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Emerging Leaders for Social Justice: Negotiating the Journey Through Action Research

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this qualitative research study was to understand the experience of graduate students in an educational leadership program as they began to apply leadership for social justice theory through the process of action research. This study used critical race theory to explore dimensions of race, power, and privilege. Findings from focus groups with 12 graduate students reveal that relationships influence the path of becoming a leader for social justice as well as their ability to engage in change on their campus. While the importance of relationships was found across all participants, several themes were unique to the emerging leaders of color. Recommendations for leadership preparation include the need to honor personal and professional experiences of students, supporting community leadership development, and highlighting the unique experiences and needs of emerging leaders of color.

As school districts become more diverse, there is a nationwide move to address the needs of diverse students, faculty, families, and communities. The educational leadership literature suggests that too few school leaders have the knowledge and skills to effectively respond to the shifting demographics (McKenzie et al., 2008). Leadership for social justice (LSJ) is seen as a way for leaders to begin to respond to this diversity and issues of social justice in schools (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2008; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2009). "Leaders for social justice are principals [who]

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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" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223). The work of a leader for social justice is difficult and controversial and takes an extraordinary amount of commitment (Lindsey, Graham, Westphal, & Jew, 2008; Singleton & Linton, 2005; Skrla et al., 2004).

LSJ is multifaceted. Leaders for social justice engage in critical self-reflection to (1) recognize their own sociopolitical identities (Brown, 2006; Evans, 2007; Kose, 2007; Marshall & Oliva, 2010), (2) identify systems and structures that lead to inequities, (3) promote inclusive practices and equitable access to curriculum (McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007), and (4) support teachers in developing curriculum and pedagogy that include multiple perspectives and experiences (Kose, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2004). With all the complexities involved in LSJ, developing as a leader for social justice is an ongoing process. We use the term *emerging leader for social justice* (ELSJ) to describe leaders in addition to the principal (teacher leader, assistant principal, central office administrator, etc.) who are intentionally developing in these areas. We offer this expanded notion of LSJ to include varied leadership roles beyond the principal, who has been the focus of the majority of the LSJ literature up to this point (Kose, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2008).

This qualitative research study focused on understanding the experiences of ELSJs within an educational leadership preparation program. In particular, we explored their process of applying social justice theory to practice through their master's action research project. We specifically examined emerging leaders with an emphasis on negotiating relationships as a key part of how ELSJs began to engage in LSJ. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a theoretical lens (Solórzano, 1998), we aim to expand the current principal-centered research on LSJ by acknowledging the need to understand the role of power/privilege and race/racism in historical and current contexts to address social justice.

EMERGING LEADERS: GRADUATE STUDENTS AND LSJ

Graduate students who hold positions as teachers, assistant principals, and academic coaches serve as emerging leaders in our study. The literature suggests that we need leaders who have the ability to transform schools into equitable contexts that are focused on social justice (Brown, 2006; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007, 2009). Leaders for social justice focus on academic achievement for all students

and work to identify and critique patterns of injustice (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007). Leaders for social justice not only identify inequities but work as change agents to construct more equitable practices in schools and communities (Brown, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). Given the resistance that principals face with their social justice work, the literature points to the need to prepare leaders earlier in their careers, especially in educational leadership preparation programs (McKenzie et al., 2008). Understanding the specific needs and experiences of graduate students as they develop as leaders for social justice is an important piece of LSJ (Brown, 2006; Evans, 2007; McKenzie et al., 2008; Young & Brooks, 2008).

Brown (2006) studied the use of several instructional strategies focused on critical inquiry and personal awareness reflection within the context of her educational leadership program. She used strategies such as cultural autobiographies, diversity panels, educational plunges, life histories, reflective journals, and cross-cultural interviews. These strategies supported graduate students' understanding of self as well as communities. Findings indicate that using transformative learning strategies can improve graduate students' attitudes toward issues of diversity and foster greater understanding of self. Brown encourages educational leadership programs to support graduate students in developing personal awareness and self-reflection related to issues of diversity, as these are key characteristics in LSJ.

McKenzie and colleagues (2008) lay out the framework for the structure and content of social justice educational leadership preparation. These authors recommend the selection of students who already show a commitment toward issues of social justice with a beginning self-awareness about their own beliefs and biases. Selection also must include students who are already strong instructional leaders in the classroom and have shown leadership in their schools. The content of leadership preparation for social justice must include the increased development of leaders' critical consciousness, content related to teaching and learning that is culturally responsive, and the promotion of proactive inclusive systems. This content should permeate throughout the curriculum, and social justice should be used as a lens when looking at ideas such as professional development, instructional models, supervision, and curriculum development. Finally, McKenzie and colleagues describe the ongoing support that educational leadership programs must provide for graduates as they enter the induction period of becoming leaders for social justice.

Further adding to the LSJ literature, Young and Brooks (2008) examined how educational leadership preparation programs support graduate students of color. Key findings include the need for programs to be race

conscious in faculty hiring, increasing diversity in authors and perspectives in curriculum, and having conversations within the classroom and across the department. Of particular importance, the faculty in Young and Brooks's study also reported the need for race-conscious mentorship for graduate students of color. In addition to mentoring, the authors suggest the creation of multitiered (program, department, college, university, community, etc.) and multipurpose (social, academic, and professional) networks for graduate students of color. There must be formal structures of support related to recruitment of students, hiring of staff and faculty, and mentoring and induction. In addition, there must be space created for informal structures of support between faculty and students as well as among peers.

In their study of effective school leadership programs, Darling-Hammond, La Pointe, Meyerson, and Orr (2010) found the existence of action research as a key pedagogical tool for graduate students to make theory-to-practice connections. As an applied approach, action research is a form of collaborative inquiry to improve educational practices and influence a community (Glanz, 2003; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Stringer, 2007). The action research process often includes collaboratively identifying an issue or problem within the context, reviewing literature related to the issue, collecting data on that issue (often both quantitatively and qualitatively), analyzing the data, planning for change, and enacting change (Glanz, 2003; Stringer, 2007). Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, and Basom (2011) found that graduate students that engaged in a reflective, inquiry-based approach to learning became skilled at formulating problems, convening stakeholders, using data to show the needs for change, and demonstrating increased confidence in improving student learning. In addition, this inquiry approach during field experiences helped graduate students see the complexity of school leadership and move beyond a management view of leadership to one focused on school improvement and instructional leadership. Perez and colleagues (2011) found that through systematic, reflective inquiry into school issues, graduate students deemed "building relationships, inspiring trust, and empowering others to make decisions as central to effective leadership" (p. 240).

