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# SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

A Case Study of Engagement Practices with Multilingual Families

Article by Vera J. Lee, Kristine Lewis Grant, and Barbara Hoekje

## Abstract

Traditionally established best practices for parent engagement cannot be assumed to be effective when serving culturally and linguistically diverse families. Such practices do not account for cultural variation and linguistic differences in family involvement with school-based activities. School leaders with a social justice orientation are key to challenging established practices and creating school cultures where multilingual families are welcomed and engaged. The authors present a qualitative case study of an administrator and the lead ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher of a large urban charter school in the northeast region of the United States, and their efforts to serve and support the families of English language learners (ELLs) to explore the question: How do school leaders exhibit a commitment to social justice in their leadership and practice? Using Furman's (2012) dimensions of social justice leadership as a framework for analysis, we identified the following themes from interviews with the school leaders: reflexive leadership; building trust and support; building inclusive communities; creating systemic change; and supporting families in larger sociopolitical contexts. The findings of the study reveal how these two school leaders instantiated social justice perspectives and practices in creating a school that invited inclusion and full participation of multilingual families. The findings of the study can help educational researchers and practitioners rethink the sufficiency of established best practices for schools serving multilingual families.

## Introduction

Educational laws and policies such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds include requirements for parent involvement intended to close the achievement gap and increase students' academic outcomes. To comply, educators and school leaders often employ established best practices to involve parents in the education of their children, such as parent workshops, school events, volunteer opportunities and other school-based activities. However, even the best of established practices may continue to reproduce the experience of marginality for families outside mainstream culture, including linguistically and culturally diverse families.

School leaders with a social justice orientation engage culturally and linguistically diverse families in ways that challenge established practices, redress educational inequities, and promote the achievement of English Language Learners (ELLs). Recognizing the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) that ELLs bring to schools, social justice leaders endeavor to break down barriers and build authentic partnerships with their parents and families. Leaders for social justice reinterpret and reimagine established best practices for parental involvement by developing collaborative approaches organic to the school and community. This case study explores the social justice *praxis* of two educational leaders in an urban charter school serving the families of ELLs by investigating the question: How do school leaders exhibit a commitment to social justice in their leadership and practice?

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### ENGAGING CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES

Scholarship on engaging culturally and linguistically diverse families in the education of their children sets the stage for: a) an interrogation and revision of established best practices in parent involvement; b) an appreciation of community cultural wealth; and c) an adoption of new dispositions, orientations, approaches and practices by school leaders.

#### ***An interrogation and revision of established best practices in parent involvement.***

Established best practices of parent involvement are based on white, middle class, English-speaking norms. Measured against this standard, it is assumed that parents who do not participate in these school-based and school-sanctioned types of involvement do not care about their children's education (Wassell, Hawrylak, & Scantlebury, 2017). Such stereotypes and other forms of deficit-thinking mask the realities of ELLs and their families. Moreover, established practices for parent involvement are initiated by schools, and do not challenge or change inequitable school policies or practices. These also do not take into account the ways that race, culture, and language mediate the experience and enactment of parent involvement.

Culturally and linguistically diverse families' ways of supporting their children's learning are often unseen and unrecognized by teachers and school administrators (Valdes, 1996). Having traveled great distances and at times at great peril, many immigrant families bring their children to the United States in hopes of attaining a quality education and a chance at a safer, better life (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). With limited language and knowledge of the US school system and with culturally different experiences of schooling, immigrant families often are disempowered (Gaitan, 2012).

#### ***An appreciation of community cultural wealth.***

In stark contrast to those who look at immigrant families and see a lack of the valued forms of capital associated with white middle class culture are scholars who approach culturally and linguistically diverse families as possessing “funds of knowledge” (Gonzalez et al., 1995) which can be drawn upon as a resource in schooling. Indeed, as Yosso (2005) contended, culturally and linguistically diverse families possess multiple forms of capital, collectively referred to as *community cultural wealth*. Community cultural wealth serves as the basis for our approach to notions of human capital. Community cultural wealth is “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). Yosso (2005, pp. 77-81) identified six forms of community cultural wealth:

1. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.
2. Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.
3. Familial capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition.
4. Social capital is the network of people and community resources.
5. Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions.
6. Resistant capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.

