

Elementary Principal Leadership for Equitable Learning Environments for Diverse Latina/o Students

Peggy Hickman*

Arcadia University

Shernaz B. García

University of Texas at Austin

The purpose of this study was to present a critical examination of the narrow view of “high-performing schools” as related solely to student test scores, particularly in light of existing theory and models of culturally relevant, responsive, and reciprocal teaching and learning for Latina/o students with disabilities. The framework and guiding hypotheses presented in this paper are derived from the findings and subsequent analyses of data generated from a larger study of principal leadership of two Title 1 bilingual elementary schools in which at least 80% or more of the students achieved scores of “proficient” or above on the state accountability tests for at least three consecutive years. Findings are presented in light of tensions and contradictions among the principals’ beliefs, knowledge, and actions taken with regard to programs and services in relation to the complex and non-linear intersectionality of culture, language, economic diversity, and disability for Latina/o students receiving general and special education services. In particular, findings critically highlight the tensions, contradictions, and hegemonic nature of the principals’ beliefs regarding the influence of socioeconomic status on schooling, as well as their knowledge of second language acquisition processes, and the resulting decision making and programming for Latina/o ELLs with disabilities that bring into question whether these high-performing schools were socially just or equity oriented. The paper concludes with a focus on broadening the current discussion of equity- and social justice-oriented leadership for diverse Latina/o students.

Keywords: diversity, English language learners, equity, leadership, social justice

As the needs of an increasingly diverse student population call for more differentiated instruction, educational leaders are expected to create and sustain environments that promote meaningful educational experiences for all student groups within standards-based systems. The critical role of educational leaders in the academic achievement of students has been consistently documented in educational literature (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Levine & Lezotte, 2001). Yet current and historic discrepancies in achievement, dropout rates, and disproportionality in special education referral and placement rates between Whites and all other subgroups of students persist (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higarada, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2011). Furthermore, 75% of the U.S. population of English language learners in schools are Spanish-speaking Latinas/os. For these students, research has continued to show disparities in academic achievement, graduation rates, and lifelong employment and earnings outcomes (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Therefore, it is critical to investigate the multiple dimensions of school leaders’ roles in creating and

sustaining environments that support and produce more equitable outcomes for students. The framework and guiding hypotheses presented in this paper are derived from the findings and subsequent analyses of data generated from a larger study of White, female principal leadership of two Title 1 bilingual elementary schools in which at least 80% or more of the students achieved scores of “proficient” or above on the state accountability tests for at least three consecutive years. Findings are presented in light of tensions and contradictions among the principals’ beliefs, knowledge, and actions taken with regard to programs and services in relation to the complex and non-linear intersectionality of culture, language, economic diversity, and disability for Latina/o students receiving general and special education services.

Social Justice and Educational Outcomes

In the standards-based, high-stakes accountability environment of current educational discourse, the term *outcomes* has become narrowly, and almost singularly, defined as student test scores. For Latina/o students with and without disabilities, the research is clear that there are many linguistic and sociocultural implications that must be addressed in educational contexts in order for equitable outcomes, broadly conceived, to be achieved (Artiles et al., 2005; Baca & Cervantes, 2004; de Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). To this end, social justice has emerged in the field as a lens through which leadership beliefs and values such as equity, access, and caring can provide the impetus to promote and achieve high levels of academic performance for historically marginalized student groups (Brown, 2004; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Scheurich, 2003; Theoharis, 2007).

The term *social justice*, however, holds a variety of meanings depending on the author (see, for example, North, 2008, for an extended discussion of the historical use of the term in educational research). For the purpose of this paper, it is used to refer to equity-oriented education for diverse Latina/o students, which seeks to: (a) promote positive learning outcomes for all students (McKenzie et al., 2008); (b) be responsive to, appreciate, and recognize/celebrate differences at the individual, group, and community level (Lynch & Baker, 2005); (c) consistently analyze practices and policies to weed out oppression, marginalization, and unethical treatment of, and toward, those who are different from the “norm” (North, 2008, p. 12); and (d) prepare students with the beliefs, knowledge, and skills to interact successfully for equity in diverse and inclusive communities (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Young & Laible, 2000). Recently documented experiences of social justice school leaders (e.g., Brown, 2004; Henze & Arriaza, 2006; Rorrer, 2006; Theoharis, 2007) have captured the need for leaders to build a belief in, and commitment to, equity, and to enact those beliefs through institutional practices, such as disaggregating data, to inform instruction. Enacting these beliefs also allows leaders to reframe questions that guide reform efforts—for example, from questioning high standards to identifying ways to support all students to meet the standard (Henze & Arriaza, 2006).

There are points of tension, however, inherent even in the definition of social justice offered above, that are likely to increase the complexity and challenge of addressing these multiple components. In this age of standards-based academic accountability and diversity of student background and academic need, social justice leadership must also account for

the complexity and inherent tensions that occur in the context of schooling across multiple, equally relevant yet often contradictory, nuanced, and competing demands. Some examples include ensuring standards-based education for all students, yet safeguarding individualized instruction for students with disabilities and differentiated instruction for all; responding to high-stakes testing and accountability while honoring voices of diverse community stakeholders; and allowing celebrations of individual identity while creating contexts and instruction that value group history, language, and socialization. For academically diverse students, this also includes creating inclusive environments while instituting tiered systems of academic and behavioral support. In the broader context of district and state education departments, social justice leadership involves, for example, attending to the complexities and tensions between aligning curriculum across districts while analyzing ways in which it marginalizes many students and supports mainstream cultural hegemony. These represent just a few of the ways in which social justice leadership must inform, and be informed by, multiple educational realities and foci.

Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this study was to provide an evidence-based, critical examination of these tensions and contradictions through the leadership of two urban, Title I, bilingual elementary schools that had achieved consistently high rankings in relation to student performance on state accountability assessments. In particular, we focused on programs and services for Latina/o students with diverse academic and linguistic needs. Findings uncover that the intersections between each principal's sociocultural beliefs, knowledge, and actions often created contradictory programs and services for Latina/o students with and without disabilities across each school, in ways that highlight the need for a broader view of social justice leadership to include cultural responsiveness and challenges to hegemonic, middle-class leadership beliefs and practices. In particular, we highlight the principals' understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds, as well as second language acquisition processes, and their intersection with both curricular programming as well as special education service provision for Latina/o students with disabilities. Although the schools (and by association the principals) were considered "academically successful" according to student test scores, findings from this study serve to critically underscore the problematic nature of such a narrow view of schooling and the tensions that arise across leadership actions in these diverse contexts in terms of broader views of equitable and socially just educational contexts. Discussion and implications of these findings offer considerations relative to broadening the nature of social justice schooling and leadership for diverse Latina/o students.