Action research is particularly conducive to the work of leaders for social justice; it can help uncover the causes of school improvement issues as being related to equity and social justice (Kemmis, 2006; Kinsler, 2010). Perez and colleagues (2011) found that systematic inquiry can influence how graduate students frame issues within their schools and can help them begin to see problems as social justice issues. This can then lead to rethinking avenues for improvement and questioning the status quo. With

a focus on continuous reflection before subsequent action, action research can move leaders toward change (Glanz, 2003; Stringer, 2007). This can then help ELSJs begin to move LSJ from theory to practice.

RELATIONSHIPS AND LSJ

Within the literature on LSJ, there are implicit as well as explicit connections to the importance of relationships. Shields (2004) explains that for schools to challenge the status quo, leaders must acknowledge the centrality of relationships. Leaders for social justice must encourage the development of relationships and facilitate dialogue about difference. Shields contends that "pathologies of silence" develop when schools fail to acknowledge and discuss difference. Leaders have also explicitly named the development of relationships as a proactive way to combat resistance and sustain the difficult work of social justice leadership (Theoharis, 2007, 2008). Theoharis (2007) found that leaders for social justice identify relationships with other administrators who hold similar activist and social justice beliefs as being a support network to sustain their work.

Leaders must not only develop an equitable school culture inside the school but also must connect with and welcome a multitude of voices from the community (Dantley, 2005; Evans, 2007; Marshall & Oliva, 2010; Shields, 2004). Leaders for social justice are committed to forming relationships and engaging in sustained conversations with communities (Brown, 2006; Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Brown (2006) suggests that leaders start developing relationships in educational leadership preparation programs by employing strategies such as life histories, cross-cultural interviews, and community diversity panels. Social justice leaders must also develop a relationship with themselves by increasing personal awareness and critical consciousness (Brown, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008).

The importance of relationships is also implicit in descriptions of enacting LSJ within the literature. For example, implicitly, there is a connection to relationships, as McKenzie and colleagues (2008) name raising the academic achievement of all students and developing inclusiveness as goals for social justice leadership. Enacting these goals implies strong teacher and student relationships as well as relationships between the school and families. Leaders for social justice also work with their teaching staff through professional development to support teacher growth related to equity and diversity (Kose, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). Leaders must have relationships with teachers to initiate difficult conversations, support reflection on identity, challenge assumptions, and reexamine traditional

practices within the context of professional development. Supporting the development of critical consciousness within teachers and students implies strong relationships with staff and students (McKenzie et al., 2008).

Embracing the values of LSJ as well as forming relationships does not translate into equitable schools. Leaders must contend with increasingly pervasive federal and state accountability systems (McGhee & Nelson, 2005). Becoming an effective leader for social justice quite often means challenging and dramatically changing values, perceptions, and existing practices (Guerra & Nelson, 2007; Theoharis, 2007). As such, leaders for social justice often face resistance to their work from the school, community, and district (Cooper, 2009; Theoharis, 2009; Young & Brooks, 2008).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the field of educational leadership seeks to become more racially diverse and effectively serve a multicultural student population, examining the role of race and racism has become more common in the literature (Smith-Maddox & Solórzano, 2002). Research on LSJ provides a promising way to begin to address race by using a race-embedded approach (Brown, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2007). While LSJ addresses improving racial equity, it is through a more nuanced approach to race and does not fully interrogate race and racism (examining racial identity, the historical context of race/racism in education, the systems of power and privilege that maintain inequitable student learning, the intersection of race/racism with other inequalities, etc.) and the experiential knowledge of racially diverse communities. Unless race and racism are addressed directly, they may go overlooked or underexplored because many new leaders may lack the cultural competence or comfort level to address such areas effectively (Bustamante et al., 2009; Guerra & Nelson, 2007). Thus, to expand the LSJ literature, we use CRT in our study to explore dimensions of race, power, and privilege—in particular, the concepts of interest convergence and cultural intuition.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

There is an emerging group of scholars in educational leadership that are attending to race and racism more directly (Cooper, 2009; Morfin, Perez, Parker, Lynn, & Arrona, 2006; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). A growing number of scholars have utilized a CRT framework to examine educational leadership (Alemán, 2006; López,

2003). Building on these scholars, our study draws on CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano, 1998). CRT is useful, as it offers a lens to directly address race and racism in educational leadership by putting race at the center of inquiry, in comparison to LSJ, which positions race as one part but not necessarily at the center.

In a special issue in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, Parker and Villalpando (2007) identified five tenets of CRT: the centrality of race and racism, the challenge to dominant ideology, a commitment to social justice and praxis, the centrality of experiential knowledge, and the historical context and interdisciplinary perspective. Within the scholarship on CRT, three key concepts inform our study: interest convergence, cultural intuition, and community cultural wealth.

In our study, we centralized race in multiple ways throughout the research process. In the data collection phase, we oversampled for students of color; conducted racialized focus groups (White and non-White); asked direct questions regarding race, power, and privilege; and had racialized facilitators of the focus groups (e.g., White students with a White facilitator). In the data analysis phase, we conducted racialized analysis, doing a comparison of the White students and the students of color separately, as well as delving into race, power, and privilege separately. In addition, we examined for interest convergence, cultural intuition, and community cultural wealth.

Interest convergence. Bell (1993) conceptualizes interest convergence as an opportunity when the interests of those in power align with those who do not have power. In other words, policies and practices will be pursued only so far as those who hold the power receive a direct benefit. Bell and others (see Bell, 1993; Harris, 1993; Lawrence & Matsuda, 1997) highlight civil rights legislation as a key example of interest convergence of both White and Black Americans. In education, scholars utilizing a CRT lens have found that initiatives that are successful are often a result of interest convergence, such as desegregation and school finance (Alemán, 2006; Orfield & Kurleander, 2001).

For example, Orfield and Kurleander (2001) suggest that desegregation policies in education were successful because of the benefits to White and non-White families. They also suggest that we have seen a rise in school resegregation through the dismantling of policies integrating education because such interest convergence no longer exists. Interest convergence then offers an expanded view of LSJ by allowing for a race-based explanation of shifts and changes in educational policy for students of color. Furthermore, interest convergence uncovers the nonserendipitous nature of such change that is grounded within racial opportunity and privilege.