Individually and collectively, community cultural wealth informs strengths-based and assets-based approaches for schools to employ when building relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families. This approach to family-school partnerships also builds upon human capital (Vesely, Ewaida, & Kearney, 2013). Vesely et al. (2013) argued that schools, early childhood education programs in particular, are well positioned to help culturally and linguistically diverse families build the human, social, and navigational capital necessary to raise healthy children in the United States. Understanding and appreciating the aspirational capital of immigrant families for their children can dismantle myths about “parents who do not care” and serve as a first entry into generative conversations about ELLs’ learning and development.

***An adoption of new dispositions, orientations, approaches and practices by school leaders.***

New scholarship on engagement with multilingual families has emphasized a range of culturally responsive dispositions, approaches and methods that go beyond established best practices. Araujo (2009) recommended that teachers engage immigrant families by drawing on family funds of knowledge along with culturally relevant pedagogy and

enhanced communication with families. Auerbach (2009) examined the approaches of four school leaders who made concerted efforts to forge authentic relationships with immigrant families by hosting an annual conference with politicians, developing a Parents as Authors program, sponsoring community-style house meetings in classrooms, and conducting home visits. Based on this study and other research and experiences, Auerbach (2011) advised school leaders to validate multilingual families' cultures, keep interactions with parents and families small, and nurture parent voices. Baird (2015) also suggested that engaging the families of ELLs should move away from established practices and toward dynamic processes that are responsive to the families, communities and the social contexts that they occupy.

## LEADERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES

Social justice leadership is a small yet blossoming area of the literature on school leadership. Emerging in the early 21st century, social justice leadership has roots in the Civil Rights Movements for equity and justice along the lines of race, language, gender, and ableism (Lewis, 2016). Drawing on a Foucaultian conceptualization of power, Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) defined social justice "as the exercise of altering [power] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions, among other forms of relationships" (p. 162).

While there are a number of studies that examine the role of school leaders and family-school partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Vera et al., 2012; Wassell, Hawrylak, & Scantlebury, 2017), there are only a few studies that examined these principals through the lens of social justice leadership.

Theoharis and O'Toole (2011) conducted two case studies to examine how school leaders were able to create asset-based, inclusive services for ELLs and their families. They placed emphasis on understanding the beliefs, knowledge, and skills of the school leaders. After identifying that the ELLs in their schools were underserved and underachieving, both principals felt empowered and responsible for taking action: "Committed to the stance that all learners can succeed with appropriate and adequate support, they prepared themselves and their staffs to critically examine ELL services and make well informed decisions about educating ELLs" (p. 678). Engaging families was part of a comprehensive plan for school reform.

The case studies in Auerbach (2009) provided powerful models of school leaders who pushed through established norms in school-family communication to find new and more inclusive forms of family engagement for their Latino families in order to facilitate the parents' involvement in their schools. The actions of these school leaders were marked by their own personal involvement and commitment to social inclusion and equity.

DeMatthews, Edwards, and Rincone (2016) conducted an in-depth qualitative case study of one leader's enactment of social justice leadership in a private nondenominational Christian elementary school located in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Community cultural wealth informed the school leader's "desire for change that consisted of a school–community partnership rooted in parent ownership, hope, and service" (p. 782). The school leader "understood that parents needed to be empowered and critically question the society in which they live" (p. 782). The findings of this study also underscored "the persistent effort necessary to value families and meaningfully engage them in the school improvement process" (p. 782).