Principal Leadership and Latina/o Students with Diverse Abilities

Diverse schools include a complex interplay of cultural, linguistic, economic, and educational diversity, which undergirds, informs, and influences teaching and learning. It has been well noted in the literature that race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English

language proficiency, and disproportionate identification in relation to disability are conclusively linked (e.g., Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; Hanlon, 2009).

At the same time, public school principals continue to be predominantly White, college-educated, able-bodied, and middle class (United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2009a, b), and have received little formal preparation in responding to traditionally marginalized and non-mainstream diverse students and communities (Brown, 2004; Zehler, Fleischman, Hopstock, Pendzick, & Stephenson, 2003). The percentage of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse (CLED) students enrolled in U.S. schools continues to rise, particularly in suburban contexts (Timberlake, Howell, & Staight, 2011). The potential for sociocultural and linguistic discontinuities between principals and the students, families, and communities they serve is therefore highly likely and undeniable. Some emerging research indicates that educational leaders often struggle with adjusting to leading their school communities' response to cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity (Timberlake et al., 2011). Their efforts to address these issues are often met by systemic forces that tend to promote maintaining the status quo (Nieto, 2011) instead of considering alternate perspectives and ways of teaching and learning that are more equitable and responsive to the social and cultural experiences and goals of diverse populations (Baca & Cervantes, 2004).

Studying cultural, linguistic, economic, and ability/disability influences on and in educational contexts is particularly complex both holistically and comprehensively. The multitude of sociohistorical, contextual, and individual considerations and interactions that come to bear in each situation (Artiles et al., 2010) present researchers and practitioners with tensions and intersections that seem tangled and opaque. This has resulted in research that has isolated one, or at most two, elements of diversity to study within these complex contexts (e.g., socioeconomic and cultural diversity, special education in urban environments, or linguistic and cultural diversity). In doing so, however, one is left with an incomplete picture of the complexities many school leaders face each day, as they simultaneously respond to the intersectional nature of diversity (Hickman & García, 2010). Particularly with regard to Latina/o Spanish-speaking students, the influences and implementation of principals' beliefs and knowledge about, and actions taken in relation to, views of culture, biliteracy, special education services, and curricula must be seen as interrelated and mutually influential. Doing so carries the potential to significantly shape broadly conceived outcomes for these students.

Overview

The framework and guiding hypotheses presented in this paper derive from the findings and subsequent analyses of data generated from a larger study, the purpose of which was to examine (a) the nature of principals' personal and professional experiences, knowledge, and beliefs with regard to bilingual and special education as well as working with diverse communities; and (b) the ways in which these principals' knowledge and beliefs were reflected in the leadership of their respective elementary schools (Hickman, 2004; Hickman & García, 2010). This study focused specifically on each principal's beliefs, knowledge, and

skills in relation to the various sociocultural dimensions at work within the school environment, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language background, and disability. Principals from self-identified White, middle-class backgrounds participated in this study, which illuminated the critical beliefs, knowledge, skills, and experiences that lead to success or challenges in effectively addressing cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity in their schools. The selection of White principals of high-performing schools in CLED communities was purposeful, as we sought to investigate the intercultural and interracial dimensions of leadership from the perspective of those similar in background to the vast majority of educational leaders in the United States (White, middle-class, college educated, able-bodied). In particular, we sought to uncover if and/or how those intercultural and interracial dimensions influenced not only academic outcomes, but also broader elements of equity and social justice in the context of considerable sociocultural differences between the leaders and the students and communities they served. Two of the participating principals, Brenda and Carol, and their school contexts are included in this paper (all identifying information, including names, has been replaced by pseudonyms; school demographic percentages are approximate to protect confidentiality).

Methods

The research, which was conducted over the course of an academic school year, was structured as a comparative case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of leadership in Title I, CLED elementary schools in Texas. The methods used to generate data included purposive participant sampling, interviews, document collection, and observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The participants included two elementary school principals, initially selected from a database of Texas elementary schools awarded prestigious recognition between the years 1998 and 2001 (the specific award is not named, to maintain participant confidentiality). Part of the criteria for receiving this award was that the schools had to have a four-year history of top rankings in the Texas educational accountability system. From this database, schools and principals were invited to participate if:

- Their Latina/o student enrollment was at or greater than 50%;
- Students who were English language learners (ELLs)—students designated as “limited English proficient” (LEP) by state language assessment standards—comprised at least 25% of the student enrollment;
- The student population labeled as “economically disadvantaged,” as determined by free or reduced lunch status, was greater than 50%;
- The school was led by a culturally mainstream (White) principal;
- The campuses provided services to students with disabilities at their sites; and
- The percentages of special education and LEP students who were exempted from the state accountability assessment were near or below the state average during 2001–2002.

Tables 1-3 provide the demographic descriptions of each site, exemption rates for the state, and comparisons across both schools, from 2002–2003, the year of the study.

Table 1
School Demographics (2002–2003)

Factors	Billings Elementary	Colter Elementary
School type	Urban	First-tier suburban
Grades	PreK–5	PreK–6
Student enrollment	900	475
Latina/o	800 (89%)	310 (65%)
ELL	480 (55%)	105 (23%)
“Economically disadvantaged”	690 (77%)	260 (55%)
Total number of students receiving special education services (Texas = 12%)	50 (6%)	60 (13%)
Number of bilingual/LEP students receiving special education services	6	18 PPCD* and/or autism 7 (2 autism)
Assistant principals	2 (1 bilingual)	0
District programs		Autism; PPCD+
Bilingual program model	Late transition	Early transition/Dual-immersion
Number of teachers	45	35
Certified bilingual education teachers	20	5
Monolingual general education teachers	24	30
Certified bilingual special education teachers	0	0
Monolingual English special education teachers	1	6

*PPCD: Preschool program for children with disabilities

Table 2
Limited English Proficient (LEP)/Special Education Accountability Assessment Exemption and Participation Rates, 2002–2003, by School (includes all students tested)

2002–2003	Billings Elementary	Colter Elementary
LEP exemption rate (state: 1.1%)	.8%	1.3%
Special education/IEP exemption rate (state: 1.7%)	0%	1.3%
Percent “Meeting IEP Expectations”* (Texas: 69%)	100%	92%

*The percentage of students acquiring the standard of “Meeting Admission/Review/Dismissal (IEP) Expectations” was used by the Texas Education Agency as part of school accountability ratings to denote the percentage of students passing the assessment level of the SDAA documented in each student’s Individualized education plan.