Cultural intuition. Consistent with CRT and founded on Chicana femi-
nist epistemology is Delgado-Bernal's (1998) notion of "cultural intuition,"
a theoretical sensitivity to data and analysis based on one's identity. Such
cultural intuition can come from personal experience, the existing litera-
ture, professional experience, and the analytic research process. From a
methodological standpoint and building on community cultural wealth
(Yosso, 2006), it is important to acknowledge this biased knowledge and
lack of objectivity as an asset.

In an effort to center the experiential knowledge of racially diverse
communities (students of color in K–12 schools, ELSJs of color, and com-
munity members), cultural intuition may provide more insight into the ac-
tion research process for ELSJ. Cultural intuition offers an expanded view
of LSJ by taking into account one's cultural competence and background
into one's leadership and decision-making process. In particular, cultural
intuition affirms one's cultural competence (when present) and provides a
lens to understand nuances between differential leadership responses and
practices for social justice.

Community cultural wealth. Drawing on theories of cultural capital
and CRT, Yosso (2005, 2006) introduces the concept of community cultural
wealth and an approach that taps into less acknowledged and overlooked
assets to assist minority students in education. In particular, Yosso (2005)
highlights forms of community cultural wealth, aspirational capital, famil-
ial capital, social capital, linguistic capital, resistant capital, and naviga-
tional capital that are important resources that can help students, families,
and educators improve educational success. For the purposes of this
article, we highlight two forms of wealth: social and navigational capital.

As a form of community cultural wealth, *social capital* refers to the rela-
tionships and networks that can provide emotional and instrumental support
to help minority students navigate educational institutions. Unlike traditional
notions of capital, which focus on individuals in positions of power, com-
munity cultural wealth taps into nontraditional (and less acknowledged) net-
works, such as working-class relatives who have information on educational
opportunities or siblings. Similar to social capital, navigational capital sheds
light on the knowledge and skills to successfully navigate social institutions
(e.g., education). An example that Yosso (2005) provides is the notion of
"academic invulnerability" in which students tap into individual, family, and
community resources to navigate racially hostile campuses.

Community cultural wealth is relevant to this study, as it provides an
assets-based lens to examine students of color and the process of devel-
oping emerging leaders for social justice. A community cultural wealth
framework also recenters our understanding of leadership from the indi-

vidual to the community level, allowing us to examine experiences and relationships (traditional and less traditional) that further social justice, such as the social networks (social capital) and multiple stakeholders that help students' successfully navigate school systems (navigational capital).

Taken together, our study builds on LSJ by drawing on CRT in general, and it calls on interest convergence, cultural intuition, and community cultural wealth in particular to explore race, power, and privilege more deeply. We examine the role of relationships and use CRT to highlight the complexity of race and racism within emerging school leaders' development process in an educational leadership program. In particular, we examine students' professional identity and cultural intuition as ELSJs and their experiences with action research to document their unique developmental processes with becoming ELSJs, highlighting areas of promise and documenting challenges and tensions within this work. In alignment with CRT, we pay attention to issues of individual and systemic power and privilege (e.g., interest convergence), as well as the role of race and racism within this area. By centering race and racism and moving the experiences of students of color from the margins to the forefront, we seek to find more effective ways of preparing and sustaining emerging educational leaders for social justice.

Using a CRT framework and action research as a tool to translate theory to practice, the research questions guiding our study are as follows: How do emerging leaders develop their role as social justice leaders in furthering educational equity for students of color? In particular, what role does race and relationships play in this process for leaders of color?

CONTEXT

Guided by CRT, exploring our campus and program context is important to our research, specifically highlighting the ways in which our university has transitioned and continues to transition to become more inclusive of social justice and students of color. Our educational leadership program is located in a Southwestern public university that is transitioning from a teaching university to a research-intensive institution. Historically, the school has been a traditionally White university situated in a geographic area with a growing Latina/o local community. The university is actively engaged in the process of becoming a Hispanic-serving institution, with 24% of the undergraduate student population identifying as Hispanic. Currently, we have approximately 200 students enrolled in our program, which is 68% White and 32% students of color (23% Hispanic, 8% African American, 0.7% Asian, and 0.7% other classification), with a substantial

growth in students of color in the last 15 years. Our students come from a 100-mile radius, covering urban, suburban, and rural school locations that are representative of the central Texas area. Within this area, there are a number of high-growth school districts in suburban areas where new home construction was happening at a feverish pace. In addition, the urban city area has faced gentrification, diversifying suburban and rural school districts to include higher percentages of students of color, low-income students, and English-language learners.

BECOMING AN EQUITY-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Our program is relatively open access, as applicants must have a minimum GRE score, completed 1 year of teaching, and earned a bachelor's degree for acceptance. We attract a diverse range of aspiring school leaders, from second-year teachers to district coordinators to assistant principals. Our program has transitioned several times over the last 15 years. We first moved from a more traditional educational administration program, focused on the technical and management aspects of leadership, to a greater focus on instructional leadership. In the past 5 years, we engaged in further transition to include an explicit focus on equity and social justice throughout coursework. For example, our supervision course now includes an explicit focus on culturally responsive teaching, and our course on school environments now includes equity frameworks and community outreach projects. Like many educational leadership programs, we do not admit to being at a state of completion but are continually moving forward in the area of social justice. We strive to develop culturally competent, instructional leaders who work within communities.

While our student population has diversified, we have been very purposeful in trying to racially diversify our faculty. At the time of this study, our tenure-line faculty of 10 has transitioned from being exclusively White (just 8 years ago) to including 3 faculty of color (1 Latino, 1 Latina, and 1 Asian American). Faculty interests are also diverse and include innovative areas of leadership, such as a focus on curriculum and instructional leadership, as well as significant expertise in the community, such as community organizing and nonprofit work, community partnerships, and higher education. Within these areas of interest, many of the faculty members share a core passion for social justice and equity.

ACTION RESEARCH AS A CORE PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

The 39-credit hour master in educational leadership consists of a sequence of courses intended to build on each other, moving from a focus on self, systems, and communities to specific courses on leadership

knowledge, such as curriculum, campus leadership, law, and continuous school improvement. A key piece of our educational leadership program is the focus on action research. Students spend time learning the skills and collaborative techniques of action research and then create an action research project in the capstone class.

