is attuned to the relationships between ecological oppression and the cultural habitation of societal and educational spaces. These scholars also forewarn leaders to guard against blindly accepting all social justice discourse as being just and oriented toward transformative change. Most recently, Ryan and Rottmann (2007) entered discussions of social justice by acknowledging the myriad of definitions. These scholars centre critical social justice leadership as a distinct conceptual framework which moves leaders beyond popularized connotations of justice to embrace substantive issues and change. Ryan and Rottmann further distinguish critical social justice as concerning the following: the construction of social institutions, the materialization of privilege and disparity, the in/visibility of oppression, the redistribution of resources and recognition and the valuing of diverse positionalities. McKenzie et al. (2008) scholarship accentuates the need for educational leaders to focus on academic achievement, preparing students for critical civic engagement and creating inclusive educational school communities. Moreover, Wilson Cooper’s study (2009) reveals that leadership for social justice necessitates a willingness to undertake cultural work with the aim of building community through and across differences. In effect, the courage to examine the ideological and practical contradictions present within one’s self and one’s environment with a conscious commitment towards empowering minoritized voices.

Libratory theorist Freire (1998) also accentuates education as the vehicle through which individuals may achieve emancipation and proposes that leaders must embrace the wider school community and work towards the mutual development of staff, students and community members. Brown (2004) likewise emphasizes the critical role of education and proceeds to demand that decisive action be taken to redesign training programs for
educational leaders. Crafted within a transformative pedagogy, Brown (2004) proposes that programs and certification bodies adopt a social justice orientation by revising the curriculum content, instruction and assessment measures to reflect approaches that facilitate “awareness, acknowledgement and action” (p. 77) around social justice and equity issues. Likewise, Rusch (2004) indicts postsecondary leadership programs as sites where equity discussions are constrained and experienced as infrequent and uncomfortable encounters by faculty in spite of recruitment and hiring practices that target greater diversity. Fault lines or systemic barriers also were shown to be evident in the undertaking of equity work as it was more commonly reported to be associated with females and minoritized individuals. Rusch (2004) contends that educational leadership faculty must begin to purposefully interrogate their programs in an effort to transcend the rhetoric that permeates educational leadership preparatory programs as spaces which nurture and forefront engendered and racialized discourse.

**Summary**

Seminal works in this chapter reveal that African and Africentric educational leaders have been critical agents in designing and transforming the landscape of schooling (Dantley, 2003a; Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Efforts towards greater justice in education have also encompassed a moral focus (Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010) emphasizing the saliency of race and the imperative of a sociopoliticized consciousness (Dillard, 1995; Foster, 2005; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Tillman, 2008). Furthermore, leaders of African descent have engaged in critical collaboration (Wilson Cooper, 2009; Gaetane et al., 2009; Murtadha & Watts, 2005), heralded the expediency of community development (Foster,
2005) and pressed for democratic access and authentic participation (Dillard, 1995). Additionally, leaders have also lobbied for equitable learning resources and opportunities, the availability of culturally similar role models and greater cultural competency in education (BLAC, 1994). This legacy reminds us that African and Africentric leadership is enmeshed in the historical and sociopolitical realities of leaders' lives and professions. Further, that leadership for social justice unfolds in context as a multi-dimensional and potent catalyst that propels leaders to adopt a moralistic, strategic and dualistic engagement as leaders and community members.

In the same manner, the literature reveals that African and Africentric spiritual worldviews are diversely understood and thematically linked. Perspectives commonly entail five underlying themes that foster sociopolitical consciousness, self-empowerment and communal engagement in opposition to and in spite of the social tensions which invade the lived experiences of people of African descent. Given that conceptions of leadership as a spiritual endeavour are now emerging and that scholars speak to its value in helping leaders understand the sociocultural dynamics of leading and tailor their efforts towards ethical, compassionate and informed practice, it is of interest to explore African and Africentric educational leaders’ perceptions concerning the role of spirituality in their efforts towards social justice. Available literature on the connections between spirituality, leadership and African and Africentricity as reported by Dantley (2003a, 2005a) crafts African and Africentric leadership as a purposeful engagement that is oriented towards transformative change and empowerment. Furthermore, Dantley’s scholarship and Walker’s reflective narrative further illuminates the interplay of African and Africentric spiritualities in fuelling and directing leaders’ commitment towards more socially just practices of schooling.
As discussed in the literature, there are multiple ways to understand social justice and socially just educational leadership. Recent literature in the field compels a movement away from traditional notions of justice towards critical conceptions having the potential to foster more substantive outcomes for marginalized populations. In the context of African and Africentric school-based and community leadership, justice has been understood to involve an individualized and collective focus towards awareness, empowerment, access and actualization. Though not always attainable, the literature suggests that spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders are concerned about justice and enter purposefully into the educational arena to enact transformative change. Through the present study, it is my hope to reveal some new understandings concerning the nature of African and Africentric educational leadership. Further, it is of equal importance to be able to offer an informed report on what justice means and the role of spirituality within the task of leading.
Chapter Three
Methodology:
A Critical Phenomenological Approach

Introduction

In the former chapter, I explore the nature of African and Africentric educational leadership, the multi-dimensional facets of leading and the contextual factors that are known to influence leaders’ work. Attention is also paid to documenting how African and Africentric spiritualities are conceptualized in the literature and likewise examining the function and impact of spirituality. Reports by researchers in the field identify spirituality as an influential agent in identity formation and maintenance, personal empowerment and wellness. Additionally, I also review understandings of educational leadership and focused attention on documenting what the literature says about leadership as a spiritual endeavour. The chapter concludes with a discussion of concepts surrounding social justice and social just leadership.

In this chapter I discuss the methodological approach I use to explore the perspectives of spiritual African and Africentric leaders and the role of African and Africentric spiritualities within leaders’ practices for social justice. The first component explains the design of the research including my selection of a qualitative research approach. Next, I describe the limitations of my study. I continue by discussing how I access participants and the ethical considerations governing my approach. I depict who these participants are and the procedures I use to collect, code and analyze data arising from participants’ interviews. In conclusion, I define my stance in the research process and its influence on the study.
Qualitative Research

Locating the voices of spiritual African and Africentric leaders is central to the present study. Consequently, it is imperative to utilize a research design that respects and facilitates access to the richness of participants’ lived experiences. While ongoing debate abounds concerning the pertinence of various research methodologies (Silverman, 1993), Kincheloe (1991) reports that qualitative research methodologies are positioned to “appreciate human experience in a manner which is empathetic to the human actors who feel or live it” (p. 145) and as such, attend more authentically to the known worlds of participants. Correspondingly, Morse and Richards (2007) also report that qualitative research methodologies affirm participant’ perceptions as “meaningful accounts rather than fixed and static descriptions” (p. 30). Further support is garnished from Merriam (1998) who states that qualitative methods are highly appropriate when goals are designed to learn how individual participants experience a phenomenon, and their attributed meanings and interpretations. Merriam (1998) claims that qualitative methodologies adopt an “insider” (p. 7) perspective that allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon under investigation. This perspective not only facilitates a more authentic description but also permits the research participants to assume greater control over the investigation (Berg, 2004). Berg (2004) also emphasizes the contextual sensitivity of qualitative research methodology and reports that this technique “seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (p. 7).

In addition, Morse and Richards (2007) record that qualitative research permits researchers to “understand an area where little is known or where previously offered understanding appears inadequate” (p. 29). Qualitative inquiry methods therefore, facilitate a
deeper understanding of the phenomenon and guide the researcher in the “discovery of central themes and analysis of core concerns” (Morse & Richards, 2007, p. 30). This aspect is particularly advantageous to the present study as literature respecting spirituality, educational leadership and social justice is newly emerging.

A phenomenological research design is used to explore the phenomena of spiritual African and Africentric leadership and African and Africentric spiritualities. Finlay (2010) defines phenomenological research as the “study of phenomena; their nature and meanings” (p. 1) and notes that this approach entails several essential characteristics: epoche phenomenological reduction, rich description, intentional relationships, imaginative variation and the synthesis of essences or meaningful themes. Epoche compels openness to the phenomenon as it appears. Phenomenological reduction directs that researchers critically recognize the “intersubjective connections” in the research process (Finlay, 2010). Finlay (2010) explains, “Researchers’ subjectivity should therefore be placed in the foreground so as to begin the process of separating out what belongs to the researcher rather than the researched” (p. 7). This was particularly important to the present study as I identify as a spiritual African and Africentric educational leader and therefore, wanted to adopt an attitude that enabled the lived experiences of participants to emerge. Kincheloe (1991) argues that in regards to educational research, phenomenology reduction anchors researchers in understanding that “we cannot understand an educational act without understanding the framework, the context within which teachers, students, and administrators make sense of their thoughts, feelings, and actions” (p. 148). Critical phenomenology builds upon this inter-subjectivity, and focuses the attention of the researcher on the forces, ideologies and contexts which contour, pattern and give meaning to that lived reality (Kincheloe, 1991).
The element of rich or “textured” descriptions provides concrete and everyday examples of leaders’ understandings and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric leadership. Participant narratives give insight into the meanings leaders assign to their professional work, which are later used to develop general understandings about the phenomenon of study. The concept of intentionality is found by tracing participants’ perspectives of their identities and their consciousness around being a spiritual leader of African descent. Descriptions discuss participants’ perspectives in relation to their experiences of spirituality, notions of educational leadership, and the influential factors which contour leading and the conceptions and concrete exemplars of social justice. Through imaginative variations I am able to embrace and document the complimentary and contradictory experiences of participants themes that are applicable to the research question.

In summary, phenomenological research is an empowering method that is oriented toward the meanings of “first-degree” experiences of participants (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 28) and has the potential to unearth a deeper appreciation of the phenomenon under study. This comprehensive framework was deemed appropriate in understanding how spiritual African and Africentric leaders conceptualize and inhabit educational spaces.

**Accessing Spiritual African and Africentric Leaders**

The study explores the meanings and experiences of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders, their efforts towards social justice and the impact of African and Africentric spiritualities. It involves purposive and nominated sampling of 10 educational leaders whose self-identification reflects ties to spirituality, an African and/or African diasporic presence and social justice. Purposeful sampling is selected because it involves the
deliberate selection of individuals whose characteristics validly represent the phenomenon in question because they “know the information required, are willing to reflect on the phenomena of interest, have the time and are willing to participate” (Morse & Richards, 2007, p. 195). A nominated sampling technique is deemed congruent to the present project as it permits involved participants to recommend potential candidates for future involvement.

The present research embraces a broader definition of educational leadership that recognizes the professional roles of individuals working within, and alongside educational institutions as an inclusive definition is in keeping with a critical leadership perspective (Freire, 1998; hooks, 1994; Portelli & Solomon, 2001). In keeping with this inclusive conception of leadership, attempts are made to recruit individuals from various professions and standings. Participants are drawn from two particular groupings; individuals are either involved in educational leadership positions within schools or assume educational leadership positions within the broader community.

As part of the process, I sent a letter of request detailing aspects of the research study including my identity, purpose and parameters of the study was sent to a leading Black/African educational organization in Nova Scotia requesting them to forward a Letter of Request to their membership (see Appendix A). Invitational bulletins are placed in local spiritual settings including churches and sanctuaries as a means of attracting interested participants (see Appendix B). These bulletins request that individuals meeting the selection criteria voluntarily participate and/or recommend individuals who they deem to be spiritual educational leaders. With respect to individuals within the Ontario context, participants were purposively recruited and reflect educational leadership as demonstrated within schools or community context.
Following a recommendation or a display of interest, I contact participants by phone, e-mail or in person. I follow up positive responses by giving participants the Letter of Information (see Appendix C), a copy of the tentative questions to be asked (see Appendix D) and the Letter of Consent (see Appendix E). Following signed consent, I proceed to conduct individual interviews in a mutually convenient location. Interviews are taped following participant consent and later transcribed by myself. While I offer to send transcriptions to participants to determine accuracy of content, make corrections, additions and/or deletions, only one participant obliges this request. I set the target sample originally to include between 10 and 12 participants. Thirteen individuals expressed interest; however a sample of 10 is selected for logistical reasons in order to accommodate my time constraints. All participants reside within Canada and espouse a spiritual framework that is seen to inform their personal and professional lives. Participants in the study express a commitment to principles of equity and social justice and are employed in positions that afford the opportunity to challenge and work towards the creation of equitable educational spaces.

**Collecting Data**

This study explores the understandings and experiences of Spiritual African and Africentric leaders. Morse and Richards (2007) claim that the act of collecting data is a misnomer as data is neither “preexisting nor passive” (p. 109). Consequently, these authors contend that, “qualitative researchers collect not actual events but representation,” and therefore assert that researchers are actively involved in the process of “making data (p. 107).

In keeping with phenomenology, I use an informal, semistructured interview method containing 13 questions to collect the data in the present study. Questions address the
following topics: spirituality, leadership and social justice. Questions are piloted on a sample of seven educational leaders and adjustments are made to ensure that the content and phrasing of questions is clear and in keeping with the focus of the study. Participants are provided with a modest honorarium following completion of the interview for their willingness to contribute to the research study.

Participant interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and are conducted in a location that was mutually agreed upon. The majority of participants choose to be interviewed within an educational setting or their office. Interview times vary between regular and outside regular working hours. Following each interview the audiotape is transcribed and anecdotal records are made to record my impressions and emerging thoughts. Participants engage in the research process in ways that are appropriate and meaningful. Some participants prefer to interact in ways that allow for a more fluid interaction while others are most comfortable by following the questions as outlined in the interview questionnaire. Both approaches inform the research process and guided my efforts towards an understanding of the intersections between spirituality, educational leadership and social justice.

In Table 1 I utilize a table employed by Keita (2010) to summarize the connection between the research questions, research method and interview protocol.
### Table 1

*Connection Between Research Questions, Method and Interview Questions*

| Research questions                                                                 | Method   | What was asked                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| adam      | Interview                                                                 | • Please describe your spirituality.  
• How would you describe your personal identity?  
• As a spiritual person and in the context in which your work, how do you define educational leadership?  
• As a spiritual African Canadian educational leader, what has your work been about?  
• What events, situations or conversations brought you to your current position?  
• What does being a spiritual African educational leader mean for the way in which you lead? Can you share an example of how you believe your spirituality influenced your leadership?  
• In what ways do you see educational leadership as a spiritual experience?  
• In the context of your work, what does democracy and social justice mean?  
• What things need to change in order for it to become a reality? How do your work with parents, students, staff and community members to encourage these changes? |
| How do African and Africentric educational leaders understand their spirituality? | Interview                                                                 | • Please describe your spirituality.  
• How would you describe your personal identity?  
• As a spiritual person and in the context in which your work, how do you define educational leadership?  
• As a spiritual African Canadian educational leader, what has your work been about?  
• What events, situations or conversations brought you to your current position?  
• What does being a spiritual African educational leader mean for the way in which you lead? Can you share an example of how you believe your spirituality influenced your leadership?  
• In what ways do you see educational leadership as a spiritual experience?  
• In the context of your work, what does democracy and social justice mean?  
• What things need to change in order for it to become a reality? How do your work with parents, students, staff and community members to encourage these changes? |
| How do these leaders understand and experience their leadership?                   | Interview                                                                 | • As a spiritual person and in the context in which your work, how do you define educational leadership?  
• As a spiritual African Canadian educational leader, what has your work been about?  
• What events, situations or conversations brought you to your current position?  
• What does being a spiritual African educational leader mean for the way in which you lead? Can you share an example of how you believe your spirituality influenced your leadership?  
• In what ways do you see educational leadership as a spiritual experience?  
• In the context of your work, what does democracy and social justice mean?  
• What things need to change in order for it to become a reality? How do your work with parents, students, staff and community members to encourage these changes? |
| How does spirituality influence leadership for social justice?                     | Interview                                                                 | • What does being a spiritual African educational leader mean for the way in which you lead? Can you share an example of how you believe your spirituality influenced your leadership?  
• In what ways do you see educational leadership as a spiritual experience?  
• In the context of your work, what does democracy and social justice mean?  
• What things need to change in order for it to become a reality? How do your work with parents, students, staff and community members to encourage these changes? |
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<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>What was asked</th>
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<tr>
<td>What issues and challenges influence their leadership practice?</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>• What factors make your work easy or more challenging?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What are some of the risks involved in your work? What motivates you to continue despite these risks?</td>
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**Data Coding and Analysis**

In keeping with phenomenological congruency the analysis of data is undertaken through simultaneous procedures. Merriam (1998) views this approach as highly advantageous in that it allows the researcher to engage in deliberative and ongoing reflection that is “parsimonious and illuminating” (p. 162). In particular, Merriam (1998) believes that simultaneous analysis, allows for the adaption of data collection procedures, incorporates observations and learnings and supports the researcher in exploring emerging findings connection to current research. Simultaneous procedures were incorporated through each data coding and analysis phase.

Descriptive data coding procedures are useful in recording factual information about participants as related to personal and professional demography. I am able to learn where these leaders work, the scope of their position, their educational training and the approximate length of time they have been involved with education. I commence by creating several spreadsheets one of which manually records and codes this demographic information. I read each transcript, color-coding the rich descriptions of participants as I go along and place aside any information that is extraneous to the current study. I cut rich descriptions out of
each transcript and individually categorize these excerpts according to the topical themes of spirituality (conceptions and experiences), educational leadership (conceptions and experiences) and social justice (conceptions and experiences). Subsequent spreadsheets record individual responses to the interview questions and topical themes. After numerous rereadings of the transcript and descriptive excerpts, I am able to thematically encapsulate the participant responses and organize their ideas using specific phrases or concepts. I develop a more summative document containing a listing of participants and these organizing concepts. Using the literature as an investigative tool, I record participant’ concepts and proceed to use a graphic organizer to map out the collective responses of participants according to the arising themes.

Initially I organize participants’ descriptions according to whether they were school- or community-based educational leaders. After much consideration, I merge the perspectives as the study is concerned with an understanding rather than a comparison of meanings. As the data analysis progresses, I am able to notice correlations between the data and several prominent theories. With a constant writing and rewriting of findings I organize individual and collective data in accordance to three broad headings: African and Africentric spiritualities, spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership and African and Africentric Leadership for social justice. Participant’s perspectives on African and Africentric spiritualities acknowledge the presence of a divine or Supreme Being and the interrelatedness of spirituality to individuals’ lives and community. African and Africentric spiritualities connect with other expressions of spirituality including: Black Theology, African American spirituality and African spirituality and critical spirituality. Collective notions of leadership whereby leaders acknowledge that their life’ work is agency oriented
and influenced by numerous relational factors are supportive of critical notions of educational leadership namely Black feminist epistemology, critically spiritual leadership. The existence of disparate conditions and leaders efforts to foster more critical just educational environments and processes are in sync with integrative antiracism and critical justice. There are also times when themes diverge from what is known in the literature. For instance, on many occasions, spiritual African and Africentric leadership seems to be a paradox in that it entailed complimentary, yet opposing conceptions such as being religiously unorthodox, contestable and contested and transformative and transformational. Therefore, while showing congruency with more critical orientation, meanings could also be associated with traditional and interpretivists understandings of leadership.

**Limitations**

This study captures the reported perspectives of 10 spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders in relation to their leadership for social justice. Findings are therefore meant to be reflective of these leaders’ understandings and experiences and provide an avenue to gain further insight. Given that the purpose of this research it was not necessary to utilize confirming accounts of other school-community members. This may be seen by others as a limiting factor. I am also cognizant that a larger number of participants may have enhanced the findings of this study and provided greater insight into the phenomenon in question. Additionally, narratives reflect participants’ thoughts as shared during the interview and are not meant to assume that these reports capture the entirety of participants’ beliefs on the subject matter. Moreover, while I attempted as much as possible to utilize participants’ descriptions, it is also possible that the meanings I ascribe differ from participants’
intentions. Further, the contextual elements in which leaders’ work also proved to be very influential in their leadership. Having an opportunity to experience these influences and observe participants undertaking their leadership in such contexts may have enhanced my understanding of the dynamics which inhabit their scope of leading.

Participants

Demographics

In my study I contact 10 educational leaders who view themselves as spiritual and whose professional work unfolds prominently within school and/or community based organizations. As educational leaders, they represent a dynamic collective whose actions and efforts expand notions of educational leadership to entail a responsive, multidimensional and compassionate practice. There are several noteworthy features. The majority of participants use multiple descriptors (gender, community, family, maternity, age, socioeconomic, sexual orientation, rationality) to self-identify with all expressing racialized notions of themselves. Participants’ understandings also reflect complex notions of spirituality with most self-identifying as having a Christ-centred foundation. Other connections to Buddhism, a higher power, God or Lord along with specific denominational affiliations are also reported. I found it particularly interesting and confirmative of literature pertaining to African American spirituality that most participants while identifying with a religious conceptualization are adamant that their understandings are distinctly different from traditional notions. Symbolism was found to be a prominent attribute of leaders’ spirituality as is the distinguishing characteristic of interdependence and relationality.
Demographically, all of the school-based leaders have undertaken undergraduate studies. Five of six school-based participants possess graduate-level training at the Masters level while four of six are provincially certified educators. One participant, Jonathan received teacher-certification through a national body while Caplan in his present educational leadership role serves as an instructor at the postsecondary level. With respect to the professional profiles of community-based leaders, three of the four posses undergraduate and/or university degrees with specialized training in education, social work and/or spirituality. The remaining participants report ongoing interdisciplinary training and development.

Of these spiritual African and Africentric leaders, three are solely trained within the Canadian landscape. From a professional standpoint, five of six school-based participants are employed within board or school-level positions. In addition, the majority of these leaders (four) also involve themselves with educational endeavours within their own communities. All of the participants exercising leadership through community organizations are involved in board or managerial positions. There was an equal distribution of men and women involved in the study, with the majority working in community.

The study employed a purposive sampling technique which allowed the study to be informed by individuals who were known to each other and by me. These relationships facilitated a more natural and convenient process which I believe resulted in participants being more open and forthcoming. Leaders’ positional leadership identities are also framed diversely. The majority of school-based participants report assuming an administrative post. Allessandra’s and Caplan’s leadership mandate include official references to an advisory and coordinator capacity while Jeff role encompasses that of the latter. Allister’s references to
leadership reflect an ad hoc advisory role and also entail that of mentor and educational tutor within a grassroots organization. Jonathan is the lone participant who mentions a directorship as part of his leadership identity. Likewise, community-based leaders serve in various leadership capacities including that of tutor/parent educators, coordinator, president and chairperson. In particular, Chantal takes of the role of educational tutor in support of youth within a community agency and provides educational training to parents and families. Neale’s role is chiefly that of coordinator but also includes instructional programming and support. Samuel also provides tutoring to youth through a comanaged program, but also supports adults and families within a community nonprofit organization as a member of the leadership board.

In an effort to maintain the anonymity of participants and adhere to the agreed parameters of confidentiality, a brief overview of each participant’s journey into educational leadership is provided. In as much as possible, I utilize “thick descriptions” namely, direct quotes and passages to give voice to the perspectives of participants and capture what participants identify as significant to their understanding of and experiences of spiritualized leadership. Next I present a brief overview of participants’ profiles including aspects of their leadership journey, positional assignments and spiritual leanings. Collectively, their profiles reflect an interdisciplinary and multidimensional tapestry of professional training, leadership and practical engagement.

**Jonathan**

Jonathan is a school administrator whose involvement in the field of education dates back several years. With degrees in management and administration, he is assigned an upper
level position in charge of directing nonacademic programming for a high school in excess of one thousand students. In this “position of influence” Jonathan indicates that he feels “obligated to contribute the best possible, in terms of leadership, in terms of imparting on young minds.” In addition to this administrative position, Jonathan has also been assigned a teaching portfolio that includes business-related coursework. Jonathan’s entrance into the field of educational leadership is a remarkable story. Having completed his Bachelor’s and Master’s degree at international institutions, he decidedly returns home in an effort to impact the schooling experiences of students within his home community. He explains:

I went back home and decided that I needed to set the trend and try to impart some of this knowledge that I have gotten and really pave the way as a mentor and a coach and a teacher to influence students to try and make that path, make a similar path, a difficult path, I might add, but to strive for it because there is not much hope there for them.

Jonathan was educated outside of Canada. He identifies with a transcendental definition of spirituality which simultaneously embraces the relevance of a Supreme Being and equity. Jonathan views his self-identity through his Caribbean nationality and his African descent.

**Allessandra**

Allessandra is presently employed at prominent Canadian university where she has for the past 4 years assumed two distinct, yet interrelated positions student: advisor and university faculty member. Allessandra’s full-time position is that of Student Advisor and in this capacity she provides academic, social and vocational support to students and manages a career centre which offers students a secure space in which to explore and facilitate their educational endeavours. While appreciating the significance of the advisory position in
mentoring and support the interests of students and faculty, Allessandra exclaims, that she particularly enjoys the faculty assignment of part-time lecturer because she sees “the important value” and opportunities to “impact on…students lives, their education and their career.”

In addition to these educationally-based roles, Allessandra also assumes a significant number of positions within her local community including serving as an advisor of youth and a member of the board of leaders within her spiritual community. Allessandra’s spirituality while linked to Black Christian traditions also encompasses elements of African spirituality. Allessandra also assumes various leadership positions within her home community namely that of deaconess, and youth advisor. She was born and educated within the Canadian context and self-identifies as being African Canadian, Black, a woman, a mother, privileged and of African descent.

Caplan

For the past 12 years, Caplan has been working as a student services coordinator for a major postsecondary institution where he provides academic counseling and support to students. Aspects of his role include five crucial tasks namely, recruitment, retention, learning, stewardship and assisting students to navigate postsecondary studies. Prior to his current position, Caplan reports working as a community educator for an organization charged with advocating for African/Black children, youth and their families within various educational settings. This leadership role provides Caplan with numerous opportunities to raise awareness, and equip schools and communities with resources to promote their
academic achievement and cultural awareness. He explains his entry into his present leadership position.

And you know it was so ironic when they advertised for this job I had just gotten out of university and they advertised for this job looking for someone with a Masters degree. And I said I am not going to get the job but I am going to apply for the job. So I sent in my résumé and about 2 weeks later I got a call to do a telephone interview. I did the phone interview it was a prescreening and the lady called and said can I call you back tomorrow because we want to do a more formal interview. We did that and then she said could you come in for a meeting. So I went over to her office and sat down and she said there are three of us who want to interview you. and I said, are they playing games or what are they doing. So I went and we had the 3 person interview. Then she called back 2 days later and she you’ve made the final selection there are four of you that we want to interview. I said OK and she said this interview is going to take about 3-4 hours and there’s a presentation that I have to do. I said to myself is the job really worth it. So she gave me a date and I had something like 2 weeks to prepare. And I was ready to call her back and say no, but then I read the ad again and said they must see something in me that they want me to come to the final interview. So I said ok – there were 9 people at that interview….I said oh my God, what did I get myself into. And 2 of them I knew from the community.

Caplan proceeds to inform me that he is selected as the successful candidate for the position of Coordinator. During the course of the interview, Caplan also reveals that he serves the Chairperson for a community-based educational committee charged with inspiring and supporting Black/African learners. Caplan’s spirituality while situated within Black Christian Baptist tradition holds bold linkages to family and community. He was born, raised and educated within a “Black” Canadian community.
Allister

Allister is a middle-school-based educator whose professional introduction into teaching begins within a southern African context. He possesses Bachelor and Master’s level degrees in the areas of political science and his former setting provides a critical lens from which to judge and interpret his current educational experiences. He states,

The school system in terms of what we have at home is a lot different, in terms of discipline because there are certain things the students wouldn’t do like having their pants at the bottom, not properly dressed, smoking on campus. You cannot do over there because it imposes, allows them to have self-discipline. Self-discipline is not working over here.

As an educational leader, Allister states that he makes purposive attempts to connect with students and “help them get a sense of education, the value of education, the intrinsic value of education”, tasks which he sees as being capable of moving students towards greater self-discipline and success. Allister’s connection to educational leadership also transpires outside the boundaries of public schooling. He reports being heavily involved in a community-based initiative for newcomers to Canada. In this role his efforts are directed to working jointly with schools in supporting the academic needs of “immigrant” children and their families. As a spiritual person, he self-describes as Christian and nonreligious.

Zina

Zina is a middle-school administrative leader who has been involved in the field of education for over 15 years. She has obtained Bachelor’s degrees in the Arts, education and subsequent Master’s level certification in education. The focus of her educational leadership is also situated in community where she is presently chairing an education committee. Zina
reports previous involvement with several significant projects aimed at equipping parents to be better informed around educational issues. Zina’s recalls that her entrance into the field of education was somewhat of an anomaly in her region. She explains,

When I went to [school] that year a little boy came up to me and said “are you a teacher, but are you really a teacher? Finally a Black teacher...a little boy in Grade 4. Another student came up to me, and this was a white student, said “are you really a teacher? and [another person] faced the same thing. They really wanted to see a Black teacher; those children had never seen a black teacher. The kids have never seen a Black teacher that was the ‘90s.

Despite having a term contract, Zina is forced to change schools because she “didn’t really have any seniority.” Eventually, she is “offered a [permanent] job…despite opposition from other teachers questioning “why am I getting a job, because we were all hired together.” Zina continues teaching but the idea of entering the arena of administration begins to take shape. She proceeds to explain:

Then I went because of my degree and taught Phys. Ed for 2 years. At that time I was in the pool, the V.P. pool and so I knew I needed to get a different experience with different levels because at that time I only had elementary experience. After 7-8 years at one school it is time to move and so I went to [another school] and taught for a bit – phys Ed and drama the first year. Then the second year I taught Phys. Ed, African Percussion and Learning Support.

Zina makes the transition from vice principal to principal in a manner which she describes as a spiritual. Her thoughts are shared below:

There’s always a spiritual part everywhere I’ve gone. Every school I’ve gone to I’ve felt that I should be there for that particular time. There’s a spiritual reason for me going and a spiritual reason for me being somewhere’s else. It
was the time and the purpose and it’s funny that when this job came up I, e-mailed the principal to congratulate him and he said I should apply for this position. I was thinking I didn’t want to go to because it was too far for the kids. But spiritually I could feel the pull. I applied for all these different schools, but spiritually I knew I would end up here. I don’t know how long I am supposed to be here, well the school is supposed to be closing in a year, but there’s always a reason for being here.

Zina describes her spirituality through the lens of Christianity, the Black church and the divine. While born within a predominantly Black community, she also recognizes indigenous First Nations aspects of her identity. Zina was born and educated within Canada.

Jeff

With bachelor's certification and Master’s degrees in education and social work, Jeff has been working in the field of education for over 15 years in Canada. He possesses a rich interdisciplinary health and educational background. His current position being upper management was preceded by a lengthy involvement across a number of different disciplines. He explains:

I was first hired by the school board as a social worker…in effect 9000 students. I was the only social worker that they had. That was the first time they had a social worker. When the Board decided that they were going to amalgamate…. So they created a position, of Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and human Rights and so I was given that position, or rather I applied, there was a competition and I was the successful candidate.

Jeff reports that he continues in the position until,
We were downsizing at the Board and so one job was made out of two. I headed up and became the Coordinator of Labour Relations for nonteaching staff and so that went on for a little while. I did that for 15 years, the two positions. Every other Board had them separate, I did two positions. I didn’t get paid for two positions though, for one. And I talked about that with my boss at the time, “how come I am only getting paid for one position. So that was the past.

With no compensation for carrying two positions, Jeff decidedly begins to investigate other employment options, though not without further obstacles. He explains:

What happened was my director of Programs Services went to everybody else, every other Coordinator and offered them the job and never came to me. So, even though I’d been there the longest in that position, other than another gentleman who was there maybe 2 years longer than me. So I told my director, I’m applying for this job and it should just be a lateral movement. He said we have to interview for it, because they had somebody else in mind. So I told him, I am just going to take the job and you are going to give it to me. So that’s what I am doing now.

Jeff believes that his spirituality best reflects a collection of Catholic, Christian, and Middle Eastern Buddhist practices. He was born and educated within Canada.

**Samuel**

Samuel is an educational leader with remarkable experience in community development. As a community-based educational leader, Samuel explains that his leadership occurs predominantly in the “downtown core” area of a major metropolitan city. It is here through a local community organization that he chooses to devote much of his time and skills and attempts to, “Reach people in a city and where the majority in the downtown are
forsaken. Downtown, where crime is, transience and all bad things about the city.” The impetus he explains is quite simple, “Being in the city was a way of reaching out where the sick are walking with them and being with them.” In this regard, his leadership entails responding to the practical needs of youth and adults, but also includes creating opportunities for outside individuals to learn about the community through the eyes of its members. In addition to “walking with and being with” these members in community, Samuel is also a cofounder of an afterschool tutoring program for high school students who have recently immigrated into Canada. As coordinator and tutor, he provides administrative leadership and direct service to students within the program. Having previously obtained two Masters degrees in Education he is currently working towards the completion of further postgraduate studies within the field of education.

His notion of spirituality is grounded within a practical application of Christ-centred philosophy that goes to where people are. He is aware that his conception of spirituality counters traditional expectations. Samuel reports being born in the African continent and dually educated within his home country and Canada. His understandings of spiritual African and Africentric leadership are shared from this perspective.

**Chantal**

Chantal’s narrative reveals an extensive background in the area of child welfare that includes working “in the area of child protection for the last 14 years”. Chantal is confident, and conversant and her comments reveal that she is both insightful and astute in areas pertaining to children, youth and the complexities of education. Chantal was possesses an undergraduate degree and further graduate studies in the social sciences field. For the past
several years, Chantal has been self-employed as a parent educator and educational tutor. She contracts with governmental departments to provide services to “youth in care” and their families who are of Black and African descent. Chantal’s leadership unfolds alongside schools as she is charged to provide supplementary educational support to children whom she describes as having a “number of challenges.” In her role as parent educator, Chantal provides training and support to parents who are at-risk or are experiencing a wide range of socioeconomic challenges. In addition to the former, Chantal also reports working in a mentorship program aimed at assisting youth who are transitioning into or out of the public school system. Chantal identifies herself as a Christian and reports practicing her spirituality interpersonally and in community. She belongs to a “Black” spiritual community with ties to the Baptist tradition.

**Neale**

Neale presently serves as the Coordinator for a community-based educational program which provides students of African descent with opportunities for academic and cultural enrichment. This position involves Neale developing and implementing curriculum, skill enhancement, and facilitating self, community and cultural awareness. As the educational leader within this program, Neale is also responsible for training Peer Tutors, and hosting a variety of child-community endeavours over the course of the academic year. She emphatically proclaims that, “It’s the type of work that I enjoy and the type of work that I always see myself doing.” Neale’s journey into educational leadership and child-work commences as a natural extension of her personal interest. She declares that she has “always been interested in working with children and youth and some adults” and has chosen to
purposefully assume a number of leadership positions within the community including serving as “Youth Leader, Youth Advisor, under the Church and working with youth groups in the community and different community organizations.” In particular, she has successfully served as an Adult Educator/Tutor, Youth Supervisor, Literacy Instructor, recreational leader and support specialist for students with exceptional learning needs.

