EXAMINING THE LINK BETWEEN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND EQUITY SCHOOLING IN CHANGING MALTA

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ABSTRACT
The study examines how Maltese school leaders who have completed an educational leadership program in the past six years understand the concept of equity schooling and the role that multicultural education plays in the formation of polices which aid this important quest. The qualitative method of investigation was used throughout the study. The semi-structured interview method was thought to be ideal since it allowed the researcher to probe (McLeod, 2014) into the interwoven links between Multicultural education and equity schooling. It also allowed participants to feel at ease with the researcher thus increasing the validity of the study. 55% of the school leaders interviewed were familiar with the concept of equity schooling. Ten percent of those interviewed equated multicultural education with social justice whilst stressing on equal participation of all children irrespective of children's cultural or linguistic background while 20% perceived multicultural education as an essential prerequisite towards fair and equal distribution of resources. Only 35% of respondents spoke about equity schooling in terms of 'cultural proficiency', 'cultural competence', 'responding to cultural backgrounds', or similar notions. This indicated a dire need for more emphasis on school equity issues in schools together with an infusion of culturally responsive education courses within Educational Leadership programs.

INTRODUCTION

The education of students whose background differs from mainstream culture continues to be a mammoth challenge for educational leaders. Multicultural education and equity schooling are interlinked concepts found in both social science and education research. Both address the engagement of minority students within the learning process, leading to increased academic achievement. By being familiar with these concepts and implementing relevant changes in diverse educational settings, school leaders are in a better position to truly reach the potential of all students.

Background of the study

The increasing multicultural realities within the Maltese social context have prompted Maltese school leaders to incorporate leadership practices aimed at stimulating healthy learning environments, characterized by a number of supportive and responsive structures primarily geared at spurring teachers to include all children in their daily curricular planning (Vassallo, 2016a). A large number of initiatives aimed at supporting interactions between teachers and students proved instrumental towards the construction of new realities based on mutual respect and tolerance (Vassallo, 2016b). The Maltese National Curriculum Framework (MEDEF, 2011, p. 20) further supports these initiatives by highlighting the need for student services to be "given in the context of diversity, implying that they address the learner's current/ actual level of competence with a view of subsequent progress and achievement." This statement further pushes school leaders to develop leadership strategies and skills aimed at reaching the needs of multicultural students in our classrooms in an atmosphere of equity, respect and trust.

According to Bigelow (1993) multicultural education aims to ensure such equity in education for all students so as to make the world a better place both individually and collectively. Banks (1993, p. 23) concurs when he states that "multicultural education… is not an ethnic- or gender-specific movement. It is a movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring, and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world." Malta, small island in the Mediterranean Sea, is witnessing a change in population demographics and an increasingly questioned effectivity of its educational system. Equality suggests that everyone has equal opportunities to learn and everyone learns equally the same way. The concept of equality makes a strong case for equal treatment and access to resources. Educators might believe in an "equal" approach to teaching and learning because they feel fairness is an essential response to differences. However there exist instances when doing so clearly undermines the reality that different children would actually benefit from different approaches and resources in order for them to participate fully in schooling and engage to their potential (Banks & Banks, 1995).

Bell's (2007) offers five prerequisites for the enactment of social justice to prevail. She strongly advocates for a full and equitable participation in society together with the mutual shaping of society to meet the needs of all groups. She also mentions the equitable distribution of resources to safeguard the physical and psychological

safety of all individuals within the different groups, and places emphasis on self-determination and interdependence as the tools necessary to achieve self-efficacy and social responsibility within society. She claims that social justice is both a goal and a process. It is the "equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs… in which distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Bell, 2007, p. 1). Achieving an ideal vision of social justice is a rather complex, arduous and elusive task. It requires actions that are "democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change" (Bell, 2007, p. 2).

