PRINCIPALS’ ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK TO ENACT SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP:

REFLECTION, RESISTANCE, AND RESILIENCE

by

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Abstract

Principals’ Engagement with *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to Enact Social Justice Leadership: Reflection, Resistance and Resilience

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Now, more than ever, leadership — principal leadership — is needed to address the increasing diversity and marginalization in Ontario schools. In 2009, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* policy was released. While *The Ontario Leadership Framework* was developed to support and sustain quality leadership in schools and districts across the province, it contains little to connect it to the 2009 document. Lying at the crossroads of education policy, educational leadership theory, and the practice of social justice leadership, this study aims to understand how principals engage in the *OLF* to enact social justice leadership. Using critical theory to conceptualize leadership for social justice, and a qualitative design, semi-structured interviews from 14 principals were analyzed using a constant comparative analysis method. This study found the *OLF* does not support social justice leadership. Through their own reflections on power and privilege, principals choose to engage in the *OLF*, not by trying to fit it into their social justice leadership, but rather by viewing it through the lens of social justice and social justice leadership. The power of reflection threads throughout the findings as does the need for principals to employ resistance and resilience to engage in the *OLF* to enact social justice leadership. It argues that if practicing and aspiring principals are earnest about closing the achievement gap of marginalized students, then they need to have experience with marginalization, with reflecting on their privilege and power, with resisting the status quo — all the while working subversively and with political savvy so that they can resist the dominant versions of leadership and actually make a change in schools that empower
individuals against the structural injustices found in the greater society and within our schools.

Given Ontario’s commitment to equity and inclusive education, if all students are truly to benefit from schooling, then this research indicates to policy makers that changes to the *OLF* are needed.
Preface of Thesis

I respectfully submit this dissertation as a representation of a journey that began for me in January 2011 in the Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership and Policy program in the Department of Leadership, Adult and Higher Education. In truth, this journey began in 1977 when I decided to pursue an undergraduate degree, following a challenging personal process of overcoming barriers in order to complete high school. This experience of marginalization set me on my path to ensure social justice in education.

I hold dear the words of Michelangelo “I am still learning” and an inscription on a dictionary my husband Mark gave me 40 years ago — “Congratulations on choosing a college career Sept. 1976” — as two sources of inspiration when the journey persistently offered challenges or as I have now come to reflect upon — opportunities.

My academic supervisor, Dr. John Portelli, a major thinker in critical theory and democratic educational leadership, challenged my beliefs and practices. I am grateful, too, for the camaraderie of a cohort of colleagues, especially that of Michele Reaume. Together, they have given me the guidance and support that led me to the submission of this original, unpublished, independent work.

This thesis is written to my colleagues who are principals. I challenge them to think critically, to reflect deeply, to resist and challenge the status quo, and to measure their leadership accomplishments in the schools that they administer through the lens of all of the students and families who desperately rely on public education to ensure the human rights each of us is afforded by our membership in the human race. Gloria Steinem said, “There is always one true inner voice. Trust it.”

My acknowledgements to individuals would not be complete without thanking Fran Cohen, who edited the many drafts of this dissertation, for her expertise and steadfast commitment to see it finished. I now completely appreciate the writing and editing process!

To the reader, I thank you in advance for your consideration of this thesis, the findings and the critical analysis that I submit as evidence of the expectations inherent in a doctoral dissertation of the University of Toronto. Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003) summarize my sentiments:

*After my best efforts, here is what I believe to be true — not the whole and final truth, but a truth important to me and I hope to you, a truth that I have supported as fully as time and my abilities have allowed, so that you might find in my argument good reason to consider it, even to accept it, and perhaps even to reconsider what you believe.* (p. 186)
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Chapter 1
Introduction

*It is true that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it, transformation cannot occur.* —Freire, 1998

1.1 Background, Rationale, and Focus of Research

Ontario is Canada’s most diverse province (Statistics Canada, 2006). As such, issues such as race, class, gender, language, disability, and sexual orientation set the circumstances for amplified marginalization of students and families accessing public education in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). “Who truly benefits from public education?” is an important question. Connell (1993) argues that social justice matters for everyone connected with the education system, because education is a major public asset that “shapes the kind of society that is coming into being” (p. 14). Social justice in schools is important because “Every human being out there needs to have the opportunity to better their life, irrespective of who they are, what race they are, what gender … This will allow you to better yourself — to become a better human being … to improve your quality of life” (Principal Jaabir).

Over the past three decades, educational leadership has been a well-researched topic. Scholars agree that student achievement is linked to school leadership. “Conventional wisdom and considerable empirical evidence suggest that school leaders, especially those in principal and vice-principal positions, account for an important proportion of the variation in student achievement across schools” (Leithwood & Azah, 2014, p. 18). From a critical perspective, Bogotch (2002) maintains that social justice “cannot be separated from how educational theories and practices are being (re)defined and practiced by professionals within schools” (p. 2). Educational leadership continues to require close examination given the growing student diversity in Ontario and the well-documented, disproportionate number of marginalized students whose needs are not being met by the Ontario public education system (Toronto District School Board, 2012).

In response to the challenges of an increasingly diverse population in Ontario schools, the Ontario Ministry of Education released Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009). It is designed to
“promote fundamental human rights as described in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (p. 13). Even with this policy, few principals\(^1\)
understand how to make social justice central to their leadership practice to enact an equitable
distribution of education success in their schools (Toronto District School Board, 2012). And,
those who do, face resistance.

Ontario has been working on reforming its education system since the beginning of this
millennium. Principals have experienced an inordinate amount of change to curriculum and
policy.\(^2\) In support of the reform movement, in 2005 the Ministry of Education developed and
released its educational leadership strategy to strengthen school leadership across the province as
part of its commitment to improve student achievement.

A significant aspect of the Ministry’s educational leadership strategy was the alignment of the
research on successful school leadership by Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins
(2006) to a leadership framework. Since the release of the first leadership framework in 2008,
two subsequent versions have been produced. Influenced by a report to the Ontario Institute for
Educational Leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi, Azah, Hache, & Donovan, 2011) describing the key
features of high-performing school districts in Ontario, the first leadership framework, *The
Ontario Leadership Framework 2012: A School and System Leader’s Guide to Putting Ontario’s
Leadership Framework into Action*, was released (Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership,
2013). Then, following the release of a research paper commissioned by the Council of Ontario
Directors of Education and the Institute for Education Leadership — *Strong Districts and their
Leadership* (Leithwood, 2013) — the most recent version of *The Ontario Leadership
Framework*, or the OLF, was published in September 2013 (Ontario Ministry of Education,
2013). Changes included clearly identifying the alignment of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s
revised *K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (2013) policy with the OLF and adding the
*Personal Leadership Resources*. The document is both a detailed and thorough representation of
the focus of leadership reform in Ontario as well as claiming to be a practical guide for principals

\(^1\) Throughout this research, the term “principal” denotes both principals and vice-principals.

\(^2\) These changes include but are not limited to the following: Aboriginal Education, Class Size, E-learning, Boy’s
Literacy, Environmental Education, Combined Grades, Experiential Learning, Full-day Kindergarten, Healthy
Schools, Literacy and Numeracy, Safe & Accepting Schools, Supporting English Language Learners, Learning
for All, Student Success/Learning to 18 Policy/Program Memoranda.
to address the achievement needs of all students. While the document itself is not a policy per se, in the same year, the Principal/Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010) was developed and legislated to ensure its implementation.

Examination of the research that supports The Ontario Leadership Framework indicates that transformational leadership is the theory most closely aligned with the OLF (Leithwood, Tomlinson, & Genge, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Transformational leadership theory, conceptually situated in the dominant positivist tradition, represents the largest and most prevalent set of educational leadership studies. In contrast to this tradition, research on educational leadership for social justice (Connell, 1993; Foster, 1986; Freire, 1998; Furman, 2012; Furman & Shields, 2003; Griffiths, 2013; Portelli, Shields, & Vibert, 2007; Portelli & Solomon, 2001; Ryan, 2006, 2012; Shields, 2010) argues that critical theory is theoretically and substantively a valid lens to conceptualize leadership for social justice. Freire (1998) contends that “critical pedagogy,” the term he uses to characterize his view of social justice leadership, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power. While Foster (1986) argues that the essence of leadership is “the desire and attempt to change the human condition” (p. 187). A number of leadership theories consistent with social justice, and from a critical perspective, appear in the literature (McMahon & Portelli, 2004; Ryan, 2006; Theoharis, 2007; Shields, 2010). These scholars and other critically oriented theorists claim that social justice leadership endeavors to bring theory and practice together so that power and accountability are examined through a dynamic exchange, or praxis, requiring both reflection and action, and an explicit consideration of power relations involved in leadership. They criticize the orthodox mainstream positivist tradition of educational leadership because it is situated within the white, male, middle-class, Eurocentric management theory of effectiveness and efficiency, and claim this leadership has not only created but also sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools.

Despite the agreement of both theories on the value of school leadership as an integral aspect of school reform, it is at the convergence between these two fundamentally opposing conceptions of educational leadership that the problem of leadership for social justice is situated. This difficulty is further amplified by the tension that exists between the philosophy underlying the Equity
Strategy through which principals are compelled to do equity work and where the OLF is theoretically and practically situated. In fact, this intersection sets up significant difficulty for Ontario principals committed to social justice. Even though research on successful school leadership supports *The Ontario Leadership Framework* in Ontario, this study will show that principal leadership for social justice is hindered because of systemic resistance — in particular, because of the OLF itself — and also because of principal desire and drive.

At the centre of this leadership debate is the attainment of social justice for all students. In the literature are three dominant views: in the *distributive* sense, social justice must be characterized as “equity”; in the *retributive* sense, as “fairness in the competition for goods”; and in the *recognitive* sense, as recognizing and valuing difference (Gale, 2000). Arguably, a definition of social justice in education needs to include how social justice outcomes or student achievements are conceived of. Robeyns (2006) identifies three purposes of schooling: rights, capabilities, and human capital. In the literature, social justice outcomes are inclusive of both academic and social outcomes that support students in becoming “full citizens” in a democratic society” (Dei, 2010, p. 359). While *The Ontario Leadership Framework* claims a close alignment with the *K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (2013) — a tool for school improvement and student success — social justice is not mentioned within the document. “The issue of social justice is not an add-on [to education]. It is fundamental to what good education is about” (Connell, 1993, p. 15). And yet, many principals, who have not examined the power their social position affords them in student success, do not see that they are responsible for the variations in the patterns of student success or failure across racial, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions (Foster, 1986; Portelli et al., 2007; Riehl, 2008).

While the OLF is almost a decade old, scant research exists on whether it does or does not support principals in their challenge to ensure equitable outcomes for all students, nor on how increasing diversity in Ontario schools has impacted the principal practices set out in the OLF. Being held accountable to a leadership framework that has no mention of or reference to the need for social justice or equitable outcomes for students is particularly difficult and challenging for principals who say that they have reflected on their social justice work in schools and are impassioned about social justice. Further, missing from the recent research is how principals

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navigate the tension between accountability and social justice. If the OLF doesn’t support social justice leadership practices then practitioners, scholars, and policy makers alike need to understand how principals can engage in the OLF, the resistance they face, and how they maintain their focus on social justice. Hence the need for this qualitative study that lies at the crossroads of education policy, educational leadership theory, and the practice of social justice leadership.

Main Research Question and Sub-questions

The main research question of this study asks, How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?

Sub-questions that arise include:

1) How do Ontario principals understand social justice leadership and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice?

2) What strategies or practices do principals engage in to do and to sustain their social justice work in Ontario schools?

3) What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?

By asking questions that examine the experiences of principals as they balance the tension between the social justice needs of marginalized students in schools with the expectations of The Ontario Leadership Framework, this qualitative study gives voice to principals’ insights about the role of power and social position as a condition of social justice in schools. Doing so exposes the challenges and resistance that principals face, along with the strategies of political resilience they develop to sustain themselves professionally and personally as they enact social justice consistent with the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Critical theory has its roots in several traditions. From the tradition known as the Frankfurt School, it is defined according to a specific practical purpose. Horkheimer (1972) states, “A theory is critical to the extent that it seeks ‘emancipation from slavery’, acts as a ‘liberating ...
influence’, and works ‘to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of human beings’” (p. 246, cited in Bohman, 2005, p. 1). Bohman (2005) explains, “A critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms” (p. 1).

Critical theory applied in education has given rise to critical pedagogy, as seen in the works beginning with Paulo Freire, followed by Henry Giroux and others including Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, bell hooks, Michelle Fine, Jean Anyon, Antonia Darber, Joe Kincheloe, and Shirley Steinberg. In *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage* (1998), Freire’s foundational argument is that neutrality in education does not exist and education is “that specifically human act of intervening in the world” (p. 90); his body of work demonstrates that education can either reproduce or unmask the dominant ideology. Because of its critique of institutional structures and traditions that perpetuate inequity, critical pedagogy has significant implications for the practice of educational leadership (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011, p. 8).

McLaren (2007) builds on the conceptualization of critical pedagogy:

> Critical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by dominant culture while others are clearly not. Critical pedagogy asks how our everyday common sense understandings — our social constructions or “subjectivities” — get produced and lived out. In other words, what are the social functions of knowledge? The critical factor here is that some forms of knowledge have more power and legitimacy than others. (p. 137)

McLaren’s work provides a good example of how integral critical pedagogy is to creating schools where staff and students are able to think critically to challenge oppressive power and inequity defined by the dominant structure.

In critical theory, Kincheloe (1999, 2005), like Freire, argues that neutrality does not exist. Rather, critical theory focuses on who has power, how it is negotiated, and how the structures in our society preserve the distribution of power that supports some members at the expense of others. Critical theory rejects the ideology that only facts constitute scientific knowledge. Critical theory raises understanding of how and why the dominant perspective shapes political opinions, worker role, religious beliefs, gender role, and racial self-image.
Merriam (2009) claims that engaging in research involves choosing a study design that corresponds with the research question and the researcher’s worldview. In critical inquiry, critical theory assumes that there are multiple socially constructed realities. Its purpose is to critique and examine them. Moreover, a critical theoretical perspective invites questions about the lasting effects of a certain kind of knowledge and leads to the exposure of hidden relations of power and identity. Subsequently, it questions the goals of social institutions such as schools, and indeed, of all education, asking: *Whom do these goals benefit?* and alternatively, *Whom do they harm?* It also asks, *How are these objectives perpetuated?* (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of research from this perspective, according to Merriam (2009), is change, emancipation, and empowerment, the goal being to “critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (p. 10).

Critical pedagogy also has a very strong inherent component based on hopes and possibilities that connect with practice. However, critical pedagogy does not dispense solutions that are meant to solve problems universally. A key aspect of critical pedagogy is that it encourages the educators themselves within their own contexts to come up with possibilities since they are the ones who know their context best. Hence Butin (2010) claims, for example, that a “critical theory perspective attempts to undermine ‘best practices’ formulation because such so-called best practices are usually complicit with power structures” (p. 78). In the educational leadership literature for social justice, scholars claim that critical theory is a theoretically valid lens through which to conduct research and construct one’s own practice.

Leading for social justice is a significant challenge for Ontario principals. This study lies at the crossroads of educational leadership theory/ideology, educational leadership policy, and the practice of social justice educational leadership. The phenomenon explored in this research is the experience of principals who believe in equity and social justice but must work and lead within the tenets and accountabilities of *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. Fundamentally, the purpose of this study is to document and examine how principals who enact social justice leadership consistent with the expectations of Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* engage with *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. Given the aims of the project, a qualitative research design utilizing in-depth interviews was chosen to allow for a thorough investigation to

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4 Educational leadership for social justice includes the following researchers: Connell, 1993; Foster, 1986; Freire, 1998; Furman, 2012; Furman and Shields, 2003; Griffiths, 2013; Portelli, Shields, and Vibert, 2007; Portelli and Solomon, 2001; Ryan, 2006, 2012; and Shields, 2010.
understand how these educational leaders interpret their experiences, construct their world, and attribute meaning to their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

In summary, critical theory informs the research design of this study because it asks researchers to “view events in an historical perspective, to doubt the validity of received truth, and to continue our search for a more adequate solution to our problems” (Foster, 1986, p. 13). Then researchers must question the social structure — ask questions of class, power, and culture. They must examine the ways in which this structure perpetuates and legitimizes how schooling and education is designed so that the interests of some members of society are preserved at the expense of others, and how these patterns are reproduced (Kincheloe, 2005, 2008). Furthermore, in light of the fact that other scholars have used critical theory to situate similarly focused research, it was the optimum choice to position this study and its conceptual framework. Doing so exposes the challenges and resistance that principals face, along with the strategies of resilience they develop to sustain themselves professionally and personally as they enact social justice.

1.3 Role of the Researcher

“A qualitative dissertation is different in that the ‘researcher is the instrument’ and the reader needs to understand your perspectives, conceptual approach, and potential biases much more clearly” (Butin, 2010, p. 121).

Because data is mediated through the researcher, scholars need to describe relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, any expectations, and experiences that may qualify their ability to conduct the research (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) claims that while objectivity is important in scholarly work, external reliability is inseparable from the researcher’s worldview, which both impacts and limits the knowledge produced. Further, the researcher should explain whether she is inside the phenomenon or more of an objective viewer.

Your experiences are important, but they are not transparent or self-evident. To understand them, you need to find words to help you interpret them, words that form explanatory concepts that can help you excavate your experiences, to undress them and open them up to interpretation. Those explanatory concepts are part of a framework, a lexicon, a system of intelligibility that itself needs to be interrogated for the assumptions that inform it and the interest that it serves. There exists no absolute presuppositionless system. (McLaren, 2007, p. 119)
Conducting research is an intensely personal experience. Arguably, subjectivity is part of any type of research. My interest in social justice leadership is rooted in my practice of educational leadership and in my personal lived experience.

First and foremost, I come to social justice leadership from extensive experience in the field of education in Ontario. From my first elementary teaching assignment in a rural school, then in a regional high school, followed by a central position, then principalships in four different, diverse, and remote schools, I witnessed despair and hopelessness for marginalized Aboriginal students for over 20 years. Now, having gained employment first as a secondary vice-principal and currently as an elementary principal in Ontario’s largest urban school board, I have seen the marginalization of immigrant and refugee students due to racism, language, and spiritual/cultural discrimination and poverty. Freire (1998) argues that guilt and discomfort are positive. They lead one to critically self-reflect: to ask questions, to develop knowledge, to act, then to ask more questions in an ongoing cycle of learning, then to act on this learning. In my journey to understand my privilege and power, and my quest for equity in public education, this study is guided by the need to understand Who truly benefits from public education?, by the belief of critical theorists that the work one does should “benefit those who are marginalized in society” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 21), and by the unacceptable choice that I believe some of my colleagues make in not focusing their leadership practices on enacting social justice in their schools.

I locate myself first as a white privileged female education practitioner and then as a scholar and researcher. A few lived experiences pushed me into an awareness of social justice, privilege, and power.

I was born and grew up in a very small Manitoba farming community along the border of the United States of America. My father’s teachings had a tremendous influence on the development of my worldview. He was the eldest of eight children who left school at age nine to support his father and their farm, only to have it lost to creditors months before his return from his five years of serving Canada overseas during WWII. Of course, when I was a child, I didn’t recognize where the lessons he was teaching me about survival and independence were rooted. When he was dying, his intense gaze caught my attention just as it had for years — once again, modelling the importance of “collecting your thoughts.” We had had a regular ritual in which we walked
silently together along the riverbank, pausing periodically to share an insight with one another. He never judged, so neither did I. It was in those moments that, I now realize, he gave his greatest lessons. He taught me to believe deeply, to love freely, to trust openly, and to “love thy neighbour as thyself.”

I was a child of the 1960s. Some claim it is the decade that changed America. Canada too was deeply affected by the civil rights and anti-war struggles in the United States. I clearly remember the impact of the assassinations of Kennedy and King. During this decade, I began to personalize how race situated power and what it meant to be white. At the same time, my worldview was tested by a very personal experience that intensified my interest in equity and social justice and my consciousness of my privileged white position in Canadian culture. In 1969, “Janet” from a nearby “Indian” reservation, sat in the desk in front of me at school. I observed classmates, teachers, and administrators excluding and punishing Janet for being different — in their words, “a dirty Indian.” Then and to this day, I feel shame and guilt for my white privilege and for not following my father’s teachings and standing up for Janet.

I speculate that the major influence guiding my passion for social justice in schools is my personal experience with the legacy of marginalization. In high school, I was asked — no told — by the administration to leave because I was having a negative influence on the “moral tone” of the school. The experience of being young, pregnant, alone, and powerless fuels how I conceive of social justice and guides how I approach leadership for a socially just school.

In spite of this experience, I completed my education — including an undergraduate degree and my teaching qualifications — by travelling 400 kilometres to attend class, all the while marrying, working, and raising children. I was very content teaching, especially the “hard-to-serve” with whom I found teaching the most rewarding. However, I recognized the injustices occurring in the schools in which I worked and I decided that the best way to influence change was to accept a central position as coordinator of Special Education services in the board in which I was employed. I soon realized that any real change in schools came about through the power and influence of the principal, so, more than 15 years ago, I set my sights on becoming a principal myself.

I clearly remember an instance that exemplifies the depth of my commitment to social justice even when faced with professional repercussions. It was an incident in which a director disputed
a decision I had made regarding a student who needed an advocate so that she could have equitable access to education. I soon learned that such decisions would often bring me into conflict with my superiors who did not feel the same impetus to lead for social justice. On this occasion, he challenged my convictions and felt the need to exercise his power. He became so angry with my decision (that went against his own) that he accused me of having a problem, and threatened repercussions. In light of my own experience of being thrown out of high school and that of the student for whom I was advocating, his threat did not seem like an actual problem. My response was, “With all due respect sir, this is not a problem. I know first-hand what a problem is — your threat is not a problem.”

St. Pierre (2005, cited in Waite, Nelson, & Guajardo, 2007), argues that the use of our “biographies and the meaning we attach to them become, in the first instance, the raw data and field notes of our lived experience, and, in the second instance, inform our interpretation, our ‘storying’ of our lives” (p. 201). The experiences described above influenced my worldview and precipitated my desire to work for social justice in schools. They are the collection of understandings that guide this research and inform its design. However, the fact remains that I also carry many other biases and prejudices with me wherever I go. Freire (1998) captures this conflict aptly when he argues that an individual may be both the oppressed and the oppressor under certain conditions and in certain contexts.

1.4 Significance of the Work

To reiterate, the purpose of this study is to document and examine how principals who enact social justice leadership consistent with the expectations of Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework. If we fail to answer this question, not only is the future of education equity for Ontario students in jeopardy, but so also, as Connell (1993) and others point out, is the future of our society.

By asking questions that examine the experiences of principals as they navigate the tension between social justice leadership within the expectations of The Ontario Leadership Framework, this qualitative study has the potential benefit to participants of voicing their insights about social justice and sharing the concrete strategies and practices they engage in to do social justice work.
The critical piece in changing how principals access the *OLF* is to engage both practicing principals and future principals in examining leadership practice from a critical perspective, reflecting on their privilege and power, actions and leadership, through the lens of the marginalized. This study seeks to illuminate how principals enact social justice despite the fact that social justice is nowhere explicitly mentioned in *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. The study also addresses the challenges and resistance they face within *The Ontario Leadership Framework*, and the strategies of political resilience they develop to sustain themselves professionally and personally. Their narratives can lead to a better understanding of the patterns of principal success in leading for social justice.

This research benefits the practicing community of leaders in public education in that it provides guidance to principals working within similar conditions as well as to principal candidates and their mentors. Alternatively, boards and systems of education need to be keenly interested in this study because it has current and future implications for principal fit — meaning the selection of principals to work in high priority schools. Ultimately, this study could inform both the leadership framework and the *Principal and Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA)* policy amendments so that social justice becomes the central focus of educational leadership in Ontario.

Further, by examining Ontario’s provincial leadership framework and the educational leadership theory that underpins it, a substantive praxis of social justice leadership in the Ontario context can be developed. Doing so can make a significant contribution to the scholarly research and knowledge base of educational leadership theory/ideology generally and the practice of social justice leadership specifically.

In turn, the findings of this study could lead to a greater awareness of social justice issues in public education, ultimately informing policy-making for future Ontario school reform.

### 1.5 Organization of the Study

The structure of the study is designed to facilitate an investigation of how principals engage with *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice leadership. The overall research question explores their understanding of social justice leadership and the impetus that drives them to lead for social justice. It also examines the strategies and practices they engage in to do and then to sustain their social justice work. Finally, it investigates aspects of *The Ontario*
Leadership Framework that principals feel help them and/or, conversely, hinder them in their social justice work in Ontario schools. The complete study is organized into seven chapters.

The introductory chapter presents the rationale and research questions, the theoretical framework, the role of the researcher, and the significance of the work. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature, first situating the term “social justice” in the educational context. It presents four theories of social justice leadership set within the context of two landmark authors, Foster (1986) and Freire (1998). A detailed review of The Ontario Leadership Framework and the literature that supports its development follows. Most importantly, this chapter presents a conceptual framework that provides a lens through which to make sense and meaning of the principal’s experiences in engaging with the OLF to enact social justice leadership.

Chapter Three describes the methodology engaged in to conduct this qualitative study. Chapters Four through Six are dedicated to presenting the findings and critical analyses. Through the analysis and synthesis of the interview data, Chapter Four examines the first research question regarding how principals understand social justice leadership, and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice. Chapter Five examines the praxis — the dispositions, practices, and actions — that principals engage in to do and to sustain their social justice work in Ontario schools. Lastly, Chapter Six examines the principals’ experience with the OLF and the aspects of it that help or hinder them in their social justice work. In this chapter, principals propose amendments to the OLF in support of social justice and social justice leadership.

The final chapter summarizes the overall study through a brief overview, rearticulates the arguments identified in the preceding three chapters in which I both present the findings and critically discuss them, and offers some theoretical and practical implications as well as potential questions for further research. I conclude with a personal reflection.

1.6 Research Limitations: The “Unfinishedness” of the Study

Two limitations exist in choosing interviews as this study’s main source of data. First, both the interviewer and the respondents bring “biases, predispositions, attitudes, and physical characteristics that affect the interaction and the data elicited” (Merriam, 2009, p. 109); second, participants may tell the researcher what they think the researcher wants to hear, producing a “response effect bias” (Butin, 2010, p. 97).
One requirement of the researcher in a critical qualitative process is to reflexively identify one’s biases, values, and personal background. These include gender, race, history, culture, and socioeconomic status that together shape the researcher’s interpretations during the research (Cresswell, 2009). Acknowledging and describing this researcher’s experiences to those reading the study identifies the lens through which research decisions were made — from the choice of topic, to the research questions, to the methodology. Respondent bias is addressed in the Methodology section where participants describe their experience, their work context, and how they became principals who enact social justice leadership.

Butin maintains that the key to eliciting responses from an interviewee depends much on subtle cues and prompting. For example, using “hmm ... interesting” or “tell me more...” phrasing scaffolds the interview, deepens the discussion, and reduces bias concerns (Butin, 2010). To address the “response effect bias,” the interview protocol was piloted to ensure that phrasing was fair and not closed-ended. Further, “response effect bias” was addressed by emailing a transcribed copy of the interview to each participant to read, add further information, and correct any misinterpretations. Merriam (2009) also points out the complexities of the “interviewer–respondent interaction” in terms of participant risk. To minimize participant risk, interviewees were thoroughly informed about the nature of the study and their participation when they were recruited, and again just before beginning the interview.

1.7 Summary

Many historically based social conditions set the circumstances for amplified marginalization of students and families accessing public education. To help combat this, in 2009 the Ontario Ministry of Education released the Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. While this policy outlined the government’s approach to addressing the growing diversity of Ontario students, the primary responsibility for attaining social justice and social justice outcomes lies with principals who are, as agents of their boards of education, responsible for policy implementation at the school level.

While research on educational leadership supports the pursuit of social justice and the centrality of the role of the principal in its attainment, it differs fundamentally on the theory that most aptly guides principal practice. Ontario’s educational leadership strategy, *The Ontario Leadership*
Framework, was developed “to support and sustain the highest quality leadership possible in schools and districts across the province” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 4). Ongoing research on educational leadership for social justice has been increasing. This research conclusively argues that critical theory is a substantively valid lens to conceptualize leadership for social justice. No previous studies have looked at whether The Ontario Leadership Framework actually supports principals in pursuit of a socially just school or how the increasing diversity of the student population has impacted principal practice. Further, missing from recent research is an examination of the experiences of Ontario principals regarding how they navigate the tensions between the leadership practices that support the social justice needs of marginalized students and the tenets and accountabilities of The Ontario Leadership Framework.

Who truly benefits from public education? This qualitative study lies at the crossroads of education policy, educational leadership theory, and the practice of social justice leadership. It asks: “How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?” It also asks the sub-questions: How do Ontario principals understand social justice leadership and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice? What strategies or practices do principals engage in to do and to sustain their social justice work in Ontario schools? What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?

If these questions are not asked, then the voice of Ontario principals committed to social justice is silenced, practicing principals and future principals will continue to experience isolation/marginalization, and policy makers will not have had an opportunity to consider the educational leadership that is essential to enacting social justice in Ontario schools. Ultimately, if these questions are not asked, the social justice gap will continue to widen between race, class, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions that exist in Ontario. Although principal practice in Ontario is guided and evaluated by The Ontario Leadership Framework, in order to enact social justice leadership the central task of principals must be to examine and reflect on their own privilege and power, then employ resistance and resilience through a lens of social justice to revise and meaningfully implement The Ontario Leadership Framework.

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Chapter 2
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

A literature review provides the basic rationale for one’s research and serves to validate and position its theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It is a “multistage process” — “there is no one literature review ... The key is to realize that different literature searches should be conducted at different points with different goals and outcomes” (Butin, 2010, p. 64).

This chapter provides a detailed description and analysis of the literature relevant to this study’s overall research question: “How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?”

The literature review, like the study itself, is based on two fundamental beliefs:

• All students in Ontario deserve to be successful in school — “success” in this research means an education “with knowledge and resources that help them [students] fulfill their responsibilities as ‘full citizens’ in a democratic society” (Dei, 2010, p. 359).

• School leadership, specifically principals and vice-principals focused on equity and social justice, is central to meeting the needs of each student, but especially of those marginalized.

The literature presented in each section reflects relevant aspects of the conversation in the professional community to this point. This study is intended to join that discussion and build upon it. Part I focuses on defining social justice and social justice outcomes, as these terms are central to informing this research. Part II explores four approaches to leadership for social justice consistent with critical theory. The contributions of two authors, Foster (1986) and Freire (1998), both important in setting the underpinnings for social justice leadership, are foundational in this pursuit. Part III outlines the context of school leadership in Ontario by explaining The Ontario Leadership Framework (Leithwood, 2012). Part IV describes the conceptual framework that acts as a lens through which to make sense and meaning of the principals’ experiences in engaging with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership.
2.1 Part I: Social Justice

The first sub-question asks, *How do principals understand social justice leadership and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice?* Social justice itself is the foundation of social justice leadership. Fundamental to the understanding of social justice leadership is ensuring an understanding of the concept of social justice.

“Discussions of social justice have a long history” (Gale, 2000, p. 253). The way in which social justice is defined in the literature is varied, complex, and contested (Marshall & Maricela, 2010). “Social justice is not an easy concept to define” (Ryan, 2006, p. 5); however, a working definition of social justice is essential to this study and warrants a discussion of both the themes that underlie it and how these themes apply in an educational setting.

Social justice involves two main principles: liberty, or individual freedom (to the extent that this is compatible with the freedoms of others); and the equal distribution of material and social goods (except where an unequal distribution would contribute to the well being of those who have unfavourable starting positions). (Rawls, 1971, cited in Gale, 2000, p. 254)

Recurring themes in social justice literature are *distributive, retributive, and recognitive* (Gale, 2000). In the distributive sense, social justice is not just equal distribution of material and social goods. Such a view (based on Walzer, 1983, cited in Gale, 2000) is deemed “simple equality,” which perpetuates the deficit idea of a “liberal-democratic solution to equality imbalance” (p. 255). In describing what distributive social justice is *not*, Gale explains that it is *more than* equal distribution. According to Gale, social justice must be characterized as “equity”; that is, “as a justified deviation from ‘equality’ and to register social justice as different from ‘sameness’” (Gale, 2000, p. 255).

In the retributive sense, Gale (2000) claims that social justice is “primarily concerned with fairness in the competition for goods (presumably, capitalist markets provide the quintessential example) and is not a matter of equalizing possessions” (p. 256). He argues,

Many researchers have noted that in Western capitalist societies the gap between rich and poor is growing and the inverse relationship between poverty and academic success is so strong that “the best advice we can give to a poor child
keen to get ahead through education is to choose richer parents.” (Connell, 1993, p. 22, cited in Gale, 2000, p. 258)

In the recognitive sense, social justice is focused on “recognizing differences and areas of commonality among cultural groups” (Gale, 2000, p. 259). Using Berlin’s work from 1969, Gale advocates three necessary conditions for social justice:

1. Fostering respect for different social groups through their self-identification
2. Opportunities for groups’ self-development and self-expression
3. Participation of groups in making decisions that directly affect them, through their representation on determining bodies (Gale, 2000, p. 260)

Further, he contends that, “Within the recognitive justice perspective, difference is differently valued” (p. 262). Because of the challenges in defining social justice, Gale’s (2000) three themes will be used to describe and analyze the social justice literature.

In Connell’s (1993) view, social justice is about the distribution of educational opportunity. He argues that assessment systems are powerful because they “shape the form of the curriculum as well as its more obvious content” (p. 32). As a result, school systems value achievement on individual merit and embrace a very closed definition of curriculum, outcomes, and the purpose of schooling. Connell concludes that social justice is mainly about “the social relevancy and responsiveness of the relationship between the marginalized and the socially dominant or hegemonic content or curriculum derived historically from the educational practices of European upper-class men” (p. 25). This view supports Gale’s recognitive description of social justice.

Justice as described by Griffiths, means “[t]he right distribution of benefits in a society” and is “concerned both with individual empowerment and also with structural injustices; that is, with questions of power and resources available to particular communities for sectors of those communities” (Griffiths, 1998b, p. 179; 1998a, p. 13, cited in Joshee, 2007, p. 172). According to Gale (2000), this conceptualization would be considered as focusing both on distributive and recognitive social justice.

Shields (2004) explains a “just education” as a system that ensures equity of access (distributive). Recognitive justice is also discussed in Shields’ (2004) work. She uses the term pathologizing to denote “a process of treating differences as deficits, a process that locates the
responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of children (home life, home culture, SES [socioeconomic status]) rather than situating responsibility in the education system itself” (112). Shields claims that all children from all groups should find inclusion in the curriculum through their lived experiences, which would lead to equitable outputs of academic standards so that children could leave school fully prepared to lead fulfilling lives.

In Gale’s (2000) view, both distributive and retributive forms of social justice focus primarily on the distribution of goods and the economic sphere. He favours the recognitive definition of social justice because it expands the definition to include “a positive regard for social difference and the centrality of socially democratic processes in working towards its achievement” (p. 267).

Other researchers build on the recognitive theme of social justice. Theoharis (2010), adding to Dantley and Tillman’s (2006) framing of social justice, conceives of social justice as “largely about changing inequities and marginalization” (p. 333). In his research of justice-minded principals, he identifies four injustices present in schools:

1. School structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement
2. Deprofessionalized teaching staff
3. School climate that needs to be more welcoming to marginalized families and to disrupt the disconnect between the school and the community, low-income families, and families of colour
4. Disparate and low student achievement (p. 340)

Ryan (2006) sees social justice as inclusion, claiming that it provides a positive focus on those who are consistently disadvantaged or marginalized. Inclusion in this sense means that “everyone deserves to be included fairly in all systems and practices of school and society” (p. 15). Further, Griffiths (2013), while not specifically using the term “social justice,” considers inclusion in schools to be based on the purpose of education, which is “more than simply training students to read, write and perform well on standardized tests” (p. 1).

Social justice in educational settings cannot be completely defined without an examination of how the literature defines student achievement, meaning the tangible social justice outcomes for students.
Various philosophical ideologies produce varied research that defines student success or student achievement. For the purpose of this study and defining student achievement, a critical view of student achievement is sought because “critical discourses offer a pedagogy of hope and possibility through which teachers, administrators, students and communities can use their power to become positive agents of change” (Portelli & Vibert, 2001; Smith et al., 1998; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005, cited in Portelli et al., 2007, p. 15).

Shields (2004) references four terms — “just, democratic, empathetic [and] optimistic” (p. 125) as “guiding criteria against which to ensure that actions and decisions [in an education setting] maintain a social justice focus” (p. 123). In other words, these terms describe the social justice outcomes for student success by which educators can measure their educational practice. A critical view of student achievement then, means outcomes that ensure all students a just, democratic, empathetic, and optimistic experience in schools.

Defining student achievement — outcomes for students — is based on the question, “What is the purpose of schooling?” Robeyns (2006) identifies three roles or purposes of schooling and education: rights, capabilities, and human capital. From a human rights perspective, education is the guaranteed right of every human being. This perspective emphasizes the intrinsic importance of education and implies government responsibility in mobilizing resources to ensure that a quality education is available for all. Secondly, from the capability perspective, the impact of education is evaluated based on how education has affected all capabilities; that is, to consider all the changes in opportunity or well-being provided through an education. Lastly, from a human capital perspective, education has both a personal and collective economic role.

Robeyns (2006) contends that rights and capabilities are frameworks for viewing the purpose of schooling; capabilities aim to expand human potential, while a rights-based discourse can become a powerful tool to advocate for not only a right to an education but also for a high-quality education for all.

Campbell-Stephens believes that education is about a moral purpose that develops self-determination in individuals and unity within and among communities: “The purpose of education must be to empower and liberate” (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009, referencing Michael Dantly, pp. 17–18). It must provide opportunities for young people to develop an
understanding of who they are, to release their genius, and to develop spiritually and intellectually.

Social justice outcomes are “educational opportunities that transform the life experiences of young people” claim Lingard, Hayes, Mills, and Christie (2003, p. 2). These researchers describe a conceptual model of “productive performance” that includes process indicators of both academic and social outcomes, not as binary entities, but as closely interwoven. Academic outcomes include in-depth inquiry, higher-order thinking, elaborate communication, and an understanding of how knowledge is constructed and produces effects of power. Social justice outcomes include connectedness to the world beyond school, citizenship — both responsible and transformative — and cultural knowledge (Lingard et al., 2003, pp. 5–6).

To summarize, because social justice is the foundation of social justice leadership, how social justice is conceived of in the literature explains how social justice leadership is theoretically situated. Gale’s categories of distributive, retributive, and recognitive define social justice as a fair and inclusive distribution of access to an equitable education — one in which difference is celebrated and curriculum is relevant and responsive to the students’ lived experiences. From a critical perspective, the purpose of schooling or student achievement is based in the rights and capabilities framework (Robeyns, 2006). Student achievement, then, is holistic, encompassing both academic and social outcomes that ensure students become “‘full citizens’ in a democratic society” (Dei, 2010, p. 359).

The second part of the first sub-question asks *How do principals understand their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice?* From Freire’s (1998) research, critical pedagogy is concerned with the development of critical consciousness. He describes critical consciousness or “conscientization” (p. 55) as a disposition of critical self-consciousness that he roots in the concepts of humility, faith, hope, critical thinking and solidarity. He claims that through “critical consciousness” one is able to critique truth and knowledge. Empowerment and freedom, according to Freire, begin when one recognizes where one is positioned in a society that is a system of oppressive relations.

Literally translated, Freire’s concept of conscientization is the notion of critical self-consciousness — the process of a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action. Freire offers the following theoretical explanation of “conscientization”:
I like being human because I perceive that the construction of my presence in the world, which is a construction involving others and is subject to genetic factors that I have inherited and to socio-cultural and historical factors, is nonetheless a presence whose construction has much to do with myself. I like being human because even though I know that the material, social, political, cultural, and ideological conditions in which we find ourselves almost always generate divisions that make difficult the construction of our ideals of change and transformation, I know also that the obstacles are not eternal. “Conscientization” ... is an attempt at critical awareness of those obstacles and their raison d’être. And, in the face of pragmatic, reactionary, and fatalistic neoliberal philosophizing, I still insist, without falling into the trap of “idealism,” on the absolute necessity of conscientization. In truth, conscientization is a requirement of our human condition (1998, pp. 54–55).

It is throughout the course of “conscientization” — critical consciousness — that one is able to examine one’s position within the social, political, and economic contexts, which then leads to a (re)consideration of these contexts by asking, *Who is being included/excluded? Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?*

The other disposition, according to Freire, is “human curiosity.” Stanley Aronowitz asks in the introduction to *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage,* “What, indeed, does freedom mean, especially in education?” (Freire, 1998, p. 18). Aronowitz claims,

Freire holds that a humanized society requires cultural freedom, the ability of the individual to choose values and rules of conduct that violate conventional social norms, and, in political and civil society, requires the full participation of all of its inhabitants in every aspect of public life. But people cannot raise themselves to bid for power unless their curiosity has been aroused to ask the hard questions: “why” as well as “what.” For Freire, then, “the foundation stone of the whole [educational] process is human curiosity. This is what makes me question, know, act, ask again, recognize.” A learner who has reached this point is ready to demand power, which, after all, is the object of any pedagogy of freedom. (p. 19)

This quote asks each of us to consider why individuals take action for social justice. It may be as simple as or as deep as “human curiosity.”

Karpinski and Lugg (2006) state that social justice “means pursuing policies, practices, and politics (educational, social, and economic; see Anyon, 2005) that enhance the lifetime opportunities for all children, particularly those children who have been historically
marginalized” (p. 279). The next section outlines the literature relevant to the second sub-question of the research: What strategies or practices do principal engage in to do their social justice work and to sustain their work in Ontario schools?

2.2 Part II: Leadership for Social Justice

From the critical discourse, two authors — Freire (1998) and Foster (1986) — have particularly influenced the underpinnings of leadership for social justice.

Freire (1998) contends that, in practice, leaders need to develop a disposition of critical self-consciousness and must take difference seriously; they must acquire the skills to critique commonly accepted truth and knowledge, and then act with resistance, subversion, and dialogue. These attitudes, skills, and actions, he says, will enable leaders, first to take on the politics and issues of social justice and equity often set in policy, and second to bring about change. Freirian leadership is rooted in his concepts of humility, faith, hope, critical thinking, and solidarity in which horizontal, rather than hierarchical relationships, and dialogue between the “oppressed and the oppressor” — those with power and those marginalized — are fundamental (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011). Freire (1998) terms his view of leadership as “critical pedagogy” in which social justice, like education, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power.

While he does not specifically use the term “social justice,” Foster’s seminal work Paradigms and Promises: New Approaches to Educational Administration (1986) focuses on concepts and practices related to the application of moral, transformative, and socially just leadership. Foster argues that the essence of leadership is “the desire and attempt to change the human condition” (p. 187). Like Freire, Foster contends that leadership is grounded in a “critical spirit,” which ensures that leaders do not situate themselves in fixed ideas or self-serving causes espoused by others. Foster’s (1989) four criteria for thinking about leadership comprise a functional definition of educational leadership from a critical perspective: leadership must be 1) critical, 2) transformative, 3) educative, and 4) ethical (p. 34).

Based on the concepts of leadership described above, a number of leadership theories consistent with social justice and a critical perspective of leadership appear in the literature. Four of them, chosen because of their relevance to critical theory and to this thesis, follow: 1) transformative, 2) critical democratic, 3) inclusive, and 4) social justice leadership.
Four Approaches to Leadership Consistent with Critical Theory

1) Transformative Leadership:

Transformative leadership, writes Shields (2010), takes seriously Freire’s (1998) contention “that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur (p. 37). Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others” (Shields, 2010, p. 559). “To create learning contexts or communities in which social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced” (p. 572), Shields outlines seven major theoretical elements of transformative leadership:

1. a combination of both critique and promise
2. attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes
3. (de/re)construction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity
4. acknowledgement of power and privilege
5. emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good
6. focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice
7. evidence of moral courage and activism (Shields, 2010, p. 562)

Accordingly, the fundamental tasks of a transformative leader are threefold:

1. ask questions about the purposes of schooling, what is taught, who is successful, and who is not
2. examine practice, e.g., through (re)consideration of every decision, and asking, Who is being included/excluded? Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?
3. take responsibility, e.g., critique how leadership practices marginalize some and privilege others (Shields, 2010, pp. 570–575)

These tasks underpin educational decisions and involve the assessment of policies and practices within the school. They are foundational in relationships and dialogue between and among people in schools in order to overcome the pathologies of silence on difference and diversity.
They are crucial, too, in developing schools that are both socially just and deeply democratic (Shields, 2004).