From an educational standpoint, Neale has obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree, specialist diplomas in Special Education and additional coursework and/or certification in a variety of domains including Child Psychology, Adult Education and the Arts. She has been employed within the field of education since 1992. Her spirituality has implied connections to a higher power and the divine and is deeply founded within the African Baptist tradition. Neale was born and educated in Canada.

**Suzy**

Suzy’s practice of educational leadership extends over several decades and encompasses community, provincial and national involvement. Suzy is a senior administrative leader within Black community organization that is charged with monitoring the education provided to Black learners. Her leadership spans more than 20 years and she has been honoured on numerous occasions for her work in schools and community. In regards to community, Suzy also serves as a board member on numerous organizations pertaining to spirituality, women and youth. Moreover, Suzy is also involved in further activity at the provincial level, a position where as director, she facilitates training programs for members and staff, a task which proved quite extensive. She explains:
We had to do so much training. People think that because you have a job there aren’t any issues. When people start coming and talking to you there must be a need. There are so many things going on in the workplace – if people are going into work shooting, there has to be a problem. If people are not functioning there has to be a problem.... as the director I have been teaching these courses Tuesday and Thursday nights, as an educator, teaching employees how to be peer supports for the other employees. That program was amazing because we had to look at racism, prejudices and discrimination. We have to look at who we are – if we are going to discriminate against gay or lesbians, then what about me a black person standing up in front of you. We have to educate about culture, the different diversities. We are here in this world for a purpose, everyday I think of education, life is about educating ourselves, life lessons.

Suzy reports that she serves as spiritual educator within her home community. She identifies with an African-centred spirituality that is divinely-oriented and includes unorthodox connections to Christianity and her community.

**Summary**

The participants’ profiles represent an eclectic and rich blending of experiences, educational journeys and mandates. School-based participants serve within site, departmental, postsecondary and board level educational leadership positions and with the exception of Jonathan and Jeff express ties to community-based educational endeavours. Participants working from community-based educational positions likewise assume varying positions as coordinator, parent educator, tutor, educational trustee and/or teacher and engage in multiple ways with education and leadership. Spiritual foundations are also diversely understood.
Researcher’s Stance

Walford (2001) contends that, “all research is researching yourself” (p. 98) and with this statement alludes to the subjective nature of all research. Consequently, it is recommended that researchers recognize their centrality in all aspects of decision making and methods. Similar sentiments are adopted by Kincheloe (1991) who declares that an “awareness of self and the forces which shape the self is a prerequisite for the formulation of more effective methods of research” as the “knower and known” are inseparable (p. 29). I concur with the former statements and therefore choose to explicitly make known my identity and its relationship to the present study.

I’ve come to this research as a spiritual educational leader of West Indian descent. The spiritual realm, as known through my Africentric Christian community is real, potent and integrally connected to my understandings and experiences in schooling. I view spirituality as empowering in that it challenges me to undertake educational leadership as a critical endeavour that regards kindness, compassion and restoration as fundamental aspects of leading. Through spirituality, I understand leadership to involve an individual and communal orientation that is supportive of the interests and concerns of marginalized families, students and teachers, all of which may be at odds at differing points in time. In essence, spirituality compels me to view leadership as a giving away rather than an acquisition and an expressed comfort in not knowing and thereby learning.

As a result of my affiliation with indigenous spirituality, I also experience racialized discrimination both within and outside education. Ironically, schooling policies prohibit the cultural expression of my spirituality within the educational landscape, while simultaneously
sanctioning the visibility of others. Likewise, assumptions abound concerning the irrelevancy of spirituality to education while at the same time individuals and systems benefit from the wisdom and corrective actions that are spiritually inspired. Spiritual marginalization also exists within the wider society as Black spiritual communities are often historically ostracized from mainstream denominations. Furthermore, within African and Africentric spiritual communities, discrimination is frequently engendered against women leaders and their ability effect proactive change and resolution. Therefore, in light of what I have come to understand and consequently experience, it is not my intention to essentialize African and Africentric spiritualities as being without contradictions. Rather, through the tensions and contradictions I endeavour to embrace the meanings which spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders assign to their work and the impact of spirituality on their efforts towards justice and democracy in education.

As a former student and present educational leader within Nova Scotia, I am cognizant that I carry multiple and varied markers of privilege and marginalization. While I seek to ensure that educational settings are more critically just, I am also aware that I wear my own complicity that is intermingled in this struggle. Notwithstanding the former, I understand educational justice as critically inclusive movements that prepare all members of the school community to engage more humanely and communally in education and society. Leadership for educational justice from this perspective necessitates a realignment of priorities towards a focus on leadership for equity (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009). This orientation necessarily values the cultural-historical legacy of minoritized leaders as informative and crucial in transforming educational mandates. Further, an emphasis on
equitable standards, as opposed to neoliberal conceptions, is deliberate in positioning perceptions of race, gender and socioeconomic as critical elements in the equation.

I believe that convincing the academy of the need for equitable educational transformation within the field of educational leadership will undoubtedly continue to be an arduous task. It is heartening however, when I consider that theorists continue to daringly challenge the absence of minoritized perspectives and experiences. I too am concerned with this invisibility and in particular, the tendency for the histories and knowledges of African peoples to be silenced by accounts that bear no resemblance to our lived experiences. I intentionally enter into this arena, gratefully acknowledging the current efforts of researchers and honouring the spirits of educational leaders who have toiled, resisted and ruptured the fabric of exclusion within and alongside the boundaries of schooling.

In conclusion, I believe that in order for the discourse of educational leadership to be truly equitable there must be a recognition that approaches to understanding leadership are as varied as those who undertake and adopt this mantle. It can no longer be acceptable practice to explore the knowledge base of educational administration without acknowledging that indigenous understandings also exist and are relevant. Such truth-telling would not only unearth the fallacy that the dominant perspective encompasses the totality of thought on present topics, but also bring attention that alternative understandings and experiences meaningfully exist. My work is a dedication to “calling those things that are not as though they were” to hearing those voices which are often muted by the collective noises of the status quo. As a result, I am astutely aware that my experiences of spirit and cultural locatedness influence all aspects of the research process including the interpretation of
participants’ perspectives on central issues of spiritual expression, leadership and conceptions of social justice.

In the following chapters I undertake an analysis of findings using a thematic approach. Scholarly literature in Chapter Two is used as a preliminary investigative tool to inform the current and potential themes that arose with respect to spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership for social justice. In addition, I use participants’ responses to the guiding research to develop topical headings that were consistent with areas of investigation namely African and Africentric understandings of spirituality, constructions of educational leadership and leadership experiences.
Chapter Four
Understandings of Spirituality

Spirituality is that part of our lives and community through which we make meaning and understanding of our world. In fact, it is the spiritual dimension of humankind that gives us the motivation as well as the technique to complete the Freirian (1998) project of reading our world through the esoteric exercise of conscientization or personal critical awareness. Spirituality is the grounding for the values and principles we espouse that inform our personal and professional behaviour. It allows us to create the projects of transformation that call into question that vestiges of our “as is” situations to convert them into the vagaries of our “not yet” hopes and dreams. (Dantley, 2003b, p. 274)


Introduction

Spirituality is an integral component of the African and Africentric lived experience. It has anchored our sense of identity, empowered our personal and social accomplishments and provided a mechanism whereby members have been able to counter experiences of marginalization with resiliency, hope and achievement. As members of African descent reflect a diverse heritage of histories, beliefs, and values so too do the spiritualities they embrace. This study is aimed at capturing the personal and collective understandings of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders within the context of their work towards social justice. In this section I extract meanings from the data in an effort to answer the primary research question: How do spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders practice leadership as a form of social justice? and two of four subquestions:
1. How do African and Africentric leaders understand their spirituality?

2. How does spirituality influence leaders’ social justice practice?

These research questions are significant for several reasons. Primarily, as the researcher I am interested in understanding the relationship between participants’ spirituality and their leadership practices for social justice. Secondly, I hope to contribute to the current scholarship on African and Africentric spiritualities as contextualized by participants’ conceptions. Lastly, given the present interest in leadership as a spiritual practice I hope to be able to offer further insight in regards to the nature of spiritual influences. I am fully cognizant that other meanings are possible, however, to the extent possible it is my sincere desire to honour the voices of participants by utilizing excerpts from participants’ transcripts to assist in contextualizing their meanings.

In the present section I first embark on documenting what African and Africentric educational leaders have to say in regards to the meaning of spirituality. I have selected to discuss my data collectively through the reportings of school and community-based participants. Further, I use thematic headings which provide a collective portrait of meanings and simultaneously capture the uniqueness of participants’ experiences. School-based narratives reference educational leaders working within the confines of schools and postsecondary institutions. Community perspectives reflect participants who are working with community-based organizations or community-oriented initiatives.

Responses to the previously mentioned research question identify spirituality as a, multi-faceted catalyst within the professional lives of school and community-based leaders. In keeping with the literature on African and Africentricity, participants’ spiritual worldviews
are consistent yet unique. Ascribed meanings reflect a self-described racial consciousness with participants primarily self-identify using racial terminology that draws on connections to ethnicity, gender, linguistic, class and geographic demographics. Collectively their narratives also reveal an astute awareness that their positional identities as educated members and ascribed identities as people of African descent situate them within a duality as both privileged and targeted and simultaneously highlight beliefs surrounding the presence of benevolent and malevolent forces. Participants’ collective understandings predominantly make reference to God, Lord or a “higher power” but simultaneously report espousing a contemporary perspective that is related to yet, distinctly different from and beyond the framework of religion. Additionally, understandings of spirituality as embodying symbolic emblems and activities are also commonly reported by the majority of participants. As alluded to in research (C. Stewart, 1997), participants also discuss aspects of their spirituality from a stance of relational interdependence that regards relationships with nature, family, community and ancestors as significant. Section two documents how spirituality influences leaders’ practices. Participants comment on the role of spirituality as a phenomenon that anchors and infuses leaders’ practice educational leadership. Further, reports reveal that spirituality acts as a motivational force that inspires action and a catalyst that empowers leaders to engage in social justice work.

**Racialized Consciousness**

The study explores the practices of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders therefore, the issue of race is central to this investigation. As expected, participants’ spirituality is housed within a racialized self-identity with participants choosing to self-
describe using descriptors which reference their Africanity or Africentric experiences. Throughout their narratives, participants repeatedly call attention to themselves as raced and positioned members in society as in varying degrees, participants intentionally describe their identities through locations of race, ethnicity, gender, language, class, sexual orientation and regionality; findings which speak to a sociopolitical consciousness, and of knowing the self through differing cultural currencies. Participants’ deliberateness is in keeping with Taubman’s (1993) autobiographical register which asserts that despite the imposition of objectified characterizations, individuals will strive to define a self-hood that is multi-faceted and personally connecting. Further, Taubmans’ description of identity development speaks to leaders’ purposeful agency in combating the fictitious societal demarcations. Narratives suggest a sense of pride and ownership in constructing authentic understandings of their identity.

In conjunction with the former, it is important to note that participants refrain from describing themselves through popularized labels such as minority, non-White, or people of color,” a finding which speaks to their willingness to utilize terminology having greater significance and authenticity. Of the school-based participants, descriptions utilize such terms as “African” while others employ African as a descriptor in conjunction with an additional term such African Descent or African Nova Scotian. Participants’ narratives also reveal their comfort in utilizing labels interchangeably as several participants also refer to themselves as “Black” or “Black Nova Scotian”, “Black Canadian” and as coming from Black community. The narratives of participants working primarily in and with community are also quite telling. Participants choose to self-identify using multiple descriptors with racialized labels continuing to be the common denominators. However, unlike their school-
based counterparts, the terms African descent or African Canadian are not used as referents. Leaders invoke the terms Black, African and African Nova Scotian in reference to themselves and collectively choose to reference their ancestral nationality, gender, family and age within their profiles. The current section will outline the above findings in greater detail.

African and Africentric leaders are adamant in defining themselves. Rather, than buying into prescribed racial understandings, narratives suggest that leaders consciously deliberate and construct their identities through personally meaningful frameworks as expressed in the following by Allister and Allessandra respectively:

I am a pure African; there are no two ways about it. I don’t want to go back to say that I am African Canadian, I am pure African. I was born in [an African country]. So I don’t want anyone to define my identity, I want to define my own identity as an African, pure African.

One thing that I don’t think that I mentioned that is also a very very important to say who I am as a person, an African descendent an African Nova Scotian.

In addition to the expressed intentionality, participants’ reports also reveal that the struggle to form an identity exists amidst the imposition of popularized and shifting conscriptions of selfhood as exemplified by Jeff:

This whole thing about African Nova Scotian. I am a Black Nova Scotian, heterosexual male. I am a Black person of African descent but I have no connection with Africa. I may like to visit Africa, but other than that I have no connection with Africa. I am a Black Nova Scotian and also Black Canadian. So that’s all I know. I connect with my African heritage because of my skin
color. Nova Scotian, my Canadianness because of where I am situated where I am located, where my mother was located, my father, my grandparents were located and where my community is located. That’s where I connect with myself. It’s interesting we were Negros, we were colored people, we’re Black and now we are people of African descent. If we go by what the sociologists are saying, what the anthropologists are saying the whole world is African.

In the same manner, other narratives such as the one expressed by Samuel below, address the complexities of being Black and a non indigenous member of society

Well, it’s obvious, I am a Black man, I am a Black immigrant from Africa…and I think that adds a different spin, being a Black immigrant in Canada

As noted, Samuel’s description references his phenotypical characteristics as a primary signifier of his identity. What this printed text cannot convey is the resolute manner in which these words were uttered as his suggests that he is acutely aware of the precarious currency of his identity within the Canadian sociopolitical climate and the need to contest some of the assigned representations. As explanation of the former is:

Being Black and being in Canada is a different experience I think, than if you were born a Canadian. If you are Black, from another place the experience will be different. I wonder whether others can see that there is a difference, that’s a big doubt.

Being a “Black immigrant” from an African nation in Samuel’s opinion, places him and others like himself in a uniquely complex location that is experientially different from individuals who are born within the Canadian context. Samuel is quick to point out that while similarities across racial boundaries may exist, there are intra-identity complexities which
create different lived experiences for people of African descent. One example being that of language:

I think one of the things, I think to begin with, as you can hear me, I have an accent. And what happens at first is that, I speak from the point of view of my friends, my accent plays a big part, is that they have a harder time communicating and being heard in what they say. The frustrations. And then later, not knowing the system itself, its construction, there’s this naivety at first, and sometimes it hurts. It hurts people and it hurts me to see them going through that and sometimes you wish you could do something about it.

Diaspora narratives as in the ones below, further express a critical awareness of the self as complexly interwoven and comprised of diverse ethnocultural lineages that are multi-national

First, [I’d] like to define myself by my nationality. I am a [Carribbean country] of African descent primarily, like they say back home…we are a people of many nations because right now I have so many mixed up in my blood.

I identify myself as African Nova Scotian. That being said I also acknowledge my native heritage as well. In different parts of my family there is Mik’maq heritage and also there is some Cherokee. My father’s grandmother’s father was part native.

and as referenced by Suzy, historically intertwined with rich ancestral linkages.

Black community, knowing the African culture, [and] coming from our ancestral roots” allow members of her community to “…learn to value who we are and as a Black [person] living in Nova Scotia you have to always remember who you were.
Further to highlighting the realities of being racialized members within the Canadian context participants’ accounts acknowledge the relative privileges they possess as a result of their identity. Narratives chiefly reference educational attainment as spoken of,

I know I am privileged because I am in education because I can speak English, because I have more than grade 12 education. I am a part of privilege group people and because I have a job and I acknowledge that. So by purchasing knowledge [I have] my own privileges as a woman, an African descent educator. [It] makes me responsible, I have to give back to make sure other people can also you know what’s like.

and ultimately, the urgency leaders feel in imparting their acquired knowledge and ensuring that other members have access to similar experiences as seen through the following:

I went back home and decided that I needed to set the trend and try to impart some of this knowledge that I have gotten and really pave the way as a mentor and a coach and a teacher to influence students to try and make that path, make a similar path, a difficult path, I might add, but to strive for it because there is not much hope there for them.

Participants know themselves as raced and socially positioned members of society. Their self-identifications are intentional, thoughtful and provokingly mindful that their social currencies have been and continue to be politicized within the Canadian context.

**Divine, Unconventional and Symbolic**

The meanings which school-based and community leaders assign to their spirituality are consistent with African and Africentric scholarship on spirituality. Most notably, whether undertaking their leadership within public school settings, institutes of higher learning or
through community-focused initiatives all participants reference meanings which are predominantly orientated toward a divine entity that references “God”, a “higher power or Lord. Explanations of spirituality invoking references to “God” position the divine as a being that requires preeminence. The former meanings is specifically noted in Jonathan’s transcript who declares that “God has to be the forefront” of his life and Allessandra who reports that her “spiritual job is in relation to God.” Quite similarly, other leaders like Jeff understand a God–inspired spirituality as an organizing framework that provides purpose for their leadership practices as noted:

I guess it plays a big part in my life subconsciously because I want to do God’s work in my job and how I treat people.

Similar sentiments are echoed by others as found in the following:

Spirituality is my life, it’s not just at home and going to church, it has to be a part of everything I do. They have to see that I am a child of God and not this evil dictator. There are times when the administrator has to put their foot down, ok this is the way things have to be, but at the same time they have to see Christ coming through because on the job I can’t preach. (Zina)

Likewise, divine-oriented reports define spirituality as an organizing framework for daily living as Neale suggests, spirituality is

Everyday living, the realization for me that in my own strength I cannot do anything and everything that I do I trust in a higher power, the Lord to help me in all that I do and even through everything else He is always there.

Neale’s narrative centres a “higher power” which she calls “Lord”, but stops short of naming an affiliation to any denominational or religious order. In this respect, her description reveals
a deliberate acknowledgement and reliance upon a sacred entity which in her words, is “always there”. This engendered and omnipresent power appears to lend an assurance and supportive navigation to her life. Clearly, trust is an embedded element of her spirituality which appears to have been tested and proven secure. As expected, there are also tangible and novel aspects within Neale’s understanding of spirituality. Neale’s spirituality offers her insight into her own human condition and holds out a bridge which allows her to transcend what she sees as her incompleteness and frailty. Leaders’ narratives also describe spirituality as an opportunity for the Divine to engage in humanity as noted:

I think that God wants equality for all and justice for all. When you have that position and that stance to the core, that’s what keeps you going.

In addition to a divine inclination, meanings of spirituality also appear linked to hosts within the spiritual realm

I consider myself as a spiritual person and I am connected to what’s around in my presence and when I need this I call them. I am not ashamed to say that I call these spirits before me. The spiritual is very empowering as well as emotionally and mentally.

Definitions of spirituality also contain references to a religious affiliation as most leaders declare their adherence to a faith-based spiritual orientation, namely Christian, Catholic, African Baptist or Buddhist as noted below:

What’s important for you to know about me…in anything I do I like to ground myself spiritually and to follow as close as possible the Christian principles. Because I think that those principles are spiritual principles. Working here at the college for the past 12 years, it has had its ups and downs and I’ve always come from Christian home, brought up in the Church. I am still involved with
the Church and I bring those same values from home and church to work. Though we have fun at work, but I still try and follow the same guidelines.

Implicit within Caplan’s narrative is the finding that most leaders speak of spirituality with a deliberate accuracy. Their narratives are exact in detailing spirituality as an intentional possession as exemplified by Zina who states emphatically, “It’s my life … Spirituality is my life, it’s not just at home and going to church, it has to be a part of everything I do.” Others speak to the imperative of having their meanings accurately recorded. This deliberateness is highlighted in Allister’s account:

Like I said earlier, I want to position myself in terms of how to look at spirituality. If I think in terms of religion or Christianity or whatever, I am a very strong Christian, therefore I incorporate this into my teaching.

As noted, Allister welcomes the opportunity to define his spirituality. Like most leaders, his spirituality appears to be a conscious and purposed choice. Similar sentiments are echoed by Allessandra and subsequently Caplan reflect the former, “I have no problem telling people I am a Christian.” and “You don’t have to go around saying I’m a Christian – you walk your talk [so] that people will know that you are a Christian – and I try to do that.”

Juxtaposed to this seemingly religious foundation are simultaneously unconventional interpretations of spirituality. While leaders’ meanings seemingly adopt a faith-based orientation they do so in characteristically unorthodox ways. Repeatedly, participants’ definitions include reports which question, move beyond or explicitly reject the confines of a religious foundation. Meanings suggest that these leaders critically distinguish their
definitions of spirituality from traditional notions. Jeff’s comments provide an account of this tendency:

I was born and raised a Catholic and I still practice Catholicism, but I have questions about that sometimes. I don’t question my faith as a spiritual person but I guess I question the Catholic faith. I’ve looked at Buddism, I’m attracted to some forms of it, but I’m not a regular church goer. I guess I like going to church for the solitude for the whole connectedness to God I get that there. So I am not a bible thumping Catholic because most Catholics are very serene.

Additionally, Jeff mentions to two symbolic elements, church and scriptural text which while associated with his denomination order are apparently not integral to his understanding and practice of spirituality. As may be seen from the former narrative, while spiritual definitions contain hallmarks of a religious order, they expansively stretch beyond the boundaries of religious community to encompass diverse understandings. Suzy speaks to this reality:

Spirituality is very important in our life….Spirituality is the inner; it’s what I do for my inner spiritual being. For me I believe that my spirituality comes from within. It’s something I received from God. When I think about God’s blessing in sending His son Jesus here, because God was so loving that he sent his son that we can have a spiritual life always. For me I can carry that spiritual life within me every day and how I live that it’s not about my religion, it’s about me the person, my spirituality can just walk with me.

This propensity is further taken up in Allister’s narrative who forthright defines his spirituality as Christ-centered. Although framing his spirituality within this religious parameter, Allister is adamant that when discussing spirituality, his is “not talking about religion,” nor does he “worry about religion” as it is the Spirit which provides motivation.
Spirituality, as defined by leaders purposely holds the Divine in an unorthodox manner and separate from the workings of an essentialist religious foundation. Suzy’s spirituality espouses a God image and although containing a Divine point of reference, she is cognizant to point out that it is not a religion.

Likewise, meanings are also telling of contradictions existing between and within one’s spiritual worldview as noted by Jeff:

I’ve always wondered about people’s faith and spirituality. They say they are good Christians, yet they do deeds that are not the Christian way. How do they look at themselves in the mirror? I take it personally how they are.

Allessandra’s storied description of her spirituality also exemplifies the tensions experienced between her spiritual understanding and her denominational order:

I remember that my son, my baby son was getting christened and I remember saying to my pastor that I wanted to do some libation to call on my ancestors to present their spiritual, spirits and he actually looked at me and said that it is like witchcraft. And I was just like so offended because how could you not be connected to your ancestors. That just means saying I want them present, that I value, appreciate…and that I mean I want [them] to be present for my child’s christening. That’s not meaning you are calling the ghosts to come, the spirits.

In sync with African and Africentric scholarship, spirituality is defined as a phenomenon that is understood to exist in the natural realm and as being capable of being experienced outside formalized settings. Leaders speak to definitions of spirituality as occurring within nature as may be seen through the following. For example, Suzy’s spirituality takes up residence within the presence of the everyday and resultanty offers her “calmness” and “peace”.
When I drive I go to the water and I get my calmness and that brings me to a wholistic approach of how I deal with stuff. Water if very calming, music, driving – it’s inner peace, if I am feeling comfortable and my soul is feeling comfortable, as my dad would say, don’t go to bed angry ‘“don’t let the sun fall down upon you when you are angry”

School-based and community leaders’ meanings of spirituality encompass a symbolic aspect as in various ways participants explain how rituals, practices and scriptural texts embody their spiritual lives. The role of symbolism within leaders’ spirituality appears to be three-fold. First, symbolizing practices such as libation, act as an acknowledgement of the omnipresence of the divine and spirits as noted:

I think it’s very important to do libation, to get respect to honour to our ancestors to God...because we wouldn’t be here, we wouldn’t be in schools, we wouldn’t be able to do things we are doing if it wasn’t for our ancestors.

Secondly, symbolic practices such as prayer, textual readings and church attendance provide leaders with opportunities to nurture a relationship with the divine.

Prayer, reading my bible, fellowship with other Christians…meditating, talking to God. I treat God the same way I would treat my best friend. Just talking and reading his word, the bible, meditating, going to church. These are all things that I see in developing a relationship.

Lastly, spirituality as defined through symbolism engages the divine in the everydayness of life as asserted in by Suzy in the following:

Our spirituality comes from within but it is also something that we learn as a little kid. The Lord’s Prayer that was spiritual learning. Today I do my
prayers, it doesn’t need to be at night or in the morning but I ask God to bless
the world and pray for our leaders.

Allessandra’s account also expounds upon this finding

I pray like in the car, I pray when something good happens, I pray for
something [that I have] lost and I find it. You know, such prayers, go on
within my day. I don’t even count [how often] because it’s instant.

There was also the sense that symbolic rituals also serve as a supportive and empowering
catalyst. Of this Suzy says, “In our church family we have cells. We share our joys and
sadness for the week, and do the readings and you walk out there powerful”.

Participants’ narratives describe spirituality in terms of a divine-oriented
phenomenon. Having said this, they are astute in collectively wanting to define their
spirituality within but away from religious underpinnings. Leaders acknowledge the role of
symbolic rites and practices as being descriptive of spirituality and speak to its presence
within the day-to-day realities of their life.

**Relational: Historical, Current and Interdependent**

Participants’ meanings situate spirituality within the confines of a relational
paradigm. Throughout their accounts, leaders report that spirituality is historical and current
with intersecting linkages across familial, communal, ancestral boundaries. Participants’
storied descriptions of spirituality define it as a construct which is bounded by history and
relational happenings. Although claimed and experienced by leaders now, spirituality is
defined as intergenerational and interdependent. For example, Caplan explains his meaning
of spirituality through a storied account. He begins by first referencing maternal happenings
while he was in his mother’s womb and continues to trace his spirituality through his early childhood years. In this context he recollects following his mother’s footsteps and subsequently being involved in traditional church-based activities and practices. He recounts

When my mother got baptized, she was 6 months pregnant with me… I was baptized when I was 12; I was involved with the junior choir, the young boys’ choir, taught Sunday school, taught Sunday school for a while, was president of the Sunday School Teacher Association; we used to have monthly meetings. Other positions I had, I was Assistant Treasurer for the Church, and used to be the clerk and this is my second term as Chairperson of the Education Committee. I was involved with [the organization’s name], was president of the Young People’s, Chairperson of the scholarship committee all of these things helped to mould who I am today.

The sentiments along with the intonation in his voice suggest a deep appreciation for this introduction to the realm of the spirit. Interdependence and relationality are also located within Caplan’s conception of spirituality as a familial endeavour. Within his description Caplan discusses the importance of maintaining an intimate and supportive relationship with family members

My spiritual values and my family values are one in the same and it impacts on everything that I do. Even looking at this picture of the Black lady and that is right in front of me and that picture that shows three generations. Everyone who comes in notices them. My family is behind me because they are my backbone.

In Caplan’s eyes, spirituality is synonymous with family, and the multiplicity of bonds that are created across relationships. Further evidence of this is found as I am invited to peruse his office which showcases a variety of photos depicting family members across several
generations. Quite clearly, family and spirituality intertwine to fashion his identity. So deeply entwined is his practice of spirituality as family that it affords him the flexibility and freedom of practice within and outside the traditional nuances of his faith community.

When we go to church we go as a family and a lot of people when they go to church, the kids sit upstairs, but I find that as a family, we sit together. And because [wife’s name] is sick and sometimes I stay home, she’ll say well you just go. It’s not that I don’t feel comfortable, but we are always together and I feel out of place when she is not there.

As earlier mentioned, leaders’ conceptions of spirituality often contravene established practice and Caplan’s narrative is no exception. However, what is pertinent to the present discussion is that his understanding of spirituality reveals a deliberate attempt to remain committed to family. His narrative highlights a collective definition of spirituality as exemplified by his decision to worship together and if need be, remain at home with his wife during times of illness. The former is also suggestive that leaders’ spirituality is dynamic and resilient enough to embrace the diversity of needs.

Meanings of spirituality as relational and intergenerational are also reported by various community-based leaders. Like leaders in schools, participants often choose to define their spirituality through narratives which recite excerpts of their spiritual journey. For example, Samuel states

When I was 8 or 9, there were some church ladies around and my mom would ask these church ladies to come over. I would sit around, and she would let me ask them questions, so I would ask things about the gospel, things I don’t understand. So they would be telling me….I had a hunger…. I think one of them wanted me to be a member of their church and that day I had a soccer
match and I decided consciously that I wasn’t going to be baptized, that I wanted to play soccer…. No, I just didn’t want…maybe I wasn’t ready.

Samuel’s explains that his spiritual awakening actually occurs during a solitary moment and not during a collective gathering as generally expected.

It happened when I was 13 years. It happened when I was alone as I was reading the Gospel according to Luke. I was taking care of my sister’s child. She was away working I was bored. I went…and bought a book and one of the books I bought was the gospel according to Luke. So I read that the gospel that afternoon and it was just very interesting at the end I finished it, I was deeply touched. I had never come to understand the gospel like that.

Samuel proceeds to discuss how his spiritual journey evolves to include ministerial training programs and pastoral ministry. Cumulatively, his definition evokes personal, familial and communal images.

Definitions of spirituality as complex and intertwined with ancestral heritage, the supernatural realm and the natural world are also provided.

So I have lots of spiritual experiences connected to the ancestors….I am not only talking about ancestors and slavery. I am talking about an ancestor who dies just died last week.

In church you can feel the spirits and you can feel the people who are with you. You have that warm feeling. I know when my father was visiting the spirit was present. I got to know it’s now and it’s not just on your imagination. They gave you the sense that you know when something was happening. That’s miraculous. You feel that power and it’s not witchery. It just being connected with the spirits and there is nothing wrong with that and you shouldn’t fear what you don’t know. And when I, when I realize I feel
uncomfortable, I ask God, you know, I have done nothing to this spirit, take it away.

Spirituality is uniquely formulated within a historical and sociocultural context that links both past and present. In sync with this understanding are definitions which craft spirituality as through transcendental references:

It’s a feeling in you like Gandhi and most of the leaders of the world they were motivated to do what they did. And so as an individual you can also encourage students so that they accept you. To have a different way of defining spirituality. That’s what Nkrumah was grappling with all the time – to define spirituality.

Spirituality from this perspective entails an emotional dimension that compels engagement with humanity.

Leaders further define spirituality through references to interpersonal relationships and see helping “fellow human beings to move on”, and stepping “forward, to do some … things, and then help other people in need, not only just academic work” as being exemplars of this practice. Zina’s spirituality for example entails a relational dimension which she states, compels her to work for the “betterment of children and the betterment”. Her narrative also describes spirituality as an interrelated phenomenon that is “part of everything” that she does within the process of leading. Likewise, spirituality reportedly encompasses a desire to “help” others through their life conditions as explained below:

I think what I saw and perhaps [what] caused the way I see myself, I thought that through education I could help people cross bridges. I’ve always looked at, sort of from a pastoral ministry [to be] involved to help other people. So
education came up as a place that I would be challenged a bit to actually put spirituality into practice.

The nature of spirituality as expressly noted by Samuel involves a focus on others, and in particular, assumes a supportive stance that is able to “help” others in ways they deem most meaningful.

An additional example of the significance of spirituality within the everydayness of family relationships follows

One thing good about it is that God taught us unconditional love. As parents we may not able to give unconditional love like God but we can give unified love and take that love and spread it to somebody else. Our spirituality plays a very important part in that. Everyday we have to have that spirituality and values because it all applies to one another. It follows a sequence, at least in my life. I find I need that spiritual time.

Many leaders describe spirituality as being experienced and practiced as a daily occurrence with others. In this regards, spirituality as such, occurs and is cultivated in the world and in relationship with others, a profound awareness that repudiates the divide between the sacred and the secular.

Function and Role of Spirituality Within Leadership Practice

The parameters of my research explore African and Africentric leaders’ perception of spirituality in their leadership practices for social justice. The findings from the data present a collective portrait of spirituality as a foundational catalyst that inspires, empowers and assists leaders in mediating the tensions within their professional and personal lives. As a foundational catalyst, participants’ comments highlight the significance of spirituality as a
phenomenon that is intertwined with and inseparable from practice. Amidst the various
definitions and expressions of spirituality, participants explain that spirituality infuses their
daily lives and shapes their professional practice. In one sense, participants express
spirituality as an integral component of their identity as a person and professional.

Leaders’ connotations situate spirituality as an inspirational dimension of leaders’
work that compels them towards openness, acceptance and an ability to be attuned to the
oppression of others. In this manner, participants discuss spirituality as an intervening agent
that directs leaders to engage humanely with others. The final theme is in relation to leaders’
involvement in social justice work. In addition to shaping leaders’ values, the data reveals
that spirituality empowers leaders to purposefully and intentionally engage with the tensions
and issues found in their educational contexts. Participants describe spirituality as facilitating
leaders’ ability to transcend negative situations, reinterpret societal patterns and behaviours
and gain the strength and wisdom necessary to move forward. In the following segments I
document in detail, African and Africentric leaders’ perspectives on the influence of
spirituality in shaping their social justice practice.

**Foundational**

In the majority of narratives, participants situate spirituality as a foundational catalyst.
Participants’ reports continuously speak to spirituality’s centering effect as noted in the
following:

“It’s the main, the foundation of my life. This is where I try to stem all my
aspects of life, my personality, my life; everything just branches out from
there.”
From Chantal’s perspective, spirituality is a centrally located and anchoring entity which underpins and connects aspects of her being. Spirituality in the eyes of Chantal, “branches” to aspect of her identity and crucially links ways of being and living. It is, as she describes, a fundamentally rooted and life-giving to her existence. Spirituality is moreover for others a way of life as indicated

It’s how I deal with life, value and respect people, that spirituality it’s something that we carry within. Lots of time we don’t realize that we are being read – people will be watching you to see how you are – and they can read you by your approach – You have to be careful because you never know who is around and what they may pick up.

She continues:

For me I carry it everyday. I get up in the morning and I go to bed at night and I thank God and I go to my work and I carry it with me. So it is about who I am and I thank God that He is there because we can’t do it on our own, it’s about our spiritual base that keeps us going.

In addition to the above reports, participants’ comments reveal that spirituality shapes one’s identity as a human being and invades the field of education.

You can’t have one without the other. You can’t have education without the spiritual, we all need the spiritual. I’ve had this discussion many times. Life is not, we can’t live without being a spiritual being, being part of a spiritual being. You may succeed, but there is something that made you succeed. There’s something there that made human beings. And we have to believe in something. Some people say they don’t believe, how did we get here. You can’t talk about the big bang theory. Where did that big bang come from?
Where’d that piece of particle dust come from? They’re saying it’s the big bang theory, where’d did this come from?

Moreover, leaders like Jeff are convinced that leadership necessitates a spiritual foundation and that it is inseparable from and infuse one’s professional practice.

