Social Justice

Seeking a Common Language

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Since the late 1980s, interest in social justice issues has increased among scholars in educational leadership preparation programs across the country. As recently as 5 years ago, Anderson (2002) noted, social justice and equity issues rarely appeared in the literature associated with educational leadership programs. Shoho and Broussard (2003) found increasing interest in social justice issues at the annual meetings of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) over a 16-year period, 1987 to 2002. Whereas in the 1980s, few educational leadership scholars were working on social justice issues, the renaissance of social justice scholarship in other educational areas has fueled growing interest in social justice and educational leadership at the dawn of the 21st century.

Although issues of social justice and equity are gaining legitimacy in the scholarly literature, there is still no broad-based agreement on a conceptual definition of social justice with respect to educational administration. For some scholars, social justice is restricted to issues associated with specific classifications such as race, ethnicity, gender, economic social class, sexual orientation, religion, and disability (Applebaum, 2001; Hutchinson, 1997; Mohr, 1989; O’Loughlin, 2002; Scheurich, 2002; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tyson, 2003; Weiner, 2001; White, 2002). Consequently, dialogues involving social justice issues often result in
proponents working against rather than with one another. As Gonzalez (2002) noted, "The educational success of all children remains an untenable cause until all at the table realize that they are part of the solution" (p. 6). Similarly, Young, Petersen, and Short (2001) pointed out that laying the blame for perceived injustices on others is a waste of time.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical and underlying aspects of social justice and propose a working conceptual framework for understanding it. To achieve this purpose, this chapter is organized into four sections. First, we will provide a rationale for investigating a definition of social justice and discuss why it is imperative that we start from a common reference in framing social justice discussions. Second, we will provide a historical overview to illustrate the roots of social justice and how this concept has fared in the educational administration profession. Third, we will scrutinize the literature to assess how other disciplines and scholars have defined social justice. Using this literature, we will construct a framework describing social justice and its guiding principles. Finally, we will discuss how educational leadership preparation programs can better prepare future school leaders to address social justice issues. In doing so, we will focus on the language that educational leadership programs use and how it may impede administrators' understanding and interpretation of social justice issues.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE IMPORTANCE OF A COMMON REFERENCE POINT

As with other popular social concepts, such as affirmative action, multiculturalism, and the provision of adequate school finance, social justice is a politically loaded term, subject to numerous interpretations. Like other abstract concepts, the exact meaning of social justice has been elusive and difficult to pinpoint. The meaning adopted for social justice greatly influences the perspective taken when addressing an issue under examination. For example, some scholars view social justice strictly from a racial perspective (i.e., critical race/postmodern: see Scheurich, 2002), whereas others view it primarily from a gender perspective (i.e., feminist theory: see Shakeshaft, 1989; White, 2002). Although the term social justice implies a valuing of diversity, the variety of perspectives has created a situation where there is no common reference point from which to engage in scholarly and practical dialogue about the meaning and implications of social justice. Without a common language, it is difficult for scholars to engage school leaders in a meaningful dialogue on social justice issues. The multiplicity of social justice perspectives has produced an environment in which proponents of social justice often argue from narrow and mutually exclusive viewpoints regarding who should participate in addressing social justice issues (Mohr, 1989; Scheurich, 2002; Tyson, 2003; White, 2002).

This situation nullifies the very inclusiveness that social justice perspectives purport to espouse. This contradiction between the espoused theories (inclusiveness) and theories in action (exclusiveness) of social justice makes it difficult to reach consensus and forge alliances among all relevant stakeholders. Hence, because one of the purposes of social justice is to combat the societal ills experienced by those with the least voice in society, particularly children, it is imperative that those in positions of advocacy be able to communicate in a common language (i.e., have a shared understanding of what social justice is and means).

To gain an understanding of what social justice means and its semantic use in the English language, it is important to understand its roots. In Latin, justice comes from the word equitas, which means fairness, and social derives from the word socius, meaning companion. Combining these Latin roots produces a literal definition of social justice as being fair
to one’s companions. Although this definition appears to be straightforward and easy to comprehend, some basic assumptions underlie its simplicity. For example, to use this definition for social justice would entail a fundamental shift away from popular theories such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which places the individual above others, to a conceptual model such as that proposed by the Dalai Lama (1999) and McCalla (2002), where empathy and concern for others form the foundation for all social interactions. It is unlikely that in the foreseeable future, mankind will be able to evolve to a state where individual needs take a backseat to the needs of others. If individual needs continue to be the focal point of societal concerns, then a definition of social justice must take this into consideration.

As noted earlier, social justice is not a new concept for scholars in disciplines such as sociology, history, law, social work, curriculum, and, of course, theology, but it is a relatively new term to the field of educational administration. Social justice is deeply rooted in theology (Ahlstrom, 1972; Hudson, 1981) and social work (Koerin, 2003), with rich roots in educational disciplines like curriculum and pedagogy (Apple, 1996; Freire, 1970/1992, 1996). Despite this foundation, there is still great ambiguity about the term social justice and its underlying principles. In general, social justice has been linked to the concepts of equity and fairness. Beyond this simplified definition, however, there are varying perspectives on what social justice actually is. To gain a deeper appreciation of the underlying meaning of social justice, it is important to understand its historical roots. In the following section, we will trace the religious roots of social justice and its influence within the progressive education movement of the 1930s and 1940s. Subsequently, our historical analysis of social justice examines how educational administration programs have traditionally viewed social justice issues.

**THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The roots of the educational social justice movement are found in the 19th-century religious traditions of the Protestant social gospel movement (1840s to 1914), as well as the Catholic Church’s call for social justice (1890s through today). Both were responses to the rise of industrial capitalism and the dislocations it imposed on families and communities (Ahlstrom, 1972). What makes the social gospel movement striking is that it was a religious critique by Protestants of the very Protestant foundations of American capitalism (Hudson, 1981). At the time, the vast majority of American Protestants believed that the rich were rewarded by God for their good works; conversely, the poor were poor because they were being punished for some sin or personal failing (Hudson, 1981). As the income gap between industrial capitalists and industrial workers widened, however, poverty grew at rates never before seen. Millions of Americans lived in conditions marked by squalor and disease (Zinn, 1999). The long-standing biases regarding the “immoral” poor were thus called into question. Proponents of the social gospel, including some who were also political Progressives, advocated that “good Christians,” meaning middle-class, white Protestants, needed to get involved in tackling the social ills of the day—taking action to ameliorate the conditions confronting the poor. They believed that like Christ, Christians should “visit prisoners, clothe the naked, and feed the hungry” (Armstrong, 2000, p. 169). Adherents were to rescue the poor workingman and his family from the vagaries of capitalism. As a result, activists rooted in the teachings of the social gospel worked to found settlement houses to serve recently arrived immigrants, expand public school offerings, establish minimum wage laws, establish a separate system of juvenile justice, and ban child labor (Kennedy, 1999;
Reese, 2002). Many of the educational innovations at this time—from playgrounds and school nurses to nascent lunch and breakfast programs, along with a greater focus on “child saving”—were legacies of religiously inspired Progressive reformers. As numerous scholars have noted, most adherents of the social gospel were not socialists, as their political opponents were wont to allege (particularly after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution). Rather, they were religiously inspired reformers, working to soften the harsher edges of the capitalist status quo (see Ahlstrom, 1972; Kennedy, 1999; Lissak, 1989; Reese, 2002). Proponents also hoped to recruit workingmen, and particularly immigrant and Catholic workingmen, into their middle-class Protestant churches (Hudson, 1981). However, reformers had greater success in tackling the social ills of the day than in enticing working-class Catholics to join the congregations of the Protestant middle class.

The Catholic Church also reacted to these social and economic conditions and dislocations. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued Rerum Novarum (On the Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor), which called for social justice, or a fairer distribution of society’s economic resources (Ahlstrom, 1972). Like the social gospel, the 19th-century call for social justice was reformist, not revolutionary; Rerum Novarum contained explicit critiques of both socialism and broader revolutionary impulses:

However, it would be nearly 40 years until the Catholic Church in the United States embraced these teachings. As religious historian Aaron Abell tartly observed, “Though lip service was paid to Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum, leading Catholics . . . failed to emphasize its meaning; they expounded it as a ‘bulwark’ of the status quo and not as a charter of social justice” (quoted in Ahlstrom, 1972, p. 1004). Nevertheless, Leo XIII had laid a foundation that would be embraced later, when enthusiasm for the social gospel had largely faded in Protestant circles (Ahlstrom, 1972).

By the 1920s and 1930s, economic conditions were as dire for many Americans as they had been during the late 19th century. However, the depth and breadth of what eventually became a global depression touched far more people, not only disrupting families and communities but also bringing down several national governments and disrupting most others (see Hobsbawm, 1994; Kennedy, 1999). Such an overwhelming economic, social, and political disaster prompted various radical remedies, from the emergence of fascism in Italy, Germany, and eventually Spain to the forced collectivization in Stalin’s Soviet Union (Hobsbawm, 1994). In the United States, both fascism and communism attracted followers, while more progressively minded Catholics—particularly those in the nascent Catholic Worker movement—worked toward the greater economic social justice espoused in Rerum Novarum (Ahlstrom, 1972). Americans from diverse backgrounds continued to search for ways out of the expanding economic quicksand (Hobsbawm, 1994; Kennedy, 1999).

One of the most controversial social justice-oriented proposals of the era came from educators. In February 1932, in a speech at
the Progressive Education Association’s annual convention, George S. Counts asked the question, “Dare progressive education be progressive?” At the time, progressive education was largely the province of college professors and educators at schools—both public and private—for children of the upper middle class (Counts, 1932/1978; Cremin, 1961). Progressive education was noted for its commitment to child-centered education, but in Counts’s Veblean worldview, it was more of a benefit for the pampered children of the social elite than an instrument that could transform the political and economic status quo. The Depression provided an opportunity to return progressive education to its “progressive”—and potentially transformative—political roots. Counts insisted not only that educators should get involved with politics but that they needed to lead political change. He later observed in his seminal book, Dare the School Build a New Social Order?

We live in difficult and dangerous times—times when precedents lose their significance. If we are content to remain where all is safe and quiet and serene, we shall dedicate ourselves, as teachers have commonly done in the past, to a role of futility, if not positive social reaction. Neutrality with respect to the great issues that agitate society, while perhaps theoretically possible, is practically tantamount to giving support to the forces of conservatism. . . . To refuse to face the task of creating a vision of a future America immeasurably more just and noble and beautiful than the America of today is to evade the most crucial, difficult and important educational task. (Counts, 1932/1978, p. 51)

Counts, in his speech to the Progressive Education Association and in subsequent publications, called for educators to embrace political indoctrination of students and for teachers to work for the further democratization of American society by tackling the social, economic, and political issues of the day in their classrooms. This speech electrified the audience, which expected far blander rhetorical fare (Cremin, 1961). In addition, it ignited a revival in progressive education that explicitly linked public educators to broader issues of economic justice and democracy.

