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# Teacher Leadership: Women (of African Descent) Enacting Social Justice

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# Agency Through Teacher Education

## *Reflection, Community, and Learning*

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## Chapter Four

# Teacher Leadership

### *Women (of African Descent) Enacting Social Justice*

Vonzell Agosto and Zorka Karanxha

This chapter is concerned with how educational leadership preparation programs promote a sense of agency and build capacity among women of African descent (who identify racially as Black) to serve as teacher leaders for social justice. According to Zeichner (1993), “How teachers’ everyday actions challenge or support various oppressions and injustices related to social class, race, gender, sexual preference, religion, and numerous other factors needs to be a central part of teachers’ reflections, teacher research, and collaborative decision-making schemes” (11). Zeichner positions reflection as a political act linked to social justice. Yet, as Hargreaves (2009) has argued in recent years, teacher leadership has become so “formalized and data-driven that long-term reflection and deep conversation have been replaced by the pressure to meet short-term targets in hurried meetings” (quoted in Crowther, Ferguson & Hann, 2009, xi). The trend toward data-driven professional development jeopardizes critical reflection and dialogue, key practices of social justice pedagogy and teacher leadership (Freire, 1970; Sledge & Morehead, 2006).

According to Maxine Greene (1998), social justice education aims:

for enhanced perception and imaginative explorations, for the recognition of social wrongs, of sufferings, of pestilences wherever and whenever they arise . . . it is to teach so that the young may be awakened to the joy of working for transformation in the smallest places, so that they may become healers and change their worlds. (xiv)

Although this working definition of social justice helps to guide our interpretations of leadership practice described by teachers who have completed an educational leadership program, we privilege their responses to questions such as: How do you model social justice in your current position? How does your behavior in your class reflect social justice? How do you live social justice? From the participants’ narratives of experience we extracted their understandings and expressions of social justice that reflect definitions and models of teacher leadership presented or ignored in the literature.

In this chapter, we present five participants’ narratives that reveal the impact of the educational leadership preparation program on their engagement in critical social justice leadership. Understanding the impact of the program on their practice and how they translate their understandings of social justice into their work can help to improve educational leadership programs

and broaden current conceptions of teacher leadership. Snell and Swanson (2000) claim that what is “missing from most of the research on teacher leadership is a broader conceptualization of this phenomenon, as well as a portrait of what it looks like on-the-ground and in-practice” (3).

Using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, we examine the literature on teacher leadership and draw from interviews with Black female teachers to understand how they translate their preparation in a social-justice-oriented leadership program into critical social justice teacher leadership. Critical race theorist Yamamoto (1997) argues for critical race praxis that pays “enhanced attention to theory translation and deeper engagement with frontline action” (874). This chapter addresses both of these gaps in the research by exploring how the practice of teacher leadership among Black women is informed by educational leadership preparation for social justice. This study reflects our developing critical race praxis and how we advocate for critical social justice leadership toward anti-oppressive education in our program.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership preparation departments are well positioned to prepare teacher leaders with organizational knowledge that they can utilize during the years they remain in the classroom and/or prepare to take on administrative roles. York-Barr and Duke (2004) raised the following questions for educational leadership to which this chapter responds: “In what ways are educational leadership programs currently expecting and preparing administrators and teachers to share leadership for school improvement? How might such preparation be improved?” (292).

### Conceptions, Definitions, and Models of Teacher Leadership

Definitions of teacher leadership vary, yet common themes reflected in the literature spanning twenty years are captured in the following quote: “Teacher leadership reflects teacher agency through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshaling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve students’ educational experiences and outcomes” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, 263). This quote captures the conceptions and definitions of teacher leadership offered by Murphy (2005), who suggests that there are three components: an instructional component (breaking down barriers to the improvement of student outcomes and experiences), a relational component (establishing relationships), and an enabling component (marshaling resources). These components were expressed in an earlier study by Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) who found that teacher leaders navigated the structures of schools, nurtured relationships, modeled professional growth, helped others with change, and challenged the status quo by raising children’s voices.