I don’t think you can be one without having some sort of guidance. Some sort of connectiveness to one’s spirituality. I’m not saying that Christian is better than Judaism or someone that practices Islam. You have to be strong in the way you think about things. But there’s always that connectiveness and you have to be able to make those decisions. And a lot of those decisions come out of the basic tenets of the 10 commandments. Subconsciously we are thinking that way and it does influence you on a level, a deeper level than we realize. There is a connection with being a leader. There is a connectiveness that you have to realize. It’s part and part, the basis of who we are. Even if we were not an educational leader, a foreman or supervisor, that’s the basic tenet in charge of leadership. It comes from what we practice in our faith and what we read about in the bible etc.

Further references from Chantal and Samuel respectively also speak to this account,

I don’t know how you would separate them, how you would not incorporate the spirituality piece. It’s not a hat I wear and take off. It’s a hat that is on all the time. I don’t take that hat off. Can me the speaker be different from me the Christian – can I become a secular person when I am in the class absolutely not – People get frustrated with me, when they express frustration and I don’t follow through using their patterns, well for me it is not my style – it is not who I am. I say besides, I have faith, and I can’t separate myself from what I believe in. The way you talk but the way you conduct yourself. They are little things but they get to realize that you have more substance to your life.
The phrase, “It’s not a hat I wear and take off…” elucidates insight into the meanings ascribed to spirituality and provides a subversive perspective which challenges notions of the secular and sacred divide. The above narratives also convey the relationship between spirituality and leadership by suggesting that the former is intricately entwined in everyday life and professional practice.

Similar to these accounts, Allessandra sees a natural relationship between spirituality and leadership and emphatically states:

I don’t think you can separate the spiritual job and who you are because if you are true child of God and believe what you are doing then you are who you are.

Likewise leaders like Neale report that spirituality influences “the values and beliefs” in her work and accordingly states,

I apply it to everything that I do, regardless of what it is...It allows me to look at different ways to learn. In terms of spirituality and everything else in the world there is a connection.

**Inspirational**

In addition to emphasizing the role of spirituality within their professional practice, narratives also speak to the impact of spirituality in inspiring leaders toward more humane and just practice. More specifically, spirituality motivates leaders to be critically conscious, empathetic and adopt the ethic of care. The following excerpt provides an example:

Those who are poor – God didn’t make them poor. We have to help make them to take those steps forward. Bring the prostitute forward and let her speak. I don’t want to speak for the prostitute; I see what made that person to
become a prostitute. Why should that woman stay in the situation where her husband was beating her, that’s not the way to live? God doesn’t want men beating their wives, children.

As noted above, Suzy’s spirituality dispels myths around poverty and reflects a broad understanding of the complexities affecting the most vulnerable. Her spirituality in this regards, inspires her to declare a more justice reality about God, fate and inevitability and acts a catalyst for rethinking assumptions and practices. Additionally, leaders report that spirituality inspires them to be empathetic

   God has to be the foundation to which I am coming from. God has to be the forefront of our lives in order for us to be able to understand and to empathize with our fellow man. It doesn’t just emerge. I don’t think this ability to critically reflect on our practices and to work communally comes naturally. I think the basis of this has to come from this higher power.

Moreover, other excerpts offered by participants reflect a nonjudgemental stance.

   Well, the spirituality piece keeps me from being judgmental, not being angry, not holding malice. It just kind of tends to keep you to practice the way Jesus would practice. That’s your core and you do what you can do, but you don’t try to hold in because you are always in a conflictual relationship because you are being a spiritual leader, or advocate for change. What you are trying to do is break down a lot of strongholds, power stations that need to be changed. If you did it naturally, of course you would walk away mad …but the spiritual piece keeps you from being mad because God is at the forefront and you’re just doing what God would want you to do – and one is not to be angry or malice. Just recognizing the structures that we work in.

   And maintain openness towards others
Spirituality requires me to be knowledgeable, open to investigation...in a world where there is a lot of knowledge generated by good principles.

Lead through love as spoken by Chantal and Jeff respectively.

John 3:16 speaks about God’s love, and everlasting love and that’s how I try to see the world. How God has loved the world. And I try to love people, I could never have God’s love, but I strive to have a nonjudgmental love for people for all mankind. The next [part of the scripture] speaks about God sending his son in the world not to condemn the world, we try to somehow want to be judgmental, always blame, always criticize the world. I keep that scripture in the forefront of my mind that why God came here for – so all those things that I want to do blame, criticize, judge, when I think about that scripture what did he come to do. Those are factors that form and shape me and continue to shape me on this journey as I proceed.

Practically leading also means

On a day-to-day basis it probably would connect as “love one another as we love ourselves”. So, I try not to judge, not to be too judgmental. I say that because I had a director who was a very strong Christian, but I watched her be so belittling and wondered why does she treat people this way. The way that she treats people was not according to the bible. Or why is she talking about people this way. She shouldn’t be talking about people I try not to judge, and I try to treat everyone equal and I try to, I have to turn the other cheek a lot. It really upsets me.

In addition, spirituality motivates leaders to adopt a personal ethos that regards life as sacred and worthy of respect.

People have to realize that life is a blessing. It’s not what you have in your material life…it’s the respect that you receive from somebody…or you gave
something [to someone] that didn’t have anything, what’s more important. For me spirituality is about going out and knowing that I am loved and do love.

Other leaders like Jonathan, remark that spirituality compels leaders to value equity, justice and community.

I think spirituality is the foundation which, or drive towards which equity is based upon. Equity, social justice, democracy, spirituality has to be the foundation. Without that, those values, the community togetherness that spirituality brings forth, we can’t see, we don’t see the need to strive towards equality. We’re not empathic, there’s no empathy, there’s no values, there’s a lack of communal values…not just values from our individual perspectives but a lack of communal values.

Quite similarly, participants report that spirituality motivates a deeper-level engagement with others as stated in Allister’s narrative.

I try to see them as human beings – I am motivated by a kind of spirit to work with zeal and enterprise without looking back…To help your fellow human beings to move on, despite the fact that they are not your children. You did it because the Spirit is within you.

Spirituality is thereby instrumental because as Allister’s further states

If you have spirituality in terms of these things, you also try to encourage students. I am not talking about religion; children need to have the motivation to redefine themselves in term of how they carry themselves in the school system. And that would take care of discipline and all of the academic work.

The spiritual as known by Allister is also a critical agent that has the potential to assist students in fashioning an alternate image of themselves and their educational experience.
Collectively, participants’ narratives suggest that spirituality provides a critical lens from which to undertake their work and inspires leadership as a focused tool for change.

**Empowering**

In addition to inspiring leaders, the data reveals that spirituality empowers leaders to purposefully and intentionally transcend the negative and contentious issues of practice. Narratives repeatedly make specific references to spirituality as a potently instrumental force that is invoked to inform and analyze social interactions and reinforce their resolve to move forward. For instance, spirituality enables leaders to remain calm, balanced and focused during school meetings as Chantal explains:

Well, when I go into these meetings I tend to pray because when I go into them you have a lot of psychologists, social workers, teachers, guidance counselors, principals, vice principals there are a lot of people in the room who have their own belief systems about this child. And a lot of them don’t know the child. A lot of labels are put on these children, that I tend to think, not so. I tend to pray before I go in I just kind of pray while I am sitting there because you have so many other, and besides all this you have about 7-8 different personalities, a mishmash over a lot of stuff going on in the room over one child. And the parents are there. So someone has to …not that I keep the balance, but my spirituality has helped me to not get caught up in all of the drama. They don’t realize that I am putting these scriptures on myself. They don’t realize really what model I am using or theory I am using. I’m not using their theories. My theory is the bible, and those scriptures which are my theory.

Zina’s account also provides an example of a situation in which the spiritual was invoked in preparation for and during a parental meeting.
I said, God you are going to have to step in because I don’t like being rude to parents especially if they are coming from a place where I can’t even imagine the place they are coming from. So I guess in that situation I asked God to work through me, but also to work a miracle even before we had the meeting.

In this regard, spirituality empowers Zina, in her words to be “positive, more positive in the midst of a storm,”

So when you have the meeting you see the other side of things that are beyond that person’s control and that’s probably why that person behaved that way when they come into the building. Everybody has their child’s interest at heart. So I’ve seen a couple of situations.

Zina is convinced that while “some people see this leadership approach as being a weakness “because you don’t come down all hard and nasty,” she believes that, “it is better to win people with sweetness than with vinegar. Why make people all mad? – win them on your side and work from there.” In Zina’s former references, spirituality is seen as an enabling force that imbues her with the ability to reengage in the most difficult situations and gain an appreciation of the potential factors that may influencing the reactions of others. In addition to aiding leaders to mentally transcend the negative situations narratives further reveal that spirituality equips leaders to contest systemic structures.

Being a spiritual leader affects the way I lead by giving me a positive outlook in a negative situation. So, helping me to deal with that negative situation whatever it is. I give people to benefit of the doubt but at the same time recognizing that things need to be done. When I put that scripture on myself everyday because when I work everyday, especially in child welfare, education, especially child welfare, [where] it’s modeled and shaped for a social worker to find blame, to find deficit, to be very judgmental toward
families, children. And we don’t approach that holistically, we go in to break families down. Because we are setting blame on the youth, the mother, the father, someone is to blame in the family. And all that blame causes dissension in the family, rips apart individual pieces of the family. So I use those scriptures, both scriptures to try and shape and form me. Both as a way to combat those structures that are in place and for me to start my practice, before I get out my house, I am reshaping and renaming what they are doing and what their mandate is. I am still working there, I am still working within the mandate but I am reshaping and renaming different structures that within it.

And fuels leaders’ resolve to transcend the employment equities they experience

As a black person we couldn’t do it without the power of Christ, without the power of Christ. Even in my job, even though I was educated I wasn’t treated the same. If I didn’t have my spirituality, I have to say God give me patience. I can do my job – why am I working three times harder than the white women beside me. You get a job, go to the job to do a job! It’s not about taking advantage. However, the ones who do less are the ones that get promoted. The workaholics are the ones who never ever get looked at….but what can I do to help them. It’s not my job but I will help you….they’re not used to someone helping – but it’s about values, teamwork. In my community everything is teamwork. That’s how we survived….team players, part of a team coming through our lives, that’s how we survived.

Allessandra references the history of spirituality and people of African descent and also cast spirituality as an empowering dimension that has fuelled resilience. She alludes to this in the following statement

Spirituality is very empowering both emotionally and mentally...And that’s the beauty of being people of African descent we come from such a strong
history, So I say [because of ] the spiritual that we don’t have many things knock us down. It’s when we get knocked; when we get knocked we get stronger.

The emphasis on spirituality’s role in helping leaders navigate the issues they face is also a thread woven throughout the narratives. Suzy speaks to spirituality as an empowering force within her life and comments that her resilience is both noted and queried by her colleagues. She explains

When I go to my meetings they ask me you don’t get tired?, I say yes I get tired but I get my strength from God….They say you have a husband that is sick, don’t you get tired, I say He’s always there,,, I might not have the money but I know that I have a spiritual blessing…I can walk away knowing that I have been lifted. It’s about knowing where to go and who to talk to….a peace….a peace for sharing.

The findings from the data indicate that leaders acknowledges spirituality’s role in assisting them to undertake their work

My spiritual life helps me to do the type of work I do in school because everyday I look forward to going to school...and working with the children regardless of what I do at work and in the classroom, something a child says or does. I will reflect back on my spirituality.

and successfully accomplish all aspects of their work

We need faith, to be strong because if you are not strong people will drive you crazy. The world is not a good place out there. You need that, some sort of connectedness of being. So does it play a big part in my life? I’m sure it does at a subconscious level because I want to get along. I guess it plays a big part
in my life subconsciously because I want to do God’s work in my job and how I treat people.

The findings report that leaders employ spirituality when needing to make decisions. In this manner narratives demonstrate that spirituality instills leaders with a sense of direction for next steps. Zina’s account speaks to the former:

If I don’t get up in the morning, if I’m rushing through the day without asking God to guide my decisions that I am making here on the job, family then my days is a mess and if the day goes wavy in between then I have to pray like in situations with parents. I pray before I meet with them or situations with teachers or staff I pray before I meet with them so that I can make the right decisions for the betterment of the children, for the betterment of them whatever. I pray for the children all the time, there are so many crises.

In conjunction with this background, Zina provides an example to clarify spirituality’s imperative.

There was another situation when I prayed that He would give me the right words so that when I call it would be fine. Help me be positive because it is easy if someone is already up here escalated, angry at another teacher, angry at another child, how you speak to them on the phone can drive them right through the roof. I can see my job would be that much more difficult if I didn’t have a spiritual connection.

Of her present appointment she also remarks that it was her spirituality that provided her with confirmation

Spiritually I could feel the pull. I applied for all these different schools, but spiritually I knew I would end up here. I don’t know how long I am supposed
to be here, well the school is supposed to be closing in a year, but there’s always a reason for being here.

In the former narrative Zina credits spirituality as the leading and confirming factor in her present appointment. Although unsure of the length of this leadership position, she remains adamant that her placement is divine rather than coincidental.

**Summary**

African and Africentric spiritualities as expressed by these leaders of African descent are situated within a racialized consciousness that collectively entails divinely unconventional and interdependent understandings. Spirituality in this respect is multifaceted, communal and consequently framed with and through community relationships, endeavours and knowledge-sharing. In this regard, spirituality is ultimately transgenerational permeating ancestral and relational boundaries. Spirituality is life-giving, vibrant and serves as an integral backdrop to relationships and life. Spiritual practices reflect commonly reported symbolism amidst the presence of an unorthodox religious expression. Lastly, participants intentionally offer up descriptions of spirituality that were enriched by sensitivity to family, community and their ancestral heritage.

Comments shared by participants working within and alongside educational institutions reference the impact of spirituality within their efforts towards social justice. It is clear from participants’ reports that leaders experience spirituality as a present entity. While participants share unique aspects of their professional leadership practices, several broad themes emerge thereby revealing that spirituality centres, inspires and empowers leaders’ practices for social justice. The findings are further suggestive that spirituality provides
leaders with the values for leading, including their ability to regard students, families and members of the school community as being essential agents in the change process. Collectively leaders are cognizant of the issues impact leading for social justice including the necessity of being spiritually anchored and prior to and during one’s practice. Further, leaders are also aware that children and youth and their families need to be motivated to engage in the educational process and it is leaders’ spirituality which enable them to undertake this process with optimism and empathy.

Participants’ understandings of educational leadership are captured in the next chapter. While demonstrating consistency with the literature, participants’ narratives also offer distinct perspectives on leadership that are contextualized by their identities, circumstances and histories. Participants’ leadership identity is centered within social histories as invariably, participants discuss their identities from an African and Africentric location that names race, ethnicity, gender and/or regionality. Leaders’ narratives also reference past experiences and construct leadership through an invisibility stance that honours leadership as communal rather than personal. In this regard, leaders were hesitant to describe themselves as leaders.
Chapter Five  
Understandings of Educational Leadership

It is necessary, therefore, to reconstruct a view of leadership which counters the emphasis on individuals, hierarchical relationships, bureaucratic rationality and abstract moral principles. (Blackmore, 1989, p. 94)

We are compelled to write and contribute to the disparate fields of scholarship in which we find ourselves, in a different voice, because no one else will. (Dantley, 2002, p. 342)

Introduction

Scholars draw our attention to various themes associated with African and Africentric educational leadership. Specifically, researchers report that leaders are concerned with issues that are related to academic progress and success but are equally as troubled by those structures which deter success. Additionally, emphasis is also purposefully placed upon transforming their societies and communities into spaces which are more equitable and just. As researcher, my interest is in understanding how educational leadership is framed by individuals who self-identify as spiritual and are involved in social justice work. In particular, I want to gain a sense of how leaders define educational leadership, what the nature of their work entails and how they arrived at their present location. The interview protocol provides me with a mechanism to gain insight into participants’ conceptions of leadership and serve as the basis to respond to the primary research question and one subquestion: How do these leaders understand and experience their leadership?

As educational leaders, these participants represent a dynamic collective whose actions and efforts expand notions of educational leadership to entail a responsive,
multidimensional and compassionate practice. All participants share passionately about their involvement with education and openly share aspects of their profession in ways that affirm their commitment to change and social justice. Participants’ narratives define leadership as a dynamic endeavour that engages in the processes of schooling and society. The present findings are synonymous with current scholarship in that collectively, participants describe leadership as a change-oriented endeavour. Change from the perspective of participants is focused in two specific areas. Firstly, change is constructed in terms of altering the philosophies and ideologies of individuals towards more critical understandings of education. In this regards leaders define change in terms of attempting to assist others in shifting their thinking towards an understanding of the saliency of race and racism and the importance new formations of schooling. Secondly, change is constructed in terms of making efforts towards altering the structures of schooling.

Inclusive within participants’ definitions of change is an understanding that leadership requires individuals to possess certain qualities that will enable them to assume a productive and effective stance. More specifically, African and Africentric participants describe educational leaders as needing to demonstrate fairness, strength, firmness and a value for professional learning opportunities. Similarly, definitions of leadership point to a realistic perspective recognizing that managerial tasks are not opposed to a transformative mandate. Rather, participants’ narratives indicate that managerial perspectives must be assumed as they are prudent to the justice equation.

In addition to descriptions of leadership as change-oriented, participants identify educational leadership through a communal lens that speaks to building community engagement by communal reciprocity and enhancing learning. Definitions highlight
awareness that one’s present state is the result of the efforts of those who have gone before. As a result, leadership requires leaders in the words of participants to “look back” and “give back”. Notions compel leaders to engage in purposeful actions to ensure that others benefit from your accomplishments. Participants’ narratives also express that leadership is synonymous with teaching, and caring, aspects which are woven through school-based and community accounts. Lastly, definitions include explicit notions of leadership as a bestowed mantle or calling that invokes references to the divine or a divine entity. This theme suggests that African and Africentric leaders understand leadership to be an externally conferred phenomenon.

**Perspectives on Leading**

**Change-Oriented**

Conceptions of leadership as a change-oriented endeavour reflect understandings of leadership as a purposed and intentional engagement that is concerned with altering the mindsets of individuals and systemic configurations of schooling. In this regard, participants’ meanings situate educational leadership as dynamic and nontraditional. The following statement by one participant underscores this belief

Leadership can be defined in a multiplicity of ways and in the confines of the area in which you are everyone has aspirations. If we attempt to undertake that, in terms of what you want to change. As a leader, leaders try to change.

This commentary on leadership defines leadership as a vibrant and relative entity that focuses on change. Allister’s references are in regards to working with youth to change their perspective on schooling. Additionally, his discussion is also concerned with altering the
understandings of educators. In a similar fashion, Allessandra’s constructs her understanding of leadership as centring on “making a difference”. This description also depicts her practice in the field as she simply states, “I see myself as making differences because I have to make differences.” The impetus for such change-oriented action according to Allessandra rests in her realization that by virtue of her education and position as an “African descent educator” it is now incumbent upon her to work to ensure that others have an opportunity to access this level of education.

Conceptions of change are also discussed in relation to the ability of leaders to influence people’s actions as noted in Jonathan’s narrative.

At first leadership meant, because I am from a managerial background that you need some charisma to get the troops going and moving along with you. But, obviously even from my standpoint I felt I was charismatic enough to influence a few and the organizational skills were there to some extent. However, in the context of education, that was not, that was not sufficient and I was wondering why.

Jonathan’s initial expressions define leadership as an individual and managerial endeavour. This vantage point privileges a charismatic orientation which positions the leader as the central figure charged with advancing change and moving individuals along. From this angle Jonathan admits questioning his effectiveness and eventually embracing broader definition of leadership that focuses on evoking systemic change

I think I did see myself as a leader, but not effectively. No, not effective in the way that I need to, that I needed to impact change because I realized that the system needed a change and I was at a lost as to exactly how to bring forth
change. That’s where I diverted and take a step back to look at the situation some more.

In the aforementioned we hear of Jonathan’s internal struggle and the ensuing conviction that for him, leadership must entail more than a title or position. It must lead one towards impacting change as in the narrative:

As someone that wants to advocate for change. Anyway you want to define it. Anyone who wants to take a stand for change, have a stance on where you are going and where you want to make a change....Promoting education and promoting change, education for the child and change for the system.

This definition of leadership includes multiple aspects. First, educational leaders are interested in promoting individual and system level change. Subsequently, real leadership demands that individuals consciously engage in their work, identify the required outcome and resolve to move forward towards that end as noted in Chantal’s perspective:

The ones who want to be a leader do it right. And doing it right means instilling, advocating changes. The ones who are not leaders, find another route, you can still make changes. Baby steps, and if you take baby steps, that’s changing society.

Inherent to Chantal’s understanding of leadership is the belief that leaders are internally motivated to move beyond the status quo. There is a realization that change is necessary and leaders are motivated to accomplish the required modifications. Also included within this description is an alertness or appreciation that nonleaders do possess a degree of agency and as such, making change is also within their grasp if so desired. While Chantal’s response suggests that nonleaders are capable of making a difference, she is also cognizant that the
route which they embark on is not only different, but the resultant outcomes produced by their undertaking are minor or babylke in comparison.

**Characteristics**

Coupled with definitions of change, are conceptions of educational leadership which describe leadership through individual characteristics. Participants in various ways contend that in order for leaders to accomplish certain tasks they must possess certain qualities. For instance, Jeff uses descriptors such as “fair”, “strong”, “objective” and “subjective” and constructs the work of leaders within an agency framework that requires leaders to be direct, inclusionary and decisive.

You have to be fair, you have to be strong. You have to be objective and yet subjective. You have to be strong and not I guess push what you’re thinking on other people. But try to develop consensus, but yet if you are the leader you have been put in that leadership position to make a decision. If it is not going to be a good decision, better be able to step up to the plate and say I made that decision and that’s the way it is going to be.

In addition to sharing this perspective on leadership on leading, comments suggest that to some degree, leading involves achieving a precarious balance between consensus building and a resolve to implement what is essential and necessary.

I find that people have no backbone and they acquiesce instead of them saying we are going to do this. You make a decision don’t be calling downtown all of the time. That’s what you’re getting paid the big bucks. That’s why they are getting paid but if it is hard for them to make a decision. I feel they try to pass the buck off on somebody else; I’ll just give it to somebody else. You have to
have some common sense. You should be able to. That’s why they wanted to be principals. You have to be very strong to make a decision.

Quite similarly, other leaders choose to employ such terminology as being “open-minded”, “innovative,” “open to new ideas”, “open to change” in their definitions of leadership. Still others employ words such as desire, and passion to symbolize the tenets of leadership. Jonathan prefers to think of his current role as “a position of influence” and says he feels “obligated to contribute the best possible, the best of [himself] possible in terms of leadership, in terms of imparting on young minds.

Additionally, definitions of leadership also highlight the necessity of engaging in professional learning opportunities. This theme is exemplified through narratives such as Neale’s who states emphatically that leadership is about

Learning and continuing education that helps me and who I will be working with.” I am determined to learn and will continue to learn as much as I can about myself and other educators in history. It is important to know because if we don’t get out there and learn no one is going to bring that education or information to us.

Moreover she reports that it is her desire to “improve in all areas of education” as continuing education assists her in acquiring further skills and in effect, her ability to interact with others. This act of locating and acquiring knowledge is not only educative, but in her opinion, essential as learning for oneself and self-initiated study appear as a significant act of resistance to contest a curriculum which is marginalizing and unidentifiable. Likewise, similar sentiments are put forward by Suzy who acknowledges learning as a central aspect of her leadership.
We are here in this world for a purpose, everyday I think of education, life is about educating ourselves, life lessons.

Understanding of leadership that focus on particular characteristics suggest that leadership is more than positional authority. In effect, participants’ reports indicate that leaders must possess certain qualities and values that will enable them to accomplish the necessary changes. In the next section I discuss another theme arising from the data, that of leadership as a commitment to a collective and communal outlook.

**Communal and Collective**

A recurring theme emerging from participants’ narratives is the conception of educational leadership as a communal and wholistic undertaking. Taken together, participants’ meanings configure leadership within the boundaries of interrelatedness to portray leadership as a process that is framed by communal understandings, students’ identities and a reliance on a divine impartation. In this manner, participants situate leadership within a collective gaze that is oriented towards advocacy, teaching and caring.

For some leaders, the adoption of a communal perspective occurs quite surprising. Take the case of Jonathan who reports a shifting in his conceptualization of leadership from managerial towards the communal as a result of running into “brick walls” and noticing that the managerial approach is ill-suited to the presenting educational demands.

Well you know, everything just didn’t fall into place. I mean, I got my budget set up, management; I got my time, my calendar set up. All the sporting things etcetera and I’m very organized. And I try to do a lot of stuff by myself. So,…I ran against, ran against a lot of brick walls per se, because every now and then a parent would come and add a new dimension to the mix, a teacher
would come and add another dimension and,…my superiors would add another dimension and everything got chaotic then.

In the midst of a “chaotic” situation Jonathan explains that he begins to rethink his former assumptions.

So you know, I was like, the whole managerial style, I didn’t see it then but I’m like, something is wrong with this picture. Something is not fitting in this educational context. So I needed to step back and I saw the principal at my school having the same problem, right, having a similar problem and as such the school was suffering. I’m like there has got to be a better way of doing this. We’re not doing something right here. So I stepped back and now I realize, I realize a better model that probably should work.

The “better model” which Jonathan refers to entails a focus on community.

A more democratic approach, a more communal approach to leadership instead of this whole individual, mechanistic, managerial model that we are trapped in. I’ve learned that leadership has to take on, take on others, others embedded into it. So instead of me, trying to organize everything by myself and in my own narrow framework, I needed to get the parents involved a lot more, the community involved a lot more, the students that I, that are under my charge. They all have so much more to offer, collectively than what I can offer in that individual position, so, that’s what I learned from sitting back and looking at it.

Quite clearly, Jonathan’s understanding of leadership moves from being anchored to a mechanistic approach towards a communal or “democratic” understanding. Shaped from this vantage point leadership is constructed through an inclusionary model that values the
contributions of parents, students and community voices on educational tasks and decision-making.

While some leaders like Jonathan assume a communal perspective as a result of occurrences in the field, other participants report that a community-focused definition is a natural leaning that is culturally significant and valued. Allessandra explains

For many Africans in Nova Scotia we find that we don’t speak singular, we don’t speak for our own children from the ground of our body. We speak community sense, and I just [don’t mean] the community where we live, but the community means all of our community people of African descent. If I can affect to help, my community globally then I am where I need to be.

In this quotation, the relationship between leadership and community is made explicit. Community-focused leadership is directed towards ensuring that shared interests are spoken for and represented. Likewise, educational leadership within the context of African peoples is fluid reaching beyond and across geographical boundaries to embrace the realities of our global context.

Another aspect of communal engagement reported throughout the data is the element of giving back to one’s community. In this regard, leadership is defined as the ability to assume a reciprocal point of view. Caplan’s narrative provides explanation

I am just giving back to my community and when I talk about my community I am not talking about the community of [names community] but the entire Black community because so much has been given to me it is just a portion of what I can give back to my community by being here, by being present.
Leadership as defined by Caplan unfolds as a result of and within the boundaries of community. It compels a desire to be “present” and available to community interests and concerns. The element of giving back is further reported by leaders within community.

Allessandra explicitly states

As a woman, an African descent educator, it makes me responsible, I have to give back to make sure other people can also you know what’s like.

From Allessandra’s perspective leadership not only entails giving back, but also the acknowledgement that appreciation must be coupled with constructive actions that allow others within one’s community to experience what she terms as a privilege. Similar reflections by other leaders infer that the practice of leading compels a desire to share and give back. Suzy explains

Well I started off as a young girl involved in the 4-H club in school. We were involved with teachers; it was something that they started in the Black communities, leadership training.... So I learned that if I got something that I would always give back whether if somebody gave me a gift, If I went and did something for someone and they gave me something whatever it was that I would share with somebody else.

In the aforementioned narrative, we are privy to the threads of leadership that have influenced her life. Central this project is the community’s role in modelling the idea of giving back to one’s community. This foundation not only shapes her understanding of leadership but ultimately her practice.

If we are going to be a community we all have to be responsible for one another. We have to care by giving and respecting. In our family we did that. My dad was farmer and so many times people in my community would not
have food by my dad would feed people. He would take vegetables and go and say you guys take these to so and so’s house. [I would say] do we get any money, no, just take it to their homes. As I got older people would always comment on how my dad would give them food and clothing. They educated us on how to give, how to love, and how to share.

Suzy continues to highlights the idea of leadership as a community-fostered and responsive endeavour. When taken together with the emphasis on creating opportunities for others, leadership appears to be intertwined with an ethic of communal care. Leadership from this communal perspective involves the distribution of knowledge and learning. In this respect, real leadership entails being responsible to one’s community by returning home and purposefully sharing, a theme also made relevant through the following:

And so working in the school system regardless of what I learn, I learn to apply it and the more you learn, you learn to get out there and get more education and bring back what you learn to the children.

By marrying education with the idea to “bring back”, Neale’ posits another description of leadership that is intricately intertwined with community. Of prominence is the aspect of deliberative teaching. Expressed within her narrative is a determined resistance to share her knowledge with those who have been invested in her care. Educating and passing along crucial information is reportedly a critical element in the learning process as stipulated below:

We have to educate about culture, the different diversities. We are here in this world for a purpose, everyday I think of education, life is about educating ourselves, life lessons. Life lessons that are learned, and pass them off to somebody else. We teach them by showing them. Today we don’t teach by
showing by getting involved and doing. We can teach by our actions and how we relate to other people.

Suzy is adamant that leader’s work must necessarily be engaged in educating and getting involved. Further to these statement she exclaims,

I have to be out there doing something. God has given me these talents for me to be the voice of something that they can’t speak for themselves. My family does the same thing. Taking what you have and sharing it.

In a similar way, Samuel identifies with a communal understanding of leadership that values teaching by reporting that leading involves

Discovering and introducing a world of discovery to the learners. You are bringing learning to the forefront, things that are happening in society so that they are becoming aware. You are delegating them to become aware and educating ourselves that we become better leaders.

Other notions of leadership reflect a wholistic understanding of education that compels leaders attend to student. She explains that leadership is

All about educating the mind, body and soul. And the soul part you are not supposed to talk about it in school. But what bothers me is that we are allowed to promote Halloween, yoga which is spiritual, but you can’t promote Jesus. That’s the part that bothers me. So I just let me light shine through my actions and interactions. I want to educate people’s mind, body and souls. School is all about educating the mind, but you can’t just disconnect the mind from the body, from the soul. You’ll just feel very empty.

Zina’s perspective on leadership identifies educating as the primary descriptor of leaders. In this sense, she asserts that leadership is ultimately about fostering growth within the lives of
students so that are able to move “...towards wholeness and actualization. From the above excerpt, leadership is a tri-partite educative endeavour that necessarily involves a mental, physical and spiritual component. Likewise, the findings further suggest that leadership must further be focused on creating access and opportunities for others.

Leadership entails aspects of general education [whereby leaders] look at the different caveats of education and then provide help, find ways in which learning can be accessed by others, in which learning becomes a joy for them because he is a leader.

From this perspective, leadership is about engaging in the parameters of education to explore avenues whereby others learn and advance. In this regard, Samuel ultimately contends he tries to “look at people and try to persuade, them to perfect their skills, for the sake of making life better.”

The data currently shows that African and Africentric leaders link conceptions of leadership to community. Leaders are explicit in connoting leadership as an endeavour that builds community through communal reciprocity, teaching and sharing. Equally as important are descriptions of leadership as an externally bestowed and invisible undertaking.

**External: Bestowed and Invisible**

Two-thirds of participants focused on meanings of leadership that were associated with a bestowed or invisible conception. Bestowed conceptions root leadership beyond the physical realm and conceptualize it as an impartation of the divine while conceptions of leadership as an invisible phenomenon convey leaders’ reluctance to identify as leaders. With
respect to bestowed meanings, definitions of leadership provide ontological accounts with deep ties to the divine as reported below:

God gives everyone of us a talent and we have to use it and respect people for what they do. God has given me these talents for me to be the voice of something that they can’t speak for themselves.

Similar thoughts, as found below also echo the bestowed.

We live in a world where there is a lot of knowledge generated by good principles. …Those formulas work to inform me and make me understand in a way that I can be more helpful. Those principles are common to us as human beings, we have been gifted with brains, it is God who is giving it.

In this context, one’s ability to lead arises from the gifting of the divine as it is God, in Samuel’s opinion, which confers gifts that enable leaders to engage with the world. Other leaders invoke the divine by explicitly defining leadership as a calling. Caplan speaks to this

Everyone has their calling and I think [leading] is my calling. Everyone is a leader, even followers are leaders. Everyone has leadership potential....Everyone has their calling.

What is also of interest in the latter portion of his narrative is the perception that the potential for leadership is inherent to all individuals and that subsequently, everyone has been prescribed a certain measure of potential to fulfil a “calling” in their life. Contrasting this universal definition of leadership is an account, which while acknowledging leadership as a divine calling, suggests that leadership is rare.

Everyone is not called to be leader, but the ones who want to be a leader do it right.
Chantal’s comments attribute leadership to a “calling” and adamantly express the idea that leadership is bestowed and not acquired. As such, she has specific directions for those who are “called” and those who are not. What is certain from this reflection is her contention that leadership is not a possession to be obtained. Rather, through her eyes, leadership is a calling which some individuals are gifted to receive and subsequently, utilize rightly to foster change.

As additional theme arising from the data is the aspect of invisibility. Participants in various ways refrain from initially describing themselves as leaders as evident in the next segment.

I don’t consider myself to be a leader even though others may see me as a leader. I look at it as something that I have been called to do and I don’t consider myself a leader.

Caplan’s conception of leadership as a “calling” appears to frame his stance of invisibility. While he is fully cognizant that others perceive him as a leader, the tone of his comments suggests he has no right of ownership to this title. In this sense, invisibility is therefore a deliberate act to displace attention that belongs elsewhere. Similar sentiments are shared by Samuel, who has been engaged in community development projects which serve the most vulnerable members of society. He too renounces the title of educational leader as reported in the following,

I don’t think I’ve ever seen myself as a leader. But I’ve always found myself in positions of leadership.
Despite the adoption of invisibility, Samuel’s comments do reflect an acknowledgement that he often assumes positions that were reserved for leaders suggesting that invisibility is a chosen rather than prescribed location. The mantle of invisibility is also temporarily worn by Allessandra and Jonathan. Allessandra purposefully works to increase the representation of individuals of African descent within her centre over the years and her narrative suggests that she has made a substantial difference. However, when asked to describe herself as an educational leader, she refrains from assuming any credit for its expansion and prefers to recognize growth as maturity. Additionally, she prefices her self-description by saying “I am not good at describing myself. I think that’s when I get really shy...” Allessandra’s honesty helps me to understand the nature of this reluctance as she reveals that to some degree, her reservation stems from shyness. Still other narratives suggest that invisibility is the result of not fully understanding that various definitions exist as noted by Jonathan’s recollection, “Really, I didn’t really define myself, define myself as a true educational leader until I actually started studying and reflecting on the practices that we do [and] are involved with at school.” Jonathan’s statement exemplifies a regard for reflective practice as a determinant factor in helping his broaden his definition of leadership. As asserted below, his narrative also suggests that merely assuming the label of leader does not ensure that one is capable of demonstrating the necessary leadership.