Nevertheless, larger social and political issues eventually swamped educators’ efforts at “social reconstructionism” (Cremin, 1961). First, progressive educators were an admit- tedly small minority within the profession. Second, without teacher tenure, most progressive public school educators needed the support of sympathetic administrators and board members even to attempt implementing these ideals. Third, World War II had an adverse impact on progressive education principles; educational reports like the Eight-Year Study found that progressive principles produced outcomes similar to traditional education. Finally, progressive educators were operating in an environment where many Americans increasingly equated progressive education with rampant classroom permissiveness. Progressive educators were also suspected of harboring communist sympathies. The 1957 launch of Sputnik, at the height of the Cold War, effectively marked the demise of progressive education (Cremin, 1961).

While progressive education and, more specifically, social reconstructionism receded from the educational landscape, the civil rights movement and subsequent women’s, American Indian, Chicano, and nascent gay rights movements pushed educators and most Americans to rethink the basic meanings of democracy, citizenship, and liberty. Many people of faith were involved with these movements, particularly within the African American civil rights movement (Hudson, 1981). These experiences radicalized generations of social justice workers and theorists. By the 1970s, social justice-minded educational theorists drew selectively on the more emancipatory legacies from the Progressive Era and the theorizing generated by African American theologians and various political activists, as well as more radical notions.
Perhaps the most influential educational theorist of the current era is the late Paulo Freire, who combined liberation theology and Marxism (Freire, 1998). Freire was a long-time adult educator, working with illiterate peasants in rural Brazil. His involvement with education for social transformation resulted in his imprisonment and subsequent exile by a Brazilian junta in the late 1960s. He traveled throughout Latin America working with various educational and political organizations. He returned to Brazil after 16 years of exile (Allman, Mayo, Cavanaugh, Heng, & Haddad, 1998).

Freire employed a dialectical process as a means to critique traditional pedagogical practices, or what he called “banking education.” But he went further, drawing on liberation theology to inspire students to engage in understanding and perhaps transforming their own social and political worlds. Through literacy, students would learn to read both the word and the world (Allman et al., 1998). Although some questioned Freire’s embrace of both liberation theology and Marxist analysis, he saw no contradiction in his position:

I began to read Marx and the more I did the more I became convinced that we should become absolutely committed to a global process of transformation. But what is interesting in my case... my “meetings” with Marx never suggested to me to stop “meeting” Christ. I always spoke to both of them in a very loving way... Sometimes people say to me that I am contradictory... I don’t consider myself contradictory in this... If you ask me then, if I am a religious man, I say no... they understand religious as religion-like. I would say that I am a man of faith... I feel myself very comfortable with this. (quoted in Lange, 1998, p. 82)

Freire felt comfortable in claiming the faith in which he had been raised, namely Roman Catholicism, because Latin American theologians had been exploring very different notions of the Christian message of salvation. Developed at mid-century by clerics who could not reconcile the contradictions of European Catholicism with the harsh realities of life for many peasants in Latin America, liberation theology stated that the church had to take a prophetic role in addressing the historic injustices faced by the poor and dispossessed (Cleary, 1985; Peterson & Vasquez, 1998). The church had to have its own Easter. Like Christ, the church too had to be crucified, to die, and to be resurrected—this time siding with the poor (Lange, 1998; Peterson & Vasquez, 1998). Liberation theology differed from the earlier social gospel in that it explicitly drew on Marxist analyses of class to critique oppressive governmental and power structures (Allman et al., 1998; Lange, 1998). Activists inspired by liberation theology worked against totalitarian regimes in Latin America throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Diamond, 1989).

Given Freire's combination of active political commitments, theorizing, and vast real-world experience, his writings have been embraced by many U.S. educators. Yet, the embrace of Freire by American educational theorists has been somewhat paradoxical. Although Freire was quite clear that religious faith inspired his work, many theorists, for whatever reasons, have stripped away his theological foundations. Religious educators have also found his works to be highly compatible, but they, of course, have retained one of his central features—liberation theology (see Prevost & Elias, 1999).

This paradox is not too surprising given the highly secular environments in which most U.S. academics work. In addition, an explicitly political theology has had a questionable political status—at least for white, middle-class Christians (see Dorrien, 1997). Fully embracing Freire, or for that matter the social gospel or social justice, would also present potential issues involving church and state, at least for public education (see Lugg, 2004). Nevertheless, by not mentioning these historic and religious roots, contemporary educators
who are committed to promoting socially just practices in schools ignore an important legacy.

Although it is important to capitalize on the historical legacy of social justice and its advocates in education generally, it is also important to note that social justice does not have a long history in educational administration. This brief history and the reasons for it will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: A PARADOXICAL PREMISE

Much of the history of educational administration as a profession and a discipline has been marked by a certain exclusionary zeal. This was particularly true for the early 20th-century administrative progressives, who embraced the nostrums of business efficiency to bolster their political and professional stature (Blount, 1998; Callahan, 1962; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Not shy about promoting the cause of the efficient school administrator, professors of educational administration extolled the virtues that would flow to school districts that hired properly educated candidates, especially their own students (Blount, 1998; Callahan, 1962).