Michael Fullan (1994) offered six theoretical domains that, if addressed, he suspected would promote teacher leadership on a large scale to contribute to education reform: increasing their foundational, political, and subject matter knowledge; strengthening their habits of critical reflection, collaboration, and sense of moral purpose. Portin (1999) developed the triadic model of teacher leadership that was further extended by Webb, Neumann, and Jones (2004) to include transactional, transformational, and critical leadership. In critical leadership, “organizational members consciously attempt to engage in dialogue about a *level playing field*” that is “critical in nature with an ongoing goal of identifying inherent biases and inequities in the community” (260, emphasis in original). This notion of teacher leadership, as

dependent upon critical reflection and dialogue oriented toward equity, is consistent with the working definition of social justice education offered by Greene, which comprises the recognition of social wrongs, sufferings, and pestilences.

### Teacher Leaders of Color

Calls for the formal preparation of teacher leaders are evident in the literature; however, empirical research on the concept is limited (Harris, 2005; Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Still, within the empirical studies conducted over twenty years in the review by York-Barr and Duke (2004), either the teacher leaders are White or the racial and ethnic identifiers of the participants are not disclosed by researchers. Additionally, recent literature exploring teacher leadership from the vantage point of those working in educational leadership preparation programs has focused on White teachers working with Black students (e.g., Scribner & Bradley-Levine, 2010). A recent exception to this trend is Weiner's (2011) study of principals and teacher leaders from various racial and ethnic groups who participated in a teacher leader program. The resounding absence of teachers from racial and ethnic minority groups (teachers of color) in the literature on teacher leadership seems to imply that racial and ethnic identity is irrelevant and/or that racial/ethnic minority teachers are not considered teacher leaders. Thus, we turn to the literature on social justice among racial/ethnic, primarily Black, women teachers to understand how their practice is framed and whether this framing is consistent with the qualities of teacher leadership presented in the research on teacher leadership.

Beauboeuf-Lafontant's (2005) study of Black women teachers on gender, teaching, and social justice is useful. It draws on the body of scholarship that speaks to the role of Black women as teachers who work toward social justice by marshaling resources, building relationships, and challenging the status quo to break down barriers to student learning. She found that a view of ongoing development, reflection, and change were hallmarks of their teaching. The participants invoked several of Fullan's (1994) theoretical domains as they described teaching from a sense of purpose and expressed views that effectiveness hinges on continual development. While these teachers "sought to address the deficiencies of teaching and education by bringing more caring, concern, sociopolitical awareness, and commitment to their interactions with children," Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) did not describe their practice as teacher leadership (440). Instead, she interrogated the gendered norms that have constructed notions of good teaching and good women and how the feminization of teaching intended to encourage submission and powerlessness. According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005), "Such gendered norms do little to encourage or sustain teacher responsiveness to the inequities in access and outcomes called for by the contemporary literature of change" (437). She found that teaching practice among the participants stood in sharp contrast to the gendered notions of good teachers: their "voices led so directly to action," yet facets of their practice are echoed in the literature on the agency of Black (female) teachers that has characterized them and their teaching as "transgressive" (hooks, 1994), "subversive" (Foster, 1997), "tricksters" (Jeffries, 1994), "quiet revolutionaries" (Wade-Gayles, 1993), "dreamkeepers," "conductors" (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and "gate openers" (Koerner & Hulsebosch, 1995). In other words, the agency among Black women who endeavor to instigate change toward social justice has been documented. More recently, Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan's (2000) study of teacher leadership found similar representations of agency among Black women teachers as they focused on doing what was right for students, even if that meant challenging the status quo and administrative barriers.