Bell (2007) believes that the ultimate aim of social justice education is to enable people to inculcate the necessary critical tools to mitigate against oppression and work in such manner as to stop or deviate domineering patterns and/or behaviours both in themselves and in the institutions and communities in which they reside. According to Robins et al. (2006) multiculturalism is the preservation of different cultures or cultural identities within a society or nation, holding each as equally valuable to and influential on the members of the society. He also proposes other definitions:
Cultural proficiency: See the difference and respond effectively in a variety of environments.
Cultural competence: See the difference, understand the difference that difference makes.
Cultural pre-competence: See the difference, respond inadequately.
Cultural blindness: See the difference, act like you don't.
Cultural incapacity: See the difference, make it wrong.
Cultural destructiveness: See the difference, stomp it out (p.3).

Equality assumes that all students within a classroom have equal opportunities to learn and everyone learns in the same way. Equality also assumes that everyone should receive the same treatment and access to resources. The quest of ensuring equality in education prompts educators to advocate for even distribution of existing resources to all students irrespective of their backgrounds or cultural origin. It is evident across the curriculum, but most explicit in the construction of required textbooks and delineated suggestions for content-rich, nonfiction texts, basal readers, and other texts for ELA instruction and reading in the content area.

Educators might pursue an "equal" approach to teaching and learning because they feel it is the most fair response to differences, but in many instances, doing so undermines the reality that different individuals might legitimately benefit from different approaches and resources to fully engage their potential. Common assessments, for example, make several assumptions that may be problematic. They assume that the content used to determine whether a student meets a standard is experienced and interpreted the same way for all students regardless of their cultural background. A common assessment of reading comprehension that uses a text passage taken from *To Kill a Mockingbird* may be interpreted differently by a student from an under resourced community in New York City than a student from an affluent suburban community outside of Atlanta. They also assume that all students can show what they know equally well in the same way (such as through answering multiple choice questions), and that all students experience the assessment process itself in the same way. It is still the individual's responsibility to fill the gap between available resources and the resources needed in order to succeed academically. For those without access to the necessary resources, it is difficult to catch up to their more privileged peers. Fairness in education is not accomplished through a mechanically equal distribution of resources and opportunities. Rather, fairness is achieved when the students who inhabit classrooms and schools have access to the resources they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Broadly defined multicultural education can be termed to be a designed set of educational strategies intended to assist teachers to respond to the many issues arising from the changing demographics of their students. It aims to provide students with a knowledge base of histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse cultural groups (Banks, 1995).Other scholars (Kislev, 2016; Evans & Levinson, 2009; Sleeter & McLaren, 2000) advocate in favour of increased awareness of one's own cultural identity, how cultural identities are formed, dominant and dominated cultural groups, oppression, racism, social justice, radicalization and methods of appropriately addressing differences among differing groups of people. Multicultural education, as a tool to promote equity schooling and social justice is therefore a set of continuous deliberate processes of understanding and celebrating customs, beliefs and identities of each student whilst mitigating against forms of oppression that individuals or groups may be experiencing. The principal goal of multicultural education, besides bridging the achievement gap between ethnic groups is to inculcate and foster an environment where social justice prevails, extending beyond the concrete walls of classrooms and not limited to racial or cultural diversity issues (Bell, 2007; Freire, 1970/2007; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Torres & Noguera, 2008; Young, 1990).

On the other hand, the discourse of social justice would include essential elements such as respect and dignity, imbalance of powers, knowledge of differences and disproportionate distribution of wealth. Students from dominant cultures need to appreciate and value the cultural capital which other students bring about in the classroom, and teachers need to create an environment which serves as a catalyst for this to happen. Both students and teachers need to be cognizant of the multiple faces which oppression possesses. Students from minority cultures need to cultivate strong relationships and nurture a positive self-image so as to develop an identity which supports their full engagement in schools. While the discourse of social justice in education is widespread among researchers, yet its application in the real context of the classroom is rather scarce (Pollock et al. 2010). Similarly, research conducted by Borrero, Conner and Mejia (2012), points towards the need for schools to develop more awareness towards the need to promote more social justice initiatives within their schools. They eloquently state that schools are lacking in the promotion of social justice but also on the general understanding of what it entails. Understanding how school leaders define social justice and examining ways of how schools can promote social justice are essential prerequisites towards the construction of meaningful dialogue aimed at providing practical assistance towards minority group needs. Being successful at school is a significant and important step towards the effective engagement of minority groups in society. This further highlights the importance of training school leaders in educational leadership. As Turhan (2010) aptly puts it:

> Social injustices in today's schools can lead to tomorrow's economic imbalances. School administrators have a great role to ensure social justice in schools. Therefore, studies related to leadership roles of school administrators to ensure social justice are needed (p. 1360).