Insights from these studies have indicated that social justice leaders possess certain dispositions, qualities, and skills in their engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse families. These leaders "view language as a right, ... and work to provide [students and families] equal access to educational opportunities" (Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011, p. 650). DeMatthews et al. (2016) highlighted the following four practices after reflecting on the focal leader in their study:

1. A leadership orientation directed at learning about the lived experiences of marginalized communities paired with a willingness to consider how multiple inequities inside and outside of the school interact with implications on student achievement and well-being.
2. A deep and reflective leadership commitment aimed at balancing purposes of schooling (e.g., academic, economic, political, social emotional) so that academic achievement does not overshadow community engagement, a culture of respect and tolerance, challenging dominant ideologies, and the social and emotional needs of children and families.
3. The fortitude to recognize that leaders: (a) do not have all the answers, (b) must invest in parents because they are most important to student success, and (c) understand the limited role a school can play without the full participation of engaged, empowered, and supported parents able to act in solidarity.
4. A commitment to promoting socially just family engagement through school–community partnerships that draws upon cultural community wealth and prioritizes the needs of students, families, and communities. (p. 784)

In short, the role of school leadership is critical in addressing issues of inclusion and marginalization in school communities (Theoharis, 2007).

## FURMAN'S FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

Central to social justice leadership is the critical examination of power relationships, the identification of marginalizing practices, and their replacement with more equitable practices (e.g., Carpenter, Bukoski, Berry, & Mitchell, 2017; DeMatthews, 2015;

Theoharis, 2017). That is, social justice leadership requires that school leaders can identify, interrogate, and eliminate inequities in educational policies and practices.

How can such leadership for social justice be developed and in what domains does it operate? Furman (2012) proposed a framework that conceptualizes leadership for social justice along Freire's concept of *praxis*—that is, the necessary integration of both *reflection* and *action*. Considering educational leadership as *praxis* allows us to examine the way educational leaders both *think about* and *act upon* the issues that arise in their schools, the essential quality of social justice leadership. Of particular value to the current study, Furman (2012) identified a range of domains in which social justice leadership operates--from the personal to the interpersonal, to the communal, the systemic, and the ecological—explicitly accounting for the way personal and interpersonal dimensions affect the communal, systemic, and ecological levels.

In Furman's (2012) framework, the personal dimension refers to the ways in which the school leader demonstrates “deep, critical, and honest self-reflection” (p. 205). The interpersonal dimension is characterized by leaders who “pro-actively build trusting relationships with colleagues, parents, and students in their schools” (p. 207). The communal dimension relates to the idea of leaders who “work to build community across cultural groups through inclusive, democratic practices” (p. 209). The systemic dimension pertains to school leaders “assessing, critiquing and working to transform the system at the school and district levels, in the interest of social justice and learning for all children” (p. 210). Finally, the ecological dimension relates to the idea that the school leader recognizes how social justice issues in the school are “situated within broader sociopolitical, economic, and environmental contexts” (p. 211). The model is nested, with each level dependent upon qualities and actions in the prior dimension.

In our analysis, Furman's (2012) social justice framework served as a tool of inquiry with which we could examine our transcripts for the presence—or the absence— of leadership praxis in relation to the personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological dimensions of social justice leadership. As we coded and discussed our findings, we found specific themes emerging in the leadership praxis of two educational leaders in one school, and it is these themes we report and discuss in the present case study.

## Methods

The case study reported here is part of a larger research study on school and family communication that took place during the 2016-17 school year with three charter schools in a large city in the northeastern United States. The schools were chosen for the study on the basis of a presence of English language learners in the school, a mission of inclusiveness with multilingual and multicultural families, and accessibility to outside researchers. Permission was granted through the IRB process of the researchers' universities to conduct the studies. All names of schools and participants as reported below are pseudonyms.

The study found that in all the schools, administrators had a key role in setting expectations around school-family communication. However, in some cases, administrators went further by challenging expectations and creating new norms around inclusion, not only in communication, but in membership in the school community. The current study is a case study of one of these schools, North Charter School.

The case study approach is a qualitative methodology that explores an example in depth in order to illustrate or extend knowledge of a phenomenon (Stake, 2009). We focused on North Charter School as a case study of the ways the two school administrators demonstrated social justice leadership in their everyday reflection and actions—their social justice leadership praxis. In the sections below, we describe the process of our analysis and the emergence of the themes of social justice leadership highlighted in this case study: reflexive leadership; building trust and support; building inclusive communities; creating systemic change; and supporting families in larger sociopolitical contexts.

## SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

North Charter school is one branch campus of a large charter network operating in the city and surrounding region, comprised of nearly 20 elementary and secondary schools. North Charter is a K-8 school in operation since 2012, enrolling nearly 500 students, 14% of whom are English language learners. The fact that North Charter is an elementary charter school within a large urban school district has consequences for the nature and availability of resources and its general decision-making structure.