## Concerns Regarding Gendered and Raced Conceptions of Leadership

In addition to the concerns raised about the limitations posed by gendered and raced notions of good teachers, there are concerns about the cultural traditions that define conceptions of leadership. Lambert (2003) warns that leadership and teaching might not be a beneficial merger for either leadership or teaching, as leadership is steeped in archaic Western European cultural norms, and teaching is an older concept embedded across cultures. In heeding the warnings of Lambert (2003) and Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005), our merging of the notions of social justice, agency among Black teachers, and teacher leadership is exploratory. Still, the absence of attention to racial and ethnic minority groups in the literature on teacher leadership perpetuates a dominant narrative that ignores their contributions; therefore, this exploratory study of social justice teacher leadership among Black women is also a challenge to the field to reflect on the power behind the production of dominant narratives that are perpetuated under the umbrella of leadership.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Using the tenets of CRT, we portray the lived experiences of female teachers of African descent related to leadership for social justice. CRT has five defining elements reflecting its basic assumptions, perspectives, and pedagogies: race and racism, social justice and social justice practice, historical context, the contestation of dominant ideology (i.e., White supremacy), and the recognition of experiential knowledge (Villalpando, 2004). CRT perspectives in education generally reflect a similar commitment to social justice and provide an analytical frame guided by the following tenets:

1. Name and discuss the pervasive daily reality of racism in U.S. society which serves to disadvantage people of color.
2. Expose and deconstruct seemingly "color-blind" or "race-neutral" policies and practices which entrench the disparate treatment of non-White persons.
3. Legitimize and promote the voices and narrative of people of color as sources of critique of the dominant social order which purposely devalues them.
4. Revisit civil rights law and liberalism to address their inability to dismantle and expunge discriminatory sociopolitical relationships.
5. Change and improve challenges to race-neutral and multicultural movements in education which have made White student behavior the norm. (Ladson-Billings, 1998)

Undertaking this project is in itself a critical race studies project in that it challenges liberal notions of leadership and "race-neutral" literature that marginalizes teachers of color and their narratives of critique while promoting White teacher leaders as the norm.

In addition to the working definition of social justice offered by Greene (1998), we draw on some of the key assumptions of critical social justice leadership which, according to Ryan and Rottman (2007), include:

- Social institutions are human creations.
- Societal institutions continuously disadvantage some communities more than others.
- Patterns of dis/advantage are not always visible.
- Social justice involves more than resource distribution and economics.
- Social justice is not consistent with the idea of just dessert.
- Social justice favors equity over particular versions of equality.

Social justice involves all aspects of education.

Social justice calls for hope. (12–16)

Narratives of teachers of color who practice social justice leadership counter the dominant narratives of teacher leadership. Counter-narratives or counter-stories serve as an analytical framework.

## METHODS

Counter-stories or counter-narratives are commonly used with CRT “to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, 144). According to Nelson (2001), counter-stories are stories of self-definition and insubordination.

The counter-story positions itself against a number of master narratives that misrepresent the group, creating “an oppressive identity.” The counter-story can alter the oppressors’ perceptions, but can also alter the individual member’s perception of her/his self so that the individual members reject the harmful master narratives and see themselves as capable and valuable members of the society.(7)

Counter-narratives serve as an analytical framework in educational research (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The narratives of the participants are analyzed for the qualities of teacher leadership, how these qualities promote social justice outcomes, and how the participants attribute their leadership development to the program. Furthermore, the participants’ narratives of leadership are also analyzed through the analytical framework of CRT and critical social justice leadership.

### Context

The leadership preparation program attended by the participants is situated in a mid-size city with a population less than 250,000. The program is designed as a two-year program that leads to a master’s degree in educational leadership and principal certification which is dependent upon students passing the state certification exam. Upon completion of courses and a practicum, students are required to complete a portfolio of academic and practical artifacts they have created while in the program and provide a reflection on their development related to each of the leadership standards designated. No section of the portfolio asks specifically about their understandings of social justice.

### Sample and Participants

Through e-mails and phone calls, we invited seventeen Black women to participate in the study. All the women met the following criteria: (1) had enrolled since the department changed its mission and values to explicitly reflect a social justice orientation in 2008; (2) had already graduated from the program or were in their final year of the program; and (3) had taken a class with at least one of the authors. Our assumption was that students would be more likely to volunteer if they recognized one of the authors as a professor from the program and that our experience with the participant as a student might provide us with insight into their experiences and understanding of their stories. We conducted five interviews with five participants whose teaching experience ranged from five to ten years spanning the three school levels

(elementary, middle, high schools) in the same school district. The participants who had graduated from the program had only done so six months to a year prior to the interview. During the interviews each of the participants expressed an intention to become a principal.