Action research: Planning stage. Within our program, action research takes place in two distinct phases: planning and implementation. During the planning stage, students are enrolled in an action research class where they develop an inquiry question related to an equity issue in their school. Students have free choice over the issue they focus on during their action research; however, we have noticed that as our program has evolved, there is now a greater number of action research projects that include a social justice focus. Planning also consists of collecting data from multiple stakeholders about that issue through methods such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, document analysis, and critical analysis of data (e.g., disaggregation of achievement, discipline referrals, attendance beyond single measures—race and class; race, class, and grade level; etc.—and across multiple years to locate systemic patterns). One unique feature of our action research process is the explicit inclusion of community perspectives outside the school walls, such as individuals from nonprofit organizations, religious institutions, and social service organizations, as well as parents who are not currently involved on campus and community members through neighborhood walks.

Action research: Implementation stage. After data collection, students develop a collaborative action plan where they take a lead role in facilitating change on their campus. For many students, this is their first leadership role in a campuswide initiative. Students then implement their action plan the following semester when enrolled in their administrative internship. Implementation may include leading professional development workshops, facilitating book clubs, organizing campuswide events, and so on. During this implementation phase, many students take on new positions as assistant principals, instructional coaches, or central office administrators. However, many others are still working as classroom teachers. Given our university and program context, two key questions that kept emerging were (1) how do emerging leaders begin to bring LSJ theory to practice during the action research process? and (2) what role do race, racism, and the intersection of power and privilege play in this process?

METHOD

The data for this study were part of a larger research project studying our educational leadership students' social justice leadership development.

The research question guiding this study was "How do emerging leaders for social justice develop as they begin to apply LSJ theory through the process of action research?" The subquestion guiding the findings was "What role do race and relationships play in this process?" Sampling was purposeful in that we wanted to recruit participants who were former graduate students in our educational leadership program and had completed an action research project focused on a social justice issue (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). To generate a list of possible participants, program faculty were asked to nominate former students who fit this criteria. Since faculty had worked closely with students in a variety of capacities, they were well aware of students' interest in social justice work and easily provided a list of participants. Specifically, the faculty has several opportunities to observe students' action research projects by teaching the action research class, supervising leadership interns, or serving on orals' panels. We also shared Theoharis's (2007) definition of LSJ but stressed that our goal was to identify action research projects focusing on students of color, which aligned with our CRT lens. We honored the nomination of faculty members as part of the program transition and acknowledged the diverse understandings of social justice present within the group. The faculty nominated 26 former students.

Twelve ELSJs from seven school districts were able to participate in the study. A racially and professionally diverse group of students agreed to participate in the study, including two African American females, four Latinas, one Latino, four White females, and one White male. Participants' professional positions included teachers, a full-time doctoral student, assistant principals, and central office administrators (see Table 1).

We wanted to understand both individual- and group-level experience and selected focus groups as the main data collection method to elicit individual participant experiences as well as allow for dialogue and participant interaction (Krueger, 2000). CRT informed our research design and analysis. For example, we purposefully sampled (Patton, 2002) former graduate students of color, had racially homogeneous focus groups (i.e., White students and students of color), and assigned facilitators by race (e.g., White students focus group had White facilitators) to reflect our race-central approach. Given the research literature and our experiences as faculty, our purposeful design was intended to provide a positive and welcoming space to discuss such controversial issues with race and social justice and allow the ELSJs to tap into their cultural intuition. Each focus group was recorded and the dialogue transcribed verbatim for analysis. Additional data included brief questionnaires before the focus groups, which solicited demographic information related to school sites, identification of class instructors and internship mentors, and brief reflections on the action research process.

Table 1. Description of Participants

Participant	Gender, Race	Action Research Topic	Position During Planning / In Implementation
Aisha	Female, African American	Closing achievement gaps in language arts through community partnerships	High school teacher / assistant principal (same school)
Cara	Female, White	The achievement gap for English-language learners	High school English teacher/ high school English teacher
Dena	Female, Latina	Assisting struggling students with teacher problem-solving teams	Elementary teacher / assistant principal (same school)
Donna	Female, White	African American discipline gap	Assistant principal intern / assistant principal (different school)
Erin	Female, White	Closing the achievement gap for African American students in math	Teacher / assistant principal (new school)
Janice	Female, Latina	The transition of English-language learners	ESL teacher / ESL–bilingual coordinator (new school)
Lena	Female, Latina	Building communities with Latina parents	District bilingual gifted–talented coordinator / university language arts coordinator
Maria	Female, Latina	Bilingual education	Full-time graduate student / full-time graduate student
Martin	Male, White	Teacher perceptions of student groups and the influence on achievement	District testing coordinator / district testing coordinator
Miguel	Male, Latino	Students and science achievement	Assistant principal / assistant principal (new school)
Sara	Female, White	Improving parental involvement and cultural awareness	Assistant principal / assistant principal (same school)
Tonya	Female, African American	African American students and the reading achievement gap	Teacher / assistant principal (same school)

Analysis began with each researcher open coding and developing initial themes for the focus group one facilitated. Consistent with CRT, within our analysis we examined the data separately by racial diversity (e.g., emerging-leaders-of-color focus groups were racially diverse, and White focus groups were not) as a starting point of our analysis and reporting. We looked for crossover and commonalities among researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This discussion resulted in the selection of four thematic areas present in the data: relationships, elements of LSJ, programmatic elements, and awareness. Thereafter, the research team went back to the data to look deeply into these themes across all focus groups and engaged in more selective coding to identify relationships and continuums. Again, we met to debrief these themes and, based on feedback from our team, adapted them as needed. We also looked for specific differences between White ELSJs and ELSJs of color. Relationships proved to be a salient theme and thus serves as the focus of this article. We then met several times to look at the theme of relationships. We looked for nuances within the concept of relationships and, more closely, at themes within the ELSJs of color and White ELSJs. Adding another layer, we delved deeper to examine the presence of interest convergence as connected to our CRT framework. Last, drawing on community cultural wealth, we looked at the ways in which community served as an asset in the leadership development process. The subthemes became related to emerging leaders' relationships with self and others, including teachers, administration, and community.

