TRANSFORMATIVE DIALOGUE: THE PRINCIPAL’S ROLE IN RAISING ISSUES OF DIFFERENCE

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Organization and Leadership in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

Within the last 25 years, the number of students of color and students of poverty attending K-12 public schools has significantly increased compared to White and middle-class students. Current estimates project that students of color will become the majority of students within our public school in 2030 (US Census Bureau, 2010) and nearly 46% of students are classified as low-income (NCCP, 2011). Although the complex connections between race (Delpit, 1996), social class (Knapp & Woolverton, 1995) and the public schools have been exhaustively covered in the literature, the shifting demographics, and historical inequities that disproportionately affect low-income and racial/ethnic minority students within schools are increasingly coming to light. With little in the form of non-stereotypical professional development, educators are left with minimal resources to examine issues of race and social class. Since institutional leadership is highly influential, if not the strongest factor, in the promotion and realization of school success, particularly in championing students of poverty and color (Mckenzie & Schuerich, 2004, 2007), the principal is responsible for facilitating discussions of oppressive policies, procedures, and practices. There is a paucity of literature describing how the principal unmasks oppressive forces and advocating for more socially just outcomes within the public schools in non-stereotypical ways.

As such, the purpose of this dissertation is to provide an alternative to the small research base by highlighting one principal committed to creating dialogues focused on issues of race and social class. I undertook a qualitative case study (Yin, 2003) conducted during the school year of 2012-2013. The unit of analysis for the case study was the dialogue conducted between the principal and the various members of the educational community. This study addressed the following research questions:
1. *How do principals facilitate dialogue to promote awareness of issues of race and social class?*

2. *How do principals provide support for staff members to engage in/with issues of race and social class?*

3. *What do principals learn after reflecting upon these dialogues?*

4. *To what extent do these dialogues lead to making positive agency in addressing these issues of race and social class?*

Drawing from the work of Theoharis (2007) and Burbules (1993), this study was conducted from a critical orientation; this justice-oriented approach to educational leadership requires that educators focus on notions of power and privilege and on the deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge frameworks that foster inclusion and dismantle inequities.

Data was collected in a mid-size urban community located in the Midwest. Over the past 10 years, the school district has experienced rapidly changing demographics (both racial and socioeconomically), an intense pressure to raise test scores, and a history of racial tensions within the community. Analysis of documents, observations, and the collection of artifacts supplement numerous interviews of teachers, students, parents, and community members. Thus far, 15 interviews lasting approximately 45-90 minutes have been conducted. I used these accounts to “locate and trace the points of connection among individuals working in different parts of institutional complexes of activities” (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, pp. 18-19) to better understand the dialogues between the principal and the each stakeholder. Although I observed several professional development sessions where the principal was leading dialogues on race and social with his staff, I assumed it would be highly unlikely or inappropriate for me to observe a potentially volatile conversation of race and social class between a principal and student or parent. In lieu of these conversations, I have supplemented my case study with dialogue in
narrative inquiry (Amalia et al. 2012). Rather than observing delicate conversations, I invited the principal to compose written responses to complex case studies.

The findings from this study should prove valuable for a variety of stakeholders: scholars, practitioners and policymakers. Socially just principals engaging in dialogues of race and social class may lead to the elimination of oppressive forces, and create more inclusive spaces for learning.
Acknowledgements

I begin by dedicating this dissertation to the people whose unwavering love, support, and encouragement made this monumental task a reality. Most importantly, I must first acknowledge my truly amazing partner, Shannon, who has stood by me during every step of the journey. A remarkable human being who has never once complained about my absence from family functions, my neglect to household chores, and my sleep-deprived behavior. I am deeply humbled to have such a beautiful and talented person a part of my life. I am more than eternally grateful for your kindness, your love, and your support, as I have persevered through the tumultuous 4 years. If I only I could add you as a co-author; if it were not for you, I am certain that this would never have happened. I am also grateful to my immediate family members, my father Brian and my mother Pamela for their patience and understanding. My brothers David and Adam are bright and good-natured persons that I have neglected over the past 4 years because of my schoolwork.

By far the greatest aspect of this journey has been the forging of close relationships with talented and profoundly impressive colleagues. To Joe, Don, Andy, Mike, Greg, John, Iris, Peter, Ghassan, Priya, Dan, and countless other persons, I cannot thank you enough for all that I have learned with and from you. A deep thank you is also in order for the participants in this study who graciously took part in this study. Their experiences and insights added much knowledge to some very important issues. I cannot thank you enough for sacrificing time out of your extraordinarily busy schedules.

I also extend my thanks to the members of my dissertation committee: Richard Hunter, Patricia Sloat, and Marilyn Johnston-Parsons. Your expertise and wisdom had a meaningful
impact on how I am conceiving of this study. Your thoughtful questioning and guidance has stretched me in ways I have never thought possible.

My advisor, dissertation chair, and “academic mother,” Anjalé Welton deserves more praise and thanks than I could possibly condense into a single paragraph. I struggle even where to begin to describe all that you have done for me over the past few years. Most importantly, by working closely with you, you have changed my mind from dropping out of the program. You’ve had a profound impact on my life and I am looking forward to collaborating with you in the future.

I conclude this dedication by sharing a poem that is deeply personal to me. A poem that I read nearly everyday. William Ernest Henley (1875) composed a poem that captures his struggles as a young boy living in poverty and coming to terms with his increasingly poor health:

Invictus
Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.
There are countless persons who put in countless hours, without praise and recognition, without any form of compensation, and are silently working to dismantle inequities. There are countless persons who are oppressed by the nefarious, invisible, and pervasive hegemonic structures.

The poem *Invictus* captures the deep internal struggle of people fighting in solidarity against the status quo. This dissertation is also devoted to you—the oppressed and the persons who work with the oppressed. This is devoted to you who have an unwavering commitment to the thankless work, the deep suffering, and to the never-ending uphill battle to provide access for those who cannot speak for themselves.
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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

**Narrative**

I was in 3rd grade. My classroom teacher began to pass out our lunch tickets to the class; she did this on a daily basis to ensure we would not lose them. The tickets were two colors—fluorescent pink and yellow. My ticket was fluorescent pink. As our class received our tickets, we assembled in a single file line and joined the other 3rd graders for lunch. Each day we divided into two lunch lines (Side A or Side B) and it was explained to us that this would help the flow of traffic. The lines never switched, you were always an A or B, it was not broken up by classroom, and it seemed relatively random. I was deeply curious and reflected on how students from different classrooms were assigned to different lines. It suddenly occurred to me that students with fluorescent pink lunch tickets were all in line B and the color is used to differentiate between lunch lines. As I received my food and met classmates at our classroom table, I noticed the students with the pink ticket received a very different meal than the students with the yellow ticket. A peanut butter and jelly sandwich, peaches drenched in corn syrup, and a chocolate milk (no choice of other types of milk); as opposed to roasted chicken breast, mashed potatoes and gravy, corn, fresh pears (not drenched in syrup), and a wide selection of milk (whole, 2%, skim and chocolate). It was upon this realization that something was off; I could not determine the problem, but it felt like I was the problem. Returning to class, I told my teacher what I had noticed and asked her why students with pink tickets receive a very different meal than the students with yellow tickets. Her eyes became large and her demeanor was unsettled. She nervously responded, “You don’t want to know. Why don’t you take a seat and get ready for math.” Now I felt awful, and I was certain that I did something wrong. Not even an hour later,
my classroom teacher became very animated and informed us that she had a surprise for us, and it was a big one. Many of my classmates were delighted and began to celebrate—not knowing what the surprise could be. She told us that we were traveling to the Museum of Science & Industry (Chicago). Many students cheered, some high-fived the person next to them, I had a terrible knot in my stomach. As the permission slips were passed around, my worst fears were confirmed; students needed to have their parent/guardian sign the permission slip and enclose $7 to participate. I was crushed. I knew my parents did not have enough money to go on the trip and I loved science. After the celebrations died down, I folded the permission slip up and placed it in my front pocket and asked if I could be excused to the restroom. I unfolded the paper, read it one last time, held back a few tears, tore it into a dozen pieces and flushed it down the toilet. If my mom were to read this letter, I knew she would begin to cry. I could not put her in a position to feel awful. About a week later, my classroom teacher asked if I had the permission slip. I told her I lost it and explained I probably could not go. She replied: “I thought you of all people, would want to go on this trip.”

In this vignette, there was never an open conversation about social class. Staff members at this school never examined the policy of asking families for money to participate in curricular activities. The 3rd grade teacher skirted the issue entirely and moved on to another topic rather than confronting the issue. This incident highlights the tension between acknowledging a conversation about inequities and not knowing what to say or how to act and being unable to successfully navigate through the discussion. However, this scenario clearly describes a teacher who was never equipped with the set of skills to engage in these delicate conversations and therefore should not be condemned. Incidentally, if the classroom teacher was unsure of how to respond, she should have sought help from the principal or another colleague who might be
better suited to talk freely about the matter. Conversations like these are becoming increasingly commonplace in the public schools across the country and becoming far more frequent as the number of families living in poverty grows. While in this scenario poverty was most salient, conversations may center on issues of race, or the intersection of the two. Most importantly, each situation that arises is context specific.

Students suffering from the effects of poverty or persons of color facing discrimination are omnipresent in the public schools. Though the influence is indirect, principals have substantial influence in the promotion of student learning, school climate, and organizational change (Brookover et al., 1978; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Halaway, 2005). With principals rightly placing a focus on student-centered academic growth, pervasive issues of social class and race are complex and manifest themselves within the public schools in a myriad of forms. There is no shortage of scholarship on the ways in which inequities and discrimination are reinforced within the P-12 public schools. Issues involving race/ethnicity (Delpit, 1996; Ladson-Billings-1994), and social class (Apple, 1996; Kozol, 1991; Knapp & Woolverton, 1995) have been exhaustively covered. However, I intend to not only highlight recent trends to poverty and race/ethnicity which illustrate broader inequities and the inextricable link between the public schools and society, but also the role of the principal working with multiple stakeholders to address these broader inequities.

**Persistent Inequities of Race and Social Class**

Students in poverty often face greater challenges to the promotion of student learning than their middle or upper class counterparts. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, nearly 15 million children—21% of all children—live in families with incomes below
the federal poverty line ($22,050 a year for a family of four). In other words, using the federal formula to calculate the definition of a low-income family—income of about twice that level to cover basic expenses—42% of children live in low-income families (NCCP, 2011). Children in poverty have higher risks of being exposed to environmental toxins (i.e., heavy metals, cigarette smoke), 16% have no health insurance coverage (a proportion twice as high as non-poor), and in turn, are much less likely to have access to doctor, are more likely to be obese (NCCP, 2011).

There is also a link between race and poverty. A disproportionate number of persons of color are affected by poverty: 12% White, 36% Black, 15% Asian, 34% Native American, 24% Other and 33% Hispanic.

Lack of basic needs, resources, and access to healthcare have a detrimental effect on the promotion of student learning and exacerbates the achievement gap. In 2007, mathematics scores for Black and White public school students in grades 4 and 8 nationwide were higher than in any previous assessment dating back to 1990 (NAEP, 2009). These data also hold true for Black and White fourth-graders on the NAEP 2007 Reading Assessment. From the 1970s to the 1980s a steady narrowing of the achievement gap showed promise and hope. Yet the measures that were implemented since 1990 have essentially yielded little to no growth between Black-White and Hispanic-White achievement. As the achievement gap persists in the P-12 experience, one of the devastating results is the disparity in drop-out rates. The United States Department of Education (2010) reports the drop-out rate for 16 to 24 year-olds has declined from a total of 14.1% to 8.1% from 1972-2008. However, substantial gaps still exist between White, Black and Hispanic students. In 1980, 11.4% White, 19.1% Black and 35.2% Hispanic students dropped out of school. In 2009, 5.2% White, 9.3% Black, and 17.6% Hispanic students dropped out of school. These statistics demonstrate that educators must advocate to restructure policies and procedures
in order to close the inequities for traditionally marginalized students. I define traditionally marginalized students as Black, Brown and low-income students.

**Raising Issues of Race and Social Class**

Taking into consideration the societal and school based race and social class inequities listed in the previous section, conversations about race and social class cannot be sidestepped or ignored. Though our schools have never been more diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) federal and state funds are diminishing and political pressures from local community members (e.g., large corporations, small businesses, parent organizations, religious groups), higher education (college and career readiness initiatives, curriculum alignment), state boards of education (i.e., changes to teacher evaluations, standardized test/curriculum alignment), and federal legislation (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core Standards) have created countless (and interconnected) challenges for principals (Engelking, 2007). Scarce resources raise tense discussions of which students should receive the little available funding. Issues of race and social class are increasingly coming to light during these heated exchanges, but many educators are unsure when and how to talk about race or social class. One of the most effective behavioral and verbal restraints in the United States is being labeled a racist (Van Den Berghe, 1996). This is not without reason, Williams (1995) writes,

> One of the subtlest challenges we face . . . is how to re legitimate the national discussion of racial . . . tensions so that we can get past the Catch-22 in which merely talking about it is considered an act of war, in which not talking about it is complete capitulation to the status quo. (p. 40)

Indeed, many educators are aware of this paradox and may sidestep the conflict of issues of race and social class or ignore it entirely. On the other hand, talking about social class is particularly
confusing because there are unclear definitions of what it means to live in the middle class or worse, assumptions that we live in a classless society. For instance, hooks (2000) argues that propaganda and advertising and in the culture as a whole assures the poor that they can be one with those who are more materially privileged if they own the same products. It helps sustain the false notion that ours is a classless society. (p. 46)

Although many politicians are fond of talking about the “middle class,” there is no federal definition of living within the middle class (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Many educators in developed countries come from what is called (loosely) the “middle class” and may find it difficult to relate to the challenges of understanding, communicating, and developing meaningful relationships with working class families whose children and families receive public assistance (Shields, 2004).

Avoiding Issues of Race

Colormuteness. Knowing when and how to talk about race for many educators is akin to tightrope walking. Educators are hesitant to discuss issues of race and social class and actively challenge inequities because of the political implications of raising race labels (Pollock, 2005). As I demonstrated in the previous section, schools mirror the complex racial and economic disparities of not only their community but of the larger society. Therefore, I argue that the public schools are the ideal location for conversations about issues of race and class; for example, Pollack (2005) contests that

[s]chools are key institutions where Americans “make each other racial”: not only are schools central places for forming “identities,” but they are key places where we rank, sort, order, and differently equip our children along “racial” lines even as we hope for schooling to be the great societal equalizer. (Pollock, 2005, p. 4)

Directly addressing the questions of when and how to talk about race, Pollock (2005) posits the insightful paradox: “race doesn’t matter, but it does” (p. 14). The apparent contradiction is the
reconciliation between two fundamentally different views of not wanting race to matter and other times mattering very much. Untangling this knot may be very uncomfortable or confusing for educators, so the issue of race may be entirely deleted from conversations, documents or policies. This is the definition of colormute (Pollock, 2005). To clarify her stance, Pollock offers another paradox: “All Americans, every day, are reinforcing racial distinctions and racialized thinking by using race labels; but we are also reinforcing racial inequality by refusing to use them (Pollock, 2005, p. 3).

**Colorblindness.** However, colormuteness is only one form of sidestepping or ignoring the issue of race. Another form is colorblindness. Blum (2002) defines colorblind as an orientation or policy which “makes explicit reference to race, or racial identity, is taken to stand condemned by that fact alone” (p. 91). In other words it is viewing all persons as the same; we live in a post-racial society where there is “only one race, the human race.” Shields (2004) for instance, notes that she regularly asks her graduate students,

What does it mean to say you are colorblind?" invariably, Caucasian students state it means “they do not see difference; they are tolerant; they treat everyone alike . . . my non-Caucasian students’ say, ‘What are you missing?’ With passion, they explain that when others ignore obvious differences in appearance, it is likely they are also neglecting more fundamental differences in world view, culture, and tradition. (Shields, 2004, p. 118)

Therefore, colorblindness, like colormuteness, perpetuates inequities by ignoring differences rather than celebrating them. Commonly, educators would then leave cultural traditions and language entirely out of the curriculum. Students of color have a far more difficult times resonating with the schooling experience when their own experiences are not reflected within the curriculum.
Replicating Social Class

Openly engaging in dialogue that confronts racism and colorblindness is very difficult, if educators are not given the skills and the space to engage in these discussions. An equally daunting task is acknowledging differences in social class. Knapp and Woolverton (1995) argue “decades of sociological work and the intuitions of thoughtful people suggest that social class is fundamental to understanding the workings and consequences of educational institutions” (p. 549). Social class is particularly difficult to address because it is often hidden in schooling, because social inequities are deeply embedded with the day to day activities, policies and procedures of schools. Nevertheless, although the social inequities are difficult to name and describe, it is imperative to highlight these inequities because social class will be replicated (Knapp & Woolverton, 1995). If we understand that schools replicate social class, we therefore, need to raise our class consciousness which is the recognition of class stratification (hooks, 2000). If the pervasive inequities oppressing persons of color and low-income students are not addressed, the school will continue to function as the vehicle to replicate inequities. To break this cycle, it is the responsibility of building level leadership (i.e., the principal) to democratically forge a vision/mission to foster an inclusive climate affording all students the opportunity for a high-quality education.

The Role of the Principal

The challenges of NCLB, federal and state mandates, local pressures from activists, politicians, business, and numerous other entities are overwhelming for principals (Engelking, 2007). Many of these top-down federal, state and local policies cannot be controlled. With the confluence of multiple interests, the principal is conflicted to create a climate ripe for student
learning. Multiple studies have demonstrated that principals have substantial influence over the climate of the school and this directly impacts student achievement (Brookover et al., 1978; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Halaway, 2005). Ideally, schools should be

[a] place where anyone can relax and be fully self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, or unsafe on account of biological sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, cultural background, age, or physical or mental ability; a place where the rules guard each person’s self-respect and dignity and strongly encourage everyone to respect others. (Advocates for Youth, 2011)

Shields (2003) believes that educators often fail to build relationships or worse even acknowledge the diverse perspectives in their respective school setting. If principals want to truly transform the experiences of students in the public schools (beyond raising test scores and truly focus on fostering a love of learning) educators need to begin to celebrate differences and create safe spaces where we can build relationships, share and value our experiences, and work toward better understanding each other to create the context to enhance meaningful curriculum, instruction and assessment. How can students focus on learning if there is a deep-seated unarticulated sense or feeling of “this place is not for me—and does not accept me for who I am—for issues I cannot control?” When students feel safe and find their personal experiences reflected in the conversations of school and deeply embedded in the curriculum (not simply in a week long unit once a year, or a designated history month, i.e., Black History Month) numerous studies have repeatedly demonstrated that students experience much more success, are much more engaged in the curriculum, have increased academic self-concepts, and increased involvement in school activities (for example, Brokenleg, 1999; Dodd, 2000; Glasser, 1996; Goodenow, 1991; Newmann, 1992; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1990).

However, it is clear that many students of color and students of poverty do not see themselves reflected in their schools. The stark differences in achievement between White
students and students of color, students of poverty and students not living in poverty, are reflected in graduation rates, access to higher education, and college completion. The continued disparity suggests that principals, in general, are not raising issues of race and social class, and more scholarship is needed for further examination. Yet according to the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (2008) standards, education leaders should “promote the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner” which includes the promotion of “social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling” (p. 15). If the expectation for principals is to address inequities why does the achievement gap persist? Barriers related to issues of race and social class will not dismantle themselves. Injustices need to be addressed directly. If meaningful changes are to happen within the public schools, it is the responsibility of the principal to engage in dialogue with members of the educational community to mitigate inequities.

**Dialogue and its Connection to Race and Social Class and the Principalship**

Given the long history of dialogue, I direct my focus to more modern conceptions of dialogue. I define the term dialogue as a pedagogical form of communication which establishes a mutual relationship specifically directed toward learning (Burbules, 1993). Of course not all conversations are pedagogical (small talk waiting at the bus stop), and not all pedagogical moments are conversational (listening to a keynote speaker at a conference). While many “shades of grey” or hybrids exist in dialogue, I am not interested in making sharp distinctions on a continuum of what constitutes dialogue. As I will develop more fully in the literature review, the modern conceptions of dialogue owe much to the concept of the dialectic. The dialectic can be defined as two (or more) individuals sharing points of view about a particular topic,
expressing sound arguments, in an attempt to better understand a phenomenon. These conceptions of dialogue are meant as democratic exchanges which challenge hierarchies, support multiple perspectives, reject final truths, and are rooted in trust and reciprocity (Burbules, 1993).

Critically examining the status quo and raising issues of race and social class (or hybrids of both) could take place formally in an after school staff meeting between a principal and her staff, or a director of curriculum and a group of elementary principals, or a superintendent at an administrative cabinet meeting. If the “value ends of leadership should be to enhance equity, social justice, and the quality of life” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p. 11), it is a fundamental responsibility for principals to shine a light on issues of race and social class inequities, to create safe spaces to engage in challenging and courageous conversations, and to create opportunities for reciprocal learning between parents, students, staff, and members of the community (see Shields, 2004, for example).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine one principal committed to social justice in order to build a rich and more complex understanding of the nature of challenging conversations leaders engage in issues of race and social class. This study will be compelling for theoretical, empirical, and personal reasons. As I will more fully develop in the review of literature, there are theories and empirical studies of (a) principals committed to issues of social justice, and (b) multiple conceptions of dialogue, but there is a paucity of literature that examines how the principals are committed to making real changes through socially just dialogue. My overarching research questions, which will be described in greater detail in the methods section, are:

1. *How do principals facilitate dialogue to promote awareness of issues of race and social class?*
2. How do principals provide support for staff members to engage in/with issues of race and social class?

3. What do principals learn after reflecting upon these dialogues?

4. To what extent do these dialogues lead to making positive agency in addressing these issues of race and social class?

These four questions may prove to be important because socially just principals not only have a dispositional and philosophical stance for serving the needs of all students (with a particular emphasis for traditionally marginalized students); they have an ability to critically examine policies, procedures, beliefs or any other structures, that may be inhibiting the growth of the traditionally underserved populations. To begin to answer these questions, I will be examining the intersection of two theoretical frameworks: leadership for social justice and dialogue.

Although I am very interested in witnessing accounts of challenging conversations of race and social class, it is unlikely that I will have an opportunity to be a firsthand witness to many instances between a principal and another member of the educational community (nor would it be appropriate for a principal to invite me to sit in a delicate conversation); however I will use dialogue in narrative inquiry (Amalia, Johnson Mardones, Johnston-Parsons, Shen, Shin, & Swanson, 2012) to supplement a case study to answer my research questions. Dialogue in narrative inquiry is a participatory methodology, inviting the researcher to engage in dialogues with the participant to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge from narrative data. As I will describe more fully in my methodology section, I will ask the principal to engage in storytelling from personal experiences to better understand the data.

Significance of Study

This study contributes to at least two bodies of research and literature: leadership for social justice and dialogue. Examining the nature of dialogue between principals and multiple
stakeholders offers another way to understand how principals can promote social justice and reshape the culture of the school. The purpose of this study is not attempting to solve issues of oppression because they are linked to systemic sociopolitical forces. However, this study is interested in how one principal is shining a light on issues of inequities to encourage school personnel to make meaningful changes in schools. Additionally, given the philosophical orientation of this study, it is also a fundamental goal to explore the role of the principal providing support (either in the form of formal/informal professional development). I make the assumption that principals are always concerned with educating all stakeholders (all staff members, parents and students) and “meeting them where they’re at” to help them better understand the world. Dialogue is pedagogical but also reflective in nature. I am also concerned with how the principal makes meaning and learns from these interactions.

For principals, this study will illustrate concrete descriptions of the challenges and complexities, power and professionalism, and the importance of creating safe spaces to ensure learning for all students. This study consists of eight chapters. Chapter 2 is a review of literature for social justice and dialogue; I examine the rich and uncharted intersection between the two theories.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The fundamental aim of this chapter is to provide a review of the literature in both the fields of leadership for social justice and dialogue in order to explore the following guiding questions: (a) How do sociopolitical forces impact education? (b) What is leadership for social justice? (c) What is dialogue? By engaging in dialogues of race and social class, I conclude that principals leading for social justice represents more than “good leadership” practices. Leadership for social justice is necessary if principals are serious about closing the achievement gap, disrupting social class replication, and increasing students’ sense of belonging to the educational community.

Still a relatively young field, leadership for social justice is slowly shifting from a conceptual framework to a more empirically based field. Drawing from empirically based journals, another aim of this literature review is to capture commonalities and differences between principals leading for social justice. Findings from several empirical studies describe values, beliefs, the successes and failures of principals leading for social justice. However, there is very little in the literature about how principals were utilizing dialogue to enact change. Almost completely devoid from the literature are empirically based studies describing principals engaging in dialogue about issues of race and social class.

Issues of race and social class are deeply embedded into the fabric of our values, and policy-making decisions impacts countless children. In the next section, I argue that many issues of race and social class are so pervasive, they are often invisible and unfortunately overlooked. Therefore, principals leading for social justice engage in dialogue to highlight these inequities to
provide more opportunities for success to students of color and economically disadvantaged students.

**Salience of Race and Social Class: Pervasive Injustices**

By most measures, the United States is the most unequal country in the Western world; the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening for decades (United Nations Development Programme, 2010). The American value of meritocracy is unfortunately not aligned to the data. Researchers from the Brookings Institute (2006) raise this critical point:

> Class matters. It takes about five generations for the advantages and disadvantages of family background to die out in the United States. People do go from rags to riches—or riches to rags—in a single generation, but only rarely. Americans need to pick their parents well. Circumstances of birth matter a lot, and the advantages and disadvantages of birth persist. On average, about half of the income disparities in one generation will carry over to the second. So if one family has five times as much income as another (roughly the difference between the income of a professional household and the income of a working class family just above the poverty line), then the children of the first family will have two and a half times more income than the children of the second. The apple doesn’t fall that far from the tree. (Brookings Institute, 2006, p. 2)

In summation, if a person is born into a poor family, there is a very high likelihood that he or she will remain in the lower quintile; conversely, if one is born into an advantaged background, he or she will, most likely, remain in that upper quintile (Appendix D). According to a recent study by the Census Bureau (2010), 46.2 million people live in poverty, up from 43.6 million in 2009, a figure that has risen over the past 4 years. The same study notes that the percent of persons living in poverty is the highest in 52 years. Poverty is not limited to large urban areas. Contrary to intuition, the suburbs are home to the largest and fastest growing population of persons living in poverty (Brookings, 2011). Between the years 2000-2008, the number of persons living in poverty grew by 25%, almost five times faster than large urban centers. Consequently, large suburbs are home to 1.5 million more low-income persons than their primary city counterparts.
In short, the number of families moving from the loosely defined middle class to working class or poor is growingly rapidly (NCCP, 2011). The ramifications are staggering for education because “children from lower social classes and from many racial and ethnic minorities, even in the best schools, will achieve less, on average, than middle-class children” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 14).

Beyond the disparity between economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged students, addressing the achievement gap has been a part of the national discussion for decades. I do not confine the achievement gap to standardized testing. In national discussions, however, the focus is limited to standardized test scores in math and language arts, which ignore the strengths of many students, particularly disadvantaged students. There are misperceptions that cloud the pathways by which social class influences learning (Rothstein, 2004). One such misperception has been reduced to a small marketable phrase: “schools don’t make a difference.” Misinterpreted from the famous Coleman (1966) report, the key finding describes that the “quality of schools attended by Black and White children has little influence on the difference in average achievement between Black and White students” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 15). Because poverty is spreading rampantly, it is unrealistic for schools to solve all of the social ills of society.

With a burgeoning number of persons moving from middle class to low-income status and little to no gains in cutting the achievement gap, these issues are salient primarily because the racial demographics continue to shift. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the 2010 projections (Appendix A) for the demographic breakdowns between all persons and children from birth to 19 are as follows: Currently, 67.3% of the total population is White and persons of color consist of the remaining 33.7%, whereas children of color account for a slight but
noticeable increase (59% White, 41% persons of color). By 2100, these projected numbers (Appendix A) dramatically change (40% White, 60% persons of color) particularly in the younger generation (36% White and 64% persons of color; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Shortly after 2050, no single racial ethnic group will constitute more than 50% of the population. However, this shift will take place on or near 2040 amongst the younger generation of 0-19 year olds. Persons of color will represent the majority of the United States near 2050. By 2100, amongst the younger generation, the Hispanic population will be more populous than the White population. Immigration and birth rates are spurring this trend, but the radical reshaping of the culture of our country has immense ramifications for the public school setting. The issues of race and social class are not a trend that will simply go away; every community, whether rural, suburban, affluent, middle or working class, large or small, will be impacted by the rapidly changing demographics.

The implications for a rapidly changing social class and racial demographics are profound for the public schooling experience because the successes and failures of the community are mirrored within the public schools. Findings from the National Center for Children in Poverty (2011) illustrate the relationship between socioeconomic status (and in turn race) and health. The NCCP have identified five domains which affect the poor more so than the non-poor: environmental health (i.e., toxins, pollution, cigarette smoke), health insurance coverage, access to health care services, behavior, and health outcomes. Furthermore, the intersection of race and social class is salient here, as the NCCP (2011) notes that not only does income level affect access so does race/ethnicity, neighborhood safety, collective efficacy, and family structure. Like the NCCP study, Berliner (2009) notes that health and family issues have a substantial impact on the future educational performance of students. Or in other words, personal
well-being and health have a direct impact on academic success. Economically disadvantaged families’ limited access to high quality healthcare is directly correlated to lower academic performance.

The aforementioned literature highlighted issues of inequity by isolating race and social class. As the racial and social class demographics shift, the data would suggest that these issues are becoming increasingly complex; there is a need to examine the intersection of race and social class. The following subsection will cover the complex intersection of race, poverty, the achievement gap, and the public schools, and how those issues are situated within urban areas.

Reproduction of Inequities Within the Public Schools

Few empirical studies investigate the complex intersection of race, social class and its impact on schools and communities. Children of poverty and children of color are disproportionately affected by social class replication and racial discrimination in public schools. Two studies will illustrate this process.

As described in the previous subsection, issues of poverty have substantial impact on education. In Kozol (1991), the author examined large high poverty, high minority urban areas and questioned how students can be academically successful with incalculable and pervasive sociopolitical forces within the larger community are linked to the inequities within the school. According to Kozol, we cannot simply solve inequities within the school without addressing inequities in larger society. Another empirical example linking inequities in the public schooling to the inequities of community is Anyon (1980). In short, the central argument in her study is: the attitudes of the educators stratified the curriculum to determine future occupations. For example, students who were placed in lower academic courses, were not given the opportunity to
engage in critical conversations and problem solving tasks. Instead, students participated in rote learning in preparation for lower skilled jobs. Students in higher academic courses engaged in more democratic forms of schooling in preparation for White collar jobs. Though Anyon focused less on the sociopolitical forces that Kozol discussed in detail, both authors describe the school as the primary instrument in replicating inequities.

This next section will continue to explore the complex intersection of race and social class by reviewing literature that explores how attitudes of school personnel perpetuate race and social class inequities.

**Attitudes about Race and Social Class**

There is little in the literature in terms of how educators discuss issues concerning the intersection of race and social class in public school settings. What is present in the literature, however, centers on the racialized and class-based attitudes of educators that is primarily rooted in deficit thinking. Deficit thinking is tantamount to blaming the victim for the crime (Valencia, 1997). Essentially, educators from a deficit perspective perceive students of color and low-income students as a problem to be “fixed” or “saved.” For instance, McKenzie and Schuerich (2004) demonstrate teachers’ attitudes toward students’ lack of academic success to endogenous deficits (e.g., poor motivation; inadequate cultures). The authors reported the comments of several teachers’ responses to students of color who were struggling within their classrooms:

[I blame the parents] 100%. Not that it’s their fault. But it’s the culture that they are living in . . . our kids come to us at pre-K, 2 or 3 years below grade level already . . . we are playing catch up from preschool on. (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 608)

Another commented:
I think that’s where the schools are having a hard time is because parents are not . . . motivating their children to do well. So, the school is hardly going to undo that lack of motivation. And I think it’s a sad thing. (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 608)

Educators often inappropriately define students to neatly categorize their own ineffective teaching by labeling students “at-risk” (Valencia, 2010). In the public schools, poverty is often invisible or inappropriately assumed. Low-SES students and students of color are often labeled and disproportionality “at-risk.” Valencia (2010) strongly critiques the label of at-risk as a sort of “Scarlet Letter,” which not only functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy, but also is based on a series of unfounded deficit based assumptions. Here we can draw a parallel to the deficit thinking of race. At-risk families are allegedly deficient due to cognitive, motivational, and familial issues. Yet this perspective overlooks the broader systemic inequities: for example, lack of medical access, discriminatory hiring practices, and historical (lack of) wealth transfers. The at-risk label falls apart when the empirical evidence and argumentation is clearly illustrated to show that, in fact, schools are often organized and run in such oppressive ways to reinforce inequities (Valencia, 2010).

Due to the vast differences in educational outcomes (achievement gap, graduation rates, college completion and many others) between White students and students of color, and low-income and non-low income students, if we do not talk about issues of race and social class, these issues will continue to perpetuate themselves. Many school districts democratically create a vision or mission statement of what the school/school district will become in 3 to 5 years (DuFour & Eaker, 2004). Many vision/mission statements declare that the primary objective of schooling is to serve all students. However, this vision/mission never becomes realized when educators do not actively and openly talk about inequities.
Several researchers have defined terms illustrating the avoidance of talking in racial terms, which is *colorblindness* and *colormuteness*. Presently, there are no terms for sidestepping the issues of social class, another substantial gap in the literature. I will define the terms colorblindness and colormuteness and present examples how omitting issues of race continue to exacerbate educational inequities.

**Marketing Poverty to Further Marginalize the Disadvantaged**

Raising the issue of poverty has historically been uncommon, and instances of trying to raise issues of poverty within the public schools are often ineffective and stereotypical. Further, as hooks (2000) raises, there are educators who continue to market poverty by perpetuating stereotypes of poverty. Profiting from the poor happens primarily from professional development workshops and “cookbooks” to “fix” a population of students. Of the very limited options available, one of the most well known ways of working with the economically disadvantaged comes from the work of Ruby Payne (1996). Unfortunately, much of what is offered in the formal trainings Payne’s company provides patronizes the poor through deficit thinking, stereotypes, and unfounded claims. The theoretical context Payne draws from is Lewis’ controversial culture of poverty. Lewis (1966) asserts there are 70 “traits” which typify the culture of poverty; for the sake of brevity, these can be categorized into four frames: (a) the connection between the culture of poverty and the larger society, (b) the makeup of the slum community, (c) the makeup of the family, and (d) the values, attitudes, and character configuration of the individual. Conclusions drawn from Lewis’ research were based on his study of Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico and were later universally applied to all situations of poverty. Payne’s logic stems from stereotypes from these contexts outside of the United States.
and applied to children in the United States for teachers to better understand how to work with students living in poverty.

On the cover of Payne’s most well known book is her self-proclamation, “The leading U.S. expert on the mindsets [author added italics] of poverty, middle class, and wealth” (Payne, 2005). Payne makes the connection that the mindset, which is in a sense, much like the term attitude which can be defined as “an individual’s tendency or predisposition to evaluate an object or the symbol of that object in a certain way” (Katz & Stotland, 1959, p. 428). A frame of mind, or attitude, is not sociological; it is psychological. So for Payne to make the claim that a group of persons, in this case the poor, share a collective consciousness or mindset is misplaced. For example:

Economic realities create “hidden rules,” unspoken cueing mechanisms that reflect agreed-upon tacit understandings, which the group uses to negotiate reality. These “hidden rules” come out of cause-and-effect situations. Hidden rules reflect the behaviors and mindsets [author added italics] that are needed to survive in that economic reality. (Payne, 2005)

For Payne to assert, without any empirical evidence, that members of a given “economic reality” (the poor, in this case) have a shared consciousness, a shared culture and values, a collective way of living is absolutely unfounded, unscholarly, and utterly indefensible.

In addition to the lack of intellectual rigor in her studies, Payne perpetuates stereotypes arguing poor students are disorganized, often steal and cheat (due to lack of role models), have little respect for authority, and require direct instruction (Payne, 2005). Furthermore, she declares that “students from poverty, are entering school in increasing numbers without the necessary ‘concepts’ and ‘cognitive strategies’ to learn,” and then boldly declares, “We simply can’t assign them all to special education” (p. 89). The subtext of this remark is disturbing: economically disadvantaged students come to school with such cognitive deficiencies that special education
programs will be unable to accommodate them at all or handle the vast quantity. My critique of Payne’s work may be pointed; however others scholars have argued far more thoroughly that her work is rooted in the culture of poverty, promulgates stereotypes, is non-scientifically based, steeped in deficit thinking and is guilty of the fallacy of logic which offers no other considerations or alternative explanations (Bohn, 2006, 2007; Bomer et al., 2008, Dudley-Marling, 2007; Dworin & Bomer, 2008; Gorski, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Kunjufu, 2006; Ng & Rury, 2006; Osei & Kofi, 2005, Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011).

Beyond the burgeoning scholarship pushing back against Payne’s work, there is very little research that addresses poverty in non-stereotypical methods and builds a critical consciousness of the interworking of social class. Ensuring the professional growth of each educator to better understand not only issues of social class, but also race, is an important responsibility for the principal. An aim of this study is to address this gap in the literature on the role of the educator in discussing and addressing racial and social class inequities.

Members of the Educational Community Talking about Issues of Race and Social Class

We are reinforcing racial distinctions and racialized thinking by using race labels on a regular basis. However, whether we are conscious of it or not, we are also reinforcing racial inequality by refusing to use race labels (Pollock, 2005). This effort to delete race from conversation is known as colormuteness. Pollock explored a diverse high school in California to better understand racial identities and the accepted practice of racial identification. Although many of the students of the high school were of mixed racial/ethnic decent, students referred to themselves as one of six groups: Latino, Black, Filipino, Samoan, Chinese and White.
Throughout her study, Pollock (2005) argues that Columbus students in the high school in which she studied demonstrated that

    racial categories are in fact always birthed in inequality contexts—and that in a nation with a legacy of simple-race logic, negotiating toward equality will accordingly require using “racial” categories strategically even as we alternately call them into question. (p. 19)

Listening to students talk about racial classifications illustrates the loose boundaries of negotiated racial categories. However, the paradox of Pollock’s study centers on how people are more comfortable using race labels to describe themselves but feel a level of discomfort with race-based terms to describe others’ racial identifies, as well as highly racialized incidents. For example, Pollock interviews a teacher to discuss Black male graduation rates. Mr. Fitsner, a teacher who admits he is concerned with Black male graduation rates, admits he would refuse to mention the term “Black” and would speak about graduation rates in general (Pollock, 2005). Another teacher, Sarah, shared with Pollock her concern that 10-15 Black males continue to congregate by the doors and feels uncomfortable to share with others that the other students are Black because “you’re supposed to be colorblind—‘They’re all the same’” (Pollock, 2005, p. 178).