The interviews lasted from one to two hours and were guided by semi-structured, open-ended questions. The questions required the participants to reflect on their experiences with the program, faculty, and cohort, as well as on their contextualized leadership in relation to their understandings of social justice. We digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews. A priori codes included teacher leadership characteristics: establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshaling resources at the school (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). The data were mined for narratives reflecting agency in connection to principles of social justice and attention to how race was invoked by the participants.

## FINDINGS

The participants were able to recall specific instances in which lessons they encountered in the program informed their leadership practice. Similar to the participants in the Silva et al. (2000) study, all five participants demonstrated egalitarian values and found ways to express these values through their work; however, they demonstrated varying levels of consciousness about social oppression (i.e., racism, ableism) as well as efforts to change structural conditions that support injustice. Furthermore, their efforts reflect both (re)distributive and recognitive principles of social justice.

We have grouped the participants according to their level of understanding of social justice and translation of social justice into practice. While two of the participants expressed little concern about social justice issues in their schools, three participants demonstrated teacher leadership for social justice that is critical, socially conscious, purpose driven, and directed at institutional change. These participants (Sherie, Bethany, and Janet) were able to translate leadership preparation into practice by displaying an awareness of the issues and specific actions they took in their school contexts.

### **Sherie, Bethany, and Janet**

These three participants reported an increased sense of awareness and criticality of schools as institutions where social justice issues are ignored. According to Sherie, "There was another layer of understanding that I gleaned from all of the social justice pieces [program content] and how the school sometimes can be very indifferent." Additionally, they showed an augmented social and cultural awareness of their students' family backgrounds and the importance of taking students' cultures and economic circumstances into consideration when making decisions. All three drew on an academic discourse to invoke the authority of research and strategically appropriate this elite discourse to promote institutional change oriented toward social justice. Furthermore, they gave examples of how research knowledge and skills acquired in the program helped them to become more aware of equity issues and to gain confidence to put into action theories or concepts learned in classes. In other words, all three reported capacity to initiate and implement change for social justice in their schools. Janet recalled, "I used to be a whiner . . . because I wasn't sure how to change until you find that information, then you realize how you can truly present it." She acknowledged that she would not have been able to accomplish that before taking leadership courses.



These three participants seemed to understand the social milieus in which they worked and the action needed to begin to address deficit views of their peers and systemic structures of schools. They were aware of the complexity of changing school structures and culture (Fullan, 2008). They stated that leadership is a process and that multiple approaches are needed, such as building coalitions, participating in schoolwide committees, preparation, resilience, persistence, working with school leaders, and engaging willing faculty to build community with their students and parents. Actions these participants engaged included: de-tracking students at a middle school, increasing parental involvement in education, organizing a male-teacher mentoring program for African American boys, incorporating fun and games for lower-achieving students, increasing enrollment of diverse students in Advanced Placement and journalism classes, increased participation of African American students in writing/editing the school newspaper, raising parents' advocacy, working with the principal on developing school improvement plans, awakening students' sense of social justice and equity, and speaking up on behalf of an Asian American cafeteria worker. All these actions were rooted in a critical social justice framework in which injustice is the result of how people organize institutions (Ryan & Rottman, 2007).

