

The historical marginalization of underprivileged students



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Despite the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of the Supreme Court in 1954, a landmark case that entitled all children to equal educational opportunities in the United States, regardless of race, economic background, religion, and a host of other factors, many students continue to be marginalized both in and outside of school. Students of color, students with disabilities, students learning English, students from low income families, and other marginalized student groups continue to face inequitable opportunities in schools and the resulting disparate achievement (Frattura & Capper, 2007).

Addressing this continued marginalization and inequitable schooling is a key principle of the growing call for leadership for social justice (Grogan, 2002; Theoharis, 2007), where the principal serves as the moderator of the equitable interests of all within a school context (Hodgkinson, 1999). Knowing that school leadership is key to reforming schools (Fullan, 1993; Grogan 2002), scholars focused on better understanding social justice leadership have identified exemplar cases where school leaders committed to equity have taken action to create more just learning environments for marginalized students (Reister, Pursch & Skrla, 2002; Scheurich, 1998; Theoharis, 2007).

Although studies have examined schools that make a difference in the lives of marginalized children (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Reister, Pursch & Skrla, 2002), there is an absence of literature regarding principals as the unit of analysis and the process of principals serving as leaders for social justice. Related to this is an absence of documented strategies that principals who are leading for equity and excellence use.

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The purpose of this study is to build upon the growing body of scholarship by the exploration of the relationship between K-5 elementary principal leadership behaviors and student achievement for marginalized students (subgroup populations). This study will also define systems and structures within organizations that promote school-wide instruction leading to achievement of students historically marginalized. Finally, the study will identify the role professional development of school leaders plays in creating more socially just and excellent school.

Significance of the study

The historical marginalization of underprivileged students often results in a school

culture that perpetuates the norm and ignores the social injustices that pervade our

schools. The resulting and inevitable destiny for many of these students is continued school failure and social inequality. A school culture that does not accept the responsibility of answering to the needs of these students and their families simply propagates hegemony and leaves these students behind-without hope, without vision, and without equal access to the quality of education to which all children are entitled (Kose, 2005; Urban, 2009).

Many years of stereotyped beliefs about the potential of marginalized populations of students has led to a deep-seated disparity between the majority and minority populations. Such differences allow the achievement gap to remain intact. These differences also result in a disproportionate

number of students of color placed erroneously in special educational where resources are also inadequate to meet their needs.

Despite reform efforts and increased awareness based on research the disparity between students continues to exist. Current research shows effective school leadership can influence overall student achievement in our schools (Leithwood et al., 2006; Marzano et al., 2005; Portin et al., 2003; Waters & Cameron, 2006; Waters & Grubb, 2004). In defining what leadership skills lead to effective school leadership, Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) and Waters and Cameron (2006) created 21 principal leadership responsibilities. The 21 leadership responsibilities developed from past educational research may be very similar to the leadership standards created by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). In order to define what are considered effective principal leadership skills, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium created six principal leadership standards based also on past educational research (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). These leadership standards have been adopted by many state educational departments and in Maryland are incorporated in “ Maryland’s Leadership Framework” (Maryland State Department of Education, 2005).

While some schools have been recognized as being equitable and excellent, what remains unknown are the specific relationship between K-5 elementary principal leadership behaviors and student achievement for marginalized students (subgroup populations). In other words, academics and school leaders are interested in knowing what does leadership that transforms school into more equitable and just places, with an attention to achievement

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for all, accomplish? How do these leaders do that? What knowledge, skills and dispositions are required of this? Professional development and preparation of schools leaders requires exemplars of equity and social justice behaviors which will be presented in this study.

Purpose of the study

This study advances conversation about what exemplary leadership of schools for social justice and academic achievement for “ all” students means. The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship of K-5 elementary principal’s leadership behaviors to student achievement for marginalized students. Why do some Maryland elementary schools serving low-income or minority students score higher on the state’s assessments than other schools with very similar students? This study seeks answers to that question by surveying principals and teachers in Maryland elementary schools serving similar student populations and analyzing the results to determine which current K-5 leadership practices and policies are most strongly associated with higher levels of student achievement for Maryland State assessment sub-group populations. It also seeks to identify the systems and structures within organizations that promote school-wide instruction leading to achievement of students historically marginalized. Finally, the study will identify the role professional development plays in creating more socially just, successful school leaders.