Sarah’s comment illustrates another form of oppression and colorblindness. The idea that whether one identifies as White, Black, Latino/a, Asian, Native American, bi-racial, is irrelevant because there is only one post-racial society, “the human race.” Like Mr. Fitsner, Sarah is sidestepping the issue of race. Fitsner omitted the mention of race; in this instance, Sarah is placing all races into one category, and this is known as colorblindness. Colorblindness proceeds from the notion that we should not see people in racialized terms. Unfortunately, this line of thinking does not permit persons of color to point out the pervasive discrimination they face. Bonilla-Silva (2006) explains that colorblindness is not about seeking out someone to blame, but
rather reframes the discussion as a collective, dominant ideology that represents one viewpoint to explain the world.

Ladson Billings and Tate (1995) argue that many school districts reify the dominant White ideology by rewarding students for conformity to perceived

[W]hite norms, offering more effective and pleasant educational experiences in predominantly White schools to predominantly White children, offering more prestigious curriculum choices in such schools, and excluding children of color from “gifted” program, honors programs, and advanced placement courses. (p. 59)

Marx and Larson (2011) studied a principal devoted to enacting positive change in school climate for Latina/o students by dismantling the dominant ideology of colorblindness. By better understanding the diverse nature of the Latino/a community, as students who need supports accessing the curriculum in different ways then their White counterparts, this principal helped his staff reject colorblindness to promote a culture of success rather than one laden with deficits. Unmasking the endemic racism within the school district’s policies, procedures and curriculum was challenging for the principal because issues of colorblindness (and colormuteness) are often covert. Unlike the explicit and historical forms of racism, for instance during the Jim Crow era, racism was easily identifiable. Such examples of covert racism include: institutionalized and apparently nonracial policies that place all races in one category or consciously delete racial words.

**Class consciousness.** Beyond the covert forms of racism, colorblindness and colormuteness, there is a paucity of literature to describe the omission of talking in class terms. No terms exist to describe the active omission of social class. What does exist is what bell hooks (2000) deems class consciousness. For hooks, class consciousness is the understanding of how and why social class works, its nature of self-replication, and the power dynamic that exists between the rich and the poor. Often assumptions are associated with the impoverished, as hooks
articulates, “poverty in the White mind is always primarily Black. Even though the White poor are many, living in suburbs and rural areas, they remain invisible” (hooks, 2000, p. 4).

Complicating the disadvantages of the poor are those in the culture of power who speak for the poor in an effort to “save” or exploit stereotypes of the disadvantaged are perpetuated and rooted in deficit thinking. Images of the poor are often depicted in the media as corrupt, dysfunctional, liars and schemers, self-centered and criminals (hooks, 2000). Without economic capital or political capital, the poor do not have leverage to debunk the myths embedded in our culture.

Discussion of issues of race and social class. Raising issues of race and social class are complex and necessarily messy due to their inextricable nature. Often described in isolated and binary terms, there may be a fear of conflating logic, or perhaps as Lareau (2003) notes, an aversion from fear to being labeled a racist or Marxist. Although colorblindness and colormuteness are terms used to discuss sidestepping issues of race, there are few studies that identify the characteristics of formal and informal conversations about race. Furthermore, as demonstrated earlier in this review of the literature, educators’ discussion about issues of social class typically depict families living in poverty in stereotypical and patronizing terms. There are no terms in the literature to describe sidestepping issues of social class; however sometimes issues of social class are raised in lieu of race. If meaningful changes to policies, procedures, and perceptions, on issues of race and social class are to be altered, paradigm shifts cannot happen if they are not discussed. Nevertheless, the sociopolitical forces impacting persons of color and race are very real and creating significant challenges for academic success.

Poverty is spreading rampantly and the demographics are rapidly changing; however the organizational structures, policies and procedures of current schools are not changing as quickly to meet the needs of their students. As Anyon (1980) would argue, the public schools, due to
their inflexibility, contribute to replicating poverty and marginalizing persons of color. The inability of educators, particularly educational leaders, to adopt a more equitable vision of hope and promise can lead to substantial challenges for schools and communities (Kozol, 1991). Moreover, if the public schools are to be successful in promoting student learning for all students, by discussing issues of race and social class, that responsibility falls onto the shoulders of the building principal. Principals are primarily responsible for discussing issues of race and social class because if the school leader does not raise the issue then positive agency toward reorienting the school will not happen.

The Role of the School Leader

Institutional leadership is highly influential, if not the strongest factor, in the promotion and realization of school success, particularly in championing students of poverty and color (McKenzie & Schuerich, 2004, 2007; McKenzie, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2006; Reyes, 2005; Reyes & Wagstaff, 2005; Shields, 2006; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001; Skrla, Erlandson, Reed, & Wilson, 2001; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004). Promoting an inclusive culture and dismantling deficit thinking through dialogue, ensures the success of all students. Two studies guide this assumption. First, the single most important factor in the academic achievement of minority students is the explicit rejection of deficit thinking by the school-based administrator (Reyes, Wagstaff & Fusarelli, 1999) and secondly, when teachers overcome deficit thinking student achievement increases (Bishop, Berryman, & Richardson, 2002). If school principals are cognizant of their own self-biases, reflective, and passionate for the promotion of a diverse culture, in terms of both race and social class, the principal can create spaces to engage in challenging conversations of race and social class. However, there are institutional and policy
constraints occurring at the local, state and federal level which jeopardize the efficacy of building a coalition of stakeholders to encourage critical conversations of social justice and agency.

Locally elected school board members govern local school district policies. Each board member may have limited professional experience in education and may be vying to promote personal agendas. In some large urban school districts, the superintendent is appointed by the mayor to push forward the mayor’s political platform (Kowolski, 2005). At the state level, unfunded mandates and legislation require additional resources and time, with limited staff members, to adhere to strict regulations.

At the federal level, broad and sweeping legislation like NCLB or Race to the Top exert additional forces for principals to reconcile with their vision of leading for social justice. Principals must comply with policies, which may exacerbate inequities and advance neoliberalism (Lipman, 2011). Though NCLB forces school districts to analyze disaggregated test scores (primarily through race, free and reduced price lunches, and disability), it places a focus on the symptoms of the challenged system (Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan & Foley, 2001). Health disparities (as listed in the previous subsections), labor market discrimination, and other historical forms of discrimination are invisible and have a greater influence on determining student learning outcomes (Brown et al., 2003). Leonardo (2007) argues that NCLB’s “pull yourselves up by your own schoolstraps’ mentality” overlooks the sociopolitical context, which is inextricably linked to schools (p. 271). Sanctions placed on school districts for failing to reach adequate yearly progress only further marginalize the population in most need.

Pressures from federal, state, and local sociopolitical forces create a web of interconnected, and often contradictory forces that complicate the promotion of student learning
for all students. Our country is only going to become more diverse, the gap between the rich and the poor will only continue to grow; therefore we need to talk about how the federal, state, and local sociopolitical forces not only continues to marginalize students but how these same policies impede learning within our schools (Census, 2010). Unfortunately, many of these pressures are irreconcilable, for example, if educators are committed to building relationships with students while the federal government forces educators and students to compete for limited resources, these end goals are mutually exclusive. In light of these pressures, the principal of the school must reconcile the different opposing forces and navigate through the bureaucracy to promote student learning.

**Theoretical Framework: Leadership for Social Justice and Dialogue Overview**

An emphasis solely focused on student learning is simply not enough to serve all students. Popular models of leadership will only continue to exacerbate the achievement gap and perpetuate the cycle of social class because there is no effort to disrupt the status quo. There is a need for a school leader to help others make the connection between the sociopolitical forces, and the intersection of race and social class and how those forces are inextricably linked to student learning. Employing leadership for social justice and dialogue are two theoretical frameworks to help members of the educational community make these connections. I am proceeding from the assumption that it is highly unlikely to enact a socially just school without a socially just leader. As I demonstrated in the previous sections, the principal is the cornerstone of creating the culture of the school district. Bogotch (2002) states that the social justice measures cannot be enacted within schools without the principal. Therefore I devote the following sections highlighting the type of leadership necessary for a principal to enact a vision of social justice.
History of Leadership for Social Justice

There is no shortage of definitions of the term social justice (Blackmore, 2002; Bogotch, 2002; Furman & Gruenewald, 2004; Gewirtz, 1998; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002). A working definition of leadership for social justice, and how this model has evolved due to the confusion surrounding the concept will be established. After this concept is defined, I will explain how this notion of social justice applies to principals. Transformative, transformational, and transactional styles of leadership often get casually tossed about and used interchangeably, so this section will specifically define each term and also frame what transformative leadership is not.

Social justice supports disrupting and subverting arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary process and therefore, supports processes that build on empathy, recognition, care and respect (Gerwtiz, 1998). Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) define social justice similarly “as the exercise of altering these [institutional and organizational] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (p. 162). On the other hand, a contrasting definition is that “there are no fixed or predictable meanings of social justice prior to actually engaging in principalship practices” (Bogotch, 2002, p. 153).

For the purposes of this literature review, I am centering my working definition of social justice primarily on the works of Gewirtz (1998) and Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002), who place the utmost care and concern for persons who continue to be marginalized. Bogotch claims that the definition of social justice cannot be separated from the practices of the principalship. Using the definitions of these scholars and undertaking Bogotch’s challenge, I will begin to define the notion leadership for social justice. Rarely is it appropriate to define a term by what it is not, yet
in this instance, due to the confusion surrounding the various forms of leadership (transactional, transformational, transformative and leadership for social justice), charting the evolution will distinguish the theoretical frameworks from each other.

In his seminal work, *Leadership*, Burns (1978) outlines two disparate notions of leadership with transactional and transformational goals. Burns defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). For Burns, simple superficial exchanges, like campaign contributions for votes or favors for influence exemplify transactional leadership. From the foundation that Burns created, numerous researchers (e.g., Bass, Avolio & Atwater 1996; Judge & Piccolo 2004; Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramaniam, 1996) have completed meta-analytic tests and reviews of the effects and validity of transactional leadership when applied in an organizational setting. Lowe et al. (1996) argue that transactional leadership can be a highly effective means of implementing first-order changes, but lacks the scope and breadth of other leadership styles to institute meaningful second-order changes. Lowe (1996) defines first-order change as a simple and subtle change that would have very influence over the daily functioning of the school. For example, if the principal decided to require all visitors to wear name badges when visiting it is a rather superficial change that would affect very few persons and would not require unilateral support. On the other hand, if the principal decided the schedule of the school was not conducive to student learning and wanted to shift from a traditional 8 hour schedule to a 4X4 block schedule (4 periods lasting 90 minutes and a 120 minute block for class/lunch), this would greatly influence the culture and structure of the school and would be defined as second order change.
To create meaningful second order changes within the organization, the effective school administrator needs to employ transformational leadership. Leithwood (1992) delineates transformational leadership from transactional leadership by “helping staff members develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; fostering teacher development; and helping staff solve problems more effectively” (p. 9). Transformational leadership differs from transactional leadership in that it garners a deeper understanding of organizational culture through the development of staff, redesigning the organization and persistent challenging of the status quo. In the public school setting, the principal seeks to collaboratively construct a clearly communicable vision and a mission in which to achieve the organizational goals of the vision. Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that transformational leadership relates positively to performance in education, which was further confirmed by additional research (e.g., Harvey, Royal, & Stout, 2003; Tucker, Bass, & Daniel, 1990). Through passion and charisma, the transformational leader inspires teachers with challenges and persuasion to provide meaning and understanding, re-culturing the school from a cold, rigid bureaucracy. This open space empowers and increases satisfaction in staff members of the transformational leader (see Appendix B). Burns constructed two platforms in which leadership theories could be built upon transactional and transformational. It is this latter platform, transformational leadership, suffused with notions of Freire’s (1970) ideals of “dialogue,” public policies and morality in which transformative leadership is conceived.

A starting point for transformative leadership is Freire’s (1998) claim “that education is not the ultimate lever for social transformation, but without it transformation cannot occur” (p. 37). The first scholars to begin to question the formal explanations of Burns’ two leadership styles were Quantz, Rogers, and Dantely (1991) when they outlined several arguments which
have now become the foundation of transformative leadership. These researchers argued that the current definitions of scholarship are completely inadequate for creating just organizations. Quantz, Rogers and Dantley’s paper radically pushes readers to a “candid grappling with the social, economic, political dilemmas the schools are currently facing” (p. 98). This acknowledgement that education and the public schools are inextricably linked to social forces was a bold and innovative statement in the early 1990’s.

Concretizing the definition of transformative leadership, Shields (2010) states: its starting point is questions of deeply democratic institutions and liberation while critiquing unjust policies and inequities; promising greater access to better opportunities and hope for a better life. Therefore I posit that educational transformative leadership is inherently suffused with the broader notions of public policy and social justice. For example, the responsibilities of the transformative public school principal is to advocate for equitable financing of public schools (at state and federal levels), building medical clinics within the school district, eliminate policies or regulations that continue to marginalize social or ethnic groups (an example of this: All students are required to have pay $10 for a class t-shirt), and to begin difficult conversations with stakeholders to acknowledge differences as differences rather than differences as deficits. To enact deep and equitable change within the landscape of the community, in which the organization is functioning, requires the deconstruction and reconstruction of long held assumptions and beliefs to reveal inequities. Reflecting upon these inequities may create cognitive dissonances in which new frameworks of acknowledgement of power and privilege can be constructed. The transformative leader who question: how can students academically excel, because their culture is consistently stripped away?
Leadership for social justice and transformative leadership are, in a sense, “cousins” and share similar scholarly relatives. Theoharis (2007) defines leadership for social justice as making “issues of race, class gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice and vision” (p. 223). This definition departs from transformative leadership. The definition provided by Theoharis centers on academic achievement in schools and specifically within the context of the United States. To contrast this notion, Shields’ (2010) notions of transformative leadership emerged from leadership for social justice and have narrowed its focus to creating a global citizenry and going beyond academic achievement, focusing on citizenship and service learning (see Appendix C for further clarification). Leadership for social justice would promote inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities, English language learners (ELLS), and other students traditionally segregated in schools. As Sapon-Shevin (2003) notes, “Inclusion is not about disability. . . . Inclusion is about social justice. . . . By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us” (pp. 26-28). I will use the definition of the scholars, Theoharis, Sapon-Shevin, Bogotch, Gerwtiz, Goldfarb and Grinberg to serve as the groundwork of my notions of leadership for social justice.

Gaps in the Literature

After reviewing the literature on issues of race, social class, dialogue and leadership for social justice, several substantial gaps in the literature have become apparent. There is literature describing issues of race consciousness, such as colorblindness and colormuteness, but there is a paucity of the principal’s role in raising these issues within the public school setting and connecting these issues to campus culture and climate, building relationships between staff and
students, and student to student relationships, and lastly how lack of race consciousness affects the promotion of student learning. Though the number of empirical studies for leadership for social justice is burgeoning (for example: Schueurich, 1998; Riehl, 2000; Riester, Pursch and Skrila, 2002; Kose, 2005; Theoharis, 2007; Shields, 2010), I find much of the literature in leadership for social justice absent of the types of dialogue principals engage in to demystify differences (race and social class) and make these instances teachable moments for multiple stakeholders. Studies have been conducted to name the phenomena and describe its characteristics (Schueurich, 1998; Riehl, 2000; Riester, Pursch and Skrila, 2002; Shields, 2010). Theoharis (2007) explores the resistance principals face when implementing socially just changes while Kose (2005) explores the types of professional development that exist for the principal’s support in issues of social justice; I see this study as an extension of their work.

Another gap in the literature is the lack of professional tools available to address class inequities in non-stereotypical methods. The role of the principal in helping staff members examine how the public schools can replicate the social structures, and the types of conversations to better understand how social class works between staff and students is relatively unexplored within the literature. In the previous section, I have illustrated that the principal is an important lever in changing campus culture and climate, promoting student learning, particularly for those students who are traditionally marginalized. Ensuring all staff members have the requisite skill set to work with all populations of students to ensure the best possible outcomes is imperative to mitigate the reproduction of social class.
Discussion

The research reviewed in this section illustrates that leadership for social justice has an unwavering commitment to serving the needs of traditionally marginalized students to prepare them for academic success within the public schools. More scholarship is emerging from the young field because numbers scholars have noted (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olsen, 2001; Banks, 1997; Delpit, 1995; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ortiz, 1997) that when compared to their White middle-class counterparts, students of color and low socioeconomic (SES) consistently experience significantly lower achievement test scores, teacher expectations and allocation of resources. The gaps in achievement, as many of these scholars have noted, are persistent and pervasive. Furthermore, the demographics of our country are rapidly changing.

The previous section demonstrated a need to better understand the conceptions of leadership for social justice. Because the notions of transactional, transformational, transformative, and leadership for social justice have been used arbitrarily by many scholars, it was paramount to construct a clear evolution of the theory to better understand and distinguish the theoretical frameworks. To further illustrate and articulate the definition of leadership for social justice, demonstrating what it is from rather what it is not, the following chart (Appendix C) from Shields (2010) succinctly outlines commonalities and differences (for example, transforming, transformative, and other models of leadership do not examine issues of power). However, I feel the definition of leadership for social justice is not adequate for describing the responsibilities, values and attitudes necessary to provide more equitable outcomes for students. This next section will expand on Theoharis’ definition of leadership for social justice to better understand the responsibilities to support students, parents and staff members in an increasingly diverse and complex setting.
Broadening the Definition of Leadership for Social Justice

In the previous section, I used Theoharis’ (2007) definition of leadership for social justice to frame my understanding: “principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice and vision” (p. 223) to frame the competing leadership for social justice frameworks. However, this definition of leadership for social justice is limited to the narrowly defined context of a school or classroom. I will argue that critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and deficit thinking are interconnected to the framework of leadership for social justice. Without exploring these additional theories, we are overlooking the complexities and richness of how the public schools are situated within a sociopolitical context; how the social and political forces impact the role of the socially just leader promoting equitable opportunities for student learning.

Critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is “an educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action” (Giroux, 2010). Cultivating an awareness of power relations lies at the epicenter of critical pedagogy. Sociopolitical forces are brought to light and critiqued. Deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge occurs when examining policies, procedures, organizations and the broader sphere of politics by asking provocative questions, for example: “Who benefits? Who is excluded? Who has the power? Why is this policy framed this way?” Questioning the status quo challenges the inherent power embedded in politics.

Power and politics does not exist outside education because the success and the failures of the community are mirrored within the public schools. Schools are governed by locally
elected school boards, adhere to state and federal mandates, receive funding from local, state, and federal sources and are pressured by local businesses and multi-national corporations. Each of the competing agendas influences school culture and local curriculum. For Macedo, education is not neutral nor is it nondirective (Freire, 1970). Or put differently, there is a hegemonic culture of power which is suffused within the school culture and within the curriculum (Apple, 2004). A fundamental responsibility of critical pedagogues is to illuminate alternative viewpoints through the use of dialogue. Freire (1970) writes that his conception of dialogue is an epistemological relationship. It is far more than acknowledging another person’s perspective, it occurs because it is an indispensable facet of learning and knowing. Dialogical teaching involves theorizing about the experiences of both partners’ experiences in the process of dialogue.

For instance, a teacher may introduce Helen Keller to a classroom of 8th grade students. Some students may have background knowledge: challenges from her disabilities, her relationship with Annie Sullivan, and other anecdotes from her childhood. The critical pedagogue may challenge students to look beyond her disabilities and share her autobiography supplemented by the work of Zinn (2010) who argues Keller’s ardent support of feminism and commitment to social justice is silenced from the stereotypical portrayal of her life. In critical pedagogy, questions proceed from both the student and the teacher to create a more complex and holistic understanding of the life of Helen Keller. This example is not restricted to the traditional student-teacher dynamic and can and should be a central role of the principal.

Let us suppose the principal is communicating student test scores from locally developed benchmark tests. Scores vary widely across demographics. Rather than speaking in vague platitudes, or sidestepping the issue entirely, the leader for social justice will ask pointed questions, for instance: “Why do you feel our Hispanic males continue to miss benchmarks?” or
“Why do our free and reduced-price lunch students continue to underperform compared to their non-free and reduced price lunch counterparts?” But the questions do not stop at this cursory examination; the questions are linked to the sociopolitical context of the community, for example: “Did you know that only 25% of our low-incomes students have health insurance? What are the implications for learning?” Acknowledging differences of power is not enough for critical pedagogues. Critical educators are also advocates for change and reflection.

Activism suffused with critical reflection is the genesis of praxis (Freire, 1970). It is only when the oppressed recognize the inequitable power structures, reflecting on their own personal experiences, can liberating agency transpire. Agency cannot be “talking about” sociopolitical forces impacting traditionally marginalized students, the socially just leader reallocates resources, alters structures within the organization, changes the school schedule, and does everything in his or her power to support students in need (see Theoharis, 2007; Shields, 2010 for further discussion). In my previous example, if only 25% of low-income students have health care, the socially just principal could form a relationship with a local public health clinic to bring services to the school. Eye exams and basic dental cleanings are two examples that could promote well being and in turn, place students’ attention on learning rather than hoping to see the chalkboard or focusing on a toothache.

Illuminating issues of hegemony, facilitating dialogue, promoting critical reflection, engaging in praxis and activism are components of critical pedagogy and broaden the definition of leadership for social justice. Also examining issues of power and promoting alternative perspectives are components of critical race theory (CRT).

Critical race theory. CRT was born out of a deep frustration at the glacial pace of racial reforms in the mid-1970s and is a natural outgrowth of an earlier movement called critical legal
studies (CLS) (Delgado, 1995). Much of the CLS literature proceeds from the work of Gramsci (1971) and is rooted in the notion of “hegemony” to describe oppressive sociopolitical structures deeply embedded in our culture. Scholars of CLS critique the United States society for its portrayal as a meritocracy, however racism was noticeably devoid from its critique and CRT was the logical conclusion.

The first and most important claim of CRT is racism is “normal, not aberrant, in American society” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv); in fact, it is so omnipresent, it has become normal and natural to persons blindly working in our society. As Bell (1992) argues, since racism is a permanent fixture, it must be unmasked and exposed in its multiple iterations. A role of the socially just principal is to make the invisible visible by illuminating blatant and subtle forms of racism.

Another claim of CRT is exploring storytelling to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Blacks and other minorities” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). Sharing experiential knowledge gives voice to a traditionally silenced perspective and furthermore, adds a complex and richer understanding to the reality of lived experiences.

Let us suppose there is a social justice committee at a mid-size urban high school. This committee is comprised of a diverse population of students, teachers and administrators and meets once a month with faculty members to discuss issues within the school. One component of raising issues is storytelling. A first generation Lebanese freshmen male student retells a story of how he was sent to the office by his science teacher to pick up a package.

It was 6th hour and Mr. Davidson asks me to go to the office and pickup a box for him; he said he had a few errands to run and really needed it for next hour. So I head down to the office and see one of our secretaries and ask for the package. She picks up the box, shakes it a little, puts her ear to the package and says, “Oh my, it’s ticking! Maybe I
shouldn’t give it to you if there’s a bomb in this box!” She laughs and then hands over to the package to me. I was speechless.

First of all, the principal, in this example, should provide the space for whomever to share their silenced perspective. Secondly, this is where the socially just principal would intervene and engage in a dialogue with students, teachers and other administrators to help others understand the serious nature of this misplaced attempt at humor. Thirdly, when misunderstandings and misstatements arise, the principal will patiently deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge and continue to work to build understanding.

A third claim of CRT critiques traditional liberalism. Rather than waiting for civil rights movements to slowly enact change, CRT advocates for immediate agency. I have already articulated this point in the previous section on critical pedagogy, if low-income students lack access to healthcare, the socially just principal will try to reallocate time and resources to provide additional support.

A fourth and interrelated to the third claim posed by CRT, suggests that civil rights legislation has been disproportionately benefitting White persons. As Ladson-Billings (1995) argues, the major winners of affirmative action policies have been White women. Many White women are then supporting households in which other Whites live, both men and women, and children, thus widening the gap in working wages between Whites and African-Americans. The socially just principal understands the need for the staff to reflect the community. If the community is 40% persons of color and the staff is only 15% persons of color, the principal will be actively seeking to hire more persons of color.

Many parallels can be drawn between critical race theory and critical pedagogy. Delpit (1996) argues that one of the great tragedies in the field of education is how the dialogue of persons of color has been silenced. Both critical theories promote the free exchange of
perspectives, pedagogy through dialogue and critical race theory primarily through storytelling. However, the storytelling could be a fertile ground for the beginning of dialogue. Both critical perspectives promote activism rather than merely talking about taking action. Lastly, both theories aim to raise consciousness for students and other stakeholders. Critical pedagogy aims for acknowledging power inequities while similarly critical race theory aims is to shed light on issues of race. Both critical perspective add richness to the narrow definition of leadership for social justice and are inextricably linked to the theory. Another theory that is related to both critical pedagogy and critical race theory is deficit thinking and will be explored in full in the next section.

**Deficit thinking.** Much like racism, deficit thinking appears in a myriad of forms. Deficit thinking pertains to both issues of race and social class. The first conceptions of the deficit thinking model has its roots in the nature versus nurture debate particularly, linking heredity and environment to intelligence. Because Darwinism was a newer and highly innovative and reputable scientist, social scientists were quick to draw metaphors for their work. It was the right of the more privileged groups “who were wealthier, brighter and moral—compared to the poor, intellectually dull and immoral—were in such privileged positions because of their alleged fitter genetic constitutions” (Valencia, 1997, p. 45). Disregarding the basic scientific dictum that correlation does not imply causality, scholars noted that inherited intelligence caused social status. Furthermore, these conclusions ignore the inculpatory role societal structural forces had in creating a social hierarchy that permits and perpetuates stratification. This inflated sense of entitlement and right to a better lifestyle lead to enforcing these measures.

In the 1940’s and 1950’s the discussion between genetics and intelligence was falling apart so researchers shifted the discussion to culture. Oscar Lewis (1965) examined the urban
poor in Mexico, New York, Puerto Rico and Cuba and devised a framework that argued that people living in poverty tend to create a “unique, self-sustaining, lifestyle or way of life marked by a host of negative values, norms and social practices.” Lewis (1965) describes 70 traits that fall into four clusters that evoke a distressful image of the poor: as lazy, fatalistic, hedonistic, violent, distrustful, dysfunctional, female-centered authoritarian families that choose not to seek employment, rarely participating in civic engagements, lack respect for authority figures. Lewis argues that the poor create an autonomous, distinct subculture, that is self-perpetuating and self-defeating over generations. Ultimately, he believed that it is the poor’s inferior way of life that is inferior to the superior, dominant culture, which encapsulates them into this impoverished lifestyle. Two seminal books (Leacock, 1971; Valentine, 1968) debunked Lewis’ empirical, methodological and conceptual framework. Leacock noted that Lewis did not make any effort to note the historical and socioeconomic dimensions that factored into the poor’s lifestyle. She also adds that Lewis’ model of culture of poverty greatly exaggerated the continuity and power of intergenerational socialization; overstates the extent that any culture especially a “culture of dysfunction” can produce uniformly negative character, motivational, attitudinal and value traits in its residents. Furthermore, Lewis’ work, Leacock argues, does not account for the autonomy of the individuals to resist socialization, which contradicts his highly abstract, universalistic set of negative traits with more situational and contextual considerations.

As the socially just principal engages in dialogue, issues of difference will inevitably arise. It is also very likely that deficit thinking will also arise. My aim is not to indict teachers, parents or students for their perspectives; in fact, I argue that many are open to alternative perspectives and have not been exposed to other explanations. It is the moral and courageous duty of the principal to deconstruct and reconstruct these inappropriate assumptions that can
transform our society into a place where persons, regardless of race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status have an equal opportunity to live a better life. Cultivating an empathetic curriculum within the system of public schools builds a more interconnected society. By demystifying differences students can begin to see themselves clearly reflected within others and within the curriculum to shape a more harmonious society.

Crafting a more holistic definition of leadership for social justice can provide a more complex and just vision for leading in a diverse society. In light of these characteristics, leading for social justice may be relatively uncommon. The following studies portray self-proclaimed principals committed to social justice and how they reoriented their schools to produce more equitable outcomes.

**Principals Leading for Social Justice**

The purpose of this section demonstrates the values of principals leading for social justice and secondly, providing empirical evidence to support the claim that leadership for social justice is more than idealism. Drawing primarily from Theoharis (2007) and other empirically based studies, I have divided the roles of the socially just principal into four categories (a) commitment to student learning, (b) improved school structures, (c) re-centered and enhanced staff and capacity, and (d) strengthened school culture and community. Though these roles resemble other competing forms of leadership styles, the socially just principal understands that continuing to focus solely on learning will reinforce the status quo, replicate social class, and exacerbate the achievement gap. Principals leading for social justice have a deep sense of purpose and morality and link these values to the promotion of student learning. Through the articulation of a democratically established vision, the socially just principal democratically advocates reshaping
the culture and inequitable structures, reallocates resources, forges close relationships within the community, and often making courageous and often unpopular decisions. Leaders for social justice understand that competing theories of leadership would only continue to perpetuate the status quo by replicating social class and exacerbating the achievement gap. The vision and core values of the principal are the foundation in which the other components proceed from.

**Promotion of student learning.** One of the earliest empirical studies of principals who are seeking more equitable outcomes was the work of Scheurich (1998). He interviewed principals who worked with low socioeconomic Latino/Latina students. Scheurich created a model called “Hi-Pass” (High Performance All Student Success Schools) for elementary schools that continue to academically excel and serve low socioeconomic students of color. For example, these schools Scheurich were interested in, were academically performing at the same level, and in some cases, excelling when compared to schools with comparable social and ethnic class status. The central tenant of this Hi-pass model is focused on student learning. These findings resemble the work of Kose (2005). Studying three self-proclaimed socially just principals, Kose (2005) explored the role of the principal in enacting meaningful change into their respective buildings through social justice professional development. Kose’s participants were able to substantially raise student test scores in light of the rapidly changing demographics.

Much like the work of Kose (2005), Shields (2010) studied two principals committed to issues of social justice, which she terms “transformative leadership.” Transformative leadership is a more focused form of leadership for social justice which focuses on global citizenship, the broader sociopolitical context, and moves away from standardized testing. In her study, one of the principals served at a middle school that, only a few years ago, was essentially a homogenous, middle class and White school. In the past few years, the middle school has shifted
to over 25% students of color in the past few years. Many of the students of color qualify for free and reduced lunches. Even though the demographics have transformed the culture of the school, 80% of the sixth grade students met or exceeded grade level expectations and 85% achieved the same level in mathematics. The principal described her central vision in education as:

> For me it means that every student that walks through the door gets an equal chance for the education we can offer them, and I think my teachers feel that way, when we talk in adult groups they want to do that, they feel that they are doing that, but they do admit to deficit thinking. (Shields, 2010, p. 20)

In her study, Shields notes that the principal’s commitment to student learning occurred not only because she was passionate about students, but because of the radical restructuring of her building’s policies.

**Restructuring the school to create more equitable outcomes.** In this section I will support Theoharis’ (2007) claims that socially just principals work to restructure the school, by adjusting policies and reallocating resources, as well as enhancing staff capacity to provide more equitable outcomes to support students of color and students of poverty.

Principals leading for social justice take measures to eliminate pullout and segregated programs to create a more inclusive environment. For instance, principals actively seek to eliminate tracking programs. In Theoharis (2007), six of the seven principals were detracking math special education programs because students of color and students of poverty were found to be overrepresented. Several principals in Kose (2005) were also detracking programs and creating a collaborative service delivery system to optimize opportunities for disadvantaged students. The two principals Shields (2010) studied reorganized the structures of their school by finding more opportunities to connect the community to the teachers and students. Students with greater need were assigned in smaller groups while teachers with more skilled students voluntarily accepted larger groups. In one principal’s school resources were reallocated to better meet the
needs of Spanish-speaking students by acquiring grade-appropriate reading materials. Other teachers followed suit and gave up fiscal requests in order to redistribute funds for materials for the underprivileged.

Understanding that the demographics are changing rapidly, not only were structures placed to make accommodations for the English language learner (ELL) populations, several of the principals in previous studies were committed to hiring staff members who would best serve the changing needs of the school district. Principals in both Kose (2005) and Theoharis (2007) reshaped their programs to not only be inclusive but were committed to hiring teachers with ELL certifications. In fact, in Theoharis (2007), one principal arranged for a university professor to teach courses for credit in their school library to help eight teachers earn their ELL endorsement. This example, though structural, connects to the next subsection. As teachers continue their education to acquire the requisite skills to support the promotion of a more inclusive environment, the school’s culture will become a more democratic community.

**Building a culture for an empowered, democratic community.** Principals leading for social justice facilitate the creation of vibrant, inclusive classrooms that acknowledge differences (Riehl, 2000). Riehl suggested three main roles of administrators: “fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programs, and building relationships between schools and communities” (p. 55). Riehl’s research concluded that the instructional leadership of the principal plays a crucial role in creating success for the student. In addition to high expectations, visibility, strong goal and task orientations, unwavering support for the staff and frequent visits to the classrooms, the principals he studied constructed a community that acknowledges diversity and altered policies that created inequitable outcomes.
Another study, which articulated the importance of building a democratic and inclusive community, was Scheurich (1998). According to the principals he studied, a core value of the principals was to ensure all students are treated with love and respect, the cultural backgrounds are held cherished, secondly that the school exists to serve the community; the school should be collaborative and democratic, and that the guiding vision of the building is to recognize and value difference. One implication is that school culture is either directly or indirectly dictated by the strength of the principal (Scheurich, 1998).

An empowered and inclusive environment, according to Riester, Pursch and Skrla (2002), should not be limited to only the students. The researchers note that a critical component of school improvement was teacher empowerment. Encouraging teachers to innovate and develop new methods of instruction help students innovate and develop new methods of perceiving the material. The principals’ encouraging teachers to openly and freely exchange students based on the students needs demonstrated another example of autonomy. Rister, Pursch and Skrla (2002) studied six low-income elementary school principals that they denoted as leaders who advocate equity and social justice. From their research they concluded that these six elementary school principals expressed the following ideals: the promotion of a culture that is democratic and embodies liberty and empowerment, a prescriptive approach to literacy and an undying commitment to student learning.

Discussion

Based upon the literature reviewed in the previous sections, leadership for social justice is a compelling vision for creating more equitable learning outcomes. And one of the central components of breaking down barriers and setting students and teachers up for success is to
engage in dialogue. Leadership for social justice has the potential to radically alter the structure of power and reorient the landscape to better advance traditionally marginalized students’ knowledge, skills and values and can be used not only for the advancement of students but for teachers, faculty and other administrators. Disrupting inequities occurs through dialogue. From this review of the literature it is also apparent that principals must tread carefully and exercise caution or face additional adversity in an already challenging position as they engage in dialogue to articulate a more equitable vision.

**Dialogue**

For the purposes of this study, I define the term as a pedagogical form of communication which establishes a mutual relationship specifically directed toward learning (Burbules, 1993). Of course not all conversations are pedagogical (small talk waiting at the bus stop) and not all pedagogical moments are conversational (listening to a keynote speaker at a conference). While many “shades of grey” or hybrids exist in dialogue I am not interested in making sharp distinctions on a continuum of what constitutes dialogue. However, it may be helpful to broadly categorize multiple forms dialogue. By illustrating multiple forms of dialogue, and situating these conceptions within the context of the P-12 setting, I will present examples to better understand the nature of dialogue. Given the long history of dialogue, I direct my focus to more modern conceptions of dialogue. As I will articulate this more fully in this section, the modern conceptions of dialogue owe much to what is called the *dialectic*, which can mean any number of things, take a number of forms in a vast repertoire of pedagogical techniques, and therefore is not truly a method, but an approach an adept educator can fluidly select and navigate through multiple circumstances.
The dialectic can be defined as two (or more) individuals sharing points of view about a particular topic, expressing sound arguments, in an attempt to better understand the truth (Burbules, 1993). Modern scholars in dialogue credit Socrates use of the dialectic as the source for their conceptions of dialogue. These conceptions of dialogue are meant as challenges to hierarchies and traditional conceptions of teacher authority; that is tolerant and supportive of diversity; that does not rely on teleological presumptions of right answers and final truths; that does not rest on isolated individual efforts, but on mutual and reciprocal communicative relations; and that keeps the conversation open, both in the sense of open-endedness and in the sense of inviting a range of voices and styles of communication within it. (Burbules, 1993, p. 7)

Thus, dialogue is a democratic form of communication empowering both members to explore, challenge, and reflect upon power and relationships, situated on a level playing field. In short, dialogue is not passive for either member. This next section will unravel the nature of dialogue.

The Nature of Dialogue

Relationship. One of the most fundamental properties of dialogue is the centrality of the relationship we are entering with another (or more) person(s) (Buber, 1987). Much like a jazz combo performing in a nightclub, its nature is a spirit of lively and spontaneous interaction, no one person controls or directs the creative flow. Though there is a plunge into the unknown, there is a general sense of safety and mutually agreed upon “rules” (Burbules, 1993). In fact, the term dialogue itself underscores this importance. From the Greek expressions, “dia” means two, but it is also a preposition meaning between, across or through and can apply to more than two persons as well (Crapanzano, 1990; Swearingen, 1990). “Logos” is a term used not only for “word” or “speech,” but also for “thought,” “reason,” and “judgment” (Crapanzano, 1990; Swearingen, 1990). Hedidegger (1977) connotes the way in which concrete speech establishes credibility:
If we say that the basic meaning of *logos* is speech, this literal translation becomes valid only when we define what speech itself means . . . *Logos* as speech really means to make manifest “what is talked about.” . . . *Logos* lets something be seen . . . for the speaker (who serves as the medium) or for those who speak with each other . . . *Logos* acquires the meaning of relation and relationship. (pp. 79-82)

Embedded in the term dialogue is the idea of a relationship and must be a starting point (Buber, 1987). In effort to build a relationship, there must be a mutually respectful agreement that establishes and maintains the integrity of the relationship to promote dynamic interactions. So in a sense, there is an underlying “commitment” (and I use this term loosely) to the other person(s) in the dialogue, though this relationship may not last much beyond the time of the dialogue. I use the term commitment for a lack of a better word, but this mutually respectful relationship must have a foundation; a “willingness to see things through” or an “openness” to hear the other person’s perspective (Burbules, 1993). I will make the following proposition for this study: If there is a lack of commitment to the dialogue, the relationship will not sustain itself, particularly when core values are challenged and the dialogue becomes uncomfortable for both parties.

In the previous sub-section I illustrated the necessity of building the relationship of dialogue and in this next section I aim to articulate the necessity of the continuous and curious communicative exchange of ideas where both parties come to better understand each other and the topic at hand.

**Pedagogical.** Unlike other forms of communication, dialogue is inherently pedagogical. For example, chatting in the elevator with a colleague is most likely not dialogue. As Burbules (1993) keenly points out “[d]ialogue is an activity directed toward discovery and new understanding, which stands to improve the knowledge, insight, or sensitivity of its participants” (Burbules, 1993, p. 8). “Traditional” roles of teacher-student may not necessarily exist in all dialogues and as some theorists note, this hierarchy can impede understanding (Freire, 1970).
A non-authoritarian approach view of learning is a paramount aspect of dialogue, even when there are “traditional” roles of teacher/student (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1991; Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) calls the top-down approach to education the “banking” model where teachers make regular “deposits” of knowledge into students whereby students accumulate knowledge and/or “capital.” Rather, Freire suggests an alternative model where teachers function as teacher-students and students function as student-teachers; both parties collaboratively working together to construct meaning from a particular topic. By democratically creating a participatory approach to learning, the dichotomy of teacher-student dissolves, bypassing the role of teacher imparting knowledge (and all its ancillary meanings and cultural value) to the student without critically analyzing the concepts. Constructing meaning through collaboration proceeds to a more emancipatory approach to education, or as Friere writes, it is not only learning to “read the word” but “read the world” (Freire, 1970).