I realize that I was, vastly inadequate. At home though, I found that I was in a position of influence and as such, I felt obligated to contribute the best possible, the best of me possible, in terms of leadership, in terms of imparting on young minds. I found that the environment that I was in was not conducive enough for me to effectively cause that sort of knowledge and the leadership that I wanted to impart.
Conceptions of invisibility are also reported for leader’s working within community-based organizations. Although Suzy’s legacy of leadership boasts involvement in several school and educational organizations, she refrains from referring to herself as a leader and adopts the account of others to state, “well, I’ve been called a community activist.” The above pattern of deference once again may be interpreted as an adherence to an interdependent orientation that regards the collective over the individual. Being “called” versus naming oneself may therefore be more authentic as it speaks to known accomplishment rather than a positional undertaking.

Whether or not leaders define educational leadership as a bestowed calling or chose to evoke images which situate leadership as an invisible practice, participants’ reports also place leadership as an external phenomenon that compels leaders to work towards fulfilling a calling or accomplishing a mission. While an understanding of leadership as a calling appears to be in keeping with thematic accounts in the literature, the data also offers distinctive accounts that African and Africentric leaders also choose to refrain from specifically identifying themselves as educational leaders.

**Summary**

Perspectives of school and community educational leaders collectively define educational leadership as a change-oriented, communal focused and external phenomenon. Participants further understand change to include attempts to influence the perceptions of others or the structures of schooling. Inherent within leaders’ perspective is the belief that leaders possess agency to accomplish the former. Participants’ narratives also include descriptors of individual characteristics which suggest that a particular mindset or outlook is
also part of the leadership equation. Participants’ accounts contain repeated references of leadership as a communal endeavour. Leadership is reportedly defined by a regard communal reciprocity and the willingness to educate others. Understandings of leadership as a calling are expressed by school-based and community educational leaders as was the characterization of leadership as an assumed invisibility. Three-fourths of community-based participants define leadership as a phenomenon that is bestowed as a “calling”, “talent” or God given entity. Communal conceptualizations reflect the understandings of three community-based leaders and situate leadership as both an educative and retributive endeavour.

Perspectives on social justice are crucial to my research study. In the final portion of Chapter Five, I document the viewpoints of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders as concerning the meaning of socially just education and leadership for social justice.

**Perspectives on Social Justice**

A socially just education requires educational leaders to practice moral outrage at the persistence, if not worsening, of homelessness, hunger, and poverty, which are not going ways, but worsening. It requires educational communities to defend and extend principles of human dignity, community, and realization of democratic process; to reinvent a sense of commitment to the public as a social good; and to restructure market models to limited spheres, which improve social relations and conditions of learning. It is about developing learning networks and partnerships premised upon trust and reciprocity between schools, communities, and among individuals. (Blackmore, 2002, p. 218)

The interview protocol asked African and Africentric educational leaders to define democracy and socially justice education in relation to their present contexts. Descriptions situate a democratic education within notions of access with meanings specifically related to
knowledge, power, and opportunities to obtain financial and social resources.

Representational understandings as evidenced by an informed and culturally responsive school system, the availability of role models, diverse and reflective curriculum, equitable participation and ownership, appropriate discipline, physical presence, culturally competent pedagogy and positional and situational power are also shared as being reflective of social justice and democracy. Coupled with this accounts are narratives which suggest that social justice and a democratic education are synonymous with freedom of expression, voice and self-definition. Participants also position a democratic and just educational system as being both present and partially existing in various forms. Leaders also direct attention to interrogating the issues within the wider society. Next, I provide an account of these themes in greater detail.

**Access**

The majority of participants articulate definitions of social justice from a point of access. More specifically, participants collectively name knowledge, opportunities to decision-making, resources, and fair treatment as avenues which constrain the materialization of a justice. The narrative below provides the context to understand the tensions around access.

Right, because it may seem that we have equal access, where you provide a platform for everyone to speak, but however, you know, the speech does not equally count. So democracy in education means that even though you are from a poor upbringing and you don’t have access to the resources to your counterpart who is well advantaged, that educational forum allows you to access knowledge, the same way, or to a close comparison too your more advantaged, advantaged students.
Jonathan’s critique of education singles out poverty as a catalyst which spawns discriminate treatment. Democracy within the parameters of education according to Jonathan facilitates student’s ability to transcend such obstacles by allowing them to access the resources and knowledge that are more readily available to their economically mobile counterparts.

Access to power and decision making are also prominent concepts. Descriptions underscore how marginalization occurs and further call attention to the imperative of altering processes to ensure greater access and transformative change.

First and foremost people have to get educated and you have to have people across all lifespans at the table. People are on different journeys and come with different stories. If you don’t see someone else’s story at the table then you will not make the changes. Not everyone has the same story. If people are middle class then they are going to come from that place. They might be able to say that’s so and so’s story, but unless you live that story you can not relate. It will be hard for you to relate of how to navigate in that position. You can still have empathy, feel bad and have all those emotions but it’s pretty hard for you to navigate unless you are coming from that position.

In contrast to deficit constructions of families, Chantal proceeds to explain how access affects a family’s ability to navigate the educational system.

There’s a difference between coming [from] and navigating. Navigating is actually working with all of these institutions to try to work out what is best for you and your family. Certain people coming from those locations can’t navigate, not because they are lazy, only because people don’t have those skills, those connections.

Ultimately the former conception of access points to an awareness that socially just schooling must broadly consider dimensions of power that exist within society and the impact that it
has on a family’s ability to participate in decision making. Other narratives utilize the lens of equity and access to explain democracy in education. The data suggests that African and Africentric educational leaders are adamant that the materialization of justice within educational settings is lacking and at best, considered to be only subjectively represented as a result of the lack of inclusiveness.

They think you have democracy in this system but they don’t, we don’t. If you look at the standardization and high-stakes testing, you see in fact, they attempt to make us feel that there is democracy in the system, but no, democracy has in fact no modern example, I am not afraid to say that there is a whole lot of discrimination. So if you ask me if there is democracy in the system, I would say not entirely, there’s a measure of subjective democracy, - not in terms of wanting to define democracy in terms of equity and inclusiveness. You do not find it.

Further clarification is provided on the subject

If you look you find [social justice is] not there. Most of the time, just like in our prison system, minorities and especially Blacks more specifically, Blacks are high especially in terms of numbers. Suspensions are mostly with the Black students so if we change the system in a way that it is equitable within the school system here Black teachers would be able to talk to these people and then the students would see them as role models. I think there will be a lot of differential change towards, it will be a question of change. These are some of the things, and even the teachers themselves talk about it.

This explanation highlights the disparity that exists between popularized conceptions of democracy and the realities of those who are working within its boundaries. Further, it is suggestive that while beliefs around the existence of democracy abound, current practices
reflect rhetoric rather than reality and are more inadequate than representative. Likewise, by highlighting differential treatment as evidenced by disproportionate numbers of Black students experiencing disciplinary infractions, it also offers what this leader believes to be tangible evidence of “subjective” democracy and its effects upon students within the school system.

In comparison to this illusion, leaders contend that democracy is consistent with socially justice and practices which centre “fairness, equity and a fair assessment of the needs of whomever”.

From Neale’s perspective democracy presupposes that one act fairly, expect fairness, and furthermore treat others fairly. She states

> When I think of democracy – I’m not being a dictator, I’m being fair in whatever I need or whatever I expect someone to be; to apply the same fair treatment.”

This conception is further explained with an explicit reference to schooling.

Sometimes in the school everything is not fair. Something as simple as social skills. Everyone can’t do things the same and so [social skills] would have to be applied to children and adults in different ways because everyone doesn’t look at things the same way. Everyone doesn’t understand things the same. There can be so many different definitions used for social justice depending on the situation.

This understanding is significant for several reasons. First, democracy and hence, justice within educational settings recognizes that individuals differences exist and therefore, need to be expected, acknowledge and responded to in ways that honour individuality. Secondly,
comments highlight how differently-abled individuals are made vulnerable within educational institutions because of expectations around socialization and the failure to recognize that abilities and perspectives are diverse and as such, normal. In contrast, to the former, we learn also that there exists a measure of fairness within educational sites for some individuals and as such, it is misleading to characterize all schools as bastions of perpetual injustice. Finally, the narrative reflects the significance of context in attempting to determine the parameters of what is socially just. Within the context of schooling, justice is situational rather than static.

In addition to centering conceptions of what is fair, definitions focus attention on the lack of equity and more specifically, the lack of employment of Black teachers.

These are some of the things, and even the teachers themselves talk about it. One black teacher in the system, in the school, this teacher can have the qualifications and they didn’t give it to [him]. And they gave it to somebody who doesn’t have the qualifications and the principal was asking...do you have the qualifications for it. These are some of the things: undermining, resentment and all the above so even if you have one Black person how does he feel comfortable in the system…Whatever you say doesn’t count. So that is why social justice is lacking. So what is their understanding of democracy…so called standardization?

Inherent within the latter explanation is also a frustration with an educational environment that excludes educators from due process. Specifically, this narrative identifies differential access within the professional realm whereby Black teachers are denied promotion, irrespective of their qualifications. Additionally, comments point to feelings of isolation and the sense of powerlessness that occurs as individual are isolated from one’s peers and
disqualified from access to decision-making. As seen in the former, African and Africentric leaders consistently report that democracy is a dubious entity that is questionably absent within educational realms:

Democracy, it’s really hard to say if we have true democracy. It’s not something I give a lot of thought to. We have a house of politics and I try to stay away from it as much as possible. In our democracy it is about the haves and the “have nots” and the haves happen to be in control. I don’t know if you can call that true democracy. I guess it’s a form of democracy to a degree. We have it to a point more than many other countries, but I don’t know if it is true democracy.

Leaders’ descriptions of social justice and democracy broadly encompass the happenings in society. Participants’ comments demonstrate awareness that disparities in education mirror the realities found in society. For instance, Zina’s critique of Canadian society points out the geographical disparities and positions democracy as an evolving entity that has yet to be fully realized. Schooling is played out within this reality.

Within boards there wouldn’t be the haves and the have nots within boards. Location, socioeconomic status, there are the haves and have nots. It impacts students, student’s self-esteem, their identity, it impacts the quality of education they receive, it impacts teacher expectations, that’s a big issue.

There was also a sense from participants’ narratives that a focus on social justice extends well beyond the parameters of schooling. Participants passionately convey that notions of access must interrogate and address the broader issues in Canadian society.

Social justice is about making it better for everyone...we don’t have people sending children out who are not equipped. We have to have a democracy that
is spiritual - We have senior citizens who are walking around because they can’t afford to buy health, can’t feed their families, can’t buy medicine cause they don’t have the money. I’d like to see the Canadian government go and live, walk and go for 2-3 days swap and go and live on the street for 3 days and see how they are going to live. Let them go and survive for 3 years without the basics. Health, education and food. In Canada education is not a right to everyone, everyone doesn’t have a house, we have people who can’t travel to everywhere, when they want to be able to get out of the community they should be able to get on a bus. Making it possible for all of us to be part of the fabric of our country.

Gaining access to public “platforms” is also stressed as a critical first step towards gaining meaningful change

The little steps, multiculturalism helps, going into those areas, being giving more platforms to talk can help. Racialized groups have an opinion of how to run the country- but that will only come if they are given more platform in the media – they play a big role. The local media should be given a platform. So far they are only good at bringing the others into office.

In addition to pointing out examples demonstrating the absence of access, the findings also reveal that leaders have concrete ideas around how to create greater access and equity. Chantal proceeds to offer up recommendations for ensuring that justice becomes a reality for all students.

Everyone having a leveled playing field and that would mean if someone, if a child is up here and another is down here – the ones who are down here have to come up here. We have to find a way to build and bridge the gap in education.
Additionally, it involves, the

System allowing people to have access and everyone having the same access. It’s not there because everyone does not have the same educational access. Not everyone has the same access, those that are located in middle to upper class versus those that are located marginal. How can be it be democratic? It touches on social, geographical, financial, it touches all of those. If those things are not in place, if democracy is not in place across the board in those settings, then it trickles down to other settings and other institutions, welfare and education. Where you are located geographically indicates what type of education you receive.

And tangible resources offering

More supports for the teachers, more, smaller classes, parents being more actively involved and that can only come when the schools is incorporated in the community. The community and the school together, not having separate identities, but building them together because that would, then the parents and the school are working together and they are all working towards common goal.

The significance of such changes is made evident.

If you have clear access to education then it can broaden your resources so that if things are not equal then you can reach a little higher to go to those areas. You may have things you have to overcome, but if you have clear access to education you can achieve. If you don’t have certain access to money, then education can give you the liberty to move around. You have those choices. …If schools became more democratic then people would have access to power. It would have to comSe from staffing, from management from the school board.
In addition, one narrative places justice within a distributive paradigm that singles out unequal treatment or access to goods as an alternate definition. The former is exemplified.

Justice is a process [and that] there are two ways of understanding justice. Social theories address the concept of justice, injustice or unequal treatment and it calls into question a sense of injustice. The other aspect that is a little mind boggling is the idea that if the majority can receive a good…if the majority are served and thinks it’s ok and if the minority isn’t that could be considered injustice.

From this excerpt, social justice is configured through a duality; one understanding regards aspects of equality, while the other considers elements of distribution and access to material wealth.

The present findings demonstrate that leaders conceptualize social justice and democracy through an accessibility stance. Leaders are also astute in recognizing the intersections between society and education and the potential pathways to ensuring greater access and equity in schooling and society. In conjunction with this construction are descriptions which centre conceptions around the imperative of representation and ownership. The following section discusses the preceding constructions in detail.

**Representation and Ownership**

Collectively, leaders recognize that schools have been and continue to be culturally diverse. Narratives further suggest a critical awareness that the structures of schools have never been altered to embrace culture as a representative and natural element of education. Consequently, participants construct representation from three distinct angles. Firstly,
conceptions discuss the need for individuals working within schools to shift their thinking towards an inclusive paradigm that welcomes everyone as part of the school-community. Secondly, leaders report that systemic hiring practices are discriminatory against Black teacher and further complicit in constricting learning opportunities for marginalized members. As a result, leaders define social justice as having culturally similar role models who are cognizant of the racialized realities at schools. Next, African and Africentric leaders address the element of voice as a descriptor of representation. In this manner, narratives collectively define a just education as a space in which minoritized members are able to retain, declare and have their voice accordingly responded to. Additionally, participants outline the relevance of ownership in the quest towards more equitable representation. Lastly, conceptions of representation heavily reflect the need to challenge how governmental structures and processes are established and implemented. More specifically, leaders’ meanings call for a rethinking of processes related to election of representatives,

We have to realize I guess that school boards, especially in [province] are becoming culturally competent, that’s the catch word/phrase of the day. We realize that we must talk about everyone. Everyone is part and parcel of the stem, society as a whole. School is a mini, a microcosm of what is already out there. We have to acknowledge that, not only White, Anglo-Saxon going to school now. We have to deal with everyone who comes into the school. We have to acknowledge everyone who comes in. We have to acknowledge that we have children of a different racial, ethnic background, children of different cognitive and accept that, we can’t tolerate that, we have to accept that.

Drawing attention to the qualitative differences between tolerance and acceptance, Jeff’s conception frames the parameters of justice beyond physical presence and towards an
inclusive framework that values the identities of everyone. This report also acknowledges that social justice and democracy necessitates a philosophical and pedagogical shift in schooling that recognizes and embraces difference, a move that is somewhat problematic for many within the school community.

The boards are trying to look at kids who are coming from different socioeconomic situations and not the nuclear family, it’s different. These are some of the issues that we have, that society has and that school has to be aware, cognitively and have to be able to teach to that. Now, that’s created a problem for teachers such that, in the way that they deal with students, it’s created a problem for parents, for a lot of people. So hopefully they can rise above that.

In addition to recognizing the current dynamics, leader’ definitions also discuss the significance of racial representation, and more specifically racial discrimination as a critical factor that is pervasive within educational context.

I’m not saying that whites don’t experience discrimination, but if you consider the school system, all the schools, in fact, I have said it openly. The schools that I go to where would you find the minority [teachers] more specifically, Black [teachers]. If you find them – [it is] one, so we have this disproportionate number of Blacks, with a disproportionate number of white teachers in the school system serving as role models for our students. So, the Black teacher is more concerned with talking to students about other issues, by the end of the day that is what I have to do. I’m not saying the other teachers can’t do it, but it’s a clash of cultures, this thing.

The impact of racism is made apparent.
The discrimination [is] that they don’t have role models. If we have teachers, they would understand the problems of the students. You can talk to parents; you have to have a rapport with parents. I have met so many students at the store. They run to me and ask if they can chat. In fact, you can get a disproportionate number of students, in ESL’s and all those Special Ed classes. So where do we locate this problem. Where do we situate this problem? That’s the problem.

In the former, Allister highlights a teacher compliment that fails to represent the expected ratio. He refers to this occurrence as “disproportionate” and suggests that this reality poses a cultural mismatch for students whose interests extend well beyond the academic domain. In conjunction with this account, are other impressions which suggests that changes in teacher compliment are being made

   Our school’s system becoming more diverse both in teaching and administration, more diverse in administration, in their teaching and in our curriculum. It’s very encouraging.”

These changes in Allessandra’s viewpoint are positive however, from a personal perspective she adds that they are insufficient as curriculum changes and pedagogical practices are also wanting

   My son’s teacher says you don’t have to think about your child going to school and they are going to get it from the curriculum….As a parent of a black child I find I am in a race to get assistance to my child. Where do I find time to do it at home? I don’t want them in [the province] to describe him, I want him to be with their peers, [to be] the dominant, either [being educated] in one of the islands some place and find somebody who can take them on or In the continent of Africa where they are going to get an education...because
it’s critical for them, then they can get a sense of identity to compose themselves as a person of African descent. When they don’t have to question do I exist, am I involved, should I be doing thing, is it ok? Because they need to have a foundation in order to achieve success. When they can go into a doctor’s office, a lawyer’s office, see people in the shopping mall and are just seeing ourselves, more representative of everyone in life. That would be justice, social justice.

Allessandra’s comments are shared with a sense of urgency and the conviction that despite the best efforts of educators and the changes which are occurring educational practices still are insufficient in fostering a healthy identity development in her child. She is adamant that alternate and supplemental experiences are vital to expose her child to cultural experiences and role models which empower and reinforce their identity. Consequently, deliberative planning is necessary. This in her opinion is justice.

Connections to voice and representation as reflective of democracy are also important to leaders as seen by the following statements

Each person has a voice, an equal voice, not just a voice, not just to be heard, for quote unquote per se, but, what they say counts and they have that equal voice and equal opportunity, we strive towards equity, more equity instead of equality.

Quite similarly, Caplan argues that

Social justice is warranted when individuals are “persecuted and oppressed [by]…social influences from without that tend to drag us away from who we are, influences that try to oppress us and repress us.
The aforementioned thoughts offer insight into the aspects which leaders consider to be integral to the materialization of democracy within educational spaces. Statements clarify the importance of substantive representation that goes beyond mere presence and allows for meaningful contributions. Additionally, narratives distinguish between equality and equity as the means to achieve this desired end point to the tensions surrounding this struggle.

Participants’ reports also move discussions of social justice towards the element of ownership. In doing so, leaders raise concern around the marketization of education and the absence of community title as definite gaps in education:

That gap – I guess the community taking full control of these institutions that are in their community. The school is ruling and operating as a business…they are not operating from a wholistic way…they are operating like they have a president, vice president and treasurer and these children are just another factor that have to be in there. But if they went wholistic, people would take ownership and say- these are our kids, so and so, little Johnny is acting out, why is little Johnny acting out, we need to get to the bottom of this because little Johnny is going through a rough time. It’s not about little Johnny being so isolated.

Opportunities for ownership according to one leader would create greater investment in education from community and help counteract the business approach that is currently being implemented.

A wholistic piece needs to be in there. Teachers, and principals and psychologists and social workers they tend to distance themselves from the reality of the children. Not all of them, but they tend to…like a business – you are working for the business but you are not having an invested interest in the business, unless it is my business. If I’m the owner of the business I’m going
to have an invested interest in the business. If I’m working for a business, I
guess I’ll do my 9 – 5 cause it is not my business and I’m only working there
to get paid and it’s not my business and that’s how the school system is to me
– It’s not a vested interest and that’s where the difference lies.

In concert with the former statement are additional thoughts on the relationship between
social justice and ownership:

Social justice is about giving to people, not always taking. Giving them the
control of their lives, understanding, and self-worth. We take away people’s
self-worth and I think with social justice we have to give people back their
self-worth….It’s not about top down, we have to start from the bottom
up….It’s about coming together and including everybody. Where I work
social justice is about inclusion.

Suzy’s description of the common injustices in schooling suggests that justice is not about
“top-down” initiatives but rather inclusionary approaches having a concern for the
redistribution of power in favour of individuals who have historically been absented from the
process. In addition to a focus on schooling, leaders’ narratives assert that one’s gaze must
also be cast on the wider society. For instance, with specific regard to the Canadian context,
Jonathan states that strides towards equity are often hindered by the appearances of progress.

We hide behind the little celebrations. We pride ourselves, an example here,
we pride ourselves as being a multicultural nation and yes, Canada is
exemplary to many nations, but we can’t be caught up, we cannot be caught
up in that notion that we are ahead of many nations to think that we should
just pause and stop, oh yes, ...Ontario is the best city in the world for nations
to come together and live a multicultural life. So hey, we must be doing
something right, so hey, we OK. We OK, we don’t need to reflect on what we
are doing. To strive towards doing it better. We don’t need to do that and a lot of times we get caught. We get caught on every level in doing that. We were better than yesterday. We are better than the next man….We ignore the subtle practices; we cover it with, with little celebrations. We cover it with newer forms that ignore one group.

The previous comments offer a national and provincial perspective on the apparent absences of justices and the contributing factors which he believes enable the entrenchment of injustices. Further stated is the awareness that if substantial changes are to occur there must be a united and concerted effort:

Towards doing better. It’s going to be a long, we’ve come a long way and we have to look back from where we are coming from and we cannot get caught in the notion that we’re there or that we’re even close. And I think that is the stumbling block of many politicians. Politicians live in the short term and school administrators per se have adopted this whole short term mentality to show, in order to show what we have done.

Having an eye on the political happenings in one’s area is a recurring theme and a route which leaders simultaneously use to interrogate the absence of justice:

If we really look into the [provincial context] and social justice, then I think we will see a need for more diversity in government. And when I say government the reason I am starting there is because they have super power…our government all levels from our national to our provincial to our principal. It’s now very “white” dominated. And there aren’t many women; White women and women of many colors with no essential power and although I try to think a lot about gender, women do bring a different title of leadership to government in anything they can do. And I think we need to see more women, and within them we need to see more racially visible
individuals because Canada…is changing. It’s not really like, but culturally it is changing, therefore we need more people.

While the “face” of government in Allessandra’s opinion appears generally fixed, her narrative contends that corrective measures are expedient and critical to discussions of justice because:

Social justice figure[s] very prominently in the positions of power, influence and the decisions that are being made [at the political level].

As an exemplar she recalls the accomplishments that have been hard won in the name of democracy.

I can remember even when we were doing designated seats for the school board we have. And we received a phone call at the Association from Toronto and Montreal and in other places saying that they thought we were going backwards because we suddenly have a specialized seat in order to show the school board that we need representation. They just don’t understand the joint context…the conditions and what it took to force the government and people to satisfactorily hear our voice.

Allessandra’s comments respond to the recent designation of an African descent seat. As alluded to in her previous comments, this occurrence is highly controversial within the popular press as it is seen to be a negative and downward shift towards segregation and separateness. Within the former passage, Allessandra reveals the contradictions within present movements towards a more socially just politically democratic foundation. Her reflections direct our attention to the hidden elements that would easily be overlooked within this present portrayal of progress. From this perspective, Allessandra challenges us to
consider that critical representation must involve attention to issues of power and hierarchy. For marginalized bodies within public institutions, her thoughts also shed light on the precariousness of leadership and how one’s positionality is configured within the local community.

In a similar fashion, democracy is construed as civic engagement and participation.

Well, I think democracy encompasses two issues – one of them has to do with civic responsibility and the other has to do with participation. At one time they looked like they were the same, but if you put in diversity, participation becomes problematic because everyone is going to say they are Canadian, but when it comes to representation, minorities don’t find themselves that they can participate, that their voices can be heard as compared to their Caucasian students, that they can be the leaders of today.

Samuel’s interpretation centres the concept of representation through citizenship and proceeds to draw the connection between accorded rights, societal realities and minoritized voices

The civic part is well understood by everyone, everyone is a citizen, a Canadian citizen they have certain rights, but when you dig deeper, it’s a matter of representation that I find problematic…. People who are outcasts although they are protected they have rights, but their voice is needed in a democratic situation – we don’t give that idea to people that fall in the minority. It’s the same for racial minority – they don’t see it as much as being equal to all kinds of Canadians – maybe that’s why we don’t see many black children aspiring to political office. Symbolic representation – there’ no symbolic representation, no one else has done it from this side, people in society will not embrace them because they don’t symbolize their aspirations.
The same for people on the street, there’s no symbolic representation, they are just outcasts.

In Samuel’s opinion, symbolic representation is the qualitative mark of a democratic society. Rather than speaking for the rights of individuals, he views symbolic representation as the vehicle through which true democracy may emerge. In the context of his work, he feels this is most appropriate as the tool to inspire youth of African descent.

Perhaps in your giving of help you may not even understand their voices. If they tell me that the state is not understanding their situation, I would just nod, yes ok, I don’t really understand. People’s voices have to be heard – it doesn’t matter if they are from different walks, people’s voices have to be heard. If I were to speak as a minority there is a lack of symbolic representation – it’s just not done, there aren’t any mentors. There’s nothing for them to aspire to – at the higher level....It’s tough because it is built on the history, are you going to be accepted? That’s how tough it becomes. The history tells me that if you are black don’t run for office; if you are Asian don’t run for that because you won’t be accepted because the voters will not see you as someone who has a right to that. …There’s no representation.

In conjunction with identifying the lack of communal representation, leaders also hold accountable governmental representatives as noted in the following:

I tell them that if you are sitting here talking about social justice, whether it’s about poverty or social justice, whether it’s for homelessness, or women in prison, are you coming because you have something to share. Only way we are going to help those people is by bringing something to the table to share. Where’s it coming from...Government has a mandate to keep people poor, as long as government is in control people are poor. Canada with all of its resources we have no reason why we have people poor. We should be able to
have homes for people. Look at the Park sitting up there empty – we have all of this people homeless, they could take these people and put them in a house, give them a place to live…If it means workfare, give them something that they can feel respected, to know that this is mine. Give them something important.

Representation from this perspective is meant to convey a deliberate engagement with others. Rather than “othering” and assuming that present practices and programs are sufficient, representational leadership is attuned to the systemic inequities exist and enact substantial and corrective action as a means of redressing disparities. Included within participants’ definitions are discussions which construct justice through a discourse of accorded rights and freedoms. I explore these concepts in the subsequent section.

**Rights and Freedoms**

The findings arising from the data identify rights and freedoms as a recurring theme in leaders’ definitions of social justice and democracy. Collectively, leaders express awareness that while individuals may be promised rights and freedoms through legislation, the actualization of those rights and freedoms is precarious at best. Narratives highlight the saliency of oppression, the relevancy of one’s social currency and the struggle to attain what has been promised. Accordingly, leaders’ definitions position democracy and social justices as the ability to choose one’s educational pursuit, assist others along their educational journey, exercise one’s rights, express one’s creativity and attain employment.

The ability to choose an appropriate education is shared as an example of a democratic education
Democracy in education means having the freedom to choose the forms of education that respond to your needs. Certain schools have more resources because of where they are geographically located based on financial income of families. So if you are in a higher-middle upper class then you would have a school that would basically show that it is more middle to upper class, only because the people that live in that area would advocate for that because that is what is important to them.

As indicated, leaders are aware that differences exist between schools as a result of financial resources within of families. Additionally, in the excerpt below there is also the recognition that as a result of daily stressors, including finances, families from lower socioeconomic locations experience other obstacles that circumvent engagement in education.

But lower class or marginalized people would have different stressors, that wouldn’t be their primary focus because they have other things they have to overcome and a big one would be financial. They have other stressors, they’re struggling, how are you going to worry about education when you are trying to find a place to live. It’s not that it is not important; it’s just that they have other barriers that they have to overcome before they can trickle down to education.

Other understandings of social justice in education command leaders’ attention to help students facilitate the journey towards academic success as mentioned:

So I have the freedom, I am impacting on my students lives to direct their education and careers. I am making sure that they know where they are and where they should be and maybe sometimes they need time [away from their studies]. That doesn’t mean they don’t come back. It means they just need to take a break, reflect, focus and you will be back.
In this sense, freedom is a vehicle which allows her the flexibility of responding to the interests of her students in a timely and supportive manner. Leaders conceptualize social justice as the freedom to exercise one’s rights and the establishment of an educational climate that encourage openness and dialogue. According to one leader, in such a setting:

People would be allowed to have their opinion without people thinking that they have to believe what other’s believe. They would be allowed to have healthy discussions without feeling that they are discriminating against somebody else. Now that doesn’t always happen [even though]...everyone has rights and freedoms

Furthermore, it means

Freedom, not taking my voice away. It means for me freedom, it means a system that I can access and I have equal power throughout. Democracy means that I have rights and privileges the same as everyone else does in all aspects: social, educational and political. That I have basic human rights.

Likewise, social justice is also defined as the

Freedom to express yourself. It is freedom to be creative – spiritually, emotionally, physically. It is being able to exercise my cultural and spiritual values in the work I do to advance the African Canadian community.” In his experience, democracy entails freedom and the ability of individuals to remain connected to their self-truths.

Notions of rights as the ability to attain legal justice and desired employment also figure prominently in leaders’ analysis of Canadian society:

We are all equal. The scales of the justice show a blind woman. But the legal system is not equal to all. You should be able to get the same rights in court
regardless of who you are and should be here for everybody. Why 20 years later are we still fighting racism in Canada? We want to bring immigrants in, but people here are still fighting for jobs, can’t get jobs in their own country.

When they arrive here they can’t get jobs, have them driving cabs, what kind of country is that. What are we doing as a country? Canada has to be made accountable.

References to experienced legal disparities typify the judicial system as an arena where justice is conditional upon one’s identity rather than accessed as an inherent right. Also duly acknowledged is Canada’s immigration policies and the manner in which governmental bureaucracies entice and subsequently marginalize newcomers once they are permitted to cross Canadian borders. This leader is astute in pointing out that the struggles for job equality are not only the sole burden of immigrants but the fight for access to sustainable employment is an ongoing battle for individuals who are indigenous to the Canadian mosaic. When taken into consideration with the former descriptions, it is clear that understandings of justice extend beyond superficial acknowledgement of one’s humanity towards explicitly questioning institutional processes.

**Summary**

While demonstrating consistency with the literature, participants’ narratives also offer distinct conceptions of leadership as social justice that are contextualized by their identities, circumstances and histories. Narratives centre the importance of leaders’ social histories as invariably, participants discuss leading from contextual locations that name oppression and racism as present and differentially impacting realities which prevent the materialization of justice. Narrative are also telling in the sense that leaders are disquieted by the semblances of
justices and push both figuratively and literally to disrupt the barriers which exist to ensure greater and more inclusive representation. Leaders thereby offer distinct portraits of social justice and democracy which accentuate the imperative of moving towards schooling that is culturally informed and responsive. Accordingly, participants’ perspectives on social justice and democracy offer intersecting notions of access, participation, rights, freedoms and ownership. Collectively, their viewpoints move educational leadership discourses beyond traditional interpretations towards more authentic understandings.

Chapter Six
Reflections on Leadership

Introduction

The preceding chapters report the understandings of participants as related to a number of concepts that intersect leadership for social justice. In the present section, I document what spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders have to share about their experiences in shaping social justice within their various contexts. Data is explored using the primary research questions, How do spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders practice leadership as a form of social justice and the subquestions:

1. How does spirituality influence leaders’ social justice practice?
2. What issues and challenges influence the practice of leader?

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, “Perspectives on Praxis”, I outline how spiritual African and Africentric practice leadership for social justice. Collectively, their narratives speak to the practice of leadership as an endeavour that includes administration, educating, and advocacy. The second section, “Tensions and Influences”,
highlights the tensions and influences which contour leaders’ experiences. Narratives
chronicle a variety of tensions which inhabit their scope of practice. Additionally, discussions
reveal that leadership is informed by past and current educational disparities, spiritual
prohibition, interpersonal relationships, salient risks to leaders’ personal and professional
identities and the audacity of hope. The final component as in “Future Directions” of this
chapter examines the directions which participants believe will be a crucial focus for the next
generation of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders. Participants’ narratives
target elements of professional practice and systemic engagement.

**Perspectives on Praxis**

Educational leaders who build their professional practice in purpose-driven
leadership clearly understand the multidimensional aspects of their daily
challenges and yet find the inner strength to resist hegemonic structures and
forms of oppression and systemic inequities in the educational system.
(Dantley, 2003, p. 273)

When spirituality becomes part of our leadership, we can begin to move in
better ways. (Soder, 2002, p. 29)

The spiritual leader sees the complex system or organization as being
horizontal—that is, despite disparate titles and compensation levels, he or she
sees others as equals working together in a learning community with a clear or
common purpose. (Stokely, 2002, p. 48)

This section documents participants’ experiences and efforts towards democratic and
socially just leadership. Participants’ comments shed further light on the scope of their
employment and community related responsibilities, their obligations, adopted roles and how
they work to institute and/or facilitate social justice and democracy within their various
educational contexts. Cumulatively, participants share perspectives describing the parameters
of their leadership as encompassing administration, education, and advocacy components.
The administrative aspect of African and Africentric leaders’ work unfolds as a duality: with a focus on students and staff members in particular. Leaders develop innovative programs in response to historical underrepresentation, advise students, coordinate activities for students and oversee matters of discipline. Staff-oriented endeavours encompass such common tasks as consultation, supervision, arranging professional development for staff, analyzing assessment results, budgeting, and policy development.

Education unfolds as a critical facet of spiritual African and Africentric leadership. Narratives reveal that school and community educational leaders undertake this responsibility in an effort to empower and reeducate members of the school community. In the context of leadership for social justice, leaders’ involvement with students focuses on implementing transitional tutoring supports for students, visioning, reconstructing understandings of diversity, and other antiracist initiatives geared toward equipping and empowering students. Additionally, narratives document the implementation of educational workshops with parents that acknowledge the historical climate of racism and simultaneously equip parents to enter into the arena of education with proactive strategies for change. Spiritual African and Africentric leaders also involve themselves in educating public school and postsecondary employees. Efforts focus on raising the competencies of staff members in regards to social justice issues and providing them with authentic knowledge on the surrounding Black communities and other minoritized populations.