Shields recognizes the challenge that transformative leaders face in this regard:

Weiner (2003) makes the important additional point that transformative leaders always experience the challenge of having “one foot in the dominant structures of power and authority.” Were this not the case, they would not likely have attained the formal recognition as leaders that casts them as “willing subjects of dominant ideological and historical conditions” (p. 91). At the same time, transformative educational leaders must be able to work from within dominant social formations to exercise effective oppositional power, to resist courageously, and to be activists and voices for change and transformation. They must be willing to take risks, form strategic alliances, to learn and unlearn their power, and reach beyond a “fear of authority” toward a concrete vision of the work in which oppression, violence, and brutality are transformed by a commitment to equality, liberty, and democratic struggle. (p. 102)

2) Critical Democratic Leadership:

Democracy, in the robust sense, is “a way of life … associated with equity, community, creativity, and taking difference seriously” (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 71). Critical democratic theorizing is “especially concerned with how democracy is subverted, domination takes place and human relations are shaped in schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 71).

In this sense, leadership is a way of thinking, being, and living in the world, whereas the tasks of leadership are to challenge the existence of unequal power relationships and the perpetuation and legitimization of the dominant, status quo ideology (Freire, 1998). Social justice, in which the “political, economic, social and cultural resources and the commodities of power and influence are shared” is the true pursuit of leadership and the best expression of democracy (McMahon & Portelli, 2004, p. 73).

Theoretically, democracy, collaboration, and empowerment are the cornerstones of critical democratic leadership (Furman & Shields, 2003). Practices of leadership include embracing difference, rejecting an automatic acceptance of the “right” way to solve issues, always making learning the key priority, honouring local thinking, moving individuals to see possibilities and
perspectives (Sackney & Mitchell, 2002), and “developing a politically informed commitment to justice for all” (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 119).

3) **Inclusive Leadership:**

Ryan (2006) argues that exclusion, in its many forms, exists in schools. Griffiths (2013), building on Ryan’s work, includes all marginalized groups in the definition in his research on inclusion — a “philosophy that brings diverse students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging and community” (Bloom, Perlmutter, & Burnell, cited in Salend, 2005, p. 6). Ryan sees leadership “not in terms of positions or individuals who perform certain tasks but as a collective process in which everyone is included or fairly represented” (p. 16). Subsequently, social justice change in schools will be the “consequence of a variety of people working together in many different ways and roles, using a multitude of resources available to them” (p. 100).

Ryan’s (2012) conceptual framework of leading for inclusion involves “advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches” (p. 13). In practice, critical reflective questions that illuminate issues of social justice and engage personal and group dialogue and consciousness are essential to inclusive leadership, according to Ryan.

In his discussion of inclusive leadership, Griffiths (2013) uses a tree to symbolize the process of inclusion, beginning with the soil that represents the purpose of education. His practical strategies to “grow” inclusion in urban schools focus on incorporating the voices of and forging partnerships with all teachers, students, and parents.

4) **Social Justice Leadership:**

**Furman**

Furman’s (2012) “social justice leadership as praxis” conceptual framework consists of three central concepts — praxis, dimensions, and capacities:
1. Leadership is conceived as *praxis*, in the Freirian sense, i.e., involving both reflection and action.

2. Leadership spans several *dimensions*, which are distinct yet overlap and serve as arenas for this praxis — the personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological.

3. Each dimension requires *capacities* on the part of the school leaders for both aspects of praxis — reflection and action. (p. 202)

Furman (2012) describes the personal dimension as developing capacities for praxis that allow for deep, critical, and honest self-reflection about biases and stereotypes related to race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, faith, and other social identifiers (pp. 205–206). The interpersonal dimension develops capacities for praxis that foster trusting and caring relationships with all stakeholders across all social demographics (pp. 207–208). The communal dimension develops capacities for praxis that involve building community across cultural groups through inclusive and democratic processes (pp. 209–210). The systemic dimension, according to Furman, develops capacities for praxis that “assess, critique, and work to transform the system, at the school and district levels, in the interest of social justice and learning for all children” (p. 210). Lastly, according to Furman (2012), praxis in the ecological dimension involves acting with the knowledge that school-related social justice issues are situated within broader sociopolitical, economic, and environmental contexts and are interdependent with broader issues of oppression and sustainability (Bowers, 2001; Osterman & Hafner, 2009; Rapp, 2002).

_Theoharis_

In Theoharis’ (2007) definition of social justice leadership, “principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions ... central to [their] advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223). He provides an organized view of the injustices present in schools and the strategies needed by principals to disrupt these injustices:

- Injustice 1: School structures that marginalize, segregate, and impede achievement — strategy: Eliminate pullout/segregated programs, increase
rigor and access to opportunities, increase student learning time, increase accountability systems on the achievement of all students.

- Injustice 2: Deprofessionalized staff — strategy: Address issues of race, provide ongoing staff development focused on building equity, hire and supervise for justice, empower staff.

- Injustice 3: A disconnect with the community, low-income families, and families of color — strategy: Create a warm and welcoming climate, reach out intentionally to the community and marginalized families, incorporate social responsibility into the school curriculum.

- Injustice 4: Disparate and low student achievement — strategy: Conflate all efforts and strategies. (Theoharis, 2009)

Theoharis argues that “[m]arginalized students do not receive the education they deserve unless purposeful steps are taken to change schools on their behalf with both equity and justice consciously in mind” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 250). “Purposeful leadership steps” include building respect, care, recognition, and empathy with all members of the teaching/learning community and resistance to political and other oppositional views. Theoharis (2009) identifies seven key leadership attributes of SJL principals:

- **Key 1.** Acquire broad, reconceptualised consciousness/knowledge/skill base.
- **Key 2.** Possess core leadership traits.
- **Key 3.** Advance inclusion, access, and opportunity for all.
- **Key 4.** Improve the core learning context, both the teaching and the curriculum.
- **Key 5.** Create a climate of belonging.
- **Key 6.** Raise student achievement.
- **Key 7.** Sustain oneself professionally and personally. (pp. 12–13)

To be purposeful in leadership — to lead with respect, care, recognition, and empathy, to build relationships, to dialogue, to ask questions about the purposes of schooling, what is taught, who is successful and who is not, to challenge historic and current marginalizing conditions, to build

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6 SJL in this document refers to social justice leadership.
respect with all members of the teaching/learning community — is not easy. Sustaining a focus on social justice is a challenging enterprise both professionally and personally (Theoharis, 2007). In this sense, leadership requires the moral use of power — an ongoing struggle to share power, knowledge, and resources equitably — to create and support forums for all voices (Bogotch, 2002).

Theoharis’ (2004, 2007) three-pronged framework of resistance — which includes the resistance principals enact, the resistance principals face, and the resistance principals develop to sustain their efforts — identifies the various resistances in leading for social justice. Theoharis’ framework will be used to analyze the data in order to understand the strategies and practices principals engage in to do their social justice work (the resistance principals enact and the resistance principals’ face), and then to critically discuss the strategies principals develop and engage in to sustain their work in Ontario schools (the resistance principals develop to sustain their efforts).

Several arguments that support this study can be found within the literature on leadership for social justice described above. For example, Ryan (2010) points out that educational administration research has addressed issues of marginalization for only a comparatively short time. In the same vein, Ryan maintains that “much of the more recent literature that addresses leadership and social justice tends to be more theoretical than practical in nature” (e.g., Blackmore, 2002; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; MacKinnon, 2000; Shields, 2004; Lugg & Soho, 2006, cited in Ryan, 2010, p. 358). Together, Ryan (2010) and Theoharis (2008) support the need for future research specifically focused on the tangible practices of school leaders who pursue social justice outcomes for students: “Work is needed to better understand the knowledge and skills these leaders possess that make them successful at leading for social justice” (Theoharis, 2008, p. 22). “[F]ew pieces (of literature) actually document how social justice leaders, and in particular principals, accomplish their goals. One exception is Theoharis (2007)” (Ryan, 2010, p. 358).

Ryan’s assessment precipitated the need to investigate Theoharis’ work more closely in this study, primarily around tangible practices. However, it also warranted a deeper examination because Theoharis’ research focuses on the principal as the subject of study. Consequently, two recent publications, Theoharis’ book *The School Leaders Our Children Deserve* (2009) and his
article “Disrupting Injustice: Principals Narrate the Strategies they use to Improve their Schools and Advance Social Justice” (2010) help to set the context for this study. The fact that Theoharis’ research was focused on principals from three American Midwestern states, seems naturally to precipitate the need for this study from a Canadian perspective.

The article collection in the literature review for this study largely reflects the US perspective, given its history of social justice work with marginalized Black students. To date, little research investigates those practices of Ontario principals that disrupt and subvert marginalization. Griffiths’ work Principals of Inclusion: Practical Strategies to Grow Inclusion in Urban Schools (2013) is the exception. It provides practical, critically based leadership strategies to build inclusion with teachers, students, and parents. What is overlooked from Griffiths’ (2013) Framework for Growing Inclusion in Schools is an analysis of the extent to which the inclusive practices of Ontario principals are supported by The Ontario Leadership Framework, the document prescribing school and district leadership in Ontario.

2.3 Part III: The Ontario Leadership Framework

The third sub-question asks, What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?

When it comes to the principals’ role in Ontario schools, The Ontario Leadership Framework identifies the organizational expectations and the school leadership practices, actions, and traits or personal characteristics that constitute the effective leadership required to meet these expectations. In its 2005 discussion paper, the Ontario Ministry of Education committed to developing, supporting, and sustaining high quality leadership in the schools across the province:

[T]he McGuinty government recognizes that the ultimate success of most of the work required to improve publicly funded education for students hinges on the full agreement and enthusiastic implementation at the school level by principals and staff.

The overall strategy to “strengthen school leadership” focused on coherent and consistent expectations of the role, powers, and responsibilities of principals.

A year later, The Ontario Leadership Strategy was introduced, a key component of which was the development of the Institute for Education Leadership. This Institute represents principal and
superintendent organizations, the Council of Directors of Education, representatives of the public, Catholic, and French-language constituencies, and the Ministry of Education. Like The Ontario Leadership Strategy, the Ministry document Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education (2008) also identifies the importance of school leadership in achieving the province’s core education priorities.

The research by Leithwood et al. (2006), Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership, as well as research conducted by Leithwood (2013) and the Institute for Education Leadership, became the foundation upon which the first leadership framework for principals and supervisory officers was developed. The research is

a summary of the key findings of a view of literature undertaken by the authors as a point of departure for a large-scale empirical study organized around what we refer to as “strong claims” about successful school leadership. These claims are not all strong in quite the same way ... but they all find support in varying amounts of quite robust empirical evidence, the first two having attracted the largest amount of such evidence. (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 3)

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.

3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices — not the practices themselves — demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.

4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.

5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.

6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.

7. A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness. (Ibid.)

This first leadership framework Putting Ontario’s Leadership Framework Into Action was introduced in 2006 and made public in the fall of 2008 (Institute for Education Leadership, 2008). Its purpose was to ensure a consistent and effective approach to implementing its
initiatives, in order to improve publicly funded education as outlined in the 2005 discussion paper.

In June 2011, a final report to the Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership, described the key features of high-performing school districts in Ontario. The general purpose of the study was to “provide a more robust empirical foundation for the provinces’ school systems in the exercise of leadership” (Leithwood et al., 2011, p. 3). This research, also supported by the Council of Ontario Directors of Education, along with the 2012 research *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 with a Discussion of the Research Foundation* (Leithwood, 2012), formed *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012: A School and System Leader’s Guide to Putting Ontario’s Leadership Framework into Action* (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013).

In 2013, the *Strong Districts and their Leadership* research paper commissioned by The Council of Ontario Directors of Education and the Institute for Education Leadership (Leithwood, 2013) brought about more revisions. It, along with *The Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 with a Discussion of the Research Foundation* (Leithwood, 2012) are foundational to the most recent version of *The Ontario Leadership Framework* or the OLF published in September 2013 by the Ontario Ministry of Education. This version is closely aligned with the Ministry’s revised *K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (2013) policy, which includes a description of the “Personal Leadership Resources” of effective leaders and reflects changes to the system-level leadership framework. The *OLF 2013* (Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership, 2013) is a detailed and thorough representation of what the Ministry of Education believes educational leadership should look like in Ontario schools. According to the document, the OLF was developed “to support and sustain the highest quality leadership possible in schools and districts across the province” (p. 4).

[T]he framework provides principals, vice-principals, system leaders and aspiring leaders with a clear leadership roadmap [of the] key practices of successful education leaders and organizations, and how you can put them into action (p. 3).

The central tenets of the *Ontario Leadership Framework* are:

- Facilitate a shared vision of leadership in schools and districts.
- Promote a common language that fosters an understanding of leadership and what it means to be a school or system leader.
• Identify the practices, actions and traits or personal characteristics that describe effective leadership.

• Guide the design and implementation of professional learning and development for school and system leaders.

• Identify the characteristics of highly performing schools and systems — *K–12 School Effectiveness Framework (SEF)* and *District Effectiveness Framework (DEF)*

• Aid in the recruitment, development, selection and retention of school and system leaders. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5)

Newly added are the *Personal Leadership Resources* — the personal cognitive, social, and psychological traits key to the effective enactment of leadership practices — which support the five *Core Leadership Capacities for School-Level Leadership (CLCs)*: 1) setting goals; 2) aligning resources with priorities; 3) promoting collaborative learning cultures; 4) using data; and, 5) engaging in courageous conversations. Together with the *K–12 School Effectiveness Framework* (a tool for school improvement planning), the “leadership roadmap” outlines 21 distinct school leadership practices organized into five domains that an effective principal should demonstrate (see Table 1):

1) **Setting Direction**: building a shared vision, identifying specific, shared short-term goals, creating high expectations, communicating the vision and goals.

2) **Building Relationships and Developing People**: providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members, stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff, modelling the school’s values and practices, building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents, and establishing productive working relationships with the teacher federation representatives.

3) **Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices**: building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership, structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration, building productive relationships with families and the community, connecting the school to the wider environment, maintaining a safe and healthy environment, allocating resources in support of the school’s vision and goals.
4) **Improving the Instructional Program**: staffing the instructional program, providing instructional support, monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement, buffering staff from distractions to their work.

5) **Securing Accountability**: building staff members’ sense of internal accountability and meeting the demands for external accountability. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b)

Table 1, below, is the “leadership roadmap” of *The Ontario Leadership Framework*.

### Table 1: The Ontario Leadership Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting Directions</th>
<th>Building Relationships and Developing People</th>
<th>Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices</th>
<th>Improving the Instructional Program</th>
<th>Securing Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Building a shared vision** School leaders:  
- establish, in collaboration with staff, students, and other stakeholders, an overall sense of purpose or vision for work in their schools to which they are all strongly committed  
- build understanding of the specific implications of the school’s vision for its programs and the nature of classroom instruction  
- encourage the development of organizational norms that support openness to change in the direction of the school’s vision  
- help staff and diverse stakeholders understand the relationship between the school’s vision and board and provincial policy initiatives and priorities  
- **Identifying specific, shared short-term goals** School leaders:  
- facilitate stakeholder engagement in processes for identifying specific school goals  
- build consensus among students, staff, and diverse stakeholders about the | Providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members  
School leaders:  
- recognize the accomplishments of individual staff members  
- consider staff members’ opinions when initiating actions that affect their work  
- build upon and respond to individual staff members’ unique needs and expertise  
- treat individuals and groups among staff equitably  
**Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff** School leaders:  
- encourage staff to react on what they are trying to achieve with students and how they are doing it  
- lead discussions about the relative merits of current and alternative practices  
- challenge staff to continually re-examine the extent to which their practices support the learning of all their students  
- facilitate opportunities for staff to learn from each other  
- suggest new ideas for staff learning  
- encourage staff to develop and review their own goals  
Building collaborative culture and distributing leadership  
School leaders:  
- model collaboration in their own work  
- foster mutual respect and trust among those involved in collaboration  
- encourage the collaborative development of processes and outcomes  
- help develop clarity about goals and roles related to collaborative work  
- encourage a willingness to compromise among collaborators  
- foster openness and fluent communication toward building and sustaining professional learning communities  
- provide adequate and consistently available resources to support collaborative work  
- involve staff in the design and implementation of important school decisions and policies  
- provide staff with leadership opportunities and support them as they take on these opportunities  
**Structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration** School leaders:  
- create timetables for teaching that maximize time on task for | Staffing the instructional program  
School leaders:  
- recruit and select teachers who have the interest and capacity to further the school’s vision and goals  
- retain skilled teachers by providing support and time for collaboration, sharing leadership, creating a shared vision, and building trusting relationships  
- provide advice to teachers about how to solve classroom problems  
- participate with staff in their | Building staff members’ sense of internal accountability  
School leaders:  
- regularly engage staff in analyzing data on the learning progress of all students  
- insist on the use of data that is of high quality (reliable, valid, collected using systematic collection processes, available in its original form, and has been subjected to collaborative interpretation  
- promote collective responsibility and accountability for student achievement and well-being  
- help staff make connections between school goals and ministry goals in order to strengthen commitment to school improvement efforts  
- assess their own contributions to school achievements and take into account feedback from others on their performance  
- participate actively in their own performance appraisal and make adjustments to better meet expectations and goals  
**Meeting the demands for external accountability** School leaders:  
- clearly define accountability for individual staff in terms that are mutually understood and agreed to and that can be rigorously reviewed and evaluated  
- measure and monitor teacher and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School's Goals</th>
<th>Professional Growth and the Relationship of Those Goals to School Goals and Priorities</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Instructional Improvement Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Ensure the goals are clearly communicated to all stakeholders</td>
<td>- Encourage staff to try new practices that are consistent with both their interests and school goals</td>
<td>- Provide regular opportunities and structures that support teachers in working together on instructional improvement and establish a system for monitoring their collaborative work</td>
<td>Monitoring Progress in Student Learning and School Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Regularly encourage staff to evaluate their progress toward achieving the school’s goals</td>
<td>- Demonstrate the importance of continuous learning through visible engagement in their own professional learning</td>
<td>- Establish a structure of teams and groups that work together on problem solving</td>
<td>School Leaders:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Encourage staff to develop and periodically review individual goals for professional growth, as well as the relationship between their individual goals and the school’s goals</td>
<td>- Exemplify, through their actions, the school’s core values and its desired practices</td>
<td>- Distribute leadership on selected tasks</td>
<td>- Assist staff in understanding the importance of student assessment for, of, and as learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Refer frequently to the school’s goals when engaged in decision making about school programs and directions</td>
<td>- Engage teachers in making decisions that affect their instructional work</td>
<td>- Collaborate with staff during the process of data interpretation</td>
<td>- Create and maintain a community-wide environment that reflects the school’s values and enables management systems, structures and processes to work effectively within legal requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Creating High Expectations**

**School Leaders:**
- Have high expectations for teachers, students and themselves
- Devote additional effort to creating high expectations among staff for the achievement of students who have traditionally struggled to be successful at school
- Encourage staff to be innovative in helping students meet those expectations
- Encourage staff to assume responsibility for achieving the school's vision and goals for all students
- Make their expectations known through words and actions

**Communicating the Vision and Goals**

**School Leaders:**
- Use many different formal and informal opportunities to explain to stakeholders the overall vision and goals established for the school
- Demonstrate to all stakeholders the use of the school’s vision and goals in day-to-day actions and decision making
- Regularly invite different stakeholder groups to discuss how their work furthers the school’s vision and goals

**Modelling the School’s Values and Practices**

**School Leaders:**
- Are highly visible in their schools
- Are easily accessible to staff, parents and students
- Have frequent, meaningful interactions with teachers, students, and parents in order to further the school goals
- Demonstrate the importance of continuous learning through visible engagement in their own professional learning
- Exemplify, through their actions, the school’s core values and its desired practices

**Building Trusting Relationships with and among Staff, Students, and Parents**

**School Leaders:**
- Model responsibility, integrity and thoroughness in carrying out tasks
- Act in ways that consistently reflect the school’s core values and priorities in order to establish trust
- Demonstrate respect for staff, students, and parents by listening to their ideas, being open to those ideas, and genuinely considering their value
- Encourage staff, students, and parents to listen to one another’s ideas and genuinely consider their value
- Encourage staff to reach out to students with diverse viewpoints and experiences to enrich the classroom experience and help all students feel included
- Encourage staff to adopt a board view of parent engagement and encourage more parents to be involved
- Help connect families to the wider network of social services as needed

**Connecting the School to the Wider Environment**

**School Leaders:**
- Develop and maintain connections with other expert school and district leaders, policy experts, outreach groups, organizations and members of the education research community

**Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Environment**

**School Leaders:**
- Take measures to secure the school’s physical facilities against intruders
- Ensure that the physical facility is maintained in a safe, secure environment

**Buffering Staff from Distractions to their Work**

**School Leaders:**
- Create and enforce consistent, school-wide discipline policies
- Minimize daily disruptions to classroom instructional time
- Implement a systematic procedure for deciding how best to respond to initiatives from outside the school
- Develop, with staff, guidelines to govern the amount of time teachers spend on non-instructional and out-of-school activities
- Regularly assess the contribution of all out-of-classroom activities to the learning priorities of students
To seek research related to *The Ontario Leadership Framework*, keywords and terms were used in both a general open-ended search and in a closed search using primary source peer-reviewed journals and books. Such consideration is essential in order to respond to both this third sub-question — *What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?* — and the overall research
question — “How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?”

As Butin (2010) argues, “The literature review is, simply put, your chance to make sure that you are not wasting your time ... if someone has already researched and written about the exact same thing” (p. 63). At the time of this study, while literature was widely available on social justice and leadership for social justice, there was none available that considered both of these concepts in the context of The Ontario Leadership Framework. This explains why “practitioner resources” (Butin, 2010, p. 65) comprise the whole of the literature on The Ontario Leadership Framework. For example, a study written by Peter Edwards and published by the Ontario Principals Council in July of 2012 examined the connection between the OLF and the Principal Performance Appraisal. Another study — a Master’s thesis written by Daniel Ballantyne and published in 2013 — studied the prevalence of the five Core Leadership Capacities in the OLF in teachers and administrators upon developing an integrated Grade 10 curriculum.

One study, published by Gino Montanari for his doctoral thesis in 2014, has some relevance to this study. He focused on the challenges between the purpose of the OLF for Catholic principals and vice-principals and its practice. He found

that participants’ experiences were largely influenced by the way their school district unpacked the OLF. More specifically, participants identified the framework as a tool for performance appraisals, a reference for job interviews, and a source of a common leadership language. Despite the intent to embed core leadership practices and competencies into the professional learning and daily practices of school leaders, study participants only used the framework to complete two administrative tasks. Further, principals and vice-principals noted aspects of their work that were not reflected in the framework. Results of this study suggest a number of implications for practice for governments, school districts, and for principals and vice-principals. (p. iii)

One other relevant study was published in 2014. The Ontario Principals Council contracted Western University to conduct research on the role of the principal, examining how principals approach their work, how they spend their time, and the challenges their work presents. Pollock, Wang, and Hauseman, conducted a survey of over 1400 principals. The report, The Changing Nature of Principals’ Work, fills the void of research about the role of the principal in Ontario. Its highlights note that 82 percent of the participants report being too busy with managerial tasks
to be able to give instructional issues the attention they deserve. One of the major issues identified was the lack of autonomy principals have in making decisions for their schools.

In January 2015, Pollock and Hauseman published another report that examined “how principals approach their work, spend their time, and the motivation and forces that influence their choices” (p. 2). *The Ontario Leadership Framework* and the concept of work guided this research. One of the key findings relates to how principals perceive the *OLF*. According to this research, principals indicated having very favourable perceptions of the *OLF*. Forty-nine percent of principals mentioned using the *OLF* to plan and guide professional learning at their school, with 45% using it as a guide to organize their daily work. (p. 4)

When asked to identify the *OLF*’s greatest strengths, 29 percent pointed to its uses for professional development (p. 45). Many reported that it did match their day-to-day activities, though 13 percent said it did “not encompass everything required of their role” (p. 46). Many had positive comments overall, which the researchers described as “mostly surface-level,” containing “little, if any, data about how the *OLF* influenced their work” (p. 45). The principals also described the limitations of the *OLF* with just over 22 percent saying that it was “not a practical document” being “too wordy” and resembling “‘a checklist’ rather than a reasoned and evidence-based approach to leadership” (p. 46). The rationale for this study arises from the fact that, to date, literature that examines the experiences of Ontario principals in how they engage with *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice is insufficient.

### 2.4 Part IV: Conceptual Framework

**Debates in the Literature**

Social justice and student achievement, and social justice outcomes, are defined and conceived of differently in the literature, depending on the theoretical lens through which they are viewed. In the same way, arguments vary around what constitutes an acceptable degree of social justice attainment in public education and in schools, what the role of social justice is, and indeed, what is the purpose of schooling. Nevertheless, on the topic of educational leadership in general, most practitioners and scholars agree that social justice in public education is a worthwhile endeavour.
Theoharis (2007), citing research on school change in *Social Justice Educational Leaders and Resistance: Toward a Theory of Social Justice Leadership*, says,

A recurring theme from these schools (schools that have demonstrated tremendous success not only with White, middle-class, and affluent students but also with students from varied racial, socioeconomic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds) and from the literature on school change is that exemplary leadership helps point to the necessity for change and helps make the realities of change happen. (pp. 221–222)

Moreover, a recurring finding in the literature on school change is that school leadership is fundamental to supporting change in schools (Bell, Jones, & Johnson, 2002; Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Grogan, 2002a, 2002b; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Riester, Pursch, & Skrla, 2002; Solomon, 2002, cited in Theoharis, 2004, p. 2). From here, however, views diverge because scholars disagree theoretically on the school leadership or principal practices that can achieve change and disrupt injustice in schools.

Some scholars are convinced that a transformational and/or a distributive conception and practice of school leadership is effective in responding to the diverse nature of Ontario communities (Leithwood, 2010, 2013; Leithwood et al., 2006, 2011; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2008; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Others maintain that leadership towards equity and social justice in schools must be conceived and practiced through a critical lens (Connell, 1993; Foster, 1986; Freire, 1998; Furman, 2012; Furman & Shields, 2003; Griffiths, 2013; Portelli et al., 2007; Portelli & Solomon, 2001; Ryan, 2006, 2012; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; 2010). This debate sets the context for the research for this study, which not only explores the question of which theory, but also examines how social-justice-minded Ontario principals balance theory and practice between the needs of marginalized students and the leadership tenets and accountabilities of *The Ontario Leadership Framework* by asking *How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?*

For Bogotch (2002), social justice cannot be separated from the practices of educational leadership. Education cannot predict or control outcomes but educational leadership, both socially and constructively, can create and support forums for all voices to be heard. Social justice, just like education, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power — an ongoing struggle to share power, knowledge, and resources equitably. It “cannot be separated
from how educational theories and practices are being (re)defined and practiced by professionals within schools” (p. 2).

The policy that outlines how social justice should be addressed in Ontario schools was released in 2009 — *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). It outlines a commitment to equitable and inclusive education that “is a foundation for excellence; meets individual needs; identifies and eliminates barriers; promotes a sense of belonging; involves the broad community; builds on and enhances previous and exciting initiatives; is demonstrated throughout the system” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 11). Ontario’s educational leadership strategy, *The Ontario Leadership Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b) was developed “to support and sustain the highest quality leadership possible in schools and districts across the province” (p. 4) and to “promote a common language that fosters an understanding of leadership and what it means to be a school or system leader” (p. 5). As the leadership framework in Ontario, the OLF claims to guide aspiring principals and vice-principals “with important insights about what they will need to learn to be successful.” For those already practicing, “[it] serves as a valuable tool for self-reflection and self-assessment.” Finally, the OLF claims, “The framework also supports the work of those responsible for recruiting, selecting, developing and retaining new leaders” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5). Leadership is defined in the OLF as:

> the exercise of influence on organization members and other stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization’s vision and goals. Leadership is “successful” when it makes significant and positive contributions to the progress of the organization, and is ethical. Management is an integral part of leadership. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5)

Another of the stated goals of the OLF is to provide a robust research foundation for educational leadership in Ontario. Its supporting literature claims that the OLF is based on the latest research on leadership available in Ontario. However, it does not describe the fundamental ideologies that support its findings. Without a detailed discourse analysis of the OLF (which is not the focus of this study), identifying its underpinnings is conjecture. Nevertheless, doing so is necessary here in order to illuminate the fundamental ideological differences between the OLF and the leadership for social justice literature reviewed for this study.
The conception of leadership described above and in Leithwood’s research reveal that his work primarily focuses on transformational leadership theory (Leithwood et al., 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Transformational leadership is an interactive hierarchical relationship between leaders and followers. Leaders are in the position of power and use their influence to develop a common direction or purpose (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In more recent research, Leithwood has changed his view to include a distributive theory of leadership (Leithwood, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010). Leithwood et al. (2008) define distributive leadership as “shared,” “democratic,” and “dispersed” (p. 1).

On examining the various typologies of educational leadership found in Foster (1986) and Rottman’s (2007) mapping of the leadership conceptual terrain, one can only conclude that The Ontario Leadership Framework is ideologically situated in the dominant positivist view. In the political realm, while not all positivism manifests as “neoliberalism,” neoliberalism sits within a positivist philosophical theory of seeing the world. Neoliberalism, according to Kincheloe (1999), aims to maintain the “status quo” through the power it gains and sustains by servicing the interests of the dominant, most powerful members of society. In contrast, the research reviewed for this study maintains that critical theory is theoretically and substantively a valid lens through which to conceptualize leadership for social justice. The critically oriented theorists named above criticize neoliberal ideology because it constructs knowledge about leadership from orthodox mainstream conceptions based on a white, male, middle-class, Eurocentric management theory of effectiveness and efficiency. They argue that the resulting hegemonic tradition is responsible not only for creating, but also for sanctioning unjust and inequitable schools.

Inasmuch as in the literature there is no single perspective on social justice or the practical leadership needed to enact it, critical theory asks important questions of educational leadership: What goals are to be pursued? Whom do they benefit and whom do they harm? How do they contribute to an equitable social justice vision in education? Critical theory also raises further questions of privilege and power: In whose political interest is this theory of leadership supported? and alternatively, Whose political or social interests are being silenced or marginalized? And, because critical theory is committed to the idea of leadership as praxis, it is

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also a practical theory, one that pairs theory with practice and vice versa. It goes “beyond mere analysis of institutional structures to show how theory can inform action, and action can lead to justice ... It is dialectical in that it is continually and critically challenged, reformulated, and challenged again” (Foster, 1986, p. 65).

This study is primarily concerned with the experience of principals engaging with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership. Given that the provincial direction through the Equity and Inclusive Education policy has increased attention to issues of diversity, equity, and social justice, the greater question in the context of this literature and this debate is, Which version of educational leadership is privileged, and which has been repressed? While the OLF states that it is based on the extensive review of the latest research on practices, one might ask, Does the research that underpins the OLF include the critical research on leadership by Foster and Freire, or by Shields, Furman, Theoharis, Portelli, or Ryan? This question, and others posed by critical theory, are critically analyzed and discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this study.

Constructing a Conceptual Framework

Miles and Huberman (2008) claim that a conceptual framework is a visual or written explanation of the main concepts to be studied and the relationships among them. Merriam (2009) explains that a conceptual framework shows why a topic matters and acts as a guide to exploring specific questions and strategies for examining themes within the topic and provides a lens through which to analyze data and understand the phenomenon in the study. The conceptual framework of this study relies heavily on the critical theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction chapter.

The literature reviewed, and the debates within it, lead once again to the central question of this dissertation, How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership? This question lies within the intersection of leadership theory, policy, and social justice. It also raises the question, How do principals navigate the tension between the leadership practices that support the social justice needs of marginalized students within the tenets and accountabilities of The Ontario Leadership Framework? As a leadership framework, the OLF claims that a number of practices are helpful to Ontario principals to support an effective school. Because social justice leadership does not conform to the hegemonic conceptualization of leadership, there is no straightforward response to the central research
question. In order to understand how social justice principals engage with the OLF, a conceptual framework is needed that can act as a lens from which to examine their experience.

Foster’s (1989) four criteria for thinking about leadership offer both a functional definition and a conceptualization of educational leadership from a critical perspective. Recognizing that leadership for social justice is grounded in critical theory, it is helpful to include the insights of critical theory, and Freire’s philosophy of praxis in particular, in the development of a conceptual framework of recursive educational leadership for social justice. Both will inform an analysis of the data gathered, leading to a deeper understanding of how principals engage with the OLF to enact social justice leadership.

Freire (1998) argues that theory and practice coexist in a dynamic exchange or “praxis” in which one informs the other. He claims that through critical awareness and a reflective consideration of ideas, praxis has the potential to bring about change. Freire’s perspective is intrinsically political in nature: the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice does not privilege either aspect — and this in itself is an expression of a political stance. Moreover, in Freire’s view, praxis is not complete without a serious consideration of issues of power. In this regard Portelli, Shields, and Vibert (2007) contend that

> A critical perspective brings theory and practice together, acknowledging that theorizing arises from practice and that all practice is inherently theoretical. Appropriate practice, therefore, is determined by practitioners who critically assess their contexts keeping in mind issues of equity and social justice. (p. 16)

The literature demonstrates that the concepts of leadership for social justice from a critical perspective have many common threads. These themes include: critical reflection and practice, a critical view of social justice and student achievement, the examination of educational policies and leadership theory, challenging the status quo and, interwoven among these, recursive reflection and consideration of ideas.
Figure 1. A framework for recursive leadership for social justice through the lens of critical theory.

It is important to note from the beginning that the conceptual framework presented here works recursively, in that the process beginning with “critical reflection” can repeat itself indefinitely. In a recursive formula, the preceding term is often used to define the next term. This is not to say that the recursion always works in a clockwise manner. Each of the four circles represents a significant aspect of leadership for social justice. While the graphic above is simple, it demonstrates the concepts of applying a critical theoretical lens to leadership. Each is explained below.
Critical Reflection and Action or Practice

Critical reflection and action or practice is the central concept of leadership for social justice. To summarize the literature reviewed, Freire (1998) and other scholars contend that leaders need to develop a disposition of critical self-consciousness or “critical spirit” (Foster, 1986) — “a disposition of critical self-consciousness” that is rooted in Freirian concepts of humility, faith, hope, critical thinking, and solidarity to critique truth and knowledge (Freire, 1998). Reflection is the cornerstone of this conceptual framework of educational leadership for social justice. First, educational leaders, or as is the case in this study, principals, through critical reflection will need to transform their way of thinking — to take seriously the multiple perspectives in schools and in education of those who possess a range of voice and power — in order to successfully interrupt injustice in their schools.

Freire (1998) describes the process of connecting to one’s critical consciousness with the term “reflexivity.” He claims that the practice of reflexivity — or a critical and reflexive disposition — can assist leaders to interrogate and understand more, and look at all the possibilities in relation to the context. Through reflexivity, Freire claims that individuals can oppose the concealed ideology in the dominant discourses of equality, difference, and freedom and embrace responsibility for themselves, their liberation, and the empowerment of others. Critical consciousness and reflexivity are two important dispositions to social justice leadership that give leaders tools to critique their ethics and values, and their personal prejudices and biases — and then to examine and critique leadership practices that marginalize some and privilege others by asking, *Who is being included/excluded? Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?* The praxis of critical reflection and leadership as *critical practice* (Foster, 1989) is the foundation of an understanding of privilege and power, and it is the nucleus of the conceptual framework of this study. In the Freirian sense, it involves both reflection and action or practice, a combination of critical thought and the desire and commitment to change the human condition and to take action to transform the life experiences of young people (Freire, 1998).

Social Justice

To reiterate, “Social justice is not an easy concept to define” (Ryan, 2006, p. 5). The literature supports a critical view of social justice and student achievement. Of Gale’s themes —
distributive, retributive, and recognitive — scholars favour the recognitive definition of social justice because it expands the understanding to include “a positive regard for social difference and the centrality of socially democratic processes in working towards its achievement” (Gale, 2000, p. 267). To reiterate, Connell (1993) concludes that social justice is about “the social relevancy and responsiveness of the relationship between the marginalized and the socially dominant or hegemonic content or curriculum derived historically from the educational practices of European upper-class men” (p. 25). Ryan (2006), building on this theme, addresses issues of inclusion and exclusion within the school and community. In a similar vein, Theoharis (2007) states that social justice is “largely about changing inequities and marginalization” (p. 333).

In the literature, student achievement through a critical lens contributes to defining social justice. Robeyns (2006) identifies three roles or purposes of schools and education: rights, capabilities, and human capital. Campbell-Stephens (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009) states that she believes education is about a moral purpose that develops self-determination in individuals and unity within and among communities. For Shields (2004), social justice outcomes are those that ensure all students a just, democratic, empathetic, and optimistic experience in schools while Lingard et al. (2003) define student achievement as, “educational opportunities that transform the life experiences of young people” (p. 2). Student achievement is holistic — encompassing both academic and social outcomes that ensure students become “full citizens’ in a democratic society” (Dei, 2010, p. 359).

Foster (1989) challenges leadership must be ethical. For Karpinski and Lugg (2006), social justice means “pursuing policies, practices, and politics” (educational, social, and economic; see Anyon, 2005) that enhance opportunities for all children, particularly those marginalized (p. 279). Shields (2010) contends that the task of leaders is to “ask questions about the purposes of schooling, what is taught, who is successful and who is not” (p. 570). Regardless of the difficulty of defining social justice, it is the lens in this conceptual framework through which the construction of policy and leadership theories are examined, then critically reflected and acted upon in challenging the status quo.
Examining the Construction of Policy and Leadership (The Ontario Leadership Framework)

“Leadership is and must be oriented toward social change, change which is transformative in degree” (Foster, 1989, p. 34).

For principals, a policy is a document, initiated and produced outside of the school, outlining a decision on an educational issue. It then becomes the responsibility of the principal to develop a plan of action and to ensure its timely and strategic implementation. The Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy policy is one example (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Its purpose is to eliminate systemic barriers and create learning environments that foster respect socially, politically, and economically. While the OLF itself is not a policy per se, the policy that holds principals accountable to the OLF is the Principal and Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal policy, the PPA. It is Regulation 234/10 of The Education Act that specifies the standards, processes, timelines, and forms to be used in the performance appraisal of Ontario principals and vice-principals. At first glance, these policies appear to bridge social justice and leadership. But, according to Freire (1998), “neutrality in education is impossible” (p. 100). This observation provides the context within which leaders must examine the construction of policy and leadership. Joshee (2011) argues that policy is fundamentally set in the context of politics. In her view, policy should be considered and evaluated through the “value position” of the author. Researchers Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry argue that how we understand policy “is linked to the ideological or philosophical positions we hold” and is directly related to our political dispositions (Gale, 2001, p. 1). Gale (2001) poses an important question for principals to ask about policy construction: “In whose interests and for what purposes is policy constructed”?

Theoretically, social justice is fundamental to social justice leadership. Critical reflection and a critical view of social justice and student achievement will enable leaders to challenge the status quo and take on the politics and issues of social justice and equity often set in policy and in leadership. Fundamentally, critical pedagogy is one in which social justice, just like education, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power (Freire, 1998). Foster contends that when leadership is grounded in a critical spirit (reflection), it ensures that leaders do not situate themselves in fixed ideas or self-serving causes espoused by others. Theoharis (2007) defines social justice leadership as “principals mak[ing] issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual
orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions ... central to [their] advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223). Ryan (2006) sees leadership “not in terms of positions or individuals who perform certain tasks but as a collective process in which everyone is included or fairly represented” (p. 16). A practical strategy to encourage inclusion, according to Griffiths (2013), is to focus on including the voices of and establish partnerships with all teachers, students, and parents.

But it is Shields (2010) who provides a useful framework to ask questions about how the OLF in particular, and educational leadership in general, constructs the purpose of schooling. She asks, *What is taught? Who is successful and who is not?* She then examines leadership practice and decision making by asking, *Who is being included/excluded? Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?* Through these questions, she places responsibility on school leaders to consider how their leadership practices marginalize some and privilege others.

**Challenging the Status Quo**

McMahon and Portelli (2004) claim that social justice, in which the “political, economic, social and cultural resources and the commodities of power and influence are shared” (p. 73), is the true pursuit of leadership and the best expression of democracy. Critical democratic theorizing is “especially concerned with how democracy is subverted, domination takes place and human relations are shaped in schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life” (Kincheloe, 1999, p. 71).

Foster argues that the essence of leadership is “the desire and attempt to change the human condition” (p. 187). Having the disposition to critique commonly accepted truth and knowledge through critical reflection supports leaders (principals) to act with resistance, subversion, and dialogue — dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor (Miller, Brown, & Hopson, 2011) — to bring about change (Freire, 1998).

Theoharis, Foster, and Ryan encourage leaders to engage in forthright conversations about issues of power and privilege to challenge the status quo. Theoharis (2007) describes what it means to challenge the status quo through the resistance that principals enact, face, and develop. Foster (1986) describes reflection as the *critical educative use of leadership* that empowers followers to focus on change through rational discourse or dialogue “in which all arguments can be heard
without regard to the class or status of the respondent” (p. 186). At the same time, it allows for the understanding that such dialogue is nevertheless always political. For Ryan (2012), essential to inclusive leadership are critical reflective questions that illuminate issues of social justice and engage personal and group dialogue and consciousness.

Recursion

Recursion in this conceptual framework means that each of the themes also interact with each other in a continuing self-referential way, making praxis and recursion analogous. Theoharis (2007) and Shields (2010) recognize that sustaining a focus on social justice is a challenge that leaders face both professionally and personally, making critical reflection the nucleus of leadership for social justice. Black and Plowright (2010) and Rogers (2001, cited in Lucas, 2012) contend that “the terms reflection, critical reflection, reflective practice, reflective thinking and reflexivity have similar meanings and application in educational literature, as well as used interchangeably” (Lucas, 2012, p. 163).

Social justice leaders — principals — need to critically reflect and act in a recursive cycle in order to keep social justice and its outcomes the focus of educational leadership, to examine and associate the various leadership policies and practices based on various ideologies, and to challenge the status quo. In this regard, it would be fitting to utilize Freire’s insights on the concept of critical self-consciousness or “conscientization” — the process of a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action — as an act of resistance.

Furman’s (2012) “social justice leadership as praxis” reflects Freire’s concept of “praxis.” Praxis, according to Freire (1998) involves both reflection and action. Freire writes that while they are distinct, theory and practice coexist in a dynamic exchange. He asks leaders to focus on the positive tension and cognitive dissonance created within and between theory and practice. He further argues that theory and practice inform one another in a cycle of critical awareness and reflection that brings about change. Therefore, within this praxis of leadership and social justice is the mindset of resilience or critical reflection. This mindset involves practices that range from what Freire described as simply acting with resistance and subversion, to what De Angelis, Griffiths, Joshee, Portelli, Ryan, and Zaretsky (2007) described as “creative compliance” — or what Shields (2010) describes as acting with “one foot within the dominant structures of power and authority” (p. 570) while exercising oppositional power, taking risks, and forming strategic
alliances to become activists and voices for change. Together, this mindset and these practices lead to resilience, and resilience will enable leaders, first, to take on and bridge politics and issues of social justice and equity, and then to bridge theory and practice in praxis to bring about change (Freire, 1998).
Chapter 3
Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study is initiated at a time when, more than ever, leadership — principal leadership — is needed to address the increasing diversity in Ontario schools. *The Ontario Leadership Framework*, based upon a neoliberal conception of leadership, was developed “to support and sustain the highest quality leadership possible in schools and districts across the province” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 4). Current research conclusively argues that critical theory is a valid lens through which to examine leadership for social justice. These two seemingly different conceptualizations of leadership pose a significant challenge for principals, especially in light of the fact that there is no specific mention of social justice in the OLF. Social justice cannot be separated from the practices of educational leadership, argues Bogotch (2002). This challenge is further intensified by the high stakes accountability that principals face to the tenets of the OLF outlined in the *Principal Performance Appraisal* policy. This research is situated within the tension that lies between the leadership practices that support the social justice needs of marginalized students and the tenets and accountabilities of the OLF.