**Genres of Dialogue**

In the previous section I identified two elements that comprise dialogue; in this section I will define and describe the four different genres of dialogue: conversation, inquiry, debate, instruction. Many of the arguments proposed in this section are heavily indebted to the work of both Burbules (1993) (four genres of dialogue) and Gadamer (1982; his insights in defining and conceptualizing dialogue). Before detailing the four genres of dialogue, it may be helpful to first, imagine a two-by-two matrix (see Table 1) with inclusive and critical located on top of the grid and divergent and convergent located to the left the grid:
Table 1

*Burbules, 1993*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genres of dialogue</th>
<th>Inclusive</th>
<th>Critical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divergent</td>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>Debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergent</td>
<td>Inquiry</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first distinction rests on the end goal of dialogue and its relation to knowledge. If the dialogue has a specific endpoint, it is *convergent* (Dascal, 1985, p. 3; Petit, 1985, p. 431). On the other end, Bakhtin passionately argues his conception of “heteroglossia,” where language is both the means and the product of dialogue; in finding our voice we inevitably find elements of others. For Bakhtin, dialogue is necessarily *divergent:*

> Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. . . . Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272)

Therefore, Bakhtin believes our language is inevitably pluralistic; every word we speak is borrowed from countless sources. The other distinction I will illustrate is one between *critical* and *inclusive.* Some scholars have framed this distinction as the “believing game” and the “doubting game” or as the “connected knowing” and “separate knowing” (Elbow, 1986; Belenky et al., 1986). From a critical perspective, the partner(s) in dialogue takes a more skeptical approach to arguments and questions the accuracy of the partner’s position and does not hesitate to question evidence, consistency, and logic (Burbules, 1993). An inclusive perspective grants an initial plausibility to arguments because the partner(s) simply asserts them. There is a desire to better understand beliefs, feelings, experiences (and so forth.)
**Dialogue as conversation.** Underlying conversation is a general sense of cooperation, tolerance, and a direction of mutual understanding (inclusive-divergent dialogue). Though this amicable sense provides the context of the conversation, partner(s) may not be working toward a consensus or reconciliation of differences of opinion. An example of this exchange could be two friends sharing their P-12 educational experiences (the teachers, curriculum, after-school opportunities, field trips, facilities, and many others) and how each of those instances formed their outlook on life.

At the epicenter of the Gadmerian view of dialogue is a goal of understanding. For Gadamer (1982), understanding begins with a question:

The close relation that exists between question and understanding is what gives the hermeneutic experience its true dimension. However much a person seeking understanding may leave open the truth of what is said, however much he may turn away from the immediate naming of the object and consider, rather, its deeper significance, and take the latter not as true, but merely as meaningful, so that the possibility of its truth remains unsettled, this is the real and basic nature of a question. (pp. 337-338)

For Gadamer, what matters most “is the mutuality, the respect required, the genuine seeking to understand what the other is saying, the openness to test and evaluate our own opinions through such an encounter” (Bernstein, 1986, p. 113). As a result of this mutual exchange between persons, communication essentially becomes comprehensible to one another and there is a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1982). However, I strongly caution the reader to consider the dangers of superimposing one viewpoint over another and consider this an immediate “fusing.” If an individual from the dominant perspectives views are not properly scrutinized, the dominant points of view would only reinforce stereotypes, maintain prejudices, and perpetuate injustices. In other words, this “fused horizon” can only be mutually constructed when persons exchanging in dialogue find “a common language” (Gadamer, 1982, pp. 346-349). As this study will focus on dialogues across differences, difficulties in translations of cultural experiences, language, or
paradigmatic incommensurabilities are inevitable. Many of us have experienced innocuous (and somewhat embarrassing) misunderstandings or nonunderstandings of culture.

Occasionally experiences where radical incommensurability exists should not obscure the crucial point that our ways of thinking, speaking, and experiencing world have far more commonalities than differences. These commonalities serve as the catalyst to pursue attempts at overcoming these misunderstandings or nonunderstandings rather than engaging in counterproductive conversations.

**Dialogue as inquiry.** Inclusive-convergent dialogue approach aims toward answering a specific question, possibly to resolve a specific conflict, reconciliation of a dispute or to garner consensus on an issue. An example of this could be a teacher working with her principal to better inform her instructional practices through the use of district benchmarks and formative assessments. The word “inquiry” can be defined as a type of formal investigation to examine and weigh alternatives to determine a solution (Burbules, 1993). As I noted earlier, the boundaries between these genres are not clearly defined, so in the aforementioned example, the classroom teacher may participate in a “brainstorming” activity with the principal to generate other forms of instruction beyond lecturing, for example, to promote student learning—a divergent activity. However, the endpoint of this activity is to generate a menu of options but ultimately, formulating a concrete plan so further analyses can be drawn upon to gauge success of answering the specific question. Freire articulates this point by noting the educational benefit of dialogue is in people “attempting, together, to learn more than they now know” (Freire, 1970, p. 79). Rich and interesting synergies of knowledge can be constructed by generating lists of ideas or by building off each other to problem solve, yet this form of dialogue is more than that. Dialogue as
inquiry is concerned with determining reasons, and uncovering evidence to challenging questions (Burbules, 1993).

Another aspect of dialogue as inquiry is reaching a political or democratic consensus. As an educational leader of an organization, gauging the “winners” and “losers,” the fuzzy grey areas, political tensions from the state, federal and local governments, the pull from businesses, implementing policies are always very challenging. Building consensus is paramount to effective leadership. Working collaboratively to construct a compelling vision (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) or common purpose of: “What do we want to look like 10 years from now?” requires an identification of commonalities of values and differences. Inevitably, there will be differences on what the school (or district) should become, and questions on how to accomplish these goals, but dialogue as inquiry can help members of the educational community better understand their role in relation to others in the context of an interconnected plan. The inclusive nature of this exchange provides stakeholders with a legitimate voice and “buy-in” to the process to fulfill their personal and school (or district) goals with much enthusiasm and purpose.

Dialogue as debate. From the critical-­divergent perspective we have a, generally, skeptical nature with poignant questions and sharp answers as a means to distinguish differences of opinion. Agreement and reconciliation are not endpoints in debates (Burbules, 1993). One such example is very clearly illustrated every four years when candidates run for the office of the presidency. Two (or more) candidates are in a semi-­structured setting where a moderator offers prompts while the candidates articulate their political platforms. Of the forms of dialogue debate is the most challenging to navigate through, because positions must be articulated clearly for the sake of defense. Ideological stances from participants also advocate for their positions adding to
the spirit of the exchange. Embedded in the word “debate” are connotations of winning and losing, competitiveness and demonstrating a “toughness” and political acumen.

One of the strengths of debates lies not only in participating in a vibrant exchange of ideas, but in the non-participatory role of observing participants advocate for their positions (Burbules, 1993). In the example of the presidential debate, two candidates with more or less similar platforms may have vastly different positions on healthcare, for example. As the two choices are proposed, the merits and shortcomings of each choice can be assessed to determine what makes the most sense for you, the state and humanity. Conversely, one of the dangers of the debate is the possibility of interference with its pedagogical nature. This sounds counterintuitive but the rhetorical approach to debate can undermine logical arguments and elicit visceral responses which has the potential supersede rational judgment.

**Dialogue as instruction.** The critical-convergent dialogue utilizes questions and provocative statements to stimulate conclusions to move a discussion or thought process forward. An example of this could be a principal guiding a young teacher to find and identify high-quality, peer-reviewed journals through various search engines in effort to improve her effectiveness in differentiating instruction to students with special needs. As many words evoke rich imagery, the well known forms of ancient Greek dialogue also capture the essence of dialogue as instruction.

Most familiar to this directive form of instruction is the exchange between a young boy and Socrates in *Meno* (Plato, 1961b). Though Socrates never made any assertions, we observe him lead a young boy through a set of geometrical proofs, prompting and probing with questions at just the right level of difficulty to stimulate learning. A centerpiece to this form of dialogue is *aporia*, which can be defined as an intentional deep conceptual confusion which leads to the
reconstruction of a richer and more complex understanding. For Socrates, persons with firm understandings and deeply held beliefs create obstacles for themselves and impede learning. In attempt to uproot and unlearn these entrenched understandings, Socrates would gradually lead partners into contradictory puzzles, leaving them feel numb as if stung by a stingray (Plato, 1961b; or see Freire, 1970).

Put in more modern terms, Vygotsky’s (1962) ideas on intellectual zone of “proximal development” and learning are relevant. Building upon constructivist views of teaching and learning, modeling, questioning, and scaffolding are methods to direct student learning. The connection between Plato and Vygotsky’s ideas can be made by heeding the advice of Palincsar (1986):

Critical to the teaching-learning process is the role of dialogue: it is the means by which support is provided and adjusted. . . . When children engage in problem solving, they display the kind of behaviors that are characteristic of dialogue, posing and responding, to their own questions, essentially internalizing the dialogue they have experienced in the initial stages of problem solving when they were collaborating with a more expert individual. It is this dialogue, occurring with initial instruction regarding the strategy, that enables learns to participate in strategic activity even though they may not fully understand the activity and would most certainly not be able to exercise the strategy independently. The relationships between the learner and teacher in this supportive dialogue is to be contrasted with the observed when students are passive observers who receive demonstration and are “talked at” regarding strategy use. (p. 75)

In this section I have described two aspects of the same phenomena from two different eras, on the one hand from ancient Greece, on the other the modern conceptions of Vygotsky’s teaching and learning and how it relates to dialogue. From these four genres, conversation, inquiry, debate and instruction, the reader gain a better handle on how these methods (for lack of a better word) can be utilized by an adept educational leader to articulate differences and lead members of the educational community to better understand themselves and each other.
Discussion

As I noted earlier, offering a typology of four types of dialogue and describing its nature could be dangerous; it has the potential to be reified into a strict and exhaustive list. Inevitably, when partners engage in dialogue there will be moments in the exchange where elements of more than one of the forms of dialogue (if not all four) will momentarily come to light. There will be moments when it will be difficult to describe when and how different aspects of dialogue begin and end. It will also be difficult to describe if one or more are present simultaneously.

For instance, let us imagine we have a student, the student’s mother, and a principal discussing the student’s behavior. Over the course of the past few weeks, this student has been accused of bullying other students. Other students and parents have expressed their concern of this students’ aggressive behavior (confrontational, short temper, posturing, and so on). The principal’s starting point is to resolve this conflict and find a set of solutions (dialogue as inquiry). However, in this instance, the principal does not have a strong relationship with the parent because the parent and student recently moved into the school district. The first 10-15 minutes of this exchange would exhibit the qualities of dialogue as conversation to build trust and earn rapport. Moving fluidly from the conversation, the principal then begins to inquire about the multiple conflicts. The principal determines that the student requires additional behavior supports from the school counselor to better understand conflict resolution skills. Here is where the principal probes and asks questions at just the right moment and appropriateness to lead both the parent and student to teach both participants about the need for supports (dialogue as instruction). Yet with the risk of painting with broad brushstrokes, it is safe to generalize that instances like this scenario are fairly commonplace in the public school setting. Thus, as demonstrated by this scenario, dialogue is fluid and is unpredictable. As a researcher, I will not
have the ability to record dialogue in every given situation. In the methods section, I intend to describe how the various forms of dialogue will be a tool to categorize the dialogue between the principals and others.

To further complicate the nature of dialogue, it appears that the outcomes of dialogue would seem to be only positive in nature and this may be simply untrue. Dialogic contexts can also be a potential for misunderstanding, because:

[d]ialogue creates an opportunity for some to learn from and with others. Such diversity, however does not only create a set of possibilities and opportunities; it also constitutes a potential barrier—for it is these very same differences that can lead to misunderstanding, disagreements, or speaking at cross purposes. (Burbules & Bruce, 2010, p. 1112)

It is entirely possible that I will observe or learn of conversations between the principal and others that were not fruitful and damaged relationships.
Chapter 3
Research Methodology

Review of Purpose and Question

After the general purpose of this study is defined, I will first describe my paradigmatic context, design, participants, procedures, data collection, analysis, validity concerns, study significance and limitations, and personal position. The focus of this study is to understand and describe how one principal is engaging in dialogue to address injustices, and similarly, how the same principal support school personnel and community with similar dialogues. By exploring dialogue, I am interested in the active participation of a principal working toward positive agency in restructuring and re-culturing their school to a more inclusive environment. My interest is not to assume that principals initiating dialogues are socially just; this would defeat the purpose of this study. The assumption is that principals with a vision of socially just learning are attempting to dismantle deficit thinking, race and social class stereotypes (and help teachers help others dismantle deficit thinking) to create safe spaces where students would feel more comfortable learning. Finally, I also make the assumption that school leaders who ignore or sidestep issues of race and social class do not deconstruct deficit thinking. Each of these efforts are striving toward answering the following research questions:

1. *How do principals facilitate dialogue to promote awareness of issues of race and social class?*

2. *How do principals provide support for staff members to engage in/with issues of race and social class?*

3. *What do principals learn after reflecting upon these dialogues?*

4. *To what extent do these dialogues lead to making positive agency in addressing these issues of race and social class?*
Paradigmatic Context

Understanding the paradigm in which my research questions are situated is necessary because different paradigms suggest different corresponding methodologies. Positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory, are five (broad) research paradigms suggested by Lincoln and Guba (2000). Critical theory is “concerned with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics intersect to construct a social system” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 281). My research is committed to notions of (leadership for) social justice and dialogue and is therefore situated in the paradigm of critical theory. According to Kincheloe and McLaren, there are two primary goals of critically theory: to identify policies, procedures, laws, or any other oppressive forces in order to live a meaningful and happy life. Secondly, critiquing instrumental rationality is more interested in question of “why should” rather than “how to” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). With this study situated in the critical theory paradigm, ontologically, my research questions assume that there is no one quantifiable reality. In the next section, I will outline my case study methodology, and supplement the data with a developing methodology described as dialogue in narrative inquiry (Amalia, 2012).

Methodological Design

Case study. I employed a qualitative case study design as described by Yin (2003). Both authors argue that case studies can aid researchers to better understand a particular issue or phenomenon in an effort to build theoretical constructions. Case studies may be used for both qualitative, quantitative or mixed-methods studies, the nature of the study is dictated by the types
of research questions (Yin, 2003; Stake, 2000). Yin (2003) argues that case studies are more appropriate for studies involving “how” and “why” questions (and sometimes “what”) rather than “who” or “when” questions. I chose the case study design because my research questions are centered primarily on “how” questions, and it will offer a means to study the following: the complexity of the principal’s role in facilitating dialogue, and how this dialogue provides support for other teachers, personal learning, and advocacy for change on issues related to social justice. I explored and described these exchanges to build higher levels of understanding to answer my research questions; therefore, I implemented what Yin describes as both exploratory and descriptive forms of cases. First, exploratory case studies aim to explore any phenomenon in the data serving as a point of interest to the researcher. For instance, a researcher conducting an exploratory case study on an educator’s understanding of issues of critical theory may ask general questions, such as, “How does a principal employ critical theory into her staff development meetings?” and “if so, how often?” The case study design was also selected as the primary means to explore my research questions because the study will aim to draw generalizations of leadership for social justice and dialogue. Krathwohl (2009) defines generalization as a “statement of the relationship between two or more variables that holds across a variety of persons, places, times, measures, and/or procedures (p. 694).

There are five components of a case study design: (a) research questions, (b) propositions (if any), (c) unit of analysis, (d) the logic linking the data to the propositions, and (e) the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2004). My research questions for this study have been covered in Chapter 1; my propositions and unit of analysis will be covered in the next subsection and the logic linking data to the propositions and criteria for interpreting findings will be embedded in my research design, data collection and data analysis sections. Though the case study research
design will offer rich descriptions through observations, interviews and the collection of artifacts, it would be inappropriate for me to sit in on a delicate conversation about race between a principal and a parent, for example. In lieu of sitting in on delicate conversations of race and social class, I will also employ dialogue in narrative inquiry (Amalia et al., 2012) to better understand how principals create and facilitate dialogue on issues of race and social class.

**Dialogue in narrative inquiry.** Dialogue in narrative inquiry challenges the assumption that assessments and evaluations are typically conducted *on* participants and not *with* participants. Dialogue in narrative inquiry can be defined as a participatory methodology, inviting the researcher to engage in dialogues with the participant to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge from narrative data. Assessment and evaluation reports are typically expressed in quantitative or linear modes of thinking. Drawing from Bruner (1986), dialogue in narrative inquiry on the other hand, contrasts conceptions of traditional form of evaluations with narrative modes. As such, “Narratives have the power to engage readers in empathetic ways; story and metaphor are powerful means by which to influence human feeling and action” (Amalia, 2012, in press). To create a more participatory methodology, dialogue in narrative inquiry invites the researcher and participant to deconstruct and reconstruct narrative data to gain a better understanding of the particular phenomena. Rather than an external pressure exerting force on a participant, dialogue in narrative inquiry is multi-vocal, by lending insider perspectives, to lend not only a sense of empathy, but to unravel the hidden complexities that traditional forms of assessment often mask. Personal narratives, and dialogue which proceeds from the narrative data, can humanize complex relationships and better explain consistencies and inconsistencies in interviews, observations and artifact data (as well as more quantifiable forms of data, like test scores). For the purposes of this study, I had the participants (the principal, teachers, parents)
share personal narratives to better understand how the principals would engage in discussions of social justice. Narrative inquiry was another useful data source, because it sheds insight into data that would be otherwise impossible to obtain.

**Propositions for Consideration**

I will make the following two propositions. Firstly, it seems plausible that principals for social justice are oriented to embrace issues of race and social class; teach various members of the educational community in qualitatively different ways than what is considered just being a “good principal.” If this proposition is true, my dissertation explored whether this type of dialogue could have a causal impact on building culture and student learning. Secondly, another proposition for consideration is that principals for social justice would adapt their dialogue to instruct and support staffs so they can, in turn, engage in dialogue. Much like the proverb: Give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime, it seems plausible that socially just principals would be interested in helping staff members to influence classroom culture, relationships with parents, other staff members and the community. I also assume that it is possible that my dialogue with the principals could potentially carry over to their work with staff members and staff members would work with students and parents.

**Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis is the object the researcher is interested in investigating. In the case study methodology, the researcher is interested in uncovering how the object functions in its context (Merriam, 1998). There is only one unit of analysis that was essentially captured by my four research questions. The unit of analysis is the dialogue facilitated by the principal. However,
as I am concerned with the principal’s growth in better understanding himself as an educator, as a leader, and as social justice activists, and in turn, how teachers better understand themselves. Another subunit of analysis is the pedagogical growth of those participants in a relationship with the principal. I am interested in the relationships formed by the principal and the various stakeholders and how each principal is advocating for their growth. I am also curious in learning how the principal assesses each stakeholder in his/her understanding of issues of social justice and works toward dismantling deficit thinking and privilege. Does the principal use different assessments for different stakeholders?

**Participant and Site Selection**

**Participant selection.** I employed a purposeful snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006) and conferred with professional colleagues—administrators, teachers, directors, superintendents, and professors—familiar with P-12 socially just principals working in public schools. Essentially, I contacted principals in professional organizations to identify colleagues who may have ideals similar to what I sought. I asked these individuals either in person, over the phone, or via email if they know of any school principals who believe in (a) the promotion of high expectations for student achievement (beyond student test scores, holistic learning, citizenship, democracy), (b) promotes inclusion (much more than only looking at special education), (c) values diversity, and (d) expects students to be able to critique power structures and transform society. Moreover, I am interested in studying principals who have demonstrated the promotion of academic success in the past (beyond student standardized test scores). I explained to my colleagues that I am willing to travel or arrange telephone or VoIP conversations if necessary. From the various recommendations, I hoped to generate a list of at
least 15-20 principals. Given my research questions, it is imperative to identify a diverse sample of principals and schools that best afford the opportunity to excavate rich data and to understand the complexity of these questions. From the previous review of literature, many of the studies explored primarily White principals leading for social justice. I was more inclined to select principals of color to fill this gap within the literature.

The purpose is to find principals who believe in and work toward the criteria established in my theoretical framework. My rationale was that I could not assume that since principals believe in a socially just form of student learning and classrooms would therefore mean these same principals would lead socially just conversations to demystify differences and support classroom teachers. Moreover, the purpose of this study is to understand the nature of these conversations, because in education, principals never take off their “teacher’s hat,” all members of the educational community—parents, students, teachers, community members—are brought along to learn more about differences as differences rather than differences as deficiencies.

After using the purposeful snowball sampling, I generated a list of 14 possible participants. I then began seeking their participation, first via email and then with follow-up telephone calls. After several weeks of communicating with the respondents in various ways, I ultimately found myself with a participant pool of three principals. Of the possible participants, a majority (10 of 14) of the principals were leading elementary schools. Virtually all of the principals (9 of 10) at the elementary school level were female. On the other hand, the remaining principals at the middle school and high school level were virtually all male (3 of 4). Although this data is interesting, attempting to explain issues of gender is not central to this study; commenting on this would be merely speculative.
Site selection. The context the principal is working within also is a factor in selecting participants. My research questions naturally lend themselves to the selection of a site that is most likely a diverse high school and community. Although it is not a specific requirement, it would be interesting to explore a school and community with a long history of race and social class tensions to explore how the principal navigates through these issues. The literature is replete with principals leading for social justice at the elementary school levels. For the purposes of this study, I was more inclined to select a high school principal to inform the literature of the successes and challenges of leading for social justice. After careful consideration, I selected James Fawkes of John F. Kennedy High School from the list of three finalists because the context of the community of Meadowbrook added to the complexities of the individual’s identities. I will go into greater depth describing what made Meadowbrook so unique in the next chapter.

Data Collection and Collection Matrix

The following steps were taken to capture/collect data.

Firstly, I piloted the prescreening interview questions with a colleague in a principalship. We examined the questions together and tried to understand if the questions are too abstract, allow enough room for a rich narrative, or are too constrictive.

The second phase was interviews. I relied upon the interview questions and had several probing questions ready to further explore issues. Ideally, with the probes I connected the questions back to the case studies. After the interview questions, I raised the data from the narratives and employed the dialogue as narrative inquiry methods. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure validity.
After each interview, thirdly, I reexamined my notes, make corrections and asked for clarification for points of confusion. I brought my laptop to each interview to take supplementary notes and will be sure to member check all data. I was not diligently typing while dialoging; however, I did type a few short reminders that served as reminders to check portions of the audio recording. I used member checking after the notes are typed and collaborate with the participant for interpretation. My first interview questions (see Appendix), 1-2, were to capture contextual information to situate the narrative and the principal, while the remaining questions 3-10 were designed to understand my theoretical framework. Each of the questions has various degrees of implicit and explicit intention in attempt to record nuance and ultimately to effectively triangulate data.

Fourthly, once the interviews are conducted, edited and member checked, I would assess them in due time to compare the results to my rubric for the selection of the principal. This framework is divided into three categories: (a) unknown, not present, unclear, (b) moderately present, implied, somewhat, and (c) clear, imbedded, explicit. As I screened the principals, for each criteria that is clear, imbedded or explicit, the principal will earn 3 points, 2 for those that are moderately present, implied or somewhat and 1 point for unknown, not present and unclear. I recorded the results in a spreadsheet with the principals’ name and context information. I also recorded the nature of the school district and it’s qualitative “fit” with my study. If there was a “border line” call on quantitative scoring I gave the principal the benefit of the doubt and round up. Particularly, questions of academic growth and learning are fuzzy issues that are difficult to measure. Implying success for all students is very different than articulating the issues African-American and low-income students are facing, for example; nevertheless, I was committed to scoring as fairly as possible.
Finally, I scheduled a series of observations at each location. I aimed to spend approximately 10 full school days (approximately 2 full weeks of school spread out through the course of one semester). With the principal’s permission, I also intended to shadow him or her throughout the building, and of course, remove myself whenever it is appropriate. As Stake (1995) notes, qualitative work is emergent, and it may be possible to shadow a teacher or a student for a full day if the situation will lend itself to answering my research questions. I collected artifacts to better explore the context of my case. Any professional development handouts, school handbooks, or student work could be examples of types of artifacts were such examples.

According to Stake (1995) conducting a case study is a viable method for one unit of analysis. Finally, I described my general guidelines for data collection and analysis, explicate the actual data collection and analysis design and procedures, and subsequently address validity issues. This next section further elaborates upon how I collected my data:

**Interviews.** After the narratives were analyzed, another primary source of data was conducting two 45-minute semi-structured interviews with the principal. I aimed to craft questions that not only highlighted themes that have emerged from the data, but to address gaps, confusion and disconnects. For example, upon analyzing the narratives, if the principal expresses an interest to pull students out of class and create an honors program, this represents a departure from the theoretical framework of leadership for social justice. I would be interested to see if this case was an exception or common practice. Like the narrative analysis, all interviews were coded and analyzed. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed with audio recognition software. As all the interviewees’ time is valuable, I scheduled one short 20- to 30-minute follow-up interview to address any unanswered questions, which may be done over the phone for their
convenience. During the interview with the principal, I asked a question about a challenging conversation with a parent, student or staff member around issues of race and social class. I asked for the principal’s permission to speak with each of the stakeholders involved in that conversation. Ideally, I would contact one student, one parent and one staff member to triangulate the results. I followed an identical protocol with the identified interviewees as I did with the principal.

**Observations.** Another important source of data were observations. I observed John F. Kennedy for approximately 5 months from the middle of August to December (and planned to check in a few times thereafter). To better understand the nature of the principal and the relationship to the staff members, parents, I planned on spending more than 20 half-day observations at each site. I assumed that each principal has subtle influences on students. Identifying the nuance of their craft was challenging; however, the amount of time devoted to John F. Kennedy helped me understand the principal’s, teachers’, and parents’ beliefs, values and orientation. Beyond the principal, I was interested in observing students participating in various committees, staff development meetings, teacher collaboration meetings and daily classroom behavior. All of which will contribute substantially to understanding the context of each school to capture “thick descriptions” (Carspecken, 1996).

During observations, I heeded the advice of Stake (1995) and remained focused on categories or key events, and was attentive to background conditions that may influence subsequent analysis but will not interpret relationships along the way. I kept organized field notes by bringing my laptop to each observation; wrestled between the paradox of remaining close-minded (not looking for an opportunity to expand on events as they unfold) and testing every happening to the possibility that seeing things in a different way may change the
experience. While I was observing, I scheduled small breaks throughout the day to allow time to reflect and expand upon my notes to provide a richer background.

Artifacts. All relevant documents, demonstrating beliefs, values and orientation were collected and analyzed. Relevant materials included school handbooks, flyers passed out at staff meetings, school district policy manuals, information students had taken home, and information posted on the district websites. The chart listed (Table 2) below serves as a summation of the data I have collected.

Table 2

Frequency of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Dialogue sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>20 Half-days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Including:</td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal (twice)</td>
<td>Countless cc’d emails, handouts, website</td>
<td>Ongoing with James, two formal 45 minute sessions in addition to interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 participant served dual-role as teacher/parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 social action committee meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>45 min. sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Professional development sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 After-school staff meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these forms of data displayed in this chart (Table 2) contributed to answering my four research questions in an investigation of the principal’s dialogue. To better understand my framework for data collection, I have constructed a table to describe which methods will guide my research questions (Table 3).
Table 3

**Research Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four guiding research questions</th>
<th>Sub-questions</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do principals facilitate dialogue to promote awareness of issues of race and social class?</strong></td>
<td>a) How do principals reconcile the tension between advocating for students and the challenge of helping others better understand differences?</td>
<td>Narrative Interviews</td>
<td>Additional interviews: Teachers, students, parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) What is the primary role of that the principal plays during dialogue (what genre of dialogue?)</td>
<td>Observations Artifacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do principals provide support for staff members to engage in issues of race and social class?</strong></td>
<td>a) Is the nature of the support more informal or formal?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Additional interviews: Teachers, students, Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) How often do principals provide support?</td>
<td>Observations Artifacts</td>
<td>Artifacts: are their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) How often do teachers ask for support?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do principals learn after reflecting upon these dialogues?</strong></td>
<td>a) Is the newly constructed knowledge centered more on others’ perspectives or on personal insights?</td>
<td>Narrative Interviews</td>
<td>Personal reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To what extent do these dialogues lead to making positive agency in addressing these issues of race and social class?</strong></td>
<td>a) Does this commitment to agency affect student learning?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Additional interviews: Teachers, students, parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) How does agency affect school climate?</td>
<td>Observations Artifacts</td>
<td>Artifacts: policies, procedures (handbooks)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dialogue in narrative inquiry.** The methodology for dialogue in narrative inquiry was described in the previous sections (Amalia et al. 2012). One of the first sources of data was story telling. I provided a series of prompts guiding the dialogue. Each prompt was meant to stimulate
a personal story from the participants. Personal narratives were recorded via digital audio recording and then transcribed. All narratives were coded and analyzed; a thematic analysis was employed to frame each participant. As Stake (1995) notes, important research questions cannot always be anticipated, and therefore, it is paramount to develop refined questions as themes emerge from the data. I scheduled interviews with more refined questions when it was feasible to do so.

I collected data for five months until a reasonable saturation point and analyzed the primary record throughout the study. I then wrote the case and linked the thematic analysis to the case analyses to the extant literature, and finally offered a revised theory to the nature of socially just principals raising issues of race and social class.

Data Analysis

My values color the way in which I perceive my data and in turn the way in which I evaluate my data. My research values and orientation are aligned with those in the field of critical social research (those committed to addressing issues of social inequities). Leadership for social justice and dialogue are the two theoretical frameworks I am drawing from to shape my data collection and analysis. Carspecken (1996) argues that high quality research is not biased, and such critical epistemology does not necessarily find results aligned with the critical researcher hopes to find. The aforementioned claims behoove me to: be aware of my power as a researcher, setup my research design in ways that limit bias, and employ methods that would setup compelling and valid claims through the analysis of data. Carspecken (1996) defines the first three stages of critical qualitative research as (a) acquiring the primary record, (b) preliminary reconstructive analysis, and (c) dialogical data generalization. Of note, the second
stage is reconstructive due to the manner it is analyzed; the goal is to assess data through patterns, meanings, and relationships in ways beyond what is directly observed. Most importantly is step three, which elicits a more participatory nature to making meaning for the researcher and the participant. It is a more democratic process for generating high quality data rather than merely recording data and speaking for the interviewee. I applied these three steps to my research in the following ways. First, I acquired the primary record by engaging in dialogue with the principal and other participants. The responses to the prompts served as the foundation of my study. Second, I conducted a narrative analysis on the responses to the prompts and served as the preliminary reconstructive analysis. Third, the dialogue in narrative inquiry served as the dialogical data generalization. Due to the participatory approach of the methodology it is a natural fit to Carpecken’s model. Fourth and fifth stages exist but are not relevant to my study as they are connected to the broader systemic relations of society and for pragmatic purposes are not commensurable with my study.

Analyzing the Narratives

Once the data from the dialogue in narrative inquiry is collected, I drew from Reismman’s (1993) narrative analysis to interpret the data. When using narrative analysis as a method, there are three general questions to examine of how the researcher will represent experience in research studies:

1. How is talk transformed into a written text and how are narrative segments determined?
2. What aspects of the narrative constitute the basis for interpretation?
Heeding the advice of Riessman, I used these questions along with the work of Carspecken to frame my method of data collection. As I analyzed the data, I subscribed to a more Freirian approach to dialogue where there is neither power over or power under, rather equals examining complex issues side-by-side. This participatory approach is more democratic because neither voice is suppressed. When I recorded and analyzed the data I collaborated with the principal to make meaning from their writings, moreover to also discover the basis for their interpretations.

I hoped to listen far more than I speak, asked thoughtful questions, made inferences with the primary data collection to test possible relationships or new propositions, while I carefully separated and recorded my observations from the primary data record. After interviews and observations are conducted and recorded, all written notes included in the field notes, methodological notes, and low-level inference notes were organized. This is the first of three of Carspecken’s phases I noted earlier. The deeper level analyses, and preliminary reconstructive analysis, were informed by conducting a form of narrative analysis known as thematic analysis (Williams, 1984; Ewick & Silbey, 2003). Riessman (2011) distinguishes thematic analysis from “traditional” qualitative research: “[thematic analysis] does not hope to fracture the biographical account into thematic categories as grounded theory coding would do, but interprets it as a whole” (p. 57)

Once the background information was provided, I delved into the data with the following techniques: pattern matching, explanation building, direct interpretation, and categorical aggregation to guide my search for themes. Stake (1995) notes:

The search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions, which we call, “correspondence.” . . . We can look for patterns immediately while we are reviewing documents, observing, or interviewing—or we can code the records, aggregate frequencies, and find the patterns that way. Or both. Sometimes, we will find significant meaning in an instance, but usually the mere important meanings come from reappearance over and over. . . . Often, the patterns will
be known in advance, drawn from research questions, serving as a template for the analysis. Sometimes, the patterns will emerge unexpectedly from the analysis. (p. 78)

In short, emergence was a critical aspect of this research. My strategy was to code the primary record into analytical themes (including data that does not seem to “fit”) and later theoretical themes for the case. I drew from grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) case study (Stake, 1995), narrative analysis (Riessman, 2011) and Miles and Huberman (1994) as I created my codes. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend starting with a provisional set of codes generated from the initial research questions and my theoretical framework, which are akin to what Bogdan and Biklen (2006) call the constant comparative method of coding and interpreting data. In other words, these authors are recommending the development and organization of codes into a structured set of higher-level categories, which can be represented hierarchically and through various nested structures. I manually analyzed the data, drawing from the aforementioned scholars and theories, and use the software as a guide to inform my conclusions.

**Triangulation**

Case study and narrative analysis involve the careful examination of “complex phenomena and issues for which no consensus can be found as to what really exists—yet we have ethical obligations to minimize misrepresentations and misunderstanding” (Stake, 1995, pp. 108-109). Researchers building cases are not resting on hunches or good intentions. For Stake, the primary means to ensure the researcher(s) have valid and reliable results is triangulation. Borrowed from celestial navigation, sailors made inferences every morning and evening at sea to determine their course. In narrative and case study research these inferences are made from multiple forms of data. In my study this included: narrative analysis, observations, interviews and the collection of artifacts. Effective triangulation across multiple sources of data
requires “an effort to see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p. 113). Stake borrows heavily from Denzin (1984) to frame his protocol for triangulation: data source triangulation (ensures replicability of the study), investigator triangulation (alternative perspectives are present in examining data), theory triangulation (choosing co-observers or reviewers from alternative viewpoints to interpret meaning), and methodological triangulation (multiple methods toward a research construct). To ensure these protocols are strictly enforced, I committed to the following procedures: in the findings section, I explored questions similar to, “What changes in circumstance might cause principals to exercise alternative approaches to dialogue?” (data source triangulation), worked closely with my advisor and committee members to reflect, deconstruct and reanalyze my data (investigator triangulation), searched for rival theories in peer-reviewed journals (theory triangulation), and supplemented the narrative analysis with case study methods (methodological triangulation).

Although some scholars could perceive this description of triangulation as a positivist approach to conducting a case study, it is entirely possible that after analyses, the data is incommensurable—multiple dissonances, contradictions, and vague and/or highly nebulous data exists. Since my paradigmatic orientation is situated within the camp of critical theorists, it is natural that many critical theorists are devoted to postmodern conceptions of analyzing data. In the postmodern paradigm, multiple conceptions of realities can exist. Whatever the results of the data, great care has been taken to ensure the data is valid.
Validation

Trustworthiness and authenticity are more commonly associated with qualitative research while terms internal and external validity, and reliability often correspond with positivism and post-positivism (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In light of these guidelines, I chose validation for this section for two reasons: first because I considered this critically oriented study to be post-positivist and second, the term validation is periodically raised in my methodology (e.g., Carspecken, 1996, Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003, Riessman, 2011).

In this section, I will be borrowing much from the work of case study. There are “four tests common to all social science methods” construct validity (use of correct operational measures for concepts being studied), internal validity (only for explanatory studies; not for descriptive or explanatory case studies; establishing a causal relationship where certain conditions lead to other conditions), external validity (establishing the domain to which a study’s findings can be generalized) and reliability (demonstrating that the operations of the study can be repeated with the same results; Yin, 2003, p. 34). According to Yin (2003), building construct validity requires multiple sources of data, member checking reviews of drafts, and understanding the chain of evidence. I did not seek a causal relationship between the principal and other stakeholders and will emphasize construct validity. However, this study may lead to better understandings of the theory through affirmation.

Another aspect of validity in this study is pattern matching (which can be described as comparing patterns with empirical evidence, including rival patterns), building explanations (comparing predicted propositions, revising and building more complex models), and acknowledging and responding to competing theories in Chapter 5 of my study (Yin, 2003). Reliability can be ensured by clearly articulating each procedure of the study. Yin (2003) argues
that replicating the findings of cases should test the theory (even with competing or similar
theories.) To ensure the greatest amount of external validity and reliability I took Carspecken’s
(1996) and Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) recommendations. I used multiple recording devices and
multiple observers, a flexible observation schedule (to minimize bias and attention), prolonged
engagement, clear and concise language in my field notes, peer-debriefing to limit bias, member
checking, stripped analysis when reconstructing themes from the data, eliminated leading
questions from the interview process, and asked participants about unfamiliar language, jargon or
terms.

**Ethics**

Of the utmost importance to this study was the essence of the Hippocratic Oath, “do no
harm.” My proposed plan of research met all of the guidelines of the university’s Institutional
Review Board. I aimed to remain flexible and respectful to the very busy schedules of all
participants I will interview. All participants were informed about the nature of this study and it
was made clear that if anyone chooses, they may drop out at any time or not answer any number
of questions. Additionally, participants were free to choose interview locations of their choice.
Another aim was to build mutually beneficial relationships where my study could inform
participants’ knowledge to better understand their complex situations as well as my own research
interests.

Participants understood the purpose of this study will be for publishing my dissertation
(as well as other future publications). To ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to the
communities, schools, and all interviewees. As the nature of the data led to delicate
conversations, this is another concern that participants feared to become “discovered.” Moreover,
I cautiously weighed probing into delicate topics and allow the participants to comfortably share information rather than push to reveal sensitive details. Conversely, I feel it was imperative to explicitly detail my role as a researcher to participants to eliminate any possible miscommunications. I explained that my role is to better understand how principals engage in dialogue to help others better understand issues of race and social class and how they support teachers in these conversations. Beyond this description, I also explained that I am not interested in consulting or collaborating with the school to implement a particular reform (however, I am interested in collaborating with all participants to make meaning from their experiences). Once I concluded the findings section, I shared the data with the participants and may enter into a “critical friend”-like relationship to help the school grow and better understand their context.