Across their various contexts, participants are involved in advocacy work. Leadership described from this vantage point reportedly includes an emphasis on altering educational governance, as seen through the establishment of community – responsive advisory boards and the expansion of membership to include community representatives. Likewise African
and Africentric leaders in schools and community purposefully attune themselves to the interests of students and community and actively involve themselves challenging systemic practices and instituting changes which reflect the interests of students. Quite similarly, leaders strategically seek out opportunities to hold institutional bodies accountable in eradicating the racism and marginalization that pervades educational settings. Moreover, narratives demonstrate that African and Africentric leaders are equally as concerned that members of community have access to the necessary services and supports to ensure health and safety. As such, African and Africentric educational leaders intentionally undertake the assignment of leading through novel and unconventional avenues.

**Administrating**

The task of spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders for social justice includes the element of administration. Participant’s narratives outline the scope of assigned and adopted responsibilities and position these duties as necessary aspect of leading. Leaders undertake administrative work that is explicitly focused on addressing racism through a variety of different venues. In addition, participants also assume managerial duties that are more characteristic of administrative posts. Student-focused activities are viewed as avenues to redress historical underrepresentation as noted:

We started a project with the junior high school students; there has been only 6 engineering of African descent graduated from the university and in the history, not yet one black female in graduate in engineering degree. And you are talking about over, you know, 400 years. When I heard those statistics that nobody was buying into it really makes me angry and crushed. And I almost feel like you know what, I need to go to door to door. I need to lead those kids into your school and I need to call the parents myself. Our kids need to find
out how easy science actually is and the fact we invent a lot of things to do with science. Who is telling us we cannot this, and why are our kids saying they cannot do math, and they can’t do chemistry, and they can’t do physics. So that just makes me angry.

In addition, projects such as the one indicated above serve to bridge gaps between the university experience and public schooling by introducing youth to professional tutors from across various disciplines. Administrative tasks further include activities such as developing implementing, monitoring and evaluating programming as in the case of Neale whose work focuses on assisting school-age children to the “life skills, social skills, leadership skills” and cultural knowledges that are absent from the regular curriculum. She describes her current project as follows:

One of the projects that stands out for this year, we talk to the children about what they value and what they feel about themselves….So we started learning circles. We form circles, and the children start by giving a positive comment to each other. We do it maybe once or twice a week. We incorporate in the learning circle an activity that we are working on for a week or a month. So the last learning circle children chose a person that they admired, a Canadian. It could be their parent, teacher or just someone that they look up to.

Neale’s narrative explains how the learning activity then, branches off to encompass a community focus with children being asked to “to try to pick a person in the community and [then the] go on the computer and do research.” Following the research component, students return “to the learning circle and share what they learned.” This activity concludes with an exercise requiring children to compare the profiles of each and complete a writing activity outlining the qualities most admired. At first glance, this project appears as a traditional
educational initiative. However, in the absence of a culturally relevant school-based curriculum I understand that this endeavour is a political project that is directed towards change. The scope of leaders’ administrative work also extends to youth who are currently outside of the educational system. Chantal for instance facilitates the delivery of interagency services to youth between the ages of 15-19 years of age. She explains below the scope of her work.

We had a number of different workshops for how we can bridge the gap. We had the justice system, educational system, child welfare trying to come together to bridge the gap through transitioning.

Over the course of several workshops, Chantal explains that her role is to ensure that everyone is heard and that they remain focused on developing recommendations capable of supporting vulnerable youth from a variety of different backgrounds and educational needs. The success of the program she reports is measured in the number of recommendations. In a similar fashion, the formal parameters of Caplan’s position reportedly entail a focus on marginalized population and particularly emphases “coordinating the recruitment, retention and success of African Canadian postsecondary learners.” Each of the aforementioned administrative functions is undertaken in response to a mandate that focuses on “diversity, antiracism and identity development.” With respect to recruitment efforts, Caplan’s role necessitates that he engage with community and community organizations in an effort to attract eligible candidates from the African Canadian communities. Equally as important is the implementation of responsive strategies to ensure the success of leaders within this higher educational setting. Caplan’s role brings him in direct contact with students through counseling and consultative interactions whereby there is an exchange of information.
concerning services and programs, learning interests and support networks. Although Caplan’s position necessitates responsibilities that one would normally anticipate, he does admit however, that there are difficult times when situations go beyond normal expectations.

I remember a student coming into my office; no she called me on the phone. She said I am ready to commit suicide and I am sitting there and I ask her so how are you going to do it – she told me, I said when are you going to do it and she told me when. I said stay on the phone, I pick up my cell phone and called....and [this person] managed to get to her....I called the suicide hotline and I told them what I did and they said you did the exact thing that we train people to do. After that I called a friend and I started crying.

From an administrative standpoint, the development of unique programming in response to the interests of students of African descent is also a function of many leaders’ responsibility. In her current position Allessandra for example has intentionally worked towards reaching out to serve more students of African descent, an approach that is beginning to yield results

I see more and more students of African descent working together which a plus is. So my centre has lots of students who come from Africa, some students who are Caribbean and a lot [indigenous students]. So it’s nice to see that changing. So I feel that it has matured. We employ a lot of international students and support the [indigenous] students.

Allister likewise chooses to focus concerted effort on students of African descent and provides a rationale for his focus:

I know the enormity of problems which students who are Black face and therefore, I try to talk to them to help them get a sense of education, the value of education, the intrinsic value of education meaning, that if you only focus on minor things like games, the way they dress, the way they present
themselves, I try to talk to them whenever I see them, I say education is more important. The best things your parents can bequeath to you is education. They can give you money and the money gets finished or something happens. But if your parents give you education, they have given you something very, very valuable. In fact, they come back and say what you said about education was true. Education can provide the money that in fact your parents would have given you because you worked to get it you see the value of the money, and you can pass onto your children the same values and whatever. So I talk to students, not only Black students but any student that is wayward.

Allister’s desire to talk with students stems from a place of concern and an earnest commitment towards helping them fully realize the promise of education.

Descriptions of leadership practice also entail an emphasis on administrative tasks that are oriented towards providing school and system-based support and consultation. In his present leadership position, Jeff explains his role accordingly.

In effect I am the principal of principal which in effect deals with all of the things that deal with discipline, budgeting, book budgeting and capital budgeting....being in charge if the need to close the school…policy [and] policy development.

In addition, Jeff reports that the nature of his position requires direct involvement in disputes and unresolved educational matters. Such occurrences in Jeff’s opinion could be decreased if the proper democratic protocols were followed:

Just recently I had a situation where a parent wasn’t satisfied with the principal and the administration and the school board member contacted me and more or less told me to go and meet with principal and figure out what is going on and do this and that. I met with the principal and the principal did
nothing wrong, the principal put in place the interventions that were required based on our policy and the parent wanted the police to come in and do an antibullying campaign and we were not going to do that. The principal did what he/she was supposed to do.

Accordingly, Jeff reports relaying the outcome to his superiors but frankly asserts that the situation did not require his intervention but rather, a realization on the Board’s part that “they were being autocratic”, rather than democratic. Another exemplar of administrative consultation is found in Suzy’s account. Suzy wears multiple administrative hats as director, past president and provincial representative for a national women’s organization whose mandate included ensuring the cultural, educational, political and economic development of Black women and their families. At the same time, she is chairing a provincial committee that is charged with the mandate of ensuring educational equity for students of African descent. In this position she continues strives to forefront the rights of Black children and youth to receive an educational experience that is inclusive and noninjurious. More specifically she states,

I was a trustee at the school for years. Then I was involved with the Monitoring Committee that is a committee that came out of we filed a class action suit against the [district] school Board for racism. Right now I am involved as the Chair; we are fighting the issues of racism and the lack of leadership within our schools.

In addition to an intentional focus on redressing the educational disparities, African and Africentric educational leaders also are committed to carrying out tasks that are more reflective of traditional staff-oriented responsibilities. For instance, Jonathan’s connection to educational leadership occurs within the boundaries of a secondary school. In this context he
assumes various administrative duties including managing two major educational divisions.

He explains:

My official position was Director of Sports Administration. So I was in charge of all the sporting activities, all the coaches reported to me. All the physical education people, I was also the Director of the Physical Education Department.... So although it sounds, its 1,300 students, it takes on a life of its own. Thirteen hundred students and about eight different sports, the varsity sports that we dealt with.

In his present leadership position, Jeff says that, “in effect [he is] the principal of principal which in effect deals with all of the things that deal with discipline, budgeting, book budgeting and capital budgeting.” His additional administrative responsibilities include “being in charge of if the need to close the school…policy [and] policy development.”

Likewise, as school principal within an urban cosmopolitan setting, Zina’s explains that her position involves ongoing attention to managerial chores

The admin job, principal’s is so different than the vice principal job. You would never be able to tell me until I got here. And it’s funny because I come from a school where for the first 4 years being a vice principal I was with a retiring principal and so he gave me a lot of responsibility. One year he was even sick for a month and I had to basically run the school. But once you get into the principal’s role then all this other stuff – deadlines, staff supervision, as Vice Principal you help out the principal but, the principal does everything. There’s another dimension to it to make sure that kids needs are being met. How do you have those conversations with people and for people that are struggling, how do you, where to you go to find supports for them and then there are the kids.
Accordingly, these administrative demands threaten to distance her from connecting with children under their care.

It’s another dimension altogether and you are further removed from the children so you have to force yourself to get back with the kids. So it’s different...all these new initiatives and staff look towards you in terms of you being the expert. But being the VP you don’t get to go to all the PD. The principal goes because you both can’t be there. VP’s have some PD, but I’m responsible for looking at the assessment. As a VP you don’t have time to pay attention to the assessment because you are doing all this other stuff. So what are you going to do with it? I like it; it’s different, different challenge.

Narratives indicate that spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders experience the administrative components of leadership. To some degree, responsibilities are reportedly similar to what one would expect of school and community administrators elsewhere, however the nature of their responsibilities and their professional assignments collectively compel leaders to coordinate and administer initiatives that are geared toward empowering students. In addition, leaders also involve themselves in projects capable of and altering the experience of schooling for children and youth of African descent. Their active involvement may also been seen through their consultative efforts with system-based and other organizational bodies.

**Educating**

Educating proves to be a critical role within leaders’ work leadership for social justice. The findings are significant in reiterating that African and Africentric educational leaders are concerned with reeducating members of the school community and in providing educational alternatives to students such as tutoring and goal setting. Narratives also speak to
the reality that leaders also involve themselves in reeducating members of the school community around issues of diversity, and African history. Leaders adopt an antiracist approach in their efforts with students and parents and choose to focus on providing them with the knowledge and skills to engage in the process of schooling. As expected, an antiracism gaze compels leaders to involve themselves in reeducating members of the larger school community by providing accurate and first-hand accounts of history and community. This section explores each of the above aspects in greater detail.

Collectively, participants report that their work entails educating leadership bodies about the history and heritages of various Black communities. Caplan’s narrative provides a telling example as indicated in the statement

I play a leadership role with the College in helping [them] understand the rich cultural heritage of the…Black Communities. The team coordinates opportunities for employees and students to participate in community events as well as leads campus sessions in African and Africentric learning and leadership principles.

Additionally, leaders educate teachers and other members of community on social justice from a cultural competency perspective

In terms of staff we try to expose them more and more to social justice issues. We expose [these ideas] to the teachers and they pass them on to the students. We held a social justice conference. We had one a couple of years ago, a national conference across the country. We’re holding another one again this year and that’s with teachers, presenters around homophobia, around socioeconomic issues around Mik’maq issues all the gender issues, all the different cultures. So that’s a two-day conference for children’s aid workers, hospital workers, community services workers.
The focus on educating educators according to Jeff is a first and necessary step towards changing the culture of the school community. Having said this, his comments reveal that this can be an arduous task.

When I say that, it’s a hard sell. You would think that teachers would have a hunger for this type of knowledge and yet I find that it’s difficult. Teachers have more tunnel vision than the ordinary person. Trying to expose them to issues around social justice, trying to put on workshops around social justice issues. Issues around cultural competence and that has to come from the top down.

Leadership from Jeff’s vantage point is not only directed towards teachers, but is also simultaneously focused on educating individuals who assume upper management positions within the Board. The impetus for this focus is explained as follows:

You have to expose the Board members so that they can be on board so that they are really serious about this. You can’t force them, but you have to say here’s what we have and here’s what we have. Here’s what their position is and now talk to me about it.

A similar emphasis is undertaken by other participants such as Suzy

I have been teaching courses on Tuesday and Thursday nights, as an educator, teaching employees how to be peer supports for the other employees. That program was amazing because we had to look at racism, prejudices and discrimination. We have to look at who we are – if we are going to discriminate against gay or lesbians, then what about me a black person standing up in front of you.
The education of students is also a prominent feature of African and Africentric leadership. Leaders choose to emphasize the provision of transitional and supplemental services, visioning and goal-setting. Samuel reports developing a tutoring program tailored to support newcomers, meaning those students who are recent arrivals in the province. The focus of this program aims to catch students in their preparation between high school and university. Our targets were mostly from Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia and China as those families were more eager to spend on their children so that they could get better grades. Initially this was offered as a free service to public schools during this time he the majority of students attending the free program were mainly of Asian descent, Chinese and South Asian in particular and that there were rarely any Black students attending. We ran seminars.

From another standpoint this program has also spawned indirect results. It has helped students to build confidence in themselves so that they do well like everyone else.

Leaders like Chantal provide academic support to students who are currently experiencing difficulty in one or more academic subjects. In this position she meets regularly with school staff in an effort to learn about the youth’s academic progress. She explains:

I go to school and pick up my student that I am working with. When I get there I interact with the teacher, [to see] how my student has been doing. Sometimes I get a positive response and sometimes not so positive. We tend to meet quite regularly; she’s on an IPP program to make sure the program is working for her. But my regular day this is how it would go.

Educational leadership as described extends beyond the school building and often requires innovative approaches to learning.
We go wherever, I try to change up to give her some different environments for learning – local library, Chapters, [recreational centre], to show here that education doesn’t have to be in a classroom sitting down. Learning can take place anywhere. I try to use different avenues so that she can use different materials.

Chantal’s rationale for choosing different learning environments is quite simple. She wants to ensure that the youth understands that learning happens in varying contexts and that the student has access to resources that she normally would not be able to use.

The strategies that the teachers use, I don’t use them because I feel that they are not making a connection. Examples around reading – I’ll take her to the university and that is two-fold because I am showing her a vision for herself plus she is learning at the same time.

Chantal’s response is one of self-empowerment and practicality. First, it involves a recognition that education as delivered is ineffective for the student and as such, her work needs to go beyond current delivery approaches. Secondly, the act of seeking out alternate learning venues and strategies demonstrates an engagement with the student and this individual’s wholistic needs. A third element associated with leadership as education is found in the connections Chantal makes between healing and self-empowerment.

When I say healing I mean – I can only speak to the two I work with. They come from quite horrific situations and they are quite broken emotionally and spiritually. So the healing piece comes in because I just don’t do tutoring. Educational leadership does not mean just tutoring people.– I am a tutor in one (sense) and that’s my job – but my job is not just to sit down and do the tutoring. My job is around – self-esteem, peer pressure, around eating, around making correct choices in life and spirituality definitely comes into play
because I [am] talking to the kids about my base….I can only talk to kids about this perspective because that is what makes me who I am. Does that make sense?

Through Chantal’s account we are privy to the psychosocial dynamics which frame her experiences of leadership. In the following she asserts that systemic structures are critical factors in redress the injury that occurs in schools. “If we can get the system to work together and then there can be some healing and restoration for the children to go to school and learn, be in a school system that is productive.” Definitions by leaders also include a focus on culture and empowerment as Neale explains

In tutoring, [students are] learning life skills, social skills and leadership skills. We are helping them with the curriculum, helping different types of learners… with cultural enrichment programs, crafts across the curriculum and learning about lifestyles, different life styles.

Narratives reveal that leaders are also attentive to helping students develop a sense of discipline and accountability as revealed in the following

For example, I went to school and whenever I give the students work to do, they say, “Oh, I’ll take it home to do it”. My goal is that class work is class work. I don’t make additional or extra work. So I attempt to impart these things to the school system and I’ve tried to encourage some of the schools, teachers as well as the students to really understand the notion that of course every student has to be accountable.

Furthermore, leaders are interested in providing students with accurate knowledge and history as heard in Suzy’s account.
I go out during Black history month and I give a history of the community. I don’t start from slavery because we come from grace, wealth. Africa was not a poor nation. But society has allowed the Europeans to go in and take over. I tell the students that you are form Kings and Queens. – It’s important for you to get an education because we weren’t allowed to get a voice, a vote – until the 1940s.

Suzy’s statements provide a glimpse of her educational approach and the information which she believes is necessary for children to reengage in the educational process. Likewise, Allessandra reports being surprised at the lack of cross cultural representation and competency within the realm of higher education of this she remarks, “You think higher learning and things may get a little better. No, they are just as bad.” Purposeful decisions are made to infuse the curriculum with material that reflects a diversity of opinions, experiences and cultural meanings. For example, Allessandra’s awareness of the presence of racism within the context of the university leads her to focus deliberate efforts on countering its presence. She remembers inviting students to do a joint presentation around issues of diversity. Following the presentation she recalls reading a students’ journal entry accusing her of showing favouritism and being paranoid

The journal says that she felt that the three of us have mental issues that we need to seek professional counselling. It is obvious that we are very sad people and we are not dealing who we are. Here you go. So it was awful that we are feeling oppressed in that we believe that we are living in an oppressed society. Because I was thinking…the world is not oppressed. That’s our problem and that maybe we should get together, and find out how we can solve our problems. And it’s always interesting because I have to mark these…. So you think this is a higher learning and things may get a little better?
Allessandra’s latter comment reflects an expectation that discussions around issues of social justice would be somewhat more received within her institution than in other spaces. Allessandra proceeds to recommend that this student do further reading and that someone in her program “follow-up with her beliefs and values… [and consider that] maybe she shouldn’t be working with people.” Allessandra views this opposition as further confirmation that she needs to remain within postsecondary education.

This just tells me I need to be heard and I need to teach. It’s pushing on to say, you know what? Thanks. Thanks for what you believe because that’s just telling me I am doing a good job. And I need to be where I need to be.

She asserts that because of such explicit teaching she is often accused of favouring minoritized students and those comments usually find their way into formalized evaluations, a reality she readily embraces.

But when it comes from the evaluations, which I always love getting because I don’t mind and I am not afraid I tell you I like the evaluations. I like seeing what the students are thinking… I was thinking about the day when I was in the workshop about diversity, culture and sensitivity… that somebody [said] how I made them to feel uncomfortable for being white, and how I took advantage of the class, talked about my issues as a black person. And I know that is always going to come out with my evaluations. So I am always interested to know how they are feeling in this way and thinking this way or whatever. I just tell them that they have issues and scary enough they are going to be the people, the professionals and working in a diversity stream.

Collectively the narratives also reveal that leaders are also engaged in educating parents. As a case in point, I refer to Zima’s narrative.
I’ve done parenting workshops around the province. We went to parenting workshops at the library and it was a parenting model that was designed. And then we got call a year or two later, myself and designed a program for the African/ Black parents. The other model was good, but we thought it needed something specific so we designed the program. We had the basic ages and stages of development, working with teens, motivating from preschool up to young adulthood. So we did our research and used different writing, Kunjufu, the development of the Black child. And then a section dealing with the school system and that was talking about the program planning process: What happens if your child is referred what can you do? How do you support your child and who is out there to help you. What’s the purpose of the student support worker, what’s the purpose of an EPA?

In addition to equipping parents and families with information on students program, the program aims to build their capacity.

Ours was a train the trainer model and we incorporated drama within it and we gave them different activities that they could do and we went all over the province for about 2-3 years and now it’s still going, it’s called something different now. But I guess it did what we intended it to do.

Such work, in Zina’s opinion is critical, “because schools can’t do it all by themselves.” However, she admits, “the hardest part is getting people out [t]he more you do it they tell someone. Having the community people presenting makes a big difference, they can draw the people out.” Just as education is a key aspect of leaders’ praxis, so is the notion of advocacy. The following section, Advocating, reviews findings that emerge from the data.
Advocating

African and Africentric educational leaders engage in advocacy work within their various scopes of practice. In the present context, advocacy is understood to entail altering the governance structures of educational and civic bodies to respond to identified interests, working with parents to become actively involved in creating a more equitable manifestation of schooling, challenging policies which are inherently exclusionary and assisting others in accessing resources to support their basic needs. Narratives concur that leaders are cognizant of the intersections between school governance structures and justice. As a result, participants indicate that they purposefully involve themselves in projects which alter the basis of power in favor of marginalized communities.

As an example, Caplan expresses a degree of accomplishment in establishing a number of significant firsts within the postsecondary institution that speak to communal interests. These accomplishments in his opinion are noteworthy because they are symbols of meaningful change.

I’ve gotten more strong as an individual, more strong as in giving back to my community, providing for my community, in making sure that my community is represented here not only in the student population but also in the staffing population. And one of the things that I did since I’ve been here is that I recommended to the college that we need an advisory committee so we have a thirteen-member advisory committee from across that province that meets four times a year and this is the second turn around.

In the context of the former, spiritualized leadership entails adopting an advocacy orientation that lobbies for community representation in student enrolment and staffing. These changes reflect a concerted effort to impact both recruitment and employment strategies.
Cumulatively, these accomplishments reflect substantive movements towards “giving back” and making substantial inroads within higher education. Spiritualized educational leadership as practiced by Caplan also compels him to advocate for establishing community representation and voice on the postsecondary advisory board via the appointment of a spiritual advisor. Within the context of this organization’s history it is a ground breaking move that is initially misunderstood and deemed to be inconsequential that is, until Caplan is able to educate his supervisors on the significance of this decision.

Every group we had I made sure there was a minister. My first supervisor ...said why do you need a minister? I said because the church is the backbone of the community and everything centres around the community. She wasn’t going to allow it and I said if you don’t have a minister on the board than it’s not going to be successful. And I’m talking to my supervisor and I say to myself do I really want my job. But I think they realized that after educating her that spirituality plays a big part in the life of the community and we still have a minister on the board.

Caplan’s description of the struggle to alter systemic structures is significant for several reasons. Primarily, it sheds insight into the cultural contestations that occur in schooling. Secondly, his narrative identifies the potential risks that are involved in pushing for changes. The advocacy role of leaders in lobbying government agencies is also discussed.

You have to advocate in other social welfare settings because sometimes the child welfare of budget constraints they don’t want to have a child tutor. Many times they have threatened, the social worker saying that this child does not need a tutor when she really does because it keeps her focused and you can’t expect the foster mother to take all this on in terms of doing tutoring,
parenting and working full time. There has to be some support in the home. I advocate in that aspect… and in terms of other resources that she may need.

The system work which Chantal explains draws her into conflict with colleagues and in charge of making operational decisions around programming. In the above example, access to available resources is at stake. As such, advocacy as strategic engagement with systems reportedly crosses judicial boundaries. Quite similarly, leaders like Suzy report advocacy efforts in regards to initiating civil litigation against the local school Board for failing to apply the appropriate educational standards that were consistent with other schools in the district. She explains

We had [a] school at that time; where the bathrooms were leaking into the classrooms. The children were going to school in situations where the sewer and stuff were being leaked into the classrooms. So the community filed a class action suit and [other] communities came on board. The blackboards were so smooth that they couldn’t even write or even see what was being written. So we had to go in there and fight with a class action suit.

Suzy’s description references a well-documented portrait of substandard conditions and neglect which Black students and families were forced to contend with for years despite repeated attempts by numerous parents and community members for corrective action. In addition to advocating for system-level changes, leaders also devote considerable effort to working with and responding to the interests of students. The next excerpt serves to explain this finding.

Right now I am working with our youth to pull together something. They want to do some stuff with schools. They came to us and told us about wanting to do something with self-esteem; the educational system is failing them. They
want to get us involved to see what can we do to get them back on track…..Now our kids are going to school but the kids are suffering. Black girls they might be graduating but their self-esteem is very low and a lot of these kids are being excluded; they are not getting involved because they feel they don’t want them there. The least little thing they do they get weaned out, the other kids can do whatever they want and their parents come and take them to another school. But a Black child can’t be placed from one school to another. If you take a Black kid and put him in another school he is noticed. A White kid can be transplanted anywhere and nobody notices or questions.

This leader’s response to youth in her community appears to be one of urgency and reportedly involves hearing the voices of these youth and collaborating with them in deciding the next steps forward. Suzy discusses the ensuring tensions through descriptions of disempowerment. She states that silencing occurs as a result of some families not being heard and as a result, her role is one of enabling families who “can’t speak for themselves.” Furthermore, advocacy work is taken up with students in assisting them to access the resources for daily living.

You know when I have to deal with students from the Black community. I had one student come to me who had two children and a house…...and no income and said I don’t know what I am going to do for Christmas. She had no money, so I said let me see what I can do. So I called another friend who called her sister who worked for [an agency] and [they] fully sponsored the students, toys, Christmas dinner, everything.

As a result of his informal support networks, he is able “get to” this student and obtain assistance to support her fundamental needs for safety, shelter and food. A further example of student-responsive advocacy is detailed in the next excerpt.
We have a couple of Muslim students who also come to me and at times it is hard, not fully knowing the Muslim religion...The student came to me and said I need some place to pray. I said to myself how am I going to go to the principal and say we need a sacred space. I think that was the hardest thing that I had to do. I went to him and said we have a couple of Muslim students who are practicing Muslims and we talk about being a diverse college and they need a place to pray. He’s not a strong believer and he said ok we’ll find them a space. So we found them a space with a lock and key and nobody uses it besides them. We had maintenance clean it and sanitize it. We put in a table with a basin so they could wash. I was totally amazed because I went in thinking I was going in but it all worked out.

According to Caplan, this situation not only “worked out”, but was integral in the institution implementing a sacred space in the designs of a new building. He explains

And one of the things they are going to have at the new campus is – a room dedicated to, they are not calling it a chapel they are calling it an interfaith room. Anyone can go in and if they need a quiet meditative space than. I don’t want to take all of the credit for that because if the students hadn’t have come in then and they needed a space then we would not have had to deal with that issue.

Caplan’s willingness to bring forward the needs and desires of students, and his framing of fulfilment as a direct response to the institution’s mandate is not only social justice, but cleverly strategic in critiquing absence as a transgression of formalized policy. His reflection of spiritualized leadership in this case draws connections between culture and presence and the manner in which institutional acts of omission render marginalized bodies invisible.
Advocacy for students is also directly undertaking by prompting school staff to appreciate the potential socioeconomic factors that influence students’ learning and progress.

Chantal explains

A lot of people in the room have their own belief systems about this child. And a lot of them don’t know the child. A lot of labels are put on these children, that I tend to think, not so. I usually talk about my interaction with the child…in the school, in the home and in the community – so I have all the factors of how this child operates instead of just one aspect of in the classroom. I try to take all different aspects, - I go in the home to see what’s going on in the home, how she functions in society. She comes to my home so you find out very quickly what kind of personality you are dealing with.

Chantal claims that her approach is different because she is able to gather information from differing sources which help to provide more accurate information on children. She shares this information during school meetings in the hope of widening the portrait of children to reflect a more precise representation.

I think I understood that because I had a child who was labeled difficult. If I just had a child who was just struggling then maybe I wouldn’t see the structures. But because I had a child who was labeled difficult and was struggling and was still struggling that opened my eyes to a lot. And that’s how I started to challenge the structure and to see how these structures impacted the child.

Chantal describes what leadership as advocacy entails

What I try to do is let the school become aware of other factors and that sometimes Eurocentric values are not, Black values and there are other factors that come into play besides just being in school. You don’t know if that child
had breakfast, how he left the home that morning, you don’t know what’s going on in the home, in the community, where does the child lives there are shootings on a regular basis. These things are going to impact our children and that needs to be taken into account everyone does not respond the same way to those factors. Some kids are resilient and keep on going through and some kids are affected by it. That stuff is what has to be taken into account when you say a child is acting out in school. A child is not acting out because they want to act out. They just don’t get up in the morning and say look I’m just going to act out. There are other factors that are driving him to act out and that’s where my advocating comes from in the school – let’s try to get to the bottom of what’s going on. It’s not about punishing the child.

This leadership approach is not necessarily well received.

We don’t really talk – but when you try to talk about stuff like this it, people see it as a bigger problem that they can’t take on. They are doing all they can to just keep their head above the water, never mind take on other problems.

The former comments centre advocacy as an experience in countering erroneous images and presenting accurate reflections of children. The rationale for undertaking this work is subsequently presented.

The reality is that if people don’t know the child and all that you have is written on paper then it doesn’t look too good. But if you have a personal relationship with the child, then there is more that can be a factor. Sometimes, people, the paper, school does not take in our culture.

Inherent within participant’s narratives is an awareness that advocacy work with systems demands strategic engagement. A finding expounded upon by Chantal
It is a game; you have to be able to maneuver yourself around. You can’t ostracize, you can’t burn all your bridges because you need those bridges to get back over. Strategically, skillfully to make these changes. Step by step… not going in to make one big drastic change, it’s just little. If I can make a change in the child’s life in terms of her thinking that she is not a bad child, something wrong with her. If I can change that then that is going to equip her to further her education. There’s nothing wrong with me, I got this far and that’s how the change is made. Small little steps, but you need to get to the end. You need to finish your education. Knowledge is power.

Further insight is revealed in the following:

The main thing is that you have to approach it with kid gloves. You have to approach it in the manner from an educational point of view. You have to come in not like a bulldozer, but come in very slowly and to educate. You have to address these issues in a soft and meaningful way because these are strongholds and power that people don’t want to give up. But there is a skill in doing this.

Advocacy is also practiced in relation to intentionally addressing the assumptions of staff members. In particular, Allister’s narrative references confronting a provincial licensing board around the lack of Black teachers employed in the system, a stance that is often met with resistance. He reveals

They don’t seem to see, I talked to some of the teachers. But they feel that, even when I am talking to the [provincial licensing board] they told me no, no, what I’m saying is wrong; the school system reflects the multiplicity of cultures and all that. I always ask them are you talking in terms of the presence or students or the role models. They say it is the same thing. I tell them to go back to the schools and then look and take a statistical report and
I see that it’s 1 to 9 or many times it is 1 to 10. I have found only 1 or 2. I have never found three. The best is two.

In the aforementioned passage, Allister details some of the obstacles he confronts when attempting to provide information which contradicts the metanarratives of school. From teachers to senior administrative staff, the difficulty seems to lie in the perceptions of reality. Likewise, Allessandra’s “commitment to change and improvement” leads her to question practices and demand answers in response to students’ reports of differential treatment.

I always tell people that I was born...I was born in the right era, not just any time but in the right era. I was born in 60’s...because I am an African and I am a marcher, if any injustices are going on I want to be there. What do you mean they said this to you? Who said that? What do you mean, we’re going to call them. Are we going to see them? We have to write a letter. Because I don’t like any injustice, I guess that’s why I am in this position, it’s important to me because I don’t doubt what students say, so the students feel they have been discriminated against in school, something must be done and said to make them feel that way. And we need to find out why. Maybe that’s being done impartially. We still need to; you know you made the students feel a certain ways. So I guess I see myself as socially committed to change, and committed to the improvement of themselves.

Yes, these systems are strongholds and it’s hard to permeate into these walls that have been built up for years. But it doesn’t mean that you have to battle everyday and that you are tired and can’t go on because some days are good days and you are making little headways, so it’s not always uphill but the overall theme, challenge is going to be uphill because you are trying to level out playing fields that never get leveled. They’ve never been leveled.
Narratives report that leaders undertake their advocacy work outside the walls of schooling. Allessandra’s narrative for example, speaks to the significance of advocacy for youth in community and provides a critical example which highlights the tensions existing between traditional and personal understandings of spirituality and education. This anecdote involves the decision of a young man to attend football practice on a Sunday instead of attending church. In this instance, Allessandra is asked to intervene on the student’s behalf and it is her spiritualized approach to leadership which critiques the tendency to condemn rather than support this student’s decision.

We always go through ups and down problems and issues, because our team deals with things, we have younger counsellors and older counsellors and they forget what it is to be a team. I had a young who was winning in football, because he wants to get a football scholarship to go to university....So lots of football games practices tend to be on Sundays., I remember they were really hard on me [for defending his stance] and say what’s your priority? He should be in church, and I say, hey hold now, you know like this child is only 17 years old and trying to get to university, wants to get the football scholarship that doesn’t mean he is not connected to God or committed to the church. So don’t say things....It’s not the same as when you were a young person. You have all you have in church. And things are allowed to be on Sunday. Guess what, this is no longer the way.

Allessandra continues to point out the tensions of a religion that is out of step with the reality of students. She stresses that her community,

Need[s] to be a little more lenient and I understand that this is a football scholarship. Churches are not going to pay the tuition and that’s not taking anything away from God. But he is getting released to go through the university and this is the tool that he has that God gives him. To give him the
opportunity to go to university free and you need to respect that and encourage that and pray for that. When he has time and he is able to give it back, because it doesn’t mean that he is not giving in other ways. I am sometimes able to bring that balance.

Leaders choose to focus their advocacy efforts on helping families and community become involved in the system of education. Of this, she utilizes a common colloquial saying to describe her work in this area, “Those fish are harder to fry, because you hit another marginalized group,” and explains the dimensions of advocacy within this context.

So I try to get to the avenue of the parent, the foster parent to kind of take that role on with other parents, to look at these structures. Especially in this community where there are a lot of society problems and there are a lot of statistics where our children are dropping out of school, not going to school, not finishing school, there is a definite problem.

Chantal seizes these opportunities to empower parents to realize that advocating for their child is not only a right but a necessity. Her goal as stated by the following is “self-determination” and empowerment:

I advocate for giving back parents their power or them taking back the power and what they want to do for their families and their lives. Children, giving them a voice, hearing their stories. That’s what it’s all about hearing people’s stories. And the more we hear people’s stories, the more we allow people and give back to people their power. And when people start getting back their power that’s when social change happens. That’s when changes will happen and peoples’ voices are heard. That’s where I am, letting people speak about their stories, lettings them have a voice. The child welfare system doesn’t allow people to have a voice. The social worker is the expert; they’re the ones
that know these people’s lives, which is a lie. These people know their own lives.

In undertaking leadership as an advocacy experience, leaders centre connections to voice, agency and inclusion.

I get them to become actively involved. I think that is the key because if they don’t see it themselves it’s not for you to tell them. They need to see it. They are only going to see it when they get actively involved in the schools and start going to these meetings, talking to the teachers. Some of the parents I talk to feel intimidated because they are going in the room with a psychologists and people who have a lot of academic learning. So they feel how can I sit in that room with all of those people who are so well educated.

Understanding the structure of schooling is equally as significant.

But I tell them that they need to go into the room because you need to look out for your child. The schools are built like a business and when it’s built like a business you child doesn’t really matter, so you need to make it matter and you need to …My number one key is to go and to see how these structures are. And once they go and start seeing it themselves I try to work with them from there.