Two school leaders from North Charter were interviewed: Ms. Lin, the Assistant Principal of Student Support, who managed the ESL program, the special education program, the social work and the counseling program; and Ms. Moore, the ESL teacher and coordinator. At the time of the study, Ms. Lin was in her second year serving as an administrator at the school, and Ms. Moore had been at the school for four years.

## DATA SOURCES

The primary data sources that were analyzed included the transcriptions of one-on-one interviews with the two administrators. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and Author 1 was the interviewer for each session. Secondary data included the school's website so the research team could review relevant information, such as the mission statement, managing charter entity, and history/background.

## DATA ANALYSIS

A coding framework was developed based on Furman's (2012) five major dimensions of social justice (personal, interpersonal, communal, systemic, and ecological). The coding framework identified evidence in our data for reflection and action (*praxis*) in each of the five dimensions. Each researcher independently coded the interviews for evidence of leadership praxis across the five dimensions, recognizing that the

dimensions are interdependent with each other. We then discussed our coding with each other, clarifying and reconciling any areas of difference.

## Findings

Using Furman's (2012) framework as an analytic lens, five themes emerged with particular salience from our coding of the interview transcripts with Ms. Lin and Ms. Moore. Within the personal dimension, the theme of *reflexive leadership* refers to the ways in which the school leader demonstrates critical self-reflection in terms of any potential biases, assumptions, or values they have about race, gender, sexuality, etc. especially in the context of their role as school leaders (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012).

Within the interpersonal dimension, the theme of *building trust and support* emerged. This theme is central to the work of social justice leaders who establish and sustain trusting relationships with students and parents, as well as the members of their faculty and staff (Auerbach, 2009; Furman, 2012). In addition, the theme also emphasizes the systemic and structural supports that are currently in place at the school that sustain positive relationships with parents and offer support to families (Auerbach, 2009; Theoharis, 2007). Within the communal dimension, the third theme of *building inclusive communities* relates to the idea of leaders fostering a sense of community among different stakeholders within the school, with particular attention to building bridges between cultural groups (Furman, 2012; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Within the systemic dimension, the theme of *creating systemic change* pertains to the idea of a school leader developing a sustained critique of systemic inequities, and eliminating barriers to ELLs' educational access and their parents' full participation (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012). Finally, within the systemic dimension, the theme of *supporting families in larger sociopolitical contexts* relates to the idea that the school leader addresses social justice issues that occur in the school as a result of larger national and global issues (DeMatthews et al., 2016; Furman, 2012; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011).

### REFLEXIVE LEADERSHIP

Ms. Lin demonstrated deep and critical analysis about some of the accepted practices that North Charter School used to include and support multilingual families. During an interview, she was asked the question, "How [has] your school, and school staff try to better understand...the background, and cultures, and goals that the families have for their children?" In response, Ms. Lin talked about the "cultural programming" events that the school sponsored in an effort to celebrate different cultures and to invite families to the school:

Then, through our cultural programming...we are trying to bring families in, but again,...how do I bring families in, to share their culture, but also not wanting to paint a picture that like, our Burmese mothers, who weave, that's not all they do, because

they're Burmese. I think that's going to be in the next coming year, is that will be our shift, and how do we get past this?

Schools commonly invite parents of different backgrounds to share a cultural practice with students, such as music, art, food, etc. At North Charter School, Burmese mothers were asked to teach students how to weave. Ms. Lin described this practice as a "dangerous space" because she did not want the students to draw generalized assumptions about Burmese women (that they are all weavers) or to conclude other stereotypes about the culture. She recognized the tendency for schools to present cultures in one-dimensional ways and exhibits critical awareness and growth in wanting her school to "get past this."

In responding to the same question, Ms. Moore shared her frustration in working with teachers and an administrator who do not feel that it is their responsibility to find a way to communicate with multilingual families and believe that the school "can't help with that (addressing the language needs of parents)." As a child of immigrant parents, who spoke a different language other than English, Ms. Moore realized that she did not face the same challenges as her parents had:

I know that I'm not perfect. I know that I live my life pretty easily able to communicate. My parents speak a different language, and so I think that having seen that experience has been helpful for me and having—going to other countries where I don't speak that language.