These three participants showed an understanding of the disproportionate negative impact of public schools on African American children, focused on uncovering the hidden oppressive school structures, and showed the importance of hope. They promoted recognitive justice through building relationships and facilitated (re)distributive justice by redistributing goods and services (North, 2006). Janet spoke about her work to stop the practice of tracking students at the middle school where she works. The idea had come to her after doing a class project called an equity audit, which for her was "an eye opener." She knew her school faced similar inequities when it came to students' access to rigorous curriculum, since tracking practices resulted in a majority of minority kids being in regular classes. She decided to talk to the school principal about the idea of a non-tracking school. She presented information from a graduate course and research she had gathered on de-tracking. When she finished presenting her ideas, the principal was reluctant but encouraged Janet to gather more information and present to the Student Advisory Committee (SAC). Janet became a member of the SAC committee and, in collaboration with three other teachers, looked at ways to change the practice of tracking. In the process, she found out "they [teachers at the school] were really against that [de-tracking] at one point." With her principal's support, she and the three other teachers continued to press on. As they worked to expand access to AP classes for more students from various backgrounds, they encountered teachers at the school who would say, "I don't want these kids." After de-tracking the previous year, Janet looked at the data and noted that "kids' behavior not only got better, but their attendance increased."

Janet also initiated integrating low-performing children from a classroom other students labeled the "boom-boom room" into an intensive school program. These classrooms were all in one wing of the school. Janet described that the wing was "like a jail." According to Janet, these students did not have enrichment classes due to their low scores on the state standardized tests. The students were in a block-scheduling situation (math and intensive reading) but were able to have fun due to Janet's efforts to organize opportunities for the students to take trips and for the parents to come and play football with them. Additionally, she organized a male-teacher mentoring program for twenty-five male kids in the intensive program. Each male teacher met once a week with three to four students they did not teach. Teachers would also drop by classrooms to keep a watchful eye on the students they were mentoring. These examples show that Janet utilized all three characteristics of teacher leadership and a commitment to (re)distributive justice (access to rigorous curriculum, desegregation, de-tracking) and

recognitive justice (building relationships between teachers and students, acknowledging the kids are more than numbers to be counted and measured on their achievement on standardized tests).

Incorporating social justice as part of the content of her course, Bethany was determined to make her students aware of the existence and persistence of racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and language status in the society at large (Greene, 1998). Additionally, Sherie, Bethany, and Janet worked to reach the parents of poor children at their schools with the purpose of increasing their sense of advocacy on behalf of their children. For instance, Bethany contacted the parents of students enrolled in AP classes who came from low socioeconomic households and realized "they did not advocate for their kids." She "reached out to them, sent letters to their homes," taught "them how to go through the data and evaluate their children's strengths and weaknesses," and engaged in intervention processes so "they" would not "give up." Janet organized babysitting for parents with young children so they could attend parent-teacher night and a parent-teacher meeting that was held at a community center. Sherie spoke of her work with all students and her efforts to try to bridge the gaps between students, teachers, and parents.

Teacher leaders require ongoing quality support, especially since few receive formalized leadership training before taking on leadership roles (Murphy, 2005; Weiner, 2011). The responsibility to support teacher leaders usually falls with principals and is a critical element in the development and mentoring of teacher leadership (Donaldson et al., 2008; Murphy, 2005). Sherie, Bethany, and Janet spoke of the support they received from their principals. Bethany's principal engaged in a race-conscious dialogue concerning her leadership development and how to navigate the resistance she might face. Janet's principal encouraged her to start de-tracking, utilizing the SAC, while Sherie's principal engaged her in developing school improvement programs. Janet was encouraged by her principal to become the school's AVID program teacher. Their interactions with principals included programmatic, curricular, and structural change. Sherie, Bethany, and Janet exhibited understandings of their social milieus related to race, class, and sexual orientation and demonstrated the capacity to translate concepts such as justice, equity, and advocacy into their efforts to lead for social change and institutional change. According to Young and Brooks (2008), educational leadership preparation programs should help students of color take into account the social, political, economic, and policy milieus in which they work and learn to operationalize and concretize abstract concepts such as advocacy and equity in their contexts.

### **Rhonda and Misty**

Rhonda and Misty expressed higher satisfaction with the social context of their preparation but only superficial knowledge about social justice. Although Rhonda demonstrated curriculum and instructional leadership when she opted to focus on Black history, her treatment did little to challenge the conditions that contributed to the incident brought to her attention by her students. According to Rhonda:

Some of the kids were very upset that it was Black History Month and we [the school] have done nothing for it. [My students] went to the principal and asked why aren't we doing anything? They did not plan anything even in the African-American history course. Then they came to me.