Furthermore, the truly professional administrator was appointed by the school board, not elected. As with the move toward a more professionalized school board, school districts, prodded by Progressive elites, increasingly dispensed with the practice of elected superintendents (Blount, 1998; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This professionalized embrace was also calculated to push women out of the nascent profession, just at a time when more women were coming to the superintendency through the power of the ballot (Blount, 1998). Because educational administration programs either barred women or maintained strict quotas limiting their numbers, even if they were “properly trained,” it was highly unlikely that female administrators would be selected by a school board whose own membership was increasingly composed of businessmen (Blount, 1998; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Callahan, 1962; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Religion also was an important informal criterion for choosing superintendents. For an aspiring superintendent, it helped to be Protestant and an active church member, especially in small or medium-size communities. For example, Fredrick Bair found in 1934 that among the 796 superintendents who responded to his survey, only 6 were Roman Catholic, none Jewish, and none agnostic. The remainder were Protestants of one form or another, and 93% of these were regular church attendees (in Tyack & Hansot, 1982). This preference for “active” Protestants when selecting superintendents was continued well into the 1950s and beyond (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Similarly, race also shaped who could become and remain an administrator. Although segregated black schools typically hired African American principals, their work was likely to be overseen by a white superintendent, who might not be particularly sympathetic to the welfare of African American students, teachers, or administrators (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). By the 1960s and beyond, indifference and, at times, outright callousness and brutality led to clashes between African American communities and typically white school administrators (Tyack, 1974; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Furthermore, when public school districts desegregated, black teachers and administrators generally lost their positions (Arnez, 1978).

As with race, class was also a defining feature, given the educational credentials and graduate education needed for entry, as well as the social expectations placed on many superintendents and principals (Callahan, 1962; Nasaw, 1979; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Finally, with the growing awareness of homosexuality and homosexuals during the mid-20th century, administrators had to conclusively demonstrate their heterosexuality—that is, to
be married. At the start of the Cold War, homosexuality was repeatedly linked with communism, and all manner of “gay purges” were carried out across the labor force (Blount, 1996, 1998, 2003; D’Emilio, 1983). Public school educators came under particular scrutiny, with single teachers and administrators viewed with suspicion (Blount, 1998, 2003). Lurid tales of “homosexual recruitment” were splashed across the front pages of newspapers (Alwood, 1996), and the State of Florida’s Johns Committee spent several years in the early 1960s investigating such “infestation” within its public educational system (Sears, 1997). Consequently, one lingering Cold War legacy is that to remain in the field, public school administrators’ “non-queer” credentials must still be unassailable (Blount, 2003; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b). By 1988, one study noted that “while fifty-seven percent of all households in this country are married couple households, ninety-four percent of superintendents and eighty-seven percent of public school principals are married” (Feistritzer, 1988, p. 17).

In each case—race, class, ethnicity, religion, gender, and sexual orientation—public school administrators have, at times, been expected to be the enforcers of oppressive societal and legal norms in a governmental institution that claims to espouse democratic values (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Herr, 1999; Lugg, 2003b, 2003c; Nasaw, 1979; Rousmaniere, 1997). What this has meant in daily practice is that administrators have been charged with disciplining students and faculty into following proper social mores and, occasionally, punishing them (Foucault, 1979). This policing authority is both a historical legacy and a contemporary reality (Blount, 2003; Goodman, 2001; Lugg, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). Superintendents and principals are expected to uphold a myriad of educational policies, which range from maintaining a drug-free zone (in all 50 states) to rooting out suspected “queer” educators (13 states), to enforcing antibullying policies.

Public school administrators are also expected to enforce a complex mix of progressive and wildly socially regressive policies, which vary from district to district and from state to state (Lugg, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

Based on this brief history illustrating how educational administrators have reflected the values of the dominant society, it is unsurprising that educational administrators have often been the perpetrators of social injustices on those entrusted to their care (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Lugg, 2003b, 2003c; Nasaw, 1979). At the same time, it is grossly unfair to characterize educational administrators as bankrupt individuals who mindlessly enforce socially unjust policies in a vacuum. For example, Leonard Covello was a high school principal working in New York City public schools, from 1934 to 1956. Drawing on his own experiences as an Italian immigrant boy attending the vastly overpopulated and occasionally anti-Catholic and anti-Italian public schools, he worked hard as a building principal to make his public school an oasis within an economically distressed and sociologically shifting community (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). As one former student recalled, “He filled a hero void for most of us, not a cowboy hero, not a blood and thunder hero, but a true hero. His dedication could show in his own quiet way . . . he was a real big brother and a real father” (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 209). Another example was Miles Cary, principal at McKinley “Tokyo” High School in Honolulu from 1924 to 1948. Educated at Ohio State University under the supervision of Boyd Bode and other progressive educators, Cary reshaped an entire generation of mostly Japanese immigrant children into believing they could do anything they desired. As one former student said about Miles Cary’s leadership:

I think the generation of students that went through McKinley at the time he [Miles Cary] was principal all benefited from the sense that he was the one who was very much interested in their welfare and always
wanted the best for them in the sense that he wanted them to get an education to be able to cope with their society, to make a contribution to the society and to be active participants. (Shooh, 1990, p. 186)

However, in many ways, these two examples represent the exception rather than the rule (Shooh, 1990; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Covello’s commitment to ensuring his high school was a safe place entailed constant and heroic efforts that extended far beyond the regular hours of the position. Similarly, Cary’s devotion to progressive principles like democracy was learned through his own experiences in school.

It has been shown that schools as organizations have powerful influences on the actions of individuals (Hoy & Miskel, 2001). Viewing social justice in schools from afar is often difficult during the heat of the moment. According to Beck (1994), moral dilemmas involving people are inherently difficult to resolve. Thus we must ask: To what degree have university programs contributed to the school administrator’s lack of preparation to deal with social justice issues? And if preparation programs are part of the problem, then what can university administrative preparation programs do, beyond extolling the value of socially just policies and practices in schools?