Specifically, it examines *how principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership*.

The following sub-questions guided the research process:

1) How do Ontario principals understand social justice leadership and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice?

2) What strategies or practices do principals engage in to do and to sustain their social justice work in Ontario schools?

3) What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?

This chapter describes how and why these 14 principals were selected as the research sample, the instrument used to collect interview data, and the procedures followed to analyze the data.
3.2 Research Design

“A research method is nothing more (or less) than a tool to help you answer your research question(s). The research question serves to constrain and contain what you will subsequently do” (Butin, 2010, p. 71).

Merriam (2009) explains that the purpose of qualitative methodology is “to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14). Essentially, qualitative research seeks an “understanding of how people make sense of their experiences” (p. 37). Further, Strauss and Corbin (1998), in speaking of qualitative research methodology, claim that it is “the theoretical perspective into the social world. It is a way of thinking about and studying social reality” (p. 3). Given the overall research question — How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership? — qualitative methodology was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this study.

Research methodology is influenced by theoretical views informed by epistemological understandings, which in turn inform the choice of strategies of inquiry and research methods. Ratvitch and Riggan (2012) identify the inseparability of what you choose to study and how you choose to study it. Merriam (2009) writes, “How one thinks about the nature of knowledge and its construction underlies how you approach a research project” (p. 22). Qualitative research is philosophically positioned in what one believes about the nature of knowledge and the nature of reality. Fundamentally, what questions are asked, what is observed, and what documents are deemed relevant depend on the theoretical framework of the study (Merriam, 2009).

Merriam (2009) further contends that “[c]ritical research can be combined with other qualitative methodologies” (p. 35). Qualitative research from a critical theoretical perspective seeks not just to study and understand the phenomenon and the meaning it has for participants in the interpretive philosophy, but to critique and challenge “the underlying socioeconomic, political, and cultural causes of the problem” (p. 12). Its purpose is to change, emancipate, empower — indeed power dynamics are at the heart of critical research — including the larger structural and historical systems of society that shape educational practice (Merriam, 2009). “Dominant beliefs about what is legitimate knowledge illuminate ideological prejudices about the relation
between research and context” (Gitlin & Russell, 1994). A critical perspective weakens the hierarchy between empirical research knowledge and experiential knowledge of practitioners. A critical perspective assumes that there is no single observable reality; rather there are multiple realities and they are socially constructed. It questions goals of social institutions such as schools and education asking, Whom do they benefit? (and alternatively, Whom do they harm?) and How are they perpetuated? (Merriam, 2009). The critical theoretical framework upon which this study is situated and the qualitative methodology that “focuses on societal critique in order to raise consciousness and empower people to bring about change” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23) together underpin this study.

Because this study is interested in the experiences of principals as they engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership, a basic qualitative design was chosen: “1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). She goes on to say that “all qualitative research is interested in how meaning is constructed, how people make sense of their lives and their worlds. The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings” (p. 24). A basic qualitative design recognizes that “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Since understanding is the goal of this study, data was collected through in-depth interviews. The interview questions were developed through a critical lens, the theoretical framework that underpins this study. A constant comparative method of data analysis was then employed to inductively find recurring patterns that characterize the data. According to Merriam (2009), choosing a basic qualitative design ensures that the findings are “richly descriptive” about what has been learned about a phenomenon given that data analysis is inductive and comparative; the findings represent “the researcher’s understanding of the participants’ understanding of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 24).

Within the basic qualitative methodology, both an exploratory and an emergent design were employed. An exploratory design, according to Butin (2010), is an “in-depth analysis of the complex and layered issues, and flexible enough to account for highly open-ended research questions, data collection protocols and analyses.” An emergent design is one in which “the researcher modifies the research focus and specific methodologies to take into account new and unfolding information and findings” (Butin, 2010, p. 80).
It should be noted that two limitations, applicable to this study, exist in qualitative research: the knowledge generated by the research may not generalize to other people or other settings, and the findings are more easily influenced by the researcher’s personal biases and idiosyncrasies.

### 3.3 Research Setting and Context

The research setting for this study is Ontario, Canada’s largest and most populated province, representing approximately one-third of the nation’s population. In Canada, provincial governments are responsible for public education so the Ontario Ministry of Education oversees both elementary (junior kindergarten–grade 8) and secondary (grades 9–12) school programs and allocates public funding from the province. There are 72 school boards and 11 school authorities in Ontario, ranging from the largest board in Canada, the Toronto District School Board, responsible for over 450 schools, to one of the smallest, the Rainy River District School Board, which oversees 14 schools. Each is governed by elected trustees who hire a director to govern the operation of the school board and is responsible for hiring and placing educators in administrative positions, including superintendents, board-level positions, and school principals.

Significant to this study is the educational leadership context in Ontario. There are over 5000 elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals across the province who administer English language schools. Principals are governed by the *Education Act* Regulation 298/90 “Duties of Principals,” the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* and the Teachers Qualifications Regulation under the Act. While this legislation outlines detailed responsibilities of the principal, *The Ontario Leadership Framework* is the standardized policy to which all Ontario principals are accountable and by which their performance as school leaders is evaluated.

### 3.4 Sample

In schools that have successfully overturned the traditional expectations for students who have historically failed in school, beginning with Edmonds (1979), effective schools research states that the principal plays a critical role in the success of the school. In other words, the principal’s leadership is of paramount importance in creating the conditions for success in schools that serve

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8 There are also 12 Francophone boards of education in Ontario — four Public and eight Catholic — that are not included in this study. Although their insight into social justice issues, including minority language issues, would be extremely useful, it is outside of the scope of the current research.
marginalized children in general. In this study the Ontario principal, meaning either principal or vice-principal, is the unit of analysis.

Based on the assumption that I, as the researcher of this study, want to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77), I began recruitment using purposeful sampling, which ensures that each participant meets the criteria and detects issues central to the research. My sources included numerous colleagues from my administrative experience, which spans more than 25 years in both rural and urban locations in Ontario, as well as colleagues whom I’ve met through the Ed.D. cohort at OISE, U of T. Snowball sampling was then utilized to expand the sample. Snowball sampling, as described by Bogdan & Biklen (1998), is a sampling technique that asks the first person interviewed to recommend others.

The sample was selected based on principals or vice-principals who self-identify as doing social justice work in schools and who claim that they have reflected upon their work. Specifically, they each 1) have 3–5 years of experience, 2) possess a belief that social justice — issues of marginalization e.g., race, class, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and/or other historically marginalizing conditions — are at the centre of their practice, 3) have evidence other than provincial assessment data to indicate that their leadership has achieved a more just school. Having experience indicates that participants know the everyday realities of being a principal and that they have reflected upon their work. Their experience leads to self-knowledge and demonstrable understanding of leadership strengths and limitations. Their self-identified belief that social justice is the centre of their practice was key to this study. Finally, provincial assessment data is not substantive evidence that participants’ leadership has achieved a more just school. Rather, data on “the extent to which students understand a range of perspectives on and approaches to equity and social justice issues, and of factors that affect inequity and social justice,” as Realizing the Promise of Diversity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) puts it, is more significantly important to social justice than the individual student or school results on standardized tests. Such test results have more to do with the demographics of the school than the teaching and learning that occurs there.
Recruitment of Participants

Recruitment focused on inclusion from the broad spectrum of local contexts within Ontario — urban and rural, elementary and secondary, and principals and vice-principals who work in English-speaking environments.

Two colleagues who met the participant criteria and whose social justice work was known to me were sent emails asking them to consider participating in the study. When both responded in the affirmative, they were emailed an information letter/informed consent (see Appendix A). Once the interviews were completed, using the post-script dialogue from the purposeful sampling (see Appendix B), both participants were asked to pass on the recruitment script email to colleagues whom they believe also meet the participant criteria for the study. Subsequently, potential participants contacted the researcher directly if they were interested, via the recruitment email account supplied. With each participant, the same process was followed until 15 participants from a variety of contexts across Ontario were affirmed. Subsequently, a total of 14 principals and vice-principals, who self-identified as doing social justice work in schools and who claim that they have reflected on their work, participated in the study.

Sensitive ethical issues exist in research. The University of Toronto has a distinct protocol for ethics in research, specifically regarding the recruitment of participants. The steps outlined and approved in the “Ethics Review Protocol,” submitted to the Ethics Review Board, were followed carefully in order to gain access to and permission from participants. To ensure that the participants were aware of any risks associated with participating in the study, a strict consent process was adhered to. To obtain informed consent, the following steps were followed:

1) Colleagues (purposeful sample) were emailed Appendix B to invite them freely and voluntarily to participate in this research. Once participants responded in the affirmative, they were emailed the information/informed consent letter (Appendix A).

2) Similarly, to expand recruitment (snowball sampling), an email from potential participants with whom current participants had shared my institutional email address and recruitment email script (Appendix B) were engaged.
3) Each participant reviewed the invitation letter and informed consent (Appendix A), made inquiries and/or voiced concerns, then individually considered and decided to participate, returning the signed informed consent via email and keeping a copy for their records. Subsequently, further emails were exchanged to set up a date/time/location for each interview.

4) Consent forms were collected and secured.

5) Prior to the interview, the invitation/informed consent letter was reviewed with each of the participants and they were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study prior to the interview.

Procedures were used to protect the confidentiality of the participants. For example, all identifying information of the participants was replaced with identifying codes prior to data collection (interviews).

Participant Profiles

Participants represented a broad spectrum of local education contexts within Ontario — urban and rural, elementary and secondary, public and Catholic systems. Their experience as principals ranged from a minimum of 3 years to 21 years. The chart below demonstrates the breakdown in demographics for this study.
Table 2: Profiles of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Board</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgess</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>racialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D'Andre</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>VP</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>racialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadley</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idella</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>racialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaabir</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>racialized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>secondary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>rural</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackenzie</td>
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<td>elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norman</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>elementary</td>
<td>principal</td>
<td>urban</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>dominant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 14 principals or vice-principals who participated in the study self-identified as doing social justice work in schools and claimed that they had reflected on their work. Every principal possessed a belief that social justice — issues of marginalization, e.g., race, class, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and/or other historically marginalizing conditions — was at the centre of their practice, and claimed his/her leadership had achieved a more just school.

What follows are brief biographical sketches of the individual participants — their experience, the panel/board in which they work, and how they became principals who enact social justice leadership. This information provides a scaffold for the analytical section that follows. Perhaps, as Waite, Nelson, and Guajardo (2007) propose, they may offer a context and some generalization for those reading this research. However, none of the participants fit into a preconceived notion of principalship or vice-principalship per se, and each has his/her individual narrative. Adhering to the ethics of the University of Toronto, all identifying information was changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Neither school names nor affiliated boards are mentioned.
Principal Anderson

Principal Anderson, who has been an elementary principal in a large urban public board for 14 years, didn’t think he would ever become a principal. His commitment to social justice began 35 years ago when he was working in a group home with adults with developmental challenges. He attended a workshop on the process of “normalization,” which he described as looking at how people dealing with disability in its many forms are treated in society. When he became an educator, this experience set in motion his choice to teach teenaged students with developmental disabilities, centred in schools whose populations were made up of a range of socioeconomic groups, including recent immigrants. Later, as a principal, he requested placement in a school that he defined as being in a very “needy” (high poverty) community. In this position, he realized the importance of engaging and supporting parents, so that their children’s basic needs could be met, which in turn would support their success in school. Principal Anderson committed to social justice when he realized that the people living in marginalized communities needed to have a voice. He acknowledges his whiteness and his maleness in his approach to relationships and social justice.

Principal Burgess

Principal Burgess was completing her third year as a secondary vice-principal in an urban Catholic district school board at the time of this research. Her commitment to social justice came “naturally” from her experience with her family growing up: “My parents taught me to be a good person, to do whatever I need to do to support other people.” She claimed that, in her classroom, inclusion was her vision and she connected this vision to being a strong proponent and supporter of special education — “I believe that everybody has a place and purpose.” Together, her experiences with her family and her Catholic faith are central to her commitment to social justice. Principal Burgess’ passion for “just being good to people” and her strong moral compass guides her social justice leadership.

Principal Collins

Principal Collins attributes the development of her awareness of the importance of social justice to her experience as the only Black teacher candidate in a teacher’s college program in the late 1980s. She remembers walking through the door to her first classroom practicum and hearing the
students whispering, “Is she a Black teacher?” Many years later she became active in her board on developing race awareness curriculum. She claims that having the opportunity to do something productive with her experiences with racism changed her life — “It helped me to reflect on my own experiences — it grounded me in my core values of what I wanted to bring forth as I worked with young people in schools.” Principal Collins’ career began as a classroom teacher in middle school. A close friend convinced her to pursue a formal leadership role because she not only has the talent for leadership but represents an under-represented group in school leadership in being both female and Black. She has been an elementary school principal for over a decade, serving social justice by and large in urban schools of high poverty. She believes social justice is about equity, giving voice to the marginalized, power, and challenging the status quo. For Principal Collins, education plays a huge role in levelling the playing field and empowering young people to take issue with injustices in society.

Principal D’Andre

Principal D’Andre’s commitment to social justice developed as a special education teacher working with youth who were disadvantaged because of their difference. “It just resonated with me that these kids (identified special education students) need to have a chance.” She described alarming experiences with teacher colleagues who treated marginalized students poorly. These experiences set her commitment to “student voice.” Principal D’Andre is in her tenth year as an elementary principal in a rural Catholic district school board. Her priority is creating opportunities that ensure that the voices of students — not just the achieving students but those who are struggling in school — are heard.

Principal Evans

Many influences brought Principal Evans to understand social justice. His mother was a special education teacher, so from an early age he understood that students who had identified exceptionalities and who were marginalized by their needs were not included in any typical education system. Principal Evans disclosed that he himself was identified as a student with special needs. As a student, he keenly felt the “conclusions and assumptions” made about him by the education system from its deficit thinking position. “Ironically some of the needs that they identified I would actually identify as my strengths.” When in university, Principal Evans had the opportunity to participate in a program that believed in integration and inclusion for exceptional
students. He next taught at four schools in the Jane and Finch area, where he claims that Peter McLaren\textsuperscript{9} singlehandedly made a mess of the unique strengths and character of the area by naming it the “Corridor.” “I lived in the area and it’s a vibrant, lively, dynamic, caring, and outspoken community.” Principal Evans is now completing his twentieth year as a secondary school administrator, having held both vice-principal and principal positions in a large urban public board.

\textit{Principal Florence}

When Principal Florence was a young girl, her family adopted a small boy who is learning disabled. She witnessed first-hand his experience in the school system, the disadvantages he faced and the marginalization he experienced. She feels that this experience is the foundation of her social justice work. When she began teaching, she had a choice of placements. She chose to move to a marginalized community. Social justice for Principal Florence is grounded in the principles of equity and inclusion. In her view, “education is a vehicle through which to ensure social justice” and the role of social justice leadership is one of advocacy — “advocacy for those who are being disadvantaged by the system or by the process, by the teacher, by the community.” Principal Florence is in her fifth year as a secondary vice-principal in a large urban public board. She recognizes that leading for social justice is challenging and that social justice leaders need to work subversively and strategically to accomplish social justice in their schools.

\textit{Principal Gray}

Principal Gray is now in his late 40s and has been an elementary principal in an urban board in southern Ontario since 2000. He has held various administrative positions including chair, vice-principal, and principal. Principal Gray became highly aware of his white male privilege early in his teaching career, first in a very poor area in Ottawa and then in the Jane/Finch area of Toronto. He claims that “when he dug into how the world operated for people who didn’t look like me, I woke up to the reality of how other people are perceived and embraced in society that has nothing to do [with anything other] than socially constructed barriers.” Principal Gray asserts that his commitment to social justice came as a result of this realization. He sees the role of

\textsuperscript{9} Peter McLaren is Distinguished Professor in Critical Studies, College of Educational Studies, Chapman University, Co-Director of the Paulo Freire Democratic Project, and International Ambassador for Global Ethics and Social Justice.
leadership as social justice — “Social justice is ensuring that my influence is over staff to reach all the students so that [the students] receive equitable support in the school.”

Principal Hadley

Principal Hadley is an elementary principal in a large urban public district school board. She immigrated to Canada from Trinidad with an honours degree in mathematics and economics. She says that, to her, social justice means dealing with exclusion and oppression, recognition and distribution. Social justice matters because society is inequitable — certain groups have privilege, others do not. Principal Hadley has intimate, personal experience with racism and discrimination. She offers her experience of applying to teacher’s college as an immigrant as a poignant example of how schools and education are often unfair places. When she took her application in to the university, she was told that they didn’t accept her qualifications. Principal Hadley claims that had she not challenged the authority of the clerical person making the decision (who she sees as representative of the bureaucracy and power within higher education) she questions where she would be now. This experience of discrimination is just one of many, including being called the “N-word.” As a result of these experiences, she focuses her social justice leadership on empowerment, rather than enabling, in order to build capacity for social justice in the schools where she has worked for the past 11 years.

Principal Idella

Social justice matters to Principal Idella because “it’s the core essence of why I became an educator.” Principal Idella arrived in Canada as a young child from Greece. Both of her parents spoke only Greek and she described their employment as “tough jobs.” She remembers growing up in a very Anglicized school where she and her family experienced discrimination because they did not speak English and they were not of the same social class as the rest of the community. Given her personal experience with marginalization, she believes that schools need to be teaching not just academics, but also how we can have a just society. Principal Idella asserts that social justice is something you are — it is your moral compass and imperative — “It’s not an extra layer of my leadership, it’s who I am.” Principal Idella acknowledges the power and privilege inherent in her position. She feels that leaders must separate their own personal biases and listen, really listen, to what people in their school communities are saying. In turn, Principal Idella believes that in order to promote social justice in a school, there must be what
she characterized as frank and difficult conversations to challenge educators’ mindsets. Principal Idella has held principalships in elementary, primary, and middle schools in a large urban public school board for the past 14 years.

*Principal Jaabir*

Principal Jaabir grew up in a very poor rural community in Nigeria. He introduces himself first as a Black man and second as an African. He claims that his first experiences with marginalization were when he left his little village and felt “the sharp end of the stick.” He claims his strong African mother, who taught him concepts of gender and racial equality, influenced his conception of social justice and the importance of education in ensuring opportunity for a quality life, irrespective of race or gender. Principal Jaabir talked about his mother’s struggle to pay for his education in Nigeria. It was only through the charity of the headmaster, who saw potential in him, that he was able to finish school. Consequently, access to an equitable education is a significant guiding purpose for Principal Jaabir’s social justice leadership. Principal Jaabir is in his third year as principal of a large secondary school in an urban public board in southern Ontario, having previously been a vice-principal for five years. The poor academic reputation of his current school sometimes influences parents to send their children to an alternative high school. He attests that he works diligently on social justice to ensure that the students who do attend have the opportunity for a better life because of their experience in his school.

*Principal Kelly*

Principal Kelly attributes her commitment to social justice to her family who lived a privileged life. Her father was an importer and, when she was a child, he and her mother travelled extensively. When her parents realized that they wanted another child, they chose to adopt a boy from the Philippines. As a young boy living in a well-established white upper-class neighbourhood north of Toronto, he experienced marginalization because he was not white. This marginalization was heightened when, in his early 20s, he came out as a gay man. Principal Kelly spoke about how this experience had a profound impact on her personally and how it changed how she sees people. She openly discussed her feelings of “white privilege guilt.” She asserts that her devotion to her Catholic faith guides her social justice leadership. Principal Kelly is an elementary principal in a dual track French Immersion school in a rural Catholic district
school board. At the time of this research, she was completing her fifth year. Before becoming a principal, she worked at the district level as a curriculum consultant in the areas of equity and religious education. She participated in creating some Ministry of Education documents and implementing professional development related to them.

Principal Lewis

Principal Lewis’ 14 years of experience as an administrator spans both secondary and elementary schools in a rural public school board. Thinking back to when she was a child, she recalls a great deal of conflict in her family. As a result, Principal Lewis explained, social justice has always been something that has driven her — that is at the centre of who she is. She spoke of her strong need for peace, resolution, and a levelling of the playing field so that “school is always a place where everyone is valued and each person is able to meet the goals he/she may have set for themselves.” Principal Lewis explains that her focus is on instilling pride in students about who they are and about educating them about society and how it works. In doing so, students learn about being human and how to treat others, so that school is a safe space to acquire knowledge and grow the skills needed to be successful in life.

Principal Mackenzie

Principal Mackenzie’s commitment to social justice was initiated by her experiences of being on the margin throughout her schooling in the Ontario school system, due to racialized discrimination. She did not see herself in the curriculum and found that teachers expected her — as a nine-year-old Black child — to speak on behalf of the entire Black population about what it is like to be Black. These and other experiences of racism in society, set her course to make the publicly funded education system a space where socially constructed notions of power and inequity are openly addressed in critical discussions. Looking through the lens of her experiences, and now having her own children in the system, she questions why her high-school-age children have never had the opportunity to discuss difference and social justice either in terms of what is happening locally or globally. Principal Mackenzie described the deep resistance she has faced when championing social justice throughout her career, which spans decades. She spoke of a time when, as a classroom teacher, she encouraged her students to think critically about how men and women are socially constructed in the media. The principal approached her and said, “You know Mackenzie, you are doing great things in you classroom
but you really need to tone it down.” This example illuminates why she now feels that leading for social justice is often subversive. Principal Mackenzie has been a principal for eight years in a large urban public school board. Recently, having worked on implementing the Equity and Inclusive Education strategy, she has accepted an appointment with the Ministry of Education.

Principal Norman

Principal Norman fled Germany with her family in the late 1950s. She explained that her parents did so in search of opportunity to live in a free culture. Her Jewish father was an aeronautical engineer who was unable to obtain a position in Canada in his field; he worked on pipelines and then selling insurance. Her mother, a highly educated woman who spoke several languages and was an international switchboard operator, could not gain employment with the Canadian telephone company because of her German accent. Principal Norman remembers that in their neighbourhood in Toronto, she and her parents were consistently referred to as Nazis and murderers. She asserted that her commitment to social justice and to public education came from her parents, her personal experience with gender inequality as a female principal, and then reverse racial and class discrimination because she is visibly white and dresses well. Principal Norman has over 21 years of experience as a principal in elementary and secondary schools in a large urban public school board in Ontario. She stressed that social justice leadership is a “battle” in which you engage “in little fights along the way.”

3.5 Data Collection

The main method of collecting data for this qualitative study relied on a series of 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Field notes of observations and reflections along with a review of documents comprise the data collected for this study.

According to McMillan and Wergin (2006), the primary method of collecting data in a qualitative study is the individual interview. “The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 67). The main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind” (Patton, 2002, p. 241, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Given the research
question and the purpose of this study, interviews were the most appropriate form of data collection.

While different types of interviews exist, the semi-structured interview was chosen because it can be a mix of more or less structured and flexibly worded questions. Merriam (2009) cautions that the way in which questions are worded in an interview is a crucial consideration in extracting the type of information desired and “the fewer, more open-ended your questions are the better” (p. 104). To guide question development, Merriam has found Strauss, Schatzman, Bucher, and Sabshin’s (1981, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 97) typology of different questions useful: hypothetical, devil’s advocate, ideal position, and interpretive questions. Supported by this typology, a critical theoretical perspective, the conceptual framework, and the research questions, an interview protocol (Cresswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009) for asking questions and recording answers was developed. The interview protocol (see Appendix C) contained a mix of more or less structured questions about background/demographic information, and the participant’s experiences and behaviours, opinions, values, and feelings (Patton, 2002, cited in Merriam, 2009). The reason for each question was based on the need to ensure each of the sub-questions was responded to. As you will note in Appendix C, questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 12 addressed the first sub-question; questions 6 and 13 investigated the second sub-question; and, questions 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 explored the third sub-question.

Prior to conducting the interviews, since “Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your questions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 95), the interview protocol was first piloted with volunteer colleagues who are principals, whose social justice leadership work was familiar, and who voluntarily agreed to participate in a mock interview for the sole purpose of ensuring that the questions were worded to elucidate responses to the research question. As a result of the pilot interviews, the questions were refined.

The interview protocol was provided to participants in advance of the interview. During the interview, The Ontario Leadership Framework (Ontario Institute for Educational Leadership, 2013) was made available to each participant. As this is an emergent design, the questions were flexibly worded and evolved under the direction of each participant and changed throughout the process as needed. In the tradition of critical theory, the interviews embraced a transformative interviewing philosophy, meaning that issues of power, privilege, and oppression were made
visible and the researcher intentionally aimed to challenge and change the understandings of the participants (Roulston, 2007, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 92). Gentle probing was enlisted when explanation, clarification, and description were needed for understanding. With the exception of three interviews that had to be conducted by telephone because of distance, face-to-face interviews of approximately 60 minutes were conducted at a private, innocuous location, for example a coffee shop or other convenient, agreed-upon location. None of the participants declined to have the interview recorded. Immediately following the interview, observations and reflections on the verbal and nonverbal behaviour of each participant were recorded in field notes and each interview was transcribed.

Merriam (2009) contends that documents open new insights and the researcher must keep an open mind when it comes to discovering useful documents. Documents, according to Merriam (2009), include anything written prior to the research at hand. Public documents and research documents related to and including The Ontario Leadership Framework, as well as the relevant research that supports this framework since its inception in 2005, were gathered and examined. Intersecting with the OLF document are many other Ministry of Education policies governing principal/vice-principal responsibility and accountability. Of particular pertinence to this study is the Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). This policy was examined as a document relevant to this study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Because the process of data collection is recursive and dynamic, a qualitative design is always emergent. As a result, a subsection on data analysis may be misleading (Merriam, 2009). In this study, data analysis and data collection were carried out simultaneously from the beginning. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), doing so enables the researcher to make decisions that narrow the study, develop analytical questions, plan data collection based on previous observations, write memos about what has been learned, try out ideas and themes on participants, consider the literature while in the field, and visualize what is being learned about the phenomenon that can bring clarity to the analysis.

Cresswell (2009) recommends that data analysis be clearly identified. To this end, his suggested steps (pp. 185–190), in italics below, were utilized in the data analysis. While the steps are
distinct, they are also simultaneous and interactive since “[d]ata analysis is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study” (p. 184).

Step 1. **Organize and prepare the data for analysis.**

Data collected for this study consisted of audio files, interview transcripts, and field notes. All interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ permission. The raw data or audio files were then encrypted. Each recorded interview was then transcribed verbatim as soon as possible following the interview. Copies of transcriptions were emailed to participants with an invitation to review and revise through “track changes” directly on the original transcript. Participants were asked to return the revised transcripts or to advise if there were no changes. Only one participant made changes to the transcript. Once the transcripts were confirmed as an accurate representation of the interview and no modifications were deemed necessary, the audio files were destroyed. Subsequently, within each of the transcripts, names and other identifying information connecting the participants with their organizations were systematically changed, giving each principal an alphabetized pseudonym beginning with the letter A (Anderson) and ending with N (Norman). Hard copies of each of the transcripts were printed and filed with the field notes for each participant.

Step 2. **Read through all data.**

Each transcript was reviewed individually, first in a descriptive way to get a sense of what the interview was all about. Notes were made in the right-hand margin. The second reading of each transcript gave a more general, collective sense of the data. Again, ideas were recorded in the margin. These margin notes and ideas served as a preliminary analysis.

Step 3. **Begin a detailed analysis with a coding process.**

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), using both inductive and deductive components, was chosen to analyze the data. “The constant comparative method of data analysis is widely used in all kinds of qualitative studies ... Its inductive comparative nature provides a systemic strategy for analyzing any data set” (Merriam, 2009, p. 31). Merriam (2009) states,
The basic strategy of the method is to do just what its name implies — constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances. Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization. (pp. 199–200)

Essentially, the purpose of the method is to identify patterns in the data. An inductive process enables researchers to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories as they gather bits and pieces of information from interviews, observations, or documents — data, which in turn are combined and ordered into larger themes or categories as the researcher works from the particular to the general (Merriam, 2009). In turn, these tentative categories are checked with other data. At this point, a slight shift occurs to a “deductive mode of thought” (Merriam, 2009, p. 183) to see whether the category exists in subsequent data until saturation.

Step 4. Use the coding process; generate a small number of themes or categories.

As data is collected, data analysis follows systematic steps. “These involve generating categories of information (open coding), selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model (axial coding), and then explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories (selective coding)” (Cresswell, 2009, p. 184).

The process of open coding began with a third, inductive reading of the transcripts, during which similarities or categories were noted. This reading was the preliminary to organizing the data to see if new categories or codes emerged. Cresswell (2009) also conceptualizes variations in codes, which Merriam (2009) explains in this way: “Since the categories or themes or findings are responsive to the research questions, the name of these categories will be congruent with the orientation of the study” (p. 184). Moreover, Merriam states that most often the investigator devises categories that reflect what he or she sees in the data. Preliminary codes were recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript.

A fourth reading of each transcript led to the decision to abbreviate each of the categories and institute the use of alpha codes. These categories or themes were then analyzed for each individual transcript and across different transcripts — the process of axial coding or “relating categories and properties to each other, refining the category scheme” (Merriam, 2009, p. 200).
To enable selective coding (in which core categories, propositions, or hypotheses are developed, which in turn become the major findings of the research), data must be organized in a very systematic way, assigning a designation to various aspects of the data (Merriam, 2009). To facilitate this process, Excel software was employed.

In Excel, tabs were set up for each participant. Columns of data were identified. Themes from each of the data sets (Anderson through Norman) were transferred onto an individual data sheet along with accompanying quotes to support the themes. A separate column was generated where themes were compared with other participants in order to generate common themes.

Steps 5: Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.

The data, in themes from each transcript, was then transferred to a summary analysis spreadsheet (in Excel) of the ten themes that emerged from the data. The summary spreadsheet assisted in deductively reducing the major findings into five interconnecting themes. These interconnecting themes, through deductive analysis, turned out to be four themes aligned with the research sub-questions. Quotes supporting the themes were then compared with the common themes generated previously and were organized to illustrate the accounts of the principals’ experiences in the form of narrative text.

Step 6. Make an interpretation on meaning of the data.

“Asking What were the lessons learned?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Cresswell, 2009, p. 189) is the quintessential question to ask in this final step of making an interpretation of the data according to Cresswell (2009). The interpretation of the findings are grounded both in what this researcher brought to this study of my own culture, history, and experiences and in comparison with the findings in the literature and critical theory that situates this research.

Reliability, Validity, and Generalizability

“Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner” (Merriam, 2009, p. 209).

Both qualitative reliability and validity procedures were incorporated into the data analysis, including but not limited to clarifying the bias that I, as a scholar and practitioner, bring to this
study: “As reflexive qualitative researchers, what we see depends on how we filter or select what we see. What we see also depends on how we look — how we open ourselves to the acts of seeing” (Luttrell, 2010, p. 476).

Reliability or “the extent to which there is consistency in the findings” (Merriam, 2009, p. 234) was addressed by explaining the assumptions and theory underlying the study, by triangulating data, and by describing in detail how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from the data (Cresswell, 2009). Reliability in the instrument — the semi-structured interview protocol in this study — was checked for consistency across participants and within the instrument itself. Reliability in the procedures and analyses was met by documenting the systematic process used to collect and analyze the data (McMillan & Wergin, 2006).

Validity depends on the fit between the intent of the research and what was actually studied. McMillan and Wergin (2006) note that qualitative research is strong in internal validity when it revolves around credibility — the extent to which the data, data analysis, and results are accurate and trustworthy — because the main purpose of a qualitative study is to obtain an understanding of the phenomenon under study rather than to generalize the findings. To increase credibility, detailed field notes were kept to describe how participants were engaged, along with the nature and length of the interviews. Member checking — submitting transcripts to the participants to solicit feedback to ensure that their perspectives had been recorded accurately — was also enlisted. Coding of transcripts was done in an effort to identify trends or conclusions in the data. Triangulation — comparing and cross-checking of the interview data, with the field notes and the documents — was also used in this study.

External validity (generalizability) may suffer in this study because of the limited number of persons, situations, or events studied. Since the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize findings, it is usually discussed in terms such as translatability or comparability rather than generalizability (McMillan & Wergin, 2006). Steps were taken to safeguard validity. First, the data is complete and rich; second, both the data and analysis are described in detail; and, third, the results provide insights useful in other comparable settings.
**Ethical Considerations**

Because this research involved human subjects, the University of Toronto ethics committee reviewed the research and approval was received from the University of Toronto Internal Review Board before the research project began.

Merriam (2009) raises cautions about the complexities of the “interviewer–respondent interaction”: “Interviewing — whether it is highly structured with predetermined questions or semi-structured and open-ended — carries with it both risks and benefits to the informants. Respondents may feel their privacy has been invaded, they may be embarrassed by certain questions, and they may tell things they had never intended to reveal” (Merriam, 2009, p. 231). There is the remote risk with interviews that participants may feel uncomfortable or upset. To minimize the risk, participants were well informed about the nature of the study and of their rights through the informed consent letter (Appendix A), which they signed, and which I reviewed with them prior to their participation in the interview. Participants were encouraged to keep the consent form for their records. In addition, in collaboration with the participants, interviews were planned to take place outside of the participants’ working hours and removed from their work sites to ensure a comfortable and confidential atmosphere.

Before the interview began, I reviewed with each participant that:

1) all interview participation is voluntary, i.e., he/she may choose to not be audiotaped, to not answer any questions in the interview, to terminate the interview at any time, and/or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence, penalty, and/or judgment;

2) at no time will value judgments be placed on his/her responses nor is there risk of any harm;

3) their information will be anonymous because their names (and the names of their school and board) will not be used in the study nor within any of the research, writing, and publication;

4) I, the researcher, will strictly maintain the confidentiality of participants, and lastly;

5) any and all information related to the interview will be retained in a secure location and kept confidential. Should participants feel uncomfortable or upset, I will switch the tape recorder off,
acknowledge the value of what the participant has shared, and suggest that we move on to another question.

Participants were informed that following the interview, if they chose to withdraw from the research, the participant’s data, both audio and transcribed, would be destroyed without consequence to the participant. As outlined in the “Invitation to Participate in a Research Study” letter, after the interview, transcripts were sent to each participant to read in order for him/her to add any further information or to correct any misinterpretations. The letter also outlined to participants that once the data had been analyzed, they would not be able to withdraw from the study.

Participants were informed that all identifying information, including when, where, and with whom the interview was conducted would be replaced with identifying codes (i.e., pseudonyms) to protect their confidentiality. Similarly, school names and affiliated boards would not be identified in the data. Should the participant name specific institutions or persons in the interview, these would also be given a fictitious title or name in the final transcription of the data and not mentioned by name or title in the dissertation or in any subsequent publication.

Participants were given the opportunity to request a copy of the summary of results of this study. The consent form states: “If you would like a summary of the results of the study, please check here. The summary of results will be emailed to participants after completion of the study.” In the case that participants would like to be informed of the results of the study, their contact information was kept separate from the data.

3.7 Summary

The study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with flexibly worded questions guided by the conceptual framework developed from the review of literature on social justice, social justice leadership, and The Ontario Leadership Framework. Fourteen principals and vice-principals from urban and rural, elementary and secondary, public and Catholic systems, representing both racialized and dominant cultures who self-identified as doing social justice leadership were interviewed. The interviews explored how they understand social justice leadership, or drive to lead for social justice, the strategies or practices they engage in to do and to sustain their social justice work in Ontario schools, and what aspects of The Ontario
Leadership Framework they feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work. The interview questions were designed to investigate the experiences of principals as they engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership. Responses were critically analyzed using a constant comparative data analysis process to inductively find recurring patterns that characterize the data.
Chapter 4
Findings, Critical Analysis, and Discussion of Social Justice Leadership

This chapter describes how principals understand social justice leadership and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice (Research Question #1). A critical analysis and discussion follows the account of the data in each sub-section.

4.1 Social Justice: Privilege and Power

Principals view social justice through a double lens: one of privilege and one of power. They claim social justice in schools is anchored in the social and historical notions of privilege and power. Through a lens of privilege, principals define social justice as recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting difference that, together, lead to inclusion. Through a lens of power, they see social justice as the equitable distribution of power — in a robust sense — that leads to empowerment.

In general, principals define and understand social justice in more than a purely neutral or descriptive manner. They realize that privilege and power exist because of the way in which society is constructed. “I woke up to the reality that how other people are perceived and embraced in society has nothing to do with anything other than socially constructed barriers” (Gray). Principal Gray’s experience reflects the responses of many of the participants in the study. Like him, they understand from their experiences that the predominant white male perspective gives them “a passport in life” simply because of the way in which society is socially and historically constructed.

Principals explicitly identify several forms of privilege, including ability, race, gender, and ethnicity/language. “Society is inequitable, certain groups have privilege; some do not. Traditionally dominant groups who are privileged, they are not willing to recognize that injustices exist that need to be addressed” (Hadley).

Principals claim that social justice is about rethinking those inequities that lead to privilege for some and disadvantage for others. This understanding shapes their concept of social justice in their schools. Principal Gray explains, “I had to help them navigate the system.” Many principals
understand that social justice involves a reconsideration of privilege — recognizing and then acknowledging and accepting that differences exist. This understanding in turn, leads to inclusion. “Social justice ... in terms of what I do, has to do with the way in which I include, value, and promote the self-worth of the students in my building” (Evans). “Students feel that they belong” (Burgess).

As with privilege, so follows power. Principals see that power creates dominance or oppression in education — “who gets what” is proportionate to those with or without power. Social justice is about critically examining how society is constructed in empowering some and marginalizing others. “For me, social justice is looking at all of those social historical pieces and looking at them from a very critical perspective and engaging in an opportunity to critically examine the way in which society’s perspectives have been constructed and how to re-think that” (Mackenzie).

Two themes exist within the concept of power — equity and distribution. Equity for the principals means fairness. They use equity and social justice interchangeably. As one principal states, “Social Justice — it means equity” (D’Andre). The principals describe equity as either everyone getting treated fairly, or as everyone having equal opportunities. For Principal Jaabir, social justice means, “Every member of society is getting a fair shake” (Jaabir). In Principal Collins’ view, “Generally, regardless of the politics behind it, social justice to me is just levelling the playing field” (Collins). For some, however, social justice includes both equity and fairness. Principal Lewis sees equity and fairness as “level[ling] the playing field for everyone and respect[ing] everyone in their needs” (Lewis).

But social justice is also about distribution: the fair and equitable distribution of power. “It has to do with recognition and distribution” (Hadley). When the principals examine social justice and distribution through a lens of power, their definition of social justice as distribution becomes more robust. Distribution, then, is not just the distribution of goods and services in the charitable sense, it is the distribution of power in a real way that counters dominance and oppression. “Looking at issues of power — the isms: ageism, classism, racism, sexism — they are all anchored in the issue of power and who has the power” (Collins). This view arises from the lived experience of many of the principals in the study who feel first-hand the injustices connected to those with or without power.
Unlike inclusion and equity in the charitable sense, i.e., providing help with a tolerant attitude, principals understand that power must be distributed equitably so that it empowers the marginalized: “giving those among us who are or who have been marginalized, who are disenfranchised — giving them a voice, hearing, learning about their stories, framing their contributions to society in an appropriate way” (Collins). Principals contend that social justice is not about charity, because even a benevolent view still holds all of the power. Rather, social justice is about empowerment — ceding autonomy and self-determination to the “others.” “Social justice is the outcome when you find a way to honour diversity, inclusion, equity, and excellence” (Evans). A key aspect of empowerment is attending and responding to the voices of others. “Social justice to me is really listening, listening to individuals; it’s learning from individuals and the community” (Norman).

Social justice conceived of as empowerment not only acknowledges the differences in privilege and power, it challenges the status quo. The principals in this study acknowledge that power, including their own power, has the potential to set up the conditions for and the perpetuation of marginalization through a charitable sense of social justice. Or it has the potential to empower — to challenge the status quo giving social justice a more robust conception and definition.

The principals argue that privilege and power together perpetuate the social and historical inequities in society. Because education and schools reflect society and in fact are established to maintain its values, schools not only maintain the status quo in society, they also teach that some students are privileged and hold more power than others. “Education holds a great amount of power; the teachers hold huge amounts of power and so do the principals. It’s incredible” (Idella). The resulting hierarchy in educational institutions demonstrates that power and status quo are very important in education and easily perpetuated.

**Critical Analysis and Discussion of Social Justice**

While much of the following was outlined in the Literature Review, how social justice is defined is worth repeating because of the importance of working from a clear definition.

In the literature, conceptions of social justice are varied, complex, and contested (Marshall & Maricela, 2010). Recurring themes are distributive, retributive, and recognitive social justice (Gale, 2000). Gale (2000) describes retributive social justice as “primarily concerned with
fairness in the competition for goods” and recognitive as focusing on difference. He favours the recognitive because it expands the understanding of social justice to include “a positive regard for social difference and the centrality of socially democratic processes in working towards its achievement” (p. 267). Other researchers build on these themes. For Griffiths, distribution means “[t]he right distribution of benefits in a society” (Griffiths, 1998b, cited in Joshee, 2007, p. 172). Shields (2004) describes a “just education” as a system that ensures equity of access, which aligns with both the distributive and recognitive notions of social justice. In discussing difference, Shields (2004) uses the term pathologizing to denote a process of treating differences as deficits. It is a process that locates the responsibility for school success in the lived experiences of children (their home life, home culture, socioeconomic status, etc.) rather than situating responsibility in the education system itself (p. 112). On the other hand, Shields declares that social justice in schools is realized when all children from all groups find inclusion in the curriculum through their lived experiences. Such an approach would lead to equitable outputs of academic standards so that children can leave school fully prepared to lead fulfilling lives (p. 124)

Ryan (2006) sees social justice as inclusion, meaning “everyone deserves to be included fairly in all systems and practices of school and society” (p. 15). He claims inclusion provides a positive focus on those who are consistently disadvantaged or marginalized. Ryan’s view implies that inclusion, in terms of education justice, encompasses all three themes. In distributive and retributive social justice, it is the equitable/fair distribution of education. In recognitive social justice, inclusion acknowledges difference.

In Connell’s (1993) view, social justice is about the distribution of educational opportunity. However, in his research, he concludes that social justice in education is more about “the social relevancy and responsiveness of the relationship between the marginalized and the socially dominant or hegemonic content or curriculum derived historically from the educational practices of European upper-class men” (p. 25). Connell’s view is more than just distributive — it is also recognitive. Further, he argues, assessment systems are powerful because they “shape the form of the curriculum as well as its more obvious content” (p. 32). As a result, school systems value achievement on individual merit and embrace a very closed definition of curriculum, outcomes, and the purpose of schooling. In this way, they support the retributive theme of social justice.
From a range of theoretical orientations, various definitions of social justice are based on the epistemological differences described above. Viewing social justice through Gale’s three categories suggests that the findings in this study fall into the recognitive and distributive themes. In the recognitive sense, for principals, privilege implies difference — and recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting difference leads to inclusion. In the distributive sense, they see how power associated with privilege determines how equity will be distributed and the marginalized empowered. It appears that principals do not discuss the distributive form of social justice because they see it from a critical orientation. Principals have a robust sense of social justice, which is not simply about the fair and charitable distribution of goods.

Gale describes retributive social justice as “primarily concerned with fairness in the competition for goods.” In a review of the literature, the phrase “fairness in the competition for goods” that describes social justice is likely supported by a positivist view. Positivism ideologically supports the concepts of individualism, rationality, and equality (Foster, 1986). In the political realm, it is described as “neoliberalism,” and it aims to maintain the “status quo” by the power it gains and sustains by serving the interests of the dominant, most powerful members of society (Kincheloe, 1999). Those who support the retributive approach argue that equal opportunity for attainment of goods is in fact social justice. They see equal opportunity as fairness and equity.