Ms. Moore reflected on how her parents' experiences living in a country where they did not speak the language as a moment of personal growth in recognizing how much easier her life was in comparison to theirs. She also visited other countries that gave her a different perspective and a greater understanding of what her parents and the multilingual families experienced with linguistic and cultural differences, "I think it's really good for people to put themselves in a position that our kids and families are in on an everyday basis to feel that experience out."

Ms. Moore and Ms. Lin also demonstrated reflexive leadership in thinking about the ways in which their school involved multilingual parents and communicated volunteer opportunities to them. Ms. Moore shared the following examples of typical ways that multilingual parents participate in school events:

We had parents in here yesterday doing...It's Filipino bamboo dance. Parents were here doing that. We had talked about Karen weaving. Parents came in for that...There's lots of parents that want to go on field trips. I feel like we could utilize parents more than we do. I think that as a whole, Charter as a network doesn't really have systems for parent involvement, and so it just depends on teacher to teacher.

Ms. Moore shared Ms. Lin's concerns about the ways in which multilingual families are often asked to participate in school events by presenting cultural traditions, practices,

food, clothing, etc. These are forms of participation that do not offer parents a leadership or decision-making role that invite higher levels of participation.

One of the ways Ms. Moore built relationships with multilingual families by involving herself in the community and attending different events that are hosted there. She was often the only teacher who commits to doing this, yet she realized that her other colleagues may have had different reasons for not taking the time to connect to the community in the same ways:

It's a hard lift to ask people to do that. A lot of people feel—which is not wrong, their job is their job. Their jobs in school, and their job is through the school day...It's a really hard thing [because] lot of times, it's like, those events are on Saturday. Those events are on Sunday. Those events are at night when people aren't working. It's a lot to ask people to do that. I could encourage it, and I always invite people. Sometimes, people come. My principal really tries to come when she—we have a new principal this year.

Ms. Moore recognized that some of her colleagues may have held a different belief about what constituted “their job” and they may not have the time or willingness to give up weekends and evenings to attend events in the community. Yet, in her experience, becoming a part of the families’ community “has been the most effective for [her]” in terms of building relationships with families.

## BUILDING TRUST AND SUPPORT

This theme highlights the *interpersonal dimension* (Furman, 2012) of social justice leadership. This area is critical for leaders to possess in order to build trusting and positive relationships with multilingual parents who may seek them out for support and help with issues they are experiencing inside and outside of school. Ms. Lin shared that parents would seek her advice home about maintaining their child’s home language:

When families come in...one of the most frequent things I hear from my bilingual ESL families is that some doctor told them that we should only be speaking English at home...Also, just assimilation of things like that, like, let's only speak English. We have really tried our best to support parents in understanding that they must maintain their native language at home.

Ms. Lin gently, but directly, addressed a common myth about first language maintenance with parents, that it will interfere with an ELL’s ability to learn English when second language research shows the exact opposite to be true--that a student’s first language can help him/her learn a second language. Ms. Lin was also concerned about the recommendations that parents received from medical professionals to “only speak English to your child” and viewed this advice in the context of larger sociopolitical issues around assimilation versus acculturation of immigrant families.

Ms. Lin also highlighted the important role that the language interpreters and lead ESL teacher have had in building trusting relationships with families, and she credited the

ESL teacher, Ms. Moore, for pushing for changes in school practices to better serve the needs of multilingual parents: “She’s done a beautiful job developing relationships with the families over the past four years, to a place where they’re trusting her.” The extent to which parents trust the ESL teacher was evident in how they approached her to request socioemotional support for their children when the recent immigration order(s) were issued:

They have requested support for their kids, because they don’t know how to support the emotional functioning of their children. We are starting social work groups that are focused on fears around the immigration status...that’s the feedback we’ve been receiving lately, but I’m sure that’s on the forefront of people’s minds.