Trustworthiness was supported by multiple researcher analyses and debriefing throughout the process. These debriefings included meetings to negotiate possible areas of researcher bias (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Also, we engaged in member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by sharing and debriefing themes with each participant. Given the feedback from participants, we engaged in further discussion and adjusted themes.

FINDINGS

For all the ELSJs in this study, relationships emerged as a key piece of negotiating LSJ. As a form of social and navigational capitals, relationships not only influenced the ELSJs in becoming equity oriented but also influenced the process of engaging in LSJ during the planning and implementation of their action research. While the importance of relationships was found across all focus groups, several themes were unique to the ELSJs of color.

THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN BECOMING
EQUITY ORIENTED: UNDERSTANDING SELF

There were distinct differences in how White ELSJs and ELSJs of color gained an equity orientation before entering the program—in particular, in their awareness of the way that race, class, and language mediate educational inequities. Furthermore, there were differences in the ways in which White ELSJs and ELSJs of color drew on their cultural intuition to navigate leadership development. White ELSJs became equity oriented primarily through their professional experiences in Title I schools or in schools that were experiencing demographic shifts (i.e., increasing percentages of students of color), thereby relying on their professional cultural intuition. In particular, their experiences in interacting with students of color and staff sparked new understandings of equity and challenged their own notions of equity.

For example, Donna, a White assistant principal, had attended suburban predominantly White schools throughout her life and had never fully explored racial diversity (or the lack thereof) due to her racially homogeneous schooling experience. Through her graduate work in our program, she reflected on her experience in realizing that there was a demographic shift in her own classroom: "[I taught] a reading improvement class at a Title I school, and I taught that subject [for] 4 years. On the very first day of school I noticed there were no White children in my classroom." This experience challenged Donna's own racial normativity of community by expecting some White students in the classroom. In another instance, Sara, a White assistant principal, shared her experience with coming to learn about equity through the demographic changes occurring in her district and campus:

> [My] community was much more affluent and homogeneous and not a lot of diversity. . . . I have been there through the rapid change of the clientele of our school, the attitude of the district toward our school, the attitudes of people at my school . . . and I have been aware of these comments and perceptions well before I could even put the word [*equity*] to it.

For these White ELSJs, the findings suggest that working on campuses with increasing numbers of students of color and facing racial inequities shaped their awareness of educational (in)equities.

ELSJs of color also frequently mentioned the influence of their professional experiences and community in increasing their awareness of school inequities. However, central to ELSJs of color were their own personal experiences—their navigational capital—in navigating the educational

system, such as dealing with racism, classism, and deficit views, thereby drawing on their personal cultural intuition more strongly than White ELSJs. In our program, students complete an autoethnography during their first semester of coursework. Reflecting on this coursework, one African American assistant principal, Tonya, shared her personal story of how she experienced inequalities throughout her educational experience in the United States across multiple states:

> I was born in Texas and grew up in California. . . . I went to elementary school in Texas, until the fifth grade, and everything seemed okay because I was 9 or 10 years old. But then I go to Virginia and I am there and everything is not what it is cracked up to be. . . . I am thinking, okay I am just like any other kid . . . I am smart kid . . . I am intelligent. . . . As I moved up to 9th and 10th grade, I moved up to New Mexico and I was like, "Why am I the only Black kid in these classes?" I am taking AP honors classes and I am doing it and I am thinking, where is everybody else? I know I am not the only Black smart person on this campus.

Furthermore, Tonya acknowledged the presence of systemic inequities: "I knew it was a bad system because I grew up in that system. I was all over the country because my dad was in the service . . . so I have experienced [them]." Taken together, the narratives then suggest that ELSJs of color rely on their personal and professional experiences to become leaders for social justice. As a result, many ELSJs of color have more deeply utilized their cultural intuition and negotiated their understanding of equity earlier in their lives and enter the program with personal and professional experience with educational inequities.

DEVELOPING EQUITABLE SCHOOL CONTEXTS: THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

As the ELSJs worked on facilitating school improvement on their campuses to support equitable school contexts for students of color, relationships with teachers, school administrators, and the community played an important role. The ELSJs of color had unique experiences within their relationships with each of these stakeholders. All the ELSJs used action research as a tool to facilitate change on their campuses. As seen in Table 1, the majority of emerging leaders in this study began the action research process in our principal preparation program as teachers. Many of them became assistant principals or central office personnel during implementation. For this group of ELSJs who became assistant principals, some stayed at the campus where they had taught, and others moved to new contexts.

Relationships with teachers. Developing relationships with teachers on campus was a common way of developing social capital for ELSJs. For

those ELSJs who changed campuses, many recognized that they could not just come in and immediately have conversations about equity issues. Rather, ELSJs had to engage in a relationship-building process with the teachers in their new community to build enough trust to discuss equity topics. Miguel, a bilingual Latino assistant principal, shared how starting out as an assistant principal in a different school resulted in difficulties engaging in discussions with teachers regarding their beliefs and practices related to his action research topic of science and equity: "I had one [teacher] who told me, she said, 'I don't know you, I don't know if I can trust you.'" Miguel spent his time forging relationships by talking to teachers in the hallways, covering classes for teachers, and sitting in on team meetings rather than delving into equity issues. Erin, a White teacher, began working on action research related to African American student achievement in mathematics. However, before engaging in implementation, she became an assistant principal at a different campus. Erin explained how she had to start again. Even though this new campus struggled with equity issues as well, she felt that she needed to spend time building relationships. Many teachers viewed her as an outsider, and she struggled gaining their trust. Erin shared that most of the teachers "felt what they were doing was fine and students should adapt to them." Now that she has been there for more than a year, she feels more comfortable taking on issues of equity. In reflecting on her efforts over the last 2 years, Erin stated, "The first year was hard. The second year has been much more successful as for them [teachers] being open to more ideas will be an option, but last year, no." She realized that the work was not going to be easy. Again, Miguel and Erin had to spend time building relationships with teachers to lay the foundation for their equity work.

The story was different for ELSJs who had been on a campus for some time and had worked over the years to establish relationships; yet, ELSJs are clear that this was still not an easy process. Several emerging leaders became assistant principals in schools where they had taught for several years.

An African American assistant principal, Tonya, who was working on African American achievement, developed a breakfast club where teachers came before school to discuss issues and readings she provided related to her topic. Having relationships in place allowed Tonya to begin these difficult discussions and fostered teacher participation.