The weakness in a retributive definition of social justice is that it says nothing about either difference or privilege. In terms of distribution, it interchangeably uses equity and fairness to mean the equalization of goods and services. The retributive definition of social justice doesn’t consider how society is historically constructed — where fairness and equality situate the few who are privileged at the expense of many. Given that the principals in this study acknowledge both their power and their privilege, social justice in the retributive sense was not discussed. In the broader context of principals, however, this definition of social justice offers an explanation as to how inequities are preserved. Those with power, i.e., principals, perpetuate this view, likely because few of them have had their own first-hand experiences with marginalization and its effects.

To summarize, the varied and contested views of social justice drive a major section of this research. Much of its focus is dedicated to an investigation of how principals characterize social justice and how social justice and education are related to each other. A strong foundation of
social justice affects the role of principal. In fact, how principals conceive of social justice is the foundation upon which the remainder of this study rests. It asks, *How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?*

In this vein, Gale’s 2000 study, *Rethinking social justice in schools: How will we recognize it when we see it?* raises questions that help to deepen the definition of social justice: “*What should social justice desire? Whose desire is it? How should social justice be achieved? Who should social justice benefit?*” and “*What should social justice deliver?*” (p. 268). The previous section of this study addressed the questions, *What should social justice desire? and Whose desire is it?* The next sub-section “Going Deeper: Social Justice and Student Achievement” will address Gale’s questions, “*Whom should social justice benefit?*” and “*What should social justice deliver?*” Principals claim that student achievement drives their social justice leadership. Investigating how principals define student achievement offers insight into how they conceive of social justice. Finally, Gale’s question, “*How should social justice be achieved?*” will be addressed in a later section — Social Justice Leadership: The Act of Social Justice that brings together how principals conceive of social justice and how they understand social justice leadership.

### 4.2 Going Deeper: Social Justice and Student Achievement

How do principals understand the connection between social justice and student achievement?

> Principals claim social justice cannot be achieved without a focus on learning and student achievement. As such, principals define social justice outcomes as high academic achievement, critical thinking, and social/emotional intelligence, as well as student empowerment and responsiveness to injustice.

Principals see the fundamental interdependency of social justice and education. “*SJ and education are intertwined*” (Burgess; Hadley). By “intertwined” they mean that these concepts coexist — where social justice is an outcome of education and education is a platform for social justice action, or as Principal Norman put it, “I don’t think that one functions in the absence of the other” (Norman). Although social justice and education are interdependent, each will be considered separately — first, to contribute to the overall understanding of what principals mean by social justice, and then to examine how they conceive of social justice leadership.
While social justice in schools is anchored in the social and historical notions of privilege and power, social justice is an outcome of education: “Social justice is the outcome when you find a way to honour diversity, inclusion, equity, and excellence” (Evans). As an outcome of education, principals consider learning as fundamental to social justice: “Learning is the foundation of social justice ... they are integral together” (Evans). This finding is an important one. Principals understand the connection between social justice and learning — that these are intertwined, and that social justice is not achievable without a focus on learning. In response to Gale’s (2000) question, “Whom should social justice benefit?” the principals reply students. In response to Gale’s question, “What should social justice deliver?” the principals reply learning. In this way, principals consider students and their learning fundamental to how they conceive of social justice.

Secondly, an integral aspect of social justice is that it requires action — and education is a platform for that action. “Social justice in terms of the education system ... occurs when students are given the tools, the opportunities, the knowledge to excel” (Evans). Principals claim action means challenging students and staff to critically examine, rethink, and discuss how marginalization is constructed and perpetuated by the privilege and power structures of the few in the dominant group in our society.

It’s about the way in which you work with the students and with the staff about rethinking the world that we live in … Ask them to think critically about how their view of the world has been developed, and how that view has been developed to maintain and establish particular ideals that actually work to maintain the status quo. (Mackenzie)

The finding that education is the platform for social justice needs further examination. It challenges the purpose of education and schools and how principals define learning or student achievement. It is a finding that leads us to ask Gale’s question, “What should social justice deliver?” Historically, the purpose of education has evolved according to the demands of society. Going deeper into what principals believe are the fundamental social justice outcomes for a student illuminates what they consider to be the purpose of schools, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding of social justice.

In the literature, the purposes of education are discussed at length from various perspectives. For the purpose of this study, Robeyns (2006) supplies a useful construct, identifying three roles or
purposes of schools and education: human capital, rights, and capabilities. From a human capital perspective, education has both a personal and collective economic role. From a human rights perspective, education is the guaranteed right of every human being. This view emphasizes the intrinsic importance of education and implies government responsibility to mobilize resources to ensure that a quality education is available for all. Lastly, from the capability perspective, the impact of education is evaluated based on how education has affected all capabilities, that is, to consider all the changes in opportunity or well-being provided through an education. Robeyns claims that the appropriate view of the purpose of schools and education lies in expanding the capabilities of human potential, and encouraging a rights-based discourse so that the capabilities and potential of all students are respected. Certainly the findings of this study concur with those of Robeyns. However, at the same time, principals believe another fundamental purpose of schooling and education is to ensure that students are prepared to take action towards social justice: “Education ... it’s about teaching how we should have a just society” (Idella).

Principals consider social justice and education to be intertwined. They claim social justice cannot be achieved without a focus on learning and student achievement, seeing these as codependent or inter-reliant. Examining the outcomes of social justice through a consideration of the very purpose of schools as described above will lead to a deeper understanding of social justice.

**Student Achievement: Social Justice Outcomes**

*In order to further explore a definition of social justice, this section asks, “What should social justice deliver?” If learning is the fundamental outcome of education, for principals this question means defining student achievement. The purpose of schools as described by Robeyns provides an appropriate background through which to contextualize the principals’ view of student achievement or social justice outcomes. Principals define social justice outcomes in a holistic way: high academic achievement, critical thinking, and social/emotional intelligence, as well as student empowerment and responsiveness to injustice.*

1. High Academic Achievement

Like Robeyns (2006), principals believe all students have a right to a high-quality education: “Social justice in the schools is that every kid knows that they have the right to an education”
(Jaabir). The intrinsic importance or value of education, they believe, is for students to have an “opportunity to better their life ... education for me is the cornerstone of life” (Jaabir). However, because of their understanding of privilege and power, they are also keenly aware that the way in which a high-quality education is interpreted as academic achievement varies between the dominant group of students and those traditionally marginalized because of race, culture, poverty, etc. “Every human being out there needs to have the opportunity to better their life, irrespective of who they are, what race they are, what gender ... This will allow you to better yourself to become a better human being ... to improve your quality of life” (Jaabir).

A high-quality education, in terms of how the principals define social justice, is one where students are recognized, acknowledged, and accepted as different; and where equity and fairness exist as their right. Students also have the right to an education where there is an equitable distribution of power among all stakeholders within the school. It is an education focused on high academic achievement for all, or as one principal explains, it is an education that offers “the same opportunities privileged people have” (Hadley). Principal Gray argues, “I do not accept any social justice definition that does not support students making academic progress. It’s foolhardy.” These rights form the essential intrinsic purpose and importance of education. However, for many of the secondary level minority students, principals claim that a high-quality education is not within reach because “there is too much segregation in schools with academic, applied, and locally developed (streams) ... Large biases are created ... Stigma is attached to those courses” (Burgess). Principals claim that, in a socially just school, educators must recognize, acknowledge, and engage students differently so that in the end, all students have the same outcome, not a different outcome for minority and non-minority students.

Secondary principals are well aware of what happens to minority students when difference is not recognized, acknowledged and accepted: it creates a cycle of marginalization. The education system perpetuates the cycle of marginalization by lowering the bar for minority students (Principal Jaabir) and by failing to differentiate the curriculum in a way that gives minority students an opportunity to be successful (Principal Mackenzie): “I don’t believe that we have a curriculum currently in secondary schools that every student is able to access” (Mackenzie). According to Principal Jaabir, secondary minority students are placed in applied classes often because the educators possess a deficit mindset regarding these students’ potential. The stigma attached to these courses is that the students know applied courses are for “stupid kids.” The
result is a cycle in which the students who are already underachieving fulfill their self-deprecating philosophy. In response, the minority students find a way out of school — either by failing grades or through violence and suspension — which in turn eliminates their opportunities for higher education and an escape from poverty. While the principals acknowledge that changes are needed to ensure the curriculum is culturally relevant, almost all of them believe, from a rights-based perspective, that by setting high expectations for high academic achievement for all students, the inequities experienced by minority students can be eliminated. In this way, high academic achievement is a cornerstone of social justice and social justice outcomes.

As a cornerstone of social justice, Principal Gray points out that setting high academic achievement goals for all students ensures that “schools don’t support the status quo.” High academic achievement can challenge the deficit mindset of schools that support the status quo and ensure that all students have, not only a right to an education, but a right to a quality education. “[Students need a] strong grasp of literacy and numeracy so they can fight against the system ... to make sure they aren’t pulled down or that the deficit ideologies don’t sink into their skin ... If you don’t, ... all of that internal passion to overcome will not nearly be as powerful” (Gray).

High academic achievement is a fundamental social justice outcome. First, it has the potential to break the cycle of marginalization in schools, and second, it provides students with hope. “Student achievement that is focused on academic progress for students is a core underpinning of social justice if students are to have hope for the future” (Gray). Principals believe that high academic achievement is a fundamental social justice outcome. They argue that student achievement has to focus on the whole child: “Literacy alone will not be enough ... Social justice includes the whole child ... [and addresses] matters of racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, able-ism” (Gray). Principals also understand that they need to work with staff to challenge their deficit mindsets and question their pedagogy: “Using a strength-based approach ... the teacher has to believe that there are strategies or ways that we can work together to help kids to learn ... [and] to discuss instructional practices together. I mean everything leads to equity and inclusivity” (Lewis).
2. Critical Thinking and Social/Emotional Well-Being

From a capacity-based discourse, the purpose of schools has to do with how education affects all capabilities to expand human potential, including well-being (Robeyns, 2006). From this perspective, principals claim that the purpose of schools and schooling is having the resilience and capability to pursue whatever goals the students set for themselves — “School is always a place where everyone is valued and everyone is able to meet whatever goals they may have for themselves…” (Lewis) — to live a fulsome life, to become “fully, whole members of our society” (Evans). Principals claim that social/emotional well-being supports critical thinking, which in turn helps students attain full membership in society. Together, critical thinking and social/emotional well-being comprise the second fundamental social justice outcome.

Essentially, emotional well-being helps students to be “able to accept challenges and accept the risk” (Lewis). Critical thinking in this context means students are able to think independently and to question the connections between concepts. In particular, critical thinking is understanding and investigating how socially constructed barriers limit students from attaining their full human potential.

Ask students ... to start thinking critically about what it is that is in their community that they have, what they don’t have and why that might be, and how those inequities get replicated ... Students will then be able to challenge those inequities ... Education is the platform to be able to engage kids in having those kinds of conversations (Mackenzie).

The practice of critical thinking, the principals agree, comes from students with high social/emotional well-being, who have “a good insight into themselves, what their beliefs are” (D’Andre). High social/emotional well-being means the students have strong inner self-supports including high self-awareness, confidence and self-esteem, self-sufficiency, and independence.

Some of the principals suggest that students need to think critically in order to gain “awareness of how society socially constructs identity” (Gray), both theirs and that of others. Through the process of deconstructing identity, the students, as Principal D’Andre points out, “feel that they have been valued as a person no matter what their areas of strength/weakness or in whatever ways they are different” (D’Andre). Or, as Principal Lewis suggests, “Social justice is about them (students) feeling connected.” As a result, the student will have a strong sense of self and
be immune to those identities fabricated by society. “[The] person would know him/herself ... to be immune to those constructed identities” (Gray). Principal Evans gives a poignant example: “If a student chooses to be bisexual, it’s not my lens. I need to honour, respect, recognize, and value that — I don’t ask them to change their lens to become my lens” (Evans).

Critical thinking and social/emotional well-being in this way are connected. If students possess the social/emotional well-being to think critically, the principals feel that they will have the resilience and ability to pursue whatever goals they set for themselves to live a fulsome life: “that they’re armed with the tools they need for the rest of their life; for example, to question things, to overcome barriers, to not be deterred, to have resilience” (Florence).

In this context, then, learning must become broader than just academics, although some of the principals feel that “academic skills support the two (critical thinking and resilience)” (Gray). If, as some believe, all learning is social and emotional, then academics and critical thinking, as well as social/emotional well-being are inextricable in affecting all capabilities to expand human potential. Focusing on teaching students to access their inner strengths, and to think critically, supports academic achievement. In turn, academic achievement supports the development of social/emotional well-being and critical thinking. Principal D’André, fittingly points out that “[i]t’s easy to instill critical thinking in kids, but what are they going to do about it? ... That outcome is really important.”

For the principals in this study, high academic achievement and critical thinking are two cornerstones of social justice outcomes that work together to achieve social justice for students. While the principals believe, from a rights-based perspective, that the purpose of schools and schooling is for students to have an “opportunity to better their life” (Jaabir) and, from a capacity-based discourse, to become “fully, whole members of our society” (Evans), they also believe that the purpose of schools and schooling is to ensure that students understand and act on their responsibility for social justice through “empowering young people to take action, to not accept, to challenge, the status quo” (Norman).

3. Student Empowerment and Responsiveness to Injustice

Some findings of this study do not fit into a rights-based or a capacity-based discourse because principals believe that an additional, fundamental purpose of schools and education is to ensure
that students are prepared to take action towards social justice. From this perspective, principals argue that a significant purpose of schools and schooling is to help every student become a “successful citizen” (Idella), meaning the student is prepared to “actively make a more tolerant society” (Jaabir). As Principal Idella points out, “Education is not just supposed to be about ‘my child has a better opportunity’; it’s about teaching how we should have a just society.” To become successful citizens, principals claim that students need to be empowered — to feel they have a voice and then to use their voice to actively respond to injustice — to make a more just society. Being empowered and responsive to injustice as “a critically conscious individual” (Idella) is the third fundamental social justice outcome.

Principals claim that students first need to feel they have a voice. Voice, from a critical perspective, connotes power or the lack of power. Student voice or self-empowerment begins when educators distribute their power to the students by engaging in critical dialogue about privilege and the power associated with that privilege. Through dialogue, students begin to understand, acknowledge, and accept their own power and privilege, “to understand their rights and to be able to advocate on their behalf” (Idella), and to recognize and acknowledge that many differences are not accepted. They see that inclusion, equity, and fairness are often shrouded in the veil of “equality.” This confusion of equality with equity extends beyond their immediate circle of influence to the greater global society. “Students understand the fundamental workings of social justice” (Norman), which means that it gives students what principals describe as a sense of “respectful courage” or self-empowerment, “to believe that there is nothing that they can’t achieve if they have a desire to” (Florence). Once students understand that they have a voice, they can challenge the status quo. “[T]he power that is so unequally distributed in the school, like the school itself, it holds a great amount of power. The teachers hold huge amounts of power and the principals — it’s incredible” (Idella). They can question whose voices are heard and whose are silenced in society and reflect on how privilege and power have socially constructed barriers to social justice.

In summary, social justice is taking action to make a difference and responding to injustice. High academic achievement along with critical thinking and high social/emotional well-being are the skills and tools that empower students to use their voices “to be the change they want to see in the world” (Collins). Students understand that inequity exists beyond themselves and that it is pervasive in society. The way to challenge society’s inequities is through empowerment, “to
have the **courage** to be the change in the world ... I think that’s a big piece. If they can graduate with that mentality ... small actions can bring forth great change” (Kelly), to not only speak up for themselves but to be able to empower others, “to advocate on their behalf” (Idella), and then to “work with others to influence and act” (Norman).

### Critical Analysis and Discussion of Student Achievement

Principals define social justice outcomes in a holistic way: high academic achievement, critical thinking, and social/emotional intelligence, as well as student empowerment and responsiveness to injustice. How does this definition of student achievement compare to the literature?

To reiterate social justice outcomes from the Literature Review, Campbell-Stephens believes that education is about a moral purpose that develops self-determination in individuals and unity within and among communities: “The purpose of education must be to empower and liberate” (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009, referencing Michael Dantly [2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2008], pp. 17–18). She claims education must provide opportunities for young people to develop an understanding of who they are, to release their genius, and to develop spiritually and intellectually (p. 17).

Further, the literature states, social justice outcomes are “educational opportunities that transform the life experiences of young people” (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 2). These authors describe a conceptual model of “productive performance” that includes process indicators of both academic and social outcomes. Academic outcomes include in-depth inquiry, higher-order thinking, elaborate communication, and an understanding of how knowledge is constructed and of how it produces effects of power (problematic knowledge). Social outcomes include connectedness to the world beyond school, citizenship — both responsible and transformative — and cultural knowledge (Lingard et al., 2003, pp. 5–6).

Most principals understand that social justice in education is anchored in the social and historical notions of privilege and power. They define social justice as understanding where and how privilege and power are situated in schools and then how these are perpetuated. Principals claim that because social justice is an outcome of education, it should both benefit students and deliver learning. Gale’s question, *What should social justice deliver?* leads to a consideration of education as a platform for social justice. Using the purpose of schools as a lens, principals view
learning or social justice outcomes in a way consistent with the literature, i.e., in a holistic sense, which, to reiterate, includes high academic achievement, critical thinking, social/emotional intelligence, and empowerment. Education framed by social justice should produce students who have greater hope for the future, resilience, capability to pursue their goals, and empowered to be active members of society who are responsive to injustice.

In contrast, Principal Evans argues that employability is what social justice should deliver. This claim aligns with Robeyns (2006), who describes the purpose of schools from the human capital perspective. From this perspective, education has both a personal and a collective economic role in which skills and knowledge acquired through education are important in terms of a person’s income-generating ability. “Human capital theory considers education relevant insofar as education creates skills and helps to acquire knowledge that serves as an investment in the productivity of the human being as an economic production factor, that is, as a worker” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 72). The human capital model and Principal Evans argue that the employment skills and knowledge that one gains through education may be the difference between poverty and economic stability. Robeyns admits that this purpose of education has limitations — specifically it values education only insofar as it contributes to the person’s economic productivity and in turn society’s economic stability. It sees education only through the eyes of mainstream economics. Knowledge that is not directly instrumental in ensuring economic stability is not valued. Robeyns claims that the significant weakness of viewing the purpose of education solely through economics is that “not everyone has the same rate of return” (Robeyns, 2006, p. 72) meaning, “Given the same amount and quality of education, not every child or adult will to the same degree be able to use this education for income-generating activities” (p. 73). For example, there is often a gender division between skills and knowledge and remuneration.

Principal Evans’ claim needs to be discussed because he may represent a number of principals who feel they are enacting social justice in their schools. Indeed, if in fact they consider employment to be the difference between poverty and economic stability, then employability is a valid social justice purpose of education. In this way, students are not further marginalized by a society that holds both employment and income in high regard. Principal Evans’ claim also attests to why in social justice leadership research, scholars need to ensure that social justice is thoroughly defined before examining the leadership that enacts it.
Simply put, from a critical perspective, principals claim that learning, student achievement, and the purpose of schools is empowerment — to open up hope and possibility for students to make boundless life choices because they have an education. “If you want a socially just society, you have to educate your population. With education, then people have the opportunity to make life choices — not being relegated to a choice that was made for them for lack of education” (Jaabir).

The next section addresses Gale’s question, *How should social justice be achieved?* Research has well established the link between student achievement and leadership. The next section looks at this strong relationship to examine the findings of how principals conceive of social justice leadership.

### 4.3 Social Justice Leadership: The Act of Social Justice

*Principals use leadership to lever social justice, to respond to the injustice created through privilege and power, and to keep student achievement the core business of schools.*

The theme of this section is composed of two related sub-themes: conceptualizing social justice leadership and the resistance that principals encounter. For the participants, the resistance they encountered in their leadership work made them reconsider their theorizing about leadership and re-conceptualize it from a social justice perspective.

“Learning is the foundation of social justice ... they are integral together” (Evans). Principals claim that social justice requires action and that education is the platform for social justice action. “Education is a vehicle ... a platform through which social justice occurs ... The two pieces are related ... a place for social justice action to occur” (Florence). This finding is fundamental to understanding how principals understand social justice leadership. It responds to Gale’s (2000) final questions, “*How will we recognize social justice when we see it?*” and “*How should social justice be achieved?*” as well as to the research question *How do principals understand social justice leadership?*

If education is a platform for social justice, then an integral aspect of social justice is that it requires action. Principals claim that social justice should be enacted by addressing injustices. “*It (social justice) has to do with addressing exclusion and oppression*” (Hadley). Principals consider social justice leadership, then, as taking leadership action against the social and
historical notions of privilege and power within our schools. It is action grounded in equity and focused on inclusion — “an active process focused on those who are marginalized and grounded in the principle of equity with a vision to inclusion” (Florence). Social justice leadership is putting social justice into action. “I mean you have to educate people about society and how society works and their role in it, but also to educate them about being human and how to treat people” (Lewis).

Essentially, social justice leadership is conceived from a critical sense that society’s values are socially and historically constructed and that schools and education reflect these values. It is about understanding how the social and historical notions of privilege and power are situated in schools and how these notions are perpetuated. Social justice, through an understanding of privilege, recognizes, acknowledges, and accepts difference to enact inclusion. Social justice leadership uses an understanding of power to equitably distribute it in a charitable sense of goods and services and in a robust sense to enact empowerment. Principals also see that social justice leadership not only requires the lens of privilege and power to elevate the importance of social justice in schools, but it also requires action to challenge how schools and education are constructed.

Lastly, principals unanimously say that if education is a platform for social justice, then they are responsible to take that action — they are the lever needed to create the conditions that point to the necessity for change and to make change happen. “My role is to really be the main support of social justice in a school; otherwise, it won’t happen” (Gray). In this way, principal leadership becomes a condition of social justice. “If someone asked me how the school and I would characterize what we do for kids, my answer would be social justice” (Gray). If education is a platform for social justice action, then principals use leadership to initiate it: to respond to the injustice created through privilege and power and to keep student achievement the core business of school. “If the educational system is set up in such a way ... then a key part of the responsibility falls on school leaders to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to reverse the injustices that exist” (Hadley).

Social justice cannot be achieved without a focus on learning and student achievement. Social justice leadership then is leveraging student achievement as social justice because social justice and education are conceptually interdependent. It is influencing the learning in schools, focusing
on high academic achievement, so that students have an opportunity to better their life and gain hope for the future. It is encouraging critical thinking and high social/emotional intelligence in students so that they have resilience and the capability to be fully engaged members of society and to pursue their goals. Social justice leadership listens to and empowers students to have a voice and to become active members of society who are responsive to injustice. Social justice leadership is principals encouraging action against injustice created by historical and social notions of privilege and power that marginalize students. Social justice leadership keeps student learning the main focus. Principal Burgess summarizes what she believes social justice leadership to be: “As educators ... build a climate where students are able to thrive academically, socially, morally, spiritually depending on what the student wants — where teachers are supporting students ... delivering an unbiased education and treating students with respect” (Burgess).

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Social Justice Leadership

The research supports the relationship between student achievement and leadership. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty’s (2003) meta-analysis of 30 years of research about the effect of leadership on student achievement found that, in fact, there is a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. Other research goes one step further, suggesting that, in particular, it is the leadership of principals that is extremely influential in student outcomes or achievement. “Conventional wisdom and considerable empirical evidence suggests that school leaders, especially those in principal and vice-principal positions, account for an important proportion of the variation in student achievement across schools” (Leithwood & Azah, 2014, p. 18). A recurring finding in the literature on school change is that leadership is fundamental in making change (Bell, Jones, & Johnson 2002; Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002; Grogan, 2002a, 2002b; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Rapp, 2002; Riester et al., 2002; Solomon, 2002, cited in Theoharis, 2004).

For Bogotch, social justice cannot be separated from the practices of educational leadership. Education cannot predict or control outcomes but educational leadership, both socially and constructively, can create and support forums for all voices to be heard. Social justice, just like education, is a deliberate intervention that requires the moral use of power — an ongoing struggle to share power, knowledge, and resources equitably. It “cannot be separated from how
educational theories and practices are being (re)defined and practiced by professionals within schools” (Bogotch, 2002, p. 2).

Given the literature, one of the key findings of this study is the collaborative relationship between how learning or student achievement is defined and how principal leadership is conceived. Principals, both by the account of this study and previous research, appear to hold the power (positive/negative) in the relationship between student achievement (social justice) and the leadership needed to enact social justice in schools — rendering principal leadership the lever for equitable outcomes for students and a model of how social justice can be achieved. If principals are responsible for creating the conditions for learning and social justice in schools, then they can also be held responsible for creating a context that perpetuates marginalization and poor achievement of minority students in schools. Arguably, if the principals in this study did not define student achievement as social justice, they would use the power in the relationship between student achievement and leadership for a very different purpose. If, for example, principals see student achievement through the human capital purpose of schools in which student achievement is defined as employability, their leadership would reflect that purpose. The relationship between student achievement and principal leadership will be further explored in the section on *The Ontario Leadership Framework*, as this relationship has a substantive impact on the examination of the overall research question, *How do principals engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?*

A lever is a simple machine that makes work easier. It involves moving a load around a pivot using a force. In this study, social justice leadership is the force that pivots student achievement. The other aspect of the lever as a simple machine is that of a competing force or resistance. Similarly, when principals lever their leadership, they confront resistance. Resistance is a key aspect of social justice leadership.

**Resistance in Social Justice Leadership**

_The principals know that leading for social justice is challenging. They understand that neutrality does not exist within an education system that was developed based on a hierarchical social system. Principals enact social justice leadership to respond to the injustice created through privilege and power: to challenge the status quo and to keep student achievement the core business of schools. In doing so, they face resistance from_
staff, from parents and the community, from the principalship itself and from other principals, from supervisors and the organization, and, ultimately from exhaustion.

For the purpose of this study, I draw upon Theoharis (2004) for a definition of resistance. He claims that there are three ways in which resistance can be framed: “(a) the resistance principals enact against historic marginalization of particular students, (b) the resistance the principals face as a result of their social justice agenda, and (c) the resistance or resilience [these] principals develop as a result of facing constraints in their work” (p. 4). Resistance for the purpose of this section is the “resistance principals face as a result of their social justice agenda.”

1. The Staff

Teachers hold the power to set standards for high academic achievement, to teach critical thinking and social emotional intelligence, and to empower students. “I think the way it’s (social justice) actualized in our schools is really under the auspices of what teachers want” (Mackenzie). Research indicates that teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement.

The principals in this study claim that resistance begins when they engage in leadership practices that model their commitment to social justice. When principals challenge the status quo, the resistance from teachers involves their deficit mindset or attitude and their lack of commitment to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum. “Some barriers [are] ... teacher attitude, the lack of commitment ... teacher resistance” (Hadley). One example of teacher attitude/deficit thinking held by staff is that of not taking difference seriously. “When people who work in schools do not take the time to understand difference or to deal with difference in positive ways, that also proves to be a barrier” (Hadley). Principal Jaabir, from a secondary school perspective explains, “You’re going to get resistance along the way; you’re going to get the deficit thinking that says, inside the school ... that the kids are failing applied classes ... that’s a deficit mind. What I’m saying is that the kid is failing applied because you told him that these [applied classes] are for idiots and you are going to fail.” From an elementary school perspective, Principal Anderson provides this example: “a teacher yelling at a student for not having snow pants on when the student didn’t own snow pants.”

Principals aim to keep student achievement the core business of schools. “I think for our kids the important thing is that they (the students) are getting a decent education every day” (Anderson).
When principals hold that the moral purpose of schools is student achievement, teachers resist. Another example of deficit thinking is a lack of commitment to a moral imperative by staff. “You have to convince people because not everybody comes with the moral imperative. When I first became a principal, I was shocked” (Idella). Keeping teachers focused on their purpose and commitment — that students are “getting a decent education every day” — is another form of resistance principals in this study experience. “[There’s] a lot of work to do with educators ... to define our purpose for schooling ... If we want 85 percent of students to graduate, we need everybody to buy into that to create a system where every kid can flourish, and currently we’re not there” (Burgess).

A deficit thinking mindset impedes a collaborative learning culture that is responsive to the diverse needs of students, particularly when the staff’s mindset/philosophy has not evolved. “They (teachers) don’t want to deviate from what they did 20 years ago ... [we] need to kind of gently push them along the continuum” (Kelly). Principals face resistance when challenging the staff to be responsive to the students. “The push back is that there is a negative undercurrent at times” (Anderson). One principal describes the resistance he faces as “getting bogged down by this foolishness, which can have a slowing down effect” (Jaabir). He claims this resistance achieves what the teachers want — that any leadership efforts towards social justice be effectively thwarted or stopped entirely by the staff.

Principals also experience emotional resistance from staff. “Some (teachers) will say Why are you now telling me all of the things I’ve learned are wrong?” (Mackenzie). Engaging staff is a balance between courageous conversations and the fear of isolating teachers and not moving towards collaboration in a positive way. Principal Anderson gives an example of a courageous conversation he had with a teacher. The teacher was scolding a child for not having the materials she needed for the school day. He addressed the teacher: “We don’t put kids down because they don’t have stuff provided to them, it’s not their fault” (Anderson). Principal Anderson recognizes the caution needed when approaching staff and offers a solution to being in a confrontational position: “being able to say in a non-threatening way and not having teachers work in isolation but teaming them up with a stronger teacher who is keen ... who is able to influence in a positive way.”
2. The Parents and Community

Relationships and community engagement are vital to student achievement and are a dominant theme in leading for social justice. However, barriers arise when principals challenge the socially constructed values held by parents and the community around student achievement. Sometimes, the resistance from parents and the community is covert while at other times it is overt. Principals feel that the lack of parental engagement in their diverse schools is a covert and silent form of resistance. Principal Anderson tries to make sense of the lack of parental engagement as a form of resistance from his community. He laments, “Either we (principals) are doing a good job, parents don’t care, parents are too busy and overwhelmed by responsibilities, parents are territorial/apprehensive, or parents have given up on advocacy because of their frustrations.”

Only one principal responded that he never receives resistance from parents. “Never, ever, ever ... I firmly believe ... when we as the school speak of a holistic support of a child ... we are communicating to that parent and that child that we care about them and we see them as an individual with hope ... If we stray away from that message, it becomes judgmental” (Gray). At other times, this same principal acknowledges, painstaking resistance from parents and community can be covert, particularly around the leadership practice of honouring voice and shaping and preserving respectful relationships. He claims, “It’s tough, messy, hard work.” The trickiness lies in “making sure that you’ve got a lot of voices ... It’s painstaking and a mess” (Gray).

Principal Mackenzie concurs. She gives the example of trying to engage a broader representative group of parents from a changing community on the school council. She wanted the new community members to have a voice so she formed a support group for them. In her words, “I got a lot of flak for doing that” (Mackenzie). The parents who wanted to silence the voices of these other parents deemed that Principal Mackenzie was being “too exclusive.” She responded, “I am not being too exclusive. I’m providing access to what’s happening in the school” (Mackenzie). Principal Mackenzie elaborates:

Pressures come from people because the things are so normalized that when you want to do things differently ... then people almost think as if you’re questioning them ... When you shake up people’s worldview about the way they understand things, then they start to take things personally, ... then it’s like people almost
attack what you’re doing, rather than them thinking about what is it that we’ve been doing ... People start to think about it in terms of themselves personally and then they don’t act, they resist ... this perpetuates the status quo.

Moving parent and community engagement towards a growth mindset can be as difficult as moving staff. The principals acknowledge that addressing resistance from the parents and community requires moving beyond working in silos to building collaborative networks. “Real social justice isn’t going to happen until we get beyond the ‘this is my territory and this is your territory’ and have real work between the groups” (Anderson). Principals feel bound by the confines of their building. As one said, “I am limited in what I can do here within the building and that’s the boundary” (Anderson). Moreover, they lament the lack of collaboration between the two organizational structures whose mandate is to improve student achievement — the board of education and the social service agencies. The result, as Principal Hadley points out, leads to a perpetuation of the status quo: “So some way the board of education needs to be collaborating with social agencies … Children are missing out [because of] that lack of collaboration” (Hadley).

3. The Principalship Itself and Resistance from Other Principals

“There are people in our schools who don’t see that equity should be at the forefront of everything they do” (Idella).

Principals found that when they disclose that their leadership values rest on social justice and when they model and make explicit their belief and commitment to social justice and social justice leadership, they are confronted with resistance from colleagues. The resistance derives from fundamental differences in how principals conceive of student achievement and the purpose of schools. Principals in this study recognize that in leading for social justice they often find themselves opposing or going against the grain of the dominant hierarchical styles of leadership, and thus challenging their relationship with colleagues. If principals do not adhere to the dominant conception of leadership, their colleagues may feel that they are undermining the principalship and other principals: “When I as an individual say ‘no I don’t adhere to that [hierarchy]’, it at times places me ... in a challenging position because colleagues then feel that you’re undermining the title [principal]” (Norman). The isolation that principals experience from
their colleagues is a way of perpetuating the dominant conception of leadership and the status quo.

Because the dominant leadership conception is seen through a hierarchical lens, power relationships or politics exist. Politics means that those power relationships at the top of the hierarchy seek to dominate those in lesser positions. In the case of one vice-principal in particular, it felt more like oppression:

Sometimes it feels like your hands are tied in terms of your ability to work as a social justice leader ... The magnitude of your impact can be limited by the team you work with ... It changes when you’re the principal because ultimately you have a little bit more control ... When you’re a VP it’s the vision of the principal that drives the vision of the school ... If the priorities don’t align, then you have to find a way to work within those restraints to forward your agenda and that can be a struggle. You know, [what you can do] depends on how much control your principal allows you to have within the building ... Every team is a little different and the amount of control you have varies depending on the philosophy of the principal. That’s a real pressure in social justice leadership work because — just bring it back to the framework — there’s accountability pressures (e.g., responsibility for literacy, OSSLT results are poor) ... It lands on your lap yet I haven’t yet built enough trust ... to build capacity to start influencing change and if I’m not going to be supported by the leadership [team] — is that the hill I’m prepared to die on? (Florence)

Further, she is afraid of reprisals, that if she makes a move without her principal’s endorsement, she may experience ramifications: “There are political ramifications if you are looking for a promotion” (Florence). Thus, she feels in a Catch-22 position.

3. Supervisors and the Organization

Supervisors are those to whom principals directly report, i.e., superintendents, while the “organization” refers to all of the structures to which principals are held accountable, i.e., school boards and the Ministry of Education.

When principals try to strike a balance between their leadership values and those of the organization, they find themselves in further difficulty. They understand that neutrality does not exist within an education system that supports privilege, power, and hierarchy. Principal Jaabir describes this experience as “working inside a leadership box.”
Principals, because of their position in the hierarchy, face competing demands of organizational accountability. On one hand, they have a deep sense of moral accountability to their public — the students and their parents. However, on the other hand, as Principal D’Andre points out, principals have multiple accountabilities beyond students and parents, including the teachers and their contracts and unions:

There are so many other things you have to deal with: students, parents and teachers and their bullshit ... then the directives from the board, from the trustee — do this, do this, do this, do this — all that bullshit that really has nothing to do with students, yeah, and you can get wrapped up in that. (D’Andre)

The pressure for principals working in between the various and often competing demands of accountability stems from the hierarchical levels of accountability within the organization — specifically from the superintendents, the director, and ultimately the trustees and the board. Accountability becomes a systemic barrier to social justice and social justice leadership when principals are accountable to a senior team that does not have a clear vision of equity or social justice and who conceive of leadership in the dominant hierarchical sense that values power and power relationships, as found, for example in the OLF:

The system level leadership who establish the board’s vision, instruction and guidance — it seems to me to be more reflective of an accountability agenda that is more consumed with educational standards than with supporting social justice work in schools. And so, if you have people in senior leadership positions who are themselves engaged in inequitable practices, and do not have an understanding of social justice, who are not committed to social justice, then how will this work be done in schools? (Hadley)

Consequently, principals feel that they face frustrating bureaucracy and power relationships when it comes to social justice and social justice leadership. As one principal laments,

I feel like in my role now I’m up against incredible bureaucracy ... like the superintendent forgets what it’s like to be a principal ... I feel the (superintendents) have forgotten the challenges and the demands of a principal ... I think this is a barrier to social justice work because it doesn’t allow people the time to reflect because they are so overly concerned with checking things off their list ... I think that needs to happen, the superintendents giving the principals freedom [to do their social justice work]. (Idella)
Accountability becomes a systemic barrier to social justice and social justice leadership when power relationships determine who will comprise the organization that determines its vision.

Even the board of education, they need to be looking at their leadership team. Politics impact the people we have in those positions. Because you can do the right things, and say the right things, and align yourself with the right people — but if you rub people the wrong way, then you’re likely not to secure one of those positions. (Hadley)

Principal Norman described her experience:

The challenges and pressures for me in leading for social justice — part of that is on a very personal level as a female ... The other pressure is that Whose story is it? I want to say this very cautiously ... At times I have been privy to reverse discrimination where the assumption has been made that because I am a white female leader, I have led a privileged life and that I have no understanding or relationship to social demographic perspectives ... A myriad of assumptions are made about me because of how I look ... It’s not only frustrating, but it inspires anger ... I need to very carefully monitor my emotions ... because everybody is so busy judging you. So part of the challenges I see in leading for social justice is that perpetual question: “As a white woman what right do you have to say XYZ? because you haven’t lived that experience.” (Norman)

This is not to say that the principals disagree with accountability. On the contrary, they question to whom and for what are principals accountable. They argue that there is a choice. Where the principals face resistance is balancing a personal moral commitment to social justice with the consequences they face if they don’t meet the multitude of competing accountabilities. However, as one principal pointed out, a hierarchical system, by its very nature, supports a system in which essentially every member works inside a box. “I’m not naive to the fact that even the top people — there are these boxes that they have to work inside. And whatever boxes they give us too, we do our best to adhere with it” (Jaabir). She adds, this is how the hierarchy is perpetuated.

5. Exhaustion

“You’ve got to pull yourself back into what you truly believe. I know why some things happen: you’re exhausted” (Idella).
When the principals try to balance the mindfulness of their beliefs with those of their supervisors, they experience deep frustration and isolation to the point where exhaustion itself becomes a form of resistance. “It’s frustrating work too, because it’s exhausting; it’s doing the same thing over and over again” (Anderson). One of the challenges that leads to exhaustion for the principals in this study is the frustration of having to explain privilege, difference, equity, power, and social justice “over and over again” to the dominant society. “Levelling the playing field ... white people versus Black people, it’s going to look different. And that’s very difficult to explain to people in the school that have a hard time with social justice and with equity really, because they don’t see why we need to do that. Facts, perceptions and beliefs ... huge challenges. I was trying to change ... the mindset ... I think the challenge is that people don’t understand — and it goes back to understanding a person’s narrative or perspective” (Idella). Principal Idella voices the ultimate frustration in leading for social justice — changing mindsets. She knows how vital such a change is in addressing social justice in schools. Her frustration, along with that of many other principals in this study, comes from explaining difference and equity over and over again to staff, to parents, to colleagues, and to supervisors, and having them disregard difference, let alone respond to it. The principals are well aware of the importance of seeking out the stories and perspectives of those who are marginalized, and reflecting on their own story — on their own privilege. If this is not part of their practice, then leaders may be perpetuating society’s socially constructed view of difference and equity. As Principal Idella laments, “You can say you understand ... but really, I will never understand what it is to be a young Black man, never!”

The ultimate challenge is isolation. The principals feel that there are very few other principals with whom they can build an alliance, particularly because many principals are the only administrator in the school. “Your number of colleagues is significantly diminished ... in a school where there’s one [administrator]” (Florence). The next layer of isolation arises from colleagues, other social justice principals. They lament that very few principals are “open” about their social justice leadership. In this regard, they are very cautious about who they engage in social justice dialogue. In this way, the principals in this study feel that, as Principal Florence states, “essentially social justice leaders are marginalized” (Florence).

The principals understand that leading for social justice is not easy, and at times is overwhelming. Principal Idella says, “I knew it was going to be intense” and Principal Lewis uses the word “daunting” repeatedly throughout the interview — “I mean there’s so much.”
Frustration and isolation cause exhaustion for many of the principals in this study. In turn, exhaustion becomes an unintended form of resistance to enacting social justice leadership.

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Social Justice Leadership Continued

Social justice leaders understand that privilege and power is inherent in leadership and in the principal’s role. Further, they understand that when they use leadership to lever social justice — to respond to the injustice created through privilege and power; to challenge the status quo, and to keep student achievement the core business of schools — they face resistance from others who do not conceive of leadership through a critical lens but rather through the lens created by the dominant society and its historical and social construction of leadership.

One fundamental aspect of social justice leadership and of achieving social justice is challenging the status quo. Another is facing the multiple forms of resistance, which inevitably result from challenging the issues of privilege and power. Theoharis (2004) explains that the resistance principals face as a result of their social justice agenda is the resistance from challenging “the traditional norms informing public school leadership” (p. 24) or “a status quo that creates and accepts as normal or natural disparate achievement among racial groups” (p. 18).

Literature on theoretical conceptions of leadership presents a variety of assumptions about reality, truth or knowledge, change, power, and the purpose of schooling (Foster, 1986). Knowledge, change, and power are key emerging concepts. Two theoretical perspectives, neoliberal and critical, are particularly relevant to this research question.

When principals think of leadership, most tend to revert to the traditional, dominant understanding, which is notably described in the literature as positivist. It focuses on finding the one best answer (Butin, 2010). Social change is focused on equality, a “one-size-fits-all” design, and what works best for the economy (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). It gains and retains its power in neoliberal ideology by serving the interests of the dominant, most powerful members of society (Kincheloe, 1999). The purpose of schooling is to “prepare students as politically passive and compliant workers for the dynamic labour market conditions” (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, p. 15). This theoretical perspective underpins transformational leadership, which views leadership as an interactive hierarchical relationship between leaders in the position of power and
influence, and followers (Leithwood et al., 1996), providing direction and involving “a process of influence” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 7).

Alternatively, the critical theoretical perspective largely held by the principals in this study is fundamentally concerned with the assumptions and values that underpin knowledge. It asks how power is constructed and how it shapes individual consciousness and ways of seeing (Kinchemoe, 1999). Critical perspectives of leadership — feminism, postmodernism, and critical pedagogical perspectives — draw upon a range of theoretical orientations to provide, as the term suggests, a critical examination of the knowledge foundations upon which leadership theories are based. Applied in education, critical theory is critical pedagogy, which argues that neutrality in education does not exist (Freire, 1998). Ultimately, this means a critical theoretical perspective empowers individuals to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987, cited in Cresswell, 2009, p. 62).

Critical democracy, which takes difference seriously, is underpinned by the tenets of critical theory and critical pedagogy (Portelli, 2012). Critical democratic theory focuses on critiquing and changing society and is intent on correcting social injustice. It is concerned with “how democracy is subverted, domination takes place and human relations are shaped in schools, in other cultural sites of pedagogy, and in everyday life” (Kinchemoe, 1999, p. 71). It is not prescriptive, but encourages critical inquiry, thinking, and reflection. Social justice leadership is a shared process guided by discourse linked to the democratic imperatives of equality and social justice (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009). It is centred on the ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes at the service of learning (Theoharis, 2007), and it honours localized thinking but moves beyond to see possibilities and perspectives (Sackney & Mitchell, 2002).

To summarize, this section discussed two inter-related themes. The first examined how social justice should be achieved to uncover how principals conceptualize social justice leadership. Principals understand that social justice and education are intertwined and that together they are anchored in the social and historical notions of privilege and power. Principals consider social justice an outcome of education and education a platform for social justice. Social justice requires action to challenge how schools and education are constructed. Principals understand that social justice leadership is putting social justice into action — action that is grounded in
equity and focused on inclusion, rather than the social and historical notions of privilege and power within our schools. Principals understand that social justice leadership is keeping student learning the core business of their leadership. Social justice leadership is influencing the learning in schools to focus on high academic achievement that leverages critical thinking and high social/emotional intelligence. It listens to and empowers students, first to have a voice and then to be empowered as active members of society who are responsive to injustice.

The second theme is that social justice leadership uses leadership as a tool to respond to the injustice in schools created through privilege and power. Using a lens of privilege, social justice leadership enacts inclusion by recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting difference. Using a lens of power, social justice leadership, equitably distributes power in a charitable sense of goods and services and in a robust sense to enact empowerment.