The fact that the families were not afraid to approach the teachers and administrators about needing socioemotional help for their children during a time of crisis and uncertainty for immigrant families highlights how the school has formed relationships with parents “based in respect and caring, active listening, and clear communication” (Furman, 2012, p. 208). Ms. Moore recognized that sociopolitical issues occurring outside of the school had a direct impact on the well-being of students and as a leader, she needed to address this issue head on.

In responding to a question about communication strategies the school uses with multilingual parents, Ms. Moore shared her thoughts about North Charter School’s need to create an inviting environment for parents and addressing their language needs:

communicating with families goes down to pushing my school to make sure that it's, first, a welcoming environment, putting up, displaying common communication in families' native languages, providing...There's the welcome sign, which is cute, the kids made. There's also a thing that I have for them to pull out if they're struggling to communicate with families. Do you need an interpreter? They can point to the language that they're speaking so that they can contact the interpreter. One of the things that I have done on a planning base is I have all cohorts rostered with students' native language with the interpreter's contact information next to it so that the front desk can see that, find that, and contact that person.

Ms. Moore focused on creating both a system of communication support for families and a climate that made them feel welcomed in the school. From posting visual signs to assist multilingual parents with their questions and needs, to developing a plan to have information about the families’ native languages and contact information for interpreters, she implemented services that served the families more effectively.

## BUILDING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Both Ms. Lin and Ms. Moore discussed their efforts and strategies toward “building inclusive communities” at the school. Their areas of concern focused on the exclusion of multilingual parents from the Parents Association (PA):

I think that our Parent Association, it's mostly white, English-speaking, stay-at-home moms. I think that's wonderful that we have moms who are able to contribute to our community so significantly. Also, I know that they have not created a super warm, and welcoming environment for all of our families. Not to pass judgement, it's just our families who are super-involved may not have an access point, to be honest, to understand the community that we serve...in terms of parents communicating to us, that has come up on a number of occasions, feeling like they don't have a voice in the Parent Association.

While Ms. Lin appreciated the support the school has received from the current members of the PA, she was also troubled by the fact that the group has catered to white parents and had not created a climate that welcomed parents from other cultural or linguistic backgrounds. She also believed that the active members of the Parents Association lacked cultural sensitivity and awareness of communities outside of their own.

Ms. Moore further explained how the PA deliberately excluded anyone they did not know or want in the group:

Our PA is just basically our white women, and so we don't have—they don't want anybody else in there. We did have people that responded, but—that were native English speakers, but they were black, or they were Hispanic, but they speak English, and they apparently didn't want them to be part of the team. They sent out text messages to them saying, "Make sure you fill out your ballot. There's people we don't know on there. We don't want them to be in here."

When leadership positions for the PA became available, the core members of the organization strategized to keep current members in those roles and to purposefully exclude new members that included people of color who spoke English. In an effort to address some of these problems, Ms. Moore facilitated a "racial empowerment committee" that enabled parents to meet with school leaders:

Part of my racial empowerment committee, we host parent feedback dinners where parents give direct feedback to the principals, and the principals are held accountable to those parents.... I feel like parents helped me—I come up with ideas because of conversations with parents, and then they help me execute it. I feel like that's a decision that they're making.

Ms. Moore used her role at the school to create forums for multilingual parents to be included in decision-making processes at the school and served on school level committees that enabled her to advocate for parents who are excluded from traditional parent groups.

In addition, Ms. Lin instilled changes to create a more welcoming school environment for all families. One of these changes included filling the front desk position with individuals who were able to interact positively with parents:

Another thing that has come up is just about how does the building feel, when they come in? Do they see their children represented on the walls of our building? That is something that we are trying to take action on. The big third thing that I would say is they...cal[] the front desk, speaking Spanish, and the person not—just being like, “I don’t speak ... Can you just find someone who speaks English?”...It was really important to us, when we re-staffed those positions, we staffed them with people with a level of competency to support our families in that way. Just like something as little as training our admin assistants, like smiling, making eye contact – the little things matter, and then also implementing the language specialists...

Ms. Lin recognized that building an inclusive community meant having images of diverse people and communities present around the school. It also included staffing the front desk with individuals who would not respond dismissively to parents whenever a parent called the school who did not speak English as his/her first language. Ms. Lin also focused on the importance of body language, and how that can communicate warmth and positivity as well. Finally, she also recruited language specialists to work at the front desk so parents had a translator available to them in case they needed one.