Table 3
Principal Profiles

Characteristics	Brenda	Carol
School	Billings Elementary	Colter Elementary
Years in administrative positions in education	11	18
Highest educational degree	Master's	Master's; completing doctoral courses
Previous administrative experiences/types of schools	Suburban/Middle-Class/White; Title I/Urban/African American and Latina/o	Title I/Urban/ African American
Teaching experiences/Types of schools	Suburban/Latina/o	Title I/Urban/ Latina/o
Teaching specialties	Special education, music education, gifted education	Early childhood (non-special education)
Bilingual/Spanish	No	No

Data Sources and Data Collection

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals, Brenda and Carol (Fontana & Frey, 1998), who each participated in a mean of 4.5 hours of individual, formal interviews across the data-collection process. Questions asked of each principal included those concerning her experiences, understanding, and beliefs in relation to the education of Latina/o, Spanish-speaking students with and without disabilities at her school.

Often, informal conversations with each principal would also occur during shadowing and observations at the sites. Observations occurred during a mean of 14 full days per site over the course of the data-collection period. These observations, and corresponding field notes, served to document daily actions, interactions, and activities related to the education of these students; the observations served to generate and confirm other information recorded (Creswell, 2008) in reference to each principal's leadership with and on behalf of Latina/o students with disabilities. Specific formal contexts for principal observation across sites included: special education eligibility/IEP meetings, for students who were ELLs as well as those who were monolingual; special education prereferral team meetings; faculty/staff meetings; district meetings; Parent-Teacher Association meetings; Campus Advisory Team meetings; campus leadership team meetings; meetings with grade-level teacher teams; and Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) meetings.

Data Analysis

The process of open coding and continuous analysis of individual parts of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) began after the first level of member checking (in which the researcher clarified understanding of the participants' positions during interviews and shadowing of participants, and evolved throughout the data analysis and writing process, including

sharing the draft and final written products before submission for review) and continued using constant comparison methods throughout the investigation and analysis of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexivity, member checking, peer debriefing, purposive sampling, and triangulation gave trustworthiness and credibility to the findings of the study (Creswell, 2008).

Findings

The findings from this study suggest that each principal's beliefs and knowledge related to sociocultural differences (differences in regard to culture, language, socioeconomic status, and ability) between themselves and the students and families they served were highly influential and, at times, fraught with tensions and contradictions that directly, and critically, affected their work in educating Latina/o ELLs with and without disabilities. These dimensions, and their interrelated nature and influence on school programs and policies, are presented below.

The Principals and School Contexts

To situate them for the reader, a description of each of the principals within their school context precedes the presentation of findings. All names and identifying information related to the principals and their school contexts have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

Brenda, principal of Billings Elementary School. Located on the fringes of a large urban center in Texas, and with an enrollment of 900 students, Billings had achieved the highest Texas school accountability rating of "exemplary" for three consecutive years prior to the year of this study. The largest student population was Latina/o, and more than 50% were ELLs from Spanish-speaking homes (see Table 1). Brenda described the bilingual education program at Billings as following a "late transition" or "maintenance bilingual" model. She acknowledged, however, that the bilingual education classes in Grades 4 and 5 were primarily for recent immigrants or students who had not yet become proficient enough in English to participate in English-only instruction for all subjects.

As presented in Table 1, students with disabilities comprised just 6% ($n = 50$) of students at Billings, and 60% ($n = 30$) of this group received speech and language support only. Of the remaining 20 students, six were ELLs classified as LEP, representing 1.3% of the ELL population at Billings: The representation of ELLs in special education programs was quite low, but consistent with the small proportion (3.3%) of all students receiving non-speech-related special education services.

A veteran administrator with 11 years of experience, Brenda was leading her fourth year at the school. As an administrator, she had worked in a variety of school settings and had the broadest range of experiences in terms of student ability as well as racial/ethnic diversity. Certified in music education, and later in special education, her teaching experiences ranged from working with students with emotional and behavior disorders in urban school settings to teaching White and Latina/o students in a gifted program in a predominantly suburban school. She was described by others at her school as an engaging, smart, personable woman who demanded, and rewarded, excellence from her students and

teachers, and acquired and provided whatever resources were needed to accomplish this goal.

Carol, principal of Colter Elementary School. A much smaller campus with about half the enrollment of Billings, Colter was located in a fairly wealthy suburb of a major urban center in Texas, which bussed urban Latina/o ELLs to and from its campus daily. It had achieved the Texas school accountability rating of “acceptable” once and “recognized” twice in the three years leading up to the study. Like its counterparts in the study, Colter served a student enrollment that was predominantly Latina/o, but a relatively smaller percentage of the total student enrollment was classified as ELLs, with Spanish as their primary language.

Colter offered two bilingual education programs for ELLs: one multiage, grades K–1 immersion class with a Spanish-speaking teacher (with early transition to all-English classrooms in second grade); and a second, evolving dual-immersion program for students in pre–K through second grade (with plans to add a grade level each year up to sixth grade). Compared to Billings, Colter’s special education population was high (13%), though still in line with state percentages (see Table 1). Colter, however, housed a district-level program for students with disabilities, in this case a preschool program for children with disabilities (PPCD). Of the 13% of students who were served in special education, close to one-third ($n = 18$, or 30%) received services through the PPCD program; none of these students was classified as LEP. Seven other students receiving non-PPCD special education services were ELLs.

Carol had more years of administrative experience than Brenda, with 18 years in this capacity (five in her role at Colter). Her prior administrative assignments had placed her in predominantly African American communities. Carol was certified in early childhood education, and had taught in predominantly Latina/o, Title I, urban schools prior to becoming a principal. A soft-spoken, self-described introvert, Carol worked with her teachers on “creating an inclusive community, and inclusive classrooms, for all children with disabilities at Colter.” She was a daily presence throughout the classrooms and common rooms of the school, interacting with and observing teachers and students.

Culture as Socioeconomic Status

In this section, the tensions and contradictions between and among the principals’ beliefs, understandings, and actions in relation to the students and families they served become evident in their views on culture, the purposes of schooling, perspectives on bilingualism and second language acquisition, and the intersections of language learning and disability. One of the many interview questions asked of the principals was their perception of how “culture influences their leadership in their schools in relation to teaching and learning.” Their responses to this question highlighted their mainstream, hegemonic views of what elements comprise “culture,” culminating in descriptions of practices that were contradictory to their stated beliefs in relation to Latina/o students.

When asked their perceptions of cultural influences, both principals quickly began talking about their perception that *socioeconomic status* was more influential in relation to student learning needs than ethnicity or any other dimensions of cultural identity. Both principals had been teachers and administrators in urban, low-income, primarily Latina/o and/or

primarily African American schools; they identified poverty, or the low socioeconomic status of their students and families, as the “cultural element” that had the greatest impact on teaching and learning. They proposed that this belief stemmed not only from each of their professional experiences in urban and suburban schools, but also connected to their own childhood experiences with varying levels of familial financial strain.