For the participants, the resistance they encountered in their leadership work made them reconsider their theorizing about leadership and re-conceptualize it from a social justice perspective. Social justice leadership means confronting resistance from staff and parents, from the principalship and other principals, from supervisors and the organization and from exhaustion. Inevitably, all resistance involves issues of power and privilege.

Two main criticisms of social justice leadership appear in the literature. Some critics argue that social justice leadership is too theoretical in nature with too few concrete examples. Theoharis (2007), referencing the research of Blackmore (2002), Larson and Murtadha (2002), Lugg and Soho (2006), MacKinnon (2000), and Shields (2004), observes that social justice leadership tends to be more theoretical than practical in nature. This criticism will be addressed in the section on praxis (Chapter 5). Another criticism is that social justice may be enacted through a dominant positivist conception of leadership. In this theoretical tradition, social change or school reform is focused on equality and a “one-size-fits-all” design (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006). This criticism will be addressed in the section on The Ontario Leadership Framework (Chapter 6), which examines which aspects of the framework help/hinder social justice leadership.


Given that the principals face exhausting resistance, what makes them choose social justice leadership and why do they continue to do it?
Social justice matters to principals because of their personal lived experiences of race, gender, ability, language, etc. As such, these experiences set their moral compass towards social justice to guide them in their social justice work.

The participants of this study are principals and vice-principals representing a broad spectrum of local education contexts within Ontario. Twelve principals are from urban areas, two from rural. Nine of the participants represent elementary schools, five secondary. Eleven administrators are employed in public school boards and three in Catholic systems. Twelve participants are principals and two are vice-principals; their experience ranges from three to 21 years. Four of the participants are male and ten are female. Ten principals self-identified with the dominant race and four identified as racially non-dominant. While not capturing all of the differences in principals in Ontario, collectively these 14 represent a range and wealth of experience and demonstrate a representative sample of principals and vice-principals in Ontario who lead for social justice. This section addresses what makes principals choose social justice leadership and why they continue to do it. The question, How do principals understand their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice? explores why social justice matters to these principals. The principals interviewed in this study explain that when it comes to a moral compass, most rely on their personal lived experiences as the guiding force. The most common thread is their lived experiences with some form of marginalization. Five major themes emerge from the data. These include their lived experience with:

a) able-ness  
b) race  
c) gender  
d) language and  
e) their realization of privilege

In turn, these themes inform their responses as the principals explain why social justice matters to them. Principals Anderson, D’Andre, and Florence describe their experience with disability as their impetus to lead for social justice. Though they are not themselves disabled, by working with students, principals Anderson and D’Andre came to understand their ability privilege. Principal Anderson’s understanding of the issue started when he was working with students with developmental disabilities: “When I started teaching I taught students with developmental
disabilities... I understood they need to have voices as well.” Through her experience teaching special education classes, Principal D’Andre saw that ability advantaged some students, and herself, over others: “As a classroom teacher, I taught special education... It just resonated with me that these kids need to have a chance and I saw that they were really disadvantaged.”

Principal Florence had a very personal experience of recognizing the privilege of ability in her family. It became the foundation of her social justice work: “I have a brother who’s learning disabled and struggled in school... So watching his experience and the disadvantages he faced and the marginalization he experienced, is the foundation for my social justice work.” While the principals did not experience disability themselves, their experiences set their moral compass towards social justice to guide their practice.

Racism is the second major lived experience. In contrast to their colleagues who understand disability through their privilege of being abled, the principals who experience racism, experienced its power first hand. Principal Collins, who was the only Black teacher candidate in the education program in a teachers’ college in the 1980s, experienced the physical “raised eyebrows” and “open surprise” representation of racism when she first stepped into a classroom in Ontario. “I walked through the door as a teacher candidate and I could hear whispering saying, ‘Is she a Black teacher?’” Principal Collins goes on to say that this experience explains why she chooses social justice leadership, how it has set her moral compass, and why she will continue to do it: “That experience changed my life... opened my awareness... It helped me to reflect on my own experiences... It grounded me in my core values... of what I wanted to bring forth as I worked with young people.”

Principal Hadley has experienced a far more overt display of racism. “I have been called the ‘N-word’ — so I know what it feels like to be discriminated against.” From this experience, from the racism she knows exists in schools, and from her own childhood experience, she has come to realize that schools are unjust places, as is society as a whole: “I believe society isn’t a fair place; people are not willing to admit it but schools are often unfair places. Certain people have privilege, certain people have access to specific opportunities that others do not.”

Principal Jaabir experienced racism as a child growing up in Nigeria. With the help of his strong, supportive West African mother, he began to understand the dynamics of power in racist culture. Along with deconstructing racism, his mother taught him about the responsibility in the male
dominant role bestowed upon him in Black culture. He claims these experiences formed his philosophies of social justice and equity:

Those ideas that one learned from mother about going out there and standing for what is right ... to question some of that authority ... Social justice is very passionate to me ... because as human beings, we’ve got to continue to make this world a better place to live in ... My hope is that my kids are born into an easier time than I had in terms of dealing with other human beings ... and my hope is that my grandkids are going to have an even easier world in terms of dealing with other human beings.

Principal Mackenzie experienced racism as a child within the school she attended: “For me it’s my experiences of being on the margin throughout my schooling ... Not seeing myself reflected in the curriculum — having teachers expect that as a Black child I was able to speak to why, for example, Black people were enslaved.” These experiences along with her experiences in society direct her moral compass towards social justice and guide her social justice leadership: “Experiencing those times of inequities and my own experience in school, also in society, have prompted me to want to be engaged in this (SJ) work.”

It is perhaps a commentary on our society, or at least on the principals in this study, that the only principals who discussed racism as their impetus for social justice were from the non-dominant race. Equally significant is that all four who identified as racially non-dominant cited racism as their impetus for social justice and social justice leadership.

Principal Norman describes experiencing gender marginalization, which led her to social justice. It was not, as one would first assume, from the hands of dominant white males, but from her experience with her female colleagues:

At times I have been privy to reverse discrimination where the assumption has been made that because I am a white female leader, I have led a privileged life and that I have no understanding or relationship to social demographic perspectives ... A myriad of assumptions are made about me because of how I look ... It’s not only frustrating, but it inspires anger ... I need to very carefully monitor my emotions ... because everybody is so busy judging you. (Norman)

This situation is not as unique as one might expect. Principal Norman raises a significant question in this study: Can a leader champion social justice when he/she represents the
dominant race and works in a role that exemplifies both privilege and power? “So part of the challenges I see in leading for social justice is that perpetual question, ‘As a white woman, what right do you have to say XYZ?, because you haven’t lived that experience.’”

Many forms of privilege exist in society. Principal Idella experienced, as have many newly arrived Canadians, that language difference is considered a deficit. Principal Idella’s family emigrated in the 1960s from Greece. They had to work very hard to find employment, food, and housing. Learning English, while it was important, was challenging because her family settled in a Greek-speaking community in order to survive: “On a personal level ... I grew up in a family who ... weren’t familiar with the English language ... and had to work in tough jobs.” Because of her “immigrant” status, “in my school I felt the odd person out.” Consequently, she explains, she always feels marginalized, not only because of the language barrier, but also because of the social class barrier that resulted: “There was always a language barrier and a social class barrier ... those emotions growing up ... feeling embarrassed because of my parents ... is always in the back of my head.” Because of her experience, Principal Idella feels compelled to make schools places of inclusion, where difference is not only recognized but also acknowledged and accepted, and where it fuels her commitment to social justice and social justice leadership.

Principal Gray recognizes how his white male privilege gives him social immunity: “I have a passport in my life,” he explains. “I woke up to the reality that how other people are perceived and embraced in society has nothing to do with anything other than socially constructed barriers.” What Principal Gray realized was that those who are not privileged need assistance in operating in society, “and I had to help them navigate the system.” As a result, he has set his moral compass towards social justice. Similarly, for Principal Evans, understanding his white privilege meant understanding how children in a certain area of a large metropolitan city experience marginalization every day, mostly because of economics and poverty, but also because of racism. Their neighbourhood is the only area of the city where they are accepted: “Teaching in the Jane and Finch area gave me an early foundation with the problems regarding social justice.”

Principals Kelly, Lewis, Burgess, and Norman are all white female administrators who discuss how growing up brought them to a realization of privilege that sustains their social justice leadership. Principal Kelly explains her experience with racial privilege in her family home: “I
led a privileged life in a privileged community ... My family adopted a child from the Philippines ... His experience taught me a lot about equity and fairness.” As a child, Principal Lewis witnessed a lot of conflict. Consequently she is keenly aware that “what is fair and what is right ... are at the centre of who I am.” Similarly for Principal Burgess who grew up in a home fraught with alcoholism, “I think my passion for just being good to people has led me to social justice leadership.” Principal Norman, as well, struggled with privilege as a child: “My life was impoverished by virtue of the fact that my parents were seen as less worthy and less intellectually capable and less academically oriented and less qualified than other Canadians.” This experience, she explains, is why social justice matters — because it’s personal: “It [social justice] matters to me because I have lived the reality of being on the fringe and marginalized.”

This section answers the questions, What makes principals choose social justice leadership? and Why do they continue to do it? Social justice matters to principals because of their personal lived experience, either first hand or in recognizing their own privilege. Ability, race, gender, language, and culture in a socially and historically constructed society are all aspects of how privilege provides rights and freedoms, or power, to some while marginalizing others. As such, these experiences set their moral compass — their beliefs and values — towards social justice to guide their practice.

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Impetus

Personal lived experiences have a strong role in shaping values that lead to social justice leadership. Principals Collins, Jaabir, Hadley, and Mackenzie, who have experienced and continue to experience racism, express the importance of fairness and justice to guide leadership for inclusion and empowerment. Principals Anderson, D’Andre, and Florence, who have experience with disability, value that student achievement needs must be defined holistically and inclusively. In action, these values of care and compassion put learning needs, regardless of what they are, first and foremost in social justice leadership.

Other principals recognize their own privilege. From Principal Idella’s embarrassment was born the values of open-mindedness and avoiding judgment. Examining their own privilege has enabled principals to ask what is fair and what is right. From experiencing white privilege, as Principal Gray did, to the privilege experienced by Principals Kelly, Lewis, and Norman, understanding privilege offers individuals the ability to see the significance in integrity — to be
courageous and stand up for what is fair and right — in social justice leadership. While social justice leadership is fraught with resistance, Principal Burgess’ experience taught her the value of “relentless pursuit and never giving up.” Her example demonstrates the importance of resilience in social justice leadership.

Principals understand that social justice leadership is anchored in the social and historical notions of privilege and power. The fact that, for principals, their personal values are at the heart of their social justice leadership is important for two reasons. First, this finding sets the context for how principals respond to the central investigation of this research: how they engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership. Second, this finding will be important to the discussion about the original problem in this research that identifies the need to examine how principals navigate the tension between social justice leadership and accountability within The Ontario Leadership Framework.

In the literature, Freire explains that it is not just the principals’ experience with disability, racism, and privilege that guides their values and their actions — it is their reflection on these experiences. From Freire’s (1998) research, critical pedagogy is concerned with the development of critical consciousness, which he defines as a disposition rooted in humility, faith, hope, critical thinking, and solidarity. He claims that through “critical consciousness” one is able to critique truth and knowledge. Empowerment and freedom, according to Freire, begin when one recognizes where he/she is positioned in a society that is a system of oppressive relations. Through critical consciousness one is able to examine practices and policies and engage in (re)consideration that asks, Who is being included/excluded? Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?

The task of critical pedagogy, according to Freire, is to bring oppressed members of society into their own critical consciousness. For Freire (1998), change in consciousness and concrete actions are linked in praxis which, he claims, is the greatest barrier to an unjust status quo. Critical pedagogy argues that neutrality in education does not exist. A critical theoretical perspective, fundamentally concerned with the assumptions and values that underpin knowledge, asks how power is constructed and how it shapes individual consciousness and ways of seeing (Kincheloe, 1999). Ultimately, this means a critical theoretical perspective empowers individuals to
transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987, cited in Cresswell, 2009, p. 62).

Social justice is imperative to principals because of their personal lived experiences with privilege and power. These strong views on social justice provide a major theme in this research because a critical consciousness, the ability to critique truth, and knowledge of these experiences (Freire, 1998), sets one’s moral compass and helps us understand the values inherent in our lived experiences. Instinctively, these values are at the heart of how we understand social justice leadership.

A later section of this study will discuss the power of reflection on praxis as a critical disposition needed to underpin social justice leadership; however, the principals’ responses cited above reveal how fundamental such reflection is in helping principals make sense of their personal lived experiences as their impetus or drive for social justice. From a rational perspective, values don’t exist in educational leadership. One could argue that employing a critical consciousness to understand and learn from our lived experiences should not enter the leadership equation. However, principals in this study successfully argue that a critical consciousness of the multiple constructed realities, voices, and power in our society is fundamental in educational leadership and in sustaining a focus on social justice.
Chapter 5
Findings, Critical Analysis, and Discussion of Praxis: Social Justice Leadership Dispositions, Practices, and Actions

Praxis in the literal sense means practice — “doing.” Praxis in this research borrows from Freire’s (1998) conception of praxis that theory and practice coexist in a dynamic exchange or “praxis” in which one informs the other. He claims that through critical awareness and a reflective consideration of ideas, praxis has the potential to bring about change. Freire’s perspective on praxis is intrinsically political in nature: the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice does not privilege either aspect — and is, in itself, an expression of a political stance. Moreover, praxis à la Freire is not complete without a serious consideration of issues of power. Leadership requires praxis, combining thought and action to critically interrogate the marginalization of people. Praxis in the context of this study means the dispositions, practices, and strategies based on a leader’s beliefs or values that lead to the empowerment of those marginalized in schools.

“Part of it is deliberate, part of it is instinctual, part of it is based on experience, part of it is personality, and part of it is ... I don’t know” (Evans). Grounded in their conceptions of social justice and social justice leadership, this chapter describes the social justice leadership dispositions, strategies, or practices that principals develop and engage in to lead for social justice and to sustain their work (Research Question #2). Following the account from the data, a critical analysis and discussion of the findings is presented.

5.1 Dispositions

A disposition is an attitude or a way of being that shapes how a person responds when they find themselves, as is the case here, faced with leadership situations. Four dispositions are discussed here: Know Thyself, Moral Courage, Reflection, and Perseverance.
I. Know Thyself

“As an educator, as a human being, you need to know your story and listen intently to the stories of others” (Norman). Principals’ personal lived experiences with power and privilege, and the beliefs and values born from those experiences, are fundamental in understanding who they are. In turn, understanding their story of who they are is at the core of their leadership. Self-knowledge is where their social justice leadership begins. With a clear understanding of self, most principals are then better able to recognize, acknowledge, and accept difference in others.

Through self-knowledge, principals claim they understand what they stand for. “Social justice for me, it’s who I am, it’s not something — an extra layer of my leadership or another layer as an educator — it’s who I am” (Idella). They realize that social justice, simply put, is just who they are. Through self-reflection, principals claim they can test and check their assumptions and beliefs. “It’s about ... knowing yourself, challenging yourself and actually being valued and heard” (D’Andre). Once solid in their self-knowledge, they are able to take a stand on social justice and recognize that knowledge continues to be constructed through dialogue and interaction with those who are marginalized. “I state my own feelings on things, plus my own ineptitude or my own lack of knowing” (Gray).

Principals then draw on the power of self in leadership situations. When they interact with others to engage in social justice leadership practices — e.g., modelling and being explicit in belief and commitment to social justice, challenging the status quo, critical instructional leadership, shaping and preserving respectful relationships, and building capacity/empowerment by honouring voice — they are highly aware that neutrality does not exist in any exchange or dialogue. This awareness guides their interactions. “It is important to keep in mind at all times, to inform the work you do, how you interact with others in a supportive way and how you engage them in collaborative ways to do social justice work and to address societal inequities” (Hadley).

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Self-Knowledge

Hodgkinson (1999) claims that “introspection ... is assumed to lead to an inner understanding which is accompanied by increased awareness or consciousness of one’s being and of one’s actions” (p. 16). He claims that if knowledge is power, then self-reflection — to know thyself —

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10 These practices are discussed in detail elsewhere in this thesis.
becomes the source of leadership practice. “[K]now thyself may be called the ultimate leadership imperative” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 153, cited in Hodgkinson, 1999, p. 17). The “onus is for the leader to acquire self-knowledge and self-mastery” (p. 18).

Knowing thyself can be the most promising disposition for principals, regardless of their school or the context in which it is situated. Self-knowledge is especially important for principals to sustain their belief in, and vision for, social justice. It is also important in responding to Gale’s questions that position the principals’ conception of social justice leadership: What should social justice desire? Whose desire is it? Who should social justice benefit? What should social justice deliver? and How should social justice be achieved?

The concept of personal intelligence adds to the idea of “know thyself.” According to Mayer (2014), personal intelligence is the ability to understand yourself, leading to the ability to better understand those around you (p. 66). Important questions should be raised about the role and implications of personal intelligence or self-awareness in leadership. What is the relationship between personal intelligence and leadership? Is personal intelligence or self-awareness in leadership a better predictor of work performance? Daniel Goleman (2006), writing about emotional intelligence, claims that emotional self-awareness appears in various models of leadership. Through self-awareness, leaders can integrate their values into their work.

2. Moral Courage

Courage is required in order to take action when one has doubts or fears about the consequences. From critical self-reflection, principals develop the disposition of moral courage. In practice, moral courage guides and drives their leadership practice; it is “very important to have a strong moral compass in leadership” (Burgess). Moral courage for principals in this study equips them to enact social justice, to be creative and constructive, and to speak out and do what is right. “So in this journey, in doing social justice work, it’s extremely important to have like-minded committed individuals who … have … the moral courage to do the right thing for students” (Hadley). Moral courage, “that’s the biggest one I think as an administrator you need” (Burgess).

In order to do what is right for students, principals claim that a central aspect of social justice leadership is engaging the staff. “If you’re going to lead with the social justice compass, you have to do that in everything that you can do ... it’s important for staff to see that leaders are not...
going to make excuses for socially unjust practices” (Burgess). Principals recognize that the slow process of team building and engaging staff in social justice is built on trust and is chiefly achieved through awareness and engaging in open dialogue. “I spend a mountain of time on social justice, working on developing awareness with staff through narratives ... conversations ... dialoging” (Gray). “You will always have resistors on staff but sometimes you need to find out the source of the resistors” (Hadley). When challenged by staff, “I always bring it back to what I think is best for students” (Burgess). “You never lose focus if you have the kids … The kids are the one thing I think of as a resource and a strategy that keeps me going” (D’Andre).

Principal Hadley challenges,

Some principals may not have the moral courage to do what is right ... If you value standardized tests, and you keep pushing that as the main measure of whether students are successful or not, then you as a principal do not meet the needs of marginalized students ... and you are not acting in an ethical way as a school principal.

Others, like Principal Gray, draw upon their moral courage to “first seek to understand and then be understood. I try to really understand how that person is constructing that view before I counter it ... because how they construct their view is going to give me their real information, where I need to build awareness on staff with that.”

Having the disposition of moral courage is fundamental to how principals engage in and sustain social justice leadership work. For example, principals employ moral courage when challenging colleagues to do what is right for students.

I don’t think that it’s appropriate anymore in schools to have leaders that aren’t socially just and that are not able to and willing to have those courageous conversations that involve working as hard as we possibly can to create great schools where every kid feels like they can achieve socially and academically (Burgess).

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Moral Courage

Hodgkinson (1991) claims in the preface to his book Educational Leadership: The Moral Art) that, “values, morals and ethics are the very stuff of administrative life” when referring to educational leadership (p. 11). Principals agree that moral courage is what Hodgkinson describes
as the “stuff of administrative life.” Second to self-knowledge and understanding, moral courage is the essential disposition of successful social justice leadership.

3. Reflection

“I think reflection is a huge piece of being a leader” (Idella). Reflection not only ties together self-knowledge, moral courage, and perseverance — the other dispositions — it is also the one that principals draw upon to connect thought to action. The power of reflection is threaded throughout the practices and strategies that principals employ to enact social justice leadership.

What does reflection mean from a critical perspective? Briefly, a critical consciousness, according to Freire (1998), is the ability to critique truth and knowledge — “a disposition of critical self-consciousness” rooted in humility, faith, hope, critical thinking, and solidarity (p. 14). Freire would argue that experience with privilege and power is not what guides the values and actions of principals but rather their reflections on these experiences. Freire describes connecting to one’s critical consciousness as reflexivity. He claims that the practice of reflexivity guides leaders to question the dominant discourses of equality, difference, and freedom and to critique their ethics and values, and their personal prejudices and biases — then to embrace the responsibility for themselves, their liberation, and the empowerment of others.

How does a critical reflexive disposition influence how principals engage in social justice work and sustain their social justice leadership? Reflection is a disposition eloquently described by John Dewey (1910): “Reflection is turning a topic over in various aspects and in various lights so that nothing significant about it shall be overlooked — almost as one might turn a stone over to see what its hidden side is like or what is covered by it” (p. 57).

Reflection is the disposition that gives principals time to take a moment to think carefully and to consider ideas so that their practices do not replicate the status quo. Reflection is about evaluating a circumstance or “weighing it out” (Florence) — meaning that it is about whether you accept a situation at “face value” or whether you question what is beneath the surface to see what may be influencing the situation. Reflection is vital to engaging in social justice work because it results in a critical depth of understanding of the knowledge that grows through an experience. In turn, reflection or “weighing it out” guides choices to consider responses to the
multitude of stimuli that confront principals every day. In this way, reflection provides the opportunity for principals to consider in a given situation, the depth of their leadership response.

You have to decide which hill to die on because there may be something else you feel even more passionately about ... You have to be prepared to decide and prioritize where you are going to invest your social justice capital in order to have the greatest impact in your sphere of influence (Florence).

The principals admit that exhaustion is one major force of their own resistance. Reflection helps to counter exhaustion because it provides an opportunity for self-nurturing. “Take care of yourself” (Kelly) and strive for work/life balance. “Social, emotional, professional, personal — balance. And it is amazing how that allows you to just cope with everything” (Evans). Reflection provides the time and opportunity to take an objective view, “to sometimes step away ... to give yourself an opportunity to have some space” (Florence). Reflection provides principals with the humility to pace themselves — to remember that they are not going to enact social justice in one day. Because social injustice has its roots in historical privilege and power, “you just make it (reflection) part of every day ... You’re not going to do it all in one day because it didn’t happen all in one day” (Lewis). Reflection on past experiences provides perspective and knowledge of one’s own limitations. “It’s having the maturity to know that I don’t have to do all of the things asked of me” (Anderson). Because they see the necessity for reflection, principals find ways to make reflection a part of their daily routine — “A walk to clear my head every morning prepares me for the day” (Idella).

Isolation is another difficulty that principals face; “It can be a really lonely road sometimes” (D’Andre). Some principals seek out relationships with colleagues — “having a wide sphere of people you can reach out to and see what they’re doing differently” (D’Andre). Doing so provides them with an opportunity for dialogue and reflection with trusted colleagues — “being able to talk with colleagues and laugh and joke and realize you’re not alone” (Anderson). Others need to separate their work from themselves. A reflective disposition is achievable by finding time to disconnect physically and emotionally from their social justice work. “I do struggle with this ... When I walk away from work, I don’t carry it with me” (Kelly).
Critical Analysis and Discussion of Reflection

A critical theoretical perspective is concerned with the assumptions and values that underpin knowledge. It asks, *How is power constructed? — And how does it shape an individual’s consciousness and his/her way of seeing?* (Kincheloe, 1999). Critical theory, according to Kincheloe (1999), promotes an individual’s consciousness of him- or herself (self-reflection) to gain an understanding of how and why his/her political opinions, worker role, religious beliefs, gender role, and racial self-image are shaped by the dominant perspective. The practice of reflexivity, or a critical and reflexive disposition, is turning the stone of truth and knowledge over to interrogate and understand more, and to look at the possibilities in relation to the context.

In education, critical theory emerges as a philosophy of *critical pedagogy* (Kincheloe, 1999; McLaren, 2007) — Freire’s central theoretical contribution to educators. It stresses the importance of acquiring critical thinking (a practice of reflecting, analyzing, and making critical judgments in relation to social, economic, and political issues) to encourage the development of a critical consciousness. Critical pedagogy from Freire’s research, argues that, “In fact, neutrality in education is impossible” (1998, p. 100). Freire (1998) claims that through “critical consciousness” one is able to critique truth and knowledge and examine the status quo through (re)consideration that asks, *Who is being included/excluded? and Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?*

Empowerment and freedom, according to Freire, begins when one recognizes one’s position in a society that is a system of oppressive relations. From there, one must then work with oppressed members of society to bring them into their own critical consciousness in order “to transcend the constraints being placed upon them by race, class, and gender” (Fay, 1987, cited in Cresswell, 2009, p. 62).

“Engaging in social justice through a critical lens is examining what we do in our own context daily” (Mackenzie). Education leaders are bombarded with a daily multitude of decisions and choices. The literature suggests that a reflective disposition influences how principals critique truth and knowledge. Not only is a critical reflective disposition important in influencing how principals engage in social justice work, it is vital in sustaining their social justice leadership. This finding is central to the examination of the overall research question — *How do principals*
engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership? — and will be discussed in Chapter 6 in the section on the OLF.

One could argue that employing a critical reflection or consciousness should not influence leadership. In a rational sense, thinking is logical, objective, and systematic. Leadership is guided by conscious reasoning rather than by experience. Rationality asks leaders to act sensibly and reasonably based on facts or reason. Critical theory advocates a different conception of leadership, one that promotes and supports an individual’s consciousness of him- or herself. Leadership involves understanding power — how power influences leader ego and how it functions in hierarchical organizations. For example, a critical understanding of how power functions allows for “the examination and demystification of those structures within which leadership occurs” (Foster, 1986, p. 184).

Reflection for Foster (1986) is the critical educative use of leadership — in which leaders empower followers to use dialogue for change. In the Freirian sense, praxis involves both reflection and action. Foster’s seminal work *Paradigms and Promises: New Approaches to Educational Administration* (1986) focuses on concepts and practices that relate to the application of moral, transformative, and socially just leadership. Foster argues that the essence of leadership is “the desire and attempt to change the human condition” (p. 187). Like Freire’s dispositions of critical consciousness and reflexivity, Foster contends that leadership is grounded in a critical spirit. This grounding ensures that leaders do not situate themselves in fixed ideas or self-serving causes espoused by others.

Critical theorists argue that leadership is not simply skills, but a way of thinking, being, and living in the world. It asks the questions *Why? To what end? In whose interest? Who is heard? Who is silenced?* (Portelli, 2004). “It is my belief that today the progressive kind of teacher needs to watch out as never before for the clever uses of the dominant ideology of our time, especially its insidious capacity for spreading the idea that it is possible for education to be neutral” (Freire, 1998, p. 90).

Practically speaking, educational leaders need to activate the disposition of critical self-reflection or reflective practice because a critical consciousness, the ability to critique truth and knowledge, is an effective tool to “weigh it out” and ameliorate the competing demands. Or, as John Dewey (1910) said, “turn a stone over to see what its hidden side is like or what is covered by it” (p. 57).
4. Perseverance

From critical reflection, a vision of social justice is born, as is the perseverance not to be discouraged from acting on that vision. “You have to be willing to not be deterred” (Florence). In the words of Principal Burgess, perseverance is “relentless pursuit and never giving up.” Most principals would agree that perseverance is part optimism and part tenacity — with a touch of humility.

Principal Jaabir describes his optimism: “I approach my work from this point of view: If the job has to get done, then it’s going to get done. I tend to always see the cup at least half full” (Jaabir). He explains further that his optimism comes from his experience of being “turned on” to learning in a similar way when he was a student. He now feels a commitment to mentor students. “I got into teaching because I wanted to learn ... I had this amazing teacher ... He opened my eyes ... There is that drive, you know, that drives me itself. There are days that are hard but someone touched me in a way that got me more serious” (Jaabir).

Persistence is the other side of the optimism coin. “If you have the hard work piece, that consistency piece is going to help sustain you” (Florence). Persistence also means that regardless of the challenges, a leader can draw on the disposition of optimism in order to persevere. “Resistance, roadblocks, false starts will not deter me because I have my psychological and social resources, you know, to persevere” (Collins). Tenacity, similar to persistence, is a disposition that combines determinedness and sometimes stubbornness. For Principal Jaabir, it means, “I get on and I get the bloody job done” (Jaabir). Principal Gray emphatically declares, “I mean some people say don’t water the rocks. I say water the rocks until they erode” (Gray).

Principal Idella is modest, expressing her humility: “I will always be the teacher in front of kids, I knew that when I was going into leadership. I said to myself, I will never forget what it’s like to be in front of 30 kids teaching a class; and I keep remembering that” (Idella). Principal Gray, too, is humble and uses his teaching experience to remain optimistic. “I want to help people have a better life before I’m gone. I’ve got boundless energy for that. I find it rewarding ... It’s a selfish personal need and hopefully makes a difference. I don’t even know if I do it very well. I certainly try” (Gray).
“Vigilance and an understanding that you can’t win every battle” summarizes the balance between tenacity and humility for Principal Florence. Principal Gray expresses it another way: “I just work harder at communicating, at developing awareness. I don’t take it as rejection ... I take it as I haven’t understood them. I haven’t been a good teacher ... developing their awareness ... And at the end of it — it is not consensus and consent.”

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Perseverance

A famous quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841) captures the essence of perseverance:

> The characteristic of genuine heroism is its persistency. All men have wandering impulses, fits and starts of generosity. But when you have resolved to be great, abide by yourself, and do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world. The heroic cannot be the common, nor the common the heroic. (p. 1)

The capacity to persevere is the disposition that principals draw upon when resistance pushes against their social justice beliefs and values. It is the disposition that helps principals reflect on who they are and remember why social justice is worth fighting for. It sets social justice leaders apart from others who rely only on “facts” and reasoning to guide their leadership.

5.2 Practices and Actions

Principals rely upon their dispositions to engage in and sustain their work. One of the criticisms of social justice leadership is that it is too theoretical. The following section discusses the praxis principals engage in to enact their social justice dispositions and leadership. In the last portion of this section, a discussion of the dispositions ensues with regards to the leadership strategies of subversion and political savvy. These strategies frame the resilience needed for principals to sustain not only their work, but also themselves, in the leadership journey.

> Principals engage in five practices to enact social justice leadership. These include 1) model and be explicit in belief and commitment to social justice; 2) challenge the status quo; 3) use critical instructional leadership; 4) shape and preserve respectful relationships; and 5) build capacity/empowerment by honouring voice.
To lead for social justice, the principals in this study say, one must have “a clear vision of social justice” (Florence). At the centre of the social justice and equity that guide their practice is the welfare of the children in their schools. “I talk about the holistic focus of the school ... holistic ... mind and body ... soul ... the belief in himself or herself to overcome, the resilience to continue on” (Gray). With this vision, principals understand that their commitment is fundamental to enacting social justice in a school. “My role is to really be the main support of social justice in a school; otherwise, it won’t happen” (Gray).

To enact social justice in their schools, the principals engage in dialogue and explain what they believe to be social justice at every turn. “Be very explicit with what you believe in at every opportunity” (Gray). Then, to engage others in the vision, they model social justice and moral courage by challenging the status quo. “Promote that risk taking is part of social justice ... Otherwise people are not going to step up and believe in social justice because you’re not modelling social justice as a leader” (Idella). Having a vision and a commitment to social justice involves all stakeholders. It involves hearing and listening to the very voices most marginalized in schools — the students. “When I’m establishing a shared vision, I look for those opportunities to have [marginalized students’] voices” (Mackenzie).

Modelling and being explicit in their belief and commitment to social justice involves demonstrating to members of the school community that difference is not always visible. The principals in this study first model that it is important to recognize difference by inviting members of the school community to tell their stories and then to really listen to the experiences that individuals and families bring to the education experience. “You have to really listen to people and then listen some more and then some more and then some more” (Idella). Attentive listening enables principals to engage in the narratives to understand difference. “I have to separate my biases and put them to the side and listen to what this person is really saying” (Idella).

Principals understand that they are the main support of social justice in schools. At the same time, they acknowledge that they need to engage a team to enact social justice effectively. Principals then intentionally find or create opportunities to model and be explicit in their belief
and commitment to social justice by building a shared vision and capacity within the school — “build a team of like-minded colleagues” (Florence).

“If you’re going to lead with the social justice compass, you have to do that in everything that you can do. It’s important for staff to see that leaders are not going to make excuses for socially unjust practices” (Burgess). However, principals find that sometimes modelling and being explicit about their vision are not enough to engage their staff in social justice. Sometimes engagement means challenging the status quo.

2. Challenge the Status Quo

Challenging the status quo means challenging the hierarchical power within the school: “It’s so unequally distributed in the school, like the school itself, it holds a great amount of power, the teachers hold huge amounts of power and the principal, it’s incredible” (Idella). “If schools [are the] great equalizer ... they must identify issues of equity and social justice. Social justice, if a school isn’t doing that, it is simply replicating the status quo” (Gray).

To build the capacity necessary for social justice in their schools, principals need to focus their energies on their staff. “My influence is over staff, not students, so I devote my practices mainly to staff ... The awareness with the staff is the overwhelming key” (Gray). The first step in challenging the status quo is building an awareness of the privilege and power inherent in society. “It’s developing the awareness of staff of how the system works because the vast majority of staff have passports like me (Gray). From this awareness, most teachers will find it difficult to challenge the vision of social justice because it is about what is right for the students. “I’m a firm believer that when people see the inequity, the overwhelming mass majority will develop a passion and a strength to fight for these kids that wasn’t anywhere near [as] strong before” (Gray).

However, one obstacle to building the capacity for social justice with some staff is their deficit mindset. “A fixed mindset ... I think that’s really an impediment to any kind of positive social justice outcome because they have kids pigeonholed and they don’t actually even recognize it in themselves” (D’Andre). Principals agree that in these circumstances they must directly confront the attitudes and beliefs around privilege and power in the school with staff in order to model and be explicit about a vision of social justice. “Getting staff to buy into [a vision of social
justice] is done by changing the mindsets” (Evans). “Whatever I can do as an administrator to challenge that belief…” (D’Andre).

With teachers who are reticent about seeing social justice issues, principals feel that they must challenge attitudes and beliefs through the practice of courageous conversations — “After you build up some social justice advocates on staff, then have those [courageous] conversations” (Gray). A critical discourse or a courageous conversation that challenges deficit mindsets begins by first seeking to understand the perspective of each staff member, to “recognize that each person who is in the building ... is bringing with them [their own experiences/mindset] and how do I incorporate what they’re bringing?” (Evans). This understanding provides a starting point for building capacity by first initiating an examination of the attitudes and beliefs around privilege and power in the school and then by raising awareness of and challenging the dominant beliefs that underpin the issues of classism/racism/able-ism. “As you become more and more experienced as an administrator you know the follow-up questions to ask to have a better idea of people’s level of commitment” (Hadley).

Principals recognize that challenging the status quo is both exciting and stressful — Principal Idella calls it a “messy business.”

And so all of a sudden I’m starting to uncover all these, you know attitudes and beliefs that have existed in the school for years and years and all this messiness started coming out in these sessions. We had some difficult conversations, like I brought up the piece on my beliefs that the school is power, and the power you hold as teachers ... The privilege and power that we hold is much different than the children walking in the door. So I laid it right on the table ... then that’s when [the teachers start saying], are you trying to say that I am privileged? ... and it was messy.

However, as Principal Burgess explains, it is vital to student achievement to have these courageous conversations because teachers have the greatest influence over student achievement:

I don’t think that it’s appropriate anymore in schools to have leaders that aren’t socially just and that are not able to and willing to have those courageous conversations that involve working as hard as we possibly can to create great schools where every kid feels like they can achieve socially and academically.
Principal Idella observes that only by getting people upset does a leader effectively challenge the status quo: “In my third year of my first principalship, I understood that if people don’t get upset there’s going to be no change” (Idella).

Courageous conversations are those dealing with privilege, power, and politics through dialogue. Their goal is to change attitudes and beliefs through a respectful yet challenging approach that seeks to understand where the teachers’ values lie with respect to social justice — “having challenging conversations in a respectful way and leaving people with their dignity intact” (Lewis).

Overwhelmingly, the principals want the influence or control to hire staff who are reflective of the students in the school and who acknowledge privilege and its impact on teacher attitude. In other words, they want the freedom to hire for social justice: “high-end staff ... with high expectations to deliver curriculum in a way that will excite, motivate students, and make those real life connections” (Hadley).

3. Use Critical Instructional Leadership

*Teachers may need encouragement to understand that how they teach involves perpetuating the teaching practices that marginalize. Principals must hold teachers accountable for curriculum, for their pedagogy, and ultimately for the climate in their classroom.*

Principals define social justice outcomes or student achievement as high academic achievement, critical thinking and high social/emotional intelligence, and student empowerment and responsiveness to injustice. However, the attainment of these outcomes rests on one simple need: “The bottom line is the kids need to learn how to read and write ... If they don’t, they will be further marginalized” (Gray). In practice, principals recognize their pivotal role in holding teachers accountable for pedagogy and curriculum. “I think it’s my responsibility mainly to make sure ... to support people in the instructional program as part of a team” (Lewis), in a way that is responsive to all student needs. This goal is achievable, principals claim, by “teachers working from a culturally relevant approach” (Gray).

Instructional leadership, from a critical perspective, is engaging teachers in deconstructing the curriculum through a lens of cultural responsiveness and relevance — “helping staff to see, to
think critically about the curriculum in terms of who’s missing, what is absent, and whose story is being told and not told” (Mackenzie). Then once it is deconstructed, at every opportunity, teachers must introduce a social justice perspective into the curriculum. As Principal Idella tells her staff, “I want you to infuse social justice throughout the curriculum” (Idella).

Critical instructional leadership also requires that teachers focus on a pedagogy that encourages critical thinking: “preparing lessons from a more equitable perspective where you integrate social justice issues across the curriculum ... to pose to students critical questions — Who says this is the way things ought to be? Who benefits from this decision? Who is being marginalized? Are there other points of view?” (Hadley). Teaching Confederation as part of Canadian history provides an illustrative example: “When we’re teaching Confederation ... Who are the missing voices? ... Ask those probing questions ... Promote an environment where it’s okay to ask those questions” (Idella). In order to engage teachers in inculcating a responsive pedagogy and relevant curriculum, principals must challenge current pedagogy and curriculum. Principal Idella continues with the Confederation example: “The way in which we structure the conversations that we have with our students continually makes Europe superior to all those who are not, [white Caucasian] right?” (Idella).

Principals acknowledge the need to be sensitive to how teachers react when their practices are being brought into question. “Some (teachers) will say ‘Why are you now telling me all of the things (pedagogy and curriculum) I’ve learned are wrong?’” (Mackenzie). The principals in this study recognize that critical instructional leadership is about providing both a venue for and the opportunity to critically examine how teachers have always taught, and what they have taught, and then to make the changes that look at pedagogy and curriculum through a social justice lens. “That’s hard because teachers have been attached to the same thinking” (Mackenzie).

4. Shape and Preserve Respectful Relationships

The principals in this study recognize that in order to build and sustain a capacity for social justice in their schools, they need to empower respectful relationships by honouring the various voices in the school community.

Principals understand that shaping and preserving respectful relationships with students, staff, and parents is the key to social justice leadership practice.
Relationships [with students] are so incredibly important ... I learned a long time ago I had to build relationships [with them] ... I haven’t suspended a student for two years now ... That’s the same way I treat the staff, the parents, the community, the superintendent. Every staff member is a unique individual in this building ... Getting to know them helps with moving the school forward (Anderson).

Respect in relationships grows through “connecting with people and trying to be realistic with them” (Lewis), and seeking to understand, through dialogue, where staff position themselves on social justice. “Provide opportunities for staff narratives,” suggests Principal Gray. “It’s in the relationships that I build ... I use fireside chats as a strategy ... my communications strategy is generally oral and one-on-one ... to get a sense of who they are as individuals, their values as educators” (Collins). Principal Collins explains her lesson about the importance of dialogue and respect in shaping and preserving relationships:

It takes a lot of time to build relationships ... I tried to cut corners and realized — I thought damn — I’m actually going to have to earn this [relationship] ... I was humble and made an apology ... I told them my story about being raised and growing up just a few blocks away in the same circumstances that our children are in here at this school ... They gave me a second chance.

Building respectful relationships also sets the foundation upon which to build capacity/empowerment by honouring the voices in those relationships.

5. Build Capacity/Empowerment by Honouring Voices

Empowering voice is a social justice leadership practice that principals engage in when building capacity/empowerment for social justice in their schools — “giving people who are marginalized, whose voices are not heard, giving them an opportunity to be heard” (Hadley).

Capacity and empowerment stem from eliminating the traditional hierarchical model of leadership and replacing it with leadership that embraces partnership, “a more equitable manner of leadership” (Norman). Principal Collins, from an urban elementary school, explains how she builds capacity/empowerment with her staff: “I tell them whatever is going to happen here, we are going to do it together ... I question how I can support them and their vision/take on the school, then I share how I’m going to lead ... I look at school data, ... successes and where to
Principal Evans, from an urban secondary school, provides his example:

> Social justice is when I build capacity in my staff ... by including them in the decision-making process in every aspect of the school ... If I can take all of those pieces that each person brings and bring them into this picture of my school, then the outcome will be more socially just.

Principal Florence, also in an urban secondary school, explains her approach to enacting capacity/empowerment in her school: “Work with others who are prepared to help you to find the resources and the strategies — the supports in order to carry out your work ... to accomplish those [social justice] goals” (Florence).

All of these examples, for both elementary and secondary schools, emphasize that when principals acknowledge and distribute power equitably, capacity/empowerment is built amongst staff because having their voices heard is empowering. As Principal Idella previously stated, “One of the most important pieces of social justice leadership is listening. You have to really listen to people and then listen some more and then some more and then some more.” Principal Evans suggests that honouring voice is not only listening but also understanding the narrative behind the voice. He recognizes, as do most of the principals in this study, that every voice brings its own experiences/mindsets into the school setting. In this way, each voice is rich with experience. The sum of the voices is a mosaic of voice — voice that is much more powerful together than individually, to take action against injustice. “What needs to happen is that capacity needs to be built and people need to be empowered in such a way that even if the designated leader, the principal of the school, isn’t there, the social justice work can continue” (Hadley).

Tied into voice — the distribution of power — is advocacy. “A social justice leader possesses advocacy” (Florence). Advocacy includes advocating for staff. “Demonstrating what you expect and doing the same with them ... the staff needs that too. They need to feel respected and accepted” (Lewis). Principals claim that advocating for staff voice is not just ensuring all voices are sought, engaged, and listened to. It is also about purposefully seeking, engaging, and listening to those voices that may disagree with you. Principal Idella suggests that, in this way advocacy is about respect. “I mean, even if it’s a view that I disagree with because that’s the key part too — is making sure that you’re supporting leaders that aren’t like you ... analytical deep
thinkers ... I still highly respect them.” As some of the principals in the study point out, those staff who disagree openly are voices that challenge our own thinking. Isn’t that exactly what social justice leadership is all about!

However, the practice of advocacy in building capacity/empowerment by honouring voices to make a socially just school goes beyond staff. Principal Florence argues, “You have to be willing to advocate for those who you see being disadvantaged by the system — the parents, the teachers, the community” (Florence). Advocacy extends to students and families, “helping children and families who may not be able to [advocate]) without someone intentionally making those opportunities available to them” (Hadley).

Principals believe that parents are key stakeholders in their child’s success. Parent capacity/empowerment — parent engagement — stems from eliminating a deficit model of the role of parents and replacing it with a model that distributes the power inherent in the roles of teachers and principals in schools. Principal Idella points out that “the number one barrier for a parent is the power of the building” (Idella).