The responsibility which school leaders have to empower educators to be proactive in their quest for more just and equitable schools has prompted the author to identify those factors which strengthen the link between the multicultural education and equity schooling. The purpose of the study is therefore to understand the evolving role which multicultural education plays in the creation of polices which help construct equity and just schools and also to highlight the necessary practices which need to be enacted to transform these policies into tangible action plans which promote real and effective change.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative method of investigation was used throughout this study. This method was preferred over other means of investigation as it allowed the researcher to focus more on the subtleties of collected data rather than on metrics. Moreover, qualitative means allow the participants to feel more at ease while responding, since they are not influenced by a group. This allowed the researcher to 'delve deeply' (Denzin et al., 2005) into the extent of which school leaders established links between multicultural education and equity schooling and allowed respondents to determine how and in what ways school leaders in primary schools in Malta understand the concept of equity schooling and what role does multicultural education assume towards its promotion and implementation.

One qualitative method of investigation is the semi-structured interview. This was used to offer a balance between the flexibility of an open-ended interview and the focus of a structured ethnographic survey. It gave the researcher the advantage of returning to the same topic numerous times, thus enabling the participant to produce information with stimulated memory (Bailey, 2008). It also allowed the possibility of capturing verbal and non-verbal cues and also allowed probing into emotions and behaviours (McLeod, 2014). With the interview being more like an everyday conversation, a safe and relaxed environment could be created and this encouraged elaborate responses. The validity was also enhanced by hiring a moderator from a foreign university whose task was to conduct 50% (10 participants) of the interviews herself. This would ensure that responses were genuine and not influenced by "what I want to hear." Validity was also ensured by using the respondent validation technique. This involves checking initial results with participants to see if they respond affirmatively. Confidentiality and anonymity were stressed prior to the interview. The highest of ethical standards were maintained throughout the whole research study.

Participants' responses were analyzed to detect perceptual differences within the various forms of oppression such as injustice, racism, repression, disability, sexism and social class. These were then coded and analysed to determine whether existing practices within the school environment are inclusive or exclusive in nature.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How does a school leader, define equity schooling?

2. How does a school leader define Multicultural Education?

3. How does Multicultural Education (as you define it) promotes equity schooling within school?

4. How do school plans/activities/policies contribute to the promotion of equity?

Invitations were sent to 25 randomly selected school leaders who had completed a program in Educational leadership/ management within the past six years from the commencement of this study. Five invitation were not returned and this resulted in a selection of 20 school leaders (80%) who accepted to be interviewed. The semi-structured interviews were analyzed using NVIVO (a software program used for qualitative research and specifically of unstructured text) where a number of key themes were identified for each question. Responses were then coded in relationship to Bell's (2007) characteristics of social justice and Robins et al.'s (2006) definition of multiculturalism and continuum of cultural proficiency. The number of coded responses in each category was tallied.

RESULTS

Familiarity with the concept of social justice
55 % of the participants felt that they were familiar with the concept of equity schooling in education, with 30% reporting limited familiarity with the term as applied in the educational milieu while 15% reported no familiarity with the term. 20% of school leaders associated equity schooling with restorative justice, i.e they limited their perception to established structures such as 'the prefect of discipline's office', the' school's discipline board', or the 'college principal's office'. These responses however were deemed by the author as dissonant with Bell's (2007) concept of social justice.

The results are tabulated in the table below:

Table 1

Familiarity with the concept of equity schooling

Familiar	Limited familiarity	No familiarity
55%	20%	15%

One of the school leaders defined social justice as "the bringing together of people of many different faiths, traditions, socio-economic statuses … but also includes NGOs (Non-governmental organizations) working in favour of environmental issues, industrial relations, etc". Another school leader described his view of social justice in terms of the teachings of Jesus in favour of the poor and the needy. Out of all respondents, only one answered that she has deliberately initiated an activity which supported social justice. The author views these conceptualizations as a detachment from the notion of educational leaders as active protagonists with a clear focus on equity and universal understanding of social justice leadership exists among scholars working toward this end (McKenzie et al., 2008). Therefore, the most important responsibility of school administrators is to institutionalize social justice in schools.