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PREPARATION PROGRAMS

From its inception, the position of school administrator was designed to attract individuals who were willing to comply with a view of schooling that validated rather than challenged existing norms (Blount, 1998; Callahan, 1962; Nasaw, 1979; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). School administrators were appointed as stewards of the communities in which they worked, charged with embodying and reinforcing the values of the power elites who hired them. Superintendents were expected to be responsive to the demands of school trustees, to carry out their requests, and to ensure that teachers complied with their wishes (Cuban, 1988). As instructional leaders, principals were expected to supervise instruction, manage the curriculum, and assist teachers; as appointees of the school board, they were charged with executing the preferences of school trustees without controversy or dissent (Cuban, 1988).

The creation of formal, university-based administrator preparation programs at the beginning of the 20th century reflected Frederick Taylor’s principles of scientific management as well as the increasing influence of the industrial-corporate sector with its emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. This is reflected in the views of Franklin Bobbitt, an instructor in educational administration at the University of Chicago, whose work, The Supervision of City Schools, was published in 1913 as the 12th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Callahan, 1962). According to Bobbitt, schoolmen would become “mechanics” whose task would be to implement policies and practices according to the dictates of business and industry (Callahan, 1962). With the rapid growth of cities in the mid-19th century, both the principalship and superintendency became increasingly important mechanisms for imposing order on a large and diverse student population (Nasaw, 1979; Pierce, 1935). The emphasis on principles of scientific management and the emulation of corporate values permeated the small circle of university professors who, through their role in the professional preparation of school administrators, exerted a powerful influence on the thinking of principals and superintendents in key positions across the country. This commitment to the values of efficiency and effectiveness is exemplified in Stanford School of Education Professor Elwood P. Cubberley’s 1916 publication, Public School Administration, in a chapter entitled, “Efficiency Experts: Testing Results.” As the influence of professional school managers grew, that of school boards decreased, a trend
that was accelerated by turn-of-the-century reports of the illegal activities of many school board members, particularly those in urban areas (Guthrie, 1990). In an effort to improve the administration of schools, reformers in the Progressive Era were determined to separate the management of schools from the influence of politics, and by the third quarter of the 20th century, schools were bureaucracies characterized by principals and superintendents as professional managers at the building and district levels and teachers as members of professional unions (Guthrie, 1990).

With the globalized economy that was in place by the end of the 20th century, Americans, fearful of losing their competitive edge, demanded that schools be held more accountable for improving the learning of all students, regardless of ascribed characteristics. The 1983 release of the publication, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, sparked a national effort to reform public schooling in the United States (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The demands for greater student achievement associated with this report were linked to calls for increased teacher participation in matters of classroom instruction and the hiring and evaluation of teachers, as well as the allocation of resources and the devolution of decision making to administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members at the local school level (Guthrie, 1990).

Although the general trends in the evolution of management-focused, university-based administrator preparation programs are clear, it is important to note countervailing perspectives that have argued for a social justice orientation in educational administration. During the 19th century, the populist movement and educational agenda provided the basis for contemporary democratic communitarianism, which espoused social constructivism (Haste, 1996; Johnson, 1995; Kahne, 1996; Macpherson, 1996; Singh, 1997; Varlotta, 1997). In the latter half of the 20th century, critical theory and postmodern theory presented a challenge to the logical positivist paradigm, with its assumptions of an objective and measurable reality (Bhola, 2002). Sprunging from the neo-Marxist, critical sociology of the Frankfurt School, "critical theory is a theory of participative democracy rooted in the analyses of social reproduction and resistance" (Bhola, 2002, p. 183). As such, it provides a powerful framework for a social justice orientation to educational administration (e.g., Kochan, 2002; Schierich, 2002). Similarly, in its opposition to positivism, the feminist critique has strong ties to critical theory, sharing with it "the emphatic themes of empowerment and emancipation" (Bhola, 2002, p. 183). It also serves as a useful framework for exploring issues of social justice in preparing educational leaders (see Grogan, 2000). Postmodernism challenges traditional notions of power and hierarchy and, as such, has played a significant role in examining the intersection of social justice and educational leadership (e.g., Sackney, Walker, & Mitchell, 1999). John Dewey's social reconstructivist philosophy resonates with postmodern perspectives and has been useful in conceptualizing educational administration and issues of justice (e.g., Bogotch, 2000; Maxey, 1994). The concept of moral leadership has also played a critical role in discussions of social justice within leadership preparation (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Bogotch, Miron, & Murry, 1998; Greenfield, 1999; Hoyle, English, & Steffy, 1998; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1992; Wong, 1998).

Interest in understanding the nature of school leadership and the preparation of educational administrators has produced a substantial body of literature: descriptive (e.g., Beck & Murphy, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 2002; Daresh, 1997; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hart, 1993; Murphy, 2002), prescriptive (e.g., National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1994; Wilmore, 2002), and reform
oriented (e.g. Barth, 2001; Blase & Anderson, 1995; Capper, 1993; Crow, Matthews, & McCleary, 1996; Duke, 1992; Goldring & Rallis, 1993; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Jacobson, 1996; Lomotey, 1989; Murphy & Seashore, 1999). Within the past 15 years, numerous groups, including the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, the National Commission for the Principalship, and the Danforth Foundation, have advocated reforms in educational administration preparation programs (Duke, 1992). The National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Elementary School Principals have also been active participants in the effort to improve the preparation of principals (Daresh, 1997).