Principal Hadley is a strong advocate for parent voice:

> Communicating in positive ways with families, getting to know their concerns, getting to know their needs ... what their dreams are, what they value, how they see themselves. Giving people who are marginalized, whose voices are not heard, giving them an opportunity to be heard ... For example, people who might have a deficit mentality and see parents disinterested or disengaged ... Dig deeper and find out why, because often there are valid reasons ... Nobody is sending their children to school to fail, so having that conversation where concerns are heard ... what you do is form alliances with people who do not have a voice who you need to be working closely with the school.

Principals seek parent voice in a variety of ways. A very effective way is taking time to engage parents in dialogue and then finding ways to include that dialogue in meaningful ways. “We spend a lot of time listening to parents and integrating their voice[s]. They see the school as a powerful advocate for their child” (Gray). Another way to engage parent voice is through surveys — “perception surveys to ask students and parents how they feel about the school” (Hadley).
Student capacity/empowerment — student voice — is an integral aspect of how principals see student achievement. Principals advocate student voice especially for those students whose school experience leaves them feeling disenfranchised. What is needed are “opportunities for students to express how they feel about schools, what they want from schooling, where they see themselves in the future” (Hadley). Student capacity/empowerment is built when responding to student voice. For example, the goal for Principal Idella is “making sure that we’re listening to what is going on with our students ... and that we’re valuing their belief system.” Principal Jaabir very aptly describes the importance of not only engaging student voice but also empowering a robust student voice on social justice issues. “You want this young person to take ownership, to build their capacity as a leader, because you’re building a leader who is going to go out there and do amazing things” (Jaabir). Or as Principal Kelly said, “The onus is on us as educators to plant the seed of critical inquiry with the kids.”

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Practices and Actions

Traditionally within educational institutions, theory informs practice. In his introduction to Freire’s book *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation* (1985), Henry Giroux claims, “Theory does not dictate practice; rather it serves to hold practice at arm’s length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history” (p. xxiii). Further, “theory emerges from specific contexts and forms of experiences in order to examine such contexts critically and then to intervene on a basis of an informed praxis” (p. xxiv).

The praxis of educational leaders is often caught between theory and practice, between the abstract and its application. While Freire agrees that theory and practice are distinct, he claims they coexist, interact, and inform each other. By leaders focusing on the positive tension and cognitive dissonance that praxis creates, leaders can enact change. Chapter Two discusses in greater detail the transformative, critical democratic, inclusive and social justice leadership as described in the literature. For this section, it is summarized.

Shields (2010) identifies seven major elements of transformative leadership:

1. a combination of both critique and promise
2. attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes
3. (de/re)construction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity
4. acknowledgement of power and privilege
5. emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good
6. focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice
7. evidence of moral courage and activism (p. 562)

Democracy, collaboration, and empowerment are the cornerstones of critical democratic leadership (Furman & Shields, 2003). Democracy, in the robust sense, is a way of life “associated with equity, community, creativity, and taking difference seriously” (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 71). Practices of leadership include embracing difference, rejecting an automatic acceptance of the “right” way to solve issues, always making learning the key priority, honouring local thinking, moving individuals to see possibilities and perspectives (Sackney & Mitchell, 2002), and “developing a politically informed commitment to justice for all” (Gale & Densmore, 2003, p. 119).

Ryan’s (2012) conceptual framework of leading for inclusion includes “advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches” (p. 13). In practice, critical reflective questions that illuminate issues of social justice and engage personal and group dialogue and consciousness are essential to inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2012). Griffiths (2013) uses a tree to symbolize and illustrate conceptually the process of inclusion. His conceptualization begins with soil that represents the purpose of education, which in turn is foundational to the practical strategies to growing inclusion in urban schools.

Furman’s “social justice leadership as praxis” conceptual framework consists of three central concepts: praxis, dimensions, and capacities:

1. Leadership is conceived as praxis, in the Freirian sense, i.e., involving both reflection and action.
2. Leadership spans several dimensions, which are distinct yet overlap and serve as arenas for this praxis — the personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic and ecological.
3. Each dimension requires capacities on the part of the school leaders for both aspects of praxis — reflection and action (Furman, 2012, p. 202).

Theoharis (2009) identifies seven key leadership attributes of SJL principals:
Key 1. Acquire broad, reconceptualised consciousness/knowledge/skill base

Key 2. Possess core leadership traits

Key 3. Advance inclusion, access, and opportunity for all

Key 4. Improve the core learning context — both the teaching and the curriculum

Key 5. Create a climate of belonging

Key 6. Raise student achievement

Key 7. Sustain oneself professionally and personally (pp. 12–13).

In terms of praxis, Freire (1998) argues that “critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice. Otherwise theory becomes simply blah, blah, blah, and practice, pure activism” (p. 30). Given what Freire says about praxis — that it is both reflection and action, this section identified the practices principals engage in to do social justice work.

Although the principals in this study have little opportunity to study theory, their practices reflect critical theory fairly well. This observation supports Freire’s (1998) claim — that theory and practice coexist in a dynamic exchange, or praxis, in which one informs the other in a cycle of critical awareness and reflection that has the potential to bring about change through a reflective consideration of ideas and practices, including power relations. In this study, the principals’ dispositions represent their theory. In turn, their practices are demonstrations of their dispositions. Through praxis, one informs the other.

While the principals do not use the word “praxis,” the way in which they utilize their dispositions to inform their practice and vice versa is a significant finding in this study. Through praxis, principals are able to lead for social justice — the liberation of those who are marginalized.

Counter to critical theory is administrative theory and the dominant way of approaching leadership, which Foster (1986) claims is based on the philosophical tradition of rationality. Rationality assumes that the world is objective, real, and concrete and that scientists can record and accumulate facts from regularities in human relations. Rationality accepts the social order of society and claims that all things have a function: all serve some ultimate interest.
Foster (1986) talks about how rationality and administrative theory influence how schools are conceived: “Thus, schools are functional for social systems insofar as they prepare youngsters for the outside world” (p. 55). He also discusses how the leadership in schools is conceived: “The administrator’s role then is not to make a right or good or wise decision (values), but to make an efficient decision (facts) that achieves some goal set by others” (p. 64). In a rational style of leadership, for example, leaders review data, then plan, set goals, strategies, and timelines, and implement these based on their inclinations.

From a perspective of pure rationality, leadership does not consist of a dynamic exchange between theory and action; rather it is unidirectional in that there is a one-to-one relationship in which theory informs practice. As an example, consider The Ontario Leadership Framework (the focus of Chapter 6). Behind it exists theory. This researcher argues that the dominant administrative theory supports this framework. Principals, then, are expected to use this framework/theory prescriptively and modify their leadership style to conform to the theory so that the organizational goals are attainable. Principals who do so miss out on what the principals in this study claim leadership really is — the dynamic exchange between reflection and practice. Foster is against rationality: “Administrators need critical theory so that they don’t reproduce bureaucratic ideals of culture based on standards of efficiency, accountability, and predictability,” where schools become “arenas for competitive accumulation of skills that serve only material gains” (Foster, 1986, p. 69).

Freire (1998) asks leaders to focus on the positive tension and cognitive dissonance created within and between theory and practice. The next section of the findings addresses the question, How do principals sustain their social justice leadership in Ontario schools?

5.3 Strategies or Approaches that Principals Engage in to Sustain Their Work

Theoharis (2004) describes three distinct forms of resistance. Both “the resistance principals enact against historic marginalization of particular students” and “the resistance principals face as a result of their social justice agenda” (p. 5) were considered in sections previously. Theoharis’ third form of resistance — “the resistance or resilience these principals develop as a result of facing constraints to their work” (p. 5) frames how principals sustain their social justice work through subversion, political savvy, and resilience.
1. Subversion

Principals report that navigating for social justice in Ontario schools requires them to reframe their leadership as a subversive activity.

Principals claim that social justice leadership uses leadership to influence the learning in schools, to respond to injustice, and to confront resistance. By virtue of this definition, social justice leadership is a subversive activity.

“The job [of principal] holds a lot of power ... the institution holds so much power” (Idella). Finding a way to continue to choose social justice over organizational demands and accountabilities is indispensable in sustaining social justice leadership. “So, sometimes you have to work subversively ... You have to understand the culture within which you’re working and how best to leverage it in order to accomplish what you’re hoping to” (Florence). Subversion is a form of resistance. As a subversive activity, principals claim that social justice leadership requires both creativity and the appearance of compliance. Principal Gray describes subversion as “like staying in the weeds” (Gray). Principals see subversion as a creative choice that allows principals to exercise their power. Principal Florence explains creativity this way: “You have to be very, uhm, creative in how you access resources to forward your [social justice] agenda ... and in working with the [administrative] team ... They might not see the need in the same way” (Florence). As Principal Florence’s remark shows, the real need for creativity is not simply accessing an equitable distribution of resources — it is accessing an equitable distribution of resources within the hierarchy of relationships present in education. Principal Anderson uses the phrase it “depends on how you spin it” (Anderson) to explain what he means by creativity in leadership choices in order to ensure that students get what they need.

Creativity allows principals to find ways to appear compliant. Principal Hadley attests that she and other principals can find a way to locate social justice within the external goals and expectations of the institution. She gives the example of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) initiative. “If you look at the STEM fields in university, we do not have marginalized people represented ... minority populations are underrepresented” (Hadley). Principal Gray explains how subversion is both creative and appears compliant:
Sometimes I guess people go underground. I’m sneaky ... Well, I do what I need to get done to make sure everything is done on time ... It allows me freedom and time to go deeper in those subjects. It’s kind of like staying in the weeds. What I mean is ... I’m not a loud person ... you have to be practical. You cannot be a left-wing utopian person ... You have to have hopes for everyone ... At the end of the day; we have to work within a system. So how can we have wiggle room to support kids at your school where the needs are different than mine? ... Make sure things (board/province expectations) are done and done to the best you can. And while you’ve got extra time, keep infusing social justice efforts and actions into the brew (Gray).

Principal Norman describes subversion as justifiable scheming: “I think I am devious ... I need to be to survive and I need to advocate for social justice” (Norman). That is not to say, however, that when principals subvert power through creative compliance they are not leading authentically. “Always be a model worthy of following ... Enact authentically the actions that relate to the words that I’ve spoken ... When I look at how I lead, it’s by mutual respect and again putting into action those things that I believe are fundamental” (Norman).

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Subversion

Theoharis (2007) and MacBeath (2007) claim that social justice leadership by its nature is centred on the ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes. MacBeath (2007) claims that subversion should not conjure up radical disobedience, but rather an intellectual, moral, and political, much quieter revolution. Subversion “is intolerant, not in a bullish or confrontative sense, neither personalized nor necessarily even direct, but implicit in the fostering of a climate in which critical inquiry is simply the way we do things around here” (MacBeath, 2007, p. 245). “Intellectual and moral subversion go hand in hand. Responsibility is a moral commitment and one that is consciously and rigorously applied. It believes in accountability but one that derives from a strongly held value position rather than mandated targets” (MacBeath, 2007, pp. 245–246).

This dilemma was a topic of dialogue in *Talking about Social Justice and Leadership in a Context of Accountability* (De Angelis et al., 2007). Through a dialogue about how social justice looks in the context of accountability in standardized testing, De Angelis’ participating principals were practical in their approaches to this dilemma:
Among other things, they were reluctant to pursue courses of action that would leave them without their jobs. But at the same time, they also wanted to be true to their commitment to social justice. This requires that they engage in practices that simultaneously satisfy the powers-that-be and work in the interests of the marginalized. Each of the principals had their own ways of doing this. Darrin, for example, urges that principals need to exercise a degree of patience. But he also introduces a strategy that elicits much response in our discussion — subversion. Lindy took issue with the idea of subversion. For her, it was a dishonest way of doing one’s job. Mike, on the other hand, felt that principals needed to act strategically rather than subversively. (p. 26)

The report goes on to say, “Eventually, though, the practitioners came to more-or-less agree that their respective approaches could be described as ‘creative compliance’” (p. 26). The term “creative compliance” aptly describes how, in practice, the principals were going to ameliorate the tension between the institutional accountabilities and professional/personal accountability to social justice.

The principals in the present study subvert or creatively comply with resistance every day. While most principals openly discussed subversion, some in true subversive style, others did not. They became uneasy when asked how they sustain their leadership. Subversion does conjure up negative connotations because it suggests non-compliance. Some were conscious of the need for discretion — some even fearful — that in some way their responses and their identity could be revealed through the study.

Principals claim that creativity and the appearance of compliance are always strategic. The principals are highly aware that their leadership is accountable to individuals within the hierarchy of public education and to public education itself. “Some of these maverick things that we are doing, we’re going to be accountable to our bosses — our superintendent, our executive superintendents for equity and for student success ... even the Ministry of Education” (Jaabir). Simply stated, contrary to these claims, there are those principals who may see their role and their educational institutions as power neutral.

However, for Freire, educational processes are never power neutral. Freire (1998) cautions that neutrality does not exist in educational institutions and “subversion” acknowledges the existence of power relations within the organization and within the individuals who subscribe to the organization. He would contend that “subversion” is needed to navigate between two opposing
ideologies, essentially meaning that principals need to develop forms of resistance in order to lead for social justice. Subversion is one form of “the resistance or resilience these principals develop as a result of facing constraints to their work.” Political savvy is another.

2. Political Savvy: The Power, People, and Politics in the Workplace

Principals claim that political savvy is strategic resistance. It involves power, people, and politics in the workplace and is a critical skill for principals who want to enact social justice and survive:

It’s picking the times to engage in those conversations because I mean you could, if you’re looking through a social justice lens, have a conversation every 15 minutes about what people are or are not seeing or being mindful of ... You have to be diplomatic ... and you have to be very strategic ... We’re immersed in a battle and there are many little fights along the way ... If I didn’t speak at the moment to correct a mindset, it doesn’t mean I didn’t hear it ... It means I will strategize around how I am going to have influence over that person, that situation, that policy ... Strategically. I haven’t deviated from what I believe — I am just savvy enough to know that I’m not going to gain any ground if I push back at that ignorant individual (sic) at this moment in time. (Norman)

Principals claim that political savvy involves three steps. Knowing the power dynamics and the people in the hierarchical organization or institution is the first. Strategically navigating the politics to honour dispositions of social justice is the second. Choice is the third — whether principals choose to juggle their core personal values with those of the organization and its representatives — or not.

The first step of political savvy is acknowledging the power that exists in a hierarchical institution, such as in schools and the education system. “Leadership is often about acquiring power ... Once you take power out of [leadership] then it becomes collaboration” (Florence). Power is dynamic and appears in various levels of the hierarchy. With staff, power reveals itself when “the conversation stops when we walk into the staff room, teaching changes when we walk into a classroom, students change their behaviour when they see us” (Anderson). It is present in the relationships with staff. “Through experience I’ve learned where those boundaries are (referring to staff) ... If I can maintain those relationships with people, they will keep me going ... I’ll have a totally different conversation with three different people ... and I’ll shape my
interaction with them [for a positive outcome]” (Anderson). And, it is present in the relationships with supervisors and those further up the hierarchy, including the organization itself. Principal Jaabir’s quote is worth repeating. “Some of these maverick things that we are doing, we’re going to be accountable to our bosses — our superintendent, our executive superintendents for equity and for student success ... even the Ministry of Education who has given us additional funding” (Jaabir).

For some principals, understanding the existence of power and how it is both produced and subverted is empowering to them and they embrace it. “I like living between a rock and a hard place. I always have. Because between the rock and the hard place is where the challenges occur” (Evans). Principals claim that strategically navigating the hierarchy of people and politics in the workplace to honour their social justice dispositions is the second step. “Ensuring that you have the perspective of others … I get the fragility of humanity and that lesson came from my family” (Norman).

For principals of social justice, marginalized people are at the top of their hierarchy because they are the focus of their social justice leadership. “My self-esteem ... is tied with me wanting to help people. I want to help people have a better life before I’m gone. I’ve got boundless energy for that. I find it rewarding ... It’s a selfish personal need and hopefully makes a difference” (Gray). For everyone else in the organization, however, people who are marginalized are often not the priority and consequently hold the bottom position in the power hierarchy. Ensuring that the people who are marginalized remain the focus of social justice leadership requires political savvy.

People within the school — the staff — hold considerable power in the workplace. Principal Collins explains:

At this school I was astute enough to know that there was an expectation that that’s what I was going to come in with [social justice] and [staff] already preplanned how they were going to respond ... Some people were here for 15 years so they’ve been sort of part of the problem ... I had to be really politically astute and careful in how I framed it so as to not offend people. It took me two months to figure out where I could get their buy in ... It was the environment ... I’m coming at them through the back door and they still haven’t figured that out! I
am going to be patient ... In time, I’ll come clean and put the five-year [social justice] vision on the table ... and we could actually talk about Black people.

While Principal Florence spoke about the lack of positional power as a vice-principal in a secondary school, for most of the principals, the superintendents, who hold even more positional power, have actually been supportive. “I’ve been fortunate to have a great boss,” says Principal Gray. Principal Idella explains the power dynamic between her and her supervisor:

She doesn’t agree with [my politics] always, but she allows it and she really creates that environment that I feel completely safe telling her what I feel, what I think ... She’s got the political savvies ... and that’s how I get my voice and the principals’ voice at the table ... Learning from her, by really watching and listening, so that I can understand the political landscape ... She said, “I’m going to take care of the politics and you’re going to watch, and you’re going to learn.”

“When you surround yourself with other social justice advocates or social justice leaders ... it stops being about power! That has helped sustain me because it stops becoming about who holds more power, because we all want the same thing” (Florence). Principals often feel caught in the hierarchy, in a workplace that feels like a culture of isolation, striving to serve the marginalized while at the same time navigating the staff and trying to build a positive relationship with the supervisor. In order to survive, principals seek alliances from trusted colleagues to sustain their leadership and themselves. “Seek out who is open to thinking differently and then who will have to lead those conversations. Building capacity and allies is really critical to doing social justice work” (Mackenzie).

“We (social justice leaders) are a cautious group ... Do you work outside or inside [the system]? I believe you have more of a chance of having an impact if you work within the system ... Theoretically you’re outside of the system but in practice you’re inside the system” (Florence). Strategically navigating the politics to honour dispositions of social justice is the second step, where political savvy becomes strategic resistance. Principal Gray agrees: “At the end of the day, we have to work within the system ... you have to be very strategic unless you are cornered.”

The politics within the system, so often resistant to social justice, is exactly where most principals gain their strength. “I inherently weave social justice throughout my job as a leader” (Burgess). To reiterate, Principal Evans exclaims, “I like living between a rock and a hard place.
I always have. Because between the rock and the hard place is where the challenges occur, and it’s where I feel most productive” (Evans).

Other principals find the politics somewhat overwhelming. For example, as Principal Norman explained earlier, “I need to very carefully monitor my emotions” (Norman). They gain their strength by seeing the achievements of their social justice work — “When you see the impact of the work that you do, you celebrate those victories” (Florence) — and by finding the silver lining in their slipups. “I gain a kind of fortitude from being okay with my ignorance ... learning by virtue of my mistakes ... and I never take myself too seriously” (Norman).

In practice, principal leadership is about decision-making. Decision-making is about management and administration. On a daily basis, principals in schools make tens of hundreds of decisions. Choice, however, is different from decision-making. Choice, in this study, is about leadership. The third step of political savvy is choice — whether principals choose to juggle their core personal values with those of the organization and its representatives — or not.

**Critical Analysis and Discussion of Political Savvy**


Ryan (2010) cites research by Anderson (1991), Marshall and Scribner (1991), Lindle (1994), and McGinn (2005) that claims political savvy is part of the successful pursuit of social justice (p. 360). He goes on to say, “A key element in this political action is political acumen” (p. 360). Ryan defines political acumen as “(1) understanding political environments, (2) applying the knowledge they have acquired in the strategies that they employ, and (3) strategically monitoring their own actions — as they pursue their social justice goals” (p. 368).

If principals are to succeed in their social justice endeavours, then they have little choice but to play the political game, that is, to acknowledge the political
realities of their organizations, hone their political skills and put these skills into play. Failure to do so will not bode well for the future of equity and social justice. (p. 374)

As is clear in the literature, choice influences decision-making. Choice is about having the power to select a course of action based on what is the right — best or most appropriate — choice. The choice is influenced by which values hold the most power in the given leadership situation. Choice, in contrast to decision-making, uses our values. Social justice leadership is choice. Choosing social justice leadership is a choice between personal agency — the leadership power within, based on values gained from direct or indirect lived experiences with marginalization — and the organizational and societal power.

Choice is both the act of choosing and the power to choose. Choosing social justice leadership for these principals was easy. Having the power to choose is what is challenging. Power and choice are close relatives. Overwhelmingly, the principals acknowledge what Principal Florence said: “Theoretically you’re outside of the system but in practice you’re inside the system.”

An objection to political savvy would hold that neutrality in schools and in education systems exists. The other objection may be that our leadership is not guided by our values. Both of these counter-arguments have been discussed and refuted above.

Earlier, Principal Florence was quoted as saying, “is that the hill I’m prepared to die on?” (Florence). For principals, “hill” implies the power dynamics within, and from the various forms of resistance they experience. In this study, principals must choose between the organization’s values and accountabilities and those held by the principal and decide which will guide their practice and which will be compromised to enact and sustain their social justice work. Choice is an act of resistance that principals can employ to attain the resilience they need to sustain their social justice leadership.

3. Resilience

Principals understand that they work for social justice within a socially and historically constructed hierarchical education system. As such, principals need resilience “to come up again and move forward” (Portelli, 2016).
In his book *Educational Leadership: The Moral Art* (1991), Christopher Hodgkinson describes what it means to be a leader and how to cope with the pressures of organization life: “The [administrator] must know two things: where their values are and where the power lies” (p. 6).

Resilience is the act of choice. Resilience is the act of adapting well in the face of a challenge or choice; it is required to sustain social justice leadership. Or, as Principal Anderson put it, “I burned myself twice; I’m still here!” (Anderson). When it comes to choice, there are, of course, limitations. Principal Gray succinctly captures the sentiments of the principals in this study, “At the end of the day, we have to work within the system” (Gray). Sustaining a focus on social justice is a challenging enterprise both professionally and personally; or, as Theoharis (2007) puts it, resilience, like choice, is a form of “resistance principals develop to sustain their social justice agenda in the face of resistance” (p. 248).

“It’s about weighing it out ... Where are you going to invest your social justice capital in order to have the greatest impact in your sphere of influence?” (Florence). This quote bears repeating as it applies as poignantly here as it did to the previous discussion on the integral disposition of reflection in social justice leadership.

If self-knowledge is where social justice leadership begins, resilience is how social justice leadership is sustained. Resilience is a combination of both disposition and political savvy. Resilience is a merger of knowing thyself, having moral courage, and practicing reflection and perseverance. Principals draw upon these qualities as needed. Resilience is a fusion of subversion (exercising oppositional power and taking risks) and political savvy (forming strategic alliances to become champions and voices for change) — both of which help principals to contest the resistance they face. In turn, these dispositions and strategies, or resilience, have their foundation in personal lived experiences of disability, race, gender, language, and their realization of privilege.

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Resilience

Shields (2010) describes resistance as keeping “one foot within the dominant structures of power and authority” (p. 570) while exercising oppositional power, taking risks, and forming strategic alliances to become an activist and a voice for change.
Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lie our growth and our freedom. It is not freedom from conditions, but it is freedom to take a stand toward the conditions.

—Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

This section examined the social justice leadership dispositions, practices, and strategies principals develop and engage in to do their social justice work and then to sustain their social justice leadership in Ontario schools. Principals in this study align with the literature in that they agree that underlying social justice leadership and the resilience to sustain it is “a strong core value system” (Florence). Through praxis, principals are critically aware of how their dispositions, practices, and strategies coexist in a dynamic, interactive exchange with their values, which leads to the empowerment of those marginalized in schools.
Chapter 6
Findings, Critical Analysis, and Discussion of
The Ontario Leadership Framework

The Ontario Leadership Framework is the standard of leadership practice in Ontario. As such, it sets the leadership practices required to meet organizational expectations. A detailed outline of the OLF and its supporting literature is contained in Chapter 2. This section describes what aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work (Research Question #3), given their views on social justice and social justice leadership, and given the dispositions, practices, and strategies that they develop and engage in to enact social justice leadership. A critical analysis and discussion follows the account of the data in each sub-section.

6.1 The Principals’ Experience

Principals claim limited experience with The Ontario Leadership Framework. For principals, their experience with the OLF is that of compliance and accountability.

What do the principals mean by “limited”? 

With the exception of two principals, Gray and Jaabir, who said they were familiar with the OLF, and Principals Florence and Idella, who had experience with it in their Master’s programs, the majority of principals in this study describe their experience with The Ontario Leadership Framework since its inception in 2012 as limited. Principals Anderson, Burgess, D’Andre, Evans, Hadley, and Kelly said they had read the document and had attended board-sponsored professional development. Nevertheless, they felt they were inexperienced and unfamiliar with the document and its contents. “Thank goodness you had a copy of the document because I couldn’t have told you what The Ontario Leadership Framework was without looking at it” (Anderson).

Regardless of their inexperience with the OLF, principals reported that they are keenly aware of their accountability to it. For them, this accountability is the foundation of their experience with the OLF. “The Ontario Leadership Framework is what is expected of me as a leader. It is the currency that I have to understand exists,” reports Principal Florence, meaning that there is a depth and breadth of accountability that surrounds the OLF. The document aligns with the
Ministry’s School Effectiveness Framework (SEF), the Board Improvement Plan (BIP), and each school’s School Improvement Plan (SIP). As Principal Florence points out, the OLF is the “currency” of accountability that ensures that the principals’ actions and the planning behind their actions in their schools, the SIP, comply with the Board’s goals and vision and those of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

In fact, principals claim that most of their limited experience with the OLF is through compliance with the Principal and Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal policy, the PPA. It is Regulation 234/10 of The Education Act that specifies the standards, processes, timelines, and forms to be used in the performance appraisal of Ontario principals and vice-principals. The PPA requires several pieces of documentation including the Principal’s Annual Growth Plan and multiple meetings with their superintendent to evaluate whether their School Improvement Plans indeed comply with board expectations (BIP) that in turn support the Ministry of Education’s School Effectiveness Framework. As a result, the principals in this study see the OLF as a detailed job description. Principal Jaabir states, “Really — if you want to be an effective leader, whatever you do has to mirror the stuff that is contained in this framework” (Jaabir). Principal Norman describes the lament of many of the principals, that the immeasurable number of expectations for principals in the OLF makes it impossible to attain the level of accountability expected in the PPA policy. “There’s no way that anyone ... I don’t know any human being or maybe somebody out there who could possibly embed and incorporate all of this OLF in their practice simultaneously” (Norman). Furthermore, they observe that once the PPA is complete, neither the principals nor the superintendents speak of it, or of the OLF, again.

Experience with compliance and accountability to the OLF begins when educators seek leadership positions. For some principals who are committed to leadership sustainability within their boards, their experience with the OLF is in helping to prepare and mentor teacher candidates or vice-principal candidates for promotion. Boards represented in this study use the OLF as the tool to measure a candidate’s preparedness for a leadership role. Subsequently, principal mentors ensure that they use the OLF as a basis for preparing and mentoring aspirant leaders. “I only use it when I’m doing my aspiring leader’s work” (Collins).

Principals (Florence, Gray, and Lewis) concur that their experience with the OLF is as a checklist for self-assessment and reflection in preparation for the role of principal and for
advancement; or, “a springboard for reflection on my practice ... an inventory if I’m thinking about promotion” (Florence). As such, the OLF could be helpful to an inexperienced principal.

It’s a guiding tool, it’s the snapshot of what, you know a leader is supposed to be and what you’re supposed to be focusing on. I mean it’s all helpful because if you’re coming into this job with no experience ... these are the things you’re supposed to do. It’s the guide to help you to understand the whole job and to be able to know what you need to do (Lewis).

Norman agrees that the OLF can be considered “a multipurpose tool in mentoring and selecting leaders.” However, Principal Norman laments that the number of expectations is especially unreasonable when it comes to aspiring leaders aiming to advance their careers in the hierarchical leadership system. She observes that, “in making a selection between candidate A and candidate B, the person that is able to articulate more adher[ance] to the domains is the person that is more likely to be endorsed” (Norman). This comment brings up the political aspect of the power inherent in the OLF and exposes the political nature of the principals’ experience with the document.

Principal Norman was the most articulate and animated in describing this aspect of her personal and professional experience when she has mentored or sought promotion in a system that uses the OLF as its measurement tool. She explains that she uses caution in her response when being asked about the OLF. She considers who, why, and for what purpose the question about the OLF is being asked. “For me it is an interesting dichotomy because it depends on who I’m interacting with. You know not all leaders ascribe [to] or even have this type of framework” (Norman). Principal Norman understands the political nature of the OLF because the hiring process in a hierarchical organization is political. She reveals that she uses this political understanding to her advantage within the hierarchy.

I use [the OLF] to write and respond to people ... For someone who likes to be credible ... it gives me credibility as a leader because the more I can address it and speak to it, embed it in my practice, the more it enhances my credibility because I have something that I can easily go back to when people push against me and say “oh no that’s not the way that it’s done,” I have a tool I can pull up and say, “No, as a matter of fact — it is how it’s done!”
Lastly, but of utmost importance, principals argue that they do not use the OLF to inform their practice or guide their daily work: “It doesn’t guide my practice. I don’t use it. I just know what my school needs” (Collins). Rather, in their experience, the OLF sits in the background and from time to time (mainly due to accountability), principals review the OLF. Principal Lewis states, “I do look at it from time to time ... looking to say — okay — can I check any of these things off? Am I doing these things? Am I doing the things a principal should be doing and the ministry also wants us to be doing? I wouldn’t say I use it all of the time ... because I had to find it for this interview.”

Critical Analysis and Discussion of the Principals’ Experience

Pollock’s report with Hauseman (2015) — *Principals’ Work in Contemporary Times* — examines “how principals approach their work, spend their time, and the motivation and forces that influence their choices” (p. 2). Their research was guided in part by the OLF. One of the sections in Pollock and Hauseman’s study focuses on how principals perceive the OLF and how the OLF is evident in their work. They report that 49 percent of principals in the study “used the OLF as a reference or support to plan and guide their own professional learning, as well as that of their vice-principals and members of their teaching staff who were interested in leadership roles” (p. 44). Forty-four percent “use the OLF as a touchstone to guide their daily work” (p. 44).

The principals in this study do not reflect Pollock and Hauseman’s findings. For most, their experience with the OLF is limited to when they are actively involved in a performance appraisal, or when they are seeking promotion or mentoring aspirant leaders. Indeed, this limited experience extends beyond the principals interviewed for this study. Principal D’Andre went on to remark, “At directors’ council ... principals were asked, Do you remember The Ontario Leadership Framework? And nobody knew” (D’Andre).

Principals claim their experience with the OLF is limited to that of compliance and accountability. The gap between experience and culpability causes tension for the principals. Within this frame of reference, however, principals recognize that they need to be familiar with the document and its contents.
6.2 Tension

*Having reflected on the OLF, principals almost unanimously struggle to locate their social justice leadership within the five domains of* The Ontario Leadership Framework.

Ed Taylor (2003) writes, “School leadership rooted in social justice has, at its centre, tension” (p. 1). When asked how their social justice leadership aligns with the OLF, principals almost unanimously struggle to locate their social justice leadership practice within its five domains. Having had the opportunity to review and reflect on the OLF, principals claim their difficulty is primarily because of two reasons — first, that the OLF is silent on social justice and second, that the OLF deals more with management than with leadership.

Principals recognize that while equity may be implied in the OLF, it is “not explicitly stated here” (Burgess). “There are bullets in [the OLF] that connect to social justice but I don’t know if you can define [social justice] like that” (Lewis). For Principal D’Andre, social justice is enmeshed in the OLF but “it’s just a little hard to find” (D’Andre). Other principals bluntly state — “Social justice is not the vision of *The Ontario Leadership Framework* — the ministry, the province often just pay lip service to the ideal of social justice” (Florence). If the OLF is silent on the issue of social justice, then finding social justice leadership in the OLF will be even more difficult.

Principal Mackenzie boldly questions the relationship between the OLF and social justice leadership — particularly around how leadership is socially constructed to favour a male, Eurocentric view. She claims that this social construction of leadership influences the OLF. This dominant view of leadership, she says, clashes with a critical view of leadership based on a person’s lived experiences and point of view in society:

> An objective framework in itself it is not ... Much of the research work focused on men ... some of the traditional ways that leadership can be constructed, because leadership itself is socially constructed. [The OLF has] now defined how leadership is to be constructed and enacted in a particular way irrespective of all of the different ways in which people can lead. Often people who lead in a different way may have difficulty finding themselves within the framework and seeing themselves reflected in the framework.
While not all of the principals have this degree of insight into how leadership is socially constructed through a white, male lens, they do understand that the OLF is linked to a business or management model of leadership that perceives the OLF as a checklist describing what a principal does. “This is what we do!” (Burgess). “It fits quite well in what the role is and what we are already doing” (Jaabir). But as Principal Florence points out, the OLF confuses what principals do from a “management” perspective and their “leadership.” “All of these components are components of what we do in buildings ... The [OLF] components they call leadership I would suggest are more to do with management” (Florence). As a result, principals struggle to find their social justice leadership dispositions, practices, and strategies in the OLF. Even from a management perspective, principals criticize the litany of expectations:

I think it provides a very clear description of the role ideally but not practically — I think for Leithwood — if he used this document ... he would see how [the OLF] is impossible ... One of the challenges is it is very, it’s very big, there is a lot here ... It’s a very, it’s a very large responsibility. All of these things are large responsibilities and there’s a lot to do. (Kelly)

The tension continues to increase. Even within the exhaustive list of management tasks, principals criticize the OLF because it doesn’t take into account the urgent challenges that arise every day, that take principals away from the expectations in the OLF.

Nobody could possibly do all these. These are all the balls in the air that we’re juggling. And nobody puts in here that the police walked through the door and said, “You’ve got to put your school into lockdown,” right in the middle of your graduation ceremony. (Burgess)

Yes, they agree that they are “managers” of a business, but it is the business of impacting young lives. Principal Burgess summarizes the sentiments of his colleagues: “I see more of my managerial duties as a leader in The Ontario Leadership Framework and less of the moral social justice leadership duties I have”. (Burgess)

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Tension

The literature says that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). It also says, “There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership” (Leithwood et al., 2006).
What is educational leadership? Over the course of the last three decades, educational leadership has been a well-researched topic. As outlined in the Literature Review, one of the central claims of the OLF is to “promote a common language that fosters an understanding of leadership and what it means to be a school or system leader.” Leadership is defined within the OLF as:

the exercise of influence on organization members and other stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization’s vision and goals. Leadership is “successful” when it makes significant and positive contributions to the progress of the organization, and is ethical. Management is an integral part of leadership. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5)

Within this study, leadership literature on the two relevant perspectives, transformational and critical, is discussed in the critical analysis and discussion section on the resistance that principals face (p. 116). However, in the context of examining leadership, both perspectives need to be revisited.

A broad review of Leithwood’s research reveals that his work primarily focuses on transformational leadership theory (Leithwood et al., 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Briefly, Leithwood describes transformational leadership as an interactive hierarchical relationship between leaders and followers. Leaders are in the position of power and use their influence to develop a common direction or purpose (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Given that the research by Leithwood et al. (2006), as well as research conducted by Leithwood (2013) and the Institute for Education Leadership became the foundation of the OLF, and because the OLF uses a very similar definition of leadership, a conclusion can be drawn that transformational leadership theory underpins the OLF.

In contrast, the leadership theory that explains the findings of this study is critical theory. This theoretical thread has been discussed in sections of the findings. From a critical approach, leading for social justice is at the service of learning and is underpinned by democracy, collaboration, and empowerment (Furman & Shields, 2003). “Leaders and followers join in a critical social practice of leadership that fosters a common public discourse linked to the democratic imperatives of equality and social justice” (Sackney & Mitchell, 2002, p. 899). A number of leadership theories consistent with a critical perspective of leadership appear in the literature. Transformative, critical democratic, inclusive, and social justice leadership are considered in detail in the Literature Review section of this study. Foster’s (1989) four criteria
for thinking about leadership comprise a working definition and conceptualization of educational leadership from a critical perspective: educational leadership must involve critical transformative, educative, and ethical practice.

Given that the literature explains the difference between how the OLF and the principals in this study conceive of leadership, it is not surprising that these principals struggle to locate their social justice leadership within the OLF. Principals in this study possess a belief that social justice is at the centre of their practice, and claim that such leadership has achieved a more just school. The OLF defines leadership “as an exercise of influence on organization members and other stakeholders,” which goes against what principals fundamentally believe is the relationship between leaders and others. This difference may explain, at least in part, why principals struggle to locate social justice leadership in the OLF.

As well, the OLF clearly states that management is an integral part of leadership. The other reason that principals struggle to locate social justice leadership in the OLF is because the framework often uses “management” to mean “leadership.” While transformational leadership is the dominant approach to educational leadership and, through studies, has been found to be highly effective, the ultimate test of any theory is whether it informs practice.

Gunter (2001) argues that transformational leadership is more about leadership in educational settings where advancing political agendas is more important than improving student achievement. Ultimately, leaders need to critically appraise leadership theory by asking questions such as, In whose political interest is this theory supported? and, alternatively, Whose political or social interests are being silenced or marginalized? Only then can leaders apply theory in educational settings to understand an educational issue such as equity or social justice.

Tension builds and conflict emerges when principals are required to fulfill both management and leadership roles in order to be effective in their positions. While the demands of the two roles may not technically compete with each other, they do compete for time and attention.

6.3 Conflict: Social Justice Leadership within the Context of The Ontario Leadership Framework

Other central claims of the OLF are: to facilitate a shared vision of leadership in Ontario schools and districts, to “identify the practices, actions and traits or personal characteristics that describe
effective leadership,” and to be the resource for boards to support aspiring leaders (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5). This section examines whether or not the claims in the OLF actually support principals in pursuit of a socially just school and how increasing diversity in Ontario schools has impacted the claims of the OLF on principals’ practice.

Principals argue that the claims in The Ontario Leadership Framework do not support them in their pursuit of a socially just school.

When principals were asked which aspects of the OLF help or support them in their social justice work, they responded that, in practical terms, the OLF does not support their pursuit of a socially just school or their social justice leadership. “No, honestly, [the OLF] doesn’t help me at all in my social justice work ... The framework or expectations are, you know, the standards of practice for principals; they’re broad expectations” (Collins). Rather, from a broad perspective, principals see the OLF as a detailed job description of the role of the principal:

It’s a guiding tool; it’s the snapshot of what, you know, a leader is supposed to be and what you’re supposed to be focusing on. It’s the guide to help you to understand the whole job and to be able to know what you need to do ... I mean it’s all helpful if you’re coming into this job with no experience ... These are the things you’re supposed to do. (Lewis)

Principal Hadley states that while “adequate principal leadership has a role to play [in attaining social justice], I would not give that much credit to The Ontario Leadership Framework with helping me to overcome those barriers” (Hadley).

Specifically, Principals Anderson, Burgess, D’Andre and Hadley make reference to the personal leadership resources section as adding value to the OLF. “Definitely the personal leadership resources ... optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, proactivity, those are key” (D’Andre). In 2012, The Ontario Leadership Framework acknowledged and added “a small but critical number of Personal Leadership Resources as effective leadership practices that effective leaders tend to possess and draw on when enacting the leadership practices” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

The principals agree that personal leadership resources underpin leadership and are important to survive leadership challenges. “Personal leadership resources are always ... going to help you ... because that’s ... the underpinning of everything — cognitive, social, psychological” (D’Andre).
However, the sentiment of the principals is that the personal leadership resources are not directly connected to social justice or social justice leadership: “Soft skills are vitally important. I don’t know if I would connect those to social justice” (Burgess). “There may be a role for The Ontario Leadership Framework in helping leaders to be aware of those cognitive, social, and psychological resources but it’s not the be-all and end-all. Social justice work can be done even in the absence of this” (Hadley).

Principal Idella observes that reflection, the important disposition of social justice leadership in the personal leadership skills, is not mentioned in the OLF: “As a leader, you need time to reflect, even in the personal leadership resources, [reflection is] not in here” (Idella). Reflection, notably reflection in the critical sense, is a key disposition in social justice leadership because it is the foundation of praxis. And it is the disposition that principals draw upon to connect thought and action, where one informs the other in a dynamic exchange. Because reflection ties together self-knowledge, moral courage, and perseverance, principals who lead for social justice can reconcile their personal leadership skills with their knowledge of themselves, their values, and their beliefs — and remain steadfast to these as leaders.

Principal Norman raises a key point, i.e., that the OLF is open to interpretation: “I do [the OLF] in the context of social justice” (Norman). Social justice leadership, therefore, can align within the domains of the OLF if principals are using a lens of social justice and social justice leadership from which to view it.

With regard to the five domains — the “roadmap” of the OLF, principals Anderson and Kelly agree that the Setting Directions domain can be viewed by principals as assisting in establishing goals and in developing a process to create a strong vision for schools. Principals Jaabir, Lewis, and Idella accept that the OLF sets some direction on how to run their schools; however, they feel that it does not give clear direction for the leadership needed in the current context of the growing diversity in Ontario schools:

This document does set some direction as to how you can actually run your school, but maybe we need to see social justice being specifically addressed in this document because I don’t think it does that. It may simply be because it’s working on the assumption that we would know, right? But there are a lot of us out there that still don’t get [social justice], you know? (Jaabir)
Principal Lewis agrees: “You can see some elements of equity but nothing of social justice action. You can see equity implied in [the OLF] but you certainly can’t see social justice, or certainly the requirements to do social justice work” (Lewis).

While Principal Idella accepts that the OLF sets some direction for leadership practice, she disagrees that the OLF can support social justice leadership:

I don’t know, to be totally honest I’m not sure that [the OLF] really does [support principals in their social justice work]. This [OLF] helped, I think, sort of assess what I was doing ... but I already had my strong moral imperative, so I’m not sure it helped me with my social justice leadership because again, I went to this piece [on Building Relationships] as this stood out for me.

Because the social justice leadership practice of “shaping and preserving respectful relationships” is vital to enacting social justice, principals view the Building Relationships and Developing People domain, in part, as aligning with social justice leadership. No principal mentioned either Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices or Improving the Instructional Program as supporting principals in the pursuit of a socially justice school.

Principal Mackenzie feels that Securing Accountability helps support her in her social justice work. “In practical terms, I use The Ontario Leadership Framework to my advantage. In the accountability section, I use the data to support whatever it is I am trying to drive; for example, underperforming students — looking at the data, I ask, ‘Why are they underperforming?’” (Mackenzie).

Principal Mackenzie supports the key points raised by Principal Norman — that the OLF is open to interpretation, and that social justice leadership is in the OLF if that is what the reader is looking for. This important point of “lens” or perspective that informs interpretation of the OLF will be examined in the section entitled “Navigating the Tension and Conflict”; however, it suffices to say that Principal Norman summarizes the sentiments of the principals in this study: “I do [the OLF] in the context of social justice” (Norman). The placement of this quote here is purposeful. It reinforces that the principals, regardless of whether they are reflecting on their practice or on the OLF itself, consistently reflect on and assess how they are enacting social justice leadership or fulfilling the accountabilities of the OLF through a lens of social justice and social justice leadership.
Principals argue that given that the OLF is the standard of leadership practice in Ontario — a detailed job description — social justice needs to be explicitly identified in the OLF to support social justice leadership. “If ... the Ontario Leadership Framework is the gold standard that we should be achieving ... social justice needs to be an inherent and clear part of that and it’s not” (Burgess). Principal Burgess goes on to say, “For me, the social justice piece is more important than checking off boxes of The Ontario Leadership Framework” (Burgess).

The OLF claims to “identify the practices, actions and traits or personal characteristics that describe effective leadership” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5). In fact, principals claim a number of aspects of the OLF hinder their social justice leadership practice — its structure, its unclear vision, and its implementation.

Structure

“I think there are aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework that hinder social justice work. Sometimes the very structure of the OLF hinders my ability to find opportunities for all students ... to change people ... to build capacity” (Florence). According to Principal Florence, the structure of the OLF hinders its capacity to guide the leadership needed to support social justice, such as accessing the appropriate curriculum for students, having the time needed to build capacity with staff, and having control over staffing the building in a way that reflects the needs of students.