Equity as the emergent central theme
Equity was the central theme that emerged from responses related to the definition of social justice, as well as perceived and desired implementation of social justice measures in schools. The most common statements attempting to define social justice revolved around "being fair", "equal distribution of resources", "just treatment to all." About half (55%) of educators in the study included equity of resources, equal learning opportunities (35%), "playing on level terms" (10%) or "same treatment" (45%) as part of their definition of social justice. When participants were further probed into how equal distribution of resources ensures equal justice, responses were rather unwieldy. Table 2 shows a summary of the results.

Table 2

Emerging Themes as essential for social justice

Being fair/just treatment	Equal distribution of resources	Equal learning opportunities	Playing on level terms
45%	55%	35%	10%

Student Support Services
More than half (60%) of the educational leaders interviewed believed that counselling programs were one of the means available to school leaders towards the achievements of social justice. 90% of respondents pointed at special education programs and inclusionary practices as the primary means of achieving social justice in their schools. 80% highlighted anti-bullying programs as effective means of achieving social justice, while 75% mentioned substance abuse programs as the vehicles towards achieving social justice in schools. 10% of participants also linked school equity with other issues for example the need for more security in schools and the need for more funding. Results are tabulated in table 3 (below).

Table 3

Student support services

Counselling Program.	Special Education and Inclusion programs	Anti-bullying programs	Substance abuse programs	Security	Funding
60%	90%	80%	75%	10%	10%

Enactment of Social Justice
One school leader stated that "while it is important for schools to enact in practice the principles of social justice, it is the students' family who should take the lead, while school can build on it." There were few responses which delved beyond the concept of social justice and moved beyond the idea of equity to encompass the deeper and larger concepts included in Bell's (2007) definition of social justice. Only one participant mentioned the full participation of all groups residing in the school. None of respondents mentioned "self-determination and interdependence of all individuals in a society" (Bell, 2007). 10% mentioned "individual social responsibility" (Bell, 2007), as essential pre-requisite for the fulfilling of social justice in schools. When asked to describe plans/activities/policies promoting social justice, which they have recently endorsed in their school and which are conducive to the promotion of social justice, 25% of school leaders interviewed resorted to explaining "the need for more training for school leaders and also of other staff on issues related to justice in Education".

30% of the participants linked the concept of justice with that of better policies to effectively tackle bullying and conduct behaviour. They also linked the notion of social justice to tougher penalties on drug trafficking, while 10% stressed the need for more effective measures on school absenteeism. Table 4 (below) shows a representation of the results.

Table 4

Enactment of Social Justice

Individual social responsibility	Need for more training on justice education	Anti-bullying programs	Tackling school absenteeism
10%	25%	30%	10%

Training on social justice and multicultural issues
A point to highlight is that 20% of those interviewed equated *social justice* with training for cultural diversity (in particular migrant education). They also stressed that need for more courses with Diversity/ Multicultural Education as focus. Definitions for multicultural education were more homogeneous than definitions given for social justice. 60% of participants stressed the need for more courses in Multicultural Education. They also stressed that the curriculum needs to have direct references to pedagogical practices which are more apt to schools/ classrooms with large number of foreigners. In their own words "we need to know how to teach these children" [referring to migrant children]. This is concomitant with the definition of *cultural proficiency* as

suggested by Robins et al. (2006), which stresses the need to "See the difference and respond effectively [to the] variety of environments". Table 5 (below) summarizes the findings.

Table 5

Training on Social Justice and Multicultural Issues

Training for Cultural Diversity	Training on Multicultural Education
20%	60%

Differentiated instruction, equity schooling and multicultural environments

 60% of the school leaders interviewed mentioned "differentiated instruction", "learner-centered pedagogies", "the [effective] classroom inclusion of students from African cultures", "the [effective] classroom inclusion of students from Eastern Cultures" as necessary precepts towards justice in schools. School leaders however advised that not enough was done to "successfully deal with issues of race and racism." 70% of school leaders viewed multicultural education as a tool supporting students in becoming more aware of peers from other cultures. One school leader outlined that multicultural education is an "opportunity to help students become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of other students, and also provides an opportunity to help one another." Similarly, another school leader claimed that "…we cannot preach equality without understanding what are the means to reach equality standards." The researcher noted that school leaders who linked multicultural education with social justice also mentioned "equality of opportunities" as a desired goal (table 6).