In addition, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) have each played a key role in defining standards for the principalship and superintendency that acknowledge the importance of creating equitable educational environments in which all children can experience success. UCEA, in particular, has supported several important publications on the status of educational administration and the preparation of principals and superintendents (Jackson, 2001; Jacobson, Emihovich, Helfrich, Petrie, & Stevenson, 1998; Murphy, 1993; Wendel, 1991, 1992). Of the seven domains of knowledge in educational administration identified by UCEA, Domain I, identified as social and cultural influences on schooling, focuses on preparing administrators to respond more effectively to the needs of diverse student populations (for a critique of Domain I, see Lomotey, 1995; Merchant, 1995).

Because of their historic focus on management, departments of educational administration have not typically been associated with social justice issues, and consequently, most of the research in this area has originated elsewhere. This is reflected in the ways in which colleges and schools of education tend to departmentalize their graduate degree programs, locating the professional preparation of school administrators in one department and educational policy studies, history, and sociology in one or several other departments (All Star Directories, 2003). When policy studies are incorporated into an educational administration department, social justice advocates and critics of the status quo (e.g., critical race theorists) tend to be in other departments, such as cultural studies or educational foundations. Such divisions may be perpetuated by faculty members who seldom, if ever, interact across these boundaries. In these environments, professors of educational administration may be stereotyped by their colleagues in other departments as stewards of the status quo, focused on preparing school administrators for conventional roles rather than equipping them to think reflectively, critically, and creatively about school reform from the perspectives of equity and fairness.

Although such stereotypes are unfair, it is true that for many years, professors of educational administration tended to be former public school superintendents (Cuban, 1988), increasing the likelihood that students would learn more about preserving rather than challenging the educational systems in which they worked. The last 20 years, however, have witnessed a shift in the hiring and outreach practices of colleges and universities, increasing the number of females and scholars of color who are faculty members (Antonio, 2002; Hargens & Long, 2002; "A JBHE Report Card," 2001–2002; Lindholm, Astin, Sax, & Korn, 2002; Pounder, 1990; Trower, 2002; Turner, 2000). Simultaneously, the traditional pipeline for professors of educational leadership has been severely limited by financial concerns. In many cases, principals and superintendents aspiring to the professoriate would incur a stark reduction in salary. As a result, departments of educational leadership are drawing professors from a
broader range of academic disciplines, and they increasingly have little to no traditional practitioner leadership experience. These new professors have played a significant role in reshaping the dialogue regarding the preparation of principals and superintendents. Many of these new faculty members also bring with them a rich set of experiences with diverse populations across a variety of local, state, national, and international contexts. Part of the legacy of these new scholars is their deep commitment to applying the principles of equity and social justice to educational reform, so that public schools can become places in which all children are provided with the opportunities and resources to succeed academically and socially. Interest in incorporating a strong social justice component into the formal preparation of principals and superintendents is evidenced in the writings of increasing numbers of educational administration scholars (Beck, 1994; Capper, 1993; Donmoyer, Imber, & Scheurich, 1995; Gonzalez, Huerta-Macias, & Tinajero, 1998; Johnson & Shoho, 2002; Lomotey, 1989, 1995; Lugg, 2002; Marshall & McCarthy, 2002; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Merchant, 1999a, 1999b; Merchant & Shoho, 2002; Reyes & Scribner, 1995; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Rorrer, 2002; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

Incorporating a social justice orientation into the professional preparation of school administrators cannot be done without also acknowledging the importance of political action in making schools more equitable and just institutions:

Principals, who, as a matter of habit, seldom consider whether managerial routines and instructional procedures are aligned with their values and beliefs and whose sense of organizational and personal goals are largely undefined or hidden would not be viewed as exercising an overtly political role. Yet, by enforcing district mandates and acting as agents of the superintendent, they would be engaging in tacit political activity through loyalty to existing arrangements. The consequences of a principal's actions are both political and moral in endorsing what an institution does. There is no such thing as nonpolitical behavior. (Cuban, 1988, p. 77)

While Blase and Anderson (1995) observe that “a central role of educational administrators traditionally has been to maintain the legitimacy of their institution by managing the various forms of critique and resistance that take place within it” (p. 138), they also urge administrators to direct their efforts toward understanding the relationship between schools and the broader social context, the difference between collaboration and collusion, and the ways in which institutional silencing occurs. The intersection of policy with issues of equity and social justice has powerful and at times conflicting implications for educational leaders (Jones, 2000; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Lomotey & Simms, 1996; Lopez, 2003; Lugg, 2003b; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Merchant, 1999a).

Current efforts to reform the preparation of school administrators, whether university-based, emerging from the work of professional organizations, or influenced by special interest groups at the state and national levels, are occurring within a broader political context of increased accountability for student learning (Scheurich & Skrla, 2001; Scheurich, Skrla, & Johnson, 2000). While educational sociologists, policy analysts, historians, and educational researchers debate the merits and shortcomings of the various accountability efforts, professors of educational administration, albeit divided in their opinions about the effects of these efforts, are nonetheless obligated to prepare future administrators to work within these contexts. To address issues of fairness and equity, school administrators must be prepared to adapt, change, and, most important, challenge existing educational policies and practices, whether they originate at the building, district, state, or national level. The ways in which professors of educational
administration integrate or reconcile their commitment to educational equity and social justice with local, state, and national accountability efforts will play a critical role in redefining the roles of public school administrators and in shaping their relationships with the staff members, teachers, students, and families with whom they work.