She described how she had students vote and that she would only teach the lesson if all of the students voted. From a CRT perspective, her approach to social justice was based on a liberal (Rawls, 1971) rather than transformative (Banks, 1994; 2004) conception of justice. Rhonda's

position of support for the inclusion of African American history was dependent on the approval of every student, thereby reflecting the literal and liberal notion of democracy as rule by all. Guinier (1993) critiqued this approach to democratic practice in recognition of the tyranny of the majority: the tendency of dominant groups to retain positions of power while minority voices are silenced through democratic processes. According to the assumptions of critical social justice leadership (Ryan & Rottman, 2007), social justice favors equity over particular versions of equality. Rhonda's narrative of liberal democracy was devoid of a critical analysis of how power operates to marginalize the histories of Black Americans or how their subjugation continues through dominant narratives of (mis)representation and (mis)recognition (North, 2006). Rhonda's accommodation of the students' request for a curriculum that acknowledges Black History Month aligned with the state's statute that requires teaching of African American history. The statute describes African American history content to be taught in Florida schools. According to Florida state statute 1003.42 (2)(h):

The history of African Americans, including the history of African peoples before the political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America, the enslavement experience, abolition, and the contributions of African Americans to society. (State of Florida Task Force on African American History Website)

Implied in the statute's framing of what should be taught is that the history of African people pivots on the institution of slavery rather than more complex structures such as imperialism and colonialism (Williams-Stubbs & Agosto, forthcoming). The contributions or additive approach suggested by the statute has been critiqued by scholars of multicultural education as fostering dominant narratives through the superficial and reductionist treatment of groups whose histories are already marginalized in the curriculum (Banks, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). Rhonda focused her math lesson on slavery. She stated, "It was a story about a slave woman and the control she had over her life. I gave a situation with her and her master, and the master's wife." However, Rhonda also segued into a personalized discussion of contemporary life: "What do you think—we as minorities—how are we progressing in America?" Rhonda's decision to teach a lesson only if all students agreed to have content from Black history included in the curriculum and focus on slavery suggested to us that she held a viewpoint far less critical or socially conscious than the participants discussed above. Overall, Rhonda's sphere of influence is limited to her classroom as she is attentive to issues that surface at her high school and often engages students in discussions on fair treatment, antidiscrimination, and bullying.

Although Misty communicated that the program helped her to become more tolerant, patient, understanding, and culturally sensitive, she also expressed the difficulty in sustaining a focus and motivation on effecting change. She stated, "It is easy to succumb to the everyday." Her leadership efforts were also at the classroom level. She described working with a guidance counselor to provide laundry services to a student who was labeled emotionally/behaviorally disturbed and needed to have his uniform laundered so that he could attend class. Working with the counselor allowed Misty to become better informed about the conditions of the student's life and helped her to overcome her initial fear of a student who had been known to turn over tables when angry. Therefore, she was able to retain this student in her class rather than having him sent to a segregated classroom in which all of the students are deemed eligible to receive special education services. According to North (2006), "The disproportionate number of students of color in special education programs, particularly Black and Latino males, illustrates a concrete effect of their misrecognition in schools" (513). Both Misty and Rhonda recalled learning about fairness and described a sense of satisfaction with their experi-

ence with the program and with colleagues. Both Misty and Rhonda are fairly new to their schools and at the time of the interviews were still developing their understandings of the climate and culture of the school and community.

## DISCUSSION

A driving question of this study was: How do you model social justice in your current position? The aim of the study was to understand how teachers who aspire to be principals translate their preparation in an educational leadership program into teacher leadership for social justice. The findings suggest that the program contributed to some of the participants' ability to concretize and operationalize the concept of social justice and connect their egalitarian values to teacher leadership actions (building relationships, marshaling resources, breaking down barriers) reflecting relational forms of justice, from (re)distributive to recognitive justice. However, not all five participants were afforded the same opportunity or felt prepared to take on responsibilities to demonstrate teacher leadership outside of their classrooms.