Table 6

Differentiated instruction, equity schooling and multicultural environments

Training in Inclusionary Practices	Multicultural Education as a tool
60%	70%

Multicultural Education and Social Justice

During the interview, only 10% of the school leaders established a link between multicultural education and social justice. Some were strongly in favour of assimilatory practices whereby all children are introduced to new cultural practices as perpetuated by the dominant Maltese culture. As one school leader put it "I think we are overly tolerant … while accepting that there are other cultures around us, I strongly feel that we, as the host culture need to be respected more, since we are the ones who are providing a whole lot of services."

This view was echoed by another school leader who asked "Would I be accommodated to if I were to live in another country? I don't think so. So why should we be exceedingly accommodating to so many cultures?" Another school leader claimed that the study or promotion of multicultural education "would bring the smooth running of the school in jeopardy since the cultural standards of different racial groups might be used as excuses to permit unacceptable behaviours in classes.

It must be noted that 20% of the participants who linked multicultural education with restorative justice explained that the multicultural awareness should not be thought of as a preamble toward special considerations such as in disciplinary matters or levels of classroom participation or academic expectations. On the other hand, one school leader expressed a more considerate approach stating that

> in my [her] experience… cultural backgrounds have tremendous impact on students' behaviour…and this includes discipline, participation, relationships with the opposite gender etc. I strongly believe that we all need more knowledge, awareness and skills as to how we can be *truly just to all* students

(participant's emphasis). It is not uncommon that students of particular backgrounds are more often to referred for disciplinary procedures.

Only one participant expressed the need to educate all educators and not only those who came in direct contact with children. Four participants expressed the need to urge students to generate discussions about topics such as justice in education, anxieties arising from prejudice and discrimination or oppressive policies and practices. 40 % of respondents stressed that issues of racism could be addressed through multicultural education, development of non-discriminatory policies, anti-bullying and drug abuse programs. 35 % stated that internal politics could also result in forms of oppression. 5 % of respondents mentioned that gender discrimination as a form of oppression, while another 5% of respondents highlighted that not providing for persons with disability is a form of oppression. 5% also mentioned social class status as a form of oppression within their school community (table 7).

Table 7

Multicultural Education and Social Justice

Linked *ME with social justice	Linked ME with restorative justice	Linked ME with racism issues	Linked ME with internal politics	Linked ME with gender issues	Linked ME with disability issues	Linked Me with social status issues
10%	20%	40%	35%	5%	5%	5%

* ME= Multicultural Education

Cultural Competency
All educators (100%) who participated in the study exemplified beliefs compatible with five out of six levels of Robbins et al.'s (2005) continuum of *cultural proficiency*, with the greatest percentage of them being at the pre-competent level (35%), closely followed by *cultural blindness* (25%). None of the school leaders demonstrated cultural destructiveness in their responses to the interview (fig 1).
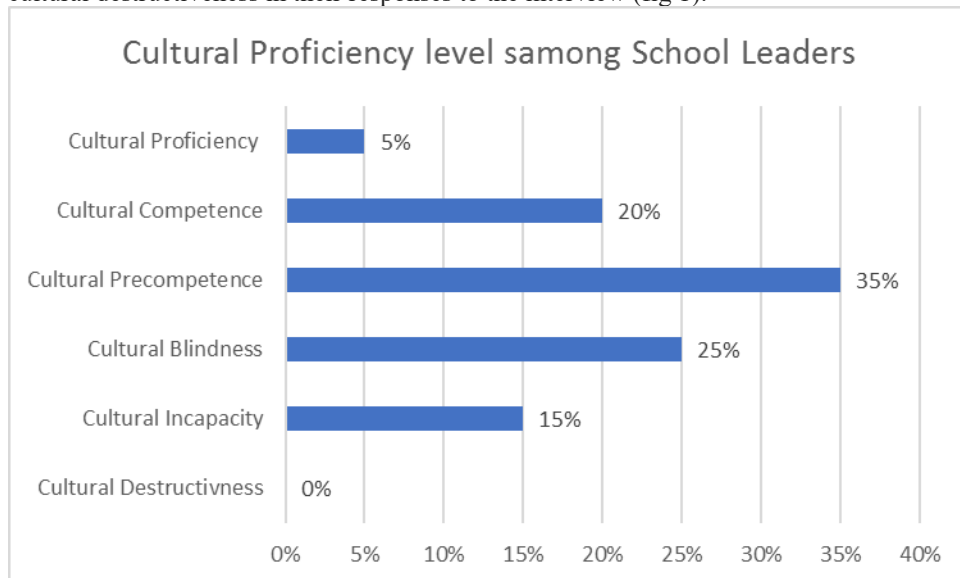