> I really believed that my background was of building relationships because people knew me as a teacher and I did not change when I became an [assistant principal], for I was the same old crazy Tonya. So that helped me when I did bring that article and people read it. And the ones that didn't come were still like, "I still want the article." We had those discussions, the hard discussions.

Using action research as a tool to bring about change related to African American student achievement offered an opportunity for personal and professional development. As a teacher, Tonya was an advocate for the African American minority population at the campus. As an assistant principal conducting action research, she was able to explore these issues at a systematic level and engage her principal and other administrators in this area.

Even though Tonya had taken on a different role in the school, teachers felt that they could still trust her. Sara, a White assistant principal in a school where she had taught for 8 years, explained that her relationships with teachers is what "saved" her in regard to taking on the topic of parent involvement on a campus with increasing racial diversity. Knowing that many teachers blamed the parents and the community for lowered standardized test scores, thereby not tapping into their community cultural wealth, also gave Sara insight into where to begin her equity work.

Whether the emerging leaders had established relationships with the teachers at their school made a difference in their ability to engage in LSJ. To peel back the layers to reach the causes of an equity issue, the ELSJs needed honesty and participation by the teachers. Relationships also provided greater connections to teachers to find those willing to participate in professional development and action related to equity. The ELSJs needed to be attuned to their relationships with teachers to make decisions about what steps to take in bringing about change. For many, the first step was developing these relationships.

Furthermore, for White ELSJs like Donna, the action research process provided an opportunity to have conversations about race and racial inequity with teachers of color—something they may not have pursued otherwise—and privilege their unique perspectives. Donna, an assistant principal, explained how having access to and trust with the only African American teacher on campus was a key piece of understanding the issue of African American student achievement within her school.

> One teacher that I interviewed, she was the only African American teacher on this campus, and she had been there for 28 years. You would think out of all the teachers on my campus, she would not be scared to give her opinion. [However] she was very interested in my paper and concerned about how it was going to be written. So my relationship with her allowed her to be honest with me.

One interesting distinction between ELSJs of color and the White ELSJs related to how the leaders of color had to recalibrate their view of relationships on campus. This was even the case if the ELSJs of color had stayed at their same campus throughout the process of action research. The emerg-

ing leaders of color were often surprised by the amount of racial deficit thinking present at their schools. Dana, a Latina assistant principal, shared,

> I think the hardest part was the data collection. It was because the survey. Some were reluctant to turn in the survey. Some did not hesitate to tell me what they felt, which was worrisome because they thought they could just say whatever they felt and be very racist. I think a lot of them hesitated because they didn't want to write it. They didn't want to put it on paper. I couldn't believe it.

Many of the ELSJs of color had underestimated the depth of racial deficit thinking related to diversity and issues of social justice. A Latina GT coordinator, Lena shared,

> What was most difficult for me was coming to the realization that our bilingual teachers had deficit views of our new immigrant bilingual children. It slapped me in the face because I was not expecting it. I would have never expected to find that in my data. And I did find some of the same deficit thinking from our Latina teachers, you know, "those parents didn't care about our kids . . ."

The idea that deficit thinking about English-language learners was so pervasive to include bilingual teachers as well as Latina teachers forced Lena to reevaluate her campus in terms of equity and social justice readiness. Tonya, an African American assistant principal, described collecting data through surveys and interviews as a "wake-up call" to how faculty members on her campus viewed issues of diversity.

Relationships with school administration. In addition to relationships with teachers, relationships with the school administration was a key part of furthering educational equity for students of color. School administration in this case was often the principal of the school, who also served as the emerging leader's internship mentor for graduate studies. Yet, unlike building capacity with teachers, ELSJs viewed developing relationships with administrators in a different light. Many of the emerging leaders talked about how the school administrator made a difference in their ability to take action regarding equity issues. This often related to support in terms of time, resources, and structures to put their work into action. Dana talked about how having a new principal committed to creating relationships between general education and ESL teachers was a key to moving forward with implementation of creating a more inclusive and cohesive ESL program. As a new assistant principal, Tonya also shared the importance of the support from fellow administrators: "So I had the support of the principals. They said, 'Go for it, go for the gold!'" She was specifically talking about the reading material she chose for her breakfast club professional development. Unsure of whether to have the teachers read an article

entitled "Why Are 'Bad Boys' Always Black?" (Monroe, 2005), her fellow administrators encouraged her to take a risk. Tonya's fellow administrators provided her with the support and confidence to share readings and begin discussions that may have been uncomfortable or risky as a new assistant principal.

Beyond these examples, there was lack of data illustrating administrative support for equity issues. Aisha, an African American assistant principal, described the difference between her principal's permission versus support for social justice work: "I had permission to do what needed to be done to get that research done and implement programs and start new things on campus. I had permission but not much support in terms of this." Aisha talked about support in terms of securing resources, such as time and support for teachers. Sara had been promised support during action research planning, which faded when the time came for implementation. Sara's principal had supported a teacher book club, but soon she realized that this just had been talk and was not supported with action. Maria explained this attitude as the school leader, saying, "You go see what you can do about that social action," and leaving the emerging leader on her own.

The ELSJs' principals often did not actively or explicitly resist their social justice work; however, by not actively supporting their work, the emerging leaders faced many roadblocks. Cara—a White teacher focusing on English-language learners' academic achievement—had arranged to coteach with an ESL teacher, signed up for specific professional development in the summer, and gave up her pre-AP sections as part of her action plan. Cara also arranged a group of English-language learners to be in common classes as part of a peer support network. However, over the summer, all these plans were changed, as the students were put into different classes and her position as coteacher was given to a brand new teacher hired from out of the district. All of the changes that Cara had planned were eliminated without even being consulted.

As Aisha explained, for true change and implementation to happen, the principal must be collaborative and supportive. The principal must "work together and get things in line so that you can implement your plan." So there was some interest convergence here from the White principal for permission to do the work but not enough for more meaningful implementation. For Aisha, this calls into question the principal's true commitment. Part of the ELSJs' equity work became about learning how to negotiate their relationships with principals and those supervising their leadership work.

Relationships with communities of color. One of the pedagogical components of our educational leadership program that promotes equity and social justice is embracing the greater community within one's leadership development, both forms of social and navigational capitals. Students take

a course centered on various community environments, which culminates in a project that delves deeper into the history, existing relationships, and identification of assets that can be utilized in school improvement. A key finding within our focus groups was the importance of developing relationships with the community, primarily for the ELSJs of color.