For Carol, socioeconomic status was the only element of diversity that she acknowledged as having a differential influence on school processes. When asked repeatedly, she continued to stress that for her, financial constraints of Colter families had “the most impact on schooling”; she recalled her own experience as a child, when her father lost his job, as an experience that helped her develop empathy for Colter families who were experiencing stress due to a lack of financial resources. This sustained her “commitment to building a supportive community for students at the school in order to respond to these stressors,” just as community support in her own childhood had supported her family through their financial difficulties.

Similarly, Brenda expressed feelings of connection with the students and families at Billings due to her experiences as “a child growing up in a financially strained, single-parent household.” Brenda firmly believed that both her personal experiences as a child with limited supervision at home, and her subsequent “acting-out behaviors in school,” developed in her a sense of understanding, compassion, and insight into the lives and behaviors of the students at Billings. She felt a particular connection with those she identified as having few resources and whose behavior she attributed to not having their emotional and physical needs met at home, as she herself had often felt as a child.

In response to these views of culture as socioeconomic disadvantage, both principals focused their efforts on building what they perceived to be “necessary” informal curricula (in addition to the formal, rigorous, standards-based academic instruction) that could give students “the information and experiences they would need to move out of poverty.” They both saw these compensatory experiences as critical to the students’ academic success.

Purpose of Schooling: Providing Access to the Middle Class

Though both leaders expressed a strong commitment to and empathy for the students in their schools, their empathy was tempered by their personal beliefs and experiences with, and socialization in, the idea of meritocracy; following this conviction, they pushed to offer school programs and curricula that, for them, compensated for what they perceived as deficits in their students’ experiences and school preparedness. Both Brenda and Carol were singularly focused on student outcomes as symbols of equity as they related to the state standards and academic achievement in the formal curriculum. They saw students’ perceived deficits through a mainstream social lens and as antithetical to school/academic achievement.

Brenda commented that academic learning “took precedence” over what she considered “cultural programs” or informal curricula not centered on academic progress. Her limited knowledge of pedagogical considerations relative to culture and its role in teaching and learning surfaced when she referred to her perception that multicultural education involved only “celebrations of cultural events and holidays.” She saw this as ancillary, almost

superfluous, to instruction that focused on academic learning. In this regard, Brenda stated that she was “not really big into stopping school around” cultural events and holidays because, in her view, these types of whole-school celebrations involved hours of practice that took the focus away from academic learning. She remarked, “We don’t do all this programming that’s not really about academics . . . because I’ve seen so much academic time wasted.”

Both Brenda and Carol also secondarily supported efforts at compensatory programs to provide students with the opportunities they perceived were “necessary” for the students to learn and to access future mainstream, middle-class experiences and economic opportunity. Believing that students’ experiential deficits, if not attended to in structured and overt ways, would continue to limit their future life goals and success, they saw rigorous academic standards and “exposure to middle-class rules” as pathways to raising academic achievement and financial stability in their students’ adult lives. They each developed overt, explicit informal (non-standards-based) curricular programs in their schools, the goals of which were to educate and socialize their students in middle-class values and experiences. This perception—that their schools needed to provide students with cultural experiences (“advantages”) that they perceived would prepare them for school success and access to the middle class—was based in an implicit curriculum (Hollins, 2008) that was guided by particular assumptions these principals had formed, based in their experiences and socialization and manifested in informal curricula that transmitted values of the dominant culture and marginalized students’ experiences. Both principals believed that these programs would enhance academic outcomes for their students. Such experiences included field trips to art museums, theater presentations, local universities, and business organizations. They also included programs such as the Character Education program at Colter. To these principals, educational access and success were founded on and sustained by middle-class values and ideals.

Brenda would often remark that she was “trying to *break* a cycle of poverty. Now, that’s how I see it.” To her, one of the most important ways to help break the cycle of poverty is by “educating children . . . helping students [get] *out* of welfare, *finishing* high school, being able to provide for [themselves], having a family, y’know, going to college for a large percentage of kids. Not for every kid, necessarily, but for a lot. *Definitely* finishing high school for all of these kids. For the vast majority of them.” Brenda continued to describe her goals for and beliefs about these students’ futures, stating:

I want them to go to college, I want them to have good jobs . . . It’s not all about money, but I want them to accomplish what they can. . . . Educationally, I want to make that kind of difference for them. That they are living productive lives, they have higher self-esteem and are productive members of society. I don’t want to assume that everybody wants to move from the lower class to the middle class. But I do know that the middle class is the standard values for the country. And the kids have to have some understanding of those [values] if they are going to make the leap. That’s each individual student’s choice. [But] they don’t have a choice if they’re not aware of the rules. . . . Frankly, when they’re in the school system for a long time, [and] the school

system is a middle-class system. And so they should be acclimated that way. And so it's not forcing our values on them to aspire for. I'm not saying that you want to be a CEO or something. But it's like, here's your opportunity.

Brenda's belief was that the understanding related to these experiences could influence students' academic knowledge and success, which could open doors of opportunity for them to break out of the "culture of poverty."

Her statements are similar to thoughts shared by Carol:

[My role as a principal is to] get kids who would not get it without me . . . to a place where they are able to compete for spots in college, for scholarships and for jobs . . . Also, generally being productive citizens and not continuing in the welfare cycle that many of their parents are currently depending on to live . . . I think the schools are the key to stopping this welfare cycle and motivating and giving the skills necessary to children to become the next generation of professionals. . . . These guys have *got* to be the owners of stuff. They've *got* to be the white-collar people. We've got to get them there.

In these conversations, the principals did express a recognition that these assumptions emanated from middle-class orientations toward "success." Yet the tension in their views, connected to their passionate drive to help their students gain access to opportunity, was also influenced by their consistent attribution of the students' underachievement, and therefore the school's need to "respond to students' lack of experiences" as resulting primarily from a view that, due to economic constraints, their families could not provide the children with the experiences related to school success. In other words, these children were not "ready to learn." These viewpoints are consistent with other research findings (Berman, Chambliss, & Geiser, 1999; García & Guerra, 2004; McKenzie, 2001), which have documented educators' deficit views and attributions of student underachievement to parental neglect, disrespect, or failure to value education. These views, while rightfully providing cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Trainor, 2008) for their students, on the other hand failed to appreciate or build on the strengths and resources that exist within any family, regardless of their race, ethnicity, social class, or language (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Moreover, it also overshadowed the sociocultural and linguistic characteristics of their students and families, and overlooked many aspects of cultural difference that are central to the schooling process (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Banks, 2002). As a result, school failure was more likely to be conceptualized in terms of a family's sociocultural deficits to be overcome by the school (Valencia, 1997), rather than by concomitantly examining the cultural relevance of the curriculum and instructional practices or seeking to identify structural inequities in school policy and practice.