Multiple structural components hinder social justice leadership. Small fragments of quotes from the principals are used to capture these.

a) “a lot of management pieces” (Florence)

Principals agree that the OLF describes the role of the principal, but that its structure highly resembles a management framework veiled as leadership practices. “I think the Ontario Leadership Framework talks about a lot of management pieces ... They call them leadership but they’re management components” (Florence). “It’s the way to run a really good business” (Anderson).

The countless expectations related to structure challenge the degree to which the OLF can effectively guide leadership: “I just think [the OLF is] daunting — there’s so much” (Lewis);
there are simply “Too many requirements” (Florence). “I think it provides a very clear
description of the role ideally but not practically” (Kelly). Principal Norman summarizes this
sentiment: “Part of the barrier in this tool is the number of components that are embedded in
each domain. It can be inhibiting and daunting” (Norman). Principal Norman makes a salient
point — that “good leadership” is only attainable to those principals who can engage in all of the
expectations in the OLF. She claims, “It’s too big a document to expect that good leadership
infers using all the elements that are written here on the framework” (Norman).

b) “One size fits all” (Evans)

[P]ractically speaking, I think [leadership] would look different for every person in
the role … there never would be a checklist that you could say, “Ok, check, check,
check,” because [principals are] not doing the same things, or it would look
different in every single school. (Kelly)

Because the OLF is a provincially and board mandated document, it implies that the framework
is a “one-size fits all model” of leadership. This structural aspect hinders social justice leadership
because it does not recognize the non-traditional forms of leadership often associated with social
justice work. Principal Evans argues, “If you want social justice, don’t view anything as being
one size fits all, and that would include [the OLF]” (Evans).

Referring to how the OLF is constructed into columns and in each column is an extensive list of
expectations, Principal Collins affirmed that social justice leadership “is not linear like that.”
Principals claim that the “prescriptive” structure of the OLF leaves very little space, trust, or
autonomy for principals to use their knowledge of their own local context to respond with sound
professional leadership. The OLF, says Principal Florence, is “prescriptive … I think leaders need
to have more control or autonomy within their school … A part of leadership is being trusted to
execute your vision. [There is] not enough freedom to actually enact social justice.” If “one size
fits all” were the case, then every school, regardless of demographics, would have the leadership
to support achievement equity across race, gender, or other marginalizing characteristics.

c) “All of this [OLF] and all the balls we’re juggling…” (Collins)

Principals argue that the OLF doesn’t speak to the depth and breadth of the role of the principal,
further building on its impracticality and contributing to thwarting social justice leadership. “To
me, it’s kind of an overarching framework but there’s so much, so much more that you have to do especially around the legal, medical, and special needs of children and everything” (Lewis).

“I believe demands are becoming even heavier on administrators; they are becoming more time consuming and [the OLF] doesn’t allow for this work [of social justice leadership]” (Idella). The way in which the OLF is structured around a management model of leadership, with an emphasis on prescription, hinders the principals because it doesn’t identify the multitude of unexpected challenges and resistance that principals face, particularly in highly diverse neighbourhoods fraught with poverty. These include the number and frequency of students in need of emotional support and/or families in need of professional support services. Because demands on principals are increasing, and these demands are not captured within the OLF, together these aspects hinder social justice leadership.

d) “An objective framework in itself it is not” (Mackenzie)

While the linear, one-size-fits-all structure of the OLF in itself either hinders or obstructs principals in their social justice leadership work, so too does the ideology upon which it was constructed. The OLF uses the phrase “mutual and objective” to describe how the structure was designed. This phrase leads the principals to question the neutrality of the OLF. “An objective framework in itself it is not. The OLF is neither mutual nor objective and leaves little room for thinking critically about leadership” (Mackenzie). Through a narrow lens of leadership and its power structure, “much of the research work focused on men” (Florence). The political structure of the OLF implies a hierarchical base of leadership hindering the freedom to actually enact social justice or social justice leadership — the empowerment and collaboration needed to shape and preserve respectful relationships and build capacity/empowerment by honouring voice.

Many decisions are made outside of the school and then the responsibilities are on the school principal to get these actions completed. And in so doing, when the schools are organized that way with a hierarchical leadership structure, then they’re setting up schools so that stakeholders can be against each other. (Hadley)

The bias in the structure of the OLF is seen as an aspect that hinders social justice leadership; it has “defined how leadership is to be constructed and enacted in a particular way, irrespective of all of the different ways in which people can lead” (Mackenzie). Principals argue that this hinders engagement in the OLF because “somebody who may lead differently than some of the
traditional ways … may have difficulty finding themselves within the framework or seeing themselves reflected in the framework because leadership itself is socially constructed” (Mackenzie). Principal Burgess sums it up this way: “I do believe it’s possible for leaders to achieve the goals of The Ontario Leadership Framework without ever considering a moral compass or social justice leadership.”

e) “I’m trying to see if [reflection is] here” (Idella)

Principals claim that self-reflection is fundamental to social justice leadership. Added to the fact that social justice per se is not mentioned anywhere in the OLF is the fact that its personal leadership resources do not include reflection. “I really completely read every single little part of The Ontario Leadership Framework and I’m trying to see if [reflection is] here — because I think reflection is a huge piece of being a leader, and I’m trying to see if it’s in here somewhere. I don’t think it’s in here explicitly” (Idella). It isn’t, and its absence obstructs social justice leadership. “As a leader, you need time to reflect, even in the personal leadership resources, it’s not in here” (Idella).

Unclear Vision

“A lot of words here, but not a really good picture” (D’Andre).

Principals feel that while the OLF claims to facilitate a shared vision of leadership in Ontario schools that supports and sustains the highest quality leadership possible in schools and districts across the province, this overarching shared vision of leadership is unclear. Because the vision is not explicit, it hinders social justice leadership. The principals claim that two issues contribute to this lack of clarity. First, the domains in the document appear to be silos because their interrelationship is uncertain. “For me a barrier or limitation for the tool is with the number of expectations and without some very clear indicators of cross-connections in terms of the domains” (Norman). The second issue for principals is that the OLF is unclear in how it relates to and connects with other ministry policies that principals are also responsible for implementing and adhering to. Principal Norman notices the apparent disconnect in relation to the Equity & Inclusive Education policy:

And so the Equity and Inclusive Schools policies and documents, I certainly don’t see those components embedded in this nor do I see within those documents the
converse construct ... I’ve got to implement this, this, this, this ... If we’re looking at policies in the context of the social justice lens, there are mitigating circumstances that go back to equity and inclusion ... Unless somebody does connect them ... we’re in trouble.

Because the vision of the OLF is uncertain, principals feel that what hinders them most is that social justice is not mentioned in the document: “It’s possible that the document may not specifically talk about social justice” (Jaabir).

Implementation

As previously reported, with the exception of two principals, Gray and Jaabir, who said that they were familiar with the OLF, the principals in this study describe their experience with the OLF, its contents, and its accountabilities as limited. “We didn’t talk about it with my board,” says Principal D’Andre. Principal Norman makes the point that just because a document is produced does not mean it is implemented in the way in which it was intended. “I guess it goes back to how do we actually speak to this [OLF] … is it that we just produce them and suddenly they show up on your desk as an administrator and it’s — ‘oh this is a really good thing’?”

The principals find that the inadequate support for implementation of the OLF has two effects that hinder social justice leadership: the question of relevance and the question of accountability. Principals question the relevance of the document to guide their leadership. “You’re not coming back to it unless you have to” (Collins). This questioning stems from the fact that when the OLF was implemented, the principals did not receive a fulsome explanation of its vision and the values upon which it was constructed.

My question back to them is, “Do you want me to be conversant in The Ontario Leadership Framework or do you want me to be more conversant in the values, the implications and the usage?” If you want me to be more of those things, which I am assuming The Ontario Leadership Framework is really about, then ... there has to be all of those things we talked about — need to be applied to this. (Evans)

However, even if the principals agree that the OLF potentially hinders their social justice leadership, they acknowledge that its existence has a significant impact on their role and position as a principal.
To be honest, I don’t go to The Ontario Leadership Framework to support my practice or for new ideas or to validate things. There’s no value added with this document with regards to social justice work. How can [the OLF] support me in leading for social justice? I don’t know if it can; like I really think that’s an independent thing. (Lewis)

An even greater effect of inadequate support for implementation for the principals is the fact that they are left searching for direction and support particularly because they are keenly aware that in the first year and every five years subsequently, they are accountable to the OLF through the Principal Performance Appraisal policy. Principal Florence asks:

Who’s challenging administrators and holding them accountable? It’s going to be the document that’s going to be used in the end that you’re going to be required to measure up against. [And] what are the consequences for me in identifying the gap in my leadership? Add to that, as a vice-principal, how does that impact my ability to move forward, which is completely dependent on the principal? Does The Ontario Leadership Framework help leaders fill gaps in their practice? If the framework is part of the performance piece and where we need to develop and grow, what structures are in place to enable that growth to take place?

Principal Florence raises an important point in reference to how principals engage in the OLF given that it is neither constructed nor implemented in a neutral manner. Principals argue that there is a fundamental divergence between to whom and for what principals feel accountable as social justice leaders and to whom and for what the OLF holds principals accountable. In fact, the OLF holds principals accountable to the organization’s goals, which principals argue do not support social justice in an increasingly diverse Ontario public education system.

Accountability is the one I have the greatest difficulty with ... My sense of accountability and The Ontario Leadership Framework sense of accountability can be divergent. And, you know, again, accountability comes up, because ultimately we are accountable to the framework. Do I have to be accountable to my board? The Ontario Leadership Framework would suggest I need to be accountable to the board and beyond. But there’s a community that I serve too. And as a social justice leader, you know, I value the role that it plays ... and at times the community might view [to whom or for what I am accountable] differently. (Florence)
The principals in this study have a high internal and personal sense of accountability. Principals feel that this divergence in accountability between organizational requirements and the principals’ social justice beliefs and values leads to a serious conflict for principals.

There is no notion, for example, of thinking critically about how you are engaging in the work or to ask questions about the outcome of your work. The impact of your work — that’s totally absent in the framework. Accountable to whom? Accountable to a community that continues to be marginalized and to be underserved? For example, building a shared vision — who do you select to participate? — Students who are not achieving, are those the voices that you hear? (Mackenzie)

This high stakes performance policy that backs the OLF hinders social justice leadership for two reasons. First, principals need to ensure that they are developing a plan to meet all of the expectations in the OLF, which in itself, regardless of focusing on social justice leadership, is daunting and unachievable. The PPA has further implications. It not only assesses performance, but in the experience of the principals, it often determines future employment opportunities. Both the OLF and the PPA are used both in the resume and interview processes and, in a very structured hierarchical system, they are used as the commodity or benchmark of whether to advance or stall a principal’s career. Principal Mackenzie argues that this accountability conflict hinders prospective leaders from leadership and from becoming principals. She describes an example of mentoring a young teacher who was reluctant to take on leadership within the school because she did not want to be ostracized by her colleagues for thinking differently. Having years of experience with social justice leadership, Principal Mackenzie identified with this teacher and understood too well that autonomy within the OLF is not present and hinders social justice leadership. “I’m also saying that you can pick your perspective and that if you do it differently it’s not valued — even though you may be doing great things, you’re not included” (Mackenzie). This assertion questions the OLF’s claim that it is “a resource for boards upon which to support aspiring leaders.”

Critical Analysis and Discussion of the Conflict

At the time of this study, scholars have not considered whether or not the claims in the OLF actually support principals in pursuit of a socially just school nor how increasing diversity has
impacted the requirements of the OLF on principal practice, hence, the significance of the research in this study.

Principals claim that the OLF does not support them in their pursuit of a socially just school. In fact, they assert that its structure, its unclear vision, and its implementation all hinder their social justice leadership practice. This finding is an important one, given the growing diversity in Ontario schools. Missing in the literature, too, is any discussion about how principals navigate the tension between social justice leadership and the organizational accountability within The Ontario Leadership Framework.

Riehl (2008) explores the role of school administrators in responding to the diversity of students. She writes, “Some scholars (e.g., Foster, 1986; Parker & Shapiro, 1993) suggest that administrators who do become committed to social change will experience conflict as they are expected to maintain institutions which they no longer see as legitimate” (p. 185). Indeed, important questions for this current research are, Which version of leadership is privileged? and Which has been suppressed? And — ultimately the pivotal question — What are the consequences to principals who champion social justice within The Ontario Leadership Framework?

Conflict ultimately involves power. A connection that has a bearing on how principals engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership is the relationship between leadership and power. “So, okay, I can play by the rules, but I will make sure that [the OLF] doesn’t hinder my ability to demonstrate where my values lie with respect to social justice” (Florence).

Critical scholars argue that the concept of leadership must include “the examination and demystification of those structures within which leadership occurs” (Foster, 1986, p. 184). Anderson (2009) writes, “Leadership is essentially political and operates within a field of power” (p. 172). Foster (1986) writes, more specifically, “Power must be a dominant concern of leadership” (p. 183) and critical reflection and analysis are needed in order to share and release power. Without a detailed discourse analysis of the OLF, which is not the focus of this study, identifying its underpinnings as being ideologically situated in the dominant positivist tradition or in the neoliberal political realm would be speculation. However, given its dominance in constructing knowledge in our society, this may be a fair argument. If the OLF is located in this
tradition, which aims to maintain the status quo according to Kincheloe (1999), by the power it sustains in servicing the interests of the dominant, most powerful members of society, then clearly the *OLF* model of leadership is privileged and cannot operate for social justice by its very structure.

Foster’s (1986) statement, “Power and the lack of power can be either uplifting or crippling” identifies the very essence of power (p. 183) because it captures its force and acknowledges the opposing binary relationship between those who hold power and those who do not. Anderson (2005) claims that power is relational and never unidirectional, bringing Foucault’s conception of power forward: “Foucault challenges the notion that power is something that is wielded and argues that it is embedded in social relations. In modern society power is exercised through institutional relations that discipline our ways of thinking and action through self-regulation” (p. 212).

The relationship between power and leadership is critical in adding to the understanding of the political relationship between leadership and social justice. Freire wrote in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), “the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 44) — in other words, in order to liberate the oppressed, we must first liberate the oppressor. To do so, scholars and practitioners need to recognize what Foster (1986) claims: “At its heart, leadership — the search for democratic and rational participation in social events — is political” (p. 187). Anderson (2005) argues that leaders must ask themselves *In whose political interest are school reform efforts performed?* And subsequently, *What are the underpinning goals of the organization?* These two questions, along with understanding the relationship between power and leadership, are key to this research in examining the role of a standardized leadership framework monitored to ensure that the school and system level leadership aligns with the goals of the organization. Educational leaders who have the knowledge of the relationships between power, leadership, and organizations can then be empowered before enacting social justice.

Social justice matters to principals because of their personal lived experiences with marginalization. As such, these experiences turn their moral compass towards social justice to guide them in their social justice work. Grounded in these experiences, principals develop dispositions — self-knowledge, moral courage, reflection, and perseverance. It is from these
dispositions that principals then develop social justice leadership strategies — subversion, political savvy, and resilience — to sustain their work and to challenge the resistance they encounter. Foster (1986) refers to this as the critical educative use of leadership or leadership that empowers others (p. 185).

6.4 Navigating the Tension and Conflict

*If the OLF does not support social justice leadership, then how do principals engage in it to enact social justice leadership? When the OLF is viewed through the lens of social justice and social justice leadership, principals see how their social justice leadership dispositions and strategies facilitate the alignment of their practices with those of the OLF.*

Principals contend that how they socially construct leadership influences the lens they use to interpret and align their social justice leadership practice with the OLF. “And so I just take a different lens to what *The Ontario Leadership Framework* is offering” (Burgess).

> When I look at *The Ontario Leadership Framework*, I am addressing it from the perspective of a social justice leader. Instead of looking at *The Ontario Leadership Framework* and wondering how to enact social justice, which came first, I put social justice leadership first, and this — the OLF — will have to serve me in my leadership, not me being a servant to it. (Florence)

In this way, we arrive at the most critical of the findings in this study. In response to the overall research question that asks *How do principals engage in the OLF to enact social justice leadership?*, the principals claim that they choose to engage, not by trying to fit the OLF into their social justice leadership, but rather by using their values and beliefs as their lens. This perspective, based on their lived experiences with marginalization, helps them navigate not only the OLF, but also the various other forms of resistance they face because of their social justice agenda. Principals understand that the following practices lie at the core of their leadership practice:

- modelling and being explicit in their belief and commitment to social justice
- challenging the status quo
- critical instructional leadership
- shaping and preserving respectful relationships
- building capacity/empowerment by honouring voice
All of these practices arise from their dispositions of self-knowledge, moral courage, reflection, and perseverance, grounded in their personal experiences with various forms of marginalization. In turn, their dispositions are what they draw upon when they find themselves faced with leadership tension, conflict, and, ultimately, a choice about their leadership. “It’s my job to see the framework as an opportunity or not. It’s how I use the framework that moves learning forward. It gives me something to reflect off sometimes. Social justice is what is important” (Evans).

Navigating the OLF requires principals to “see” their social justice leadership practices in the domains of the OLF. “In a way my leadership practices are reflected in The Ontario Leadership Framework because of the way I look at it ... How the framework is used depends on the perspective that you bring” (Mackenzie).

To support this claim and make it cohesive, some of the findings reported in previous sections are reiterated here.

“Setting Directions”

According to the OLF, Setting Directions means building a shared vision, identifying specific, shared short-term goals, creating high expectations, and communicating the vision and goals. “The primary purpose to be served by this set of leadership practices is to ensure that organizational members and other stakeholders are working toward the same set of purposes and that these purposes are a legitimate expression of both provincial policy and local community aspirations” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 13).

Principals agree that having a vision and communicating that vision, and the goals that go with it, are fundamental to leading a school. They identify this social justice leadership practice as an attempt to “Model and be explicit in belief and commitment to social justice”; or, in other words, “Be very explicit with what you believe in at every opportunity” (Gray).

From this vision, priorities can be identified. Principals also agree that setting a vision for a school influences leadership action. Because social justice is their lens, principals set the vision or the direction of the school and their actions toward social justice. For example, from a social justice lens, aligning resources with priorities or choosing the data to use to identify these
priorities will result in outcomes of equity. From a different lens, such as one of equality rather than social justice, the resources and data that support this direction will be far different. “You could have a whole different perspective in terms of setting direction ... a very different approach to what that looks like from somebody who thinks about this from a very traditional status quo perspective” (Mackenzie).

“Building Relationships and Developing People”

Building Relationships and Developing People, as stated in the OLF, means providing support and demonstrating consideration for individual staff members, stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff, modelling the schools’ values and practices, building trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents, and establishing productive working relationships with the teacher federation representatives. Principals feel that their social justice leadership practice does align with this domain. “Some of the examples I was speaking about do revolve around building relationships ... Even though it would be an extrapolation for sure” (Burgess). For many of the principals in this study, social justice is most present in this domain, such as Principal Lewis, who says that it “definitely” aligns. Just as listening and reflecting are cornerstones of building relationships and developing people, so too is social justice. “I live this portion of the framework every day” (Jaabir).

“Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices”

Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices is described in the OLF as building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership, structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration, building productive relationships with families and the community, connecting the school to the wider environment, maintaining a safe and healthy environment, and allocating resources in support of the school’s vision and goals. “The six practices included in this section of the OLF help ensure the kind of periodic refinement of the school’s infrastructure needed to keep it aligned with the school’s improvement efforts” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 21).

“Giving people who are marginalized, whose voices are not heard … an opportunity to be heard” (Hadley) captures the principals’ social justice leadership practice of “building capacity/empowerment by honouring voices.” With this lens, then, building collaborative cultures and collaboration can be interpreted as what principals describe as ensuring that all voices are heard and listened to.
“Improving the Instructional Program”

The OLF defines “Improving the Instructional Program” as staffing the instructional program, providing instructional support, monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement, and buffering staff from distractions to their work. “As instructional leaders, principals [and supervisory officers] embed direct involvement in instruction in their daily work through teamwork with all staff focused on improved school and classroom practices” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7). Social justice leaders define student achievement as social justice. Through a social justice leadership lens, student achievement is the purpose of instructional leadership and improving the instructional program is a key role for principals because it ties directly to student success and to future opportunities for a better life. “It aligns very nicely because the end result, a lot of it is how are the students doing ... Otherwise we further marginalize them ... Children have to be able to read, or they’re doomed. And we are dooming them” (Kelly).

In this way, the social justice leadership practice of “Critical Instructional Leadership” aligns with this domain. Principal Jaabir expresses the same point in a different way, when he refers to “raising the bar — raising student achievement with inclusive academic classes” (Jaabir). He means eliminating applied classes in which marginalized students are over-represented so that “the less opportune get the opportunities of academic classes” (Jaabir). He claims that by raising expectations for all students, teachers and students will raise their expectations. This philosophy advocates changing the structure to ensure inclusive expectations and practices so that students will have many more choices open to them for their future. If instructional leadership is viewed through this lens, then it is consistent with both social justice leadership practices and social justice outcomes for students.

“Kids who are marginalized often struggle in the instructional program because of academic issues, behaviour issues, mental health issues ... and it’s the hardest one to get to because we’re so busy managing behaviour all the time, because the resources and supports are so thin” (D’Andre). This argument is often made by the principals interviewed for this study in relation to leading the instructional program. Frequently, they simply have too many competing issues to have the time to focus on improving the instructional program. A vicious cycle ensues because the principals recognize that if they could improve the instructional program to address the
diverse needs of their students, then many of the issues pressing the students and stealing the principals’ time could be ameliorated, if not eliminated altogether.

“Securing Accountability”

Securing Accountability is explained in the OLF as building staff members’ sense of internal accountability and meeting the demands for external accountability. “As the domain label indicates, the OLF describes a set of shorter-term goals that need to be accomplished if the fundamental purposes of the school and school system are to be realized” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 6). The first step of the social justice leadership practice “Challenging the status quo” is building an awareness of the privilege and power that is inherent in social justice. “It’s developing the awareness of staff of how the system works, because the vast majority of staff have passports like me ... The awareness with the staff is the overwhelming key” (Gray). Through a social justice lens, this leadership practice could be seen as building staff members’ sense of internal accountability.

Because the OLF aligns with the Ontario Ministry’s K–12 School Effectiveness Framework, external accountability is essentially measured by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) through its province-wide standardized assessments in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10. External accountability as defined by the OLF is also how it defines student achievement. Through a social justice lens, principals can see that while it is a very narrow definition of student achievement, academic achievement is nevertheless a significant social justice outcome. Principals argue that through high academic achievement students will have an “opportunity to better their life” (Jaabir).

The voices of the principals summarize how they use their lens of social justice and social justice leadership to align their practices with those of the OLF. Principal D’Andre says, “it depends on what your vision is. My vision is around social justice, so then, I can see how [social justice] would be reflected in [the OLF].” Principal Idella also mentions interpretation as a way to read social justice into the OLF: “When I look at The Ontario Leadership Framework, these are really big statements. You can interpret them the way you’re going to interpret them” (Idella). Principal Collins also points to interpretation as the key to using the OLF: “The question you have to ask yourself is, ‘What is your definition of social justice? Is it treating everyone fairly? Is it levelling the playing field? Is it ensuring that everyone has a voice in decision-making in your school?’”
For Principal Mackenzie, “Engaging in social justice through a critical lens is examining what I do in my own context every day.”

Principals choose to view the OLF through the lens of social justice and social justice leadership. This lens guides them to interpret and align social justice leadership with the OLF and navigate the tension between the leadership needed for a socially just school and the leadership model required in Ontario. “I think so much has to do with the principals and their own beliefs. I think that [social justice] comes from within. Either you have it or you don’t. So if principals really truly believe that social justice is one of the most important things, then social justice has to come first, and they’ll do something about it” (Lewis). The fact that principals develop strategies to sustain their work against many forces of resistance, choosing to view the OLF through a social justice lens demonstrates yet another example of social justice leadership as a subversive action. In this way, social justice principals are resilient — they will always find a way to “come up again and move forward” (Portelli, 2016).

Principals claim that resilience takes place when they respect their personal values while finding a way to subvert the power of the organization and to enact and sustain social justice leadership. “The skilled administrator recognizes that the contractual framework that we all exist in is not a limitation of an opportunity — it’s how to see the complexity of a single decision — and the rules that govern it” (Evans).

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Navigating the Tension and Conflict

In the section on the “Strategies or approaches that principals engage in to sustain their work,” principals report that they sustain their social justice work through subversion, political savvy, and resilience. These strategies support the choices principals must make to place their personal values ahead of those of the organization.

To reiterate, Theoharis (2004) describes three ways in which resistance can be framed: “(a) the resistance principals enact against historic marginalization of particular students, (b) the resistance the principals face as a result of their social justice agenda, and (c) the resistance or resilience these principals develop as a result of facing constraints in their work” (p. 4). Choice is a factor in all three of these aspects of resistance, as the principals in this study demonstrate in their efforts to engage in the OLF to enact social justice leadership,
Patterson and Kelleher (2005) argue that resilience cannot be defined without considering its three dimensions: “the interpretation of current adversity and future possibility, the resilience capacity to tackle adversity, and the actions needed to become more resilient in the face of the adversity” (p. 3). In the first dimension, Patterson and Kelleher claim that “interpretation” falls between stimulus and response: “This filter is the most powerful factor in predicting your resilience level” (p. 3). The second dimension is comprised of three ways to compete with adversity: “personal values, personal efficacy and personal energy” (p. 6). The third dimension moves from interpretation and resilience capacity into action. According to Patterson and Kelleher, “resilience strength is the sum of the dynamic interactions among the dimensions of resilience: interpretation, capacity and action” (p. 11).

Applying this theory to this study, principals draw on their resilience capacity (dimension #2) in what Patterson and Kelleher refer to as “the master filter” to interpret (dimension #1) and then act or respond (dimension #3) to the multiple forms of resistance, including the resistance inherent in the OLF.

*Going against the grain may result in a few splinters, and it may rub a few people the wrong way, but going with it is like forcing your TRUE self to walk the plank!*

—David Roppo, life coach (Renner, 2012)

Choice is a key aspect of resilience and navigating the OLF. As such, it involves the repositioning of power. “Because a significant portion of the practice in educational administration requires rejecting some courses of action in favour of a preferred one, values are generally acknowledged to be central to the field” (Willower, 1992, p. 369, cited in Begley, 1999, p. 51). Hodgkinson (1999) attests, “power ... is above all else the ability to impose one’s will” (p. 6). Choice and true resilience are achievable when principals choose their personal values over those imposed by the organization. In critical theory, doing so is the moral use of power.

Choice also involves the act of reflection or what Freire (1998) describes as a disposition of critical consciousness. Social justice leaders need to reflect — to ask critical questions of their social reality — in order to critique truth and knowledge. In a recursive cycle, reflection guides action — the practices and strategies to bring about change and social justice.
6.5 Suggested Amendments to the *OLF*

Principal Florence’s comment reflects the general view of the principals in this study: “There are components I don’t think are in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* from a social justice perspective. Things that aren’t here that social justice leaders need to do in order to be a social justice leader are not articulated necessarily in *The Ontario Leadership Framework*” (Florence).

*The principals propose amendments to the OLF to support social justice and social justice leadership.*

To recap, principals feel that structural components of the *OLF* hinder social justice leadership — “a lot of management pieces” (Florence), “one size fits all” (Evans), “all the balls we’re juggling” (Collins), “an objective framework in itself it is not” (Mackenzie), and “I’m trying to see if [reflection is] here ” (Idella). The unclear vision of the *OLF* further hinders social justice leadership because the interrelationships between the domains, and between the *OLF* and the *Equity and Inclusive Education* policy, are uncertain. Lastly, poor implementation of the *OLF* raises questions about the relevance of the document and issues concerning accountability.

At the same time, however, principals also propose constructive amendments to the *OLF* that would support them in attaining socially just schools and in leading for social justice. It should be noted that some of the principals were reluctant to comment, since they are expected not only to engage in the *OLF* but also to have their performance measured by it. This section takes this concern into account by attempting to ensure that the principals’ voices are prominent in order for them to be heard and understood and to subvert the power inherent in their reluctance. It should also be noted that these amendments appear in the order of priority given by the principals so that *The Ontario Leadership Framework* can better support the leadership needed to respond to the increasing diversity in Ontario schools.

*Amendment 1*

*The principals recommend that social justice needs to be explicit and embedded in the OLF as well as in its connection to other policies, in particular the Equity and Inclusion Education (EI) policy.*
“A lot of words here, but not a really good picture” (D’Andre). The principals in this study maintain that the OLF’s vision and goals are not clear. “The Ontario Leadership Framework is wide open for interpretation” (D’Andre). This lack of clarity hinders social justice leadership. “If I didn’t look at it through the lens of social justice, nothing would hold me accountable for social justice ... Nothing in it holds you accountable to any of those values per se” (D’Andre). While the framework mentions equity, as Principal Florence put it, “I’m not sure that diverse stakeholders are reflected in the framework.”

So when there was the development of the OLF ... did they have other perspectives on leadership or a different way of seeing things — were their voices heard? This whole [OLF document] ... was created and developed by whom? and for whom? and for what purpose? and based on which [student] outcomes and whose outcomes? I feel like there is a whole piece missing that needs to happen in terms of the whole development of the OLF ... What’s absent in the OLF is the language that is in the Equity strategy in terms of being able to think critically, being able to identify and address barriers. There is nothing in the OLF about accountability — that there are barriers that leaders need to identify to ensure that you can have an equitable outcome — that type of language to me is missing from the entire document. (Mackenzie)

Because the principals in this study feel that the OLF does not have a clear vision and does not address diversity, equity, or social justice, they ask, How can The Ontario Leadership Framework guide our practice to support the increasing diversity in Ontario schools? “If principals don’t understand the organization’s goal, then how can you possibly use The Ontario Leadership Framework to guide your practice?” (D’Andre).

The first of the principals’ suggested amendments, then, is focused on clarifying the vision of the OLF, specifically making social justice explicit and embedding it within the domains.

“Sometimes it’s not what’s there — it’s what’s not there! As a social justice leader, then you are required to remember what’s not there” (Florence). These statements by Principals D’Andre and Florence capture the sentiments of the other principals. They imply that, primarily, principals want the vision of the OLF clarified so that social justice is explicitly stated as part of that vision: “There has to be a vision of social justice explicit in the OLF” (Evans). To ensure that the vision of leadership is directed to addressing the increasing diversity in Ontario, the OLF needs to discuss social justice explicitly. “The document can benefit by speaking directly to social justice ... There’s no reason why [it] cannot specifically talk about setting direction in a way that is aware of the diversity that a leader is going to deal with” (Jaabir). However, some principals
claim that social justice needs to be more than simply the vision of the OLF; it needs to be purposefully in the document. Principal Gray proposes, “Rewrite it better so there would be an aspect of social justice in every [domain]” (Gray). Principal Idella weighs in:

_The Ontario Leadership Framework_ doesn’t specifically outline social justice. There are places within the document that we could probably add or articulate more clearly ... infuse more of a social justice lens ... I was really excited about the possibility of _The Ontario Leadership Framework_ to primarily focus on social justice leadership ... so it was frustrating for me because I look at [the OLF] and there are ways that we need to infuse social justice into this document ... Social justice needs to be more intense. Intentional, yes and intense. (Idella)

The other aspect of this amendment is that the OLF and the _Equity and Inclusive Education_ policy need to align to guide leadership for social justice.

Have more clear and very specific language around social justice education ... We have a whole policy document that tells schools that they have to act in socially just and appropriate ways — the EI policy document ... so we need to take that and infuse it clearly into _The Ontario Leadership Framework_ explicitly. It’s not okay today to not have social justice reflected in our leadership framework. (Burgess)

What’s absent in _The Ontario Leadership Framework_ is the language that is found in the Equity strategy in terms of being able to think critically, being able to identify and address barriers ... and that should be more specific. (Mackenzie)

If the ministry is saying they want social justice as outlined in the EI policy, then they should say it ... if equity is the moral purpose for education in Ontario ... it should permeate through everything. (Collins)

Principals want to see an explicit connection between the OLF and board policies and other ministry policies such as the _Equity and Inclusion_ policy to ensure that leadership is seen through a social justice lens.

There should be a requirement that embedded within those other documents are components of [the OLF]. It is my hope that there is acknowledgement of that disconnect. I would like to see those connections of all of the policies in Ontario. Have an addendum document that marries the framework with the policies. For me an addendum for each board — where the boards are tasked to show how their policies can in fact be infused in a more authentic way — would make the document more effective. (Norman)
Amendment 2

In order to ensure the relevance of the document for principals and to respond to the question of accountability, both formally in the PPA and informally, principals recommend increased support for implementation from superintendents to provide time to engage with the document and to dialogue with colleagues.

Principal Hadley contends:

There is a disconnect between policy and practice. Most school leaders haven’t been taken through The Ontario Leadership Framework. So if [the ministry/board] want school leaders to put it to daily use, then SOs need to provide adequate, professional learning opportunities so that school leaders can learn about it and incorporate it in their daily practice. If this is what they are trying to accomplish, I would say it is another disconnect between policy and practice ... There hasn’t been any work done to make principals aware of the framework and how it could apply to their daily practice.

“We didn’t talk about it with my board,” says Principal D’Andre simply. In order for the OLF to be relevant, it needs to “come to life.” Principal Anderson asserts that the OLF implementation needs to be intentional.

Well, it’s not explicit. Right now we don’t talk about [the OLF]. Maybe we need time to do that. Maybe we need to have a focus at every [principal meeting] to spend some time on the OLF and then time in our buildings to reflect on it ... So one improvement is that these things in these domains need to come to life. I don’t know what it would look like but maybe a ten minute meeting every day in the morning [with staff] — wouldn’t that be neat?

Principals identify four significant aspects of implementation that need amending. First, principals need their superintendents to be engaged in the OLF. Then they need the opportunity, such as time at meetings, to engage with the document and then time to build it into the daily life of the school. Connected to but separate from the issue of time, principals need to dialogue with colleagues to “bring the OLF to life.”

The state of system-level leadership — those who establish the board’s vision, instruction and guidance — it seems to me to be more reflective of an accountability agenda that is more consumed with educational standards than with supporting social justice work in schools. And if you have people in senior
leadership positions who are ill-prepared to support the work, then it’s much less likely it will be done in schools. (Hadley)

“Senior Administration needs to be more engaged,” says Principal Anderson. Implementing the OLF and making it relevant to the principals begins with the superintendents at the board level. “The SO needs to support the OLF to guide leadership and planning” (Anderson). Superintendents need to make the OLF “a tool for reflection” (Anderson). For example, “SOs need to ask questions, *How do you use this in your work?* and allow time for principals to examine the document” (Jaabir). And then “[the SO] needs to provide opportunities at professional development, to share best practices around the OLF — and to provide opportunities for dialogue on a more regular basis, perhaps using the leadership framework as a foundation and to work through” (Kelly).

Principals feel strongly that time is important in implementation — “TIME for deeper engagement” (Anderson). Principal Kelly agrees: “Set aside time to look at this document and then figure out what goals do I have to do?” (Kelly). Opportunities for dialogue with colleagues are important too, to ask, “How do you use [the OLF] in your work?” (Idella).

Ideally, operational wise, whether it’s family of schools meetings or principal networking, ... allow principals time to reflect ... and get some kind of collegial support. If it’s to be used in an authentic way, [the OLF] should be built into the structures that we already have (Collins).

Resoundingly and repeatedly, principals emphasized the need for time and dialogue, as these examples demonstrate:

“…and we need time to talk about it.” (Idella)

“Time and opportunity to reflect with colleagues.” (Burgess)

“Implementation specifically around the values, implications, and usage that underpins *The Ontario Leadership Framework* — there has to be dialogue.” (Evans)

“…allocated time to embed the OLF into your practice and to engage in it to make it practical.” (Kelly)
to build it into daily life of school.” (Anderson)

Another common thread in principals’ responses is an acknowledgement of the importance of the OLF, while at the same time feeling somewhat overwhelmed by it. “It still has some motherhood feel to it ... I mean ... nothing can give you all of the answers, right? ... I don’t know if any one tool [can do it all]” (Lewis).

Principals claim that the OLF is “overwhelming” (Anderson) — “A tall order for education leaders in Ontario” (Burgess) — though they also recognize that “it’s all pretty important” (Anderson). These comments suggest that amendments to the OLF are needed so that principals are not intimidated by its magnitude. In this regard, principals recommend that there must “be practical pieces to it” (Evans). To make the document more practical, Principal D’Andre suggests including a visual that explains how the SEF, the OLF, and the PPA work together. Principals suggest including practical examples/vignettes/look-fors of how principals engage in the OLF. “If I were going to edit or fine tune [the OLF], what I would do is embed within it some specific examples ... vignettes or scenarios ... which are actual implementation examples” (Norman).

Amendment 3

Principals recommend that personal leadership skills need more prominence in the OLF. Moreover, they argue that reflection needs to be added to the personal leadership skills because it is vital to student success, and is a fundamental disposition from which other personal leadership skills evolve.

“Personal leadership resources need to be more of an ‘umbrella’ over [the OLF], as they are the fundamental leadership skills” (Idella). Principals claim that while personal leadership resources are not a part of social justice leadership, they are significant to ensuring student success and equity. “If school leaders are aware of these personal leadership resources, systems thinking, being proactive, having a sense of optimism — we can do this together, we can work supportively, we can make a difference in the life of students” (Hadley).

Principals also claim that reflection is a key disposition or personal leadership skill because it ties together the other dispositions — self-knowledge, moral courage, and perseverance. Through reflection, principals say that they can test and check their assumptions and turn issues over to
see both sides. If personal leadership skills are vital to student achievement and are fundamental to leadership, and if reflection is a key personal leadership skill, then reflection should be added to the personal leadership resources in the OLF. “I think you really want principals to reflect on their practice and look at these components as part of what their role requires” (Idella).

Because reflection on personal lived experiences and understanding how these experiences set a principal’s moral compass, an amendment to the OLF that includes self-knowledge would assist principals in making the OLF relevant to the growing diversity in Ontario.

One of the things I don’t think is addressed in the entire OLF is the isolation that comes with being a leader ... Your number of colleagues is significantly diminished ... and in a school where there’s only one [administrator] ... isolation is one thing I hadn’t anticipated in my journey to a leadership position within a system. It’s a lonely job because often we are required to do things that are difficult or challenging and you don’t have anyone to share your struggles with. Isolation is not identified even in the personal leadership skills. Maybe it’s something that needs to be in The Ontario Leadership Framework because the personal leadership resources are there to help you do the job that you and I do (Florence).

Principal Florence identifies the significant concern of isolation amongst principals as one that contributes to hindering their social justice leadership. Previously in this study, isolation was identified as contributing to exhaustion amongst principals and as a major force of their own resistance. To counter isolation, an amendment to the personal leadership resources should involve the inclusion of trust. Through trust, relationships can be built not only between principal colleagues but also between principals and superintendents. Trust may be the key to addressing one of the significant forms of resistance principals face — that of exhaustion — because they feel isolated in their work.

Amendment 4

The principals recommend that the Building Relationships and Developing People domain needs to be identified as the fundamental connection within and between the other domains.

Principals unequivocally believe relationships are key to social justice leadership:

Building relationships ... if you can do this then you could start to sort of map out a plan on how to move the instructional practices forward. Then the other
domains — how to secure the accountability in the building, how to develop the organization to support desired practices can be achieved, because if you don’t have these [relationships], then I don’t think you can get to any of it. (Idella)

Consequently they argue, “This domain [Building Relationships and Developing People] needs to be more of an overarching theme in The Ontario Leadership Framework” (Idella).

Amendment 5

Principals recommend that the values that underpin the OLF be openly identified as part and parcel of its composition.

Principals said that the OLF has “a lot of management pieces” (Florence), that “an objective framework in itself it is not” (Mackenzie), and that it has a “one-size-fits-all” (Evans) structure. Together, these factors comprise the ideology or values that support high stakes hierarchical accountability of school leadership. They not only hinder social justice leadership but also imply the measure of distrust and control with which principals feel they are viewed in the OLF.

Principal Florence goes so far as to say that in the current context, principals are marginalized. Consequently, principals recommend that unveiling the ideology that supports the OLF would be an urgent amendment. “The why [of the OLF] is imperative I think, you know?” (Norman).

Principal Jaabir says, “There are times that you can get bogged down by thinking about you being accountable to your bosses or to the people that are funding you [the ministry] — You can get hung up on that. It may prevent you from getting into uncharted territory because you don’t really know what to expect at the end.”

Amendment 5 addresses this concern and helps to ensure that leadership in Ontario schools is understood by those responsible for its implementation. Principal Florence represents the views of her colleagues:

I think that leaders need to have more control or autonomy within their school ... that there has to be different approaches ... I think right now we’re in a system that has a very top down approach, ... very little opportunity for us working in the trenches to influence those above us. It would be nice to see a leadership framework that doesn’t just reference our work within our buildings but also the work with those in positions of authority over us. So it’s not so much like a triangle but more like an interactive web. So if I were to amend it or make recommendations to the model ... [it would be] more horizontal so it would
describe not only how I am accountable to staff but how my superintendent is accountable to me. (Florence)

Critical Analysis and Discussion of Amendments

Hallinger (2003) points out that over the past 25 years, many conceptual models in the field of educational leadership have been developed. He states, “Two of the foremost models, as measured by the number of empirical studies, are instructional leadership and transformational leadership” (p. 329). Hallinger argues, “As a scholar who has contributed to this literature, I have been challenged time and again to reconcile the theoretical and practical validity of these leadership models” (p. 330).

Leithwood and colleagues (2006) posit that educational leadership underpinned by transformational leadership ideology is theoretically substantive in its effectiveness, not only to guide leadership but in achieving change in schools. This research underlies the OLF. The following excerpt from the OLF identifies the effective leadership needed to make every school an effective school:

If the key to reaching our achievement goals lies in building our own leadership practice, how can we put that knowledge into action? What core processes do we need to put into place in our day-to-day practice as leaders? What specialized skills and understanding will we need to develop? How can we know with certainty that we have adopted the most effective leadership approach?

That is the purpose behind The Ontario’s Leadership Framework. Based on more than three years of research by leading experts, and extensive consultation with educators across Ontario, the framework provides principals, vice-principals, system leaders and aspiring leaders with a clear leadership roadmap representing leading edge research and the best thinking — and experience — of successful leaders across Ontario and around the world (Leithwood, 2012, p. 3).

Principals face a challenge similar to what Hallinger describes in reconciling the theoretical with the practical. They have few opportunities to examine various theories of educational leadership and their frameworks. However, they are tasked with the challenge of “turning a school around” every day. The amendments presented above are based predominantly in practical rather than theoretical aspects of leadership.
As mentioned above, it can be assumed that transformational leadership underpins the conceptions of the *OLF*, given Dr. Leithwood’s expertise in this area. Yet, practically speaking, as the principals have eloquently pointed out, transformational leadership cannot be the only approach to school leadership given the growing diversity of the student population in Ontario. Principals claim that in order to address the needs of an ever-growing diversity in Ontario, social justice leadership is the most apt practical leadership framework that can achieve the concept of “turning a school around,” if this phrase implies social justice and equity for all students.

If the amendments suggested by the principals are implemented, then by bringing together transformational leadership theory with social justice leadership practice, true praxis — the dynamic exchange in which theory and practice coexist — can be achieved.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

There is a voice inside of you
“I feel this is right for me,
No teacher, preacher, parent, friend
What’s right for you — just listen to
That whispers all day long,
I know that this is wrong.”
Or wise man can decide
The voice that speaks inside.


All students in Ontario deserve to be successful in school. Educational leadership — principals — can ensure that this success occurs. To address the question of social justice in schools, we need to deal with the questions of how knowledge is produced and organized in educational administration and of who speaks on effective leadership for education reform.