Since the 1990s, a growing movement within university administrative preparatory programs has focused on issues of social justice. Part of this growth has been fueled by concern for the growing number of public school students who are considered at risk for a host of dismal academic and life outcomes (Grogan, 2000). In addition, social justice concerns have received support from academics who are politically committed to shaping a more equitable society for all individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sex, class, disability, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. As Larson and Murtda (2002) stated:

Researchers and leaders for social justice . . . seek to define the theories and practices of leadership that are vital to creating greater freedom, opportunity, and justice for all citizens—citizens who, through public education, are better able to participate in and sustain a free, civil, multicultural, and democratic society. (p. 136)

Yet, it cannot be stressed firmly enough that a social justice approach is a marked departure from historic administrative practice in public schools, in that it acknowledges that public schools can and frequently do reproduce societal inequities (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Larson & Murtda, 2002; Nasaw, 1979; Shoho, Katims, & Meza, 1998; Shoho, Katims, & Wilks, 1997). In addition, some of the inequities, such as homophobia, are mandated by state statute in those states with laws barring consensual sodomy (Lugg, 2003c, 2004). One of the goals of a social justice approach is that when future educational administrators are schooled in theories and praxis of social justice, they will be more aware of and work to both ameliorate and possibly eradicate the injustices and inequalities that arise within their buildings. An administrator using a social justice focus would also reach out to the larger community to build a network of support to redress these historic injustices. Although the goal of social justice-orientated educational leadership programs is to develop administrators who are sensitive to the lives and well-being of all children, these approaches may well mean that administrators are essentially conflicted in their daily practices.

For educational leadership programs to inculcate their students with a social justice framework implies a common understanding and definition of what the term means. However, one of the enduring problems arising out of the social justice literature is the ambiguity of the term itself. The next section lays out our proposed definition for the term social justice and identifies some of its guiding principles.

SOCIAL JUSTICE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As noted above, social justice has multiple meanings depending on who is asked. For some scholars, the multiple meanings associated with social justice are a positive feature that illustrates the inclusiveness of the term. In fact, Young (1990) and Novak (2000) felt it was impossible to have an agreed upon definition of social justice. As Novak noted, “The minute one begins to define social justice, one runs into embarrassing intellectual difficulties. It becomes . . . a term of art whose operational meaning is, ‘We need a law against that’” (p. 11). Yet, one of the difficulties associated with this inclusiveness of meanings is the ambiguity it brings to communicating the language of social justice to others beyond the academic world. In this case, school practitioners, in general, do not use the term social justice in their daily language. They are more likely to use terms such as equity, equality, fairness, and adequacy.
In the literature, several perspectives have been taken when defining social justice. Some have taken an ethical perspective (Britz & Blignaut, 2001; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2000) whereas others have used a power perspective (Ropers-Huilman, 1999) or a relational perspective (Young, 1990). In all of these treatments, social justice is framed from a distribution model, that is, allocation of resources. In other words, social justice was conceptualized from an economic model where financial resources were unevenly distributed among the masses. Another approach to defining social justice has been an anthropological viewpoint, where all human beings are considered to be of equal value (Rawls, 1973). Rawls identified four categories of social justice: (1) commutative justice, (2) retributive justice, (3) contributive justice, and (4) distributive justice. For Rawls, commutative justice means fairness in agreements between individuals or social groups. This type of justice is reflected in copyright laws and legal statutes. Similarly, retributive justice refers to just punishment for the guilty, effectively reflecting the “an eye for an eye” perspective. In contrast to commutative and retributive justice, contributive justice reflects a type of justice where an individual assumes responsibility and contributes to society without impairing any other individual’s right to freedom and dignity. Contributive justice represents the closest ideal to the Dalai Lama’s notion of a selfless ethic, whereby one’s first concern is for others. The last element of Rawls’s definition of social justice was distributive justice. For Rawls, distributive justice meant that information and access to information was to be fairly distributed to satisfy the basic needs of individuals. To a certain degree, distributive justice is aligned with Maslow’s need to satisfy personal safety prior to addressing loftier goals.

From an educational perspective, Adams, Bell, and Griffin (1997) constructed five principles of social justice to overcome oppression in college classrooms. They urged educators to (1) balance the emotional and cognitive components of the learning process, (2) acknowledge and support the personal while viewing interactions systematically, (3) attend to the social needs of students, (4) use student reflection and experience as building blocks, and (5) value awareness, personal growth, and change.

Zollers, Albert, and Cochran-Smith (2000) went beyond mere principles to identify a continuum of prospective teacher beliefs based on fairness and equity. Their study of teacher perspectives of social justice illustrated the difficulties associated with exploring an abstract concept. As a result, they identified three categories of divergence around the meaning of social justice that encompassed a broad spectrum of perspectives. The three categories examined issues of (1) fairness and equity, (2) institutional versus individual understandings of social justice, and (3) the responsibility of individuals to advocate and promote social justice. Despite their conceptualization of social justice into three categories, Zollers et al. accepted the inherent difficulties associated with the range and complexity that social justice issues address, writing:

Despite the fact that social justice is a fundamental mission of our institution and we are all committed to its pursuit, we could not assume that we were all committed to the same idea or shared fundamental meanings and assumptions of social justice. (p. 11)

The inherent difficulties associated with defining social justice in the literature notwithstanding, there has been widespread consensus on the guiding principles associated with social justice, with those cited most often being equality, equity, fairness, acceptance of others, and inclusiveness. The first three refer to the distribution of resources, whereas the last two principles involve a reframing of relationships. In particular, acceptance of others means to value and respect people who are different from you, that is, in terms of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and so on.
As Malu Gonzalez (2002) noted in her 2001 presidential address at the UCEA annual meeting in Cincinnati, educational leadership and social justice involve scholars and leaders who are willing to transform traditional borders to a new path. She further called on professors of educational leadership to move away from alienated borderlands and toward an integrated borderland where people perceive themselves as part of an integrated whole. Congruently, inclusiveness refers to an environment where all stakeholders are brought to the table, that is, past perpetrators and victims of injustice. Although doing so may present the potential for further conflict, inequities are likely to remain unresolved until all parties involved in social justice issues are at the table. Inclusiveness may represent a new foundation on which all social justice issues should be framed.