Throughout the data, the ELSJs of color named forming relationships with communities of color as the most powerful experience in their leadership development. Though all action research topics focused on equity issues related to students of color, only emerging leaders of color named building relationships with communities of color as the most rewarding aspect of the action research experience. This is not to say that the White ELSJs did not form relationships with communities, but, rather, the community focus was not identified as a salient theme within the White ELSJs' dialogue. Thus, the community connection was yet another opportunity for personal and professional development for the African American and Latina/o ELSJs of color.

For many ELSJs of color, engaging in action research allowed them to develop relationships with parents by affirming their experience and cultural background. Even though Maria, a Latina full-time graduate student, was working in a school context where she did not teach, she was able to take some action by building relationships with community members. Part of Maria's implementation plan included assembling a group of Latina/o parents to engage them in conversation about bilingual education efforts. As Maria shared, this type of engagement superseded her expectations.

> Fifteen [parents] consistently came to the meetings, and from those 15, they have *las comadres* and, you know, *las amigas* and extended family members in the community that they engage and talk to about these things, so it became more of a grassroots, so that was the most positive thing for me.

When thinking back on the experience, Maria recounts her work with the families of the students of color and supporting their empowerment in relation to the policies and practices of bilingual education. Furthermore, Maria helped lay the foundation for Latina/o parents to organize and empower themselves on the issue, characteristics of truly effective parental engagement. This engagement includes genuine two-way partnerships, where parental input is voiced, heard, and incorporated (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). In addition to group conversations, individual conversations with parent stakeholders were a common activity for ELSJs of color.

Lena, who focused on Latina/o parents, solicited parents' perspectives through a community conversation. She shared about the rewards of working within the community as a part of the action research process. In particular,

she highlighted the community pride in Latina mothers discussing their children's education, providing a form of navigational capital.

> The biggest reward for me is that I had a focus group with Latina moms, and that was the biggest reward for me. I'll never forget the pride in their faces when I asked if they were actively involved in their children's education, and they were so full of pride and they were involved. They made sure that they were well dressed, well groomed, beautiful, and [they] taught them how to be respectful and ready for school everyday . . . on time, early, and it was just a joy to me to have these focus groups with these parents . . . listen to their stories . . . and listen to how proud they were of their children . . . how bad they wanted to be a part of everything that was going on in the school.

Lena's conversation with parents also revealed their desire to be more involved on campus, information that would have otherwise not surfaced in the normal engagement of parents on this campus.

Aisha, another ELSJ of color, shared her experience meeting with African American parents in conducting home visits with a teacher:

> I think the most exciting thing about mine [action research project] was I had a teacher come with me and we went to two different homes [for home visits], but it was actually having that one-on-one interaction with parents of kids who you wouldn't, you don't even look at. A lot of times teachers don't see these kids even, or they are troubled kids or don't want to see them or whatever the case may be, but it was really neat to go into those homes and have those conversations and see where this kid is coming from.

Central to the relationship-building process for Aisha was the contextual information gained about the student and family dynamics. Including a teacher in the process also allowed for Aisha to role-model the type of culturally engaging parent communication practice that was absent on her campus. Maria, Lena, and Aisha all engaged parents in culturally responsive and meaningful ways (i.e., bilingual conversations, individual conversations, and home visits) that the school was otherwise not currently practicing or not necessarily ready to engage in at a campuswide level.

These ELSJs of color were and still are developing valuable relationships with parents. The examples further highlight the power in engaging parents of color who "so badly" want to be involved or "aren't seen" by the teachers to shift the power dynamic so that teachers and school leaders "see" these communities and value them as important stakeholders. In this way, these ELSJs' are laying the groundwork to shift the culture of the campus to acknowledge and value previously excluded voices of African American and Latina/o parents.

DISCUSSION

The powerful roles of personal experiences and building relationships are key lessons learned by the ELSJs who were graduate students in our leadership preparation program. While the importance of relationships in leadership development may seem obvious, this study points to the fact that relationships do matter and relationships with multiple stakeholder groups (teachers, administrators, and communities) are a key part of developing as an ELSJ (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007, 2008). Furthermore, CRT was a useful lens to understand the complex racial and power dynamics of this type of work and examine the growing population of students of color in our graduate program. In particular for ELSJs of color, we identified multiple areas of cultural intuition, interest convergence, and community cultural wealth in developing and negotiating relationships during the action research process.

ACKNOWLEDGING PERSONAL AND
PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

The ELSJs' narratives reveal that they do not start as a blank slate in entering an educational leadership program. Programs that espouse social justice and educational equity must allow opportunities for emerging leaders' work to deepen and extend their understanding of equity issues (Brown, 2006). Yet, our findings illustrate that White ELSJs and ELSJs of color draw on their experiences and utilize their cultural intuition quite differently. ELSJs of color relied on their personal experience as a form of cultural intuition to further their action research and professional experience. Consistent with the literature (Brown, 2006; Lindsey et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2009), our findings then suggest that educational leadership programs that embrace social justice would benefit from reflective activities that engage emerging leaders' personal educational experiences as well as their professional experiences to develop greater critical consciousness.

Presently, in our first required course, our program utilizes an autoethnographic component, whereby emerging leaders must write their own ethnographic account of their life. Such activities facilitate a social justice orientation by helping emerging leaders critically examine, reflect on, and understand how their multiple identities (race, class, gender, etc.) and upbringing shape their lives, developing social and navigational capitals. In addition, sharing such experiences in class allows emerging leaders to practice negotiating and revealing their identity in a safe space with their

peers. These reflective activities can also serve as a space where emerging leaders serve as peer educators to one another and, with proper facilitation by the instructor, connect personal accounts to more abstract and often difficult subject matter regarding race, racism, classism, heterosexism, and so on. Furthermore, such activities allow emerging leaders to more confidently engage in action research by tapping into their cultural intuition, understanding their own values and biases, before asking their colleagues and stakeholders to share their perspectives. Moreover, emerging leaders can begin to identify and/or publically acknowledge the personal and professional areas that they need to further develop to become effective leaders for social justice.