To be sure, these principals' vision to ensure the academic success of each individual student addressed the important multicultural education goal of increased educational equity in terms of academic outcomes for all students. Yet, in these examples, the principals' lack of ability to design their schools to become spaces where differences in

socioeconomic status as well as culture, ethnicity, and experiences were viewed from a strengths-based perspective, as resources and instructional tools to enrich and support learning, multicultural responsiveness, and reciprocity (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2013), limited their curricular focus to mainstream ways, which missed opportunities to prepare students to function in and across diverse contexts and to challenge societal structures that reinforce social barriers based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and culture (Banks, 2002).

Purpose of Schooling: Addressing *Individual* Needs

In addition to her marginalizing thoughts on student background experiences, Carol believed that appropriate and effective instruction for all students could be achieved by a focus on individual needs, rather than attention to needs of groups of students related to culture, ethnicity, or linguistic difference (attention to which she equated with negative cultural bias). As an assistant principal in an urban, African American school, Carol's interactions with teachers and parents had impressed on her that racial and cultural differences could be mediated by "getting to know" the *individual*. Carol described her own experiences as a racial minority in a predominantly African American school when discussing her second administrative placement (prior to her position at Colter). When asked if she felt as though she had been treated differently because she was White, she responded affirmatively; she believed, however, that this was related for the most part only to others' knowledge of her as an *individual*. She described differential interactions with her by African American teachers and parents as a temporary situation that lessened with time ("The longer I stayed, the less that happened") as others "got to know" her as an individual. These experiences impressed on her that understanding "the individual," and similarities rather than differences, would diffuse any potential negative perceptions by and toward others in relation to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or disability at the school, and build the kind of environment she experienced as a child, in which everyone was "responsible for the community." Fueled by her appreciation for responsibility and community, her installation of a Character Education program at Colter became the vehicle for her to, from her perspective, cultivate "shared beliefs and values" among the faculty and staff, and to educate students to each be "responsible members of a community" dedicated to being trustworthy, respectful of others, and interacting with them in caring and "fair" ways (in effect, a "human relations" model of responding to diversity (Grant & Sleeter, 1997)). She explained, "Teachers here are sensitive to meeting the *individual* needs of children, which negates sometimes those cultural biases that come into play . . . Teachers try to look at the *individual* child as much as they can" [emphasis added]. She noted that this positioning related to culture/human relations also fit well with her perception of special education services, as an individual, person-centered approach to meeting students' needs. As such, Carol felt this orientation provided a kind of inclusivity and continuity in positionality in relation to teaching and social interactions.

The contradictions inherent in Carol's position seemed to have their foundations in an individualistic view of "community" as a group of people dedicated to *each person's* identity

and self-actualization, rather than attending to a more collectivistic view of an individual as being an integral part of contributing to *group* identity and harmony (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). In effect, she created a school context that centered on “color blindness” (Grant & Sleeter, 1997), or the idea that not overtly focusing on elements of individual difference or ethnic/racial/ability group identity among students would promote harmony and acceptance. Given her lack of formal training in leading for multiculturalism, like Brenda at Billings, she failed to understand students and families as situated within socially and experientially rich cultural communities, whose experiences, values, and funds of knowledge could become part of the curriculum and school programs and processes (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Hollins, 2008; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2013). The tension evident in this context is that Carol’s Character Education program focused on individual behavior *to create a harmonious school community*, which could be seen as respect for community and the individual’s responsibility to the greater good. Yet her “color blindness” and desire to focus on the individual student *apart* from his or her family, home community, ethnicity, background, and cultural identity effectively eliminated opportunities to develop cultural responsiveness, reciprocity, and relevance in educating Latina/o students with and without disabilities at her school (Banks, 2002; Hollins, 2008).

Perspectives about Bilingualism and Second Language Acquisition

Given the large numbers of Latina/o English language learners at each of the schools, we sought to explore each principal’s informed understanding of bilingualism and second language acquisition, and the influences of their beliefs about language acquisition (first and second) on their leadership in designing programs for Latina/o ELLs in general and special education in particular. Carol stated that she had not had any formal learning experiences related to bilingual education nor second language learning in her administrative preparation programs, while Brenda noted that she had been provided with formal and informal professional development in relation to bilingual and second language acquisition. She had participated in professional development opportunities and completed some coursework toward an ESL endorsement for her teaching certificate, both of which helped her, from her perspective, understand the importance of children learning to read and gaining content knowledge through their first language—in this case, Spanish. She also stated that she had learned a great deal about issues and practices through her experiences as a teacher working in “bilingual schools,” as well as through her work at Billings with “really, really good teams of bilingual teachers.”

Carol believed that being bilingual was an advantage for all children in expanding future employment possibilities, explaining that students’ native language should be used as a foundation for English language learning for ELLs with “limited English proficiency.” Yet her actions in relation to programming revealed her lack of formal professional development and understanding of linguistic influences on learning, and the depth of her commitment to deeper understandings of language in relation to Latina/o students with disabilities. Not surprisingly, differences in each principal’s beliefs and knowledge about second language acquisition and orientation to bilingualism were reflected in their divergent and at times

contradictory decisions about the language of instruction and program models, as well as recruitment and assignment of bilingual faculty and staff for ELLs with and without disabilities.

Language Programs for ELLs

Both Brenda and Carol avowed their commitment to the *idea* that bilingual students benefit from native language literacy while gaining proficiency in English (August & Shanahan, 2008). They also believed, they said, that bilingualism is an asset for future employment. Bilingual education, at least at the primary level, was district policy in Brenda's district: as such, she followed the district guidelines for late-transition language programming.

Carol stated that she not only found the research on bilingual education to be confusing, but also that she was frustrated with the lack of direction from her district policy about bilingual education programs and practices and the resulting lack of cohesiveness in bilingual programming and placement from school to school. She often stated that she felt research in this area was inconclusive with regard to effective language programming for ELLs. This was evident in her statement that:

Personally, [my biggest challenge in this area] is understanding bilingual education. For me, it's just *understanding* it . . . Some of the research says, start them in their native language. Some of the research says, immerse them in English. And I don't know which is best. Because I don't understand it. It's new to me.

Carol's confusion was manifested in the programmatic contradictions in educating ELLs on her campus. On the one hand, in spite of her discomfort with her lack of knowledge in this area, Carol did support the use of Spanish literacy during instruction in a one-year, stand-alone, very-early-exit, transitional bilingual multiage K/1 class—the only one in which Spanish literacy was taught. Students enrolled in this class were those who entered Colter in kindergarten or first grade, and were expected to transition to monolingual English classes beginning in second grade. Carol noted that this class had been in existence for ELLs in those grades for many years as an early-transition class for Spanish-speaking students with lower levels of English proficiency.