As well as supporting parents in finding answers to their question

They wanted to know what was the problem. They were grasping because they were being suspended so often – they were at wit’s end and wanted to know what is wrong with my child. They are going to school and being suspended and they are home and they are fine. They are home and don’t have any behavioural problems but when they go to school there is a great big change. So it wasn’t hard to get my families involved because they wanted some answers to their questions.
Advocacy is also undertaken to assist others in acquiring their basic necessities as evident in leaders’ narratives.

There was a community that I used to work in downtown. It was in the downtown core of Toronto. It sort of, people sort of did not look at this as a favourable location. There are all these sex trade workers and drug addicts. So there are some neighbours who just looked down on them. So what we used to do was, we put a church there, fortunately, that we bought a building within that city. So we’d do things, plant things, have things to offer for their health. We would even go to the extent of taking food and clothing.

There is a prostitute, who just lives downstairs and the scripture says “love thy neighbour”. That’s how they lived their life – do you let a life die because that is their habit, or the skills they learned – do you say stop what you are doing – it may work or may not work. It’s not judging by their morals or the morals of the church. Who’s more important the person or the acts of the person – the person is more important, not stopping a habit. If I give the condoms to save the ladies who are being abused, I may save that life – Christ said I came for the sick not the righteous.

Leadership as experienced, represents a direct involvement with the realities in others’ lives. Furthermore, it entails a reclaiming of their humanity and situates spiritualized leadership in ways that contravene traditional expectations. Leadership represents resistance as it entails an active and determined engagement that regards everyone as being inherently worthy of care, safety and fulfilment. A similar example is found within Allister’s narrative.

I used to work with the committee and the school system to encourage students in their work, bringing clothing, food and all those things. We go to the food banks and get these things to deliver to mothers who have just had children…so I work with the community to help them. For example, yesterday
I went to the mall to get some money from the bank. When I went down there, I decided to go and see if I can get some things. Just when I noticed that a girl was following me. This girl, she looked about 14. She said I bought some things but I don’t have enough money to take a taxi or bus fare to go home. My children are crying. I said no problem. But God can- if you can help someone, you can’t go and say tomorrow I will help you. The girl said I was trying for so long. I knew you were a fairly nice person and you wouldn’t say no. There’s something in the spirit. When we got to the house, the children were crying. Why if I have a car and am alone in the car, why would I not take somebody.

This description is helpful in understanding the crucial nature of this advocacy role and the types of requests which are made. The excerpt also highlights the issues that have the potential to impact schooling for families, namely, adequate food, clothing and access to services, and the attempts which leaders are making to respond to this manifestation of social justice. Advocacy is exemplified through deliberative caring, that is a purposeful engagement to regard the human conditions of others by reminding them that there are individuals around who care and therefore, they are not “alone”. Such experiences of leadership according to Samuel are

Simply ways of caring. The community expressing their care about life, although they look different. What became more important was here is another human being, how can I extend the message of Christ. It became a way of saying I am Christ’s ambassador, a representative of Christ.

As the narratives suggests, spiritual African and Africentric leadership for social justice is a multi-dimensional task that involves aspects of administration, education and advocacy. Leaders engage in their assigned mandates but also undertake additional responsibilities
outside their positional tasks that are geared towards creating greater opportunities for others. In addition, the aspect of leading is seen to entail an emphasis upon educating through the curricula, workshops and other informal avenues that foster insight and competency. Aligned with the role of educating is that of advocacy. Change is very much seen as necessary and an inevitable component of a socially justice educational systems. Thereby, leaders choose to focus their efforts on school and society governance, raising awareness around systemic barriers and strategically entering into arenas to empower others and create greater access to resources to support daily living. What’s also important to the present study is gaining an understanding of the tensions and influences within the practice of leading. I explore this area in the next section.

**Perspectives on Tensions and Influences**

Literature concerning African and Africentric leadership speaks to the contextual, structural and relational factors which surround the practice of leading. As such, one of the research subquestions specifically asks: What issues influence the practice of leading? Through the findings I was interested in understanding the various factors which African and Africentric leaders believe frame their practice and the issues which participants believe are likely to capture the attention of the next generation of educational leaders. Discussions within this section are organized according to two emergent subthemes: tensions and influences. Narratives identify tensions as being the potency of racism and Eurocentrism within the culture of education and society and the risks associated with working within racialized and spiritually restrictive settings. Participants report influences as being family,
communal and collegial relationships and the adoption of a hopeful and optimistic perspective.

**Racism and Eurocentrism**

School and community educational leaders identify the saliency of racism and Eurocentrism as pervasive experiences within their educational contexts. Leaders are articulate in recounting numerous examples of how Eurocentric practices and institutionalized racism structure and effect differential outcomes for individuals of African descent. Narratives include specific references to disparities as actualized through hiring and retention policies, funding mechanism, program planning racially-biased disciplinary practices, incompetent teaching strategies and climates which breed racial slurs and undermining.

Narratives explicitly discuss Eurocentrism as an imposing element of education that creates tangible barriers, marginalize members’ interests and restricts their opportunities to be represented. Allister’s comments address the former

We have a kind of Eurocentric education system; it’s an imposition, this kind of thing. When we make suggestions they don’t seem to take it. They won’t listen to you. They want us to sit and listen, never directing. All white faces…this is the problem. Our voices don’t count. I said it to them. I’ve openly confronted them about that. Is there any minority sitting on the committee – NO, so how would you be able to understand my problems. They didn’t like it, I’m not afraid of them, they are just human beings. I want to talk to the structures. The structures are in place. There’s a lack of inclusiveness, it’s more important than anything.
Likewise, Neale’s narrative speaks to the Eurocentrism within her provincial educational system as inherent. Of this she states,

For a lot of Black indigenous Nova Scotians we are always taught someone else’s education and when we are taught our own we are only getting bits and pieces that is not our history, but someone else’s history and you end up learning and struggling along the way and finding out things that you should have known, that you should have learned and been taught. ...the system still doesn’t recognize African Nova Scotian history.

Further comments also confirm how Eurocentrism as expressed through values and the curriculum oppresses others who are from nondominant locations. For example, Neale declares that her educational system is

Oppressive…because it’s based on Eurocentric values and beliefs. So that doesn’t incorporate any other ethnicities, any other race, curriculum or learning styles. Children with disabilities, how much do they factor into the curriculum in the school system in general. It’s very much based on white middle class values. Even in communities that may not be all black but they are still, having that structure from that perspective. It just shows how prevalent it is in the school system.

The experiences of marginalization is further made evident by Jeff in stating that despite a growing trend towards culturally diversity within Canada, “Our textbooks don’t reflect that, our Schools Boards don’t reflect that our teaching courses don’t reflect that.’ One leader chooses to utilize a metaphor to convey the prevalence of hegemony.

I hate when people talk about the melting pot. I want to be considered part of the salad. When you go into a soup, you don’t know what’s there – when I’m in a salad, if I’m a tomato, I’m a tomato, lettuce, carrot. They all taste
different – I don’t want to be assimilated. They want people to forget their identity. God made us this way. People forgot that. Respecting the differences within our community, ourselves.

In addition to verbalizing the systemic oppression of Eurocentrism, leaders target specific institutionalized practices as producing and maintaining racism. Specifically, participants’ narratives expose hiring practices as avenues through which racism is differentially enacted and experienced. Jeff shares a personal account which unpacks how racism is manifested in this manner.

A job came up for director, and it’s ironic. A directorship position in property services and having 10-12 years dealing with the union. I dealt with the most difficult union in the province – the CUPE union and the person that got the job, he was the school services coordinator. He only came to the Board office 2 years before. The job for director came up and I was passed over. They changed the hiring policy 2 months before that job came up which allowed directors to sit on the hiring committee. I could have grieved it but it was a waste of my time. So I went for a job, since I didn’t get the director’s position I said I guess I would take the student services position....But in terms of leadership, and Black leadership they don’t know how to deal with it.

In the aforementioned, Jeff’s narrative reveals a pattern of systemic bias that nullifies established procedures. In the recording that follows, he further unveils how fears and prejudice combine to pose institutional barriers within the Africentric leadership experience.

It’s not easy. It’s very challenging. There’s a stigma because you are trying to unlock people’s minds, break down peoples, fears, fears and biases of the unknown. They’re coming to grips with their prejudices and their biases, their
prejudices and biases in their practices and I feel a lot of people are fearful of that.

Other participants also interrogate hiring practices as systemic perpetrators of racism. Allister explains

There are all kinds of barriers. They’ll say you are not qualified, my friends tell me – whites who have just left the same institution can get a job.

In conjunction with practices targeting staff hirings, narratives also suggest that policies around retention of staff also need to be reexamined as they create materialized inequities within their school sites.

There are the have and have nots among schools and districts....People go to certain schools with lowered expectations, [they] go there get a job and stay until I get my permanent and then I am off. There are no expectations and the kids pick up on that. Especially if they are living in a community where nothing is expected from the whole community and then they go to school and it’s the same thing, when do they ever feel empowered? Then they turn on the TV and then there is all that negativity.

Zina’s comments reflect not only the institutional disparity that occurs, but pinpoint disparaging teacher expectations and behaviours as invading the experience of leading and as ultimately having a negatively differential effect on students’ motivation. Further her comments, like Jonathan’s personal accounts below, paint a picture of how funding mechanisms in systems of education propels economically advantaged students into substantively different and more profitable educational experiences.
The system segregates the less advantaged from the more advantaged. Less advantaged in terms of economics, class because racism is there in its subtle sense. It’s carried down, from the whole colonial structure. But that racism has transcended into a class, socioeconomic division that really has torn the population apart. So you find that a small percentage of the students are privileged in terms of, they are, tracked into the better schools, better facilities, better teachers. Whereas a larger percentage are tracked into the government schools. Government schools meaning that it’s fully funded by the government.

From Jonathan’s experience, disparities exist and are experienced because funding mechanisms perpetuate classed hierarchies in school.

The other schools would be partially funded but a lot of private funds influence the type of resources that they are able to gather. Those would be the traditional secondary schools, traditional high schools that were started by private institutions such as churches, mostly churches. But, they are funded privately from a rich alumni background, funded from communities so that division really stands out there and even within the whole school system, even in a traditional high school that I was in you find that there is another division where you are tracked again. Where students who are brighter...what they call brighter, in terms of testing, standardized testing. There’s a lot of standardized testing that tracks students, so you tracked via standardized testing into streams and more than often, kids who are more economically advantaged get tracked into the streams that are quote unquote, more promising.

While emphasizing systemic mechanisms, leaders are also astute in recognizing that systems are constructed entities. Accordingly, their narratives identify senior management apathy and their tendency to micromanage as further institutionalizing racist practices
I find that most of our board members, our elected officials don’t know what their role is. It’s not a democracy in terms that they are interfering. The chain of command, the pyramid is that the School Board hires the Superintendent who hires the staff. The school board then sets policy that is their role, not to be interfering in the day-to-day operations of the hiring and firing of staff. You are a teacher you apply for a teacher’s license you apply for a job and you teach. What we find in our Board many times is that they become part and want to supersede their role and then if they get a call from an irate parent for example, they are calling me instead of going to the Superintendent and asking me if I can check it out.

Neale’s commentary speaks to the complicity of Board officials in sanctioning cultural hegemony.

Someone in the school board wide needs to recognize that it is very important to recognize and take into consideration who’s in the school in and what needs to be taught to the children or junior. high or high school across the board, do it in such a way that issues that pertain to different cultures, different ethnics, different races is taught so that everyone is learning about themselves and others at the same time. When it is done …so no one is feeling left out, because everyone is entitled to education, but everyone is not receiving the same education. And that also goes for the educator, too many educators really don’t have a clue what they are doing and don’t feel the need to learn more or learn different ways, instead they continue to stick to what has been done, which now doesn’t work for this generation.

One leader reports questioning his role within the reproduction and maintenance of systemic disparities.

That’s the thing, it is so embedded that you yourself take it as the norm, and without this [social justice] lens or this framework of looking at the situation I
wouldn’t know what to do. I know that something needs to be done, but you know you take a lot of things for granted. You get involved in the destructive process also. You know, because I have reflected on some of my practices and I am really, really not proud of. I have been an object of the system that perpetuates this oppression, and it’s really sad. How do we start this process of change?

Coupled with the former insight is the willingness to move forward towards change, in spite of the insurmountable odds.

There’s just so much attached to it that just looking back on it really pains, to see where we need to be. But, it’s going to take a while, it going to take some time to really change the structure. I was speaking to a colleague of mine and she was saying that you see it and you go and you do your talk, you feel like yes, a minute change and then you go back everything goes back around and you say what is the use.

Moreover, leaders’ reports also raise concerns around the proliferation of disparate practices which occupy their leadership and create differential outcomes for students. Narratives name streaming as a critical problem within their systems of education.

We have a two-tier educational system in Canada, like our health care system. Those that they don’t want to educate they throw into general. I think that education should be something that is all academic. Today I think the whole educational system has changed. When I was growing up I grew up in a segregated school and I think back and say thank God. The teachers that were there enjoyed what they did and wanted to be there....they taught you and told you that you can be whatever you want to be. No one ever said you are stupid, you go there, you can’t learn. But today kids are being told you have to be mainstreamed into general.
Not only are these practices occurring, but African and Africentric leaders report that they are being committed by individuals charged with helping to facilitate students’ success as Allister explains:

School counselors tell the Black students oh, you are not qualified for academic work. Yours are vocational courses and whatever. You are better off with the vocational courses, sports, why don’t you channel your interest in all of those things. It’s a way of marginalizing them; it’s a way of alienating them, dichotomizing the best for Whites. I am not afraid to speak out on those things... I’ve said it I don’t care whether they like me or don’t like me. Things are there – go to the school system and see. And if I’m wrong, I will apologize for it. But if I’m right.

Allister’s critique is of the system, the structures and the hidden process of schooling which materialize exclusion for Black students. A similar and more personal account by another leader details how oppression unfolds within educational sites and sets some students out for differential expectations and treatment.

I remember when I was at [school] and being in Grade 8 and being called down to the principal’s office and I’ll never forget he said to me, no, I was in Gr. 9 and I was preparing for courses and he said to me I think what is best for you is to quit school and go to vocational school and take a trade. That was his exact words. I was shy but I was bold and so I said to him at that point before I do that I would quit school. And I remember going to [an individual] and telling her what he said to me and she said don’t let anyone tell you what to do. You do and you be whatever you want to be. She’s another reason why I am where I am today because if it wasn’t for her in the school system after a while I would have believed it because after a while you are told something for so long that you start to believe it.
Participants report being the recipient of racial slurs, a reality which Allessandra reveals is not always dealt with appropriately. She recalls an incident which shapes her perception of her current educational climate. The episode begins as follows:

I know I was teaching in English class to adult high school [students] at Grade 10. But because that’s an adult high school, some of them were over like 16, 17, 18 and I remember... I do remember a book they are working on. But there’s a young white male from [community], someone in the book is doing an impersonation, dressing up for something so I say to the students is there anyone who used to dress up [as a child] or wanted to be. And I thought I know there is one that I always wanted to be but I want you to share first and I will share my one. And one little white male, I can even see what he looks like. It’s funny we recall feelings of anger. It’s just passion going into recall. And there is one little student said I bet you want to be Aunt Jemima. I did say you know what? You and I need to go out outside and talk now. And then the practice teacher, the teacher I was working with actually there in the classroom and she wasn’t sure how to deal with my situation. And you know what? I got this one. It’s ok because I wasn’t a 21-year-old student going into the education profession, in my 30’s at the moment, who has already worked professionally and knew how to deal with this situation. So I felt quite confident in dealing with it on my own.

Allessandra goes on to report that she requests that he not be suspended permanently from school but rather, be permitted to remain in the class because, “he just needed to be educated, he needed to be taught by me.” In addition to the above, participants report that their experiences include witnessing disparate practices around program planning.

Lots of students being put on IPP’s by teachers and parents knowing what an IPP is and what it meant for the education life of a child. Just so much it scared me. I was so scared...because we were in Nova Scotia and had a child
who may become part of the system and I knew that I had to get in the system or we had to move.

Other leaders like Allessandra and Allister respectively, highlight discipline as an avenue in which racism is manifested

When I was working... my eyes were opened to education and the Province’s educational system. I saw very few teachers of diversity.... I saw a lot more of male students of African descent being kicked out of the school, suspended very early, like it could be October, November and they are gone for a year.

Most of the time, just like our prison system, minorities and especially Blacks more specifically, Blacks are high especially in terms of numbers. Suspensions are mostly with the Black students.”

Similar concerns are raised by community leaders as mentioned below

I was going to be working with black youth and I saw the gap within the educational system.... There seems to be a lot of dissention, and suspension, children are expected to succeed but how can you succeed like the other students when you are not in the school system. This particular child was out of school more than she was in. I knew that before I took the contract. That was part of my motivation.

I look at what’s happening to our children, Black kids, Aboriginal and White children. Black and aboriginal are being sent to Waterville and the white kids are getting house arrest. It’s not fair. In our school system the kids are dying. Kids are coming out not being able to read. Why is that when there are teachers there? Why are 5 and 6 year olds being suspended from school? When I was in school parents could come in and talk with the children, now they don’t want that. Children are having to be responsible for their parents
and parents are not being responsible for their children. Education at all levels is the key.

While leaders problematize disciplinary processes, other findings reveal that teaching styles and an undifferentiated curriculum are key obstacles which create disengagement for students as spoken by Chantal:

[They] have such a structure that they have one way of learning. Children sit there and they have to listen. They can’t get up, they have to sit quietly and not say a word around a little table or big table with other students and not everyone learns that way. And that’s another factor of how it is a business because it is so structured. If it was invested then you would take different pedagogies for how you are going to teach people because we all don’t learn the same way. But if you have a vested interest you would take that and think let me implement other ways for children to learn besides the one way of sitting down and me teaching and then giving you a test and you giving me back what I just said to you. Giving you a spelling test, and you fail it, and you’re deemed that you are “slow” or you are deemed that you have a learning disability or deemed that you are this or that. When really if there are other ways of doing spelling bees besides telling children to go home and learn that. There has to be other ways of factoring that in for math and others subjects.

More personally she shares,

When I think of my own experiences in school it wasn’t that positive. I wasn’t the type of child who would learn the banking system style. I always struggled, but I always tried. But when I got out I was so happy to get out that I decided I wasn’t going back. .... – it’s very discouraging and if I didn’t have parents to push me in the school, I wanted to quit in Grade 6 and 7, like my student, not because I was a bad person or child or rebellious child but because I struggled with school. I was discouraged and that’s how these
children are they are just discouraged. If you’re not welcome in there then why stay there.

The former accounts paint images of a static, nonresponsive system of education that labels and fails students for failing to respond to uniformity. The resultant conditions reportedly erect hurdles for students who require “different pedagogies.” The theme of teaching styles is also directed towards postsecondary institutions. Narratives indict educational training programs as vehicles which are equally as guilty in reproducing fostering marginalization

When people are educated they need to be taught about the values and rights of people and basic human rights of people, diversity and the values of diversity. It has to be taught in university, your coming out to a black community you need to respect those values. That needs to be respected. They need to go out [and] be educated about that community, the history. They’re not being taught. Every bruise that you see is not about being abused. It’s about the education system need[ing] to be taught better. The teachers in training, people need to be going into the community; they are not getting the real complete picture. What is the diversity in the community?

and climates where leaders experience differential expectations as exemplified by Allessandra’s account:

This will be my fourth year teaching and it’s just amazing. And it’s a third year course and when I reflected on my professors coming into the classroom they didn’t really introduce themselves. They introduced their names and that was it. But being a person of African descent and a woman,...So I am always going and I always say to the students that I know I look young, but I actually have been teaching and then I given them my whole background and I feel that the reason why I have to do that background because I am an African Nova Scotian woman standing in front of them and they haven’t had a
professor who is African and teaching. So society has made me feel, I don’t know if it make you feel that way, but society has made me feel that I have to introduce all my potentials, and all my whole background to get them to understand why I have the right to be here.

Allessandra’s description exposes an awareness of disparagingly different conditions within higher education for individuals of African descent and how race and racism intermingle with the process of higher education to contest her presence as a postsecondary instructor.

According to many leaders, the disparities are magnified as a result of the dynamics which students, families and parents confront. Leaders speak to pressure they experience as a result of differentials in resources.

There is a lack of unity because of that it is very, very difficult for us to stand up. There are all kinds of barriers. The parents don’t have the resources, many may not be educated.

I saw lots of parents who don’t have the tools of knowing how to deal with the administrators or the school board or even read some of the materials that were coming home....or parents can’t understand the materials.

Furthermore, leaders speak to their experiences of trying to mount resistance under such circumstances.

Whenever there is a crisis we are right there. I think that we need to get in proactive mode and stop being in reaction mode. There has to be something in it for them. Why should I go into something if there is nothing in it for me? You can say that you’ll get knowledge and know how to deal with the system. That’s not enough, we need to let them know that our children are in danger and we need to catch them. We don’t want them to be a statistic.
Caplan’s statement reveals that without a conscious engagement, student within his community are at risk of failure and ultimately relinquishing their potential. In such instances, Caplan is convinced that leaders must work to dismantle these barriers by alerting community members of the impending danger.

We need to give them an example. Show them that a fast dollar is what it is, a fast dollar, it only lasts for a season. We need to also encourage our young people and our parents, about getting a career versus getting a job. Jobs come and go, careers lasts a lifetime. Plan for a career and not a job. There’s a quote, “the future belongs to those who prepare today,” If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” So many of us have plans, a lot of us don’t plan.

Caplan is also cognizant that leadership must also entail a focused attention on engaging youth as he astutely points out that students are internalizing this sense of failure and are now turning to more lucrative avenues to invest their talents. This cultural shift needs to be addressed from a comprehensive approach and other’s agree.

I’ve heard if from the voices. Sir, why do we need to? Where’s this going to put me? So why should I aspire to be like you? It’s sad to see the narrow scope of opportunities that we have created for our kids. Just a few and it’s sad and it’s frustrating. That whole system and that oppressive structure, I deem it as a very, very oppressive structure creates this evil and there’s just so much attached to it. Sometimes it comes down to pure dollars and sense at the moment. But then it becomes more expensive, you know, when half of your population or more than half of your population is below the standard that you want to promote and turn to a life of crime. You know you have students out on the road; you have school-aged students out on the road that are supposed to be in school.
Likewise racism is reported as being one of the major causes of drop-out as students realize the systemic inequities and question the value of continuing in the system that offers little hope.

That’s the problem with a lot of our black children today, they are told they are stupid – you can’t do math, you can’t do science and after a while it is something that you tend to believe....I think a lot of the time our students don’t excel because of those reasons. They are told something and they believe it.

Racism and Eurocentrism are tangible issues that leaders confront and are confronted with as individuals of African descent. Their sensibilities towards issues of race and marginalization compel them to view education as problematic and as systemically imposing differential experiences and dire consequences for individuals of African descent regardless of their status as students, professionals, parents or community members. In addition to identifying the former, participants’ accounts also raise awareness around the specific risks which invade their practice and I review these findings in the next segment.

**Risks**

Just as racism and Eurocentrism are salient experiences within African and Africentric leadership so too are the associated risks. School and community educational leaders repeatedly discuss the tensions they experience through notions of spiritual restrictions and racial assaults. Spiritual restrictions are understood to occur in climates which value mechanistic leadership styles, implement prohibitive mandates, and fail to provide educational spaces to nurture the diverse manifestations of spirituality. With respect to leadership, African and Africentric leaders comment that in general, educational climates fail to value spirituality. This understanding is magnified below.
As I said before, the system that this whole managerial, mechanistic system that we are thrown into, that are now emerging in the schools often times, break that, sets that spirituality aside and you are seeing it more and more. Even in, my school, a catholic school and even in a catholic school where everything should be to the great glory of God, towards brotherly love and mankind, we’re seeing a system that, that has put that aside. Opt for the more managerial practices.

Likewise, leaders’ comments suggests that discussions around spirituality are not welcome in educational contexts, as mentioned below

They don’t want to talk about spirituality, that there is something greater than we are. We have so many scholars who think they got it from themselves. They forget that there is something greater than ourselves. No one wants to talk about education and spirituality. You can’t survive in a world without some type of wholistic approach.

In fact, narratives suggest that trying to invoke aspects of spirituality within their leadership journey is a precarious undertaking influenced by a host of factors such as those noted by Allessandra, Zina and Neale respectively

It is very challenging to include my values and spirituality in education. You have to be careful.

Neale’s words illuminate the potential for harm as a present risk factor within her practice of leadership while Allessandra’s and Zina’s comments below signify that certain segments of spirituality are off limits.

I would say that it is a challenging time that’s because we are not able to express [spirituality] in front of teaching and Christianity is mentioned,
religion is mentioned and students are comfortable with religions because
there are so many...and so as soon as you bring God into anything they get
very uncomfortable in some cases., So I think it is sometimes difficult but not
impossible to do things.

You can talk about the spiritual, but you can’t talk about being a
Christian. You can mention God, but you can’t mention Jesus. You can talk
spiritual, everyone is talking about spiritual, spiritual side, but you can’t talk
about Jesus.

Educational policies as Neale explains are also held suspect:

Just have to be careful how you include it and how it is incorporated whether
it is in conversation because of the policies in the schools and what we can say
to the children in the school. You do everything, whatever you do, with the
realization that you are doing for yourself, but also that you do and support
whatever you are doing it in a way that it is never offensive. Sometimes even
the simplest things can make it difficult. Because I might do things that I don’t
think cause harm but it could be offensive to someone else although I don’t
see it.

While administrative and school culture also shape the degree of spiritual restrictions

It depends on the school and the principal to encourage schools to allow them
to talk about it. But you have to watch because you are also accountable to a
lot of different things so, so certain things that you are going to say I might
say a word about it, depending on the backgrounds. You have to be very
careful. You don’t have to pontificate the kind of things you are talking about.

Institutional policies as leaders explain, contrast distinctions between public schools and
higher educational settings
Universities provide space for people to express their faith – not public schools. Each country has its own culture, freedom to express faith – to take away Christian thought symbolizes a running away – not being ourselves. Maybe abolishing it is a nonissue. Children must be exposed to faith. They may include other faiths.

It’s kind of taboo and you can’t mention it, elaborate on it and you can’t even talk on it. Some professors will allow you to talk about it, but overall it’s something that they try to keep out of the [public] school from my experience.

Leaders also discuss spiritual prohibition as an obstacle to achieving more socially just schooling. Caplan for example exposes the spiritual absence within his institution and proposes that a Board appointed position be created for pastoral leadership. This move is a critical diversion from accepted practices and as Caplan remembers key to the program’s success. He remembers his supervisor asking “why do you need a minister?” and states that her initial reaction was “not to allow it”. Furthermore, he recounts thinking to himself, “do I really want my job.” an acknowledgement that he is treading on dangerous territory. Others attribute the absence of spirituality to a host of other problems experienced by students.

When they took the Lord’s Prayer out of the schools our children are suffering. They have nothing in the schools now. It is like walking into a prison. Nothing there to help them get through. I’m not saying you have to get up and run around with the bible. But they had a focus. If you’re a Christian, [then] the Lord’s Prayer. If you are not a Christian you should be allowed to recite the rites within your community.

Amongst the various reports of participants, the findings reveal that African and Africentric educational leaders experience risks associated with spiritual restrictions. Discussions of
spirituality are generally not encouraged and in addition, there are a host of other factors
which create spiritually prohibitive circumstances for leaders and influence how these leaders
live out their practice for social justice. Participants also duly mention that racist climates as
noted in the previous section place them at risk of experiencing racial assaults as they attempt
to lead more justly. Such assaults are perpetrated through overt means and more often
through verbalizations. Narratives convey the pain, hurt, anger and personal strain which
leaders undergo. Following are excerpts which speak to leaders’ experiences of racial risks.

So when you talk of democracy what are you talking about, when you talk of
social justice what are you talking about. When you talk about equity what are
you talking about because if you are in the school system, you feel the pain,
that’s what you are feeling. When you are outside they tell you that everything
is ok, but the assault.

Quite similarly, comments identify the emotional assault as being equivalent to physical
abuse as heard in the following:

We carry the pain, the anger, and the hurt from them, just like, ya, physical
abuse. So it’s a very hard, deep emotional abuse that racism involves. That’s a
horrible form of violence. It’s the worst type, the hidden type.

Additionally narratives also identify the personal strain that is endured in climates that are
psychologically violent.

I find trying to get their respect; I come to this Board with a great deal of
knowledge. More knowledge than the average person. But yet I’m still not
respected and it plays on me. I try not to, I try not to let it bother me, but it
does play on me. So the whole respect thing.
And professionally oppressive

Its draining, it’s draining when you work against systems that are oppressive. You are always on an uphill battle, but you have to go on a battle because I can’t contribute to the inequalities that are in society. It’s challenging, tiring, but I take my break, my vacation, and I get rejuvenated and I start all over again.

In addition, narratives also describe leadership as being fraught with threats of personal injury as Suzy reveals

I get called down all the time. People call my house saying that I need to go back to Africa, threatening calls. But I tell them that I did not come from Africa. I get threats all the time. But every time we get up and talk we are going to be threatened.

Suzy shares the above testimony with resignation in her voice. She is fully aware that the social justice work she engages in draws not only negative attention, but the potentiality for threats because she is challenging systems and attempting to change the status quo. While discussing the present tensions that exist within the scope of her leadership, Suzy situates love and forgiveness as key elements in moving forward. She recalls adopting this perspective following an opportune meeting with Nelson Mandela:

When Mandela was in jail and we were fighting for Mandela’s freedom, I learned that it is so much about love. When Mandela came here to Canada, he said to us that he wanted to thank us for being a part of his freedom. [He said,] But I want to tell you one thing – I don’t want you to hate South Africa, I want you to embrace them with love and pray for them because I have to go back there and try to make a difference and I can only do that with love and forgiveness. We said what are you talking about – how can you love someone
who put you in jail for over 30 years, and he said. He asked for God’s forgiveness. And I came out of that meeting with Mandela in Toronto and said oh my God if he can forgive those people for putting him in jail for over 30-some years, a life taken away, why am I walking around with all of these little upsets? I have to change my life.

As a result Suzy resolves to change.

I am not going to let these little things get in the way. Life is about how you live it - but we have to enjoy it and people. That’s what I try to do in my life. I try to talk to my family and share with the groups that I belong to. I know sometimes we get upset, because they are triggers, but I cool down and when I walk out of that room the meeting is over, I let it go. The meeting is over. I go to a meeting and just say – “it was an educational learning tool tonight”. Let me move on. Lord just give us the understanding for why we are here.

For spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders there are associated risks. Generally speaking, these risks are associated with either perceptions of their spiritual or racial identity. Regardless of the focus, narratives reveal that leaders are cognizant of such realities and are able to pragmatically discuss the impact as an injurious component of leading. While risks frame the experience of leading, so does the influence of interpersonal relationship. The next section explores leaders’ perceptions of others in their leadership journey.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

The findings indicate that African and Africentric educational leaders experience leadership as a relationally entwined undertaking. In various ways leaders collectively name influences of family, community and collegial relationships as critical determinants in their leadership journey. Leaders proudly pay tribute to the role of parents and family in
encouraging their educational efforts and shaping their understandings of leadership. More specifically, narratives suggest that families inspire a value for education, encourage perseverance, model leadership, and foster leadership values that emphasize communal orientations. Participants comment on how their involvement in community work lays the foundation for their current position and further make references to community support as a recurring theme. Participants report also being influenced by the concern of others outside their community. Participants furthermore identify their colleagues as being instrumental in their professional journey.

Family is a critical and supportive component of the African and Africentric educational leadership journey. Participants credit family for inspiring their initial interest in education, as exemplified

I grew up with my dad who was a farmer, but also worked in the trustee board and [was] a part of the truancy board. So all my life growing up as a kid, education was a priority for my parents, and it was important that we as children got our education. They always stressed the importance of education, but didn’t push it. They weren’t the ones to make decisions for their children or for their family but they stressed the importance of education.

and encouraging their perseverance during the more difficult times in their career journey

I remember in my third year, I was saying to myself that I can’t do this and I was ready to quit. I got a drive over to school with Aunt Diane and coming back I said that I was going to tell her that I was going to quit school. I remember getting in her car and she had this gift for me. And she said this is for you. So I opened it up and it was a plant and it said Reach for the stars, let your spirit roam free, with faith, courage unyielding, be all that you can be. And I just sat in the car and started crying and I was saying to myself how did
she know I was going to start crying. She was a really big influence. There were so many people who really influenced me. There were, other people who were a great support….I was totally amazed because every time [he] would see me he would say, “you’re going places, you’re doing it,” and conclusively states that “Everything that I’ve done in life is because of the support I got from my family and my community.” (Caplan, Participant)

Furthermore, participants relay instances whereby family members provide opportunities for leaders to acquire informal training and experience. Samuel recounts stories which situate the relevance of family in providing leadership opportunities during the early years.

Well, I am the last of five children; the other children are much older. So by the time I was 8 I was just with my mom on the farm. My mom being a business woman, she would always let me take care of the farm. – watch the workers. She would give me money to pay the workers, to see that they do the work on the farm and…she would ask me to go and buy stuff. I would go, but when I look back it was kind of scary, I was only 12.

Samuel’s tone during the interview suggests that he is somewhat surprised by the degree of trust and responsibility that was placed in his hands. Additionally, he appears quite astonished that in spite of his mother’s inability to decode and comprehend printed text, her care and influential governance was instrumental in “grooming” him to his present stature and position. Samuel’s considers himself to have been a successful student of maternal instruction, learning life lessons often “in the field” or in the presence of his mother and other women in the community. Narratives also comment on the role of family in modelling leadership practices as referred to in Suzy’s description.
All through my life ... because my dad was a trustee, I got to hear, I was always there with my ear. I just followed through in his footsteps, being a part of the school system, being a part of the school and I am still involved.

Participants report that family members are responsible for fostering community-oriented values that stress the importance of community development.

I remember my dad telling us when we were growing up as kids, not matter how well you go in school, where you go you have to always remember your roots and my roots are a farm girl and the values of giving back to the community….and whatever you learn you bring it back and share with your community so that they can all grow and learn from it.

Further, participants through their narratives comment on how familial life lessons taught them the value of reinvesting in the lives of others.

Those educational components they taught us about life.... I learned from my parents and my husband learned from his parents about giving back to the community and that was all through and at the dinner table. Discussions, kitchen talk with everyone around the table, and we shared everything, it was learning especially on the weekend. When anyone came to your house they didn’t come to your living room table. Everything was discussed around that table and you learned.

In addition to familial influences, participants indicate that they are able to lead as a result of the efforts of community members. Specifically, leaders honour the efforts of those who have gone before and acknowledge their role in stimulating their entrance into leadership as mentioned by Jeff and Neale respectively.
What motivates me is community. It’s hard at times, but that’s what motivates me. I want to see our students, go out there, our black students succeed. The fact that I’m not seeing them succeed and that’s what motivates me. They have opportunity and the fact that I achieved. I stood on someone’s shoulder and when I say that I think of people like, my father and other Black men in the community how hard they succeeded and I don’t want to let them down. I don’t want to let them down, that’s it, I don’t want to let them down. They stood before a lot more than I did. I don’t want to let them down. It’s a collective, I’m sure that they were planting that seed in my head when they were talking to me and I didn’t realize it at the time but I realize it now.