Failure to educate students has a three-tiered impact: (1) Global impact and effects on the American economy, (2) national implications of a perpetuation inequity among peoples of color or poverty and (3) personal implications

reflected in a historically marginalized student's quality of life and ability to contribute to society (Urban,). Results from this study may lead to better leadership preparation for principals, as well as professional development for leaders based on leadership behaviors that ensure all students succeed. It will also provide research based strategies for organizing and structuring schools to better meet the needs of all learners.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be examined in this study:

What is the relationship between K-5 elementary principal's specific leadership behaviors to student achievement for historically marginalized students?

What are the organizational structures and systems that are perceived to contribute to high student performance for historically marginalized students?

What role does professional development play in creating more socially just, equitable and successful school leaders?

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations:

For the purpose of this study the following terms have been defined:

Dependent Variable: Scores on fifth grade Reading Maryland State Assessments.

Independent Variables: Students who belong to a subgroup population (%African American, %Hispanic, % of Students with Disabilities, and % of students of Free and Reduced meal status) with those students who are not.

Achievement Equity: Having comparably high performance for all groups of learners when academic achievement data are disaggregated and analyzed.

Achievement Gap: The achievement gap is a persistent, pervasive and significant disparity in educational achievement and attainment among groups of students as determined by a standardized measure. When analyzed according to race and ethnicity, achievement disparities negatively impact educational outcomes for poor children and children of color on a consistent basis.

AYP: Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) growth over three years of all subgroups.

Cultural Frame of Reference: Reference that guides people's behavior from their point

of view of the given people (Ogbu, 1995).

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy: Instruction that takes into account

and applies curriculum to students' cultural, ethnic, language, and

socioeconomic background (Banks, Cookson, Gay, & Hawley, 2001).

Deficit Thinking: Students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings

socially linked to the youngster-such as familial deficits (Valencia, 1997).

Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (ISLLC 2008):

Standards used to guide principal preparation programs and principal certification organizes the functions that help define strong school leadership under six standards. These standards represent the broad, high-priority themes that education leaders must address in order to promote the success of every student. These six standards call for:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning;
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment;
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and

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6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and

cultural contexts.

Hegemony: Racial and cultural domination (Spring, 2005).

Leadership for Excellence and Equity: Schools in which all students achieve high levels of academic success, regardless of any student's race, ethnicity, culture, neighborhood, income of parents, or home language (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003, p. 1). Schools in which principals advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States. (Theoharis, 2004, p. 3).

Marginalized populations: groups of people in the United States marginalized by the majority culture (Kitzinger, 1996). In this study marginalized populations include children of marginalized communities—in particular, poor children, and children of all ethnic backgrounds; and those with disabilities—involves negotiating the hardships that are a product of a legacy of discrimination. Once these children enter the classroom they often are faced with a curriculum that can be irrelevant to their realities, ability grouping and a system of tracking that often excludes them from courses needed to pursue higher education (Potts, 2003; Smith, 2000).

Maryland School Assessment (MSA): The MSA is a test of reading and math achievement that demonstrates how well students have mastered academic standards specified in the Voluntary State Curriculum. The test was <https://assignbuster.com/the-historical-marginalization-of-underprivileged-students/>

developed to meet the reporting requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. The test is administered in March to students in grades three through eight, and once in high school.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB): The NCLB Act of 2001 aims at ensuring both academic excellence and equity by providing new opportunities and challenges

for states to advance the goal of closing the achievement gap. It relies on high stakes

testing to ensure that schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the goal of 100% proficiency by 2014. Supporters of NCLB claim the legislation encourages accountability in public schools, offers parents greater educational options for their children, and helps close the achievement gap between minority and white students. NCLB aims to show achievement toward these goals through federally mandated standardized testing. NCLB seeks to narrow class and racial gaps in school performance by creating common expectations for all. It requires schools and districts to focus their attention on the academic achievement of traditionally under-served groups of children, such as low-income students, students with disabilities, and students of “major racial and ethnic subgroups”.

Opportunity to Learn equity: Equal access to a rigorous curriculum for all students.