Yet in stark contrast was a two-way immersion, preK–6 program that was in its infancy at Colter. Beginning the year prior to the study, a few faculty members had approached Carol with the idea of adding a two-way immersion program (Howard & Christian, 2002) at the school, which Carol supported by sending them for training and allowing them to lead the creation of an additional six-year, dual-immersion cohort program at Colter. This two-way immersion program was based on a six-year, "90–10" cohort model (Lindholm-Leary, 2001), and began with ELLs who began schooling at Colter in prekindergarten. Carol saw the development of this program as beneficial in part because it allowed her to create and support a pre–K program at the school; students could enroll in the two-way program only if they began the program in pre–K. The teachers also discussed with her the potential academic and social benefits of a longer term, bilingual cohort program (Lindholm-Leary & Hernandez, 2011), to support their efforts in developing the maintenance transitional, two-way/dual immersion program.

Carol was also convinced that the development of the two-way program was a potential opportunity to support bilingualism for English-speaking students and build community within the school between English-speaking and Spanish-speaking students (Lindholm-Leary & Hernandez, 2011). She noted that bilingualism was a middle- to upper-class skill that the wealthier neighborhood parents would value, observing that many of these neighborhood parents had transferred their children to private schools as the district began busing more low-income students to her school. She believed that these upper-middle-class neighborhood families valued bilingualism as a marker of status (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2007) and would potentially re-enroll their children at Colter for the two-way immersion program. She stated, "I just wanted my [own] child to speak Spanish, I guess . . . It's just, it's one of those gut things that I just think are good for children. Plus, we lose a lot of kids from the neighborhood, and I also saw it as a *potential* to maybe bring neighborhood kids back." Carol was supportive of the activities of the fledgling dual-immersion program on the campus. Given her admitted lack of understanding of bilingual education, she looked to the dual-immersion teachers to provide her with leadership in relation to this program. One member of the school community commented that Carol was "in charge in that she makes the final decisions about the parameters of the [dual-immersion] program. But she has let [teachers] do the research, make the recommendations, and then she has okayed them."

The tensions and contradictions across Carol's decision making in relation to bilingual education at her school seemed to be institutionalized most strikingly in the structure and objectives of the two contradictory, dissimilar bilingual classes/programs (the K/1 class or the dual-language program) (Genesee, 1999). Furthermore, enrollment in these programs was based on grade of enrollment (K/1 vs. pre-K). Although it is the case that in a dual-immersion cohort program it is difficult, though not impossible, for students to enter after the initial grade of the program, the fact that the only option for students who were not part of an initial dual-immersion program cohort was *one grade* of biliteracy support or potentially *no* Spanish language support (if they enrolled after first grade) demonstrated Carol's confusion and lack of understanding concerning what type of programs were best for ELLs in her school. She had one maintenance, transitional dual-language program, which valued biliteracy, and a very-early-exit (if it could be called that) transitional program, which valued very early transition to English-only instruction. In addition, she created a context in which she looked to the dual-immersion teachers to provide her with programmatic guidance for that program while simultaneously and paradoxically supporting a much more restricted response to other ELLs based solely on grade of enrollment. In other words, she did not create parallel structures that supported native language literacy and English language acquisition equally in the non-dual immersion programs at her school. Her lack of understanding created a block in her ability to notice and respond to the contradictions inherent in this design and work to create a more integrated program for all ELLs, while at the same time holding to her beliefs that ELLs should become literate in their native language, and that monolingual English-speaking students should become bilingual as well. This lack of understanding also influenced her problematic, programmatic decision making in relation to ELLs with disabilities, described below.

In contrast, Brenda's understanding of second language acquisition (SLA), and her focus on content learning, led to a more robust and coherent approach to effective language program development. She had formal training in SLA, and spoke with confidence and clear depth of understanding of SLA processes. She saw language support as a central component of effective education for ELLs on her campus, and her conviction that ELLs should receive instruction that emphasizes their academic and cognitive development was observed in the structure of the preK–5, late-exit/maintenance bilingual education program at Billings. This was important enough to her that she ensured that all her teachers, not only the bilingual education teachers, were trained in and utilized effective instruction for ELLs (Echevarria & Graves, 2011).

During one of our discussions about language learning, Brenda commented that the focus of the bilingual program is not “really on learning two languages.” She stated, “I think the emphasis is much more getting these kids to be academically proficient, more reading, writing, math, social studies, and science, at above-grade level. I mean, [the teachers] really push them academically.” When asked to clarify if the academic focus was in English or Spanish for these students, she said, “Either one. Especially in the lower grades, it’s whatever your first language is.” She commented that English instruction (ESL) was provided by classroom teachers, not through a separate ESL program. Reinforcing her focus on academic outcomes, Brenda commented on the importance of students learning content knowledge, in whichever language, over the pressure to quickly develop students’ English proficiency:

Content is *absolutely* the emphasis. Not the speed in learning English. So after about five years, pre-K, K, first, second, third, in fourth grade they’re ready to go. But that’s pretty slow; they’ve been here a long time. [Our perspective is that] these are just kids in school who we’re trying to teach academics to, and we’re going to transition them to English when they’re ready.

For example, Brenda commented that from her perspective, in order for Billings ELLs to exit bilingual classes and continue a trajectory of academic success, they must perform at levels higher than required by the state on the English versions of the yearly accountability assessments. She considered the state cutoff to be too low for them to exit to English-only classrooms and continue to experience success. She stated that most of the fifth-graders at Billings take the assessments in English; although many fourth-graders also take the tests in English, some (about 25%) take it in Spanish. If students in fourth grade take any portion of the assessments in Spanish (reading, math, or writing), then the policy at the school is to keep those students in the bilingual program so that, although they will receive much of their instruction in fifth grade in English, they will still receive native language support. She stated that when they left Billings to attend middle school, most of the students do very well: “They’re very ready. They do great.”

Another example of Brenda's commitment to language and content development was her initiation of structures at each grade level, which supported differentiated instruction for students in relation to SLA and academic needs (for example, a student with grade-level proficiency in Spanish would attend a literacy class that supported his or her content and

language proficiency in English to build concepts in both languages; conversely, a student who was having difficulty with literacy concepts in English could attend a grade-level class in their L1 for support). For Brenda, language of instruction was simply part of the context of learning; because she supported a robust language maintenance program, her students had many more options to support their content and skill learning while becoming literate in their native language and in English.