Most importantly, I was interested in capturing the essence of the participants’ story by empowering each to authentically share and build meaning with them rather than for them. Carspecken (1996) notes that research is devoid of neutrality and underrepresented populations are often spoken for and privileged groups are often speaking for others. I see this responsibility as a procedure beyond member checking and debriefing. This is not about ensuring the transcription reflects spoken words, nor is it about capturing the essence of a point of view is properly shared. It is eliminating the knowledge I as the researcher (either knowingly or unknowingly) inserted into gaps in the data, which changes the meaning of the data. This is a grassroots approach to research, or a more democratic method to constructing meaning. Not only is this a more ethical way of conducting research, ideally this should also enhance validity and reliability.
Delimitations and Limitations

This was a qualitative study that explored the situated context of the school leaders and school districts interviewed at a particular point in time. Although the findings were used to pose questions extending well beyond the phenomena analyzed in this study, a limitation of this study was the scope of the experiences shared by the participants. First of all, the data collected through interviews provided specific findings for an individual, not group findings that could be used to consider larger populations of principals. However, these findings are not generalizable to larger populations of principals. Another limitation to this study is the ability of the participants to fully remember their experiences and feelings as they engaged in dialogue; some of these conversations ranged from a few years to many years ago. Beyond the limitations of the methodology, I delimited the principals I interviewed to public schools leaders who have served at that school district for at least three years, available to me through public data and the snowball technique. I chose not to include non-public schools (private and the “hybrid” charters) because of enrollment policies, and private schools, which have different cultures than public schools.

Reflexivity

While I do not want to shift the attention of this study from socially just principals engaging in dialogue to myself, I want to provide my personal motivations and orientation for conducting this research. I find this study to be personally compelling as many aspects of my history resonate with the topic: as a former K-12 public schools student, as a former band director/general music classroom teacher who taught grades K-12, as a former administrative intern, and as a future educational leader.
As a public school student, I found that I was unchallenged by the coursework, but felt the curriculum prepared me for the rigors of postsecondary education. Overall, I should be satisfied with my K-12 education. Yet while I attended school in a very small homogenous and rural school district, there was an underlying sense that something was terribly out of place and I was the problem.

As I progressed through my public school experience, and academically excelled, there were many times where I knew discriminatory policies were in place and it deeply troubled me. I did not have the vocabulary to express my frustration with how the system perpetuates inequity. I share my personal narrative at this beginning of chapter one for the reader to not only to get a sense of myself and my research motivations, but because the rhetoric of social justice language is often centered on supporting those who have been marginalized, without an awareness of how injustice negatively affects us all, regardless of whether aspects of our identity are agents or targets of oppression (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). In this instance, my third grade teacher did not have either the knowledge or the vocabulary to have a discussion with me to talk about differences. I wonder how many other students in my class were also deeply troubled?

During my four years of public school teaching experience, I have taught: high school, middle school and elementary school in rural, suburban and urban areas. In the No Child Left Behind era, school districts began to reallocate resources to bolster test scores and as a result, fine arts programs were often a popular target. Yet in light of these circumstances I gained a powerful insight to the vastly different types of school environments. As I noted earlier, the United States is, by most measures, one of the most inequitable western countries, and Illinois is one of the most inequitable states (ranked 2nd; Thompson, Wood, & Crampton, 2008). I have taught in a school that could not afford to replace broken windows and in another district where
the administration purchased a $25,000 talking trash cans which thanked students for recycling (this is not hyperbole; as an aside, the students broke the trashcan about 2 weeks after it was installed). I have bought dinner countless times for my students (I knew they would not eat otherwise) and have watched a young 16-year-old cry because she “only” received a $30,000 sports utility vehicle for her birthday. I have seen disengaged and angry teachers pulling out the teacher’s contract (in hand) furiously yelling at the administration that they can leave at 3:00 p.m. because “it is in the contract.” I have also seen teachers waking up at 5 a.m. on Saturdays, running practices all day with students and coming home at 2 a.m.

As a young person and inexperienced teacher, I did not know what to make of these stark differences. It was deeply unsettling; it was as if I was traveling not only to a different country but different worlds. I quickly learned that despite an excellent teaching preparation program, the field of education was incredibly chaotic and very difficult. Trying to articulate this sense of what I was experiencing, I fortuitously stumbled across Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970). And as I began to read his book, I was completely overcome with joy. I knew I had finally found someone who was thinking what I could not articulate. This book profoundly resonated with my personal experience and shifted the trajectory of my professional/academic career. After four years of teaching, and reading Pedagogy of the Oppressed, I found my professional knowledge and skills wanting.

My orientation as a researcher is situated from critical theory and guides my research interest. Carspecken (1996) defines “criticalists” as researchers who “are all concerned about social inequalities, and we direct our work toward positive social change” (p. 3). For those readers who are concerned that this orientation is value laden and ideological—I unabashedly admit that it is. All research projects stem from a relative paradigm employed by a research with
a corresponding set of values and beliefs, whether it is explicitly stated or not (Denzin &
Lincoln, 2000). However, the researcher’s value orientation should be distinguished from the
research findings: “good critical research should not be biased . . . research value orientations
should not determine research findings” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 6). As our country is becoming
more unequal and the pressure of our national and state-level politics become more polarized, I
am hopeful principals shift to a more critical orientation by widening the purposes, vision, goals
and outcomes of education to a more socially just purpose of education.
Chapter 4

Context

The formulation of this research study began with acknowledging a nuanced and complex interaction between leadership for social justice and dialogue that has been largely overlooked in both academia and amongst practitioners. As I noted in Chapter 1, the role of the principal is increasingly challenging, and because of its highly influential role, it is imperative scholars and practitioners better understand how the principal engages in dialogue of race and social class to better serve traditionally marginalized students. Compounding the federal, state, and local political forces are the changing demographics. As our country becomes more diverse, the issues of race and social class are increasingly coming to light; if educators are serious about serving all students, raising issues of race and social class will become necessary in effort to reorient policies and procedures, and to shift educators’ perceptions about traditionally underrepresented students. Two theoretical frameworks that I employ to examine the principal working toward the promotion of student learning, reorienting school structures, and creating a more inclusive democratic culture are leadership for social justice and dialogue.

So often when researchers are examining principals leading for social justice or persons engaging in dialogue, the focus is spent primarily on the content: the actors, the words, the policy change, the new procedure, and completely overlook or outright dismiss the context. Understanding where the history and the landscape of where dialogue is taking place helps situate the dialogue within a meaningful context. Knowing which events caused tensions in the past can help us understand how and why the persons are navigating through the conversation. In case study research, Stake (2000) advocates for painting a rich description of the context to portray the messiness and the complications of the setting which undoubtedly are inextricably
linked to the content (the actors, the dialogue, the events, etc.). Since the unit of analysis in this case study are dialogues centered on race and social class (transformative dialogue), I cannot separate my study of dialogue from the principal and his advocacy for social justice. This chapter will focus primarily on situating the context to paint a complicated web of interrelations between the community, the school district, and the high school where the principal works. It is necessary to describe this complex series of nested relations because if the principal is to open up and trust the process of dialogue with staff members, the principal must not strip the conversation of the history of the community, the school district, and the building. Context matters. Understanding the sociopolitical context in which the principal functions is a tenant of leadership for social justice (Theoharis, 2007). Community, school district and building history shape the terrain the principal must expertly navigate to affect meaningful change.

There were several aspects of the community that made for a compelling case study: the suddenly changing demographics in the school district and community, the consent decree, and the history of racial conflict in the community. Any one of these aspects would complicate the study. However, exploring the intersections of the three aspects adds to the richness of understanding the problems the principal mace face navigating dialogues of race and social class. Although many of these incidents occurred concurrently, I could only speculate if these incidents are related or have causal relationships. It is more likely that some incidents served as “triggers” for other incidents. Nonetheless, the changing demographics, the consent decree, and conflict within the community are not removed from the public schools; principals must address each situation because of the interconnectedness between the school and the community.
Meadowbrook

The city of Meadowbrook is located in the Midwest and positioned approximately a few hundred miles from several major metropolitan areas. Although the surrounding communities are small and rural, Meadowbrook is home to a major research university. Several large and growing technology and software companies are located within Meadowbrook. Incidentally, Meadowbrook is also home to several shrinking manufacturing companies. Two years ago, Meadowbrook was named in a well-known publication for its large number of jobs created during the economic downturn. Meadowbrook has undergone a substantial demographic transformation over the past decade. The faces of Meadowbrook have changed rapidly. In the year 2000, the demographics of the community were as follows: 60% White, 31% Black, 2% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 2% Native American, and an unknown number of multi-racial persons. However, by the year 2010, the demographics of the community were: 41% White, 35% Black, 9% Hispanic, 10% Asian, .3% Native American and 5% Multi-Racial. Lastly, the number of students enrolled in the Meadowbrook school district characterized as low-income (free and reduced-price lunches) grew from 32% in 2000 to 56% in 2010. Two important points can be drawn from the data: Essentially, the demographics of the community have flipped. Not only did the community grow by nearly 20%, but also the percentage of persons of color grew substantially as did the low-income population. During the period of rapidly changing demographics, several racial incidents polarized the community.

Incidents Within the Community

Death of Black teen. Several incidents within the community of Meadowbrook deeply polarized the community. In 2004, there was a young African-American male, 15, who locked
himself out of his home. As the teen tried to find an alternative way to enter his home, a senior citizen, and White woman, noticed the teen looking around the perimeter of the home and trying to climb into a window. She called the police. According to the two police officers who arrived on the scene, the young man became hostile and resisted arrest. While the young man and the two police officers physically struggled with the teen, according to the Meadowbrook Police Department, the one of the police officer’s gun discharged and fatally wounded the teenager. As a result of the incident the police officer whose gun discharged, was suspended indefinitely without pay.

Community organizers in the Black community called for charges to be pressed against the police officer. James Jackson hosted several town hall meetings to highlight the challenges many of the members of the Black community face (profiling) and tried to help other young Black teens understand how to speak and work with authority figures. In an article printed in the local Meadowbrook newspaper, many White community members were vocal in their support for the police officer. The reporter asked citizens their feelings on the incident; many White persons supported the police department and remarked that the teen should have provided identification if he lived at the address and should not have resisted arrest.

**Polar bear hunting.** Another incident that damaged racial relations within the community occurred in 2008. Older White men were the targets of assault and battery by groups of young Black youths. The Black youth termed the confrontations as “polar bear hunting.” Violent conflicts would often happen near or around the school district campuses. According to the local newspaper, there has been “great time and energy devoted to seeking out those who have been carrying out these crimes, but we have not found any persons of interest.”
Both of these incidents are powerful in illuminating the challenges principals must face. Knowing how to appropriately navigate a delicate conversation about each of these incidents to teachers, to students, to parents, and to community members is an unenviable task. Since the teen was as classmate to many youth, knowing how to have racial dialogues are an aspect of promoting an inclusive environment and is therefore, a responsibility of the principal. Instances like these are teachable moments to help others better understand race and should not be stripped of the context of how and why this student was shot. Rather than focusing only on the death of the student, the principal should address the ideologies and norms of folks to illuminate the causes of racial conflict.

One of the more complicated aspects of this study that had a substantial impact on the environment was the Consent Decree. This next section will explore how a grassroots movement gathered political capital and built a case against the Meadowbrook School District—and won.

**The Consent Decree**

Nearly 15 years ago, a Black community activist, James Jackson, organized a movement to address the persistent inequities many Black students were facing in the Meadowbrook school district. Jackson, the same activist in the death of a young Black teen, reached out to Bill Holcomb, a White male and life-long resident of Meadowbrook, to tap into Holcomb’s vast wealth to hire a powerful law firm from a major metropolitan area to represent the Black community. After 5 years of negotiations between the lawyers from the high-powered law firm and the lawyers between the Meadowbrook school district, the respective parties came to an agreement and implemented a consent decree in 2001. The agreement was to eliminate racial disparities in student achievement, gifted education, special education,
and discipline, as well as to do a better overall job of racially integrating the Meadowbrook schools. When organizing efforts began, the situation for Black students was bleak. At the time, only two percent of Black students were placed in gifted classes even though 20% of the student population was Black. The lawsuit filed claimed the fundamental problem was that the burden of desegregation was placed on Black students, who were bussed one-way out of their communities while their White peers were not being bussed north of Main Street. Among other improvements, the consent decree agreed to provide school facilities to fill an additional 220 classroom seats, a number that still has not been met.

A resolution reached by both sides ended the consent decree in 2009. Over the course of nearly a decade, the school district met some of its goals, and fell short on others. According to the agreement, the Meadowbrook school district must:

- Implement a policy regarding the opening and closing of any schools under which the district will consider the impact on Black students, and all other students, including the transportation burden on those students. The district also agreed to have a third-party analysis of those issues.

- Establish an "Education Equity Excellence" committee, to comprised district staff and a diverse group of community members. The district will serve as a multicultural committee to report on equity issues in a number of areas, and it will report to the superintendent. The district agreed that someone outside the district, likely from the local university’s college of education, will lead the committee for at least its first year.

- Adopt a policy stating that special education referrals, identification and programs shall be operated in an educationally sound and non-discriminatory manner, and that the district will monitor those things.

- Provide support for and monitor students who are returning to their home schools from placement in an alternative program.

- Pass a resolution reaffirming its commitment to adding elementary classrooms at William McKinley and Rolling Hills elementary schools. The district plans to rebuild Jefferson and expand Rolling Hills and establish magnet programs at both schools.
As the resolution of the consent decree passed, the superintendent at that time, an African-American male Michael Carter, pronounced it was “the happiest day of his career” but he will “not rest until the achievement gap no longer exists.” While the consent decree was in effect, educators at John F. Kennedy had strong reactions to not only the policy but also how the policy was implemented.

**The Mood of John F. Kennedy During the Consent Decree**

Over the course of the five months I spent at John F. Kennedy, I had 10 formal interviews (1 principal, 4 parents, 5 teachers) and countless informal conversations with students, staff, and community members. In 9 of the 10 formal interviews, and many informal conversations, although I did not ask any specific questions about the consent decree, it became a topic of conversation.

As the consent decree was implemented in 2001, so was a new central administration. A new superintendent, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and assistant superintendent for human resources was hired to communicate and execute the consent to decree, build relationships with the community, and ultimately cut the achievement gap between Black and White students. Michael Carter was hired as the superintendent, along with Donna Davis, an African-American woman, and Mary Burke a White woman. The three were hired, essentially, as a team in part from their experience working together for a number of years in various portions of the United States. Previous experiences included working in similar positions in comparable sized school districts in the Southern portion of the United States.

According to one teacher, the central administration was often “autocratic” and “uncompromising.” Some administrators, according to several teachers, did not seek out the
voices of teachers and community members. From the lack of teachers’ voice, a growing rift
grew between the teachers (and the teacher’s union) and the central administration. One teacher
responded, “to say we didn’t trust the central office is putting it very lightly, although animosity
toward anyone might be overstating it.” Another teacher in an informal conversation said, that
the way the administration handled the consent decree “bruised the relationships between
teachers and central office for years to come.” I followed up with the current principal, James,
about the consent decree. I asked him about the mood of the school district during that period
and portions of his response seem to be aligned with the concerns of the teachers. Although
James was hired just after the consent decree was lifted, James felt “quite qualified to give a
quality response.” According to James,

The culture of a district does not change in a few months, after all. First, the staff felt
intimidated and disrespected by the consent decree. There was a very clear narrative that
defined Central Office/Teacher (or even Building Leader) relationships that went
something like this, from the Central Office perspective: We are in bad shape in this
district due to racist, classist, lazy, and ineffective management of our schools. We are
trying as hard as we can to move in the right direction, but the teachers and some
administrators here just aren’t up to the challenge. Where we’ve had success, it’s been
due to our management strategies. Where’s there’s been failure, it was here before we
got on board, and so it is therefore the fault of others. From the Building Level
perspective (teachers and some admin: We recognized that our system needs to change,
but our strengths are not recognized, they are simply presumed to not exist. Rather than
being part of a process, School Improvement is something that happens to us, and we
resent it. We are micromanaged in many regards: the assessments we give, how we group
students, how we can manage student behavior, etc. As a result, we are just doing our
best to weather this storm. My take is that there is legitimacy to both narratives, of
course. I think the Consent Decree was understandably designed to weigh heavily on our
school system, and it did just that. I think more importantly, though, the leadership style
of the previous administration was very structural and didactic. Decisions about hiring,
initiatives, etc. were often made without input from teachers or building level personnel.
This fostered resentment. As a result, the previous administration really did not do a
whole lot to meaningfully change the culture of the district.

Knowing where the tension between the staff and administration begins and ends is difficult
because the two narratives are nearly diametrically opposed to each other. The top-down
approach by the administration was unpopular with teachers, but perhaps the administration was impatiently eager to deconstruct marginalizing practices. On the other hand, if the administration wants to embed notions of social justice and more equitable outcomes within the school, garnering buy-in from many stakeholders is a necessity. As both narratives played out over the years, distrust between the two parties grew. Another dominant fear amongst some staff members was being labeled a racist or doing something racist. Several teachers mentioned that other staff members would remark to other teachers and parents, “Well we know we have to let this kid into [this program], or we’re going to have some angry people.” The same teacher sharing this story mentioned that although there was disagreement with this staff member’s line of thinking, the professional development provided within the district was met with resistance. Providing a better understanding of issues of race and social class is one area that is currently being addressed in the school district.

Shifting the Climate of the School District

When the consent decree ended in 2009, shortly thereafter, the central administration was interested in finding new positions. Michael Carter and his two colleagues found work elsewhere, leaving a leadership vacuum within the School District in 2010. For one year, the school district hired an interim superintendent to provide ample time for a robust search for a superintendent. Several employees within the district were promoted to interim Assistant Superintendents. One of those interim Assistant Superintendents was promoted to Superintendent, Joanne Porter. The Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction hired was Patricia Maranucci. According to the teachers interviewed, each selection was very popular within the community and held in high regard. The way Meadowbrook is structured, the
high school principals in the district reports to Patricia Maranucci. Patricia was previously a high school principal at Meadowbrook Central and was known for leading “the social justice school.” For example, Maranucci worked closely with parents, teachers, and students to create a social justice committee to critically examine unjust policies and procedures within the school. From the perspective of one teacher, who worked at Central and now works for West, the purpose of Maranucci’ committee, was to “get people really talking about important issues of social justice and to make the school a more inclusive place for all students.”

Another change to the John F. Kennedy community was the hiring of the principal, James. I asked James about how navigating change in this building might be different, given the history of the Consent decree, then other buildings. James responded:

Navigating change is different in this place [compared] to where I previously worked. There is more skepticism from everyone that what I (or others) may think is a “good idea” will actually work. This is, in many ways, a good thing. We are more focused on results here in the early implementation stages than we were [in my previous school.] But on a more dialogic level, the challenge here is the same as anywhere else, I’d presume. In order to make meaningful change, a critical mass of teachers, admins, parents, community members, etc., need to part of a dynamic conversation about what needs to happen and how to make it happen. This is harder [here] because of the cynicism and skepticism that are residual from the Consent Decree and the previous administration, but it’s not impossible. I think when I was first hired, people here were just thrilled that someone new was in charge of the school, but the undergirding belief that I would not last long persisted. This belief manifested in different ways, but most noticeably in how hesitant folks were to work for new initiatives (social justice committee, our instructional committee, 9th and 10th grade teams, are all examples.) As a result, we had to show some success with initiatives that we could control as administrators. Having success with developing a tiered system to better manage student behavior, support students where needed, communicate expectations according to shared values, etc. has been hugely helpful for our future goals. With a few willing teachers, we’ve been able to see very clear signs of success here in the past 2 years. Now in my 3rd year here, this has changed somewhat. I believe that since I’ve been here longer and have built up the leadership core in the school through more teacher committees, we have more people willing to move the school in key places. This is evidenced in how a socially just message can be shared and accepted by the faculty—and through what we are doing on our 4th Mondays.
Furthermore, teachers are finding that the current administration is much more communicative, transparent, and collaborative than the previous administration. From interview data, several teachers have shared how they feel more included more in district wide initiatives, like strategic planning and school district improvement, and the vision of the school district is more clearly communicated. There are open forums where community members, teachers, students and parents are invited to discuss the direction of the school district. James’ thoughts are aligned with the teachers. He shared with me that, “I don’t know if I’d be able to [lead for social justice] if I didn’t have [the central administration] to back me up on some of these issues.” The support between the principals in the district and the central administration, according to James, is relatively strong. From the parents I have interviewed, many of the figures from central administration, especially Assistant Superintendent Maranucci, is “often in the community holding public meetings and forums, I really like to see that, we haven’t had that in the past.” A large part of Maranucci’s vision centers on the idea of building a district wide vision for social justice.

**Meadowbrook School District Social Justice Committee**

At the beginning of the 2012 school year, Maranucci worked with multiple stakeholders, in effort to form a district-wide social justice committee. According to the meeting notes found on the school district’s website, the purpose of the committee is twofold: (a) Generate a common definition of social justice and (b) to create a framework that includes specific goals for the District related to social justice. The committee of parents, students, staff and administrators meet on a monthly basis to discuss issues of inequity to make the school district more inclusive.
The following notes from a social justice committee meeting describe some of the values and activities during one session:

**Creation of committee norms**—Acknowledging that truly holding “courageous conversations” about discrimination, deficit model thinking, school district practices, community/societal practices, social norms, privilege, and systems of power—can be uncomfortable and in some cases frightening, the first task of the committee was to create a set of norms. Each table was asked to generate and share with the larger group examples of norms—the rules by which we agree to communicate with each other. The norms were collected and were used to create a set of norms for the committee for future meetings. These norms will be finalized at the next meeting when members have the opportunity to add suggestions to ensure all voices have been heard. An example of a norm could be: We will respect the views of others by actively listening (using eye contact, letting people finish their statements) when others are talking and/or presenting, and will refrain from monopolizing the conversation so others can share their views.

**Ideology circle discussion**—The group was led through an ideology circle activity that demonstrated how certain individuals in society have been able to establish societal norms/beliefs/standards (inner part of the circle) and how this system inherently excludes those on the outside of the circle from certain access or privileges. For example, in our society the norm privileges those who are “able” over those who are disabled. If we had a system where the standard served all, then such things as water fountains lower to the ground and ramps on all buildings would be common. Another example is the language spoken. In our area, English is the language utilized the most and therefore our signs are predominantly in English. The circle was used to start conversations at each table about ways in which schools—places where those who have been privileged have established the norms just like in society—exclude children or families due to practices established by the dominant ideology. Multiple examples were generated and shared with the group. An example is the practice of giving extra credit in an English class for attending the school play. This practice privileges families who have the means and time to send their student to the play and excludes families who don’t. Another example is access to after school programs and activities. Some families have the means to pick up their children if they stay after school while others can’t so the children can’t stay because they need to ride the bus home after school.

At the end of the activity the group was reminded of the two goals—to define social justice and to create a framework for the District that includes certain goals related to social justice. We talked a bit about how our framework might include specific questions or tasks that must be completed when decisions are made in the district that would mitigate some of the exclusionary practices inherent in the system.

**Future plans and feedback forms**—Feedback forms were given to each person and the responses will be utilized to plan for future meetings. The next meeting will include discussions on what makes this type of work so difficult, the difference between adaptive
and technical challenges and change, and possibly practice scenarios that expand upon the ideology circle discussion.

The ideology circle wheel activity described in the discussion section is an activity designed by Patricia Maranucci. From my conversations with James, Patricia has led interactive activities with administrators to help them better understand issues of privilege and norms. Perhaps Maranucci’s thinking is to encourage principals to lead a similar activity with staff members. Nonetheless, her vision of social justice provides an interesting and complex context in which this case study is situated within and provides critical background information to help better understand how John F. Kennedy High School connects to the vision and mission of the district.

**John F. Kennedy High School**

*Demographics.* John F. Kennedy High School is a medium-large high school housing nearly 1,500 students. The administrative team consists of one principal, one associate principal, and four assistant principals. There are 185 staff members at John F. Kennedy (this includes classroom teachers, aides, administration, secretaries, custodians, cafeteria workers, etc.). Since schools are reflections of the community, it is no surprise that John F. Kennedy’s demographics reflected the demographic shifts the community experienced. In the year 2000, the demographics of John F. Kennedy were: 75% White, 20% Black, 1% Hispanic, 4.5% Asian, 0% Native American, and an unknown number of Multi-Racial students. In 2010, the percentage of students who were White dropped to 48.4%, the number of Black students grew to 34%, Hispanics students grew substantially to 6%, Asian students also grew substantially to 8%, no students (again) identified as Native American, and 3.3% of students identified as Multi-Racial. Students of color became the majority of the population while comprising only 25% of the population nearly a decade ago.
Although the student demographics have rapidly changed, the teacher demographics have remained relatively static. In 2000, the teacher demographics of John F. Kennedy were: 87% White, 10% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian. On the other hand, in 2012, the racial/ethnic identities of teachers were: 84% White, 10% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 3% Asian. The female to male ratio has also remained relatively unchanged over the past 10 years; females outnumber males nearly 3 to 1. Teacher demographics in Meadowbrook may not have reflected the rapidly changing student population; however, they are reflective of the teacher demographics of the state. In fact, the proportion of teachers who identify as White, Black, Hispanic, Asian and Multi-racial are nearly identical to the state in both years 2000 and 2012 (citation). In light of these data, there is a growing gulf between the demographics of classroom teachers and the students they are teaching, and a possibility of a gulf of misunderstanding between personal, cultural and racialized experiences lived experiences (Irizarry, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). I will explore the gulf of misunderstanding further in the next chapter as students express their concerns to the staff members.

Conclusion: Understanding the Context Meadowbrook

From the data listed above, the demographics changed at very rapid rate. A point that I have raised several times in this study but I think needs to be underscored, because the process of change, in terms of ideological values, norms, procedures, and may not have changed as quickly as the demographics over the past decade. The two community incidents, the death of a young Black teen and polar bear hunting, may be symptoms of the lack of understanding of how to negotiate that change. The Consent Decree and the impact of the policy further complicate the context of the Meadowbrook community. The policy’s top-down nature and resistance from
teachers (and to some extent administrators) as well as the top-down leadership style of the administration caused a deep-seated sense of doubt, fear, and skepticism between the teachers and administration. That same sense is very much present today, which further challenges the principal to open up and trust the process of dialogue with staff members. After the central administration left, and the new central administration arrived, a new grassroots oriented administration began to lead for a new vision of education. Over the past few years, there has been a cautious optimism amongst teachers. Trust is being rebuilt because organizations, like the social action committee, are embedded in the culture of the school. Another aspect of dialogues that better frames the understanding of the conversation are personal identities. This next section describes each interviewee’s identity. I have also added my own identity because I would be remiss without sharing my personal experiences shaping this study.
Chapter 5
Identity

To better understand the context of this case study, I feel it is necessary to include profiles of each person to understand the rich interconnections between the students, staff members, parents, and administration. Analyzing the identity profiles is complex. Connections are difficult to distinguish and are often nested; persons are often connected to the school in a myriad of ways and often do not easily fall into a clear category. One aim of this chapter is to illuminate the complex and fluid nature of personal identities. Another aim is to examine the ways in which persons acknowledge their identity and how that relates to the school. Furthermore, these aims are rooted in the assumption that identity influences dialogues around issues of race and social class. Identity matters to dialogue. Without knowing the profiles of each character in this case study, the dialogues of race and social class illustrated in later chapters are not as meaningful because the potential barriers and pressures are not considered. The following identities are constructed from data collected from: formal interviews, informal conversations, observations, and artifact collection.

From the selection of James as the principal, I put the locus of control into James’s hands and encouraged him to select teachers and parents to share their lived experiences. James wanted to (a) select a diverse pool of teachers and parents who reflect the demographics of Meadowbrook and (b) select participants with widely varying ideologies. Some of the basic identifying characteristics of the participants appear in Table 4 (for a point of clarification, all participant names, and other identifying information have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants). For the purposes of this table, I have defined experience in the community into one of three categories, novice (1-5 years), moderate (5-10 years), or veteran (10+ years).
Table 4

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Experience in community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Fawkes</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz Kelly</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Schultz</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Smith</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Lewis</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>African-Am.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debbie Bruce</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Jackson</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>African-Am.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Novice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Williams</td>
<td>Parent/Teacher</td>
<td>African-Am.</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Sanderson</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natasha Grieg</td>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Veteran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason Swanson</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the data available in Table 4, the participants presented fairly diverse backgrounds. Some of the participants have been lifelong members of the community of Meadowbrook, while others have been residing for only a few years. Several participants teaching at John F. Kennedy also attended the local research university in Meadowbrook. One participant serves the dual role of being a parent and a teacher (and as a lifelong resident). This pool of candidates has a wide array of backgrounds: single working mother to a small business owner to a therapist. Several participants have moved within the last few years from major metropolitan areas. Several participants grew up in homogenous, White middle-class communities. As I will articulate more fully throughout the next few chapters these factors, most
likely, played a role in the ways the participants contextualized their experiences and then communicated them with me as they shared their lived experiences and narratives with me.

**James Fawkes—Principal, John F. Kennedy High School**

James is a married, White male with two children. He resides in Meadowbrook where his two sons attend elementary school in the Meadowbrook school district. James has been married to his wife, an employee of the Meadowbrook school district, for over a decade. He considers himself a “family man” and with the little free time available, enjoys running, reading, and spending time with his family. During the fall of 2012, James was recognized by a local business as a “40 under 40” for his commitment to serving the community. During my interview with four parents, each of them described him in the following ways as “very accessible,” “a strong communicator,” “great with the kids,” and “warm and kind.” Several parents stated that he is “very popular within the African-American community,” “overall, he’s just an outstanding principal, we are very lucky to have him” and communicates “what the district realistically can and cannot do for our family.” Teachers describe him as “thoughtful and reflective,” “really committed to students,” and “great at providing [teachers] an open door to voice concerns.”

Although James has lived and served within Meadowbrook for nearly 15 years, he is originally from a suburb of a major metropolitan city, Parkview.

Parkview is located approximately 35 miles away from a major city in the United States. When James grew up in Parkview, the population was homogenous and middle class. Few persons of color or low-income resided in the community at that time, incidentally, Parkview has undergone a similar transformation has Meadowbrook. When James was in high school, he was involved in a numerous school activities. In his words, he was “a good student, who loved going
to school, and was pretty good at school.” He participated in a program through his high school where he got involved tutoring and mentoring younger students. It was through this program he discovered his passion for teaching.

He attended a major research university in the Midwest and quickly landed a job within the Meadowbrook school district. James taught English/Language Arts for 9 years before becoming the assistant principal under principal Patricia Maranucci. After 4 years as an assistant principal, James ascended to the principalship. James describes himself as an educator who is leading for social justice, and advocates for traditionally marginalized students. When I asked James at what point in his life he really started to think about issues of social justice, or leading for social justice, he said it was

I probably started to really think about issues of social justice within the last five years. It was when I took a course with [a professor at the major research university] I really started to connect the systemic problems I was seeing within our community and our schools to the lived experiences to students. Five years ago, I might have said that if students aren’t achieving where we need them to be, we need to focus more on student-centered instruction. Now I see that we also need to be critical of the broader policies we have in school that can impact students.

At the time of this study, James is finishing his third year as principal at John F. Kennedy High School.

**Connecting James to the social justice literature.** The characteristics of the social action committee and James resemble much of what has been written about in the fields of leadership for social justice, critical pedagogy, and distributed leadership for social justice.

Drawing from my theoretical framework (Theoharis, 20007), I identified three key themes from the leadership for social literature base in my literature review: the promotion of student learning, restructuring the school to create more equitable outcomes, and finally, building a culture for an empowered, democratic community. James describes himself as both “an
instructional leader and a community builder.” Community building, in his words, is connected to creating “safe and humanizing spaces” for students to learn. I asked him which position he identifies more with and he responded, “You can’t separate the two, you can’t have one without the other.” Using his ontological stance as a framework to understand the rest of this section, I will integrate issues of social justice into how James promotes student learning. One academic adjustments James has pushed for over the last few years is the transition to standards based grading. Standards based grading abolishes the traditional A-F scale and employs a more comprehensive approach to examining what a student can demonstrate. “It’s a much more humane and socially just way of looking at a student,” James explains, “There is a de-emphasis on turning in homework for a grade, which is a good thing, and multiple opportunities to retake tests. I love it because students can retake tests, because we want students to really learn the material.” Although students, teachers, and parents have met the transition to standards based grading with resistance, some students who have come to understand the benefits of standards based grading have become the greatest advocates. James understands this and has provided spaces for students to champion the movement to other students, teachers, and parents. Another component of James’ instructional leadership is constantly using data to help educators inform their practice.

When James was hired 4 years ago, he communicated to the central administration and school board that he would not place a focus on state standardized tests and, essentially, rejects No Child Left Behind. Ideologically, James rejects what some scholars have called “The Reform Movement,” or the political position of Michelle Rhee, Arnie Duncan and others who advocate market-based solutions to education. However, on a more realistic level, the odds that West would have 90%+ of students making Annual Yearly Progress during his tenure as principal
were virtually zero. James de-emphasis of standardized test scores may be connected to West’s slow decline in test scores over the past few years. In light of the falling test scores, James’ personal position proceeds from the assumption that students who do not feel apart of the school culture, or have teachers who really care about them (or their friends), will not actively engage in learning. As a result, there has been a greater emphasis on several other components to the school including restricting the school to create more equitable outcomes.

Scholars (Theoharis, 2007; Kose, 2005; Shields, 2010) have written at length about the importance of principals reorienting schools to create more equitable outcomes. James understood the importance of the social action committee’s grassroots mission and empowered the committee to not only exist in the school culture, but to nurture it and support it as necessary. For example, James provided the chairs of the social action committee a seat at the building leadership committee, generally reserved for department heads and assistant principals (many of whom have certifications as administrators). It was important for James to have the students’ needs streamlined and have the chairs interface with the department chairs and assistant principals directly to dismantle equities and propose ways to disseminate the information to the 4th Monday meetings. The 4th Monday meetings were another example the social action committee and James collaborated to restructure the school. By creating a mandatory after school where each staff member in the school actively dialogue, reflect, and act (praxis) to meet the needs of the students, James is implicitly demonstrating the democratic values of Meadowbrook and actively working to promote them with staff members. This final point dovetails with building the capacity to ensure a more empowered, democratic community, which is the final characteristic of a principal leading for social justice.
Teacher’s Identities and their Perceptions of the Principal’s Leadership

Liz Kelley—9th grade English teacher, John F. Kennedy High School. Liz is a single White woman and is a resident of Meadowbrook. She is currently pursuing doctoral work at the research university in Meadowbrook. This is her first year of teaching at John F. Kennedy High School. Her current appointment is 9th grade English. Liz currently serves as one of the chairs of the John F. Kennedy High School social action committee, which is not to be confused with Patricia Maranucci’s district wide social action committee. The social action committee is a grassroots organization driven by students to raise concerns about issues of equity and access. Prior to her appointment at John F. Kennedy, she taught at Meadowbrook Central for 3 years and served as the chair of the social justice committee at Central. James proudly pronounces, “I have absolutely no shame in saying that I stole her from Central. She is an absolutely phenomenal teacher; she does incredible things with the students and she’s wicked smart.”

Matthew Schultz—9th and 11th English teacher, John F. Kennedy High School. Matthew is a single White male who resides in Meadowbrook. He is currently in his 9th year of teaching in the profession (all of his experience has been at Meadowbrook). During his tenure at Meadowbrook, he has been an active member of the teacher’s union. This school year, Matthew is teaching several sections of 9th grade English as well as an 11th grade honors English course. Matthew was one of the founders of the John F. Kennedy social action committee. One of the central components of the social action committee was the inclusion of student voice. Meetings were student driven and issues were legitimate concerns raised by students. It was a central priority for Matthew for the social action committee to be a grass roots organization.

Christopher Smith—9th grade English teacher, John F. Kennedy High School. Christopher is a single White male who resides in Meadowbrook. Christopher is a lifelong
resident of Meadowbrook and attended the local research university. He is in his third year of teaching all of which have been at John F. Kennedy. In his first year of teaching, he taught academic 11th grade English, however he has taught 9th graders in the past 2 years. In his fleeting moments of spare time, Christopher enjoys composing poetry. His writings have been published in several well-known journals. Furthermore, Christopher organizes two organizations within the community. The first of which, Christopher is an editor of a local independent online magazine; the second is a group of local writers who have been successful publishing in the literary world. Since Christopher’s arrival at Meadowbrook, he has been an active leader in the social action committee.

**Ed Lewis—Special education teacher, John F. Kennedy High School.** Ed is a married African-American male who has taught at Kennedy for the past eight years. Prior to Kennedy, he has lived in worked in a large metropolitan area, serving as a special education teacher briefly as a principal. Ed has lived in Meadowbrook for the past 3 years and has already established many connections within the community. He is active in his church and sends his son and daughter to private Christian schools.

**Debbie Bruce—School psychologist, John F. Kennedy High School.** Debbie is a married White female; she is a veteran member of Kennedy with over 25 years of experience. Prior to Kennedy, she has served in a similar positions in southern and northern California. Debbie grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is a self-proclaimed progressive activist and is eager to advocate for traditionally marginalized persons. She has two adult aged daughters, one is finishing law school, the other is finishing medical school.
Themes from the Interviews with Teachers

Based on the interviews I had with the chairs of the social action committee several themes became clear: the importance of the social action committee, the space James provides for the social action committee, and the support James provides for the mission and vision of the committee. What is being described in this section is what Brooks (2012) calls distributed social justice leadership. When I asked James about how he is leading for social justice in this school he immediately points out the innovative and progressive conversations emanating out of the social action committee. When I ask the social action committee chairs about the innovative and progressive conversations the chairs speak very highly of the students. This distributed leadership is distributed at the core, and almost a sort of distributed dialogue where students are driving conversations. But before I delve deeper into each of these three themes and how they connect to my theoretical, I will provide background on the identities of the participants, in this case, the parents.

Parents’ Identities and Impressions of James’ Leadership

When I approached James about interviewing parents, he was very eager to provide a broad spectrum of parents, in terms of race, social class and personal ideologies. He succeeded. The four parents I interviewed provided starkly different responses to their impressions of James’ leadership style, and how their children perceive and feel about school. Rather than combine the voices of the parents, as I did with the teachers, I felt it is more appropriate to provide small portraiture of the parents’ perspectives to demonstrate the diversity of these perspectives. A few exceptions exist, the first of which is one that I noted in the description of James, is a highly popular principal. He is a “great communicator,” “great with the kids,” “very
approachable,” “always has a smile on his face,” is “realistic with my concerns” and “really cares about kids.” Each of these points were raised in the four interviews. Another point that was essentially unanimous was the lack of knowledge of the social action committee. Three out of the four parents had never heard of it while one vaguely recalls the group being mentioned in a listserv email. Despite the radically different directions of the conversations, the potpourri of perspectives paints a more complex picture of the parents’ impressions of the leadership style of James.