Figure 1: Cultural Proficiency levels among school leaders

Only 5 % of the school leaders in the study expressed views concomitant with Robbins et al.'s (2005) highest level in the Cultural Continuum (Cultural Proficiency). The responses conforming to this level showed that school leaders were "creating a socially just democracy that effectively serves the needs of all cultural groups" (Lindsey et al., 2009, pp. 6-7). The second highest level along the Cultural Continuum is the *competence level* which was exemplified by 20% of educators in the study. Seeing the difference and aligning those differences with the "individuals' and their group's values and behaviours to include all other cultures' values and behaviours" (Finch, 2016) characterizes this level within the cultural continuum. Responses mirroring this

category expressed positive regard towards differences and pledged support in favour of educational processes which advocate for change in the way cultural differences are perceived by the larger society. Concurrently, however, they expressed doubts as upskilling strategies needed for such aims to be fulfilled.

The largest group of respondents (35%,) fell within the cultural pre-competence set of responses i.e. they identified themselves with differences but indicated no desire or urgency to respond to perceived differences. 25 % of school leaders participating in the study stressed that it was more important to focus on similarities rather than differences among groups and individuals. These responses conformed more to the *cultural blindness* category. These responses were deemed to fit into the *cultural blindness* category which Robbins et al. (2005) defined as "seeing the difference but acting like you do not". This view emphasizes that differences do not really matter.

At the level of cultural incapacity, individuals or groups do not intentionally seek to be culturally destructive but rather lack the capacity to assist minority clients or communities. They tend to believe in a school system which maintains its biases of one dominant group over another or, in other words, assumes a paternalistic stance towards "lesser" races. None of the educators in the study expressed opinions in favour of policies and practices conducive to destruction of cultures or to members within the culture.

Responses from school leaders demonstrated minimal cognition and nominal efforts to link social justice and multicultural education. The role that multicultural education plays in the promotion of social justice was very weakly elaborated by school leaders. Similarly, educational practices advocated by school leaders to support multicultural education and social justice were rather loosely interlinked. Here, the author does not imply that school practices addressing evident inequities are not dealt with effectively in schools but rather that schools are devoid of systematic discussions enabling the mechanisms of social justice to promote the necessary change in educational establishments.

DISCUSSION

The results show that school leaders need to be better prepared to promote a broader and deeper understanding of social justice and equity. The author contends that the notion of social justice needs to become a major discourse among educational scholars and practitioners in an upcoming era of greater cultural and geographical shifts and where higher educational attainment is at stake.

The results also shed light on the school leader's role in developing a school culture conducive to learning; ensuring appropriate management of school operations and resources and facilitating collaboration between school staff and families. The need to effectively respond to the diverse needs of the school population with fairness and equity should also be high on the agenda, honed by school leaders.

Educational leaders are in an ideal position to promote positive social, emotional, cognitive well-being to all students under their care. In doing so, they guide their staff to promote learning which builds upon the students' unique strengths and challenges. This would ensure that students are properly supported with efficacious cognitive strategies which together with counselling school services provide the fabric of support to all students irrespective of their cultural origin.