Professional Development: The National Staff Development Council defines the term “professional development” to mean a comprehensive, sustained, <https://assignbuster.com/the-historical-marginalization-of-underprivileged-students/>

and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement

School Culture: Something reflected in the environment of the school. It is present in

everyone and every environment consciously and unconsciously (Clarke & Estes, 2002).

School-Wide Instruction: Consistent implementation of instruction throughout the

entire school.

Social justice: Refers to the concept of a society that gives individuals and groups fair treatment and an equitable share of the benefits of society. In this context, social justice is based on the concepts of human rights and equity. Under social justice, all groups and individuals are entitled equally to important rights such as health protection and minimal standards of income. Dantley and Tillman's (2006) position is that social justice ultimately changes inequities and marginalization. Bogtoch's (2002) situates this social justice position within the context of school leadership. Theoharis' (2007) definition of leadership for social justice leaders: advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States. This definition centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools. In doing so, inclusive schooling

practices for students with disabilities, English language learners, and other students traditionally segregated in schools are also necessitated.

Special Education: Services and supports designed to minimize the impact of disability and maximize opportunity to grow and learn (Hehir, 2007).

Standards-Based Instruction: Use of curriculum and instruction that is aligned with

the Standards determined by the school or state.

Structure: Institutional mechanisms, policies, and procedures put in place by federal,

state or district policy and legislation or widely accepted as the official structure

of schools; not subject to change at the local school site (i. e., personnel policies,

use of instructional time, program regulations).

Student Achievement in Reading: Student achievement in reading will be measured by MSA reading scale scores. The State Board of Education set cut scores for performance standards on MSA testing. Performance standards determine cut scores for students performing at proficient and advanced levels. Students not performing at proficient or advanced levels are considered to be at the basic level.

System: Coordinated and coherent use of resources (time, personnel, students,

parents, funds, facilities, etc) constructed by the school site to ensure that school

visions, missions and goals are met (i. e., professional development, teacher collaboration, use of time).

Systemic Equity: The transformed ways in which systems and individuals

habitually operate to ensure that every learner-in whatever learning environment

that learner is found-has the greatest opportunity to learn enhanced by the

resources and supports necessary to achieve competence, excellence,

independence responsibility, and self-sufficiency for school and for life (Scott, 2001).

Tracking: A way to organize or segregate students based on ability level.

Limitations:

One of the central limitations of this study is that “ excellence” in selected schools will be defined solely by students’ attainment of a target score (AYP) on a standardized test.

Another limitation will be the focus on a single school district.

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Delimitations

External validity is impacted based on some delimitations.

The use of purposeful sampling will be required to select the schools based on a list

of criteria which will be identified by the researcher.

Selection criteria will limit the ability to generalize since there will be a narrow set of

criteria in place for the study.

Small sampling and school location may limit the ability to generalize information to other schools and district.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

“ Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn, the

gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people

learn enables them to be successful citizens...The role strategically placed to best

accomplish this is the principalship.”

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Michael Fullan, “ The Moral Imperative Of School Leadership”

This chapter focuses on the three concepts at the core of this study: social justice, leadership, and achievement for marginalized populations. Each topic will be examined in terms of its theories and concepts as well as supporting empirical evidence in research. Social justice, as the overarching topic of this research study, is reviewed first.

Next, the history of leadership literature, proposed leadership models, and the

relationship between leadership and social justice, is presented followed by a review of student achievement for all students, student achievement measures, dimensions and correlations to social justice and leadership. The chapter concludes with theoretically supported rationale for three hypotheses expressing positive relationships between social justice, and leadership behaviors and social justice and student achievement of marginalized students and leadership behaviors and student achievement of marginalized students.

While the existing literature points to the deep impact that schools have on student learning what remains unknown is the specific relationship between K-5 elementary principal leadership behaviors and student achievement for marginalized students (subgroup populations). Scholars and practitioners in the field of education are interested in knowing what does leadership that transforms school into more equitable and just places, with an attention to achievement for all students, accomplish? How do these leaders do it? What

knowledge, skills and dispositions are required? To address this gap in the literature, this particular study will be conducted to specifically explore the outcomes and dimensions of leadership behaviors and to identify relationships between these behaviors and student achievement for marginalized populations. Professional development and preparation of schools leaders requires exemplars of equity and social justice behaviors which I intend to present in this study.