COMMUNITY LSJ

Reaching out to the community and fostering meaningful relationships with community members was another key finding. In particular, developing relationships with the community was an area of cultural intuition and navigational capital central to Latina/o and African American ELSJs' experience. Our findings suggest that intentionally pursuing community connections and relationships with action research was a fruitful approach—one that was rewarding for ELSJs of color and perhaps allowed them to reach out to communities of color that were not represented or were heard less by campus stakeholders. However, White ELSJs did not pursue such relationships with the community with the same tenacity or feeling of empowerment. ELSJs of color drew on their cultural intuition by examining their personal educational background and professional experiences in reflecting on equity, whereas White students relied exclusively on their professional experiences; perhaps this is due to the fact that ELSJs of color had a personal stake as a member of the same ethnic/racial group, to serve as a bridge and advocate for these often silenced perspectives. This finding does not imply that White ELSJs did not care or contribute to this area. Rather, ELSJs of color had a stronger personal connection, whereas White ELSJs engaged in community mainly as a form of interest convergence (as a course requirement). Regardless, the use of differential cultural intuition and this dichotomy between ELSJs of color and White ELSJs form an area that is ripe for further research.

Traditional educational leadership programs attend to administrative and curricular aspects of social justice and incorporate community connections far less frequently (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; McKenzie et al., 2008). Our findings suggest a need to reexamine our principal-dominant model of LSJ. Such principal-dominant models, while important, are not

realistic for collaborative systemic change in the long term. Rather, our findings suggest that engaging the on- and off-campus community in meaningful ways assists emerging leaders development for social justice.

In addition, our findings suggest a need to expand both curricular and faculty resources that include a community component to support social justice and equity in our programs. As educational leadership programs seek to diversify their curriculum and faculty, including community perspectives, as well as faculty that have expertise in such areas, may be a meaningful approach. In particular, utilizing these often overlooked community resources may allow for greater support and engagement with social justice. Part of the transitional nature of our program has included a community environments course and the addition of faculty that have nontraditional areas of expertise (nonprofit and preK–20 partnership experiences)—both of which seem to have influenced faculty and students in meaningful ways. These new faculty members serve to keep community at the forefront with the curriculum, student recruitment, and partnerships. As our findings indicate, emerging leaders have benefited by engaging with community stakeholders. These two changes in the program have been quite effective for ELSJs of color, and we suspect that with continued development in this area, this will be the case for all emerging leaders.

SUSTAINING LSJ

We acknowledge that privilege is at play when White ELSJs engage in action research focused on social justice. For many of our White ELSJs, the action research process provided a unique opportunity to temporarily position racially diverse teachers and communities as experts and valuable stakeholders. The degree to which communities of color remained as "experts," however, remains to be seen. Was this view long-lasting? Or was it just a form of interest convergence? Furthermore, this intentional process of building relationships with hard-to-reach stakeholders of color was a form of outreach that may not have been present without this type of project.

White ELSJs engaging in social justice work often have the privilege of being able to shut off this work at the end of day and continue their lives. However, for ELSJs of color, this is not the case. This difference can be seen in our findings related to relationships with teachers and how the ELSJs of color were astounded and often hurt by the data revealing such a deep level of deficit thinking among their teaching peers. For students of color, the disturbing reality becomes thinking, "That could have been me," or even more painful, "That could have been my child," in relation

to teacher comments. Similar to Young and Brooks's (2008) recommendations, faculty cannot take a color-blind approach to supporting ELSJs of color in leadership programs. Faculty need to include spaces in class as well as writings by authors of color engaging in social justice work to facilitate conversations about the unique challenges ELSJs of color may face.

Much of the literature has focused on how principals can enact LSJ. However, our findings have implications for the need to understand how principals can support others (assistant principals, teacher leaders, etc.) engaging in LSJ. Too many principals in our study were identified as roadblocks or resistant to the ELSJs, even though many of these emerging leaders were assistant principals. When we look at the characteristics of a leader for social justice, the unique experiences of a leader who is not a principal surface. For example, in promoting inclusive practices, the challenge is not only about working to bring these practices to action but also about negotiating with the school leader (principal) to make this happen. Another layer of complexity occurs when this principal has not developed an equity lens. Our findings suggest that for leaders who have not fully developed an equity lens, there is a lack of synergy to put the necessary energy and resources to adequately address equity issues around race, class, and language.

Despite the challenges, Theoharis (2007, 2008) recommends that leaders must develop strategies to sustain their work in the face of resistance. For ELSJs of color, who often feel both a personal and a professional stake in addressing educational inequities, these strategies become even more important. We suggest that educational leadership programs must support their ELSJs to develop such strategies. Our participants seemed to have been able to adequately engage teachers in the process and overcome resistance. Yet, they faced difficulty with having adequate support for effective implementation of their projects. We acknowledge that there is a unique power dynamic at play and that educational leadership programs concerned with social justice may need to expand these strategies to include administrative mentors as well. We should ask ourselves how educational leadership programs can support the development of principals, who serve as mentors, in developing an equity lens and supporting emerging leaders' social justice work.

As the ELSJs came together in focus groups to tell us about their experiences, they continually remarked about the powerful nature of these discussions. As emerging leaders committed to social justice, they felt that connecting with one another was beneficial, since this work is challenging, takes courage, and is often exhausting. Educational leadership programs need to provide opportunities for graduates who are working toward LSJ to

develop their social capital and network to create meaningful connections (Theoharis, 2007). This calls for developing both informal and formal structures to provide support during induction (McKenzie et al., 2008; Young & Brooks, 2008). The unique experiences of ELSJs of color committed to social justice are a ripe area of research to add to the literature on LSJ.

Our findings contribute to the literature on LSJ in terms of bringing varied perspectives. We value the voices of emerging leaders and understanding their experience in developing as leaders for social justice. Using a CRT lens, we have brought the experiences of ELSJs of color to the forefront in their work as leaders for social justice and identified areas of cultural intuition, interest convergence, and community cultural wealth. We also highlight the experiences of leaders beyond just principals in thinking about LSJ. Finally, our findings suggest that with action research as a tool, leadership programs can develop social justice leadership capacity within aspiring school leaders. For our graduate students, after spending several semesters in the classroom learning about social justice and equity, action research provided a promising venue to put this theory into action. Systematic, collaborative processes such as action research that seek both qualitative and quantitative input from multiple stakeholders (including community members) may be what is needed to transform schooling for students of color.

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