However, until scholars and practitioners speak a common language and frame discussions from grounded reference points, any claim toward improving society through social justice is little more than meaningless rhetoric. For as George Counts wrote in 1932 (1978):

Any individual or group that would aspire to lead society must be ready to pay the costs of leadership: to accept responsibility, to suffer calumny, to surrender security, to risk both reputation and fortune. If this price, or some important part of it, is not being paid, then the chances are that the claim to leadership is fraudulent. (p. 2)

If scholars of educational leadership programs are to be true advocates of social justice, then they must be willing to be all-inclusive, working with all stakeholders toward a common language in which to frame dialogues addressing issues of equity, fairness, and adequacy.

CONCLUSION

Based on its historical roots and literature, social justice is an elusive term to define. In this chapter, we traced the roots of social justice and elucidated a rationale for developing a common meaning. The task we undertook was greater than the sum of the individual efforts of the authors; like other academic quests for definition, we have been engaged with "nailing jelly to the wall" (Novick, 1988, pp. 1-17). Despite this, our quest brought forth several new insights. First, if social justice is to be true to its guiding principles, then advocates must create an inclusive environment where all relevant stakeholders are invited to participate, even those who may be perpetrators of injustices. Second, it may be more beneficial to focus on a common language of the guiding principles of social justice rather than on a common definition. Because diversity is one of the linchpins of social justice, attempting to force a common definition may be more counterproductive than helpful. Third, addressing social justice issues must go beyond mere awareness and using the latest buzzwords. Social justice encompasses life-altering experiences. This implies that professors of educational leadership need to reconceptualize the core technology of delivering the knowledge base of the field if social justice is to have any lasting effect on future school leaders.

If professors of educational leadership programs hope to imbue their students with a social justice foundation, then it is imperative to equip students who will be future school leaders with a lexicon they can use to span the boundary between the worlds of academics and practitioners. Otherwise, the gap between the two environments will continue to exist and issues of social injustice will continue unabated.

In attempting to define social justice, we discovered that the process may be more important than the outcome. Although a precise conceptual definition could not be constructed, the framework for a common language and shared understanding was developed. It is now up to scholars in educational leadership to advance the guiding principles of social justice,
building a bridge that lets practitioners engage in dialogue and create socially just schools. Mirroring George Counts’s challenge to educators in 1932, we end this chapter by asking scholars in educational leadership: Dare social justice advocates build a common language to create meaningful dialogues with all stakeholders?

NOTES

1. This does not imply that all Progressive Era social reformers were adherents of the social gospel, for many were not. Furthermore, many reformers were either of a differing religious faith (generally Catholic or Jewish), agnostic (Dewey), or avowed no faith at all. Nevertheless, the social gospel inspired a generation of reformers. Many of these would find a home in the early administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as it would adhere to the Catholic social gospel—most famously Frank Murphy (see Kennedy, 1999). The argument can be made that the Roosevelt New Deal drew heavily on both traditions because many of his policies had been piloted in New York State by Governor Alfred E. Smith.

2. Dorothy Day was the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. A former “fellow traveler” in radical political circles, Day converted to Catholicism in the late 1920s. The Worker Movement, founded in 1933, drew like-minded politically progressive and radical Catholics to work directly to ameliorate the ills wrought by industrial capitalism. The movement was marked by direct social and political action coupled with “intense sacramental piety, self-abnegation, and prayer” (Ahlstrom, 1972, p. 1010).

3. George S. Counts is one of the most complex educational theorists and analysts. Largely influenced by both the social gospel and prairie progressivism (Kansas) of his youth, his outlook was rooted in the economic understandings of Thorsten Veblen rather than Marx. Although he did travel to the newly established Soviet Union, and even speaks well of its educational system (in 1932), he later expelled communists from the American Federation of Teachers because of their totalitarianism. Not only was he a lifelong unionist, he was also a life member of the NAACP and the American Civil Liberties Union, and he ran for the U.S. Senate on the Liberal Party’s (New York) slate. Nevertheless, he was long vilified for “Dare the Schools” by those who believe he advocated a Soviet-style system of education. A senior colleague met Counts at an academic conference in the late 1960s; by that time, Counts confessed, the only way he was able to “make the program” was to submit his research proposals under the name of G. Sylvester Counts.

4. Many American conservatives viewed the rise of liberation theology with a good deal of worry. Prior to its advent, the Catholic Church in Latin America had largely been the supporter of oppressive regimes throughout the region. An embrace of truly revolutionary Christianity—that was Marxist to boot—was perceived as a direct threat to U.S. national and corporate interests. Although it makes for fascinating reading, the CIA’s use of Protestant evangelical missionaries in Latin America during the 1980s is far beyond the scope of this chapter.

5. In Tyack and Hansot’s work (1982, p. 291), they list Bair’s study in a footnote (No. 7 for Section 12), but the footnote actually contains very little information regarding the scope of Bair’s study.

6. The U.S. Supreme Court invalidated all laws criminalizing consensual sodomy in Lawrence v. Texas (2003). Consequently, the legal rationale (equating status with sexual behavior) for barring “avowed homosexuals” from working in public schools has evaporated. Nevertheless, at this writing, none of the 13 states that had criminalized sodomy have revised their public school codes to align with Lawrence.

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