The differences between Carol and Brenda's understanding of the role of bilingual education in learning clearly played a critical role in the development and support of programs for ELLs at their schools. Furthermore, for students with more intensive needs related to formal diagnoses of disabilities, the principals' understanding of the role of primary and secondary language acquisition also played a substantial role in relation to the services the students received. Tensions and contradictions intersecting language and disability by Brenda and Carol produced very different outcomes at their schools.

Special Education Programs and Services for Latina/o ELLs

Given the high percentages of Latina/o students at each school, both principals were called upon to configure special education programs and services for their Latina/o ELLs with disabilities that would also be responsive to their language status. Each principal's approach was influenced by her respective knowledge concerning second language acquisition.

Brenda was the sole participant with formal preparation in ESL, and holding certification in special education. Relative to tensions related to language and disability and the convergence of these complex areas of need, Brenda resolved that the language needs of the students should factor heavily into decisions about placement and language of instruction. This aligns with research and state code in relation to multicultural/bilingual special education (Artiles et al., 2005; August & Shanahan, 2008; Cardinale, Carnoy, & Stein, 1999; García & Guerra, 2004; Ortiz, 2002; Pugach & Seidl, 1998). In addition, given her ESL background, Brenda believed that language needs superseded, or at least should play a central role, in program/service provision for Latina/o ELLs with disabilities; in relation to this population, she prioritized primary instruction from a bilingual, certified teacher in a bilingual general education classroom with special education strategy and accommodation consultation over instruction (as was available in her school) from a non-certified bilingual instructional assistant in a pull-out, special education setting with a monolingual English special education teacher. This option was also achieved because of the availability of bilingual teachers at all grade levels in her school, as well as her strategic efforts to provide professional development in special education strategies to all general education teachers. In establishing these resources, Brenda had successfully fostered a vision of shared responsibility for all students among her faculty and supported flexible instructional groupings based on language proficiency in L1 and L2.

The lack of guidance Carol experienced from her district, coupled with the contradictions in bilingual programming due to her confusion related to working with ELLs and the role of native language literacy, as well as her lack of knowledge of SLA, led to an opposite resolution to these tensions. Carol took action based on her erroneous conclusion that a

student's disability-related needs superseded considerations related to SLA. The special education teacher at Colter was monolingual English speaking. Since she could provide direct services only in English, Carol decided that any ELL with a disability should then receive all of his or her instruction, including in general education, in English. She believed this maintained consistency for students, rather than continuing to impair them in relation to their disability. Carol described a particular situation in which a first-grade, Spanish-speaking Latino ELL was diagnosed with a learning disability. He had been enrolled in the multiage bilingual K/1 classroom, gaining literacy in Spanish and English. Because "the special education teacher was not bilingual," however, Carol removed the student from the bilingual classroom and enrolled him in a monolingual English first-grade classroom, to "maintain consistency in the language of instruction" for the student, believing that developing biliteracy would complicate his learning difficulties. This effectively cut the student off from first-language supports and literacy development, rather than maintaining bilingual instruction for him in the K/1 classroom, with special education consultation or support for the teacher.

This viewpoint was borne out, from Carol's perspective, by a local dearth of highly qualified, bilingual special education teachers. Furthermore, her insufficient understanding of SLA and L1 literacy benefits led to inconsistent and divergent bilingual learning contexts at Colter, which also influenced decisions related to special education services for Latina/o ELLs with disabilities. In effect, Colter, through Carol's leadership, became an educational context in which placement decisions for ELLs with disabilities were guided by students' disability-related needs *without equivalent consideration of language needs*. Carol's lack of formal training in SLA led her to the well-intentioned but erroneous conclusion that consistency in language across programs, when it is the students' second language, is preferable to native language instruction when possible (Byrd, 2000). This misconception led to the unlawful removal of ELLs with disabilities from native language environments (Texas Education Code, Subsection BB).

Understanding bilingual/English language education law and principles of SLA, however, are but part of a larger construct of the cultural competence and social/sociolinguistic consciousness (Villegas & Lucas, 2007) necessary to working with ELLs. In other words, sociocultural and sociolinguistic consciousness and competence involve both "the awareness that a person's worldview is not universal but is profoundly influenced by life experiences, as mediated by a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, and social class" (p. 4), and the ability to adjust and respond to such influences in ways that promote reciprocity and responsiveness to different ways of being (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2013). This example of the first-grade student being placed in an inappropriate learning situation highlights the tensions and nuances involved in leadership and decision making for complex and intersecting student conditions and needs: When faced with both language proficiency and disability, decision making requires a depth of understanding of both, as well as their intersection, along with attention to potentially "thinking outside" the traditional structures and service delivery models to attend holistically to language, culture, community, and disability-related needs of Latina/o students with disabilities (Baca & Cervantes, 2004; Kalyanpur & Harry, 2013).

Discussion and Implications

The major themes that emerged from our analysis of these principals' leadership offer a mixed and complex profile of these individuals' beliefs and knowledge about diversity and the resulting programmatic actions and decision making. Data from this study indicated the principals enacted many characteristics identified in research of effective leadership (Levine & Lezotte, 2001), and the academic outcomes at their schools certainly were notable in light of the achievement gaps that persist in many schools and districts around the nation for Latina/o ELLs.

However, in spite of their expressed commitment to all students, and an empathetic view of low-income families, these principals' marginalizing focus on socioeconomic status, and deficit views about working class and poor families in particular, dominated their discussions about cultural influences on learning. This was then reflected in a strong conviction about the need for compensatory programs that reinforced the social status quo and brought little understanding of how to build environments that equipped students to live in diverse, multicultural, inclusive, and global contexts. Similarly, although both principals expressed appreciation for and valued the benefits of bilingualism, their knowledge of second language acquisition varied based on their professional preparation and professional experiences related to bilingual education and ESL programs and services. Differences in professional preparation were also reflected in their decision making related to the intersection of SLA and disability within special education programs, which created tensions and contradictions in placement and service delivery decisions for Latina/o ELLs with and without disabilities.

Thus, in spite of their view of themselves as leaders who promoted equity, these principals' understanding of equity was inconsistent with the current literature. Educators with equity orientations are described as individuals who are committed to a "critical analysis of conditions that have perpetuated historical inequities in schools" (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005, p. 202). Educational leaders with this orientation, according to these researchers, "make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision" (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223).

The discrepancy between our findings and those reported in the literature has raised questions for us about the design and implementation of leadership preparation curricula and experiences. Future leaders must be prepared to effectively translate their social justice vision into the desired actions and outcomes across multiple, intersecting, and complex areas of diversity. And they must be prepared to do so within greater contexts of tensions pulling them in multiple sociocultural, sociopolitical, educational, and leadership directions.