Some of the people who were role models helped me because I started to ask questions and then I realized that I was interested in going to university. That sparked my interest and so the following year I applied and got accepted at the university and went there. It was a struggle but I went.

Quite similarly, Neale remembers the kindness of others, two individuals in particular, who offered her words of encouragement during this time. She remembers and states, “They always had positive conversations… and…they always encouraged me to use the skills that I obtained, to work with them.” Narratives also identify youth as being the members who influenced leaders’ practices.

I felt that I didn’t start learning a lot until I got to college and felt like it was so unfair for students to be leaving school at 16 and 17 years old when they don’t even know themselves. That was one of the huge reasons why I went back into teaching to really help to pave that way.

While the support of community members is continually identified as being significant, leaders further report that their early leadership experiences were helpful in providing them with essential skills as noted by Zina:
What makes it easy is my background, my background in the church. People don’t realize when they are teaching, leading youth groups, teaching Sunday school, you have your president, your secretary and mini leaders you don’t realize that you are creating leaders. When I think of that they gave me my working skills and those organizational skills and speaking skills.

In addition to recognizing the influences of community, narratives underscore the significance of leaders’ colleagues in shaping their practice. Chantal as an example, remembers the encouragement of her supervisor as being a catalyst which prompts her to assume leadership roles within her field of practice. She explains,

I had an old supervisor that seen more in me than I seen in myself. They were encouraging me to go back to school. They were encouraging me to go back to university. I just thought I would just get my BSW, work in child welfare and I was happy. But once I got rolling into the program I started seeing other visions for myself and other ways that I could get involved and I didn’t have to be…nothing wrong with being a child welfare worker, but I didn’t want to have to do it. If I just got out that program and did that I did well. To me that was like a doctorate because I thought that if I could get through the school system, pass each course then I had a PHD from my experience in the past. Once I got through that I said that wasn’t too bad and I can’t see me stopping now, that’s what keeps me going on and just a note, I will be going on for my PhD.

The influences of supervisory staff is also spoken of by others like Allessandra in the following

I was working at the community centre with lots of use for after school [programming]. A supervisor came up to me and she said, you know there is a program in recreation administration. It’s a science degree.... So I apply…and
I remember distinctly sitting down with the administration of the school and saying to that I did not want to go to a typical profession and I said I want something different. So that’s why I was applying to your department and I got in.

Chantal also explains that her entry into the field of community-based educational leadership is unplanned and unexpected. She recalls being approached by the child’s social worker and asked to consider taking on this leadership position.

She said to me, I need a Black female that can advocate for the child but in the same sense encourage this young black girl to move forward in her education. Because this child has learned many techniques of manipulation, because she was being suspended many times, the worker thought that she needed someone with a strong personality, with love, but also firm to help her. Two siblings, one that was exhibiting extreme behavioural problems – fighting to one that was relaxed but going through peer pressures.

Chantal reports readily accepting this assignment and shares that her continued involvement with children and youth stems from a resolved passion, “that leadership comes from the passion – taking something and trying to move forward.”

Zina also credits her permanent introduction into education to the efforts of a former board administrator who “wanted to get African Nova Scotian teachers” in the Board. In addition, she recalls the following:

When I was at [school] people kept telling me that I should go into the pool, the mentorship program. The principal used to tell me, the caretaker used to tell me. I would say that’s not for me, that’s not for me, but then my second last year there a new principal came on and she asked me to be the head teacher. So, I took that on and I thought ok I can do this.
The narratives attest that relationship across family, community and professional contexts influence the journey of leadership. Leaders’ familial influences are life-giving and vibrant and provide an integral backdrop to their professional identity. Likewise, community is seen to provide the motivation and opportunities for leaders to obtain leadership training. Collegial support is seen as being the impetus for encouraging leaders to envision even greater success. In addition, the role of interpersonal relationships, the element of hope is spoken of as potently instrumental agent. Narratives as recorded, outline its relevance within the scope of African and Africentric leaders’ quest for social justice.

**Hope**

In conjunction with framing the issues of leadership, leaders identify that hope and optimism are influential aspects of their leadership experiences. More specifically, leaders are adamant that changes towards more socially just manifestations of education and schooling are possible and will occur. Narratives suggest that leaders view themselves as being integral components of the process and identify several avenues to accomplish transformative change. Participants’ comments view education as the decisive tool to recognize one’s agency, promote equity, expose staff and educators to more culturally authentic truths, link education to community and equip community members to engage in educational processes. In regards to being hopeful, narratives emanate with a committed resolve as found:

> You look at it and then you ask yourself is this a pipedream? And then you look at the alternatives, you look at the alternatives and you say…but the alternatives is to disregard our students. It’s purely two ways. It’s either strive for excellence and the only way to strive for excellence is through this
framework for me, or you ignore the cause and treat majority of individuals like, commodities, which we know cannot be acceptable. I think it goes back to what one of our professor’s states. Yes, the ideal is for us to have good health, right, and to have perfect health, but we know that it’s far reaching. However, we still do need to strive towards it, because the alternative is to die quickly.

Hope, as explained by Jonathan is not purely idealistic; rather, its simplicity may be found in boldly confronting systems of education that regard individuals as inanimate objects. Leaders are convinced as Zina states, that “a lot of things need to change,” with education and likewise are determined to implement those changes that are within reach.

I guess my being in school I can’t change what happens on the outside, I can try to improve that, but I can’t change neighbourhoods. I can’t change all of the negative influences outside of these walls, but I can change in the expectations, the attitudes, in the delivery in planning and preparation so that children get the best. Telling children that they are the best that they can do. That’s what needs to happen inside our building.

Participants’ personal experiences in education are also a potent reminder that as leaders, they have the potential to inspire change.

It wasn’t until later in life that my girlfriend talked to me about when she was in school and she was encouraging me that I could do school and that there are different styles of learning in university. When I got into university I started seeing the different styles and different ways that you can learn. That’s what motivated me because the way I was taught was not the way it should be....That’s how these children are, they are just discouraged.
Further, comments situate education as the route for fostering change and conceptualize education as a promising and empowering endeavour.

Education is empowering as it makes you more aware of your social structure structures and how they are formed. When you have that knowledge you can articulate why there are gaps in the system. You know why there are gaps and you can see them and how they are structures.... But we have to look at the structures that are in place and how we set children up to fail.

Participants’ concerns speak to adopting a critical approach to education that is equity-focused. The same is noted in the upcoming excerpts.

Well, we have to start from, personally, I think you have to start with educating the leaders, teachers, the people who have the official influence. You have to educate them first. You can’t educate the government; I don’t think you can educate the political players. I think we have to start mid stream to try to educate the people who the educating; so the teachers and administrators. We have to find a process of really, really teaching them how to teach critically. How to promote equity within the system? How to look beyond the system? How to see the oppressive nature coming down. We have to start there and then the strength of educators and the strength of these school leaders will gradually transcend into the population through the students that you put out and through the exemplary practices that you promote within the schools. That is a lot easier said than done. It is a lot cheaper to educate mechanistically on the outset. A lot cheaper to put standardized testing for accountability measures. It is cheaper in the short run to do it, to prepare our teachers like that also.
In a similar fashion, leaders like Jeff also construct schools as having the potential to be more just and suggest that the route towards a more reflective and accepting schooling lies in critically exposing staff members to the realities of others from an informed perspective.

We have to expose them more and more to stuff. To the fact that this is not a White Anglo Saxon world that we live in. So exposure and acceptance. I don’t want you to tolerate me; I want you to accept me. Don’t tolerate me, accept me. There’s a huge difference.

Leaders do not exempt higher education from the process of change; rather it is viewed as a vehicle to promote critical and authentic understandings of community, history and teacher competency. Hope also resides in the realization that education transcends the self and reaches beyond to empower other individuals within community. As such, a transformative education must be reciprocal in nature and supportive of community development.

Education is about “spiritual bonding, giving back the education we learned. Education is about giving, not just about learning. Learning how to give, share and show somebody how to become better. People look at education as sitting in a classroom, but education involves everything we do in our lives.

Chantal’s subsequent experiences with education are beneficial in equipping her with the knowledge to understand, name and confront dominating structures in schooling which position children to internalize failure and hopelessness. Her impressions represent powerfully contradictory images which speak to the tense realities of schooling. Hope may also be found in her concluding statement, “We have to find a way to build and bridge the gap in education,” as it reflects a determined resolve to believe change is not only necessary but possible.
Hopefulness is also expressed through Samuel’s account on educational systems as a vehicle for social transformation.

The purpose of education is to make life better. In the comments that students say they always ask how I can get the passion that you have. There is a larger piece, it is valuing life and seeing that they are important. I am giving them a bridge, it is not just academic. It is a pattern that you develop to enrich your life.

Hope within the former account lies in the belief that educational systems need not be marginalizing nor limiting. On the contrary, these African and Africentric leaders are influenced by the belief that education holds out possibilities for enriching and affirming the lives of students and community. Within the process of leading, African and Africentric educational leaders are also concerned with issues that will likely frame the experiences of the next generation of educational leaders. These concerns are presented below and provide future directions for those coming behind them.

**Future Directions**

In the present study, participants were asked to identify important directions for the next generation of educational leaders. In so doing, participants’ comments frame the experiences that will likely seize the attention of future leaders of African descent. Narratives point to specific issues that emphasize the need for professional and systemic engagement. Participants assert that it is imperative to maintain a spiritually empowering stance that engages students and parents and calls for a collaborative approach to education. Further, narratives advise that given the precarious climate in which spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders often find themselves in, there is a need to provide critical support to
colleagues entering the profession. In the same manner, participants reiterate the importance of adopting a life-long perspective on learning. Collectively, participants’ wisdom also underscores the significance of establishing, maintaining and improving the relational aspects of leadership.

**Professional Practice**

Leaders are cognizant of the struggle to undertake their leadership through a spiritual stance and of its relevance to the project of socially just schooling. As such, narrative encourage the next generation of African and Africentric leaders to assume a spiritually informed leadership approach with a fearless intentionality as noted.

I would encourage them to have a personal relationship with God. Let your spirit guide you. You don’t have to push the spirit on everyone else to be a spiritual leader, but don’t be afraid to be a spiritual leader in a public setting. It’s not easy but, it’s critical and be a true spiritual leader.

Moreover, participants’ comments compel leaders to undertake a tenacious determination to make a difference

Christians can play a big role when Christian leaders stand up and there is some sense of discrimination that happens with students who are different. Christian leaders need to remember that being different is a superficial boundary — simply remember that in life it is more important to help, and therefore seeing no colour.

Don’t allow them to take away your integrity by using your anger on you. Count to 10; don’t let them use your anger against you. Value who you are.
Likewise, reports declare that efforts must also be directed towards inviting the spiritual in ways that are more authentic and further stress the importance of understanding that spiritual leadership for social justice is not mechanistic, but is oriented towards changing the status quo.

I think it is important for leaders to know that we are not just producing widgets. It is not possible to take a production, managerial model and just impose it without the background of spirituality as a basis of our foundation. It is difficult, it’s not possible for us to move toward that communal process of leading and of educating our student. So it goes hand in hand...well it becomes the three components professional learning opportunities, universities etc. schools and community all must come together, under the foundation or the influence of your spiritual values.

Furthermore, leaders are ultimately advised to keep advocacy at the forefront of their work and

Look at things with a critical lens, look at things not as the gospel and when I say things I mean structures. Look at how they can make change, advocate for change because there is always going to need to be something that you can advocate for. As much as we would like to have a level playing field, I don’t think we are going to get there, at least not in my life. But for the next generation I would encourage them to advocate for injustice. And try to get that level playing field. Don’t give up.

This emphasis offers a caveat around the tendency to superimpose models of leading within this school community and challenges us to consider that leading and subsequently education, necessitates a communal engagement that affirms a spiritual foundation. As is suggested, leaders view the establishment of a tripartite relationship between the university,
schools and the greater community of parents and children as the next step towards a more equitable education. In addition, the above narratives call for leaders to recognize that leading for social justice requires a communal approach to education that engages the broader community and is attuned to their interests and concerns.

Then there’s the community, the parents, the visitors, the physical community and other stakeholders in the school, they’re not participating in what the school is doing, and the school is not looking at where kids are coming from, their lived experience and how it influences what they learn….So there’s that separation there. So…for the gap to be bridged, that triangle, of those three entities, the school system, the community and the professional institution must come together to formulate, to move formulate and move forward to formulate a more equitable environment.

Moreover, leaders highlight the strain existing between schools and community, and state the need to redefine notions of parent-community involvement beyond static configurations as described

Often times the relationship that is there with the parents and the community, you want to call in the parents for parent teacher conferences, to show the report cards or for fund raising adventures…and after that, that’s the extent of the entire interaction that you have between the three.

And towards a more meaningful pathway to authentic engagement.

We have to garner our support from our community. It has to be a closer interaction with the community, the professional institutions such as the professional accreditation programs, and the school system itself. I think right now what is happening is that everyone is in their own entity. There is not enough interaction within the three. You have the university over there, they
are set aside, create this model, this program on how to prepare teachers or how to educate teachers and you impose it …you impose it on teachers, you impose it on administrators and there’s this huge gap because there is not enough interaction, there’s this huge gap between what they have learned in university and the practical experiences in the schools.

People are like flowers – they need to be appreciated while they are in full bloom. There are many parents who need to be appreciated. Too many times we always involve the same people.

In focusing their attention on the interests of the broader school community participants direct spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders to centre youth and parents and assist them in recognizing that they have a purpose that must be envisioned and planned as Caplan explains.

We need to also encourage our young people and our parents, about getting a career versus to getting a job. Jobs come and go – a career lasts a lifetime. Plan for a career and not a job. There’s a quote, “the future belongs to those who prepare today.” If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.” So many of us have plans – a lot of us don’t plan.

Narratives also deal with specific issues affecting children and youth. In particular, leaders’ awareness of the racism and disparities present in education charge them to put forward recommendations around how to protect and empower those students under their care.

Every kid that goes there we need to teach the children that you are somebody. Everyone of you is a gift from God. I would tell my children everyday when they would leave when they were small, you have a problem let us take care of it and don’t forget you are loved, you are God’s children. You’ve got to remember that you are loved and that you are somebody.
Likewise narratives reiterate the relevance of teaching students about the richness of their cultural heritage and the hard battles that were won by leaders within their communities.

It’s important to know their past, because their community is almost gone. To know the struggle that our fathers, grandfathers had; the struggles that they had working, when they went to war, when they came back from war, the struggle they had just living. It’s important to know that it could happen to them if they don’t take care of business. The fact of the matter is that they have opportunity. They have more opportunity than what our parents had, than what we had. Seize the moment and they have to be serious with their education.

Participants believe that is also important to for children to develop cultural competence and charge leaders to instil in children and youth the importance of having “respect for all people for everyone, regardless of race, creed, ethnicity culture” and that they work to ensure that the curriculum make space for students to learn about others. Participants also see the need for students to develop self-discipline and the fortitude to accomplish their academic goals. Failure, according to leaders like Jeff is not an option.

They have to work through that, if the science and the math become difficult they have to work through that. They have to be able to, a little bit of hard work is not going to kill them. I wonder how our parents did it, worked all day, raised kids, went to school at night. Amazing. Still, they had time to organize to meet with certain people and that sort of thing. Organize the Black United Front, organize the Black Cultural Centre and do those things.

**Systemic Engagement**

Participants are judicious in addressing the systemic issues which influence leaders’ practices. There is a call for a reexamination of procedures around hiring and retention with
one leader specifically chronicling how inequities are perpetrated through succession programs. Allessandra explains,

We need to push for a Black administrator within the school system. And there have been people who have like probably much experience [in the vice principal role] but often there is no principal advice, no support from the principal their guide. I say it is okay to put them in the pool but are you going to support and guide them. Like just given them no support and you wonder why they want to go back to the classroom. And oh yes, [they say], I guess that Black person can’t handle the administration. What else do you need to do to make sure they are successful? Some of the older teachers who are represented just want the opportunity but they are being told no you are not ready. So it is interesting to see how decisions are made.

In conjunction with stressing the relevance of strategic collegial supports, reports accentuate the critical role of leaders in creating spaces for minoritized members to enter and succeed within the school system.

That’s a very important question, a very nice question because if teachers in the schools work together, they are going to help minority students to get into the school system. Opening the doors to new teachers. This on the paper sounds so laudable, so wonderful. But if they are going to deal in the spirit of equity in the school system and we can therefore learn or envision better things happening in the school system.

Quite similarly, narratives interrogate the absence of spirituality within educational programming and stress that an approach inclusive of spirituality has the potential to evoke substantive change.
You have to reformulate our educational system especially with the kinds of programs, incorporating aspects of spirituality…It’s included in some, if we are talking about character education its different from spirituality. Character education in the sense of values and all of those things. Spirituality is a different thing altogether. But then the blend of the two can bring it farther.

Equally as significant is the inclusion of indigenous knowledges and cultural texts within educational curricula as one leader declares:

We have to put in place, the historic documents, the documents are there and we have to learn from them.

Finally, participants stress the imperative of leaders acquiring and invoking cultural knowledge as a means of educating themselves so that they are in a position to empower others.

It is important to learning everything that you can learn, everything that they can learn about themselves so that they can apply it themselves and be able to tell others about themselves and be proud of who came before them and whose going coming after them so that the heritage continues to be rich.

Summary

As a means of situating spiritual African and Africentric leaders’ work toward democracy and social justice, the interview structure asked participants to comment on their leadership experiences. In various ways, participants provide insight into their experiences by describing the educational terrains in which they perform their work and the meanings they place on educational occurrences and endeavours. Narratives chronicle leaders’ work as entailing administrative, educational, and advocacy components. With respect to the impact
of spirituality, participants characterize its influence as an inspirational, empowering and mediating catalyst within their professional practice. Furthermore, participants’ comments point to the existence of racism, Eurocentrism and historical patterns of disparities and barriers across their personal and professional domains. The tangibility of harm is a realistic possibility within leaders’ experiences. More specifically, participants indicate that leadership unfolds within the parameters of risk most notably racism and spiritual restrictions that poses serious threats to themselves and their efforts to leader more justly. Despite the former, participants collectively shape leadership as a socially-inspired endeavour that is encouraged and supported by the efforts of others. The majority of participants recall the influences of relatives, neighbours and colleagues as critically proactive influences within their leadership experience. Recollections further document that the African and Africentric leadership journey is marked by an intentional optimism in the promise of education, the possibility of programs and the agency of leaders to effect transformative change.
Chapter Seven
Discussion, Implications & Recommendations

Introduction

This thesis originates from a desire to provide insight into the practice of spiritual African and Africentric educational for social justice. More definitively, it focuses attention on how these leaders undertake the mantle of leadership and the conditions which surround leading. The inquiry is also designed to explore the role of spirituality on leaders’ practices for social justice. The initial conceptual framework, as outlined in Chapter One, is highly influential in organizing the focus of this research study. In particular, the framework outlines concepts which contribute to my understanding of African and Africentric spiritualities, their approaches to educational leadership and constructions of social justice. The study informed conceptual framework as captured in Figure 2 builds upon this groundwork and provides a more reflective, and exhaustive conceptual framework from which to gain insight into the understandings, experiences and spiritual influences of spiritual African and Africentric leaders. Using participants’ narratives, I have been able to tease out that the practice of spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership for social justice is informed by four interrelated concepts: endarkened and positioned tensions and influences, divinely-inspired and complex understandings of spirituality, diverse conceptions of social justice, and multidimensional notions of leadership.
As indicated in Figure 2, and in contrast to the initial framework, I am able to specifically confirm that racialized experiences in schools and society influence participants’ leadership practices and outline the some of the specific ways in which this occurs. These findings are in sync with literature on integrative antiracism, Black feminist thought, African and Africentric educational leadership and reveal that leaders’ identities as known and assumed are constructed within a racialized dynamic of intentional and prescribed descriptors. Cumulatively, these identifiers contour leaders’ experiences and provide a backdrop upon which to anchor their understandings of education, leading and social justice. Further, narratives reveal that leaders practice through risks that are associated with their spiritual and racialized identities. Specifically, participants undertake the mantle of
leadership for social justice through tense, contested and contestable experiences and speak to the impact of these tensions within their lives. Participants report the saliency of racism and Eurocentrism within the scope of educational leadership and society. Moreover, narratives also illuminate that precariousness associated with being a spiritual leader within climates that prohibit the invoking of spirituality or expressions which challenge more commonly acceptable practices. Of further interest is the finding that spiritual African and Africentric leadership for social justice is foremost grounded in pre-leadership experiences. Participants repeatedly draw upon earlier occurrences in schooling to contextualize challenges and thereby illuminate the significance of acknowledging history in attempting to make sense of and assist in the resolution of ensuing problems. This act of looking back takes up personal, communal, institutional and regional peculiarities and bears resemblance to Dantley’s (2003) notion of profound pessimism in that leaders collectively recognize the relevance of historicity, the privilege inherent within institutional structures and the role of generational oppression in interpreting notions of social justice. The recognition of past events also lies in concert with other theorists, including C. Stewart (1997) and Cone (2004) who assert that the life experiences of people of African descent are patented with historical and encultured sensitivities. In spite of the former, leaders remain hopeful in the possibility of educational change, the importance of corrective actions and the centrality of their role in the process.

Leaders practice spiritual African and Africentric leadership from complex and distinct spiritualized understandings and encounters. However, unlike what was previously assumed in the initial conceptual framework, participants situate leadership within complex expressions of spirituality including Black theology, African, African American, humanistic
and transcendental expressions. In this manner, the study shows that spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders embrace an interconnected tapestry of conventional and unorthodox belief systems that are deeply rooted within a divinely inspired, invoked and empowered worldview. At the same time, narratives point to a need to distinguish spirituality from mainstream religion and collectively outline some of the contradictions within leaders’ spiritual communities.

The study further demonstrates that spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders conceptualize leadership practice from multiple theoretical standpoints including functional, transformational and critical. More precisely, functional impressions offer descriptions of leadership as encompassing administrative and positional tasks. Transformational conceptions outline qualities which participants believe to be necessary to undertaking the project of leading and include the ability to facilitate consensus building, change and effectiveness. Critical understandings are also linked to change but draw correlations to transformative, critical spirituality and Black feminists theories. From this perspective the findings show a relationship between leaders’ beliefs about schooling and society directly influence their leadership behaviours and that they believe intentional and strategic projects are necessary to transform educational and societal spaces. In sync with critically spiritual conceptions of leadership, spiritual African and Africentric leaders undertake leadership to fulfill a spiritual purpose, and advance individual and communal empowerment. Cumulatively, across the various theoretical conceptualizations of educational leadership, all spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders regard educational leadership as a purposeful endeavour that is oriented towards and capable of provoking transformative change.
In regards to understandings and practices of justice, participants’ viewpoints intersect with various paradigms including reformists, deliberative, transformative, antioppressive, libratory and critically spiritual. Perceptions regard justice as concerning movements towards substantive and effectual progress for individuals and community. There is a general concern with the procedural aspects of schooling and the awareness that injustice is systemically inherent within current governing, educational and societal institutions. Participants astutely draw attention to the saliency of power, the redistribution of material and human resources, the restructuring of curriculum, and the visible inclusion of marginalized voices as necessary deliverables of a socially just and democratic educational system. Several spiritual African and Africentric leaders name ownership and the ability to control educational processes as fundamentally crucial steps towards substantive change. The patterns of practices associated with leaders’ work reiterate the imperative of linking one’s beliefs with meaningful action by suggesting that it is not enough to value critical justice, one must incorporate practices that advance its project.

This chapter synthesizes the research findings to first present insight into leaders’ understanding of educational leadership and their associated experiences. In the final section I discuss how leaders conceptualize the role of spirituality and speak to its impact in crafting and fuelling their perspective on justice.

**Spiritual African and Africentric Educational Leadership Practice**

**Endarkened and Positioned**

A central theme woven throughout the participants’ accounts is an understanding of leadership as an endarkened and positioned enterprise. Consistent with Dillard’s (2000)
endarkened conceptualization, the findings of the present study demonstrate that leaders for social justice undertake their roles and responsibilities within a culturally constructed terrain of experience. Participants’ narratives speak to an awareness of self as positioned members of education and society. Themes demonstrate a predominance on leaders’ part to define their ethnocultural identity through indigenous conceptions of race that entwine with other positional markers such as gender, familial and economic stratification. With respect to the former, participants resist adopting the officially sanctioned terminology of “visible minority”, as a self-descriptor. In contrast, leaders are deliberate in signifying their identities using racialized descriptors which are seemingly more familiar and authentic. For instance, participants self-describe using the terms African, African Descent, Canadian, Nova Scotian. Other participants identify with the term Black while a minority chooses to utilize a provincial, national or engendered affiliation within their description. Leaders’ professional identities are also endarkened by the deliberateness of their self-descriptors. It is these exact positionings, that is, knowing themselves as Black, African or peoples of African descent that becomes the canvas upon which they paint their portraits of leading. In addition to experiencing the dynamics of racialized identities, the findings further reveal that leaders’ identities are relationally significant. Comments offered provide significant qualifiers which help to erase the façade of simplicity by complicating essentialized images of self with wholesome descriptions of relatedness as student, parent, sibling, friend and offspring. For instance, participants utilize national, geographical and/or positional markers as reference points and express a critical awareness that their self-definitions are complex and expansive.

The act of deliberate positioning by race and other descriptors by all participants is particularly salient in that it problematizes notions that popularized discourses sufficiently
demarcate “black bodies”, and in particular these spiritual leaders of African descent. In the same manner, intentionality interrogates “visible minority” as officially representative and exposes it as an external status that is neither self-employed nor descriptively engaged by participants to describe their identities as educational leaders. In essence, the rich and intentional positioning as suggested by Synnott and Howes (1996), demarcates such operationalized rhetoric as being “outside” the boundaries of authenticity and away from the known conceptions of spiritualized educational leaders. Therefore, while the term “visible minority” may subscribe a particular identity within the cultural fabric of Canada, it fails to be incorporated within the spiritual African and Africentric worldviews of these educational leaders. Secondly, intentional positioning further highlights that leaders of African descent are interested in and actively involved in self-defining. Descriptions render leaders as agents and in doing so, affirm the declarations of scholars who note that indigenous peoples continue to be purposefully engaged in resisting altered images of self and community (Dei, 2012; Fernandes, 2002; Restoule, 2000; Wane, 2008).

In as much as leaders choose to define themselves according to aspects which are relevant to their cultural location, their narratives also reveal that spiritual African and Africentric leadership practices are endarkened by racism and Eurocentrism. Accordingly, participants are engaged in a strategic battle of repositioning and acts of resistance whereby the struggle to retain their indigeneity against the backdrop of misconceptions, stereotypes, discrimination and segregation (Dei, 2012; Wane, 2008). In addition, all participants make repeated references to “witnessing” the realities of racism and racially particularized experiences preceding and during their leadership. Narratives collectively identify that society and education are racializing spaces that create malevolent barriers for Black,
disenfranchised and economically vulnerable populations. Pivotal references also astutely detail how governance patterns taint appointments, funding mechanisms and decision-making to generate further ambiguity for marginalized members within the school community. Within the scope of leading, participants target the influence of financial inequities, climates of high-stakes testing and standardization as contributing factors which confront the materialization of justice. These results provide further evidence that leadership is enacted against minoritizing experiences the foster negatively differential experiences, rites of access and outcomes within schooling and the broader society. Ultimately, the present findings confirm the assertions of critical theorists in revealing that perceptions of race and social currency are determinants of one’s level of engagement and the degree to which educational inclusion is experienced (BLAC, 1994; Brown, 2004; Dei, 2012; Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

As is suggested by indigenous scholars, (Cone, 2004; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b; Mazama, 2002; C. Stewart, 1997, 1999) spiritual leadership is undergirded by a uniquely recognizable and encultured identity that while influenced by the sociopolitical atmosphere is not constrained within its parameters. In the words of Dantley (2003b), these leaders exhibit a blending of “race identifying” and “race transcending” behaviours. Equally as important to note is that while spiritual African and Africentric leadership exists within a social-political consciousness, it emerges from a cultural legacy of selfhood as known and understood. Therefore, it is highly understandable that participants view themselves from various endarkened and positioned locations that are intertwined with relationally fluid understandings of selfhood. As a result of the critical awareness which spiritual African and Africentric leaders possess of schooling and in many cases, societal systems, leadership for
social justice appears to be an endarkened experience that unfolds through diverse ethnocultural understandings and locations. Narratives further depict how leaders deliberately positioning themselves against established practices, and intentionally in enter into contentious spaces to reclaim the sacred within education in ways that are known and meaningful. Practices speak to the expediency of resistance, the futility of acquiescence and the presence of hope as a means of fostering change within their respective systems of education. Results demonstrate that spiritual African and Africentric leaders possess an inescapable opportunistic perspective in that while leaders speak of their experiences as being negatively differential, participants concurrently possess a collective sense of agency and hope.

**Divinely Inspired and Spiritually Complex**

Consistent with theorists asserting the centrality of the divine (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Cone, 2004, Este & Thomas Bernard, 2006; Newlin et al., 2002; C. Stewart, 1997) participants repeatedly identify the supremacy of a divine being that they variably referred to as “God”, “a higher power”, “Lord” or “Christ. In doing so, participants affirm the divine as the author or source of their spirituality and thereby support literature noting the significance of a sovereign being within the lives of African peoples (Asante & Nwadiora, 2007; Cone 2004; C. Stewart, 1999). In addition to the former, the findings demonstrate that participants view the divine as a relational and known participant within the realm of humanity. This speaks to a relational perspective that also lies in concert transcendental descriptions. Mattis (2000) explains:

A direct, personal relationship inspires faith and trust, and reinforces beliefs in ways that abstract and indirect encounters with the divine do not.
Furthermore, the personal nature of the relationship allows God or a Higher Power to confront, challenge, and effect change in the lives of individuals. In short, it is the personal and intimate nature of the relationship that imbues spirituality with its power to transform. (p. 116)

The expressed connection between divinity and humanity is further supportive of additional spiritual paradigms including a religious spiritual orientation such as that implied by Willard (1999), Hill and Hall (2002), and Simpson, Newman, and Fuqua (2008) who note that friendship with the divine is not only possible but desirable and reported. This perspective is likewise consistent with transcendent orientations as Hill and Pargament (2003) note that, “To know God is, according to many traditions, the central function of religion. Systems of religious belief, practice, and relationships are designed to help bring people closer to the transcendent, however that transcendence may be defined” (p. 67). A relational understanding is also indicative of a Christ-centred orientation as Hill and Hall (2002) note that Judeo-Christian spiritual perspectives view the divine as “a God who allows its self to be known only to the extent that people are willing to engage it through personal relationship” (p. 365).

In addition to centering their spirituality within a relational dynamic, spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership practices are anchored by beliefs which view the divine as just and being interested in justice. Statement offered by participants such as “God wants equality and justice for all” and “God didn’t make [individuals] poor”, “God is a just God” and “If God is for us, who is against us” provide evidence of the former and reference a leadership paradigm that is attuned to and engaged within the sociopolitical realities of marginalized peoples. The preeminence of a God is who enters humanity with demonstrations of justice lies in concert with Cone’s (2004) Black theological worldview in
asserting that the divine is both concerned and involved with the oppressed. Cone (2004) writes:

The doctrine of God in black theology must be of the God who is participating in the liberation of the oppressed of the land....Because God has been revealed in the history of the oppressed Israel and decisively in the Oppressed One, Jesus Christ, [and that] it is impossible to say anything about God without seeing him as being involved in the contemporary liberation of all oppressed peoples. (p. 61)

A justice-oriented divinity also connects with liberatory notions like McAfee Brown’s (1993) who contends that “God embody[ies] very good news to the poor and oppressed – a God who takes sides with the, who identifies with them in the midst of their poverty and oppression” (p. 31).

Spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership practices emerge within complex understandings of spirituality. More specifically, participants’ accounts reference religious influences while concurrently situating spiritual African and Africentric leadership within a spiritual worldview that is reportedly unorthodox. As such, leadership practices are largely juxtaposed between an institutionalized faith-based grounding and an expressed unconventional dynamic that takes up and enters into the process of schooling in uniquely diverse ways. The results of the study lie in concert with scholarship by Dantley (2005a) and C. Stewart (1999) who collectively declare that while African and Africentric spiritualities may be housed within traditional spiritual paradigms, they simultaneously transcend organized religious boundaries to encompass creatively broad connotations. In regards to conventionality, narratives centralize Christianity, a finding which is consistent with African American, Black theological and critically spiritual perspectives. Cone (2004) interprets this affiliation as highly explicable as, “Christian theology understands God’s liberating activity
in the world [and] God’s activity [on] behalf of the oppressed” (p. 3). In this regard, Christianity is therefore not only appealing but is seen to be consistent with diasporic African and Africentric perspectives which pronounce the Black experience as contested and oppressive. Likewise, participants collectively acknowledge the significance of the church and the multifunctional role it plays in organizing, educating and mentoring leaders. This connection is supportive of Este and Thomas Bernard’s (2006) and Cone’s (2004) assertion that the church for people of African descent represents an interconnected and foundational catalyst within Black culture and the Black community. Support is also found for C. Stewart’s (1999) and Thomas Jones’s (2001) contention that church continues to be a resourceful institution and nurturing space for leadership development, a finding which according to Smith and Harris’s (2005) scholarship is understandable:

After all, black churches embodied ready-made leadership structure, networks for communicating information about political activities, a membership with transferable organizing skills, a physical space to assemble and discuss issues of the day, and a self generated financial capacity that could generate funds for protest. (p. x)

Unorthodox expressions of spirituality pervade leaders’ reports with participants emphatically choosing to distinguish their spirituality from traditional religious frameworks. Descriptions of spirituality entwined by such statements as “I am not talking about religion”, “it’s not about my religion,” “there’s a big difference between religion and spirituality” deny adherence to religious tenets or doctrines and place spirituality within an indigenous transcendental framing. The apparent distancing from formalized religion according to many indigenous scholars is understandable and in keeping with efforts to retain and affirm one’s identity and cultural knowledge. It also confirms the scholarship of Mbiti (1970) who argues
that people of African descent need not be religiously bound to be spiritual and Wane (2008) whose research notes that spirituality for African people’s is located beyond the confines of formality and “rooted” deeply in spaces of history and community. A rich description of the former is found in Samuel’s description of his spirituality within and against the backdrop of religion. While his portrayal of spiritual leadership is characterized by a divinely Christian framework he is explicit in mentioning that his spirituality is not about “recalling a law”, as it is enacted in “strange places” such as restrooms, educational institutions and at home. The location of Samuel’s spirituality speaks to elements of African spirituality as there is an awareness that spirituality exists beyond formalized boundaries and occurs in the naturalness of the self and the outer surroundings. Another exemplar is offered by Allessandra in revealing that her spiritual center is intergenerational and transcendent. The desire to honour the efforts of her fore parents through the practice of a libation ceremony recognizes the continued presence of her family members in daily life and signifies a willingness to acknowledge their ongoing influence. Allessandra’s willingness to include the ancestral spirited realm within her spirituality and against a community that denies ancestral homage is a bold step and a marker of her commitment to retain her indigeneity.