Sherie, Bethany, and Janet recognized learning gains in their overall preparedness to lead from the disposition with which they entered the leadership program. Their responses painted a broad understanding of course content and implications for students across groups. Each described experiences using terminology learned in courses, and all three approached their final semester feeling better prepared to advocate and enact social justice in schools than when they entered the program. Their narratives depicted the qualities of teacher leadership in an integrated manner as they translated their lessons from the leadership preparation program into actions reflecting their understanding of the structural nature of oppression. They emphasized how the program helped them to become more aware of racism, (dis)ability, and sexual orientation/sexuality either through lessons or experiences with other students who exhibited a range of (dis)interest in such matters. Sherie, Bethany, and Janet developed close working relationships with their principals that impacted equity in their schools by changing institutional structures toward building more equitable schools. The efforts of these participants to bridge relationships and broaden students' network of support portray communities of color as both invested in quality education and responsive to outreach efforts of these teachers. According to Stovall (2006), a counter-story is needed to identify the desire that communities of color have for quality education despite mainstream accounts that depict communities of color as "anti-school" or "anti-intellectual" (243). Their understandings of social justice and related practice involved more than resource distribution and economics, they included building relationships as a way to break down barriers between schools, students, and communities.

Within their social milieus, Misty and Rhonda described little interaction with principals or the community. However, they worked with other teachers, counselors, and families to increase equity in their schools. Misty and Rhonda described few instances of agency reflecting critical social justice teacher leadership that was either relational or an integration of the three qualities associated with teacher leadership. In other words, while they appeared to have gained knowledge about social justice, they seldom narrated examples of teacher leadership that involved sustained efforts to marshal resources, build bridges, or break down barriers that inhibit equity. Rhonda expressed a lack of capacity to engage in system-wide change efforts. It should be noted that Rhonda had just begun her second year of coursework and had not yet done her internship. Overall, the participants' background experiences (i.e., educational experiences, relationships with administrators, and context of the schools in which they work) appear to have continued influence on their perspectives and values of equity, justice, and diversity.

Yet, regardless of the background experiences, their perspectives overall suggest that the program's effort to prepare leaders to attend to the values of equity and justice among its candidates is unevenly distributed. Understanding the background and experiences of teachers can contribute to faculty understandings of what educational leadership does to encourage or sustain their social justice leadership development as they move through the educational leadership pipeline. Providing a more balanced program with opportunities to build consciousness about social justice and operationalize this concept during preparation should strengthen students' foundation for engaging in teacher leadership that is reflective of critical social justice. Furthermore, additional research on the experiences of Black women enacting critical social justice teacher leadership is needed in order to understand how their efforts challenge traditional Western European-male-dominated notions of justice and leadership and the current trend toward data-driven professional development.

The literature on social justice leadership has pointed to resistance as one of the difficulties leaders face while attempting to lead from a social justice framework (Theoharis, 2007). As we conclude this chapter we ask: How is it that our teacher leaders were able to tend to social justice issues and make the schools in which they work more equitable? One of our participants provides a partial answer: "I wasn't whining anymore, I was actually making proposals" (Janet's quote). We found that social justice in our program is unevenly distributed; however, all five of the participants unequivocally stated that the program emphasized advocacy throughout. As Bethany pointed out, "You advocate." Our recommendation for similar programs is to infuse a sense of advocacy and agency throughout the program so the students understand its importance and urgency to social justice leadership.

## CONCLUSION

From a CRT perspective, the participants' experiences present counter-stories to the dominant discourse as they contest it with their understandings and practices of critical social justice leadership. Their narratives did not exhibit deficit views of poor students of color and their families. On the contrary, they exposed school practices that continue to entrench the disparate treatment of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In this era of emphasizing data-based decision making and achievement on standardized tests, these critical social justice teacher leaders managed to see children not as numbers, recognized them and their values, and found ways to move their schools toward (re)distributive and recognitive social justice.

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