Pamela Jackson, Parent—John F. Kennedy High School. Pamela is a single African-American parent of two teenage girls. One of her daughters is a freshman attending a nearby state college; the other is a sophomore at John F. Kennedy. As a parent, Pamela is “very happy with her daughters’ experiences” at Meadowbrook. Although I asked questions pertaining to her sophomore-aged daughter’s current experiences many comparisons were made to her older sister’s experiences. This was unintended but may be useful in understanding how Meadowbrook has changed from James’s arrival. Pamela and her family are originally from a major metropolitan city. For unspecified reasons, and as her older daughter was beginning high school, she relocated Meadowbrook. Pamela describes, “My daughters would have went to [A large private Catholic high school] in the city. As I reflect, I think I did the right thing, but it’s tough to know for certain. I think going to public schools, in the end, will give my daughters a broader experience in life.” I followed up on what she meant by broader experience and she stated, “Overall, just less sheltered. They will see more things in the public schools but that will make them stronger because they will have to deal with those things in real life.” Pamela follows up this comment by alluding to students “coming from all walks of life” and there are some students she does not want “her daughter hanging around.”
Overall, Pamela perceives Meadowbrook as a “good school” with a lot of good people doing good work. She feels one of the greatest strengths of the school district is the ability of the teachers to reach out to students and form strong relationships with them. Furthermore, she commends the ability of the teachers to build robust programs and to encourage students to actively participate. Her older daughter was involved in many academic extra-curricular activities while her younger daughter is “more athletic and more into sports, like track and cheerleading.”

Another great asset to John F. Kennedy, according to Pamela, is the James. Pamela shares,

I don’t have any sons in basketball or football, but I still show up at all the games. And whenever I’m there I see James. He always has a smile on his face, he’s always talking with parents and community members and he seems to have a great relationship with everyone. I think he is really great with the kids and relates to them well.

I specifically ask if James’s relationship with the African-American community is strong and she replies,

I really can’t speak to that. I am very busy at the moment, and I wish I were more involved with things within the community. I can, however, talk about what I see at school. Whether the folks are African-American, White, Asian . . . James seems to have a very strong relationships with people from all walks of life.

When I asked Pamela about her thoughts on the school’s social action committee, she was unfamiliar with the group. After I explained the central tenants of the program, what the committee hopes to accomplish, and the inclusion of student voice, she said “the social action committee sounds like a really great thing for the school. I’ll have to ask my daughter about that.” There are a few areas in which Pamela would like to see the educators at Meadowbrook improve. Overall, she feels that the staff, particularly James, is very well organized and structured and does “a good job of keeping the kids under control.” However, she feels that the
courses themselves need “more traditional forms of education.” The courses need more structure: fewer conversations and more activities, more detailed rubrics for grading and less qualitative components for interpreting students’ assignments.

Natasha Grieg—Parent, John F. Kennedy High School. Natasha is a White woman in a long-term relationship with her partner and is the parent of a teenage daughter, a senior, attending John F. Kennedy. She is an “out” lesbian and lives in Meadowbrook. My study centers on issues of race and social class; however, given the identity of this participant, it may be somewhat helpful to briefly touch on issues sexuality and inclusion.

In general, Natasha feels that her daughter’s impression of John F. Kennedy is positive. Her daughter is very active in many of the fine arts programs such as band, choir, and drama. Natasha appreciates the flexibility of the teachers at Meadowbrook to work out any potential scheduling conflicts by not putting students in the awkward position of choosing which activity to attend. She has had many conversations with teachers and staff members and appreciates their “behind-the-scenes” conversations to set up many students for success. Another component of John F. Kennedy she feels is a strong asset is the principal, James. In her words, James is very approachable, very open to feedback and suggestions, and never defensive. He is sincere about wanting to address concerns parents may have, but at the same time, he also is open about sharing the limitations of what a school can and cannot do. His energy is positive and he is very optimistic; he uses that approach when working with students. For example, when students make a poor choice, his approach is not punitive, it’s clear he can really relate well to kids. I also like the way he speaks at commencement, he’s very well spoken—he’s clear and concise. And I also think he’s a compassionate person, you can tell really cares about students and what he does.

I asked Natasha to follow up more on this last point and shared that James, and many other members of the Meadowbrook school district, have made efforts to welcome her non-traditional family into the Meadowbrook school district. According to Natasha, “he makes us feel really comfortable, and the school as a whole, has done a nice job with out diverse family—we’ve
really enjoyed it.” When asked about her thoughts and feelings about the school’s social action committee, her response was, “I’ve heard of it. There is mention in it in the communication that comes out in the parent listserv, but I don’t know anything else about it.”

Natasha has several recommendations for John F. Kennedy. She describes many of the positive qualities of the teachers she has worked with, but veers into critique, “there are some teachers who are not that strong and should not be teaching, I think the administrators know this.” Connected to this issue, Natasha feels that the curriculum should be strengthened. I asked which parts of the curriculum should be strengthened and she responds, “There is a lot of grade inflation, students get good grades too easily and there is no shortage of extra opportunities and extra credit for students.”

**Rick Sanderson– Parent, John F. Kennedy High School.** Rick is a married White male and parent to triplet teenagers. His triplets, two girls and one boy, are juniors at Meadowbrook. Rick is a small business owner and is well known throughout the community. A self-described “helicopter parent,” he is very actively involved in his children’s academics and volunteers regularly at the school. Rick feels that, overall, his children are receiving “a high-quality education” at John F. Kennedy. “There are quite a few really good teachers” that know how to “pull the best out of” his children and other students, Rick remarked. For example, he talks about his daughter’s involvement in the fine arts:

The choir director is like Mr. Holland [a reference to the band director from movie *Mr. Holland’s Opus*]. I don’t know how she does it, but she and the drama director have such a knack for putting the right students in the right spots and really building off their strengths. I really love going to the concerts and seeing what these kids can really do.

The atmosphere in the fine arts programs, he explains, “is absolutely fabulous and inclusive. You see kids with Down’s syndrome, athletes, students of all colors, it’s really something remarkable.” Rick further describes that his children really feel like “they are apart of
something” and belong in the school. I ask him if he thinks there are some students who do not feel this way and why and responded,

Definitely. There are definitely students who feel that way. . . . I think it is mainly caused by the erosion of the family and family values. If students don’t have a strong core family and role models it’s hard for students. If they don’t have a strong family they might get into things they shouldn’t be.

Rick feels that James is a very positive aspect of the Meadowbrook community. He is “very approachable, very visible, he’s very cool (and that matters to kids), and has a great demeanor with the kids.” Rick continues, “He has a great understanding of people, from their sociological and economic backgrounds, we have a many families here that fall into many categories. He’s savvy and perceptive, yeah . . . he’s a good one.” I asked Rick if he was familiar with the social action committee. He was unfamiliar. I began to describe the goals and mission of the social action committee and he responded, “That sounds like a really nice thing, anytime you can get more students’ voices involved that’s a great. I’m all for it.” During the interview, I asked Rick about some areas for improvement and he quickly turned the question back on me, “Why don’t you go first. You’re a doctoral student. You’ve have worked in education for a while, what do you think?” A little surprised the question was turned on me, but nevertheless, I was happy to share and dialogue:

I think many educators strive to build close relationships with students. It sounds so simple but a student that loves a teacher will do anything for that teacher. And I often think teachers try to build relationships with students that are easy to build relationships with. Sometimes they really struggle to build relationships with the students who really need a mentor. Many times these students are students of color and low-income students. I don’t blame the teachers because I think there are many teachers who don’t know how to reach students who have very different backgrounds from themselves.

Rick nodded, furrowed his brow, and I assume he felt somewhat confused or perplexed. Within a few seconds, Rick shared his perspective:
I can’t think of a harder job than teaching, there are so many challenges and behind the scenes stuff that most people don’t know about. I do because I’m always up at the school. Teachers work very hard in a difficult situation that is very difficult to change. And I think that is due largely to the breakdown of the situation at the home. If you are blessed with good guidance, even then, you struggle with self-esteem issues, their bodies are changing, there’s teasing . . . but you have to have a good family to help you through this. Look, every bureaucratic structure has bloat and wasted money, that’s just how it is. When you get right down to it, if you have to place the blame somewhere, I don’t blame the teachers; I blame what’s happening in the home. Remember the teacher strike in [major metropolitan city]? They had to leave 140 schools open to feed the kids? Can you believe that? What the heck is going on at home if you can’t even feed the kids? (shakes his head in disbelief) I can’t even imagine . . . It’s a social breakdown of the family unit. Just a few weeks ago we had a student from the school system who received a 36 on his ACT and a 2400 on his SAT. We hear all these horrible things about the school in the news and how cop cars are there. But schools don’t do a very good job of publicizing what’s working. When I talked to him and he seemed like a really bright nice guy. Now, Is something like that the public schools or the family? Is it one or the other? It’s a combination of both.

To end the conversation, Rick reaffirmed his strong commitment to his children and to education,

The importance of education cannot be overstated. Nobody talks about how the influence of a teacher can last a lifetime. Nobody talks about how a teacher said something that one time and it forever changed the trajectory of a student. The ripples in the pond last a lifetime.”


Jennifer is lifelong resident of Meadowbrook. She is an African-American woman and has a duel role at John F. Kennedy. She is employed as a part-time nurse and also has a daughter (senior) attending John F. Kennedy. Jennifer has been the school nurse for 1 year; however, she has previously worked in the district for “several years.” Her daughter attended an elementary school in the Meadowbrook school district and a local Christian school for middle school. After several long discussions with her daughter, they both agreed to attend John F. Kennedy High School because it is a much more diverse school than the local Christian high school. In hindsight, she feels that she “definitely made the right decision to come here [to John F. Kennedy].” From a
parents perspective, overall Jennifer feels that her daughter’s experience at Meadowbrook “has been mixed.”

She feels that it has been a positive experience for her daughter to grow in a diverse environment. Jennifer feels that many of the experiences she has encountered here at Kennedy will prepare her for college. Some of the challenges however, of Jennifer’s daughter coming to school at Meadowbrook is a deep sense of not quite fitting in. Jennifer explains,

I have raised my daughter with very high standards. She is morally intact. She has respect for herself and for others. She is not a child that will be disrespectful to any adult, whether it be a teacher or hall monitor, whomever. As a result, she has had to deal with a lot of judgment from her peers. I will say this . . . African-American children, because that is what I have the most experience working with, and I am African-American, they have to deal with a lot when they show up. They want to be intelligent beings and do their best, but when they do – they are judged. But when [African-American students] do, not the fault of any administrators or teachers here, [African-American students] are not seen, they are invisible.

Jennifer explains that she understands that administrators are often like firefighters constantly putting out small fires throughout the day and sometimes staff members fall into that roll because “so much time is invested in nurturing and redirecting students who are in need, both academically and socially.” “For my daughter,” Jennifer continues, “that is really tough to find her place here.” According to Jennifer, high-achieving African-American students are caught in the middle, not accepted by many of their African-American peers and not quite accepted by their high-achieving non-African-American counterparts. She hesitates, “Well, probably accepted slightly more by her Caucasian peers.” Jennifer explains that she and her daughter continue have conversations that John F. Kennedy is a “stepping stone.” Her daughter’s experiences will serve as preparation for college where many other like-minded high-achieving African-American students will be present.
I ask Jennifer if she is familiar with the social action committee. She explains that she has “heard a little bit about it” but was unfamiliar with any of the specifics. I explain the mission and the vision of the social action committee and she seemed to acknowledge my explanation and did not respond to my comments and began speaking about the work of the James.

Jennifer explains that when her daughter was a freshman there was a different principal and since James has arrived, there “has been a number of really great changes that have taken place.” For instance, James is “very receptive to parent input and giving the parent’s a voice in school decisions.” Another improvement Jennifer has seen since James’s tenure is a more “open door policy” with students and parents. Students do not seem to be afraid to approach James about issues and concerns about the school because they believe James wants the school to get better. A third example Jennifer mentions is James’s work at building relationships with school organizations, particularly the African-American Club. “Maybe years ago, the African-American club was some club that they just couldn’t get rid of, but now, James not only openly embraces it, but provides students a seat at the table to hear their voice.” Jennifer underscores how much she admires James for building this bridge to the African-American club and to the African-American community as a whole. She continues, “He is very popular within the African-American community. There are some that disagree, but I think those folks haven’t invested enough of themselves into the school to see what he’s really doing.”

**Jason Swanson—Doctoral Student, Self-Reflection**

This study is not an auto-ethnography but a case study. As I described in the methodology section, I will be using dialogue in narrative inquiry as a method to engage in conversations with the persons I have interviewed to better understand their perspectives.
Because I am inserting myself into the methodology I feel it is necessary to insert myself into the identity section.

I find this study to be personally compelling as many aspects of my history resonate with the topic: as a former K-12 public schools student, as a former band director/general music classroom teacher who taught grades K-12, as a former administrative intern shadowing principals, and as a graduate student.

As a public school student, I found that I was unchallenged by the coursework, but felt the curriculum prepared me for the rigors of postsecondary education. Overall, I should be satisfied with my K-12 education. Yet while I attended school in a very small homogenous and rural school district, there was an underlying sense that something was terribly out of place and I was the problem, as I articulated within the first few pages of this dissertation.

As I progressed through my public school experience, and academically excelled, there were many times where I knew discriminatory policies were in place and it deeply troubled me. I did not have the vocabulary to express my (daily) frustration with how the system perpetuates inequity. I share this personal narrative for the reader to not only to get a sense of myself and my research motivations, but because the rhetoric of social justice language is often centered on supporting those who have been marginalized, without an awareness of how injustice negatively affects us all, regardless of whether aspects of our identity are agents or targets of oppression (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). In this instance, my 3rd grade teacher did not have either the knowledge or the vocabulary to have a discussion with me to talk about differences.

During my 4 years of public school teaching experience, I have taught: high school, middle school and elementary school in rural, suburban and urban areas. In the No Child Left Behind era, school districts began to reallocate resources to bolster test scores and as a result, the
fine arts were often a popular target. In light of these circumstances I gained a powerful insight to the vastly different types of school environments. As I noted earlier, United States is, by most measures, one of the most inequitable western countries, and Illinois is one of the most inequitable states (ranked 49th; Thompson, Wood, & Crampton, 2008). I have taught in a school that could not afford to replace broken windows and in another district where the administration purchased a $25,000 talking trash cans which thanked students for recycling (this is not hyperbole; as an aside, the students broke the trashcan about 2 weeks after it was installed). I have bought dinner countless times for my students (I knew they would not eat otherwise) and have watched a young 16 year old who was absolutely beside herself because she “only” received a Jeep Grand Cherokee for her birthday. I have seen disengaged and angry teachers pulling out the teacher’s contract (in hand) furiously yelling at the administration that they have the right to leave at 3:00 p.m. because it is in the contract and have also seen teachers waking up at 5 a.m. on Saturdays, practicing with their programs all day and coming home at 2 a.m. I have seen teachers tell students “you are destined to live here your whole life; don’t try to change anything, you know it’s true” (suggesting the problems of society are too large for any one person to overcome) and have seen teachers radically shift students’ perspectives on life. As a young person and inexperienced teacher, I did not know what to make of these stark differences. It was deeply unsettling; it was as if I was traveling not only to a different country but another world. I quickly learned that despite an excellent teaching preparation program, teaching was incredibly chaotic and very difficult. Trying to articulate this sense of what I was experiencing, I fortuitously stumbled across Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970). And as I began to read his book, I was completely overcome with joy. I knew I had finally found someone who really knew what I could not articulate. This book profoundly resonated with my personal experience
and shifted the trajectory of my professional/academic career. After 4 years of teaching, and reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I found my professional knowledge and skills wanting.

As a graduate student, there are requirements to fulfill year-long administrative internships. These internships are at both the principal and superintendent. Working closely with local principals provided me with a broader perspective, practical experiences to implement theory to affect social inequities, and to provide greater outcomes for student learning. As I shadowed my mentors and experimented with the role of an educational leader, I became aware of the challenges principals face as they reconstitute policies and procedures to facilitate equity, and in turn, the challenge and courage of these conversations. Reconciling federal and state mandates with local district policies is challenging enough, but when local businesses and community organizations begin to influence community members to take on a different agenda, the sausage making process of forming or reshaping policy can become quite heated and uncomfortable for everyone involved in the process. An equally uncomfortable conversation occurs when issues of race and social class come to light as teachers and parents are unequipped with the knowledge or language to talk about differences. Subsequently, I gradually began to delve into what principals engage in dialogue and tying in issues of social justice. Building from my personal narratives with these research interests, I am hopeful that principals can create positive learning opportunities for all students to improve their efforts to meet all students’ needs. Beyond the incredibly narrow focus of performing well on a standardized test, I am concerned that the general narrative of educational reform from both Washington and at the state level will not equip students with the imperative tools to rethink and reshape an increasingly complex and globalized future.
Conclusion: Linking Identity to Dialogue and Leadership for Social Justice

There were two primary purposes of using identity in this chapter. The first of which is to further explore the complexly woven tapestry of the community. Persons are interacting with each other in countless ways and shaping their conversations and actions from their ideologies and personal experiences. Understanding the identities of each participant provides a clearer picture of how the context functions at a micro-level (school level), while the previous chapter was illustrative of a broader macro-perspective (community). Ultimately, the identities are complex because persons participate in organizations situated within their communities; as such, the boundaries between the two are unclear and inextricably linked.

From the identities presented in this chapter, ideologically, we have a very diverse group. We have progressive educators advocating for social justice, parents advocating for more traditional forms of schooling, and a conservative, business-oriented parent advocating for traditional family values. Since the public schools honor the culture of the community, each of these positions comes together and is woven into the fabric of the school. Making sense of the wide array of beliefs and values parents, teachers, students, and community members articulate in conversations is another responsibility of the principal. After analyzing the data from the parent interviews, several themes emerged. The first of which is that there is a unanimous consensus that James is a highly popular principal. Each parent described how James is a “great communicator,” “great with the kids,” “very approachable,” “always has a smile on his face,” is “realistic with my concerns” and “really cares about kids.” However, when asked about the social action committee, only one parent vaguely recalls hearing about it and cannot describe any specific details. When each parent was given a description of the group, all four parents thought
the idea of the social action committee was a great organization. For example, Rick believes that any group that gives students a voice to express themselves is very positive.

Another purpose of describing the identities was to frame the leadership of the principal from the perspective of teachers and parents. Incidentally, because the social action committee is inextricably linked to the distributed social justice leadership style of the principal, the social action committee inevitably arose. I probed and asked questions regarding the nature of the social action committee to glean insights on how various teachers and parents felt about the efficacy of the committee. The results were mixed. Many of the teachers felt, in short, positively about the committee while parents were largely unaware of the committee’s existence. On the other hand, teachers communicated many of the same themes of the parents that James is an effective communicator, is very approachable, and really cares about students. Given the macro (community) and micro (school) perspectives of the context, the next section will describe how the principal navigates the terrain of Meadowbrook and engages in transformative dialogue.

Finally, these two points coincide with the intersection of my two theoretical frameworks: leadership for social justice and dialogue. Both parents and students comment on how James really cares about students and provided multiple examples of humanizing conversations. Some of the examples provided teachable moments for students to better understand their world and others were the re-working of school policies and procedures to create more equitable outcomes for students. For example, Nadia describes how her daughter was accepting an award for her excellence in the arts. Some students saw that Nadia had two mothers. Rather than telling the students to stop making light of the situation, James worked with the students to help them understand the complexities of non-traditional families and homosexuality. One the one hand, this is an instructional dialogue; a way for James to work with
students to help them better understand other students and themselves. On the other hand, this is also an attribute of leadership for social justice, a way for James to create a more empowered and democratic schooling experience.
Chapter 6
The Cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection, and Praxis

This study aims to examine one principal committed to social justice helping others build a rich and more complex understanding of race and social class. When I began this dissertation, I assumed that the principal would be actively engaging in dialogues with others, most likely in one-on-one settings. Fascinatingly (but not altogether unsurprising), the constant pressures of management, the historical context, and the political pressures challenged the principal, James Fawkes, to engage in conscious raising dialogue, especially concerning issues of race and social class. This chapter is devoted to describing how the principal leads for social justice by creating the structures to support meaningful dialogues with the school community around issues of race and social class.

As I will describe more in full in the following sections, it appears that James is using a form of leadership for social justice called distributed leadership for social justice (Brooks, 2012) to provide a grassroots and organic structure to naturally grow in the building. In his study of a large urban high school in the Southeast, Brooks (2012) examined how students, teachers, and administrators navigate a dichotomy of cultures because of race and racism. Brooks (2012) contends that social justice leadership can empower and enable leaders to better serve traditionally marginalize students and disassemble policies that privilege some students over others. Educators, and specifically, school leaders are uniquely positioned to create more humane and just spaces to create more equitable outcomes for students’ lives but school structures can perpetuate inequity. An effort to create grassroots social just work is distributing leadership to other members of the educational community (Spillane, 2006). Brooks (2012) notes,
Viewing leadership practice from a distributed perspective suggest that specific contextual factors, situational factors, individuals, and artifacts influence one another to create a protean phenomenon termed “leadership practice.” (p. 18)

To this end, leadership is spread over multiple persons and multiple facets of the organization to empower members of an organization to take ownership over initiatives rather than simply assigning duties. As a result, leadership becomes fluid, situational, and context-specific and evolves over time, because multiple members will take on various roles as needed. From a distributed leadership framework, leadership practices occur as three discrete components over time: situations, leaders and followers. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to examine how James distributes social justice leadership amongst the school, staff relying and engendering others to engage in and facilitate social justice dialogue and action.

Using a distributed form of leadership James also model for the school staff how to engage in praxis, or problem posing reflection to unearth and take action toward addressing inequities within the school, therefore I also demonstrate in this chapter how faculty participate in praxis through various forms of dialogue. James has collaborated with teachers and students to establish structures, which I am calling the Cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection and Praxis (Figure 1). The cycle is a deeply embedded and systemic structure with multiple interconnected components. One of the most critical means in which James facilitates both distributed leadership for social justice and praxis oriented dialogue is through the social action committee (SAC). Moreover, I also demonstrate in this chapter how James uses the SAC as a vehicle to simultaneously inculcate his vision for social justice throughout the school and empower the faculty and students to lead social justice discussions and initiatives, which ultimately encourages others to buy into his vision.
The Cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection, and Praxis

Figure 1. The Cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection, and Praxis.

In the Cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection and Praxis, there are five fundamental components:

- Students raise concerns over issues of equity
- Students dialogue with teachers/administers and reflect
- Teachers take concerns to staff
- Staff dialogue and reflect during 4th Monday meetings
- Staff engage in action plans resulting from dialogue and reflection

The first two components occur during the social action committee meetings. The third component, teachers take concerns to staff, occur in departmental meetings (curriculum meetings, or division head meeting, sometimes broader staff meetings). The fourth and fifth components happen during the 4th Monday meetings. The following sections will describe how the Principal has distributed leadership to provide the space and the support for this system to function within Kennedy High School. One of the most important and intriguing components of this cycle, is the student led social action committee.
The Social Action Committee (SAC)

One of the most striking ways in which the faculty engages in conversations centered on race and social class that is rooted in praxis is through the social action committee. As I will argue, the social action committee serves both as the excavation tool to unearth inequities and secondly as the engine to push persons to better understand issues of race and social class. James fosters and supports the conversations but allows the space for social justice to be organic and grassroots-oriented. However, this was not always true at John F. Kennedy.

History of the SAC. The genesis of the social action committee dates back to 4 years ago. However, the origins of the committee are somewhat complicated, because at one time there were two competing committees vying for survival. An African-American doctoral student, and alumni of the School District, was doing an administrative internship through the Meadowbrook School District central office. In effort to tackle issues of race and social class, the doctoral student approached administrators in the central office about an idea to form a committee to address systemic issues. Many of the central office administrators believed this committee could be aligned to the consent decree and pushed for the committee to be formed in several schools, including John F. Kennedy High School. The doctoral student led the meetings, organized the agenda, and facilitated the discussions with other staff members. Students were not involved in these meetings. By the end of the year, the group’s meeting became more sporadic, according to one teacher “sort of died out.”

On the other hand, while the doctoral student’s social action committee met, another social action committee emerged and was organized by Matthew. Like James, Matthew felt that a top-down organization would not be sustainable. As Debbie shares, “Matthew wanted the social action committee to be driven by students’ voices, and be for students.” From the onset,
Matthew believed that students should be leading the discussions, setting the agenda, and expressing legitimate concerns about what is happening at school. Matthew was teaching two courses at the time, academic sophomore English course and Advanced Placement Literature and Composition. “There was a stark divide between those two courses in every fathomable way,” Matthew shared. “The origins of the social action committee were to bridge that divide in our school culture—something that was exclusive and divisive to a more inclusive culture.” He also believed that the students involved should be very diverse both economically and racially/ethnically. Two social action committees were running within the building, and in the end, the current social action committee is still lead by Matthew, Christopher, and Liz.

In its current iteration, the social action committee meets once a month for about an hour after school. A typical social action committee consists of seven to eight regularly attending students, two to three faculty members, and one administrator (usually an assistant principal), as well as Christopher, Matthew, and Liz. I have attended five meetings over the past year (including experiences prior to this dissertation). The following sections will describe the purpose of the social action committee, its inner-workings and how it functions, strengths and limitations, and James’s role in the social action committee.

The purpose of the SAC. There are two primary foci of the social action committee at John F. Kennedy High School. The first of which is structural in nature. One focus of the social action committee is to contextualize the high school’s day-to-day actions, policies, and procedures in relation to issues of social justice. Christopher articulates this point clearly,

I think it is important for schools to create contexts and frameworks for students, teachers and parents. The social action committee is a way we can frame the decisions we make at all levels and can inform the way we arrange structures in our building.
According to Matthew, when new policies are being discussed, or older policies are re-examined, either Liz, Matthew, or Christopher are sitting at building leadership committee meetings to discuss how the policy may impact students from a critical perspective. Another focus of the social action committee is to provide a voice for persons who have been traditionally discriminated against. Liz articulates that one purpose of the social action committee is to “Center the concerns of people in the community who are often marginalized, and in doing so, create a school culture that is a more hopeful place.” Students who are not traditionally involved in many school activities are often recruited into the social action committee. James, and the other assistant principals, who by a number of indicators, including attendance, discipline data, or grades, touch base with students every two weeks to help ensure personal growth with, as one teacher puts it, “tough to reach students.”

The aim of this two-pronged approach to contextualizing day-to-day actions and making the school a more humane and just place can begin to not only alleviate the symptoms of unjust schools (achievement gap, discipline data, attendance, etc.), but begin to address the undergirding causes of systemic issues plaguing schools, or as Matthew described in the previous section, the stark contrasts in schooling experiences for students. The purpose of the social action committee guides the processes of the social action committee.

**How the social action committee functions.** In this section, I will outline several of the characteristics of the five fundamental components of the social action committee (Figure 1):

- Students raise concerns over issues of equity
- Students dialogue with teachers/administers and reflect
- Teachers take concerns to staff
- Staff dialogue and reflect during 4th Monday meetings
• Staff engage in action plans resulting from dialogue and reflection

To demonstrate how the issues raised by students end in praxis, I will first describe the characteristics of the component; secondly, I will then explain how this component functions “in action” drawing on one issue students raised during my observations of the social action committee. The example I will be drawing from is a concern raised about the exclusivity of the activities associated with what the social action committee is calling the “I AM campaign.”

**A typical SAC meeting: Students raise concerns over issues of equity.** As I noted earlier, the social action committee is rooted in students’ voices and is student-centered. Meetings begin by students organizing desks into a circle and students passing out self-composed agendas. Matthew and Christopher then project the student agenda onto their SMART boards, as another point of reference. Whichever student has generated most of the concerns for the week, generally, takes the lead in leading the discussion. No one student dominates the discussion or repeatedly takes the lead in conversations. In the previous section, I briefly described the lack of formal structural leadership with students. In short, the hierarchy between students and teachers feels flattened during these meetings. One student begins by sharing a concern for several minutes. Based on my observational data, what proceeds from this opening concern is a sharing of personal stories from students. Students’ stories often spur others to share their stories. A student randomly volunteers to take minutes during the meeting and takes meticulous and copious amount of notes, jotting down all of the key ideas in each students’ stories.

During one meeting, for example, one student raised a concern on how a large portion of the school are not involved in any extra-curricular activities. Another student brings research to the social action committee on how students involved in extra-curricular activities are more likely to excel in school, both academically and socioemotionally. Students shared personal
anecdotes on how being involved in various activities, like band, choir, theater, cheerleading, speech team (etc.) have impacted their view of school. In short, the students shared how it makes them feel like a part of something bigger than themselves. The student who initially raised the concern concludes by posing the question, “How can we get more students involved in extra-curricular activities?”

_SAC engaging in Praxis: Students dialogue with teachers/administers and reflect._ Once the student(s) raise concerns over equities, and other members respond with narratives, the members of the social action committee thoughtfully probe and ask questions to better understand the problem. Based on my observations, the co-chairs generally ask the first questions, for example:

- Who does this benefit?
- Who is excluded?
- How does this make some students feel? (both privileged and marginalized students)
- What are some ways we could alter the policy to be more inclusive?
- How might we communicate this to the students in a way that isn’t going to turn many people off?
- How can we communicate issues of social justice to teachers in ways that will not put them on the defensive?

Students and teachers work together to make sense of critical issues and get to the heart of complicated problems. Students’ stories draw from lived experiences and students ask teachers and administrators about their own lived experiences. By asking probing questions, teachers and students make connections between school policies, the student body, and the sociopolitical forces influencing schools. For example, Christopher and Matthew used Anyon (1980) to talk about the “hidden curriculum” and how schools can replicate social class by
tracking students. One of the concerns raised by students during the observations I have attended over the past few months, have centered on getting more students actively involved in schools and to feel apart of the school. One student poignantly describes:

When I see students at football games dressed in John F. Kennedy sweaters, have their faces painted, and screaming at the top of their lungs for our football team, it’s *those kids* who are really Lions (the school mascot). We know who these kids are in our schools, the cheerleaders, the basketball players, the athletes and many of the so-called popular kids. *Those kids* are Lions. But what about the students who do not belong to any clubs? What about the many students who come to school everyday and just don’t feel welcome? We need to think of a way to actively engage the students who are on the border and get them involved so they feel apart of something.

After sharing this comment, the junior asks other committee members for input. Matthew speaks and underlines the student’s comment and echoes the sentiment by sharing his experience in high school. Although Matthew was academically successful, he felt resentful toward other classmates for sharing their exuberance because he felt like he was on the margins and did not belong to any particular social group.

Using the “I AM campaign,” as an example, Liz summarizes the responses she has heard from the students, and asks, “Why do you think we have some students who do not participate in anything?” Students respond in a variety of ways:

- “They have to babysit a brother or sister.”
- “They have to work.”
- “Too much homework.”
- “Don’t know what they like”
- “Don’t buy into the school.”

One of the assistant principals notes that we cannot influence students who are working or have family obligations, and reminds the group to focus on aspects that are within reach. One student responds,
I think what we have the greatest influence over is the students who don’t feel apart of the school, so maybe there is a way we can celebrate who we are and recognize that no matter what, you are a student at this school.

Liz responds, “What are some ways we can do this?” And many of the students were at a loss for words. Matthew describes the paradox of the students on the margins: even though there are students who are not actively participating in extra-curricular activities, all students are still Lions. Matthew asks to the committee, “How do we celebrate this? How do we acknowledge the diversity of our students and celebrate each person’s unique characteristics and link them back to our school?” After several meetings and much dialogue, and reflection, the students, teacher, and administrators, transformed this concern into a movement, the “I AM campaign.” Posters will be hung up all over the school featuring members of the John F. Kennedy community, including all students and staff. Each poster will feature pictures of four different persons; under the picture will be four self-described characteristics, and finally the unifying characteristic:

- I AM an athlete
- I AM a Christian
- I AM a homosexual
- I AM a brother
- I AM a Lion

Students will solicit volunteers for the poster but will limit the number of students who are perceived to be “popular” by other students. Members of the social action committee are interested in capturing a large number of students who are not involved in any activities, the same students who were the topic of discussion in the meetings to encourage their connectivity to the school. Much of this movement was centered in the concerns of the students, and as I will describe in the next section how those concerns are streamlined and heard by teachers.
The strengths of the social action committee. When asked to identify strengths of the SAC each of the three co-chairs immediately noted the importance of centering student voice by having the students lead discussions. Liz describes,

Christopher and Matthew are amazing at centering student voices. They put the committee in the hands of students, they empower students to lead major initiatives, encourage them to come to meetings, open up the floor and hear what students have to say. In my previous school, I wouldn’t say that I wasn’t student-centered, but Christopher and Matthew are much better at it than I was.

As I mentioned earlier, several students in the social action committee were concerned about issues of tracking and the ideas of a “hidden curriculum” so they expressed their concerns to Christopher and Matthew. After several meetings of dialogue and reflection, the students lead an after school staff meeting, in front of the entire staff, probing and pushing the staff members. Three students pointed out several differences between honors and academic courses: Why are academic courses primarily based in busy work while honors courses are rooted in conversations? What kind of skills are we subtly promoting in these courses? What is the “hidden curriculum”? When the student presentation concluded, there was a space for questions and answers. Several staff members responded to the presentation of the students by supporting the work of the students by commenting how they have evolved as a teacher over time, citing how menial tasks (such as worksheets) were given to students in academic courses and has since been replaced with vibrant and rich discussions that were once and only reserved for honors courses. Other teachers spoke up and began to refute the concerns of the students citing that academic students are not ready for more advanced work if they cannot complete assignments and work on time, they are not ready for higher-order thinking. As the staff meeting concluded, teachers were asked to respond to several prompts in an anonymous survey. Questions asked, essentially, if tracking and a hidden curriculum exists in the school. According to James,”in
some ways it was polarizing. We really didn’t have people all over the place. Some people completely agreed. Some people completely disagreed. There was very little middle ground. It was interesting and it was good for our staff.”

Another strength of the social action committee is its integration with the leadership committees. As I have shared in previous sections, the co-chairs from the social action committee appreciate their voices heard when influencing school policies and instructional practices. James consciously provided access to the co-chairs of the SAC to provide a critical perspective to day-to-day policies, procedures, and instructional practices. Debbie, the school psychologist, notes that there is a very quick route between the students’ concerns and integrating alternatives into the classroom and building wide policies. For example, when students expressed concerns about Homecoming, within a few weeks, there were building wide discussions amongst faculty members to rethink how more students could have access to school-wide activities. The next section will examine some of the areas for improvement of the social action committee.

**The limitations of the social action committee.** When I interviewed the three co-chairs of the social action committee, I was surprised to find that each respondent had a very different response when asked how the SAC can improve.

When I asked Christopher if the social action committee has been successful over the past few years, he responds,

It’s hard to say. If I had to choose, I would say to the task at hand, no, we don’t have the resources we definitely have the support from the administration, but the structure of high school works against what we’re really trying to do. We’re not only fighting against resources, but pervasive structural issues that have been happening at the national, state, and local levels have been working against us for so long.

I ask him to clarify what he means by “pervasive structures” and he continues,
All three levels . . . are impeding, but let’s focus on the local level because that’s what we can really control, our school board is comprised of “at large” members, not genuine representation of community on the board, representing the support of community. [The school board] has money and power, and it’s not surprising that those policies trickle down to the local level. The cards are stacked against us. The folks are replicating power and they don’t have to work to do so. However, if we frame what we’re doing [in the social action committee] in terms of progress, we have taken positive steps as a school. We’ve really looked at structures, in the classroom, [we’ve] been given the task of planning culturally responsive staff meetings. That has been really positive.

Another interesting point Christopher raised is the lack of reflection by some staff members.

Christopher believes that failing to make the personal connection could potentially impact could jeopardize engaging in socially just professional development. In short, if the teacher does not believe that social justice is connected to his or her personal experience, a teacher may not actively participate. Christopher responds to the question, what are some of the biggest barriers to doing socially just work in schools,

Honesty, the reflection might be the biggest barrier. It’s really hard, and rightfully so, to ask teachers to change and reflect on past practices. It could be a bigger road bump then to put things into practice.

I respond to his statement by stating,

We often talk about issues of social justice in abstract terms. The oppressor and the oppressed. Discrimination and empowerment. And rarely do we stop and say, man, that’s ME. I AM the one who is oppressing students. And I have been doing some unjust things to my students for decades.

He responds,

Yeah. That’s exactly it. It’s hard in this school for teachers to hitch their wagon to another administer [given the history of the revolving door of administrators]. The previous superintendent did not aspire a whole lot of confidence for teachers in this district. I think this might be a bigger risk for teachers then we really acknowledge. I don’t know if that is structural or if that is the result of some pretty big mismanagement at the district level.

Matthew offered a different perspective than Christopher. Matthew offered a more practical example than the macro picture Christopher provided. The two barriers Matthew
offered are money and organization. Although the program is well supported by the administration, Matthew notes that the social action committee, like many organizations, could use additional funding to make more initiatives a reality. For example, Matthew notes that visually representing social justice is a priority for the future. One way to address this issue is to have more faculty and students wearing social action committee t-shirts, like other organizations, but simply do not have the funds. Secondly, Matthew notes that there were three breakfasts last year that aimed to recognize students who have exemplified issues of social justice. Students could invite family members to breakfasts made by Matthew, however the meals were costly. Matthew did however, have one area for improvement that was similar to Liz.

Both Liz and Matthew feel that dialogue and reflection are both present in the social action committee, but it is the praxis, which has been lacking in the past. Both co-chairs feel there have been great dialogues and many people have made connections between the ideals of social justice and their day-to-day practices, but time has been a factor. There has not been enough time to “do” social justice work thus far. Matthew notes that the program has existed for only a few short years and has taken time to launch the program, and again mentions financial and organizational constraints. Liz believes there should be more tangible products from the social action committee.

Liz offered a different perspective than both Christopher and Matthew. She did not feel that larger structural issues, time and logistics, were not the largest limitation, she felt the way the organization was communicating its ideals to the school were its largest concern. In Liz’s previous school, “students would be wearing social justice t-shirts, there were social justice murals on the wall, and you really don’t see that here.” When I asked her more about this issue, she responded that the “I AM campaign” will coincide with the students’ concerns about getting
more students involved in extra-curricular activities. Liz recommends securing t-shirts and to turn the “I AM campaign” into a video where every student and staff member in the school watches it and understands what our school values. She feels the more posters in the school, the more t-shirts students where, and by watching the video, students and staff members will not only see the social action committee is active, but will acknowledge the diversity of our school.

The Principal Making Space for the Social Action Committee

It cannot be overstated how important it was for each of the co-chairs of the social action committee to feel empowered to have the space to have committee. This is akin to what Brooks (2012) describes as distributed social justice leadership. According to the co-chairs, James provides the committee the space and the support to exist and fully endorses the students’ voices emerging from the committee. From the narratives provided below, Matthew and Christopher explicitly share how important it is to exist when the school and to have a space where issues of equity can be raised. Christopher shares:

"We have a legitimate voice in the school. I’m not doing this for whatever it is, the extra $40 a month. I’m doing this because we believe in this and we believe we can really make a difference in this school. We wouldn’t have the role we have in this school if it weren’t for James. He values us and puts us at an important space on the table. I think it’s pretty clear to most teachers in this building where he stands on these issues."

Matthew shares a similar sentiment:

"James’s job is multi-faceted, he is a person that we want answers to from time to time, but by in large, he is advocating on our behalf. He has been very cooperative and helpful. Providing a space at the table for us to discuss daily policies, courses and classroom management is what I’m most appreciate of."