School leaders advocating for social justice leadership would need to adopt a more constructivist approach to training teachers and learning support educators. This would then serve as a springboard for the construction of school policies which are concomitant with the principles of multicultural education. Moreover, formal training in Multicultural Education and social justice is needed. The links between Multicultural Education and Social Justice need to be further explored and researched. Teams composed of researchers specializing in diversity and differentiated teaching would need to team up with experts in Multicultural, equity and social justice education to develop research methodologies which are appropriate to continue researching this complex but very interesting area.

The study highlights the need for deliberate, elaborately planned activities targeting awareness, aptitude, knowledge and skills needed by all school leaders. As Dantley and Tillman (2009) explain, "leadership for social justice investigates and possess solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities" (p. 17). For a school leader to be aware of individuals or groups being "othered" s/he must possess an intriguing ability to look from different viewpoints the notions of culture, gender, race, socioeconomic backgrounds and academic abilities. Being able to look through the lenses of individuals and groups from minority cultures is an essential prerequisite towards the inclusion of justice as a central theme in educational leadership programs (Vassallo, 2016a). Robbins et al.'s (2005) cultural continuum provides educators with a flexible tool for

developing awareness and sensitivity towards minority groups which might be inadvertently oppressed by the dominant culture.

Bell (2007) delves into three important purposes of understanding theories of oppression. Oppression theory helps us to frame out our intentions and to implement them in the classroom. It provides a systematic tool which assists leaders in developing different courses of action. They also provide a springboard for questioning about the changing circumstance which minorities are frequently subjected to. Also, theory helps us to locate our position within our mammoth enterprise to learn from the past as we try to shape our future (p. 4).

University faculties across the world need to highlight their commitment towards social justice leadership rather than merely giving lip service for structural changes to happen. The recruitment of staff who strongly adhere to the principles of Multicultural and social justice education need to be actively taken up, establishing clear criteria against which attitudes and values are assessed. Such recruitment needs to be inclusive of individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups. Also, professional development sessions focusing on for education faculty staff would be an asset (Lopez 2010). Educational leadership programs need to have an internal evaluation mechanism which critically evaluates the program for dominant assumptions, underlying privileges and power imbalances. Byrne-Jimenez (2010) argues that such an exercise "require[s] faculty to rethink underlying assumptions, actions and policies, roles and relationships, pedagogical approaches, and levels of preparedness that challenge current modes of operation and force faculty to answer 'why' and for 'whom'" (p. 6). Leadership preparation programs need to integrate social justice awareness, knowledge, attitude and skills across the whole curriculum and not simply as an add on to an already overburdened curriculum. Rather than being lectured at the surface level aspiring school leaders need to be critical and transformative in their approach using a wide range of instructional strategies such as, case studies, field work experiences, historical inquiries, videos outlining oppression of minority groups, cross-cultural focus groups, autobiographies of oppressed individuals/ groups, interactive discussions targeting underlying assumptions, reflective practices that seek multiple perspectives and engage in broader social, cultural and political activities stimulating community outreach.

Moreover, engaging in action research as a tool for school improvement prompts school leaders to watch put for emerging issues within the school. This will assist them into mirror leadership, multicultural and social justice theory into practical inquiries, thus prompting them to challenge the existing status quo and find alternative solutions for improvement. This will also assist them into "looking through the lenses of others" (Vassallo, 2016, a, p.1) and consequently engage in "sustained conversations about differences" (Bustamante, R. M., Nelson, J. A., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2009, p. 36).

In particular, Educational leadership programs need to be more inclusive of aspects of oppression with particular plans of action directed at:

1. the ubiquity of "social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness" (Bell, 2007, p. 4);

2. the presence of "structural and material constraints that significantly shape a person's life chances and sense of possibility" (Bell, 2007, p. 4), affecting both individual and group's self-determination (Young, 1990);

3. the hierarchical echelons within society which benefit dominant or privileged groups and undermine the development of subordinated groups pushing them into abysses;

4. the ascribed dominant and subordinate roles by individuals (Friere, 1970, 2007); and

5. specific forms of oppression (Bell, 2007).