This study investigated the experiences of principals who believe in equity and social justice and yet must work and lead within the tenets and accountabilities of *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. Specifically, this study was framed by the overall research question, “How do principals engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?” Through a conceptual framework developed from the review of literature on social justice, social justice leadership and *The Ontario Leadership Framework*, the interview data from fourteen principals and vice-principals was analyzed. The study examined the dispositions, the practices and actions and the strategies that principals choose in order to navigate the tension between the leadership practices they know that support social justice and the tenets of the OLF for which they are held accountable. This study argues that if practicing and aspiring principals and policy makers are earnest about closing the achievement gap of marginalized students, then they need to have experience with marginalization, with reflecting on their privilege and power, with resisting the status quo — all the while working subversively and with political savvy so that they can resist the dominant versions of leadership and actually make a change in schools that empower individuals against the structural injustices found in the greater society and within our schools. Ultimately, this study concludes that if all students are to truly benefit from public education, then principals need to employ reflection, resistance, and resilience to lead for social justice.
This research responds to a gap in the scholarship, since no other study to date has examined whether or not the leadership tenets in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* actually support principals in pursuit of a socially just school. It asks what impact the increasing diversity within the school population has had on the requirements of the *OLF* on principal practice. Further, this research fills the void of scholarship regarding how principals balance the tension that lies at the crossroads of education policy implementation, educational leadership theory, and the practice of social justice leadership. In turn, the goal of this study is to provide evidence and concrete examples to support the assertion that social justice is indeed achievable — not only theoretically, but also in the actual practices of principals in Ontario schools. This research informs practicing and future principals that they are responsible for the variations in student success in their schools. It gives these principals insights into how to make social justice central to their leadership practice. However, a radical change that will support the increasing number of diverse and marginalized students is not the sole responsible of principals. Rather, a cultural change is needed from every level of leadership, including the Ontario Ministry of Education and its boards of education, in order to lead, learn, commit, and sustain the implementation of the policy *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) and bring the *OLF* into line with it.

Given the overall research question, the literature, and a critical theoretical framework, a qualitative methodology that “focuses on societal critique in order to raise consciousness and empower people to bring about change” (Merriam, 2009, p. 23), was chosen as the most appropriate design for this study. Fourteen principals and vice-principals who self-identified as doing social justice leadership from urban and rural, elementary and secondary, public and Catholic systems in Ontario, representing both racialized and dominant cultures, participated in the study. Because this research involved human subjects, approval of the research was received from the University of Toronto Internal Review Board prior to beginning the research project. Data collection employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with flexibly worded questions guided by the conceptual framework developed from the review of literature on social justice, social justice leadership, and *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. The interview questions, which were piloted and reviewed, were designed to investigate the experiences of principals as they engage in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice leadership. Responses were critically analyzed using a constant comparative data analysis process to inductively find
recurring patterns that characterize the data. Through deductive analysis, themes then emerged around each of the sub-questions. Both qualitative reliability and validity procedures were incorporated into the data analysis, including but not limited to clarifying the bias that I, as a scholar and practitioner, inevitably brought to this study.

This final chapter begins with a brief summary of the origins of this study and a brief outline of its methodology. The following is a brief re-articulation of the arguments identified in the preceding chapters, but reassembled into three main themes: reflection, resistance, and resilience. Some theoretical and practical implications of the study follow, along with potential questions for future research. Lastly, I present my own reflections on the conclusions of this study.

The major arguments of this study were organized around each of the sub-questions. In response to the overall research question, three significant themes emerged. Principals, in order to engage in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice leadership must employ reflection, resistance, and resilience.

**Reflection**

The first sub-question asks, *How do Ontario principals understand social justice leadership and their own impetus or drive to lead for social justice?* Principals claim that social justice matters because of their personal lived experience, either first hand or as a result of realizing their own privilege regarding ability, race, gender, language, and culture. As such, these experiences set their moral compass towards social justice to guide them in their social justice work. As Freire (1998) pointed out, it is not just the principals’ experience with disability, racism, and privilege that guides their values and their actions — it is their critical reflection on these experiences.

While all the principals voiced the significance of reflection on their lived experiences as the impetus for their work, one principal captured the connection between reflection, values, and how these comprise an individual’s moral compass or lens: “That experience changed my life ... opened my awareness ... It helped me to reflect on my own experiences ... It grounded me in my core values ... of what I wanted to bring forth as I worked with young people” (Principal Collins).

Principals in this study said that reflection or a critical consciousness of the multiple constructed realities, voices, and power in our society is fundamental in educational leadership and how
principals engage in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice leadership. Critical reflection is the nucleus of the conceptual framework of this study. Principals, through critical reflection transform their way of thinking — taking seriously the multiple perspectives in schools and in education of those who possess a range of voice and power — in order to successfully interrupt injustice in their schools. Principals said that they view social justice from two personal perspectives. They recognize their own privilege and power and claim that social justice in schools is anchored in these social and historical notions. Principals define social justice as recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting difference that, together, lead to inclusion. They see social justice as the equitable distribution of power — in a robust sense — that leads to empowerment.

As an outcome of education, principals consider learning as fundamental to social justice and that learning and social justice are intertwined. In response to Gale’s (2000) question, “*Whom should social justice benefit?*” the principals reply students. In response to Gale’s question, “*What should social justice deliver?*” the principals reply learning.

An important question arises from Gale’s research: “*What should social justice deliver?*” For principals this question means defining student achievement. Like Robeyns, principals believe that the purpose of schooling is for students to have an “opportunity to better their life” (Jaabir), to become “fully, whole members of our society” (Evans). Beyond these purposes, principals attest that students need to understand and act on their responsibility for social justice. Principals define social justice outcomes in a holistic way: high academic achievement, critical thinking and social/emotional intelligence, and student empowerment and responsiveness to injustice.

Principals claim that social justice requires action (resistance) and that education is the platform for social justice action. One of the key findings of this study, supported in the literature, is the reciprocal relationship between student achievement and principal leadership. Principals in this study claim that social justice leadership means keeping student learning — high academic achievement, critical thinking, and social/emotional intelligence, as well as student empowerment and responsiveness to injustice — the main focus. This finding is fundamental to understanding how principals understand social justice leadership and their role as principals. Principals in this study said social justice leadership not only requires the lens of privilege and
power, it also requires the action to challenge how schools and education are constructed. As such, principals in this study use leadership to lever social justice.

The power of reflection — critical consciousness — threads throughout the findings, critical analysis and discussion. For principals, reflection is an integral part of resistance and resilience. As a critical disposition of those who wish to lead for social justice, reflection is a powerful influence on praxis as well.

**Resistance**

The second sub-question asks, *What strategies or practices do principals develop and engage in to do their social justice work and then to sustain their social justice leadership in Ontario schools?* As in the literature, resistance — in its many forms — is a key aspect of how they understand and enact social justice leadership and engage in *The Ontario Leadership Framework*.

Reflection and resistance are closely linked. The principals know that leading for social justice is challenging. They understand that neutrality, in the Freirian sense, does not exist within an education system that developed based on a hierarchical social system. One fundamental aspect of social justice leadership and of achieving social justice is challenging the status quo, especially regarding issues of privilege and power. When principals challenge the status quo and keep universal student achievement the core business of schools, they confront resistance from staff, from parents and the community, from the principalship itself and other principals, from supervisors and the organization, and ultimately from exhaustion. For the participants in this study, the resistance they encountered in their leadership work made them reconsider their conception of leadership from a social justice perspective. Namely, resistance from staff, from parents and community, from the principalship itself and from other principals, from supervisors and the organization, and, ultimately, from exhaustion.

As Theoharis (2004) says, principals face resistance as a result of challenging “the traditional norms informing public school leadership” (p. 24) or “a status quo that creates and accepts as normal or natural disparate achievement among racial groups…” (p. 18). The principals in this study claim that resistance with staff begins when they engage in leadership practices that model their commitment to social justice. From the parents and community, resistance is sometimes
covert while at other times it is overt. Principals found that when they disclose that their leadership values rest on social justice and when they model and make explicit their belief and commitment to social justice and social justice leadership, they are confronted with resistance from their colleagues. Principals, because of their position in the hierarchy, face competing demands of organizational accountability. When the principals try to balance the mindfulness of their beliefs with those of their supervisors, they experience deep frustration and isolation, which leads to exhaustion. Exhaustion becomes the unintended but the often debilitating form of resistance for principals enacting social justice leadership.

This second sub-question is also about leadership praxis. Freire (1998) claims that through critical awareness and a reflective consideration of ideas, praxis has the potential to bring about change. In the literature, this is the resistance principals enact against historic marginalization of particular students (Theoharis, 2004). Like Freire’s perspective of praxis, which he claims is intrinsically political in nature and requires a serious consideration of issues of power, this study found that praxis means the dispositions, practices, and strategies of a leader’s beliefs or values, which are grounded in the principals’ conceptions of social justice and social justice leadership that in turn lead to the empowerment of those who are marginalized in schools.

Not only is reflection fundamental to principals realizing their own privilege and power and becoming their impetus to lead for social justice, it is also a fundamental disposition, along with self-knowledge and moral courage that principals employ to engage in and sustain their social justice work. Principals claim that critical self-knowledge is where their social justice leadership begins and is integral in sustaining their belief in, and vision for, social justice. From critical self-reflection, principals develop the disposition of moral courage — the “courage to do the right thing for students” (Hadley). In fact, the principals claim that these dispositions are the cornerstones of their leadership praxis.

Critical reflection not only ties together self-knowledge, moral courage, and perseverance — the other dispositions — it is also the disposition that principals draw upon to connect thought to action. In this study, reflection in the Deweyan sense is “turning the stone of truth and knowledge over to interrogate and understand more, and to look at the possibilities in relation to the context” (Dewey, 1910, p. 57). In this way, reflection and resistance are closely related and are fundamental to perseverance — the disposition that prevents principals from being
discouraged from acting on a vision of social justice. Perseverance, for the principals in this study, is optimism with tenacity held together by humility. It is fundamental to what the literature describes as the resistance or resilience the principals in this study develop as a result of facing persistent resistance to their work (Theoharis, 2004). Reflection supports self-nurturing: the humility to understand one’s own limitations, to seek out supportive relationships, or to disconnect completely for the purpose of self-preservation. In this way, principals claim, reflection is closely related and essential to resilience.

In the same vein that principals face resistance, they also employ resistance. The resistance principals’ enact summarizes the themes of social justice leadership found in this study. The principals in this study engage in five practices to enact social justice leadership:

1. Principals have “a clear vision of social justice” (Florence).

2. Principals model and be explicit about their belief in and commitment to social justice.

3. Principals challenge the inequitable hierarchical power structures within schools — the status quo. They disrupt marginalization with pedagogy and curriculum responsive to student needs. To do this, principals must hold teachers accountable for curriculum, their pedagogy, and ultimately for the climate in their classroom.

4. Principals empower respectful relationships by honouring the various voices in the school community.

5. Principals practice empowering voice when building capacity/empowerment for social justice in their schools.

These leadership practices are an important finding for two reasons. First, leadership from a critical perspective is criticized by some for being too theoretical. As the principals identified, there are concrete social justice leadership dispositions and strategies needed to enact social justice leadership. Second, the dispositions and leadership practices are significant because they relate to how principals engage in The Ontario Leadership Framework — the overall research question. Principals are expected to use the OLF prescriptively and conform to its tenets. What the principals in this study assert, is that principals who do so, miss what the principals in this study claim leadership really is — the dynamic exchange between reflection and practice.
Freire (1998) asks leaders to focus on the positive tension and cognitive dissonance created within and between theory and practice. This tension between the social justice leadership dispositions and practices and *The Ontario Leadership Framework* is where principals claim they develop strategies or approaches — resistance or resilience to face the tension and conflict in their work.

**Resilience**

The third sub-question asks, *What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?* *The Ontario Leadership Framework* is the standard of leadership practice in Ontario. As such, it sets the leadership practices required to meet organizational expectations. Principals claim their experience with the *OLF* is that of compliance and accountability. They understand that they enact social justice within a socially and historically constructed hierarchical education system. As such, principals develop resilience in order to choose social justice. Resilience in this study is another form of resistance — “the resistance or resilience that principals develop as a result of facing constraints to their work” (Theoharis, 2004). Resilience is the third major key lesson learned in this study and is fundamental to how principals engage in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice leadership. Principals almost unanimously struggle to locate their social justice leadership within the five domains of the *OLF*.

Navigating for social justice in Ontario schools requires principals to reframe their leadership as a subversive activity requiring both creativity and the appearance of compliance. Political savvy is the other form of resistance that principals develop as a result of facing constraints to their social justice work. Principals claim that political savvy is strategic resistance. It involves power, people, and politics in the workplace and is a critical skill for principals who want to enact social justice.

The *OLF* claims its purpose is to facilitate a shared vision of leadership in Ontario schools and districts and to identify the practices, actions, and traits or personal characteristics that describe effective leadership (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Given that the *OLF* is silent on social justice, that it deals more with management than leadership, and that the principals recognize that it is neither constructed nor accounted for in a neutral manner, a central finding of this research is that the claims in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* do not support principals in their pursuit
of a socially just school. In fact, principals claim that a number of aspects of the OLF hinder their social justice leadership practice — its structure, its unclear vision and its implementation. This assertion is a significant finding given the growing diversity in Ontario schools. Indeed, it sets the context for and the conflict upon which the overall research question is situated. Principals feel that the divergence in accountability between the organization and their social justice beliefs and values leads to serious conflict for them.

If the OLF doesn’t support social justice leadership, then how do principals engage in the OLF to enact social justice leadership? Indeed, important questions for this study were, *Which version of leadership is privileged, and which has been suppressed?* and, ultimately, *What are the consequences to principals who champion social justice within The Ontario Leadership Framework?* As in the literature, principals in this study confirm the close relationship between leadership and power — “Leadership is essentially political and operates within a field of power” (Anderson, 2009, p. 172). Principals argue that critical reflection and analysis are needed in order to share and release power — as is enacting resistance. Here is where the thread of resilience appears again — combining reflection and resistance to arrive at the most critical of the findings in the study: In response to the overall research question, *How do principals engage in the OLF to enact social justice leadership?*, principals claim that they choose to engage in the OLF, not by trying to fit the OLF into their social justice leadership, but rather by viewing it through the lens of social justice and social justice leadership. In this way, principals see how their social justice leadership dispositions and strategies facilitate the alignment of their practices with those of the OLF.

Principals say that resilience is needed in order to engage with *The Ontario Leadership Framework* to enact social justice leadership — to ameliorate the tension between the institutional accountabilities and the professional/personal accountability to social justice held by the principal. Principals argue that when it comes to social justice leadership in Ontario schools, the choices they make about their leadership practices are more dependent on leadership praxis, in the Freirian sense, than the organizational expectations to which they are held accountable by *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. This praxis involves both reflection and action, meaning reflection of their lived experiences with marginalization and with the resistance they face and action, meaning the resistance or resilience learned from those experiences. “The [administrator] must know two things: where their values are and where the power lies” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p.
6). As such, resilience means the act of adapting to the face of a challenge or choice by listening to what Silverstein (1996) refers to as the voice inside of you to do what is right for you. This combination of reflection and action or praxis is the context in which the principals in this study made a choice to “see” social justice and their social justice leadership dispositions, practices and strategies in the OLF. In response to how the principals in this study engage in the OLF to enact social justice leadership, choice is a factor in all aspects of resistance. The choices they make are supported by reflecting on the respect they have for their personal values, their skills of finding a way to subvert the power inherent in the accountability of the OLF. Resilience, is always finding a way to “come up again and move forward.” Critical reflection and action or practice, central to the conceptual framework of this study, is where resilience exists, in a constant process of recursion. Resilience will enable leaders, first, to confront the politics and issues of social justice and equity, and then to bridge theory and practice in praxis to bring about change (Freire, 1998).

In spite of the fact that principal practice in Ontario is led and supervised through The Ontario Leadership Framework, the central task of principals must be to examine and reflect on their own privilege and power, to listen to their inner voice that speaks of the right choice — that of social justice. Then they must employ resistance and resilience to use the lens of social justice to revise and meaningfully implement The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership. Simply, principals attest, in order to engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership, they must employ reflection, resistance, and resilience. Doing so has the potential to eliminate the marginalization of students who represent the increasing diversity within the Ontario education system.

Revisiting the Main and Sub-questions: Recommendations for Future Action

In suggesting leadership involves choice, it is necessary to probe the nature of choice. This study claims that while there is rhetorical support for The Ontario Leadership Framework — “This is what we do!” (Burgess) — it does not support principals in pursuit of a socially just school. In addition, this study found that the rhetoric about leadership in the OLF does not translate into actual practice. I think both of these are potentially powerful findings for Ontario policy makers and for practicing and aspiring principals.

There are components I don’t think are in The Ontario Leadership Framework from a social justice perspective. Things that aren’t here that social justice leaders
need to do in order to be a social justice leader are not articulated necessarily in *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. (Florence)

**Policy Makers**

This research indicates that changes to *The Ontario Leadership Framework* are needed. Chapter 6 ends with the principals making five constructive amendments, in order of priority, to change *The Ontario Leadership Framework* so that it supports both social justice and social justice leadership in Ontario. Doing so, the principals identify the implications of this study.

To reiterate, principals feel that structural components of the *OLF* hinder social justice leadership — “a lot of management pieces” (Florence), “one size fits all” (Evans), “all of [the *OLF*] and all the balls we’re juggling…” (Collins), “an objective framework in itself it is not” (Mackenzie), “I’m trying to see if it’s here (reflection)” (Idella). Its unclear vision further hinders social justice leadership because the interrelationships between the domains, and between the *OLF* and the *Equity and Inclusive Education* policy, are uncertain. Lastly, poor implementation of the *OLF* questions the relevance of the document and raises issues concerning accountability. The greatest overall implication of this study is that the Ontario Ministry of Education needs to pay attention to what the social justice principals in this study are telling them.

First and foremost, the principals say that social justice needs to be explicit and embedded in the *OLF* as well as in its connection to other policies, in particular the Equity and Inclusion Education policy: “The document can benefit by speaking directly to social justice ... There’s no reason why the document cannot specifically talk about setting direction in a way that is aware of the diversity that a leader is going to deal with” (Jaabir). Some principals claim that social justice needs to be more than simply the vision of the *OLF*; rather, social justice needs to be purposefully in the document. Principal Gray proposes, “Rewrite it better so there would be an aspect of social justice in every [domain]” (Gray). Furthermore, the *OLF* and the *Equity and Inclusive Education (EIE)* policy need to align to guide leadership for social justice. “If the Ministry is saying they want social justice as outlined in the *EIE* policy, then they should say it ... if equity is the moral purpose for education in Ontario ... it should permeate through everything” (Collins).
If, as the principals in this study claim, leadership is the dynamic exchange between reflection and practice, the second amendment proposed is that in order to ensure the relevance of the document for principals and to respond to the question of accountability both formally in the **PPA** and informally, principals recommend implementation of the OLF needs to be intentional. The principals identified four significant aspects of implementation that need amending. First, superintendents need to be engaged in the **OLF**. Second, time supports intentionality. Principals need the opportunity (time at meetings) to engage in the document and then *time* to build it into the daily life of the school. Connected to but separate from the issue of time, principals need to dialogue with colleagues to “bring the **OLF** to life.” Principal Evans voices the sentiments of his colleagues, “Implementation specifically around the values, implications and usage that underpins *The Ontario Leadership Framework* — there has to be dialogue” (Evans). Lastly, the principals in this study also claim that the **OLF** is “overwhelming” (Anderson), though they also recognize that “it’s all pretty important” (Anderson). Consequently, examples or a visual that explains how the *School Effectiveness Framework (SEF)*, the **OLF**, and the **PPA** work together would address the overwhelming and daunting aspects of the **OLF** identified by the principals.

The third amendment recommends that personal leadership skills need more prominence in the **OLF**. Moreover, principals say that critical reflection needs to be added to the personal leadership skills because it is vital to student success, and is the fundamental disposition from which other personal leadership skills evolve. Throughout this study, reflection is a thread that ties leadership practice to social justice. It ties together the other dispositions — self-knowledge, moral courage, and perseverance. And it is fundamental to the various forms of resistance that principals enact and face in leadership. Through reflection, principals say that they can test their assumptions and turn issues over to see all sides. It is through reflection that the fundamental survival strategies of subversion and political savvy — resilience — are threaded. While the principals recognize that personal leadership resources are not part of social justice, they are nevertheless significant to the leadership needed to ensure student success and equity. Lastly, this amendment needs to address the isolation that results from **Bill 160 of 1998** — which included the removal of principals from the teachers’ federations, and the changing of the professional federations into unions — whose repercussions are still felt today. Isolation for principals is also experienced through the hierarchical system upon which principals fall
midpoint. To counter isolation, an amendment to the personal leadership resources should involve the inclusion of trust or trustworthiness.

Principals unequivocally believe that relationships are key to social justice leadership. Amendment number 4 is focused on the key domain in the OLF identified by the principals in this study — the “Building Relationships and Developing People” domain. The principals argue that this domain needs to be identified as the fundamental connection within and between the other domains. The last amendment proposed, Amendment 5, is that principals recommend that the values that underpin the OLF be openly identified as part and parcel of its composition, to ensure that leadership in Ontario schools is understood by those responsible for its implementation. Amendments 4 and 5 go together given that principals see the OLF as “a lot of management pieces” (Florence), that “an objective framework in itself it is not” (Mackenzie), and that it has a “one-size-fits-all” (Evans) structure. “The why (of the OLF) is imperative” (Norman). Principals recommend that unveiling the ideology that supports the OLF would be an urgent amendment.

Hallinger (2003) points out that over the past 25 years many conceptual models in the field of educational leadership have been developed. While principals have little time to reconcile the theoretical with the practical, they are tasked with the challenge of “turning a school around.” Therefore, the amendments are based predominantly in practical rather than theoretical aspects of leadership. If the amendments suggested by the principals are listened to and implemented by the Ministry, then by bringing together transformational leadership theory with social justice leadership practice, true praxis — the dynamic exchange in which theory and practice coexist — can be achieved.

Alternatively, this study has implications for boards and systems of education who manage the impact of the growing diversity in their schools. They need to be keenly interested in this study because it has implications for principal hiring and placement — meaning the selection of principals to work in high priority schools in the future. For example, senior administration need to ask questions of principal candidates that consider their views of equity and social justice to ensure that in fact principals and vice-principals are chosen to work in high priority schools based on their values and beliefs, not by the criteria of who can most efficiently meet the demands of the OLF in managing a school.
Principals and Aspiring Principals

While policy is a crucial form of resistance, resistance must happen within schools. *What is educational leadership?* is a well-researched topic. The topic, *for whom and what purpose is educational leadership exercised?* is greatly contested. While stated previously, it is important to repeat here. Foster (1989) resolves educational leadership from a critical perspective must be critical, transformative, educative and ethical. Principals in this study agree. Social justice leadership is putting social justice into action — action that is grounded in equity and focused on inclusion, rather than the social and historical notions of privilege and power within our schools. In this way, critical leaders — principals and vice-principals — hold the power to make a significant change.

Revisiting the Main and Sub-questions

At the time of this study, scholars had not considered whether or not the claims in the *OLF* actually support principals in pursuit of a socially just school nor how increasing diversity has impacted the requirements of the *OLF* on principal practice. To reiterate, the purpose of this study was to document and examine how principals who enact social justice leadership consistent with the expectations of Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* engage with *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. If we fail to answer this question, not only is the future of education equity for Ontario students in jeopardy, but so also, as Connell (1993) and others point out, is the future of our society.

What is the larger context of how this research fits into and informs ongoing discussions in the literature and, in turn, impacts our understanding of the bigger picture of educational leadership? Furthermore, in the spirit of critical theory, the main and sub-questions set the context to reflect upon what I think about the findings. In turn, these critical reflections have implications for principals and for those who aspire to the role of principal.

By asking, *How do principals understand social justice leadership and their impetus or drive to lead for social justice*, this study sought to contribute to two separate but connected conversations in the literature — the conversation about social justice, and the conversation about how principals become invested in and conceive of social justice leadership. By asking *What strategies or practices do principals develop and engage in to do and to sustain their*
social justice work in Ontario schools? this study sought to contribute to the scant conversation available in the Canadian literature and focused on Ontario about concrete social justice leadership practices.

By asking, *What aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework do principals feel/believe help them, and/or conversely, hinder them in their social justice work?* this study sought to contribute to the conversations about how leadership knowledge is produced and organized in educational administration and about who speaks on effective leadership for education reform in Ontario.

I believe this study, while from a relatively small sample, has significant implications in the field of educational leadership. It finds that leadership in schools that support the achievement of all students does not rest on the execution of management tasks. Rather the success of students rests in the hands and hearts of principals. While research has long supported this notion, the connection between leadership and student achievement, educational leadership that supports education reform has solidly been founded in rational discourse and neoliberal ideology. To alter this situation, I agree wholeheartedly with the findings of this study: *if leaders and policy makers are earnest about social justice and about closing the achievement gap of marginalized students, then they will need to have experience with marginalization, with reflecting on their privilege and power, with resisting the status quo — all the while working subversively and with political savvy so that they can resist the dominant versions of leadership and actually make a change in schools that empower individuals against the structural injustices found in the greater society and within our schools.*

Given the critical theoretical framework and the conceptual framework of this study, perhaps its greatest value is that the participants share how they enact social justice in a ways both insightful and practical to other practitioners. As such, it confirms that Ontario principals can indeed enact social justice — despite the fact that social justice is nowhere explicitly mentioned in *The Ontario Leadership Framework* and that principals feel that the OLF does not support social justice leadership. From the findings of this study, principals may be encouraged and supported in examining leadership from a critical perspective, reflecting on their privilege and power, their actions and leadership, through the lens of the marginalized. The findings further suggest concrete practical social justice leadership dispositions, practices, and actions that principals use to address the challenges and resistance they face within *The Ontario Leadership Framework* as
well as strategies of subversion and political resilience to lead for social justice and to sustain social justice work.

Lastly, given the fact that at the time of this study, Canada is accepting thousands of new refugees, future principals will need to be prepared to lead for social justice in Ontario schools. Subsequently, the findings of this study imply that changes are needed in the principal preparations programs so that they do not focus only on the management of schools but also on the leadership in schools, from a critical perspective, that asks questions about equity and social justice.

Perhaps the greatest constraint on social justice leadership in this study was not The Ontario Leadership Framework. Although none of them said it so directly, the principals in this study gave me the impression that the fundamental act of resistance is the mindset of critical reflection — first to embrace the tensions as education leaders and then create the same tension or cognitive dissonance between theory and practice with colleagues. While I acknowledge and understand fully that purposeful leadership for social justice is not easy, it is my contention that it is only through creating tension for our colleague principals that the opportunity for change will be created within those principals who hold on to the status quo of their leadership praxis. With enough tension, they can begin to critically reflect, analyze, and make critical judgments in relation to social, economic, and political issues and then authentically distribute power and create the capacity for social justice in their schools. Creating this tension can be done by what Giroux (1992) refers to as the language of democracy. It begins by asking, “Who is included/excluded?” and, “Whose reality is represented and whose is marginalized?”

Taking this one step further, if the Ministry of Education is serious about the tenets of the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, then these questions need to be brought into the curriculum of the preparation programs sponsored by the College of Teachers for educators who aspire to the role of principal. In preparing future principals, with a leadership curriculum focused on equity and social justice, this could be what Malcolm Gladwell (2000) refers to as the ‘tipping point’ — meaning that magic instant when an idea crosses a threshold and spreads. In this instance, by simply changing the lens of the curriculum, by asking questions of democracy, these small acts may lead to a leadership revolution that has the potential to bring about the leadership change that is needed to ensure all students benefit from public education in Ontario.
What we see in this research is that the choice to lead for social justice — to attain achievement equity — is summarized and held in the power of the phrase: “you can’t lead where you won’t go!” Making a decision for social justice is at the root of a socially just school. If the OLF were changed to explicitly state that social justice is its main purpose, then it would challenge the fundamentally positivistic ideology that equality and equity are synonymous terms. In turn, if the OLF were to have critical reflection as one of its central leadership practices, then principals could use the power of their social position to enact social justice in schools in a way consistent with the Ontario Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. This conclusion clearly identifies the conditions of social justice that would be required in a revision of The Ontario Leadership Framework. While educational leadership has the potential to ignite and fuel resistance for social transformation in schools, the potential of this resistance is the subject of considerable debate and sets the context for future research.

**Possibilities for Future Research**

Social researchers have compiled widespread evidence that many marginalizing conditions set the circumstances for amplified marginalization of students and families accessing public education. Extensive research on educational leadership over the past three decades conclusively demonstrates that student achievement is closely linked to school leadership. Lastly, research on successful school leadership supports The Ontario Leadership Framework. This study acknowledges these claims. However, missing from the recent research is how principals navigate the tension between accountability and social justice. From the findings, we understand that personal lived experiences with marginalization are the fundamental impetus for social justice leadership and why principals continue to lead for social justice. What we do not seem to understand is how to teach the lessons learned by these lived experiences to potential and practicing principals alike. In particular, we need studies on how to mentor and coach novice administrators in critical pedagogy — to ask how and why knowledge about society and education is constructed the way it is, and why some constructions of reality dominate while others are oppressed. This will free principals from a principalship rooted in compliance with The Ontario Leadership Framework to a leadership position that allows principals to demonstrate professional judgment and autonomy in their daily social justice work.
Arguably, what other researchers might now build upon is examining what is necessary in order for current and aspiring educational leaders to experience or understand marginalization — so that they understand the need to examine the power their social position affords them in the role of student success, and so they can see that they are responsible for the variations in the patterns of student success or failure across racial, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalizing conditions.

This study is just the beginning. Scant research exists on how increasing diversity in Ontario schools has impacted the principal practices set out in *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. If the Ministry truly wants to realize the aspirations set out in the *Equity and Inclusive Education* policy, further research is needed. From a methodological point of view, given the Ministry’s view of empirical research, this qualitative line of research could benefit from a large-scale quantitative study on principals’ views of the research questions asked in this study. By gaining the voice of a broader sample of principals, such a study would account for variables unaccounted for in this study and address the limitations inherent in qualitative research.

Similarly, this research joins the conversation about social justice leadership in the context of the rest of Canada. Given that issues of marginalization have only been addressed for a comparatively short time (Theoharis, 2007), more research is needed. Specifically, in the context of the findings of this study, more research is needed so that transformational leadership theory is not the only theoretical framework that informs leadership in Ontario. Such research can ensure that policy makers will have an opportunity to consider the educational leadership essential to enacting social justice in Ontario schools from a critical theoretical stance. As well, the dispositions, practices and strategies of social justice leadership identified in this study, should prompt more research on the educational leadership practices that support social justice for students, specifically in Canada where diversity will continue to grow, given the nation’s policy on supporting refugees.

Another significant finding in this research is that the *OLF* does not support principals in their challenge to ensure equitable outcomes for all students. An important issue for future study would be to conduct a focus group with the same group of principals using a form of content analysis to analyze the *OLF* and its supporting research and documents to ask questions that determine the discourse used in the documents, their origins, and the context in which they were
written. The next step for the focus group would be to utilize the *Equity and Inclusive Education* policy to make revisions to the *OLF*, to ensure that social justice is both the vision and the leadership action within *The Ontario Leadership Framework* and to ensure that the *Equity and Inclusive Education* policy is enacted throughout the province.

**Personal Reflection**

When I first began this study, I thought it would be an examination of theory and practice from a positivist notion in which theory informs practice in a unidirectional and simplistic way. What I have come to understand is that principals make very few leadership decisions based on theory to inform their practice. Rather, quite the opposite is true. Reflection on their practice informs their leadership decisions. I would further venture that underlying their decision-making are their values, gained through critical reflection, first by examining their own power and privilege in society and then in the educational setting. In this way, principals who lead for social justice have a critical sense of the dynamic exchange in which theory and practice coexist.

The principals conclude that neither social justice nor social justice leadership is the purpose of *The Ontario Leadership Framework*. This study makes the significant point that regardless of the purpose or the constraints identified by the principals as inherent to the OLF, the principals in this study found a way to enact social justice in their schools. If all students are to truly benefit from public education, then principals need to employ reflection, resistance, and resilience. Engaging in social justice leadership in schools, then, is a personal choice. Given that principals are responsible for the equitable outcomes of all students, the choice becomes a moral one — and it is our choice — we can’t lead where we won’t go! Perhaps, of all the conclusions in this study, the issue of choice may be the most important one.

This conclusion is not without consequence. Choice, if you will, is only available to those with the capacity to choose. While the principals conclude that a key amendment to the OLF is that the principles of social justice should be enshrined in the document, the educational leadership necessary to change the reality of marginalized students in Ontario public schools begins with looking inward with a reflective disposition — at ourselves, our identity, how our lived experiences influence what we believe and what we think, where we are situated in our privileged position, and the lens of discrimination from this position. We need to consider where power is located in education. We need to consider how knowledge is constructed in this context.
We need to ask ourselves, “Who does the power and or knowledge benefit?” and more importantly, “Who does it marginalize and disadvantage?”

A passage in *The Art of Racing in the Rain* clearly identifies the importance of critical reflection:

> Inside each of us resides the truth. But sometimes it is hidden in a hall of mirrors. We must shatter the mirrors. We must look into ourselves and root out the distortions until that thing which we know in our hearts is perfect and true, stands before us. Only then will justice be served. (Paraphrased from Stein, 2008, p. 301)

This study found that critical reflection is a significant insight into how principals engage in the OLF to enact social justice leadership and that reflection can be the promising practice for principals, regardless of their school and the context in which it is situated. It found that principals both enact resistance and face resistance — that resistance is a condition of change. Reflection is especially important when principals face criticism and resistance when leading for social justice. By developing a critical awareness through reflection, principals develop the capacity for resilience and can sustain their belief in, and vision for, social justice for all students. They can then work to build the capacities — the dispositions, the practices and actions, and the strategies to sustain their work in order to bring about much needed change in how educational leadership is enacted in Ontario.

One might ask, “What leads a privileged principal and scholar to be compelled by this issue?” When Pollock, Wang, and Hauseman (2014) reported that one of the major issues regarding the role of principal in Ontario is the lack of autonomy in decision making in schools and that 82 percent of principals are too busy with managerial tasks to give instructional issues the attention they deserve, then the importance of bringing this issue into discussion with Ontario principals, boards of education, policy makers, and scholars alike becomes clear. In fact, to be silent is to agree to the marginalization of students and their families. In finding our critical voice, we can find hope in the possibility for change.

Many of my colleagues ask, *Why this issue, Donna? You are white, and privileged, and are at or towards the end of your career in public education.* I don’t pretend to know what it is like to experience many kinds of marginalization. But my answer is this: If not me, then by my passiveness, I agree with the status quo. I argue that whether individuals are marginalized through race, gender, or class does not matter. What matters is how each of us in a position of
power responds, holding both our colleagues and ourselves accountable for the education and welfare of all children.

Throughout this process of pursuing a doctorate of education, I have gained insights into educational administration, not just through 15 years of experience as a practitioner in schools, but also through the examination of theories related to leadership, policy, change, and social diversity. I see that these concepts, regardless of how they are interpreted from paradigm to paradigm, perspective to perspective, cannot be discussed in isolation. I understand now that my struggle — the resistances that I enacted and faced over the past number of years — stems from the incongruences between the dominant view of these concepts and my own. This study demonstrates that struggle. From it, I have learned the need to continually re-examine these concepts and how they are interrelated in order to make sense out of my practice and to guide me through my scholarship.

Freire (1998) recommends engaging in “permanent searching” or a critical disposition open to critical thinking; and, in the practice of “reflexivity,” a reflective disposition that asks each of us to question and understand more, to consider all possibilities — to reflect on our own reflections. As I proceed, I will take these two understandings — fundamental competencies for scholars — to guide me along my scholarship path.

Empowerment and freedom, according to Freire (1998), begin when one recognizes where he/she is positioned in a society that is a system of oppressive relations. Principals deal with their position in the system through resilience. I have recently become familiar with the orchid and dandelion metaphor that explains resilience. The orchid needs special care to survive while the dandelion literally thrives in some of the most adverse conditions. In a recent article in The New York Times, David Brooks (2016) suggests that if you really want people to be “tough,” “then make them idealistic for a cause, make them tender for some other person, make them committed to some worldview that puts today’s temporary pain in the context of a larger hope” (p. 1). I have been thinking about choice and resilience for many years, and Brooks’ philosophy resonates with me. A propos of this study, Brooks’ view suggests that those of us who are idealistic about social justice and have an optimistic worldview will have the resilience of a dandelion to take a leap of faith and listen to that inner voice that whispers all day long inside of us to make the right choice to do what is right. It is only through this leap of faith, Brooks claims, that we understand the
depth of our resilience. In this way this study was my personal way of coming to terms with the choices I’ve made privately and professionally over the years — in essence, it has been my own reflective journey of understanding why social justice matters to me.
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Appendices

Appendix A  Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent

OISE

ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Spring 2015

Dear Participant:

The nature and purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of principals (vice-principals) as they navigate social justice leadership in support of the needs of marginalized students within the expectations of The Ontario Leadership Framework. The 10 to 15 principals participating in this study will be selected based on having held the position for three to five years, possessing a belief that social justice issues of marginalization, e.g., race, class, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and/or other historically marginalizing conditions, are at the centre of their practice, and having evidence other than provincial assessment data that indicates their leadership has achieved a more just school. The study will be carried out throughout Ontario and a balance between rural and urban and between elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals will be sought.

This research is being conducted for the purposes of an Ed.D. thesis under the supervision of Dr. John Portelli, Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The data being collected may also be used for subsequent research articles.

The study involves semi-structured face-to-face interviews of approximately one hour in duration. Prior to the interview, you will receive the interview protocol, which will provide you an opportunity to reflect. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my role will be mainly to listen to you voice your insights about your
experiences and behaviours, opinions, values and feelings associated with how you define social justice, why it is important to you, your experiences as you engage in social justice leadership and how The Ontario Leadership Framework guides your leadership practice, as well as the strategies you have developed and engage in to sustain your social justice leadership work and yourself. You may, during the interview, choose to decline any question. Following the interview, I will write brief notes that will be used to assist me in remembering the surroundings of the interview (i.e., characteristics of the site).

Your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without consequence. I assure you that no value judgments will be placed on your responses nor are you at risk of any harm. It is the intention that each interview will be audiotaped, however, you have a choice to decline. All information will be reported in such a way (i.e., using pseudonyms) that individual participants, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified. Once the interview has been transcribed, the audiotape will be destroyed. Your transcript will be sent to you to read in order for you to add any further information or to correct any misinterpretations that could result. In addition, you may request that any information, whether the audio file or the written transcript of the interview be eliminated from the project. However, once the data has been analyzed, you will not be able to withdraw from the study. The information gathered from the interviews will be kept in strict confidence and stored at the address below. All raw data (i.e., transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 647-985-9118 or donna.kowalchuk@mail.utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. John Portelli at 416-559-3732 or john.portelli@utoronto.ca. If you have questions about your rights as a participant or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca. Thank you in advance for your participation.

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252 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Informed Consent

Thank you for your consideration in this research project: Uncharted waters: Navigating social justice leadership within The Ontario Leadership Framework. By signing below, you are indicating that you have read and received a copy of the Invitation to Participate in a Research Study letter; that you understand the nature and limitations of the research and what is being asked, along with its accompanying conditions and promises, and that you are willing to participate in the study.

I give my consent to have the interview audiotaped. □

I agree to participate in the ways described.

If I am making any exceptions or stipulations, these are:

_________________________________________ (Signature) ____________________________ (Printed Name)

_________________________________________ (email address) ____________________________ (Date)

You will have access to the final report, which will be located in the OISE/UT thesis collection and which can be accessed electronically in the University of Toronto Research Repository (TSpace) at https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944.

If you would like a summary of the results of the study, please check here

Please keep a copy of this letter and informed consent for your records.
Appendix B  Recruitment Script (email)

“Purposeful” recruitment script:

I am conducting a research project as a Doctoral Candidate with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I have admired your personal and professional commitment to social justice leadership work in public education. The central question of this research — *How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?* — intersects education policy, educational leadership theory, and the practice of social justice educational leadership.

I would appreciate your support in this research by involving yourself in a one-hour interview at your convenience. While I would be glad that you participate, please feel completely free to decline if for whatever reason you are not able to participate. And you do not have to give me the reason. I will accept whatever decision you make. Please be aware, that under your direction, you have the choice to decline, either before a date, time, and location is determined to conduct the interview or at any other time during and after the interview. If you choose to participate, both your personal and professional identity will be confidential. Once I have transcribed the interview and written anecdotal notes, you will have the opportunity to review both and clarify the intent of your responses.

If you are interested, I will email you the “Invitation to Participate in a Research Study” and the “Informed Consent” forms. Please review and direct any questions or concerns you may have to this email address and I will respond. Once you have completed the “Informed Consent” form, please return it to me via email and then together we can set up a date, time, and location to conduct the interview. Please keep a copy of the letter for your records. Prior to the interview, I will email you the interview guide of questions.

*Post-script:* Thank you for participating in this interview. It is my intention to expand this research to various local contexts in Ontario. To do this, I would appreciate you giving my institutional email address and recruitment email (above) to colleagues who meet the following criteria and who may be interested in participating in this study: (1) has 3–5 years of experience, (2) possesses a belief that social justice — issues of marginalization, e.g., race, class, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and/or other historically marginalizing conditions — are
at the centre of their practice, (3) have evidence other than provincial assessment data that indicates his/her leadership has achieved a more just school.

“Snowball” recruitment script: (email)

Thank you for contacting me. As your colleague mentioned to you, I am conducting a research project as a Doctoral Candidate with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The central question of this research — *How do principals engage with The Ontario Leadership Framework to enact social justice leadership?* — intersects education policy, educational leadership theory, and the practice of social justice educational leadership. By contacting me, I understand that you would be interested in supporting this research by involving yourself in a one-hour interview at your convenience.

Please be aware, that under your direction, you have the choice to decline, either before a date, time, and location are determined to conduct the interview or at any other time during and after the interview. If you choose to participate, both your personal and professional identity will be confidential. Once I have transcribed the interview and written anecdotal notes, you will have the opportunity to review both and clarify the intent of your responses.

Please find attached the “Invitation to Participate in a Research Study” and the “Informed Consent” forms. Please review and direct any questions or concerns you may have to this email address and I will respond. Once you have completed the “Informed Consent” form, please return it to me via email and then together we can set up a date, time, and location to conduct the interview. Please keep a copy of the letter for your records.

*Post-script:* Thank you for participating in this interview. It is my intention to expand this research to various local contexts in Ontario. To do this, I would appreciate you giving my institutional email address and recruitment email you received from me to colleagues who meet the following criteria and who may be interested in participating in this study: (1) has 3–5 years of experience, (2) possesses a belief that social justice — issues of marginalization, e.g., race, class, gender, language, disability, sexual orientation, and/or other historically marginalizing conditions — are at the centre of their practice, (3) have evidence other than provincial assessment data that indicates his/her leadership has achieved a more just school.
### Appendix C  Interview Protocol

1. What is your current role/panel/district board? How long have you been in this role?

2. Why does social justice matter to you? Probe: Tell me about your experience(s) of how you came to self-identify as doing social justice work in schools?

3. Speaking from your role, how would you characterize social justice? Probe: What does social justice mean to you?

4. How are social justice and education related to each other? Probe: How has your experience(s) helped to shape your beliefs about students and their learning?

5. What do you believe are the fundamental social justice outcomes for students?

6. Having reflected upon your work, how do you lead for social justice in your school?

7. Describe your experience with The Ontario Leadership Framework since 2012 (copy provided).

8. How do your social justice leadership practices align with the five domains of the OLF — “Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices, Improving the Instructional Program, Securing Accountability”? Probe: Your answers were __, __, & __, etc. in #6. How they are connected to the OLF?

9. In practical terms, which aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework help/support you in your social justice work? Please give examples. Probe: What in the OLF is helping you lead for social justice? How?

10. Which aspects of The Ontario Leadership Framework hinder/obstruct you in your work? Please give examples. Probe: What/which part(s) of the framework is/are an obstacle?

11. In what way, if any, would you amend The Ontario Leadership Framework so that it better supports you in leading for social justice?

12. What are the challenges or countervailing pressures in leading for social justice? Probe: For example, do you ensure social justice and meet the accountability measures of provincial assessments?

13. Describe the practices you have developed and engage in to sustain your social justice work and yourself in your role? Probe: How do you continue to do social justice work?

14. Do you have anything additional to add to this interview that may have been missed?