From the perspective of Christopher and Matthew, if it were not for the support of James and his leadership, the social action committee would not exist. James not only provides the space for
the group to exist, but is an enthusiastic supporter and permits the grassroots leadership of Christopher, Matthew, and Liz to carry out their vision of a more socially just school.

As I mentioned in the previous sections, the path between the students’ concerns formulated in the social action committee and the building-wide leadership committee is streamlined. When I asked James about this, he said it was a conscious decision to integrate the committees because you cannot separate social justice out of leadership nor can you separate social justice out of curriculum. Reorganizing the school structures to provide a more streamlined process of critically examining issues of equity is another responsibility of James and role he plays with the social action committee. As I described in my description of the 4th Monday meetings, James provides the structured outline for each subcommittee to follow during the meetings. He also pushes the subcommittees to grow by openly framing his vision of social justice by setting goals and describing what he wants the committee members to strive toward.

Lastly, and as I will more fully develop in the next theme, James will affirm the thoughts of the social action committee through building wide discussions at staff meeting and hold staff members accountable if they diverge from the school’s mission, vision, and values. Liz expands upon this key point:

James’s role is difficult because he cannot force social justice, if he did, he’d be unjust. He’d be the oppressor. But he is the boss, he has positional power that I don’t have. I can give an eloquent plea to the staff; some people might lend a hand. But if the principal gets up in front of the staff, and says, “this is what we do here, this is who we are and this is where we’re going, this is the goal of everything that we’re working on . . .” then you see more people thinking, “ok . . . well I guess I have to do this now.” That’s not the ideal way to move people along in this type of work because you want people to be compelled and inspired to do what’s best for all students. But from a practical perspective, it’d be silly not to use his positional power for good.

James must carefully balance using his positional power to push persons (students, staff, community, parents) to better understand issues of equity but cannot force the issue or he
becomes, as Liz describes “an oppressor.” The work of James and the social action committee to find the appropriate amounts of leverage to inspire and overtly move educators to understand issues of social justice are well documented within the literature.

**Streamlining Students’ Concerns and Creating Action Plans**

During my interviews with the co-chairs, each of the three persons noted the importance of what are referred to as the 4th Monday meetings. Every fourth Monday of the month, there is an after-school staff meeting entirely focused on addressing issues of social justice. The issues of social justice raised from the SAC are then disseminated to all of the teachers in the building through a series of self-selected subcommittees. All of the teachers in the building serve on a sub-committee, no exceptions. According to James, it was a goal for all teachers to be on a sub-committee so social justice was not something “that committee does” but rather something that was embedded in the hearts and minds of all staff members. Most importantly, the 4th Monday meetings is a way to streamline the concerns of students to the broader base of teachers and to affect change.

There are five subcommittees meeting for about an hour immediately after-school: Reaching Hard to Reach Students, Visually Communicating Social Justice, Positive Classroom Interactions, Community Engagement, and School Involvement. According to James, the 4th Mondays have two primary goals: to investigate our current tradition, practices, and classroom power dynamics as they inform our culture and climate; to continue to develop a culture and climate that are inclusive to all and socially just.
During the 4th Monday meetings, all of the building teachers meet one of the five subcommittees and engage in meaningful conversations to dismantle the concerns. Each committee is given a framework to explore the issue:

- Problem
- Data
- Possible Action Steps
- Priorities for coming Meetings

Each group reports the minutes of the meeting to the principal who later combines the minutes from each meeting and sends a building wide email to communicate what each subcommittee is achieving. I have included a small sample from a meeting to demonstrate how one subcommittee is tackling complicated issues (Appendix E).

From my observations of the 4th Monday meetings, dialogue and reflection is both present. Teachers challenge each other to better understand questions of inclusion, privilege and power to create more equitable outcomes from students. Furthermore, there is reflection, bringing the abstract concepts of oppression and making connections to the day-to-day practices and procedures of the school. During the discussions, of the I AM campaign, for example, teachers challenged each other on how posters currently hanging in the hallway may be communicating values contrary to the espoused values of the school. One teacher posed the question, “How are we representing persons of different racial/ethnic identities in our classrooms?.” Some teachers were quick to note the diversity of the posters and projects in their respective classrooms. Other teachers were silent. Whether it was a long and exhausting day at school, or there was a lack of knowledge or comfort in discussing, I could only speculate to why some teachers did not actively participate. On the other hand, another teacher incredulously
responded, “We also need to think about the placement of posters around the school. I saw this great poster of Martin Luther King next to a poster about guns. I doubt the teacher thought anything of it, but I think we also need to be really careful how we hang things around the school.” After much discussion and reflection an action plan (praxis) was put into place, but not just this committee, but also each of the five committees. As each subcommittee continues to carry out their action plans, James is encouraging the groups to grow in several ways.

As James shared at a staff meeting that I attended, one of the next steps of the 4th Monday meetings is to invite students to the subcommittees. Each teacher was encouraged by James to think of 1 or 2 students who show the potential for leadership—even ones who would benefit from being part of the building conversation—regardless of whether they initially have shown you signs of leadership. The idea is to help cultivate leadership in our students, particularly those students whose potential isn’t as easily recognized and rewarded at West as it might be for some other students.

Another goal the subcommittees are working toward, according to James, is better understanding what it means to be socially just. James shared,

We can’t let what we are doing on these 4th Mondays be something that only exists in the subcommittees. Our purpose for these meetings to fully inform our practice in all regards by influencing how we approach and reflect on our overall efforts to educate our students. The first step we’ll take to move in this direction is to share an article (Grant, 2012; Cultivating Flourishing Lives: A Robust Social Justice Vision of Education) with our Committee Leaders that provides a framework for school improvement that is socially just. If you are interested in this article—please let me know, and I’ll share it with you.

Incidentally, within a few days of the staff meeting, James emailed the entire staff the research article (Grant, 2012).
Conclusion: Wrapping up the Cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection, and Praxis

One of the most challenging aspects of this study was capturing the characteristics of dialogues centering on race and social class, primarily because for ethical reasons, it would be inappropriate for me as a researcher to observe such a delicate conversation between a staff member (possibly being reprimanded) and a principal. As I immersed myself within the culture of Kennedy High School, I discovered that dialoging about issues of race and social class exist was rarely, if ever, present between the principal and other persons. However, the principal was a key lever in establishing structures to support dialogues between teachers and students, students and students, and teachers and teachers.

For example, when students were discussing their personal identities with each other during the social action committee meetings, students were mutually raising each others’ critical consciousness by challenging assumptions about what it means to be included and excluded at Kennedy High School. Students questioned each other about which groups hold dominant power, which groups have more cultural influence in the school, which groups of persons are numerically the minority but have great influence, for example. An interesting exchange between two students articulates this point: One student raises the important parallel between “The 1%” and the “The 99%” (a reference to the Occupy Wall Street Movement), and notes that although some persons are numerically in the minority, some groups hold great power. As the young Black freshmen boldly asks, “What does it really mean to be a minority?” This fascinating conversation would not have taken place without the principal providing the space and the support for this group to exist.

In the context of John F. Kennedy, James provided a space for the social action committee to grow and delegated his positional power to the three chairs. According to the
chairs, James is an advocate and provides support when necessary in the form of feedback, information to move ideas through the school, and (limited) funds for projects. Unsurprisingly, the chairs are similarly distributing leadership to the students who serve as the primary catalyst for the organization, setting the agenda, leading discussion, and most importantly, voicing inequities. In this example, the situation, or the routines and tools available to the principal to promote social justice, is the monthly action committee meetings and the concerns of the students. However, here is where it becomes complicated: James serves as the leader, but the chairs serve a duel role leader/followers. By definition, the teachers are subordinates to the principal but are providing leadership to serve as the chairs of the committee. Furthermore, students could be leader/followers, serving as leaders amongst their student bodies and by definition subordinates to the teachers. What we are seeing is perhaps what Freire (1970) calls the teacher/students and the student/teachers where the playing field is leveled to critically examine issues, another link to critical pedagogy. It is possible that James’ distributed leadership or social justice is not only creating a space, but the structures to implement elements of critical pedagogy. The space and structures of distributed leadership for social justice and critical pedagogy serve as fertile ground for transformative dialogue.

One of the more the salient findings of this project is identifying the lack of boundaries between leadership or social justice and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Critical pedagogy is steeped in a deep desire to cultivate an awareness of power relations and critique hegemony, authoritarianism, make connections to lived experiences and ultimately, acting to dismantle oppression. From the data I have gathered, when persons are actively engaging in social justice work, it is difficult to determine where leadership for social justice begins and ends and where critical pedagogy begins and ends. It is possible that the two are connected; however, I argue that
the current definitions of leadership for social justice are inadequate and must be augmented to include notions of critical pedagogy. For Freire (1970), dialogue is an epistemological relationship to engage with the other, to better understand ontological perspectives, to critique power relations, and to raise critical consciousness. In summation, several of the key characteristics of critical pedagogy include: dialogue, reflection, and praxis (Freire, 1970).

Dialogue is nested and embedded through many facets of the school. Students dialogue with the social action committee chairs to deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge. The social action committee chairs dialogue with the building leadership committee. Dialogues also occur in the 4th Monday meetings between staff members. Reflection occurs when students make connections from the dialogue with teachers to lived experiences, but also in the downtime between monthly meetings. Reflection could be conceived of as the “incubation” period between dialogues. Much like the students, staff members are reflecting on the concerns of the students during dialogues and in between meetings. Praxis is an area, as described in the previous sections, is an area for improvement for the social action committee. Putting the action plans in motion to reorient the school and to create a more democratic and inclusive atmosphere is difficult to gauge the efficacy. However, the two initiatives of the “I AM” campaign and future Homecomings could be used as indicators to see if inequities have been dismantled. Another framework to illustrate the leadership of the principal in addition to critical pedagogy, is distributed leadership for social justice (Brooks, 2012).

In his study of a large urban high school in the Southeast, Brooks (2012) examined how students, teachers, and administrators navigate a dichotomy of cultures because of race and racism. Brooks (2012) contends that social justice leadership can empower and enable leaders to better serve traditionally marginalize students and disassemble policies that privilege some
students over others. Educators, and specifically, school leaders are uniquely positioned to create more humane and just spaces to create more equitable outcomes for students’ lives but school structures (Gooden, 2005) can perpetuate inequity. An effort to create grassroots social just work is distributing leadership to other members of the educational community (Spillane, 2006).

Brooks (2012) notes,

> Viewing leadership practice from a distributed perspective suggest that specific contextual factors, situational factors, individuals, and artifacts influence one another to create a protean phenomenon termed “leadership practice.” (p. 18)

To this end, leadership is spread over multiple persons and multiple facets of the organization to empower members of an organization to take ownership over initiatives rather than simply assigning duties. As a result, leadership becomes fluid, situational, and context-specific and evolves over time, because multiple members will take on various roles as needed. From a distributed leadership framework, leadership practices occur as three discrete components over time: situation, leaders, and followers. This next section describes how James reinforces the vision and mission of the school through a distributed framework.
Chapter 7

Macro and Micro Conversations: Reinforcing the Mission and Vision

Chapter 6 characterized how James himself leads and encourages others to lead and engage in praxis vis-à-vis a social justice lens by providing the necessary structures to engage in dialogues centered on race and social class. Chapter 7 more specifically examines the nature of James’ conversations with the school community (faculty, students, and parents). Although I initially assumed James was having dialogues with students, teachers, and parents, after analyzing my data, I stop short of defining James’ conversations as dialogues because using the term as defined by Freire (1970) would be a stretch. I will develop this idea more throughout the course of this chapter, however, the participants’ critical consciousness may have raised to some extent, from the data I have collected, James’ critical consciousness did not. As such, I will define the exchanges as conversations. One of the greatest factors preventing the conversations, to be limited only as conversations and not as dialogue is the complicated structure of the public schools.

Within the context of the public schools, principals serve many roles, such as instructional leaders, community builders, and managers. Juggling the many roles and responsibilities that fall under each of these broad categories is a feat of acrobatics, however the context in which the principal is working is a significant and complex challenge. During the days of observation, I have witnessed the principal navigate the threat of students potentially bringing firearms to campus, physical altercations, students wearing inappropriate shirts, students bringing marijuana and paraphernalia to campus, credible suicide threats, students defacing the school and physically damaging school property, the campus online grade book going down, the science teacher’s large pet snake get loose and wander the school, volunteers with a semi-truck
full of a food to donate to the needy showing up at the wrong time (a week early), and countless other examples. I cite these examples not to paint John F. Kennedy in a poor light, but to describe the realism and the legitimate struggles principals face on a regular basis: balancing day-to-day management with instructional leadership and community building which may prevent transformative dialogue.

Here is an excerpt from my observation of one morning. It was most likely the mean in terms of business:

7:20 a.m.

[Principal] at desk writing an email.

I enter. Principal and I discuss the new Food Bank at Kennedy. “It’ll be a great opportunity for families to discreetly pick up food for their families.”

Assistant Principal enters: asks questions about evaluations/supervision

7:25: Associate principal pops in, asks questions about students’ behavior and follow-up with parents

7:27: A teacher (don’t know name) stops by: Asks question about the bus barn and transportation, student can’t get to school. [Principal] says that he will look into it.

7:29: Math department head stops by: Has a question bout a parent, has questions about parent night) [another teacher appears at the door waiting to say something . . . waits a few minutes and leaves]

7:35: Two department heads stop by (history and foreign language) ask about mid-terms and when to administer them, how does it connect to standards-based grading and the grade book? [Discussion ensues]

8:10: [Principal] begins to finish email he began typing earlier, but the phone rings . . .

8:15: starts to wrap up email, starts working on project for an observation report, turns to me and smiles, Decides to cancel observation and let staff member know.

8:30: [Principal] decides to go pickup the student, I come with. [principal] smiles, and turns his head, “Sometimes . . . it feels like I just can’t get anything done.”

9:00: Return to Kennedy; escort student to attendance office.
Even though this 90-minute excerpt was typical in terms of the types of issues that arose, there are several key points that illustrate the grueling pace of the principalship. Notice the abrupt shifts in conversation from 7:25 to 7:35. Within 10 minutes, the principal is having three very different and important conversations that could have a large impact if not handled properly. At one point, the James shared with me in jest, “You have to be a little ADD to be able to do this job,” Consequently, one of the greatest concerns of the principal is feeling “fully present” during conversations with staff members. For example, it is not unusual for the principal to get stopped several times by teachers to have the principal sign documents, or run an idea past him while he is en route from his office to the dean’s office to defuse two angry students. The principal is greatly troubled that he damages relationships by not giving his full attention to staff members when he is thinking through how he will navigate through a delicate situation.

Secondly, although the principal was prepared and fully intended on attending a scheduled observation, he chose to pickup the student. In his words, “I think I did the right thing . . . I’m trying to build relationships with the parent and the student. Hopefully [the staff member] we’ll get it and understand.” Lastly, due to the variety of issues that arose, the principal never finished typing out the email he started at 7:30 over 90 minutes later. From my observational data, this excerpt not only reflects a typical morning, but what a typical day looks like. Multiply this excerpt by nearly forty times to create a dizzying 80-hour workweek.

The spontaneous nature of students fighting, phone calls from concerned parents, teachers becoming ill and missing several days in a row (and a scramble to find subs), are all real occurrences preventing the principal from carving out spaces to make time have conversations centering on race and social class. Spaces for conversations must occur naturally and normally as needed so the identities of students are not suppressed, but the numbers of critical incidents that
spontaneously occur jeopardize the opportunity to have meaningful conversations.

Hypothetically, the principal is standing outside of his door during a passing period and sees the AP Calculus teacher. The Calculus teacher looks concerned and says in passing, “Why do we need to have more Black kids in AP courses?” There is little time to engage in a meaningful dialogue. However, assuming the principal has time to have a conversation with the teacher the principal could unpack data and describes what the “over-representation” of students means, but if a fight breaks out between two students the principal will (rightfully) focus on the safety of the school.

Another way to describe the complex (Patton, 2010) nature of schools is the lack of organizational models representing the system of schools. Many of the organizational models used in the business world describe what motivates professionals (Maslow, 1943), how bureaucracies function (Merton, 1985; Walker & Lorsch, 1968), how persons perceive the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008), the parts of an organization (Mintzberg, 1979) or how leaders effectively manage organizations (McGregor, 1959; Ouchi, 1981), but these models seem to be strong fits for corporations or small businesses, not the public schools. Even if the counterargument were true, and the aforementioned models do accurately represent schools, the structures and management styles provided would not provide spaces for dialogues to flourish because there is little adaptability for flexibility built into schools to account for their complex natures. Professional learning communities (PLC; DuFour and Eaker, 1998) are one such structure to provide opportunities for educators a space to have conversations to align curriculum, discuss teaching strategies, and to converse about student data. A socially just principal could encourage educators to have conversations connected to inequities during these meetings but there is a paucity of literature describing how issues of inequities arise during PLC
meetings. To be very clear on this point, I am not suggesting that transformative dialogue should become the central focus of every discussion held in schools and classrooms, however there needs to be a space where conversations can be held concurrently with discussions of curriculum because they are inextricably linked to each other. At the risk of over-generalizing, in many schools across the country, the current organizational structures, the frantic pace of schooling, and the priorities of the principals do not foster an environment to promote dialogue and therefore cannot lead to agency.

Reinforcing the mission and vision of the school and protecting the praxis that exists is done primarily through macro and micro conversations. As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, there are instances where staff members are lead to better understand James’ personal position and where he sees the school progressing. There are times when staff members are acting outside of the values of the school district. In either case, it is necessary for the principal to openly frame his values to either directly instruct or to realign staff members to the values of the school. I have coined two terms to describe how James addressed these issues: Macro-conversations, which can be defined as: A non-dialogical method to communicate the educators’ personal beliefs, values and norms to a broader audience. Leaders state his or her school wide vision for social justice and sets the tone for what is non-negotiable. However, micro-conversations can be defined as the explicit and private one-on-one conversations to reinforce the values and norms of the school. However, both micro and macro dialogues are not clear and cut distinctions; hybrids of both forms exist. The role of the principal and the intersection of leadership for social justice and how dialogue relates to these conversations will be the focus of the next section. First, however, it will be helpful to briefly provide a description of the structures that afford the principal to have dialogues of race and social class.
Macro Conversations of Race and Social Class

*Even the best teachers have some direct instruction embedded in their lessons.* ~ James

Over the course of the five months I spent collecting data at John F. Kennedy, I attended several after-school staff meetings. Staff meetings begin promptly at 3:30 p.m. and end promptly at 4:30 p.m. As James jokes, “Even if I were to run over a few minutes, the teachers will definitely let you know when it’s time [to end the meeting.]” With the relatively large size of the staff, finding a space for the meetings continues to challenge James. One meeting I attended was in the choir room, every seat was filled and several dozen teachers were standing. Another meeting I attended was held in the newly constructed lecture hall, every seat filled and several staff members standing. Staff meetings at Kennedy follow a fairly predictable format: 10-15 minutes for acknowledgements and celebrations, 15-20 minutes for housekeeping, logistics, and central office requests, 15-20 minutes for staff members to share initiatives in the building, posing problems to address, and the last 10-15 minutes centers on James’s push to help staff members better understand issues of race and social class. The following is a description of what I am defining as a macro-conversation.

During the last 10-15 minutes of *every* staff meeting, James is openly framing his own values and what the staff should be valuing in students. The core values James is communicating are apart of an ongoing and broader building-wide conversation that occurs on a regular basis. It is possible that the principal or educational leader could expand these conversations to other venues like assemblies, graduation speeches, or other public events. However, in the data that I have captured, much of the content of macro-conversations stems from the concerns expressed by the students in the social action committee. James is very explicit and frank on where he stands on issues of social justice.
Lecturing during the last 10-15 minutes of every staff meeting is one method that James is openly framing his values to explicitly communicate his values, yet there is evidence to suggest that he also does so through building-wide emails. After a 4th Monday meeting, James sent a mass email to the staff, administrators, and some central administrators in the Meadowbrook school district, thanking them for their time and commitment to the 4th Monday meetings. Embedded in the email, were affirmations of not only his commitment to traditionally underserved students, but his clear articulation of where he would like to see the staff members move. James describes how

We as a school need to remain vigilant as we continue to serve our most underserved populations of students. As a staff, we must constantly reflect, dialogue, and create compelling plans of action to critique what we are doing on a day-to-day basis. We must fight to better serve all of our students.

The key characteristics of macro-conversations are openly framing values and beliefs to directly instruct staff members what the school stands for. In the previous section, I described that this can occur in emails, but as I described earlier, this can also occur during the last portion of a staff meeting. For example, during the November meeting, he synthesized the staff notes from the 4th Monday meetings and connected how the work of the staff is connected to the core values and his personal vision of social justice. James clearly articulated during the staff meeting,

Here at West, we are committed to serving all students, not just the students who bring leadership skills to the table, or think they bring leadership skills to the table (laughter from staff). We are committed to the students who feel like they don’t have a place here in school. I want each and every one of you to find one student. That one student who isn’t involved in any school activities. That one student who could really use a mentor. And I want you to provide that student a voice and the space to express him or herself. I want each of you to bring that one student to our 4th Monday meetings and help them have a seat at the table to critique what we are doing, after all, isn’t that why we’re here?

Several points James makes in this plead are noteworthy. First, notice in the last sentence, how he explicitly notes that one purpose of inviting students to the committee is to critique the school
(and in turn the teacher’s practices). Since James is using his positional power, teachers are left with little choice to choose whether or not to invite students to the table to critique school policies, procedures, and courses (many of which have been created by teachers). Although this is not related to my research questions, and it would be difficult to capture as a researcher, however I speculate that some teachers could be somewhat threatened by what some students raise in these discussions.

What James is also doing in this plea is using his position as principal to force a space for student voice. In a sense it is paradoxical: James is using power to flatten the hierarchy between teacher and students to dismantle the oppressive forces created primarily by teachers. Liz’s comments I cited earlier are illustrative of this contradiction:

James’s role is difficult because he cannot force social justice, if he did, he’d be unjust. He’d be the oppressor. But he is the boss, he has positional power that I don’t have. I can give an eloquent plea to the staff, some people might lend a hand. But if the principal gets up in front of the staff, and says, “this is what we do here, this is who we are and this is where we’re going, this is the goal of everything that we’re working on . . .” then you see more people thinking, “ok . . . well I guess I have to do this now.” That’s not the ideal way to move people along in this type of work because you want people to be compelled and inspired to do what’s best for all students. But from a practical perspective, it’d be silly not to use his positional power for good.

To reconcile this contradiction, I asked James how he straddles the fine line of using his positional power to provide traditionally underrepresented students a voice at Meadowbrook, while not forcing people to take on beliefs or initiative. He stated,

In larger discussion, like staff meetings, for example, it’s not meant to be dialogic. Let’s draw a parallel here between what’s happening here and teaching [in the classroom]. For a hopefully small portion of the lesson, a great teacher is going to explain the basic information everyone needs to know, probably in the form of lecturing. Even the best teachers have some direct instruction embedded in their lessons. [Direct instruction] has to be there to gain a basic understanding of the material. I see the broad discussions that we’re having in staff meetings as a sort of lecturing to make sure we, as a staff, are all on the same page. We have to know what we are striving toward.
For James, having macro-conversations of race and social class is in a sense, anti-dialogic, and even calling it dialogue is a bit misleading. James is consciously teaching the staff members at John F. Kennedy how to better serve traditionally marginalized students by openly framing his values through his positional power. It is a sort of visioning suffused with lecturing. It is not meant to be a space where a complex and meaningful discussion takes place, it is meant to be one-sided.

As such, hypothetically, if a staff member were to raise a contentious issue, James would avoid having a sensitive conversation between himself and a staff member in front of the entire staff. I asked him about this and he said he would enjoy continuing the conversation at a later time at the staff member’s convenience either in his office or in the staff member’s classroom, but not in front of the staff. During my discussion with Christopher, an interesting metaphor to describe knowing when and how to talk about issues of race and social class arose. Christopher, one of the co-chairs of the SAC, used the example of “grandma telling racist jokes at the Thanksgiving table” as an example where one wouldn’t necessarily endear themselves to their family members for calling grandma out for her insensitive comments. I shared this metaphor with James and he said, “Yeah, exactly. If somebody were to make a comment in front of the staff, I wouldn’t let it slide, but I would bring it up in a private setting.” The next section will articulate what the private one-on-one and small group setting.

**Micro-Conversations of Race and Social Class**

When I interviewed James, he repeatedly underscored the importance of context in engaging about race and social class. And the context can be challenging to determine, as James shares, “Sometimes, it’s really not clear. [Having conversations about issues of race and social
class] is messy, really messy.” Rather than “throwing grandma under the bus” at the Thanksgiving table (referring to the metaphor in the previous section), James has found that speaking to persons in small group settings or one-on-one settings, is a more effective way to dismantle injustices and promote critical consciousness. The following sections will describe what the one-on-one discussions look like.

**One-on-one dialogues of race and social class.** As I have stated numerous times throughout this study, one of the limitations of studying sensitive dialogues about race and social class is my inability to observe them directly. What proceeds in this section are James’s best recollections. Furthermore, many of the potential identifying factors in these scenarios have radically changed to protect the identities of the persons involved. In light of the potential inaccuracies and identifying characteristics, the essence of the following micro-conversations vignettes shine through.

**Issues of privilege—How are we preparing our students?** Eric Mitchell is an African-American science teacher at John F. Kennedy. He has been working at Meadowbrook for 6 years and received his professional training (both Bachelors and Masters) at what is often referred to as a “practitioner-oriented” university. Eric teaches chemistry and is fairly popular with the students. Colleagues describe him as “friendly” and “has a great sense of humor.” Eric has several children attending the Meadowbrook school system. However, this was not always the case. Several years ago, Eric had his children enrolled in the local private Christian schools. Eric would strike up conversations with many parents at school functions. The conversation would often sway to the differences between the Christian school and Meadowbrook. Parents would be quick to offer their opinions of the Meadowbrook school system. Several of the popular narratives of Meadowbrook were along the lines of “The Meadowbrook schools are
unstructured, and the students are undisciplined. Students are given chance after chance and people don’t get those in life,” “The grading system is inflated. There is so much extra credit and second chances to get grades up the students aren’t really learning anything.” According to James, Eric agreed with many of the parents’ impressions of Meadowbrook and would raise his concerns in private and during departmental meetings. Before I describe the content of the conversation, I must provide the context of the conversation.

John F. Kennedy has a policy called, “social probation.” Briefly, social probation is a policy preventing students from attending social gatherings like dances, football games, homecoming events, and other social school wide activities if a student has a certain number of failing grades, tardies, referrals, or a number of other indicators. According to James, the social probation system “is broken and a stupid policy.” I agree. Last year, there were nearly 600 students on social probation. To address the “stupid policy” James met with students during their physical education course in the auditorium and unveiled a new social probation policy, which in some cases, is more lenient with fewer flags to prevent students from preventing in school activities. Essentially, students currently receive social probation if a student is not passing five or more courses, receive four or more tardies for one course, two or more discipline referrals, has an un-served detention, or an out of school suspension in a period of two weeks. James’s rationale for altering the policy was clear; the old policy was clearly not working. The administration team and teachers formulated the majority of the policy. Student and teacher reactions to the new probation policy were mixed.

Eric was one teacher who had mixed feelings about the new social probation policy, calling it “far too lenient.” In a private conversation, he shared with James, “A student could be tardy three times to all of his classes, failing four classes and still get to go to Homecoming. And
that’s not cool. What are we really teaching these kids?” James acknowledged the limitation of the policy, and in fact, raised a few more holes in the policy. James rebutted,

I think what we were communicating from our old policy is that we don’t want people involved in our school wide events. Why would we do that? If our school is a family, let’s have as many people as possible participating in something like Homecoming. Unless they’ve committed some egregious mistake, we want as many students to participate in our school activities. I think our new policy is very, very fair. Some of the students that aren’t allowed to go to Homecoming, those are the students we really want attending the game and dance to really feel like they’re apart of something.

Eric countered James’s argument with an incident that happened in the school last year. A student Eric had a close relationship with was not invited back to participate in National Honors Society for his senior year. The student did not meet the academic requirements. Eric said, “Why does the student who can fail four courses still go to the football games, but [the NHS student] can no longer be a part of the National Honor Society?” James bluntly responded:

Let’s call this what it is. You are articulating the privileged White narrative. We have many students who are born with many advantages. [the former NHS student] is one of them. The National Honor Society is a national recognition. Making NHS is a big deal, and as such, we have to hold students to high standards if they are interested in earning and maintaining a national recognition. As for social probation, I have a set of expectations that all students should have. There is a baseline, so to speak. Every student walking into Meadowbrook should be able to meet these expectations. If a student can’t meet these expectations, yeah, I’m going to give them chance after chance to meet that baseline. Yes, some students need more work than others at meeting that baseline. But we can’t give up on them. That’s why the student who is failing courses deserves to go to Homecoming. We have to get that student more engaged in school. The bar has to be set higher for [the former NHS student] because he is working toward a national recognition, do you see the difference?

Eric mulled over what James said and did not respond to James’s comment. He thanked James for his time, shared that he had work to do and returned to his classroom. A few days later, Eric returned to James’s office and asked to speak with him. “You know,” Eric said, “I’ve been thinking over what you said the other day about social probation. And you’re right. I get it. But James, let me say this though, we have to do a much better job articulating what you told me with teachers, students, and parents. I think there are quite a few parents who think about social probation and some of the things we do around here
the way I did. I think that if everyone knew how and why we did things around here, we could clear up some of this confusion.

James agreed,

You’re absolutely right. We do a really poor job of communicating our values to our students and teachers, and especially, the parents. I get that. You are pretty well connected in the community, would you be willing to work with me and a few other teachers to rethink how we are communicating our values?

Over the past year, Eric, James and several teachers and students, have been providing input on a new system to provide supports and privileges for students earning and achieving different academic and social levels. Eric and James not only converse about the differences of race and social class, but reflected on how different policies affect different populations of students. Furthermore, Eric and James are engaging in praxis by reorienting the school in a way to make the school more democratic. Reorienting the school to build a more democratic schooling experience for marginalized students are several key pillars of leadership for social justice, which stemmed from the initial conversation.

**Access to the cheerleading team.** Mary Francis is an English teacher and the head cheerleading coach. She has been teaching at John F. Kennedy for 10 years and has been a cheerleading coach for 8 years. She has been the head coach for the past 4. Mary is married, and has two boys attending elementary school within the district. The self-described conservative Republican is somewhat protective of sharing her values because she acknowledges that at John F. Kennedy, very few people share her ideology. Traditionally, cheerleading camp starts in June, and tryouts for the cheerleading squad are the week before school begins. Over the past few years, James has received numerous concerns from students and parents that the cheerleading coach has been targeting only a small handful of students for summer camp. With a limited number of spots available in the summer camp, parents and students were unhappy the coach
was not communicating to a broader audience the details of summer camp. A second concern raised by parents involved the formal tryouts the week before school began. Parents and students felt that students who were not apart of the summer camp were not seriously considered for positions on the cheerleading squad. Thirdly, some students became interested in trying out for the cheerleading squad past the deadline. The cheerleading coach was very strict enforcing the deadline and was not interested in having the prospective students involved in the program in any way if school had started. James approached Mary to see if he could broaden Mary’s vision of athletics:

James: Several students and parents have approached me about cheerleading tryouts. Can you tell what tryouts entail?

Mary: Tryouts are always the Monday before school begins. Any student who is interested in participating on the cheerleading team can tryout. Students bring their registration form, and possibly three letters of recommendation (for students who have not cheered in the program before), to the first meeting. I tell the girls to leave anything of value at home, just in case. On the 1st day, myself and [assistant coach] judge the girls on double toe-touches, pikes, front hurdlers, tumbling and stunting skills and their ability to quickly learn dances and cheers. We begin judging early in the morning, have dinner and talk about what we saw, and post the results the next morning.

James: Is this the process you use for all of your squads? Varsity? Junior-Varsity? Freshmen? (etc.)

Mary: It is. And over the past eight years, we’ve found it to be effective to recruit and keep the top talent in the school. If we want a high quality program, I think we have to hold ourselves to high standards to ensure we put the best product out on the field.

James: And they are so much fun to watch! Actually, my family and I went to the football game a few weekends ago. The next morning, over breakfast, my son was goofing around and mimicking one of the dances! It was too funny. I couldn’t stop laughing.

Mary: Really? That’s too funny.

James: Yeah, he can be such a clown sometimes. Well, the reason I’m asking you questions about recruitment is that I have heard some concerns from parents that some students don’t have a fair shot at making the cheerleading squad.
Specifically, some students and parents feel that the coaches are specifically targeting a small handful of students for summer camp and, in turn, feel like they don’t have a legitimate shot to make the team when tryouts begin in August. What do you think about?

Mary: [My assistant] and I judge all the students fairly. We treat them all equally. Every student who comes to the tryout is judged using the same scale and there certainly isn’t any preference given over one student or the other.

James: That makes sense and that’s really good to hear. Let’s take a step a back for a moment. Tell me more about summer camp, what goes on there?

Mary: It’s a week long camp. We practice from 8am until 3pm, sometimes 4pm because the girls just want to be there. Some of my seniors call it “boot camp.” At first I was a little offended, but now I take it as a compliment. We work really hard there and get a lot of good stuff in that week.

James: You don’t have to get to jargon, but what kinds of things are you working on?

Mary: The mornings are devoted to fundamentals: double toe-touches, pikes, front hurdlers, tumbling and stunting skills. The evenings usually involve learning new songs so they can get used to learning new dances as quickly as possible.

James: Ok. And who do you invite to summer camp? What criteria do you have?

Mary: It’s pretty simple. We just invite all the girls who were on the cheerleading squad from last year. We know there will be some turnover. Seniors graduate, some want to focus on their schoolwork. Usually we just move girls up from JV to Varsity in cases like that. For the freshmen team we invite the girls who were on the 8th grade squads.

James: Gotcha. Ok, I’m hearing a couple of different things. First of all, what the girls are learning during summer camp is pretty closely aligned to what is judged during tryouts? Do you think that is fair?

Mary: Yeah. If you don’t have the fundamentals down, it’s hard to do any of the more advanced things we will be doing during the school year. You’ve been to the games, you’ve seen the girls at work. These girls can really put on a show. And they’re really nice girls too!

James: They are great kids. Every one of them. And they represent our school well at all our school functions. However, there is one thing I’m hearing that troubles me about the audition process. The students who went to summer camp are the same girls who have been apart of the cheerleading squad. They are the same girls who are already know the routines, the expectations, and the culture of the cheerleading team and have an advantage over students who show up for tryouts
on in August. What about the students who do not attend summer camp? They
don’t have a fair shot at this. What if we opened up summer camp to a broader
audience? What if we didn’t invite only the cheerleaders who were on the squad
from last year? Let’s open up enrollment to whoever is interested and see what
happens.

Mary: We have a tradition here at Meadowbrook. We have three fantastic cheerleading
squads. I’m afraid of opening up enrollment and changing up what we’ve been
doing for years will jeopardize what we have here. (sort of chuckling) “If it ain’t
broke, don’t fix it.” You know how that goes. I just don’t want to “water down”
what we have here, the community has expectations for us.

James: I get that, I really do. I think you will continue to have an outstanding
cheerleading program under your leadership. There’s no doubt in my mind. And
I’m not asking you to sacrifice the quality of your program. That’s not what I’m
asking you at all please don’t misunderstand me. What I am asking you is to
give more kids a shot at this, and to be apart of your very successful program.
Let’s open up enrollment, and see just how many more students enroll in the
summer program first. How many girls usually enroll?

Mary: It varies from year to year. I don’t know, I’d guess about 50.

James: Alright, let’s imagine you get 5 extra girls per class. That’s 25 plus the 50,
maybe 75?

Mary: I don’t know if [the assistant coach] and I can handle 25 extra . . .

James: Don’t worry about that. I’ll talk to [the athletic director] but maybe we can dig
up a small something. If not, I’m sure you could get Alexis [former senior
captain, alumni] to lend a hand. She is really strong, I bet she’d be great. Maybe
she would be willing to volunteer before she leaves for college?

Mary: [shrugs] I don’t know . . .

James: There’s one more thing too, and this might take quite a bit of string pulling from
central office. I want to make sure everyone interested in summer camp has a
ride to and from summer camp. I’m just thinking out loud right now, but that
might mean an activity bus.

Mary: All the girls who have participated in the past haven’t had any trouble making it
to and from practice . . .

James: That’s good feedback. I’m wondering if any of the new girls might need a ride
though? We need to make sure that all of ours students who are interested in
participating can get to and from practice without any issues. We also don’t
want to put our low-income students in an uncomfortable place by asking them,
“Who needs a ride to and from practice?” It’s a tough spot . . .
Mary: (silent, sort of perplexed and nodding)

James: I don’t know. We’ll keep working on this and we’ll see what kind of numbers we get from sign-ups this spring and we’ll go from there. Does that make sense?

Mary: Yeah, thank you for bringing this up.

James: Great! Thanks for stopping in.

There are several salient points from this conversation. First, James was explicitly committed to providing access to low-income students. His values were clear and did not leave the other person guessing where he stood on issues of social justice. There was a sense of openness on both ends, however. Mary was committed to upholding the “tradition” and the legacy she and her students have established at Meadowbrook. The conversation slowly shifted when James notes that the students who attend summer camp have an unfair advantage over students who did not have access to routines, dances, and cultural norms of the cheerleading squad. Secondly, James did not Socratically lead Mary to come to an epiphany that she has been unjust. He explicitly made the connection and trusted the openness and the process of conversation to create more opportunities for students. Thirdly, the conversation may seem to end abruptly, and as I have demonstrated in previous sections, the school day is hectic. Conversations are not afforded the “perfect” amount of time to begin and end. In fact, a more realistic recreation of this conversation would include the principal’s smartphone buzzing three times (indicating emails) and his office phone ringing twice (and ignored) during the conversation.

In light of the disruptions and structural barriers to having meaningful conversation, unearthing personal perspectives and understandings is a process that transcends the 15-20 minute window of time a principal has available in between meetings. I have asked James about this, and he perceives conversations are “nested.” From his perspective, he acknowledges the short conversations in his office, but he also trusts the long-term conversations that are ongoing
throughout semester or school year. The “macro” conversations that need downtime for
reflection, reconstructing ideas, and forming new perspectives.

As a sort of addendum to this section, Mary approached James nearly 4 months after the
conversation. This is a recreation of the one-on-one conversation in James’s office, sometime in
September as the school year is beginning:

Mary: James, can I speak to you for a second?

James: Yeah, what’s up?

Mary: Remember the talk we had back in the spring about recruiting and getting more
girls involved in cheerleading?

James: I do. How’s it going so far?

Mary: Frankly, James, when I left your office that day, I don’t know if I was a happy
camper. I was frustrated and had a long talk with my husband about it. I didn’t
know what to do. I heard what you were saying but I felt like I was the expert
on cheerleading and I was happy with the product I have been putting on the
field. But I could tell you really wanted this to happen, so I did it.

James: I’m really happy we could work something out too. I saw that we had something
like 75-80 girls go out for the team this summer? What’s her name again . . . I
can’t think of it . . . .