For educational leaders to be empowered to foster changes in schools, which pave the way for increased awareness of social justice, a strong knowledge base of oppression and anti-racist issues need to be in place. Educational Leadership Programs would need to put more effort and focus on equipping leaders to respond to inequity and social injustice that pervade their school walls. Allen, Harper and Koschoreck (2017) articulate that such programs would be inclusive of discussions about

a) the inclusion of all members of the school community;

b) a willingness to continuously examine one's own assumptions, beliefs, and practices;

c) exploring the benefits that diversity brings to the school community;

d) construction of safe and supportive learning environments;

e) the proposition that diversity enriches the school and

f) the development of a caring school community.

The common element present in each of these authors' expositions and which links educational leadership to social justice is action. Hence, Educational leadership preparation programs necessitate delving deeply into the study of oppressive practices, and cultivate the impetus to change practices, strategies and systems that precipitate inequity and oppression. Such endeavor is necessary to stimulate social actions to continue addressing issues of social justice in schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on literature review and subsequent analysis, it is evident that there is increased concern about whether school leaders are prepared to face the mammoth task of fostering social justice in their schools and classrooms. Research suggests that leadership preparation programs ought to engage in new ways that promote a broader and deeper understanding of issues related to social justice (Marshall & Oliva, 2005; Normore, 2008; Young & Mountford, 2006). The paper also attempts to spur dialogue across national and international borders, stressing the need for preparation programs to commit to pedagogies for social justice. Bogotch (2005) emphasizes that discussions on educational leadership competences need to deliberately and continuously refocus their attention on the need for social justice.

School leaders have an obligation to move beyond the rhetoric of abstract discourses and delve more into research and make the bold step to transform educational leadership courses from purely academic to agents of social change and social action. We need to be more critical into examining how recruitment processes, policies and procedures affect school leaders' initiatives into promoting social justice activities in schools. This implies that leadership programs should promote opportunities for working through anti-racist pedagogies, critical and constructive dialogues, multicultural and diversity education, and social justice. Given the scarcity of research linking multicultural school leadership and justice education, an online database consisting of multicultural educational leadership and social justice issues needs to be initiated. This would provide insight into the various contexts into which educational leaders operate in the quest for a more just and equity schools. These studies will provide a think-tank for the generation of ideas and experiences.

For reasons of ethical responsibility, confidentiality and anonymity, this study does not differentiate between various school leadership programs. However, the study poses a challenge to all programs and invites coordinators to critically examine and reflect on the embedded knowledge and views of participants and together construct a way forward. With only 55% of School leaders interviewed expressing familiarity with the concept of equity schooling, the impact of multicultural educational programs and their impact on institutional change towards social equity is unclear. With just 10% of school leaders linking knowledge of social justice to their preparation program (past or current), the development of culturally responsive leadership skills to mitigate against inequities in educational institutions and to empower minority group students to contribute to more socially just school policies and practices remains rather elusive.

Program development leaders within university colleges may feel that discussions about diversity in classrooms should be enough for future leaders to start implementing more socially just policies and practices, mitigate against biases and deep-seated perceptions. The study draws the attention of program providers that some misconceived assumptions are so ingrained that they fall below levels of awareness and are usually devoid of real understanding of those who are disempowered. The differences in responses to the research questions outlined above suggest that aspiring multicultural justice leaders may need different forms of support. One can also deduce that they are likely to face resistance when addressing issues of social inequity in their schools. The study sheds light on the importance for school leaders to continue developing moral imperatives which act as springboards for improves awareness on social and justice issues.

Research would need to refocus its efforts to examine how to explicitly address institutionalized disempowerment of minority groups so as to be able to support school leaders in their noble quest for supporting social justice. In the current educational debate, where segregation appears to be reoccurring (Rosiek & Kinslow, 2016), and discrimination is on the uprise (Colorado Civil Rights Commission, 2010), school leadership needs to focus on Equity Action Plans that can be used to stimulate reflection among educators on the impending issues on social justice and assisting them in developing concrete solution when injustices occur. For school leaders to enact change they must have a strong knowledge base in Multicultural Education principles so

as to identify and confront inequities and to include such issues in their daily planning. They would also need to develop in personal awareness and increase cognizance about institutionalization of oppression and the manners in which it is incessantly cycled. Finally, the author strongly believes that it is imperative for school leaders to be provided with enough budgeting resources to assist them in confronting and addressing inequality issues effectively through the implementation of responsive action plans addressing oppression cycles.

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