Spiritual African and Africentric leadership practice is grounded within a divinely inspired, conventionally informed and unorthodoxly expressed spiritual worldview. A further analysis also reveals that leaders’ practices are also informed by spiritual understandings that are geared toward individual and communal development. The next section explores this finding.
Focus on Individual, Communal and Systemic Transformation

The praxis of spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership for justice is collectively understood to unfold as an agency-oriented, tangible and often invisibled practice. Leaders’ perceptions are contoured by the realities of education and their willingness to actively undertake reformative projects within and beyond the boundaries of their assignments. In essence, participant’s meanings situate justice as facilitating change and supporting the interests of disenfranchised members to enter into and take up residence within schooling and society. In the words of Palmer (1983), participants’ leadership reflects an educative openness, or the willingness to remove barriers that prevent individuals from authentically knowing and speaking for themselves. Moreover, leaders’ efforts are also indicative of Dantley’s (2003) deep-seated moralism as there is a critical awareness of the ways in which disparities in schools position staff members, students and families in marginalizing locations. This engagement according to Ochs (1997) “implies an awareness that spirituality is not merely a way of knowing, but also a way of being and doing” (p. 10).

The tangibility of spiritual African and Africentric leadership practice is evident through leaders’ willingness to adopt a critically informed understanding of education, attend to the sociopolitical dynamics of justice and strategically engage in the game of schooling in spite of the risks which pervade their contexts. Further, practices are concretely understood to involve such communal tasks as providing in-school supports, delivering school-based cultural heritage presentations, developing and serving on community educational boards, promoting parent education sessions and providing a platform for youth to voice their interests and concerns. In conjunction with projects focused on students and families, leadership practices are also geared towards changing the systemic structures in school as
noted through participants’ involvement in advising board level staff on proper protocol, addressing accreditation bodies, developing culturally relevant programming, and facilitating in-servicing for staff members in an effort to challenge student and familial. While participants narratives reveal a predominant concern with critical issues of access, representation, freedom, rights and ownership, as transformative endeavours, spiritual African and Africentric leadership practice is linked to conceptions of equity, equality and fairness and away from discourses centring the urgency of high-stakes testing and unilateral accountability. Practices connect justice to more substantive issues such as facilitating access to basic resources, services and supports, cultural competencies, proportionate staffing, meaningful representation, audibility and visibility and the dismantling of discriminatory patterns and school processes. This aim is particularly significant as Ryan (2006) exposes that,

Not everyone does well in our educational institutions and not everyone is equally advantaged in our communities. This inequality does not happen randomly or by happenstance; rather, it displays distinct patterns...around markers of distinction consistently associated with ethnicity, race, social class, sexual orientation, mental and physical ability, language and so on. (p. 4)

Cumulatively, these endeavours are indicative of Dantley’s (2003a) critically spiritual leadership paradigm in that efforts reflect “inescapable opportunism, or a strategic determination to foster pragmatic changes by becoming involved with the tensions of education (p. 11). In effect, the practice of spiritual African and Africentric leadership for social justice reflects an expansive gaze towards facilitating authentic residency within educational and communal spaces. Participants involved in the research study formulate
spiritual African and Africentric leadership for social justice as a comprehensive endeavour that is interwoven with the dynamics of individual, communal and societal transformation.

**Multidimensional Notions of Leadership**

Spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership for justice necessitates the functionality of administrative undertakings. Participants allude to administrative and managerial responsibilities and pressures within the course of leading and chronicle involvement in such tasks as teaching, tutoring, advising and overseeing. Likewise, participants usage of transformational conceptions of leadership and narratives which speak of wanting to “introduce”, “inspire”, “delegate”, and “influence” others are offered in conjunction with examples of leadership practices which undertaken for transformative purposes.

Themes arising from the study also frame spiritual African and Africentric leadership practice as a relationally influenced phenomenon with participants describing their leadership using familial, pangenerational or communal linkages. More precisely, comments suggest that leaders work within a translocated duality of past and present relational linkages. These linkages are woven throughout the seams of leaders’ personal and professional lives and interconnect to form a web of inspiration and hope. This finding is in keeping with literature surrounding African and Africentric spiritualities and also supports Robertson’s (1990) contention that one’s spirituality is an extension of one’s prior spiritual experiences and community. There are numerous examples which illuminate the significance of relational linkages. Evidence may be found in Caplan’s narrative, for instance, where he gently references the ways in which his family and community are foundational to his sense of self,
success and accomplishment. Likewise, spirited accounts offered by Allessandra and Suzy collectively speak to the critical role of ancestral and familial legacies within leadership and the importance of honouring one’s heritage through practices that reinforce and celebrate their sacrifices. Such actions are deeply embedded within African and Africentric spiritual worldviews and are consistent with understandings which reiterate a “densely-populated” cosmos. Asante and Nwadiora (2007) explain the emphasis on ancestral linkages by the following: “It is the ancestors who must be feared, who must be appeased, to whom appeals must be directed; they are the one who must be invoked and revered, because they are the agents of transformation” (p. 3). In Allessandra’s case, her narratives reveal that she also purposefully seeks out opportunities to remain a part of community so as not to be identified with outsiders. Through deeply personal accounts involving family, friends, colleagues mentors and students, participants help me to understand their leadership identities are strongly influenced by the fortitude and wisdom of those individuals who have gone before him. Collectively, participants use language which describes their leadership as the resultant outcome of others’ investment or the fulfillment of a calling. As such, meanings craft leadership beyond the individual to reflect a deepening sense of purpose that one’s leadership is a crucial intervening factor in the quest for change. Taken together, these stories invoke images spanning generational, geographical and genetic boundaries. As such leadership practice as reflected through participants’ accounts is not an isolated entity, but rather fashioned through multiple encounters with others whose influences stretch beyond the boundaries of blood lines.

While spiritual African and Africentric leadership is principally fashioned through relational influences, the findings also show that leadership practice is undertaken as a
relationally influential endeavor. The concept of relationally influential emerges from narratives which depict how leaders enter into life and schooling to engage with the reality of others. In particular, from a relationally influential stance, leadership practices are oriented towards developing, nurturing and repairing relationships with others. Leaders consistently describe their efforts to create opportunities for children, families and even communities to position themselves differently. The meanings associated with leaders’ work are in sync with critically inclusive understandings of leadership which call for educational leaders to build and establish relationships with communities and their organizations (Ryan, 2003; Shields, 2003), formulate empowerment opportunities whereby community members are positioned to contribute to decision-making (Ryan, 2003) and question staffing, curriculum and organizational structures as potentially presenting barriers (Dei, James et al.; Delpit, 1995; Shields, 2004a). Spiritual African and Africentric leadership as a relationally influenced and influential phenomenon contrasts notions of leadership as purely functional and charismatic endeavour and situates it within an indigenous framing that is communal and inter-reliant. Participants’ perspectives affirm the scholarship of theorists documenting the interdependent and relational aspect of African and Africentric leadership (Cone, 2004; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b; C. Stewart, 1997, 1999) and other scholars who position leadership as communally inclusive and relational endeavour (Dantley, 2003a, 2003b; Ryan, 2006; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002).

**The Impact of Spirituality on African and Africentric Leadership for Social Justice**

*To Know God is to do Justice*

(McAfee Brown, 1993, p. 66)
This research study is geared toward understanding how spirituality impacts spiritual African and Africentric leaders’ practices for social justice. In the section that follows I explore the arising themes to discuss the relationship between spirituality and leadership practices. I review how African and Africentric leadership for social justice is informed by the spiritual worldviews of participants. Additionally, I also examine how leaders’ spirituality contextualizes the parameters of justice and empowers leaders to enter into the conflicting arena of leadership as privileged and racialized subjects.

Spirituality infuses African and Africentric educational leadership practice. Contrary to reports characterizing educational leadership as an aspiritual enterprise, the results show that spirituality inhabits the terrain of educational leadership in creative and formative ways. Narratives confirm that spirituality enables leaders to transcend what scholars report as the sacred-secular divide. In essence, participants affirm that the secular is the sacred as their reports repeatedly identify how spirituality is commonly invoked within educational spaces and perceived as an intrinsic and necessary aspect of leading. These findings mirror African and Africentric understandings of spirituality as interdependent, and resistant to the dichotomized construction of sacred and secularized boundaries (Dantley, 2003a, 2003b; C. Stewart, 1999). Participants’ narratives clearly demarcate that spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership practice is a phenomenon that also exists outside the boundaries of schooling. Spirituality is seen to compel a broader focus that embraces individual and communal engagement as an imperative and necessary component of leading for social justice. The results command attention to what theorists report is characteristic of African and Africentric educational leadership, that is, a seamless dedication to service within and beyond the perimeters of schooling.
In conjunction with the former, African and Africentric spiritualities provide the context in which leaders configure their understandings of justice. There is also a clear sense that injustices and malevolency exist and are chronic factors within the African experience. Nevertheless, while injustices are readily expressed in schools and society, spirituality fuels leaders’ beliefs that students, families and communities have the inherent right to receive and contribute to an educational system that is equitable, representative and accessible on various levels. Quite seemingly, African and Africentric spiritualities prompt leaders to espouse a “religiously” unorthodox expression of leadership that is situated towards change and the creation of spaces for others to be known and heard. Moreover, African and Africentric spiritualities being divinely inspired, position leaders to adopt a pragmatic view of education that sees obstacles as present yet permeable. It compels leaders to view themselves as agents who are called to mitigate justice by educating, empowering and advocating with minoritized individuals in schools and communities. For instance, findings reveal how leaders collectively lobby for the religious representation of others at the institutional and student levels, advocate and care for individuals, interrogate curriculum and institutions, promote community-empowerment opportunities and transgress exclusionary statutes and myths. Moreover, as leadership unfolds within current educational contexts that are contested, pessimistic and injurious, leaders’ spirituality compels an understanding of justice that honours communal knowledge as a central and deciding factor in redressing these inequities. In essence, spirituality compels an indigenous interdependence that involves looking back and with community in an attempt to institute corrective and transformative actions and ultimately, craft more authentic and relevant meanings of justice.
Participants’ narratives describe spirituality as an empowering phenomenon within their practice that helps leaders mediate justice. In particular, participants’ collective comments construct spirituality as enabling leaders’ purposed engagement in altering their sociopolitical realities. Within this understanding, this study documents that leaders invoke the practical, symbolic and ritualized dimensions of their spirituality to lead in conventional and untraditional ways. Furthermore, narratives record impressions of spirituality as an internally inspiring catalyst that compels commitment, empowers proactive initiatives and directs leaders’ efforts towards strategically dismantling marginalizing situations. Consequently, in opposition to official policies and varying degrees of risk, it is leaders’ spirituality which enables them speak and act out from amongst the silence. Spirituality is therefore seen as simultaneously informing and mediating the practice of leadership, a relationship suggestive of an interdependent dynamic between leaders’ spirituality and their leadership practices. This perception is affirmative of Dantley’s (2003b) work and provides further evidence that “spirituality is often a hidden and yet powerful element that grounds the work that takes place in schools” (p. 654). Likewise, participants’ meanings also call attention to Soder’s (2002) claim that spirituality provides an avenue for leaders to become more personally attuned and communally responsive. The influence of spirituality as known by African and Africentric leaders is further supportive of the recent call to invoke spirituality within the discourse of educational leadership. Scholars like Houston (2002), Larson and Murtadha (2002), Wheatley (2002), and Soder (2002), recognize that educational leadership expands well beyond the parameters of mechanistic and charismatic formulations to confront the challenges of creating learning communities that are critically just, authenticating and capable of working within and transforming the meanings of schooling. In
a manner that is consistent with Dantley’s (2003a), C. Stewart’s (1997, 1999), Newlin et al.’s (2002) and Mattis’s (2000) conceptualizations, both school and community-based participants report knowing the divine as a being that empowers their ability to engage justly in the world. Leaders intentionally invoke spirituality for others and themselves and thereby confirm C. Stewart’s (1997) assertion that people of African American descent are attuned to a “divine imminence” that recognizes intercession as a powerful means of invoking “the name, power and reality of God” into all situations (p. 80). Collectively, the results of the study show that spiritual African and Africentric leadership practices are undertaken within a divinely inspired, engaged and empowering framework that views justice as necessary right of humanity. While anchored within diverse spiritual traditions, this leadership paradigm compels an intervening agency upon leaders to facilitate and act justly.

Spirituality reportedly moves spiritual African and Africentric leaders towards what Dantley (2003a) refers to as a dualistic expression of leadership. From this vantage leaders are positioned to recognize their complicity within marginalizing systems while simultaneously also being cognizant of their “calling” to counter the associated tensions of practice. For instance, while working as leaders and privileged members of schools and community-based institutions, spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders are astutely aware of many of the institutional dynamics which impinge upon the rights and freedoms of students, families and communities. Notwithstanding the former, the majority of leaders boldly discuss how racism and other oppressive encounters situate them within marginalizing locations within schools and society. Leaders’ spirituality reportedly enables participants to embrace this conflicting reality and equips them with an unquenchable resolve to transcend their situational complexities. Resultantly, leaders are seen as possessing a
prophetic sensibility that enables them to view education as a tool for reconstruction and hope and the vehicle through which transformative changes will arise. Spirituality nurtures and offers leaders a connective and purposed focus for leading (Dantley, 2003a; Houston, 2002; Soder, 2002; Sokolow, 2002). The affirming nature of this finding refutes essentialists’ characterizations of spirituality as inconsequential to the project of education and further ruptures the mythology of the spiritual-secular divide that is officially touted across educational jurisdictions.

**Broader Implications**

Our [African] heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world. (Cesaire, p. 30)

Academic and social inequities pervade public schools. Without the intervention of strong leaders who strive to counter marginalizing forces, these inequities are perpetuated. (Wilson Cooper, 2009, p. 696)

What makes men and women ethical is their capacity to “spiritualize” the world, to make it either beautiful or ugly. Their capacity to intervene, to compare, to judge, to decide to choose to desist makes them capable of acts of greatness, of dignity. (Freire, 1998, p. 53)

How does spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership disrupt traditional conceptions of educational leadership? What connections are being suggested between school leadership, discussions of equity and civic engagement? How do spiritual African and Africentric leaders retheorize the role of spirituality in discussions of social justice? The present chapter is devoted to answering the above questions and in effect, identifying the broad theoretical and philosophical implications of spiritual African and Africentric
educational leadership for social justice. In particular, I choose to highlight the unique contributions and challenges which this leadership paradigm makes to current discussions within the field of educational leadership. In addressing these questions, I divide this chapter into three sections. The first section pertains to the urgency of a critically spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership praxis in responding to the call for diverse, communal and multicentric perspectives on leadership. Next, I position spiritual African and Africentric spiritualities as a sound critique of scientific and logical positivists’ approaches to leadership which essentialize spirituality and dismiss the relevance of critically spiritual values to leadership practice. Lastly, I enter into current discussions of justice to declare that a critically spiritual African and Africentric leadership is significant in outlining the pragmatics of facilitating justice. Leaders’ practices refute the actualization of prescriptive programs and neoliberal standards as pathways to equity and point to specific strategies that reference more critical understandings of student and community engagement.

To begin, spiritual African and Africentric leadership for social justice both literally and figuratively represents a bold theoretical detour from Eurocentric models which privilege “global minority” perspectives (Portelli and Campbell-Stephens, 2009). Spiritual African and Africentric leadership explicitly announces the existence of an indigenous leadership framing that celebrates leaders of African descent as knowledge bearers and constructors of knowledge. More specifically, the research underscores that peoples of African descent continue to theorize about educational leadership and that they utilize a distinct spiritual dynamic that regards historical and communal knowledges, as relevant and critical, in the process of leading. Further, educational leadership as envisioned through the lens of African and Africentric spiritualities, is indigenous in declaring that leadership is and must continue
to be a relational endeavour that is known, nurtured and successfully experienced in community. In saying this, a critically spiritual indigenous paradigm honours the role of community in fostering conceptions of leading and in doing so, interrogates functional models which advance that leadership emerges solely through the efforts of professionally contrived organizations and school-based succession planning programs. Likewise, this ontological focus redefines leadership as existing prior to and despite the benchmarks of professional development training and thereby positions educational leaders as being active within and beyond the boundaries of schooling. In conjunction with the former, spiritual African and Africentric leadership approaches are imperative to discussions of educational leadership as they are exact in confirming that racism is a contextualized reality within the Canadian context and in particular, within the realm of educational leadership. These forms of practice announce in opposition to liberalist notions of equality that race matters. Race matters in the curriculum, race matters in discipline, and race matters in leading, teaching, hiring, promotion and retention. Spiritual African and Africentric leadership asserts that one’s race unequivocally matters and thereby forefronts the imperative of acknowledging educational leadership as a racialized endeavour. In other words, spiritual African and Africentric leadership reiterates alongside antiracists scholars that any discussion of leadership cannot evade simultaneous discussions of racism and resistance as leaders are precise in identifying how racism and acts of discrimination convene to erect barriers and negatively differential experiences for marginalized populations. Moreover, in centering the saliency of racism within education, this framework also directs leaders’ attention towards the broader societal structures that impinge upon schooling and ultimately enable these systemic inequities to continue. In doing so, spiritual African and Africentric leadership
advances a form of leadership that is socially and politically mindful of the systems which affect how we live out our lives. Moreover, spiritual African and Africentric leadership evokes an alternate conception of inclusive education and inclusive leadership. Leaders’ emphasis upon racism and the articulation that Black bodies currently remain outside the boundaries of schooling racializes the inclusion debate to highlight the necessity of adopting an integrative anti-racist lens on leading.

As heard through the voices of spiritual African and Africentric leaders, critical approaches to spirituality are oriented towards facilitating more visible constructions of justice. Contrary to scientific and logical positivist contentions, spiritual African and Africentric leadership practices declare that African and Africentric spiritualities informs leaders’ consciousness and fuels an insightfulness in adherents that spawns decisive actions towards individual, communal and societal transformation. Critically spiritual African and Africentric values are advantageous to envisioning and effecting more equitable expressions of school as attention is directed toward interrogating barriers and creating opportunities for marginalized populations to access and own the freedoms that are unquestionably afforded to dominant members in society. Further, critical spiritualities direct leaders beyond the boundaries of education and away from religiosity towards practices that are responsibly authentic and many times contentious.

Spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership has very definite implications for how we conceptualize justice-making. Leaders are adamant in revealing that the manifestation of equity and social justice cannot be left to chance or to the intentions of a marginalizing educational system which places emphasis upon neoliberal conceptions of education and success. Further, this leadership perspective interrogates this popular discourse
as a distraction that deters one from recognizing the hidden realities of underachievement, disengagement and exclusion. In opposition to this framing, a critically spiritual African and Africentric narrative compels us to look critically at patterns with an eye towards understanding how cultural and historical incompetency, monocentric pedagogy and assessment practices and noncommunal disciplinary practices are fundamental to the achievement equation. Quite emphatically, narratives announce that equity and justice will not occur within schools or society without intentionality, that is, substantial restructuring, strategic engagement and advocacy. A spiritual African and Africentric approach to justice making demands that indigenous peoples access, own and provide future direction on education and that institutions begin to access the rich experiences and knowledge base of African and Africentric leaders to inform, direct and construct more democratic systems of education. While the message was heard loud and clear that there can be no equity without access, spiritual African and Africentric leadership is firm in alerting us that it is not sufficient to hang one’s hat on this guidepost, as it is only one of several markers along the journey towards attaining social justice. Spiritual African and Africentric leadership is further directive in informing that leaders wanting to enact greater justice in schools and society must prepare themselves to engage in an embattled terrain with intentional fortitude and strategic agency. This adoption as Dantley (2010) suggests, speaks to the willingness of leaders to enter into the game of education with an outward looking focus that acknowledges the efforts of community in wanting and working for equity and social justice. Further, it compels an attentiveness to hearing authentic meanings of justices and a flexibility in changing the educational landscape to embrace specific and at times and unpredictable interpretations. Ultimately, it requires leaders to assume a tangible sensibility and a
willingness to match their words with actions capable of addressing student, parental and community-defined barriers and requests for change.

In the current context, strategic agency also refers to the relevance of informed planning in the process of change. This framework not only compels awareness, but it simultaneously demands preparedness on the part of leaders to consider the implications of their actions in fostering institutional change and growth. Quite similarly, to what is asserted by anticolonial and Black feminist scholars (Dei, 2012; Wane, 2008) spiritual African and Africentric leadership recognizes that while education is a vehicle that may be used to foster transformative changes, the training of African and Africentric educational leaders must not be left to the efforts of outdated programs and ineffective systems which fail to acknowledge the relevancy of spirit, the harrows or racism or critical conceptions of justice. Enacting justice means pushing for the development of indigenous leadership programs that are culturally responsive, communally informed and reciprocal, and strategically empowering such as the “investing in diversity approach” as explored by Portelli and Campbell-Stephens (2009). Moreover, a spiritual African and Africentric leadership approach charges us to willfully contests theories which position parents and communities as willfully disinterested in education and youth as being inherently disengaged. In contrast to the former, this leadership perspective draws us to explore the many ways that these groups have been and desire to be involved in transforming educational spaces as well as the ongoing barriers which prevent their meaningful engagement. Additionally, the pragmatics of justice calls leaders towards undertaking an intergenerational leadership approach that engages the voices of youth and promotes educational planning and decision-making that is attuned to their interests and concerns. This shifting from view youth and families as receptors also requires
leaders to move through perceptions of themselves as mere managers. Critical expressions of justice leaders who are not only invested in leading educational change, but seek to create opportunities to educate themselves throughout the change process. Spiritual African and Africentric leadership calls upon educator leaders to focus on charting differing courses which affirm the identities of students, families and communities as they are known and understood.

The present study speaks back to current discussions in a manner that calls into question the continued reliance upon traditional and monocentric conceptions of leadership. Spiritual and African and Africentric leadership practices further announce the existence of an indigenous insightfulness that is crucial to the materialization of justice and in opposition to neoliberal conceptions. In light of the purpose of the study and what is now known about leaders’ understandings and experiences and the influential impact of spirituality upon leaders’ practices, I am compelled to offer a summation of the study along with recommendations and future considerations.

Summary

The purpose of this research project was to examine how spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders practice leadership as a form of social justice. Data was obtained through a series of open-ended questions with 10 participants who self-identified as spiritual and were involved in leadership initiatives within schools and communities. Subquestions were directed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do spiritual African and Africentric leaders understand their spirituality?
2. How do these leaders construct and experience their leadership?
3. How does spirituality influence leaders’ social justice practices?

4. What issues and challenges influence the practice of leading?

The practice of spiritual African and Africentric leadership is an endarkened and divinely inspired phenomenon. It arises in opposition to the threat of racialization which pervades the terrain of educational leadership and against the barriers which restrict a more inclusive understanding of education. In this manner, narratives construct leadership for social justice as an indigenous and embattled endeavour imbued with tensions, risks and prohibition. Given the former, spiritual African and Africentric leaders understand and experience their practice beyond the rudiments of functionality. Practices demonstrate that leaders intentionally undertake the mantel of leading to evoke transformative changes. Whereas leaders configure their work within a change-oriented framework that is aligned within critically inclusive, democratic, purposive and spiritual understandings, leadership endeavours are pragmatic in scope and designed to contest marginalization, initiate inclusive engagement and strategically reconstruct education within a more democratically just space. Through the relational influences in their lives leaders respectfully enter into the arena of leadership by looking with and back to in ways that allow these members to retain authenticity and hope and thereby demonstrate concern towards instituting individual, communal and systemic change. In effect, participants depict and enact spiritual African and Africentric leadership as a hopeful and relationally influential undertaking, a charge which theorists say is arguably vital to the project of critical transformation (Dantley, 2003a, 2003b; C. Stewart, 1999).
The following recommendations are directed towards educational leaders, institutions and their faculty members and researchers who are interested in furthering their understandings of and commitment to spiritual African and Africentric educational leadership practice and in leading in a manner that creates spaces for critical justice to arise.

**Recommendations**

First, with regards to spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders, I implore them to remain as the majority of participants are, hopeful, always abounding in critically transformative projects whose essence rests in the conviction that there is more to tell; that they continue to hold true and remember that leadership is less about you as an individual and more predominantly about sharing the “densely populated” cosmos in ways that declare our interconnectedness and humanity. As marginalized members in schools and society, I charge spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders to explore the creation of professional networks that advocate for and promote the practice of spiritual African and Africentric leadership. Once established this organizational body might also provide mentorship opportunities for future African and Africentric leaders and counter the systemic factors which perpetuate cycles of oppression. From an integrative anti-racist position, I encourage spiritual African and Africentric educational leaders to lobby for the development of alliances with other expressions of spirituality that are critically oriented as a means of advancing the imperative of fostering a critically spiritual presence in public and post-secondary institutions. Leaders will need to continue to advocate for the implementation of culturally safe spaces, multicentric curricula and community-invested approaches as instrumental strategies which position students and their families as active agents within the
schooling process. However, in fulfilling such responsibilities, leaders must remain mindful that administrative tasks and outcomes are also necessary deliverables. What matters in the quest for greater justice and equity is one’s purposeful intent and insight into how such tools may serve a critically just project.

In focusing on postsecondary leadership programs, it is crucial that literature and experiences offered to participants move beyond traditional and monocentric configurations of leadership. Programs must therefore reflect the entirety of leadership models, which in the present case, alludes to the centering and acknowledgement of spiritual African and Africentric leadership. As spiritual African and Africentric leadership practice is fostered by communal and relational factors, coursework and learning opportunities need to incorporate the expertise and contributions of African and Africentric spiritual leaders in shaping the development of such programs. Faculty and staff members charged with undertaking leadership roles within educational institutions would also do well to remember that academic leadership programs augment rather than supplant participants’ conceptions of leadership. This understanding is particularly significant in that it situates to role of institutions as collaborative rather than decisive. In conjunction with the voices of indigenous theorists, this study affirms the relevance of spirituality to justice-making. As such, institutional bodies wishing to move beyond a rhetorical response in the equity debate must intentionally counter the current climate of spiritual constraint with processes that invoke and value a spiritually informed response and practice.

With respect to future research projects, the present study has also raised many questions regarding the intersections between critical spiritualities, educational leadership and social justice. From an engendered perspective, it would be highly meaningful for
scholars to undertake a more extensive study that examines how women from across multiple ethnocultural locations understand and experience leadership for social justice. Directions for future research might also focus on how African and Africentric leaders negotiate their spirituality within spiritually prohibitive climates and whether certain spiritualities are more acceptable. In addition, what may be learned through ethnographic case studies of school- and community-based spiritual African and Africentric leadership practices and how might multiple viewpoints from parents, community and youth inform what is currently known and believed. Participants’ narratives briefly speak to contradictions that exist within their spiritual communities of practice and allude to issues of sexism and ageism. Further exploration of these aspects will help to highlight the additional issues that exist and how leaders work between these tensions in their efforts for more critically just educational spaces.
References


Shields, C. (2003). *Good intentions are not enough: Transformative leadership for communities of difference.* Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Education.


Appendix A

Letter of Request to Educational Organizations

[To be put on OISE/UT letterhead]

Date: _____________________
Dear ____________________:

My name is Marlene Ruck Simmonds and I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Education program in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I am proposing to conduct a research study entitled, **On Hallowed Grounds: Spiritualizing the Terrain of Educational Leadership – From Endarkened Habitations.**

The nature and purpose of the research is qualitative in design and represents my interests as an African Nova Scotian in understanding how spirituality informs and influences the professional lives of Black/African educational leaders. For this research study, I will be interviewing individuals who consider themselves to be spiritual and have been involved in leading educational initiatives that are directed toward promoting equity or democratic change within educational settings. This research study is significant as the available literature on spirituality and educational leadership is minimal. Data from this study will add to current knowledge in the field and enhance individuals’ understanding of the role of spirituality within the field of educational leadership. Data will be used in making scholarly presentations and academic publications. This research project study will also contribute to the completion of my doctoral thesis and is being conducted in partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Education degree at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

As a result of your organization’s highly visible role within the African Canadian community and the impact of its membership in creating more just educational outcomes, I would be most interested in hearing the perspectives of individuals who identify with a spiritual orientation. This letter kindly asks that you forward the attached Letter of Information to your membership.

Upon agreeing to participate, individuals will sign a letter of consent. I would also like to inform you that all of the information in this research study will remain confidential. I will be using codes or fabricated names to refer to participants in the study so there will be no way to identify participants. Participant’s name and place of employment will not be named and involvement is completely voluntary as individuals are free to decline answering any question(s) and to withdraw at any time. Individuals choosing to participate will be
compensated for their time, interest and knowledge with an honorarium of fifty-dollars ($50.00).

If you have any questions about this research study, I may be reached at (902) 457-6206 or by e-mail at m.ruck.simmonds@utoronto.ca. The study will be carried out under the supervision of my dissertation supervisor, Professor John Portelli, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education. He may be reached at (416) 926-6226 (e-mail: jportelli@oise.utoronto.ca) should you have any questions or concerns. The research has satisfied the ethical requirements of the University of Toronto. If you have any concerns about the research and would like to speak with someone not directly related to the study, you may contact____________________________._

Thank you for your interest in my research and for taking the time to read this correspondence. I sincerely appreciate and look forward to your support

Respectfully,

Marlene Ruck Simmonds
Appendix B
Invitational Bulletin

Are you a Black/African Nova Scotian?

Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person?

Is your work connected to education in some way?

Do you find yourself working to make schools and school practices more just and fair?

If you answered yes to all of these questions or know someone who could, please call (902) 457-6206. Your experiences are valuable in helping others to rethink what educational leadership is all about. Please call Marlene for more information on an exciting research study or e-mail her at m.ruck.simmonds@utoronto.ca
Appendix C

Letter of Information for Educational Leaders

[To be put on OISE/UT letterhead]

Date: ___________________
Dear ____________________:

My name is Marlene Ruck Simmonds and I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Education program in the Department of Theory and Policy Studies at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I am proposing to conduct a research study entitled, On Hallowed Grounds : Spiritualizing the Terrain of Educational Leadership –From Endarkened Habitations.

The nature and purpose of the research is qualitative in design and represents my interests as an African Nova Scotian in understanding how spirituality informs and affects the professional lives of Black/African educational leaders. For this research study, I will be interviewing individuals who consider themselves to be spiritual and have been involved in leading educational initiatives that are directed toward promoting equity or democratic change within educational settings. This research study is significant as the available literature on spirituality and educational leadership is minimal. Data from this study will add to current knowledge in the field and enhance individuals’ understanding of the role of spirituality within the field of educational leadership. Data will used in making scholarly presentations and academic publications. This research project study will also contribute to the completion of my doctoral thesis and is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Education degree at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

This letter of information therefore extends an invitation for you to share your perspective on the connections you make between spirituality and educational leadership. As a result of your connections within the community and the field of education, your name has been suggested as someone for whom this topic may be of interest and I would sincerely welcome the opportunity to hear your perspectives and insight on this topic.

I would also like to inform you that all of the information in this research study will remain confidential. I will be using codes or fabricated names to refer to participants in the study so there will be no way to identify participants. Your name and place of employment will not be named. Should you decide to participate, please know that involvement is completely voluntary. You are free decline to answer any question(s) or to withdraw at any time. You
will be compensated for your time, interest and knowledge with an honorarium of fifty-dollars ($50.00). Attached to this letter is a consent form.

If you have any questions about this research study, I may be reached at (902) 457-6206 or by e-mail at m.ruck.simmonds@utoronto.ca. The study will be carried out under the supervision of my dissertation supervisor, Professor John Portelli, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education and he may be reached at (416) 926-6226 should you have any questions or concerns. This research study has satisfied the ethical requirements of the University of Toronto. Should you have any concerns about the research and would like to speak with someone not directly related to the study, you may contact__________________________.

Thank you for your interest in my research and for taking the time to read this correspondence. I sincerely appreciate and look forward to your support

Respectfully,

Marlene Ruck Simmonds
Appendix D
Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your personal identity (i.e. culture, ethnicity, race)?

2. What events, situations or conversations brought your current position?

3. Please describe your spirituality?

4. As a spiritual African Canadian educational leadership, what has your work been about?

5. What does being a spiritual African educational leader mean for the way in which you lead? Can you share an example of how you believe your spirituality influenced your leadership?

6. As a spiritual person and in the context in which you work, how do you define educational leadership?

7. In what ways do you see educational leadership as a spiritual experience?

8. In the context in which you work, what does democracy and social justice mean?

9. What things need to change in order for it to become a reality?

10. How do you work with parents, students, staff and community members to encourage these changes?

11. What factors make your work easy or more challenging?

12. What are some of the risks involved in your work? What motivates you to continue despite these risks?

13. What is important for the next generation of educational leaders to know and do?
Appendix E

Informed Consent Letter

[To be put on OISE/UT Letterhead]

Your part in the research, if you agree, is to participate in an interview with the researcher. The interview will be informal and last approximately 50-60 minutes. We will be doing a semi-open interview which allows me to ask specific questions and also hear other informed which you believe is pertinent to this research study. Enclosed please find questions which I will definitely ask (See Appendix D). The interview session will be taped with your consent and once the audiotapes of the interview(s) have been transcribed by the researcher, the original or raw data will be stored under lock and key in the researcher’s file cabinet. In the transcripts, names and other identifying information about you or your organization will be systematically changed. Identifying codes that could connect you or your organization with the changed names will also be kept under lock and key in the place designated above. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to these coded tapes. The timing for the destruction of the tapes and/or raw data is designed to coincide with 2 years following the completing of the thesis requirement.

As interviewee, you will receive a copy of the transcript of your interview. Any section which you request to have deleted from the transcript(s) of your interview will be deleted. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and you may request that the entire transcript of your interview be destroyed.

I ______________________________, hereby agree to be a participant in the research study entitled, On Hallowed Grounds: Spiritualizing the Terrain of Educational Leadership that is being conducted by Marlene Ruck Simmonds.

I understand that the research will maintain confidentiality through coding and that my identity will remain anonymous. I also have been made aware of how the coded information will be stored and eventually disposed of following the prescribed period.

I have read this document and any enclosed documents. I understand what is being asked and the accompanying conditions and promises. I understand the nature and limitations of the research. I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time and that I may refuse to answer any questions. I will also be provided with a summary of the research results following the conclusion of the study.

If you have any questions about this research study I may be reached at (902) 457-6206 or by e-mail at m.ruck.simmonds@utoronto.ca. The study will be carried out under the supervision of my dissertation supervisor, Professor John Portelli, Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education and he may be reached at (416) 926-6226 should you have any questions or concerns. This research study has satisfied the ethical requirements of the University of Toronto. Should you have any concerns about the research and would like to
speak with someone not directly related to the study, you may contact ____________________________.

I agree to participate in the ways described. If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

I wish to participate in the research.
____________________________ (Signature)
____________________________ (Printed Name)
____________________________ (Date)