Mary: Alexis [Former Senior Captain, alumni]

James: Yes! That’s her . . . . I saw that she was around and was lending a hand this
summer. And I’m glad we got the transportation situation straightened out and
had all the girls who wanted to try out for the team had a shot at this.

Mary: Yeah, it was quite a bit more work than previous years putting everything
together, but I’m really happy with how everything turned out.

James: That’s great! Glad to hear it.

Mary: Yeah, me too. I was really worried that I wouldn’t have the same quality of girls
on the field but this team is just as strong as any of the teams I’ve had in the
past. And I was a little surprised to see some of the girls from the track team
that auditioned could really move!

James: Awesome.
Mary: I don’t know what I’m trying to tell you, I know you’re so busy and I don’t want to waste any more of your time. But I guess I just want to say that opening up enrollment to summer camp isn’t such a bad thing. It’s not as scary as I thought it was. It’s been a good thing for us.

James: Perfect. I’m really looking forward to see them at our next home game, this Friday.

Honoring Black literature and humanizing the classroom. During my observational period, James received a phone call from a concerned parent just before the beginning of first hour. The mother explained that her daughter was openly “discriminated” against in front of the entire class yesterday and felt the teacher’s comments were unprofessional. James probed for more information. He asked which class, which hour she had the course, the name of the teacher, and exactly the language she found offensive. James gathered the facts and tracked down the student as school began.

Vanessa Jones is a junior at John F. Kennedy High School. She has consistently made the honor roll each semester and is fairly popular with students. Vanessa identifies as an African-American and was born and raised in Meadowbrook. She is a solid student. Vanessa currently has a 3.5 GPA and earns mostly As and some Bs each semester. However, this semester she is taking Advanced Placement Literature and Composition with Mr. Alex Willis. Vanessa has found herself struggling in this course. In a class of 15 students, she is only one of two students of color in the classroom. In her words, she feels a “pressure” to really perform well in the class. Unfortunately, she is very unhappy with herself because she is currently earning a C; feels that she is letting herself down. When James found her preparing to head to her first class, he invites her down to his office and asks about how her AP Literature and Composition course was going, Vanessa responds:

I just don’t feel like I belong in there. I’ve done well in all my other courses, but I just can’t get the texts. None of this makes sense to me. I read Shakespeare over and over
again, and it just doesn’t make sense. And I’ll be honest with you, I just don’t like Mr. Willis and I don’t think he likes me.

Mr. Willis is an older White male, in his mid-50s, married with two college-aged sons, and has coached sports in the past (primarily football, some basketball experience.) Mr. Willis is well known throughout the school and is relatively popular with the staff. He is known to often tell jokes in the faculty lounge, pass along funny chain emails, and a few staff members refer to Willis as a “prankster.” Willis openly frames his AP course as a way to provide “an unbiased and traditional approach to examining the canon of our culture.” Willis’s course, unsurprisingly, features the works of Joseph Conrad, William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, James Joyce amongst others. Incidentally, the text the students were studying at the time was *The Song of Solomon*.

As Vanessa recalls the lesson from yesterday, Willis was describing the various themes of Toni Morrison’s work, for example: the themes of flight as a means of escape, the constant abandonment of women, the power and reoccurring biblical allusions, and the symbolism of artificial roses and gold. Willis prides his classes as having “vibrant discussions” and was looking for students’ opinions on how the impact of the singing in the *Song of Solomon* is significant to the story.

Vanessa shares with James that students offered simple answers at first, noting that singing often articulates a story, is a means of expressing one’s self, and is often indicative of a culture. Willis pushes the student to be more specific, and one student answered, “Songs are a way to heal yourself. The characters in this book were in a lot of pain, and singing is one way to cope with the grief, it’s a way to bring people to together.” Vanessa explained to James that Willis didn’t seem content with that answer and pushed the students, “But, what else?” Whether the students were a bit sluggish after lunch, or did not know what the teacher was looking for, nobody responded to the teacher’s question. Vanessa explains that on that day, she was not
feeling well. She did not know if it was something she ate or “just being in class” but on that day she was “checked out” and had her head down on the desk. Willis begins to walk around the room and says, “Anyone? Anyone?” several times and walks toward Vanessa. Willis pats her on the back and says, “Put your head up, this is going to relate to you, listen up.” James asked Vanessa how she responded to the comment,

I didn’t say anything, what was I supposed to say? He’s my teacher! I probably gave him a look, but I didn’t say anything. He did look at me dumbfounded and said that he thought that I liked this book and Toni Morrison. I nodded that I did.

Vanessa goes on to describe some pushback from one student. A classmate responds to Willis, “(gasp)—what do you mean, Mr. Willis?” A few other students perked up and looked for his answer and remained silent. James asked how Willis responded to the students. From her recollection, she recalls that Willis became extremely frustrated by the student’s reaction and tries to make light of the situation. “Well” (he sort of laughs) “I guess I’ll keep stepping on everybody’s toes no matter what I say, so let’s move on.”

James assured Vanessa he took this matter very seriously. He reiterated the values of Meadowbrook are inclusivity and social justice and would speak to Willis very soon. Later that afternoon, James was able to meet with Willis to discuss his comments. I did not experience the following conversation first hand, it is a re-creation based on the narratives by James.

During last hour, the James and Willis met. James went into what he calls, “fact-finding mode.” James asked an array of simple questions, “Do you have this student in your class? Which hour do you have her? Are you teaching The Song of Solomon? What kinds of questions did you ask?” And then James’s questions became slightly more pointed and focused, “Did you find resistance from your class when counter-arguments were presented?” Willis responds that he was “very surprised to see so many students responding in that way, and can’t believe what
they were saying.” James asked, “What do you mean? What were the students saying?” Willis’s account was essentially aligned with Vanessa’s response citing the same examples. “It’s like they weren’t even my students. It’s as if they hadn’t been listening to a single word I’ve said all year. I just don’t know how they could be saying these things.” James acknowledged his response by nodding his head, and asked him if he made a joke or a comment about “this relating to you” and “stepping on everybody’s toes.” Willis claims “I might have. I don’t remember everything that comes out of my mouth. I teach five English courses throughout the day. That’s nearly 5 hours of talking a day, and I can’t keep track of every single sentence.” James nods and responds, “Vanessa shared with me that you said, ‘Put your head up, this is going to relate to you, listen up.’ and when you said, ‘relate to you,’ you looked right at her, do you remember that?” Willis seemed unfazed by James’s comments, “I don’t know, it’s possible.” James pushes Willis further, I taught in the classroom for a number of years, and I get that you can’t remember every single word that comes out of your mouth. I have been there. I have also been in situations where there have been students who have really upset me and things have slipped out of my mouth I shouldn’t have said. I’ve been there, it happens. We’re all human. I get that too. What I think we have to be conscious of though, is the environment that you’re setting up for your classroom. We have to treat people as people, or on a case-by-case basis. Everyone has their own experiences, and if we don’t do that, we essentialize students. The lived experiences of the characters of this book are not necessarily reflective of this young girl. If we don’t treat people as unique people, the classroom turns into an unsafe space. When classrooms become unsafe, we are silently communicating that who you are and what you bring to the table is not valued. And we can’t have that. That’s not what we want for our students. If students do not feel welcome and safe in the classroom, how can we expect them to get excited about what we have to offer them? I think we need to be really careful what type of language we use in the classroom because it has a HUGE influence on the classroom environment. Because if we’re not careful with the words we use, we can really hurt our students. Not the “I’m disappointed in you because you scored a C on this test and you’re an A student” type of disappointment, but I mean the “hurt them as a human being” deep hurt. I’m talking about treating each of these kids in the classroom as a human being, and humanizing what we’re teaching about in the classrooms, does that make sense?
Willis seemed to acknowledge what James shared by nodding but seemed otherwise perplexed. “I just don’t see how what I said or what I have allegedly done could have possibly hurt someone.” James told Willis that the meeting was over and that he will continue the conversation with him at a later time. As Willis was about to leave the office, James reminded Willis to contact the student’s mother. James urged Willis to start a conversation about the incident, and to follow up with him afterwards.

Much like the previous conversations which implicitly and explicitly center on race and social class, James immediately went into “fact-finding mode” to gather as much background information before beginning to engage in the conversation. Another commonality to this conversation is the explicitness James communicates to Willis. Rather than trying to imply what Willis did wrong, or try to bring him around to guess what James is thinking, James notes the specific incident and how that endangered the environment of the classroom. However, unlike the other conversations, it appears that Willis did not raise his critical consciousness. This point is particularly interesting, however I could only speculate to reasons he did not grow and this would be unhelpful to this study. Further exploring how and why some persons do not expand their critical consciousness is an area outside of the scope of this dissertation, however it is an area for further research in follow up studies.

From the three conversations I have described in the previous sections, James took the dialogue as conversation and had a variety of successes and failures. Although it took Eric time to reflect, deconstruct, and reconstruct knowledge, Eric shared with James that he now has a much better understanding of issues of equity and is working with James to help others communicate this ideal. James’s success with Mary was somewhat positive. Mary may not have come around as much as Eric, however she moved in the direction of the values of the school.
From what James has described in his recollection of the conversation, Mary may have some lingering skepticism about issues of access. The last conversation, however, the teacher Mr. Willis, despite James’s explicit conversation did not gain a better understanding of issues of race and social class. It is possible that many principals with more traditional orientations may not have formally met with Willis to help him understand issues of race and social class. It is also possible that many traditionally-oriented principals may have let Willis know about the angry parent and student and told him to stop raising controversial issues and not addressed the undergirding issues. However, James dealt with the issue swiftly and harshly and future actions could be forthcoming against Willis. This next section describes the grey and nebulous nature of transformative dialogue. Clear distinctions between macro- and micro-conversations are complicated.

**Hybrids of Macro and Micro-Conversations: Small Group Discussions**

When I initially coded my data, I categorized James’s discussions of race and social class into two broad categories of micro and macro. However, James offered another example, small group discussions. A small group discussion would be appropriate if James has a broader concern about a policy or procedure and can dialogue about the issue within a particular department. James is not taking the time to affirm what the staff stands for and articulating non-negotiable (macro) nor is he having a private and frank one-on-one conversation (micro). For example, I was observing a meeting with the CACs (content area specialists, essentially all of the department heads within Meadowbrook) where James was probing about Advanced Placement (AP) testing. James questions:

From the data that Patricia [Maranucci] and I have been looking at it, some of our student populations, particularly our African-American population numbers are really low.
Students receiving free-reduced price lunches get a waiver for testing. But what about the students who are just above the threshold? Many kids taking AP tests aren’t taking just one test, they are taking 3-4 tests and the costs quickly add up. How much are the tests each year, something like $85-90—each? Can we really ask some families living paycheck to paycheck to come up with nearly $350? What can we do to help our students out so they can take the tests?

An interesting exchange occurred from James’s questions. The science chair mentions that some students want to take the AP tests, however representatives from prospective schools share students that a 5 (the highest composite score) is necessary for the student to earn credit (traditionally, a score of 3 waives the requirement of an introductory college course). Several department chairs agree and share stories of students’ sentiments, “I could probably get at 3 maybe a 4. But I won’t get a 5.” James smiles and says, “This is good. Keep it coming. This is the stuff I need to know.”

To further add to the complexity of this conversation, I feel that the reason this conversation started is noteworthy. James prefaced the conversation with an aside that he and Patricia Maranucci have a great relationship and is great boss, however they have a difference of philosophy on earning accolades for schools. In short, when Patricia was a principal at a neighboring school, she earned a prestigious national award, in part, for improving the number of low-income and students of color taking the Advanced Placement exams. James agrees that it is important to improve access for low-income students and students of color to Advanced Placement testing, but he questions the trade-off of students taking tests for the publicity of being a nationally recognized school. The healthy professional differences, the top-down origin, and the use of positional power from both Patricia and James to start a socially just conversation make this conversation unique and complex. In the following section, I will illustrate a series of one-on-one rich and complex scenarios that are not hypothetical scenarios.
Conclusion: The Intersection of LSJ and Dialogue: Transformative Dialogue

I define transformative dialogue as educational leaders engaging in a mutual relationship to better understand issues of difference to unmask and dismantle inequities. One of the more interesting findings of this study is the way in which the principal is (not) having these dialogues. Initially, I assumed that the principal was having rich and complicated dialogues about race and social class with teachers, students, and parents. Unfortunately, my data does not support this. What is supported by the data, however, is a three-pronged approach to ensure rich and complicated dialogues do flourish within Kennedy High School.

The cycle of Leadership, Dialogue, Reflection, and Praxis is a system that was a process that was led primarily by the principal. When I asked James how he is leading for social justice he immediately notes the power and the influence of the social action committee. When I asked the chairs of the social action committee about the initiatives of the social action committee the chairs immediately turned their attention to the students. The social action committee at its core is entirely grassroots-oriented, again this distributed model of leadership for social justice (Brooks, 2012). The concerns of the students become the talking points of the macro building wide conversations. James is openly framing who we are and what we want to become to dismantle and confront some of the injustices raised in the social action committee meetings. When teachers veer of course from the vision and mission of the school, James reinforces the values with private one-on-one conversations.

Another finding that caught me by surprise was the explicitness of the micro-conversations. Rather than trying to bring teachers along by asking broad questions, James uses directness to clearly articulate the values of the school and to highlight where the educator’s actions are unaligned. Furthermore, the explicitness could help the educator make connections
between the relevancies of their instruction, a key component to adult learning theory, which will be described more in full in the next section. Using the social action committee as a way to have an organic structure raise issues, and by having broader and more focused private conversations, James is able to actively restructure the school to create more equitable outcomes and build a culture for an empowered, democratic community—two of the key pillars in leading for social justice. Again, James is assuming that by reorienting the school and building an inclusive culture will naturally lead to the promotion of student learning. The following section will illustrate the implications of these findings within the context of leadership, policy, and social justice.
Chapter 8

Implications and Conclusions

Since the earliest in carnations, the American public schools have proven to be an illustrative microcosm of the United States, a center where political tensions, culture, and issues of differences have surfaced. Centuries ago, religious differences fractured the public school system. Currently, tensions between the schooling of students of color and low-income students and maintaining the status quo continuing to surface as the country becomes more diverse and increasingly poor. The complex nature of the principal’s time and daily responsibilities, and the burgeoning list of normative responsibilities for school leaders mandated by states and the United States Department of Education, are just a few examples of the complications in trying to create positive public schooling experiences for all students. It is possible that the tensions I have described are more present in a community that has undergone dramatic changes in demographics over a relatively short period of time. When the demographics of a community have rapidly changed, and the support structures (such as policies, procedures, school curriculum) and personal stances (ideologies) have not changed as quickly as the demographics, the incongruence between the students and the policies illuminates greater tension (Welton, 2013). This tension serves as one of the central problems of this study.

Furthermore, I also hypothesize that untangling the complicated disconnects between ideologies, support structures, and the student body requires conversations or the status quo will continue. Or in other words, the achievement gap, the over-representation of students of color and poverty receiving discipline referrals, and the lack of access to college will, at the very least, remain the same or, at worst, continue to grow unless there are conversations specific to issues of race and social class. To better understand these phenomena, or what I call transformative
dialogue, I undertook a case study to explore how one principal is engaging in these complicated conversations. This study addressed the following sub-questions:

- How do principals facilitate dialogue to promote awareness of issues of race and social class?
- How do principals provide support for staff members to engage in/with issues of race and social class?
- What do principals learn after reflecting upon these dialogues?
- To what extent do these dialogues lead to making positive agency in addressing these issues of race and social class?

In effort to answer my four research questions, I sought the participation of a principal who has an explicit commitment to issues of social justice and having conversations centered on race and social class. Using the methodology constructed by Stake (2000) and Yin (2003), as well as Amalia et al. (2012), I learned that this principal engages in transformative dialogue in number of different ways: the social action committee excavates inequities and funnels the concerns of the students to the staff and principal, the principal engages in both larger building wide conversations (macro) and one-on-one conversations (micro) to reinforce the mission and vision of the school. In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the findings as they relate specifically to the research questions and to provide further analysis and critique where appropriate and make connections, where appropriate, to the wider base of literature. In the previous chapters I have touched on several of these questions and thus far, have not addressed the final question. As such, I will elaborate on how the systems of supports are making a difference in leading to positive agency for the schooling experiences of students of color and low-income students.

It is important to note that this study was undertaken with a critical perspective, which was constructed upon the theoretical frameworks of leadership for social justice (Theoharis,
2007) and dialogue (Freire, 1970). This explicit commitment to issues of social justice to educational leadership requires that educators examine issues of inclusivity, power, privilege, and the deconstruction and reconstruction of assumptions. The relationships between these important concepts and the findings in this study serve as the centerpiece of this study. Due to the intertwined nature of these findings, and the intricate connection between the narratives of the participants, their personal ideologies and professional experiences, and the influences of the sociopolitical forces, inclined me to analyze the data together. Before I describe formal analysis, I will first describe several of the lessons I have learned from the data that I have collected, and then I will turn to the implications of the study for leadership, social justice, and policy. Thirdly, I will turn to areas that remain unexamined and future considerations to this study and finally, I will focus on recommendations and conclusions that emerged from this dissertation.

**Lessons Learned: The Grey and Glacial Nature of Dialogue in a Complex School**

As I begin this section and continue to reflect on the dialogues I shared with each of the participants of this study, it is important to note the significant challenges that I faced in writing portions of this chapter. Over the course of the 6 months, I spent countless hours observing at John F. Kennedy I observed many different types of dialogues. Yet for ethical reasons I did not witness what I am terming, micro-conversations. However, I must be explicit in noting that I am also relying heavily upon my own ideologies during my attempts to extract meaning from my analysis of the nature of an abstract concept. In light of my dialogues with participants, my countless hours of observations, and my formal and informal interviews, I have come to understand that my first attempts at analyzing data were heavily reliant upon my personal experiences, my thoughts, and my conclusions. As participatory as a methodology can be, the
dialogue in narrative inquiry I employed to mutually construct meaning with (not for) participants was ultimately written by me. I struggled to strike a balance between honoring the participants’ voices and having the final word.

What further complicated the analysis of data, were my assumptions that James was teaching educators on a wide array of issues and bringing them along to build richer and more complex understandings of race and social class. In a sense, support would appear in formal professional development and through informal conversations. From the data I have collected, whether this was happening or not is very complicated. First, I assumed that teachers were coming to James looking for strategies to help themselves work with students on issues of race and social class, from James’ recollection, this has never happened. Secondly, I assumed that James would provide professional development, or more likely have experts provide professional development, to support the teachers’ espoused needs to help them understand issues of race and social class, this is mostly false. District-wide professional development on issues of social justice is provided through interactive workshops provided by Patricia Maranucci. Although the workshops certainly raise issues of race and social class, it is not specifically focused on the two subjects. Furthermore, the professional developments are not housed at John F. Kennedy and are non-mandatory meetings. Generally, the insights staff members gleaned were on a much smaller scale than I had anticipated; the results appear to be on a continuum. Eric, the person who may have moved the most, moved on only one issue. At times, it felt like I was trying to search for more data that simply did not exist. Particularly my confusion that dialogue existed when it did not. It is possible that transformative dialogue is more rare than I had assumed. As I speculate in the aforementioned section, this could be due to the nature and structures of schools. Schools often draw from business models to describe their organizational structures, but many of the
models are simply inadequate in describing the complexities. To offset the traditional and rigid structures, principals leading for social justice, however, could encourage transformative dialogue as apart of the conversations of curriculum in weekly conferencing. The following section will tie in some of these concerns with the findings of the previous chapter in effort to answer each of the four research questions.

Answering the Research Questions

First research question. Guided by the data collection matrix (Table 2) in Chapter 3, data collected by first research question, “How do principals facilitate dialogue to promote awareness of issues of race and social class?” consists primarily of narratives, interviews (teachers, parents), observations, and artifacts. My sub-questions included, “How do principals reconcile the tension between advocating for students and the challenge of helping others better understand differences? and What is the primary role that the principal plays during dialogue (what genre of dialogue?). From the analysis of the data, I have come to understand that the principal is facilitating dialogues of social justice (not specifically race and social class) in an extraordinarily complex way. Transformative dialogue, the intersection of leadership for social justice and dialogue, is facilitated in several broad ways: the cycle of leadership, dialogue, reflection and praxis, secondly through macro-conversations, and thirdly through micro-conversations.

Although there are three primary facets of transformative dialogue, the components are interconnected and do not have clear beginnings and endings. In effort to promote academic growth for students, restructure the school to create more equitable outcomes, and to build an empowered, democratic community, the principal distributes social justice leadership (Brooks,
2012) to empower educators and students. The efforts of the John F. Kennedy Social action committee are truly grassroots. As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the cycle of dialogue see (Figure 2), reflection and praxis is an organic structure that functions naturally within the school. James has provided space not only for the committee to exist, but the chairs of the committee to have conversations with building leaders. Additionally, all staff members are involved in the 4th Monday meetings, a space created as collaboration between James and the chairs of the social action committee, for action plans to dismantle inequities. To embed the dialogue, reflection, and praxis further into the culture of the school, James openly frames the mission and vision of the school in larger conversations during staff meetings.

Figure 2. Cycle of dialogue.

I coined the term macro-conversations to describe the methods James used to effectively communicate the core values. Many of the topics raised in macro-conversations originated from students’ voices in the social action committee meetings. Macro-conversations are not dialogues, because unlike many other forms of traditional dialogue, reciprocity is essentially non-existent; instead there is direct instruction to communicate the key ideas of “who we are” and “what we stand for.” The importance of a leader communicating a clear vision cannot be
Clearly defining the vision may be one of if not the most important aspects of leadership (Burns, 1978). For example, when students’ raised concerns over access to Homecoming events, James affirmed during the staff meeting how each educator in Meadowbrook is committed to setting up every student for success, and not just the students who are already personable and have leadership skills. “We as a school, must work toward building relationships with students who are not involved in any extra-curricular activities to help get them involved in school, because we know from the research, that students who are involved in activities excel academically.” The expectations of the principal are very clear in this example: All teachers should be working toward building close relationships with students who are disengaged in school, who may be the same students who have not participated in Homecoming. Complicating the process of macro-conversations is the fine line the principal must walk between pushing teachers too much or too little; inspiring hope and empowering students versus dictating when and how teachers will create socially just spaces. Struggling deeply with that tension, James shares that he has to rely upon his “teacher hat” and gauge the readiness of the faculty as a whole on a wide range of issues. Incidentally, this point answers my sub-question, “How do principals reconcile tension between advocating for students and the challenge of helping others better understand differences?” To reinforce the efforts of the social action committee and the macro-conversations, there are moments where the principal must have one-on-one conversations with staff members.

Micro-conversations as used by James, are the explicit and direct conversations to redirect educators who have veered off course from the mission and vision of the school. These conversations are private and begin by the principal entering “fact-finding mode.” Like a detective solving a case, the principal asks questions about the time and date, which persons
were involved, exactly the language used, the witnesses, and so forth. In the examples I have illustrated in the previous chapters, James is drawing heavily from the relationships he has built. The relationship building, the trust building, and the massaging does not necessarily happen during the micro-conversations. The foundation in which the micro-conversation is happening is the trust and the relationships between James and the other person. In fact, it is possible if the relationship is not strong, the micro-conversation would not take place.

After the context has been built, the principal reaffirms the core values of the school district and clearly defines how what was said was outside of the values of the school district. The conversation may or may not be somewhat instructive, but there are explicit instructions how the classroom or school has been made an unsafe space as a result of the comments and an explanation how every student in the classroom must feel valued. Micro-conversations can sometimes side step the dualistic political ideology (conservative/liberal) perspectives in attempt to bypass an exorbitant amount of back and forth between teachers or teachers and students. Hypothetically, if a volatile political issue arose during class, like gay marriage, the principal would first affirm that educators should not advocate a political position during class. Secondly, the principal might reframe the discussion to humanize the classroom, and remind the teacher that s/he has a number of students who have two fathers or two mothers. Rather than advocating for a moral high ground (on either stance), the principal leading for social justice places the safety of students’ well being first. This was demonstrated in each of the three examples in the previous chapter. Each example (Table 5) noted a wide array of growth and understandings (or lack thereof) from the three educators.
Table 5

*Micro-Conversation Growth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Micro-conversation</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with Eric—“What are we really teaching these kids?”</td>
<td>Moderate growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with Mary—Access to cheerleading</td>
<td>Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with Mr. Willis—Essentializing students</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the diverse conversations I have observed, both micro- and macro-conversations, I will describe the role the principal plays in each context to answer my second sub-question, “What is the primary role that the principal plays during dialogue (what genre of dialogue?”; Burbules, 1993).

As I began this study, I had not anticipated the myriad of forms conversations of race and social class would take, and somewhat underestimated the influence of the social action committee to aid in the ability to lead building-wide conversations.

**Second question.** Data for my second research question, *How do principals provide support for staff members to engage in/with issues of race and social class?*, was collected by interviews and observations. Before I unpack the findings to this question, I must first note that I shifted the focus this question numerous times throughout the time I spent at Kennedy. Initially, I was seeking to understand how classroom teachers would approach the principal for a form of professional guidance to untangle an uncomfortable conversation that arose in class. I proceeded from the ancient proverb, “teach a man to fish,” where James would have conversations with teachers to help them understand race and social class and staff members would “pay it forward” with students. During one of the preliminary and informal conversations I had with the principal, he could not think of a time when a single instance occurred. Why
teachers are not approaching the principal to better understand issues of race and social class is fascinating, however answering this question would be only speculative and beyond the scope of this project.

Given the broadness of the question, I rethought how to collect data for this question, and focused more on how the principal nurtures the social action committee. I believe this is fitting for several reasons. The more I learned about the social action committee, the more I understood how student-teacher dialogues are centered on issues of race, social class and other differences. If the principal is distributing his social justice leadership, it is natural for him to provide support in a myriad of forms, for example: a resource for thinking through new initiatives, a “bridge-builder” (Brooks, 2012; Shields, 2010; Theoharis, 2007) between the social action committee and other facets of the program, and allocating funds to support the social action committee initiatives. By providing support, in many more ways than the previous examples, he is creating the space and access for staff members to engage in conversations of race and social class. Although the support for learning how to have transformative dialogue is not between he and the educators, it is generally, student teacher and teacher-teacher. Many of the examples I have raised in previous chapters, such as the “I AM campaign” and issues surrounding access to Homecoming, are two salient examples of distributed leadership for social justice (Brooks, 2012).

When I realized that my initial research question needed to be rethought, I scrapped my sub-questions posed in my matrix (Table 3) and composed a new sub-question, How did the principal create the space for educators to have conversations for race and social class? To answer this question, I interviewed the chairs of the subcommittee, the principal, and other teachers to learn more about the origin of social action committee. As I came to understand,
when the social action committee was first formed there was another competing social action committee. The current social action committee was student-oriented and gave the locus of control to the students, who created the agendas, generated the topics of discussion and were on an level playing field with the teachers. The rival social action committee was teacher-oriented and did not include students, and was driven and run by teachers. The latter group did not last the first school year. In time, the social action committee began to define itself, and situate itself comfortably within the school as it attracted members and mission to carry out the vision.

To integrate the social action committee into the school, James provided a space for the social action committee at the building leadership committee by using positional power. This was not a democratic move and was not intended to be. For James, issues of social justice were not something “that one committee” in the school promotes. Embedding the social action committee within the building leadership team is a way to streamline the concerns of students and disseminate information to all staff members. Another example of how James is working toward embedding the principles of social justice within the culture of Kennedy, is the requirement that all staff members participate on one committee. Again, if each person is actively “doing” the work of social justice, it is not only limited to a group of a few persons, but raises the possibility of transformational learning and shifting personal paradigms. This is a form of support James is providing to the chairs of the social action committee by empowering the chairs to serve as “lieutenants” (for a lack of a better word) to help carry out the mission and vision of the school (Spillane, 2006).

Here is a salient example of one of the teacher-leaders who is aiding in carrying out the vision and mission of Meadowbrook. Ed Lewis, who I described in full in the identity section, was working with a team of mathematics teachers to build relationships with several alumni of
John F. Kennedy. The purpose of reaching out to the alumni was essentially twofold: to connect successful alumni to current student in effort to show various career possibilities with the possibility of mentoring, and secondly, for financial support. Lewis, the math department, and the principal were having dinner with a prominent local businessman in the tech industry, Damien Walker. Walker was an alumni of Kennedy over 30 years ago. James described his vision of how Walker could fit into the school district and teachers followed up by providing specific examples. As dinner concluded, the various parties left the conversation in different places. The math department was off-put by the conversation while James and Ed felt the dinner was largely positive. At the center of the disagreement was a comment made by James to Walker. James explained,

> While we continue to reach out to alumni, we need to be conscientious of who we are reaching out to, for a number of reasons. Our alumni from 30 years ago are going to be pretty homogenous, essentially all White. Today we have more students of color than White students. I think we also need to reach out to the Black community as we continue to build relationship with Alumni to ensure we can build programs in our school.

This comment lead members of the math department to feel as if the meeting scheduled with Walker was wasted. Ed Lewis shared with James,

> I can’t believe some of the stuff they were saying. They said that meeting was wasted because you aren’t interested in working with the business community. And you know what I told them . . . I told them you weren’t saying that at all. I told them that you wanted to ensure that we had business-folks working with Black folks in the community to have a combined effort to tackle a tough issue. I don’t know how well they heard me, but I told them.

Ed is not apart of the social action committee, but over the past few years has engaged in several critical conversations with James. According to James, Ed has “grown quite a bit” after these conversations, as evidenced by his commitment to help other understand the dynamics of race and social class. In some sense, this could be a sort of “Teach a man to fish”-like scenario, where the teacher is affirming and reinforcing the values and mission of the school district.
Nonetheless, this discussion could serve as a starting point for future conversations. Having other teachers besides the social action committee chairs and the principal raising issues of equity is yet another way the principal is supporting staff members in engaging in issues of race and social class. After engaging in transformative dialogue for a number of years, I turned to the principal to help me understand what he has gleaned from having these conversations.

**Third research question.** Proceeding from my research question, *What do principal learn after reflecting upon these dialogues of race and social class?* the supplementary sub-question, “Is the newly constructed knowledge centered more on others’ perspectives or on personal insights?” I am seeking to better understand if James’s newly constructed knowledge is centered more on others’ perspectives or on personal insights? From my dialogues with James the answer is both, he has grown substantially in terms of learning more about himself and about how others see the world and learn. The intersection of these two concepts may best illustrate this point.

James admits that if I had asked him this question five to ten years ago, his answer would have been much different. Years ago, James would have tried to lead Socratically, hoping to bring the other participant along to have a personal epiphany aligned to James’s position. James shared with me,

> Years ago, I think my frame of reference was English Teacher. In my classes, we tackled some of the hardest literature: Beloved, Of Mice and Men, Othello... you name it. We were tackling really complex ideas, themes, literary devices... and what I was doing was asking questions, probing, having fun asking students questions, big broad questions... and really hoping students would come around to seeing the text the same way that I saw the text. And in many ways, I think that was really effective as a teacher. But what I came to understand is that I took a similar approach to raising [race and social class] issues with students/teachers/parents and it just didn’t work. Asking questions and probing and hoping people would come around to some sort of revelation just didn’t get the job done. And I know it didn’t work, because I kept having the same conversations with folks over and over again. It depends on the person, but as a whole, if I want people
to come around, I realized that I had to be explicit and direct. Now that I’m taking this approach, I feel like I’m making more progress.

I asked him what brought around the shift, why move away from the Socratic method and adopt the more explicit approach?

Students learn differently than adults. I didn’t take adult learning into consideration, I was treating everyone the same and I just can’t do that. If I’m talking about issues of social justice, I need to be thoughtful, open, honest . . . but direct. I think I’ve gotten much better at it over the years, and now that I’m not “beating around the bush,” I think I trust the process of dialogue more . . . and I think the other adult I’m speaking with can be more open and honest too. But it depends, I mean . . . if I’m talking with Liz, for example, I can stay broad and we can go at it philosophically. But for the most part, if I’m working with folks, being direct is going to get the job done.

The findings to this research question are inextricably linked to the findings to the third research question. In answering the first research question, I described the messiness of having transformative dialogue in terms of raising issues from the social action committee, the cycle of leadership, dialogue, reflection, and praxis, the macro-conversations, and the micro-conversations. As a former AP Literature teacher, James taught the staples of the canon to juniors and seniors. Much of his instruction was based in critical conversations and project-based learning. As James transitioned from his role as a teacher to an assistant principal, he found that he operated from the perspective on an English teacher and did not account for adult learning. In his classroom, he was aiming for students to slowly move to see the work of Fitzgerald as he did by posing broad and difficult questions. However, as James found, this framework did not work for adults because he continued to have the same conversations with the same staff members to demystify issues of race and social class. Over time, and on a case-by-case basis, James explained that being explicit and giving direct instructions worked. The work of Mezirow (2002) is salient here. In short, Mezirow (2002) argues that adults need critical reflection of assumptions, validating contest beliefs through discourse, taking action on one’s reflective
insight, and critically assessing it to engage in transformative learning. What Mezirow suggests, somewhat resembles Freire’s (1970) advocacy for dialogue, reflection and praxis. Both Mezirow and Freire and asking adults to reflect, validating beliefs through discourse (dialogue) and to take action (praxis). The conversations piece of the micro-conversations could be connected to claim that adults require specific connections to lived experiences and a space to have discourse to validate and contest beliefs in effort to shift personal paradigms (Mezirow, 2002; Knowles, 1980). Building upon the knowledge base of educators connects to the second research question.

To answer the sub-question, is the knowledge centered on others’ perspectives or personal insights, from the data I gathered, the answer appears to be both. The boundaries between teaching and learning were raised in these conversations. Since James’ initial forays into having social justice conversations were largely unsuccessful because he had to have the same conversations repeatedly with the same persons, he had to rethink his approach. Therefore, his newly constructed knowledge was coupled with reflection, and action. As James took each person he worked with on a case-by-case basis, he worked to better understand each person’s personal paradigm to help move them along to better understand issues of race and social class. Making personal connections to the other person’s lived experiences, to their classroom environments, to their students, and to their future professional goals, helped teachers acknowledge the pervasive problems and in turn help James gain insight on how to lead for social justice and navigate a potentially volatile situation. James, therefore, uses macro- and micro-conversations, two aspects of transformative dialogue, to lead for social justice. The final research question takes these concerns and extends the other participants’ personal paradigms into action.
Fourth research question. The final research question poses, *To what extent do these dialogues lead to making positive agency in addressing these issues of race and social class?* with the supplementary sub-questions, (a) Does this commitment to agency affect student learning? and (b) How does agency affect school climate? Data was collected primarily through interviews, observations, and the collection of artifacts to frame my understanding of this section. In its fourth year of inception, the social action committee is still a relatively new organization within John F. Kennedy. From the collection of interviews from the three chairs of the committee and the principal, there is essentially a unanimous purpose for the social action committee: The purpose of the social action committee is to give students a voice to raise concerns in effort to create a more just and humane schooling experience for all students. As I have articulated in numerous sections in this dissertation, a strength of the social action committee is its grassroots nature and the ability of student-led conversations to drive much of the conversations at the building level. In light of the grassroots nature, there is little evidence of the social action committee demonstrating that agency has changed policies, procedures, or the culture of Meadowbrook. However there are two important exceptions to this point, the case of Homecoming and the “I AM” campaign could be classified as second-order changes (Bartunek & Moch, 1987).

In the previous chapters, I covered the inequitable access to Homecoming activities and how some students do not feel welcomed into the John F. Kennedy High School culture. Teachers, students, and the principal worked together on both initiatives to restructure the policies to create greater access to homecoming events and to visually generate a space to cultivate a community built upon differences. Since the conversation of restructuring Homecoming occurred just after the event (September-October, 2012), it is impossible to judge
the efficacy of the event at this time and will require data from the following year. Furthermore, the “I AM” campaign was in its infancy when I collected this data. The initial brainstorming sessions, first conversations with the principal and teachers, and “next step” sessions where occurring in my notes in October-November. Although I would be interested in following up at Meadowbrook to measure the impact of the program on the school culture, I have no evidence to support that the current campaign lead to agency. What I can demonstrate, however, is that the student led conversations are making a difference, and the process of dialogue and reflection is leading to some sort of agency. Teachers and administrators are actively working toward making the school a more just and humane place. However, I cannot at this point in my study, effectively measure qualitatively or quantitatively whether there is impact. In fact, it is possible that the “I AM” campaign if not executed properly, could potentially be a superficial campaign where posters are hung on the walls, and there is little discussion of what is driving the movement. According to the chairs of the committee, it is an aim of the movement to have a supplementary video that each freshmen watches within the first few weeks of school to describe how John F. Kennedy is a community of differences and how the school celebrates diversity.

Perhaps a counter-argument to the lack of data is, “Why have not there been efforts prior to this year? What was happening (or not happening) in the previous 3 years?” There are several important points in response to this question. Given the tumultuous climate of John F. Kennedy, the two competing narratives were playing out in the school district, issues of race and social class were especially sensitive subjects (even more so than most school districts). Consequently, the somewhat radical positions of the grassroots social action committee were interested in moving needed more time to establish buy-in from more members of the school to slowly
integrate itself into the building and to define itself. James describes how during staff meetings he needed the first year of the principalship at Meadowbrook to learn how to navigate the dynamics of the high school. During the second year, he was able to start openly framing some of the core concepts, mission and vision of the school (macro-conversations). It was not until the last year, where James consciously and slowly integrated the social action committee into the building leadership team to interface the concerns of students with educators. This year, the 4th Monday meetings are new addition. So to clarify this point, the components of the cycle of leadership, dialogue, reflection, and praxis have been slowly implemented to gain gradual buy-in from the staff and to not disrupt the fragile nature of discussing race and social class. How James embedded the social action committee into the school can be illustrated in Figure 3.

*Figure 3. Embedded social action committee.*

The first two circles (blue) were grassroots in nature and were firmly in place by the end of the first year. The green circle, teachers taking concerns to the staff, demonstrates how James provided a space for the chairs of the social action committee a place at building leadership
meetings. This occurred during his second year. Finally, the orange circles illustrate how the concerns shared a building leadership meetings have expanded into the 4th Monday meetings and supplementary action plans are working to affect change. This has transpired during the 3rd year. Next year, there are discussions to expand the social action committees and 4th Monday meetings to include parents. Now that the cycle of dialogue, reflection, and praxis is more embedded into the day-to-day procedures of the building, and social justice is something that is not reserved to “that committee in the building” but more of “way we do things here” in effort to embed change into the culture of school (Fullan, 2007). It will be interesting to gauge the efficacy of students’ concerns moving toward policy and procedural changes.