Although at least 90% of the students at Billings, and at least 80% of students at Colter, met state criteria for passing the yearly state accountability assessments across content areas, we argue that for diverse Latina/o students, passing test scores are only one piece of an equity-oriented vision for teaching, learning, and leading school contexts. Although firmly committed to educational equity and to increasing academic performance at their

schools, as measured by state standardized assessments, these principals' efforts focused on creating conditions in which the students at their schools would fit into the existing hegemonic structures of school and society, based on White, middle-class norms (García & Guerra, 2004; Hollins, 2008). The first prong of social justice leadership—positive academic outcomes—was achieved; yet, the principals' orientation and assumptions about diverse groups conveyed their limited understanding and skills related to the influence and inclusion of deeper levels of culture on learning (Hollins, 2008). Just as significant, they did not appear to realize how their orientation reinforced the status quo, politically and socially (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997). Our assertion is that these findings can broaden the focus of educational equity to include, yet move beyond, performance on state standardized basic-skills test scores by all subgroups. What the findings demonstrate is the need to encompass educational equity, which also aligns with evidence-based practices and programming across multiple measures of educational effectiveness for Latina/o students with and without disabilities.

Implications for Preparation of Equity-Oriented School Leaders

Calls for educators to increase their awareness and knowledge of diverse student populations are not new (e.g., Waitoller, Artiles, & Cheney, 2010), and in fact are an oft-noted implication in research related to educator preparation (Artiles et al., 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2007). More recently, emergent frameworks for preparing leaders to serve in diverse school environments (Brown, 2004; Evans, 2007; Henze & Arriaza, 2006; North, 2008; Rorrer, 2006; Theoharis, 2007) have called for the expansion of existing frameworks for leadership preparation beyond awareness and knowledge of diversity to encompass comprehensive, *transformative leadership*—i.e., they must be able to shift educators' and others' collective paradigmatic thinking and lead them to examine “assumptions upon which [our] interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based” (Mezirow, 1995, p. 7; Shields, 2003). Based on our analysis, we have identified three inter-related components, presented below, that would support and expand efforts to develop transformative leadership preparation programs. We conceptualize them as working hypotheses that may form the foundation for necessary further research into preparation of leaders for enacting comprehensive social justice leadership in complex educational contexts.

First and foremost, *prospective leaders must acquire the intercultural understandings, knowledge, and skills that will support their ability to effectively enact the vision of social justice*. As noted in our introduction, an orientation to social justice values and ethics is not, by itself, sufficient to create schools and classrooms that are equitable for all students. This point was further reinforced by our findings, which clearly revealed contradictions, tensions, and limitations to and between the principals' espoused beliefs about equity and their understandings about, and skills related to, interacting with and creating equitable environments for CLED students and families (Pedersen, 2000; Young & Laible, 2000). In addition, absent from these principals' leadership abilities were skills to identify and negotiate—and ideally eliminate—organizational structures, including policies and

programs, that sustain or produce inequity. In light of the sociocultural and linguistic discontinuities between the principals and their school communities, an interdisciplinary framework aligned with the dispositions and mutually interactive dimensions of moral and equity-oriented leadership theory (Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1991) and practice can be instrumental in guiding systematic and comprehensive leadership for equity and social justice.

Second, *prospective leaders should have systematic opportunities to develop a deeper, sociocultural understanding of self and others, including the cultural foundations of organizations, school policies, structures, and practices.* This component is intrinsically linked with the first in that it represents a prerequisite understanding of culture as the context that shapes the norms, thoughts, feelings, and actions of all groups. This understanding, in turn, serves as a foundation from which to explore the influences of culture on oneself, and to understand that school policies and practices are derived from the cultural norms of society (Hollins, 2008), whose values are reflected in federal, state, and local policies as well as laws (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2013). In the absence of systematic, guided opportunities for reflection on sociocultural dimensions of identity and schooling in their leadership preparation and development (e.g., Brown, 2004; Evans, 2007), the principals in our research intuitively relied on their individual life experiences to guide their thinking, most notably in relation to educating students from low-income communities. Although they were able to lead in ways that promoted high levels of achievement—a critical component of social justice leadership—they lacked the knowledge and competence to lead for social justice in relation to deeper understandings of culture, of individual and group identity, or, and in Carol's case, of consistent linguistic support for ELLs.

A framework of cultural understanding, embracing a culture-general approach, may be useful in providing all candidates with opportunities to explore their own socialization and experiences (personal and professional), and to better understand the interface between the two. This in turn provides the foundation for understanding similar and differing cultural influences at all levels of interaction and organizational functioning. Further research is needed to describe what systematic opportunities might be more or less effective in developing these understandings with leaders (e.g., Brown, 2004; Evans, 2007).

Finally, *leadership preparation curricula and professional development should address, and prepare candidates to understand and negotiate, the intersections, tensions, and contradictions among and between the many aspects of difference they will encounter at several levels.* Social justice, equity-oriented leadership is complex; it requires preparation (in-service and pre-service) that can comprehensively and explicitly address these complexities and provide leaders with the tools (theoretical lenses, dispositions, knowledge, skills, and experiences) necessary to lead in complex environments and contexts. As discussed above, the analysis of our findings suggests that candidates should clearly understand the interface between their personal and professional sociocultural identities and factors that influence them. Also, in addition to cultural understanding, they must be knowledgeable about language diversity (bilingualism, second language acquisition, and dialectal differences), and (dis)ability, as well as the interface between them, when designing programs for Latina/o students with and without disabilities. They must be

prepared to recognize and respond to the multiple group memberships and social identities (race, ethnicity, language, gender, [dis]ability, sexual orientation, and so on) that are inherently reflected in students' and families' cultural identities (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2007; Zou, 2002). Finally, they must be able to use this knowledge and understanding to negotiate and mitigate the impact of external (macro) forces on their local (micro) systems and practices.

Conclusion

The findings from this study provide a starting point to begin further discussion of what leadership for “high achieving” schools must embody; in these two schools, “high performing” in the sense of academic performance on state accountability assessments was achieved, but with little attention given to effective, evidence-based programs and practices for Latina/o ELLs with diverse academic needs, including disability. Evolving into educational supports for 21st-century learning demands that educators support not only academic performance on assessments that are hegemonically determined; it also demands that educators identify and embrace elements of intersectionality across diverse, multifaceted, and community/student-centered teaching and learning contexts that are strengths-oriented. In other words, a commitment to equity and social justice is insufficient; we call for leadership preparation and professional development programs to explore ways to enhance the development of intercultural knowledge skills that will support prospective leaders in enacting the vision of social justice among and across intersecting areas of difference and marginalization. Besides current federal mandates and accountability for the achievement of all students, the moral and ethical imperatives for public schooling to deliver on its promise of equal educational opportunity for all students require no less.

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*Corresponding author: Hickmanp@arcadia.edu