Several of the aforementioned examples are underscored by the data collected from teacher interviews. All three of the chairs, Christopher, Matthew and Liz, suggest that little has been done in the past in actively changing policies, procedures, the climate, or academics at John F. Kennedy. James confirms as well. There are, however, differing perspectives on the root cause. Matthew and Liz articulated the lack of time and resources to move more quickly. Christopher noted that schools are not designed in away to promote a structure like a social action committee, a finding I also argued earlier. Moreover, Christopher has a different perspective than either Matthew or Liz, and argues that perhaps an even bigger problem than “doing” this work is making the connection that this work is relevant (reflection). In short, teachers may miss that the abstract ideas of “oppression” and “hegemony” are happening in their respective classroom, that they are the ones who are oppressing and perpetuating hegemonic practices within their own classrooms, and incidentally, could lead to the lack of praxis.
Another point that complicates the question of whether or not the conversations or race and social class are leading to agency is the structures of the school. One of the major insights I had as I analyzed the data was the recognition of the glacial pace and messy nature of dialogue juxtaposed against the breakneck speed and complex nature of schooling. The context of schools, as many are currently oriented, does not provide a stable space conducive to dialogue. Drawing from the excerpt of my field notes, the pace of John F. Kennedy is dizzying, fast-paced and complex. Throughout this dissertation, I have used the word complex to describe several phenomena, however, in this instance; I will draw from the work of Patton (2010). Complex systems are systems that have little use for formulae, are highly organic in nature, have a high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability, and there is great difficulty in determining the parts from the whole (Patton, 2010). For example, Patton uses the example of raising a child as a complex process. Raising a child gives no assurance of success with the next child, expertise can help but is not sufficient (relationships are key), every child is individually unique, and each day brings a drastically different experience.

In summary how the activities, like “I AM” campaign and restructuring of homecoming leads to systemic changes in addressing issues of race and social class is unclear. As a result of the lack of data connected to these issues, my two sub-questions are questions that should be placed on hold for a follow-up study. After a few years of embedding the “I AM” campaign and restructuring events, like Homecoming, to what extent do these changes affect student learning and the school climate? It would be interesting to compare climate survey data from the “Consent Decree Era” (a period of about 8 years) to 8 years worth of social action committee data. Disaggregating between race (White, Brown, and Black students) and social class (low-income, and non-low-income students) and gauging the students’ engagement in school
activities and the sense of belonging could serve as primary indicators. I would also be interested in looking at a broad array of student grades, benchmark data, and conversations about student academic growth in addition to standardized test scores to measure student academic growth and compare it between the two eras. Graduation and truancy rates could also add to the richness of the study.

**Implications for Leadership, Social Justice and Policy**

The implications from the findings are broad and influence three overlapping domains of research: leadership and social justice. First, I will connect my findings to leadership preparation programs. Second I will discuss how this research contributes to the overall field of social justice by underscoring the need to develop critical or equity consciousness (hooks, 2000; Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009), and the synergy that exists with critical pedagogy. Lastly this study illuminates the benefits of distributing leadership for social justice (Brooks, 2012) to empower youth and teacher leader voices to create safe spaces to critique building policies. In the following sections, I will be connecting my findings to the base of literature.

**Implications for Leadership**

**Leadership.** Based on my review of the literature in the second chapter, it is apparent that a paucity of empirically based studies exist in the domain of leadership of social justice (Theoharis, 2007; Scheurich, 1998; Kose 2005; Shields, 2010; Riehl, 2000; Riester, Pursch & Skrla, 2002); an aim of this study is to add to this literature. According to the existing research on leadership for social justice a school leader who is equity-minded promoting student learning, restructures the school to for the sake of fostering equitable opportunities for students
who have been traditionally underserved, and creates a more inclusive and democratic culture. However, there is limited research that examines the what dialogue between the principal and staff members, students, or community members looks that promote critical consciousness and limit deficit thinking. This research study attempts to take steps to feel a portion of that gap (because more research in this area is needed) that explores the trials and tribulations of one principal who is initiating difficult conversations centered on issues of race and social class in a mid-size urban high school. Many of the previous studies were conducted at elementary schools, and this study departs from the previous literature.

One of the themes I identified in chapter six is the importance of the social action committee. Shedding light on the importance of grassroots organizations and distributing leadership (Brooks, 2012) illustrates how inequities can be systemically dismantled. James’ leadership illuminated how he provided space for the organization to exist, and also embedded the norms and values of the group into the very fabric of the school. Therefore, this is an important contribution to the literature.

From the data that I have collected, the interviews, observations, and artifacts, the members of the John F. Kennedy community seem to very clearly understand the norms and values of the school, but it was surprising to discover that transformative dialogue is more rare than I initially assumed. For a myriad of reasons, I speculate that some educators, including some administrators, sidestep the conversation and ignore the injustices. Equipping administrators with the requisite skills necessary to navigate the challenging transformative dialogues is an area that has broad implications for leadership preparation. If teacher leaders and administrators do not have the skills necessary to have these conversations, it is possible that the skills were not presented in preparation programs.
**Leadership preparation.** The sine qua non of a modern educational preparation program is the development of vocabulary; skills and knowledge necessary to engage in substantive discussions concerning the dynamics of difference and a social justice focus should be threaded throughout all coursework in the leadership preparation program:

Wise principals will learn to create psychological spaces for genuine exploration of difference; they will initiate conversations where problems and challenges may be identified and discussed; and they will create a climate in which staff and students feel safe in clarifying their assumptions to deal with cultural dissonance. (Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2002, p. 130)

One such model that embraces the culture suggested by Shields et al. (2002) is the pedagogy of transformative leadership (Brown, 2004). Six theoretical frameworks are “woven” together to form Brown’s (2004) notion of a pedagogy of transformative leadership. Imagine three theoretical perspectives: Adult Learning Theory, Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Social Theory stacked vertically; then imagine three pedagogical strategies, critical reflection, rational discourse and policy praxis to increase awareness, acknowledgement, and action stacked horizontally within preparation programs.

![Figure 4. Brown’s (2004) notion of a pedagogy transformative leadership.](image)
This framework aims to critically examine school policies and practices that “devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others,” creates a culture that demystifies differences and deconstructs deficits (Nieto, 2000, p. 183).

I feel that this study is illustrative of a principal who was actively working to demystify differences and challenge deficit thinking to promote student learning, create an empowered culture. Professors at institutions of higher education may be at a loss for the types of content to make connections to the lived experiences of prospective administrators. If professors are going to heed the advice of Mezirow (2000) and draw from the lived experiences of adults to make transformative learning a reality, prospective administrators could use the micro-conversations section, for example, as rich case studies to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of James. Professors could also share the cycle of dialogue/reflection/praxis wheel to prospective administrators to understand how to implement a social action committee within their own schools, and embed the values and norms of the committees within the day-to-day processes.

Furthermore, as I advocated strongly at the beginning of this study, as the students’ demographics continue to shift and the teacher demographics remain unchanged, the potential gulf of misunderstandings between cultures increases. In this study, the three micro-conversations with Eric, Mary, and Mr. Willis demonstrated how teachers struggle with deficit thinking, issues of access and issues of race. It is possible that as the demographics continue to change, more issues, like the issues in the micro-conversations will only increase in our schools.

If educational leaders are not exposed to the notions of leadership for social justice, critical pedagogy, deficit thinking, critical race theory, and do not actively make connections between the theory and the student population, issues like the achievement gap and access to higher education will not improve. Another striking finding of this study was James’ comment
that several years ago he would have seen many of these situations very differently if it had not been for his courses at a large research university, where he was exposed to critical studies. James raising his own critical consciousness to provide more equitable outcomes for students dovetails into the implications for the field of social justice.

Implications for Social Justice

Critical and equity consciousness. For the purposes of this section I will use the work of hook (2000) and Skrla, McKenzie and Scheurich (2009) to frame the implications for this section. In this paper, I have used equity and critical consciousness interchangeably, and define it as the ability for persons to see and understand the complicated web of inequities. In Chapter 6, I portrayed three micro-conversation conversations that went in various directions. As I described in Table 5, Eric gained a richer understanding, Mary somewhat moved, and Mr. Willis did not move at all. The one person who did move substantially may have only moved on one issue. This study adds to the body of literature of how the principal is an instrumental lever in helping others undo the associations, and assumptions, (or more directly, the racist and classist) of differences. One of the key findings in this section described how the educator opposed to the school policy later joined the principal and advocated for the program. In a future study, it would be interesting to determine why some staff members are reluctant to accept the principal’s ideology. By openly framing his values, and of the school’s future, James’ macro-conversations also served as an illustrative point to help adults better understand their own context. Implications for adult learning theory (for example, Mezirow, 2002) are pertinent here as educators’ critical/equity consciousness grew by dialoging, reflecting, and working (praxis) to better understand power structures and to dismantle them. Adult learning theory is
pertinent because previously, the principal was approaching the adults as teenagers and did not account for adult learning theory. Now that he has accounted for adult learning, James continues to make progress with staff members.

**Critical pedagogy.** The three key pillars of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), dialogue, reflection and praxis, have a natural synergy with leadership for social justice. Persons “doing” leadership for social justice work seem to be “doing” critical pedagogy. The boundaries between the two seemingly disparate fields are not, in fact, disparate. Therefore, I argue that the current definitions of leadership for social justice are inadequate and should be supplemented with notions of critical pedagogy. For example, I used Theoharis’ (2007) definition of leadership for social justice to frame this study: “principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice and vision” (p. 223). However, after the data I have collected in this study, I propose an alternative definition for leadership for social justice: Educational leaders engaging in dialogue, reflection, and praxis to help others better understand issues of difference. Differences in this study are limited to race and social class, but can also be applied to sexuality, (dis)ability, and language. My definition of leadership of social justice embeds both of the core components of leadership for social justice and critical pedagogy, advocating for traditionally marginalized students and reflection, dialogue and praxis.

Armed with this newer definition of social justice, I must link this study to dialogue because I have argued numerous times that this dissertation examines the intersection of the two frameworks. I feel that dialogue that is dismantling deficit thinking, building a more inclusive culture, and reorienting the school to create more equitable outcomes is a form of praxis. Transformative dialogue is not just a sensitive conversation centering on issues of race and
social class, it is advocating for persons who do not have access to speak for themselves. However, putting leadership for social justice in motion, and engaging in transformative dialogue, as this principal is demonstrating, places students’ voices as the engine driving much of the building wide conversations.

**Centering students’ voices.** In some ways, the structure James is facilitating at John F. Kennedy resembles the work of Irizarry (2011). Irizarry (2011) argues that educators, researches, and policymakers are seeking solutions to address the underachievement of Latino youth, and consistently overlook the voices of youth. In his study, Irizarry engages in youth participatory action research to provide voices for students to critique the inequitable structures perpetuating inequitable outcomes in their respective high school. The parallel between the two studies is very clear: a social justice oriented principal places student in a position to articulate inequitable concerns and considers student voice as a key component of school improvement. However, one substantial difference between this study and Irizarry’s (2011) was the relationship between the students, staff, and principal. In Irizarry (2011), teachers and particularly administrators met student voices with doubt and skepticism. In this study, the principal was an advocate for student voices, and has grassroots support from classroom teachers to place student voice in the forefront of school improvement.

**Implications Summary**

The implications for this study are broad, spanning the two fields of leadership and social justice. This dissertation builds upon the burgeoning body of empirically based studies centered on principals leading for social justice. Exploring how James distributed his leadership to teachers and teachers distributing their positional power to students could have pedagogical
implications for educational leadership preparation programs. Furthermore, the micro-conversations have implications to be used as the basis of case studies to illustrate the challenges of the modern principalship.

For social justice, this study examines how persons’ equity/critical consciousness did or did not grow. From the examples of the micro-conversations, it is interesting to explore how the principal navigates a potentially explosive topic related to issues of social justice in a school and community with a history of racial strife in order to help the educator(s) grow. Each of the three micro-conversations had starkly different outcomes, which connects to various theories of adult learning. James has articulated several times that his stance on approaching these conversations has drastically shifted over his tenure as an administrator—shifting form a broader more and more philosophical approach to a potent and explicit conversation to dismantle deficit thinking. Illuminating oppression and combating ideologies outside of the school’s values connects to critical pedagogy. I have argued that the current definitions of leadership for social justice are lacking and should be suffused with critical pedagogy. When the principal puts in motion his values, there is a form of distributed leadership where students’ voices are used to drive. The following section will further build upon the implications and revisit the answers to the four research questions to make a series of recommendations and conclusions from this study.

**Recommendations and Conclusions**

As I reach the conclusion of this dissertation, it is incumbent upon me to provide a series of recommendations. In the following section, I will provide recommendations for principals, for academics training prospective educational leaders, and finally recommendations for further areas of research.
Recommendations for practitioners. The findings in this study suggest that principals struggle to make space for transformative dialogues because schools are not well suited to promote dialogue. Compounding the structural inadequacies of the school system are the sociopolitical forces of the local, state, and federal levels forcing principals to carry out mandates. Demographics possibly shifting faster than ideologies are yet another factor influencing the modern pressure of the principal. When these inextricably linked forces intersect within the public schools, principals often struggle to understand how to address complex and pervasive problems, like the achievement gap. Based on these findings, and implications, I would make the following recommendations for principals as practitioners:

- School leaders in all public schools should work to develop a greater awareness of the complicated and interconnected sociopolitical forces, organizational structures, and changing demographics to provide more equitable opportunities for traditionally marginalized students. Since the public schools are largely driven by local policies and locally funded, public schools widely vary. The findings from this study may be only in part applicable to other contexts. Nonetheless, there are elements of this study that can be transferred. By having a richer and more complex understanding of the complicated web of interrelations (federal, state, local politics, businesses, unions, history of community, i.e., any sociopolitical forces) public school educational leaders can provide spaces for more equitable outcomes.

- Principals should work to distribute leadership to teachers, and in turn students, to build grassroots movements. In the case of John F. Kennedy, the social action committee served as a critical excavation tool to unearth and bring to light issues of injustice. It is of little wonder that the top-down social action committee competing against the grassroots committee was not sustainable. As James stated, if it is not grassroots then it is not sustainable. When students’ voices where not put at the center of the organization, the social justice committee did not receive a deep commitment from students or teachers. Centering students’ voices and streamlining the concerns of the students to other staff members is a key component of the cycle of dialogue, reflection, and praxis. Additionally, the principal provided the space and the capacity for the staff to dialogue, reflect, and form an action plan (praxis) to carry out the concerns of students. I believe that educational leaders can adopt elements of this cycle to their own schools.

- The findings also dictate the necessity of leading difficult conversations of race and social class. From the macro-discussions at staff meetings, to the private and explicit micro-discussions, the principal has the unenviable task of navigating a potentially explosive conversation. However, if the principal truly is committed to promoting
academic success to all students (and not most), is interested in promoting a school where all students (not most) feel loved and valued, the barriers preventing success must be addressed. Conversations to untangle inequities are imperative if principals take these values seriously. I recommend that principals summon the courage and build a grassroots coalition to tackle controversial topics as a team rather than taking the “Lone Ranger” approach to leadership.

- Conversations of race and social class should happen in tandem with discussion of student learning, discipline, and policies. Transformative dialogue should not be reserved solely for the principal helping a staff member better understand an issue. Rich discussions could occur during weekly professional learning time to better understand curriculum selection, benchmark data, rethinking access to schoolwide events, or how to address students who continue to exhibit demonstrative behavior.

- The findings of this section affirm the large base of literature that the principal is an instrumental lever in promoting the success of traditionally marginalized students. From my interviews with staff members and parents, the ability of James to carve out spaces and time, and his ability to fully advocate for the promotion of the social action committee was essential to the success of the organization. If James had not provided a space for the students’ voices, the concerns of the students would have stopped with the committee and would not have been disseminated to the rest of school. I conclude my recommendations by underscoring the important role principals play in advocating for traditionally marginalized students.

**Recommendations for those who train aspiring educational leaders.** In addition to the school leaders that currently work in and lead in public school, I also believe it is important to propose a series of recommendations for scholars working in academia training aspiring leaders. Frankly, the aforementioned recommendations I have provided for practitioners should be embedded into leadership programs focusing explicitly on issues of social justice. If such issues were more thoughtfully embedded in leadership preparation programs, I argue that educational leaders would be more equipped to tackle the difficult tasks facing the increasingly long list of day-to-day responsibilities. Based on the findings and implications, I make the following recommendations for university level academics training aspiring school leaders:

- Educational leadership programs should thread issues of social justice, democratic practices, critical pedagogy, and issues of power and privilege throughout the entire program. As I have articulated in the findings section, James would have a radically different outlook on leading John F. Kennedy if it was not for his leadership preparation
program. Given the pervasive inequities embedded within the public school system, it is possible that very few principals have the requisite set of skills to understand issues of equity and create more equitable outcomes for students. Granted I do not make this suggestion with a broad base of empirical evidence, my general knowledge regarding the courses of many institutions granting master’s and doctoral degrees are technically and normative-focused: focusing on issues like budgeting, supervision, and school improvement (Oakes, Welner, Yonezawa & Allen, 1998). Although these topics provide aspiring educational leaders with the fundamental skills necessary to be successful, overlooking the context in which the schools are embedded is a travesty, this is a technical and normative approach. However, rarely do professors encourage aspiring educational administrators to take stance that is not politically neutral, a stance that specifically aims to benefit students and community members who do not have access to speak. As Oakes et al. (1998) demonstrated, much of the popular school reform efforts, and change literature, crumbles when applied to racially/ethnically and socioeconomically diverse school settings because issues of race and social class are treated neutrally (or perhaps blindly). If educational leaders are serious about school improvement, theoretical and philosophical scholarship related to the cultivation of an equity-minded school leader should be presented in tandem with the practical tools for principals to help make sense of the realities facing the modern principal. For example, asking questions of “Who is included? Who is excluded? How is the financing for your school structured? How is it financed in neighboring schools” in the master’s finance class is one way to unmask deeply embedded inequities.

- Connecting issues of social justice to relevant scenarios (perhaps in the form of case studies) is one way to help educators start meaningful conversations about how to rethink their personal ideologies and inequitable policies. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, adult learning theory plays a large role in the (in)ability of some persons to better understand issues of race and social class. For adults, if a direct connection to their lived experiences cannot be made, there is little hope for the adult to transform their beliefs for practices. Case studies, for example, humanize a complex idea into a difficult and gray area where real people experience complicated problems. Aspiring educational leaders could make connections from the case study to their own lived experiences after openly discussing and reflecting upon the case studies. Furthermore, I would recommend to scholars training aspiring educational leaders to carefully consider the contexts of the educational leaders, and the influences of social constructions and social norms of culture. Scholars should consider that since contexts vary so widely, different types of communities require different types of skills, abilities, and practices; these differences are merely differences and not deficiencies.

**Recommendations for further research.** As I conclude the recommendations section it is important that I briefly reflect upon the research process that I undertook to conduct this study and consider the foundation from which I am making these recommendations. I begin here by noting that this was, in many respects, an exploratory case study. I was interested in studying
complicated conversations of race and social class and these two seemingly disparate issues are often interconnected in unique and profound ways, and the basis of this study clearly means that there are still many questions to answer. The data I have collected is certainly important, it represents, however an opening door for further research much more than a concise and explicit list of “must dos” that will could be universally applied to all school contexts. The limitations and delimitations of this study provide an opportunity for future researchers to further explore. This contributes valuable information to the growing body of literature on leadership for social justice and dialogue; serving as the impetus for just as many questions as answers. Thus, my recommendations for further research are as follows:

- I recommend that further research be conducted to examining how principals are navigating transformative dialogues. While this study sheds light on one principal leading a high school in a mid-size urban setting, I wonder to what extent these conversations would look different in affluent, urban, and suburban contexts? How would these conversations look differently in elementary school and middle school contexts, for example? As I have repeatedly noted in this study, the role of the social action committee cannot be overstated. However, how would a social action committee function at an elementary school? Or is a social action committee even viable (in some form) at an elementary school? Much of empirically based literature is centered on elementary school principals, and there is little evidence of a social action committee existing let alone affecting change.

- I also believe it is important for researchers to further examine how and why certain adult learners learn about issues of race and social class. From the findings of this study, the educators portrayed in the micro-discussions came to understand race and social class in a variety of ways. What are the triggers for adults to connect with social justice? What are the barriers? How do principals help adults remove barriers to better understand race and social class?

- Finally, I advocate for more research being done to explore how principals center students’ voices within the context of the public schools. Grassroots movements to embed the values of social justice are one of the more compelling findings in this study. I recommend that further research should be conducted to investigate how principal’s can make spaces for students and how the principal’s leadership is distributed to teachers (and in turn back to students).
Conclusion

Throughout the course of this dissertation, I have argued that nuanced, complex, and inextricably linked issues of race and social class are often unaddressed, and worse even overlooked, in our public schools. At the heart of this knot are the complications between the organizational structures of schools, the sociopolitical forces, the fear of being labeled a racist, and doing what is best for all students. If educators are serious about promoting learning for all students, creating safe spaces where students feel loved and values are necessary. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the educators to tirelessly work to reorient day-to-day policies and procedures to create more inclusive spaces honoring and cherishing each student’s background. To that end, if educators are serious, and are not interested in just talking about social justice and are committed to doing social justice, than difficult conversations of race and social class are inevitable. Navigating the conversations is not simple for the most skilled persons who have the language and the theoretical knowledge to support their arguments. Sadly, countless educators are never exposed to the works of leadership for social justice or critical pedagogy and are operating from a deficit-based ideology and perpetuating inequalities. Earlier in this chapter, I addressed the apparent divide between practitioner-focused issues and theoretical and philosophical course work in educational leadership preparation programs. Risking the broadness of this claim, I submit that practitioners often look past theoretical and philosophical works as unrealistic and inconsequential to their normative responsibilities. If educators, whether they are scholars in academia, educational leaders in the public schools, or policymakers in Washington or in state capitals, want to begin to address complex pervasive problems, should strongly consider embedded notions of social justice in all facets of teacher and leader preparation, professional development and polices.
On a more humane note, I must also conclude by addressing an important issue regarding the findings of the three persons in the micro-conversations. As I addressed throughout the previous chapters, each participant had a varying degree of understanding of issues of access, race and social class. As James began to recount the story, I cannot help but think of times in my own personal journey where I had been guilty of deficit thinking. I also cannot help but think of recent family gatherings where loved ones make off-color comments and jokes. Even in the workplace, I cannot help but think of colleagues (with many advanced degrees working in the field of education) expressing ideological stances that are nearly 180 degrees different than what I am advocating in this dissertation. I believe that the persons represented in the micro-discussions are representative of all us; our journey toward becoming better people struggling to make better sense of the world.

If we as citizens living in a democratic society could instantly abolish racism and classism of course we could so. But of course it is not that easy, we must engage in messy and complicated conversations to uproot longstanding assumptions that are uncomfortable. We may have to come to the harsh realization that the jokes our grandfather (that one person that loves you unconditionally no matter what you say or do) has made racist jokes all of his life, and really does have deeply rooted deficit thoughts about a particular race/ethnicity. Similarly, we may come to discover that one of our co-workers in education has deficit views, and unlike our retired grandfather, this educator has access and influence over many students’ lives. If we seek to maintain and develop more just and equitable systems to offset deficit thinking, we must work to shift the status quo and provide more opportunities to those who face life without them. As bold and utopian as the social justice movement can portray itself to be, I understand the real threat hegemony plays. Hegemony is nefarious, invisible, and pervasive in every facet of living and as
a society, we cannot help but to fall in line, even when we want to combat oppression. There are so many different battles to combat, that we “have to pick and choose our battles” of even where to begin. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the role I play as an educator and future scholar in reinforcing hegemonic structures. If I am to consider myself an educator committed to issues of social justice I must acknowledge my own responsibility to be thoughtful and reflective, to have meaningful conversations with others about issues of difference, and to actively fight to dismantle oppressive structures. Furthermore, I feel compelled to challenge educators to become reflective and activist-oriented leaders for social justice, but I must first lead by example. I must not shirk my responsibility for fomenting grassroots movements and I must begin with the participants whose work and experiences illuminated this important research. And it is for these powerful and compelling reasons noted above that the intersection of leadership for social justice and dialogue—transformative dialogue—is so vitally important in our approach to promoting more equitable outcomes for students.
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Welton, A. (in press). Even more racially isolated than before: Problematizing the vision for "diversity" in a racially mixed high school. Teachers College Record.


## Appendix A

### Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Native Am.</th>
<th>Asian/P.I.</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
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<td>299,862,000</td>
<td>201,956,000</td>
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<td>12.5%</td>
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<td>Children age: 0-19</td>
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<tr>
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<td>59%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
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<td>Children age: 0-19</td>
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<td>18,379,000</td>
<td>54,439,000</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>36.1%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>.75%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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Census data (2010)
## Appendix B

### Transformational Leader

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire</th>
<th>Number of r coefficients</th>
<th>Mean Raw r</th>
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<tr>
<td>Transformational</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealized Influence</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Charismatic Behavior)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Motivation</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Stimulation</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized Consideration</td>
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<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional</td>
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<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contingent Reward</td>
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<td>Management-by-Exception</td>
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<td>Management-by-Exception (active)</td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>Management-by-Exception (active)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laissez-Faire</td>
<td>70</td>
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Bass and Riggio (2006)
Appendix C

Transformative Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementing Transformative Practices</th>
<th>Amy Hill</th>
<th>Catherine Lake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Background</td>
<td>Grew up in poverty with alcoholism and violence</td>
<td>Grew up in foster homes; worked in alternative education programs (e.g., outward bound)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing Critique and Promise</td>
<td>“Every student who walks through the door gets an equal chance;” leader critiques and overcomes deficit thinking</td>
<td>Ensures a level playing field—not treating every child the same; leader critiques elitist practices (gifted programs.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effecting deep and equitable change</td>
<td>Extended learning opportunities—school as safe haven, homework supervision, community partnerships, staff “buddy” program.</td>
<td>New redistributive principles (differential class and group size, resources, etc.); change from single class to school-wide activities; teacher imitated reallocation of funds to buy needed resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging power and privilege</td>
<td>Ongoing dialogue about avoiding shame, deficit thinking, occasional use of power to “bend rules.”</td>
<td>Used to require change, e.g., writing and dialogic exercises at staff meetings; also to encourage change—White boards for new pedagogical approaches; personally shouldered “blame” for failure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing both private and public good</td>
<td>A few citizenship activities for students. Use of book clubs, class buddy systems, community partnerships—elders reading.</td>
<td>Overcame resistance to loss of “teaching time” to hold regular community meetings, music, performances, recognition in partnership with community. Focus on broad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning and citizenship goals in firm belief that academics would follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focusing on liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, justice</th>
<th>Staff asked, “Why are you so driven?” Explicit rejection of blaming of parents. Began with small changes in school.</th>
<th>Differentiated between performance and ability (opportunity and ability to learn), regrouping inclusion of all parents and students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrating moral courage and activism</td>
<td>Took unpopular stand regarding gay teacher, overcame staff resistance, shared personal background</td>
<td>Challenged superintendent regarding language at meetings, took difficult stands and resisted explicit resistance of staff, community and other principals negative impact on annual merit pay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Shields, 2010, p. 574).
Appendix D

Income Inequality

Legend for Chart:

Percent

B - . . . Ended Up in the Poorest
C - . . . Ended Up in the Second
D - . . . Ended Up in the Third
E - . . . Ended Up in the Fourth
F - . . . Ended Up in the Richest
G - . . . Ended Up in the Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin Group</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poorest</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Third</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richest</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Brookings Institute, 2006)
Appendix E

Notes from Visually Representing Social Justice

Visually Communicating Issues of Social Justice MINUTES

4th Monday—10/29/12

Attendance: [Teacher Names]

· Problem:

Many students don’t see themselves as part of Meadowbrook. They don’t see that they are valued. Many groups are not openly diverse, and this may alienate students.

o How do we create a welcoming atmosphere at Meadowbrook outside and inside the school? How do we show our appreciation for diversity in an obvious way?

o How do we show what (and who) we value? Physical environment as well; what does the state of our classrooms tell students about how we value them?

o What do students see in the school that tells them they are part of the fabric of Meadowbrook?

· Data:

o Inventory of posters/ signs in school. Who’s represented? What messages are being related? How are they displayed? Where are they displayed?

o Flyers—how many dedicated places are there for flyers? Can there be certain places students can go to find information?

· Possible Steps:

o “I Am . . .” pictures. Teachers nominate? Drawing? Number? Second round for those who were reluctant. Teachers go first to create a safe space. Don’t want to alienate those who aren’t selected. Students organize and produce.

o Classroom/hallway/outside maintenance
Flower boxes

Announcements in a more effective way

Already have different groups (Autism Awareness, GSA, etc.) represented visually at different times (ALLY signs, posters).

Look at our own classes; what does my space represent. What and how am I communicating to students?

Celebrate students both in pictures and in student work; we need more bulletin board strips in the hallways and in our classrooms.

The AVID classroom was the home for AVID; place is important, communicates belonging.

Considering how all this stuff matters for getting kids to feel welcome/compelled to be involved

Making structural decisions with this stuff and other strategies all working together

Priorities for coming meetings:

Inventory:

Walk around and make records of what larger posters/signs (not flyers) are hanging in each hallway of the building. Why is what’s there there? If there’s no deliberate reason connected to our values should it be taken down? Scout places where bulletin boards for flyers could be placed. How many would we need?

Guide to setting up classrooms:

Reflect on how our own classrooms are set up. What are we trying to communicate with the posters on the wall? The way the desks are set up? Create a handout for all staff that gives ideas.

“I AM” campaign:

Figure out the logistics for how to get as many students involved as possibilities
Appendix F

Cycle of Dialogue, Reflection, Praxis

- Students raise concerns over issues of equity
- Teachers take concerns to staff
- Staff dialogue and reflect during 4th Monday meetings
- Staff engage in action plans resulting from dialogue and reflection
- Students dialogue with teachers/administrators and reflect
Appendix G

Recruiting Email

Dear Principal:

I am a doctoral student in the Education Organization Leadership program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. I have asked your colleague to pass along this e-mail to invite you to participate in my study on the role of the principal in facilitating conversations about difference (race and social class).

The objective of this research is to explore the principal’s role in facilitating dialogue involving issues of race and social class and in turn, creating “teachable moments” for staff members, parents and community members. There is no shortage of literature on dialogue and the field of leadership for social justice is burgeoning. However, there is a paucity of literature where these two fields intersect. Through narrative analysis, the collection of artifacts, interviews and/or focus groups with school principals working in high schools, I will learn more about the rich intersection between these two fields.

A second objective of my research is investigating how the principal provides support for staff members. To what extent are there formal or informal professional development to help staff members facilitate conversations about race and social class?

As our political landscape becomes increasingly polarized and as our public schools become increasingly diverse, issues of difference (race and social class) are occurring much more frequently. The significance of this study will illustrate how principals are navigating these issues and how these conversations are affecting the school environment, which has a substantial impact on student learning. By analyzing these conversations about differences, the results will build theory, inform practice and influence policy.

Your voluntary participation will involve a semi-structured interview to last approximately one hour, at a time and secure location most convenient for you. Following this interview you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview. You may refuse to participate or may discontinue participation at any time during the project and this decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your status or future relationship with the University of Illinois.

If you have an interest in participating in this study, please respond back to me at: jason.a.swanson@gmail.com and I will follow up with a phone call to discuss an interview place and time.
Appendix H

Principal Consent

Transformative Dialogue: The role of principals in facilitating conversations about difference

Principal Consent

Dear Principal XXXXX,

I am seeking your participation in a research study entitled: Transformative Dialogue: The role of principals in facilitating conversations about difference. You have been identified as principal who regularly engages in conversations about differences (race and social class) with staff members, and parents. If you are interested in participating in this study, this study aims to: 1) understand the role of the principal in facilitating dialogue 2) understand the role of the principal in supporting staff members in conversations about difference. Initially, through an interview, we can find a time to collaborate to establish the guidelines and timeline of this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, follow up interviews will involve digitally recorded interviews which are freely available for your review. The attached document “Participant Information” provides more detail about the aims and scope of the research, and the procedures to be used in the project.

I invite you to consider participating in this study. Your involvement will most commonly consist of two semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interviews will take place at school at a time, which is most convenient to the participants. Any digital audio recordings of the interviews will only be done with express written consent of the participants. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you may decline recording. The names of the participants and their schools will be kept strictly confidential. All participants will construct a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. For the purposes of this study, your school and each participant will be assigned a numerical and letter code. The interviews will be conducted by the researcher.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me, Jason Swanson at jaswansn@illinois.edu or by phone at 630.670.4251 or Anjale Welton ajwelton@uiuc.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect
calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Jason Swanson

____________________________________________________________________________

Consent Form

I am willing to participate in this research project. yes □ no □
I am willing to have my interview audio recorded. yes □ no □

_________________________________________  _____________
Signature                                      Date
Appendix I

Staff Recruit/Consent

Transformative Dialogue: The role of principals in facilitating conversations about difference

Recruitment letter and Staff Consent

Dear Staff,

I am seeking three staff members to participate in a research study entitled: *Transformative Dialogue: The role of principals in facilitating conversations about difference*. Your principal has been identified as someone who regularly engages in conversations about differences (race and social class) with principals, staff members and parents. If you are interested in participating in this study, this study aims to: 1) understand the role of the principal in facilitating dialogue 2) understand the role of the principal in supporting staff members in conversations about difference. Initially, through an interview, we can find a time to collaborate to establish the guidelines and timeline of this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, follow up interviews will involve digitally recorded interviews which are freely available for your review. The attached document “Participant Information” provides more detail about the aims and scope of the research, and the procedures to be used in the project.

I invite you to consider participating in this study. Of the teachers that agree to participate, three will be selected at random. Your involvement will most commonly consist of one semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. We do not anticipate any difficult or uncomfortable questions. If speaking about any instances of race and social class you make you feel uncomfortable you may decline to answer any question you prefer not to answer and may stop the interview at any time.

No additional activities are required to participate in the study. The interviews will take place at school at a time, which is most convenient to the participants. Any audio tape recordings of the
interviews will only be done with express written consent of the participants. If uncomfortable the participant may request not to be recorded. The names of the participants and their schools will be kept strictly confidential. The participant will construct a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. For the purposes of this study, each school and participant will be assigned a numerical and letter code. The interviews will be conducted by the researcher. From those teachers who volunteer to participate in the study at this time, one teacher from the intermediate and primary grades will be selected to participate at random.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me, Jason Swanson at jaswansn@illinois.edu or by phone at 630.670.4251 or Anjale Welton ajwelton@uiuc.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Warmest Regards,

Jason Swanson

____________________________________________________________________________

Consent Form

I am willing to participate in this research project. yes □ no □

I am willing to have my interview audio recorded. yes □ no □

________________________________   __________________________
Signature                     Date
Appendix J

Parental Consent

Transformative Dialogue: The role of principals in facilitating conversations about difference

Parental Consent

I would like to invite you to participate in a study regarding your local high school. The purpose of this project is to look at the role of the principal in guiding conversations about race and social class. I am interested in speaking with parents to better understand how these conversations affect the climate of the school. This research is being conducted by Jason Swanson, PhD student in the department of Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and will be supervised under the direction of assistant professor Anjale Welton. I will use this data, with the permission of the participants, as a part of my dissertation; however I may use this data in later publications (articles, books, or presentations).

First, I would like to find a quiet and convenient place to interview you. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record our interview for my notes. No one except the researchers will have access or listen to our interview. If recording the interview makes you uncomfortable, please feel free to decline. If any question makes you feel uncomfortable, please feel free to decline. While I interview you, I will manually take additional notes. Ultimately, your participation is voluntary.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to select a “false name” to ensure your confidentiality is protected. Nothing you say will ever be associated with your real name as I continue with my project. I will go to great lengths to hide information that might easily identify you, the high school and its employees.

If you do not wish to participate, it will in no way affect the services, grades, relationships, or support provided by the school to your children. We do not anticipate any difficult or uncomfortable questions. If speaking about any instances of race and social class you make you feel uncomfortable you may decline to answer any question you prefer not to answer and may stop the interview at any time.

The findings of this study may shed light on the role of principals in guiding conversations about race and social class and how this creates a warm and familial environment to promote academic growth for all students.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me, Jason Swanson at jaswansn@illinois.edu or by phone at 630.670.4251 or Anjale Welton ajwelton@illinois.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or
complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or via email at irb@illinois.edu

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Jason Swanson

Consent Form

I am willing to participate in this research project. yes □ no □

I am willing to have my interview audio-taped. yes □ no □

______________________________  __________
Signature                  Date
Appendix K

Principal Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Principal Interview Protocols

1. Can you talk about your professional background?

2. Can you talk about your childhood experiences, and how some of those experiences may have influenced your perception of educational leadership and your non-negotiable core beliefs?

3. The central purpose of this study is to investigate the role of the principal in facilitating conversations about differences (race and social class). What do you see as the role of the principal when working with the following groups: staff members, students, parents? Are they similar different?

4. Do you feel like these conversations are happening more so than 10 years ago, Why?

5. Can you think of a time where you had a very challenging conversation about race?
   a. In hindsight, how do you think you handled the situation?
   b. What do you think [the participant] took away from the situation?
   c. What would you do differently?
   d. Where do you think [participant] was coming from ideologically?
   e. What kind of relationship do you presently have with this person?

6. Can you think of a time where you had a challenging conversation about social class?

7. Have staff members ever approached you looking for professional development (informal/formal) to support these conversations?

8. Conversely, have you ever had to redirect staff members on the types of conversations they are having regarding issues of race and social class?

9. Do you feel there is a connection between having these types of conversations, school culture, and student learning?
Appendix L

Staff Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Staff

1. Can you talk a little about your professional background?
2. Can you talk about your childhood experiences and how some of those experiences shape your non-negotiable core beliefs? How does this relate to your views on education for yourself and for your family?

3. The central purpose of this study is to investigate the role of the principal in facilitating conversations about differences (race and social class). What do you see as the role of the principal when working with the following groups: staff members, students, parents? Are they similar different?

4. Do you feel like these conversations are happening more so than 10 years ago, Why?

5. The principal mentioned that you were involved in an incident regarding [principal anecdote]. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
   a. How do you think the principal handled the situation?
   b. Did you learn anything from the incident?
   c. Do you wish some things could have gone differently?
   d. What kind of beliefs do you think the principal was coming from?
   e. What kind of relationship do you presently have with the principal?

6. Do you think it is important for classroom teachers and all school district staff members to talk about these issues? Why/why not?

7. Do you think it is important for students to have conversations like these with other students, parents and teachers?

8. Do you feel there is a connection between having these types of conversations, school culture, and student learning?
Appendix M

Parent Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Parent Interview

1. Can you talk a little about your professional background?

2. Can you talk about your childhood experiences and how some of those experiences shape your non-negotiable core beliefs? How does this relate to your views on education for yourself and for your son/daughter?

3. The central purpose of this study is to investigate the role of the principal in facilitating conversations about differences (race and social class). What do you see as the role of the principal when working with the following groups: staff members, students, parents? Are they similar different?

4. Do you feel like these conversations are happening more so than 10 years ago, Why?

5. The principal, mentioned that you were involved in an incident regarding [principal anecdote]. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?
   a. How do you think the principal handled the situation?
   b. Did you learn anything from incident?
   c. Do you wish some things could have gone differently?
   d. What kind of beliefs do you think the principal was coming from?
   e. What kind of relationship do you presently have with the principal?

6. Do you think it is important for classroom teachers and all school district staff members to talk about these issues? Why/why not?

7. Do you think it is important for parents to have conversations like these with other students, parents and teachers?

8. Do you feel there is a connection between having these types of conversations, school culture, and student learning?