## CREATING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

As previously stated, Ms. Lin expressed that the PA does not reflect the demographics of the school in which only 20% of the students are white. She believed that a change in leadership within the organization might be one way of changing the current membership by encouraging parents who have experience working with diverse communities and would welcome and embrace culturally and diverse parents to rise into leadership roles in the organization:

There’s one particular mother in our community who is a white woman, so very non-threatening to some of our current members of the PA, but her background is she was an ESL teacher, and then she worked in refugee resettlement, and now she’s an adjunct professor somewhere around ESL-immigration studies. She would be perfect, because she is non-threatening. I saw her on Friday. I was like, “You know that you’d be great. You know that we need you,”

Here Ms. Lin strategically approached a parent, who is a white mother with more awareness around issues of cultural and linguistic diversity, and encouraged her to be involved with the PA in order to infuse the organization with parents who could change the culture and climate to become more inclusive of parents of diverse backgrounds.

Ms. Moore has been instrumental in arguing for much needed funding to better serve the multilingual families at North Charter School. For instance, she shared that she battled with administrators within the Charter network to hire additional full-time ESL teachers and to acquire translators for the school:

My challenge is not my community. It's my network and getting my network to allocate me enough funding to be able to communicate and follow the law, which is basic

communication with parents...They expected me to teach and effectively support 150 kids. I was like, what? I had to really fight and advocate with...[Charter] was not used to having that built in.

Ms. Moore leveraged state law to argue for funding to hire more ESL teachers who could effectively teach and support the ELLs at North Charter School, and put resources in place to effectively communicate with multilingual parents.

Ms. Moore has also made an impact at some of the other schools managed by the Charter entity, such as the high school, in advocating for certain changes that benefitted ELLs and their families:

It's definitely been a rude awakening for the high school, having me in there...it's like, "No, you need to do this." I do think that it is starting to trickle to the other campuses in the sense that they possibly are gonna have me here half time next year and then working at the central office next year, which would be a great place for me to be like, "So you. You're the person who gives money to schools." Then a lot of making sure that at the central office, we would be doing a lot of the paperwork that's sent to schools to send out, like report cards and all that stuff, pre-translated...

Ms. Moore had an opportunity to work out of Charter's central office for half of the academic year. She planned to talk to people in the central office e.g., Director of Finance to ask for certain practices to be instantiated across all of the schools, such as having report cards translated into different languages.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN LARGER SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS

In the fifth dimension of Furman's (2012) framework, ecological, school leaders "[act] with the knowledge that school-related social justice issues are situated within broader sociopolitical...contexts" (p. 211). North Charter School reflected the ecological dimension in its response to supporting parents who were directly impacted by current federal immigration policies. Ms. Lin shared that many of the Spanish-speaking families at her school experienced tremendous stress with the recent executive immigration orders. She believed that it was important for the families to feel supported by the school during a time of great uncertainty and fear:

We've seen it impact on kids, our families, so we've hosted three town halls with support of the high school. We [did] a K-12 town hall...we've invited an immigration attorney...people who work for City Hall, and they're wonderful people who have been really supportive in bringing us resources...families have really wanted acknowledgement about if ICE shows up to the building.

At the time of the town halls, the charter entity did not have a standard policy addressing the families' concerns about the recent immigration order. North Charter School developed its own policy and practices and called itself as a "sanctuary

school.” The teachers talked to students about what it meant to be a sanctuary school and reinforced their commitment to being a safe haven for all students.

Related to this, Ms. Lin believed that talking about what it means for North Charter School to be a “sanctuary school” was important for their white families as well as some of their Asian families:

We are trying to do some of that type of work to actually like, yes, support our immigrant families, but also to send a strong message to our white families in the community, or even some of our Asian community members, who don't necessarily have the same experience.

Ms. Lin intentionally designated North Charter School as a sanctuary school to not only show solidarity with multilingual families, and particularly undocumented ones, but also to send a strong message to white families and other parents about the school's stance towards undocumented students and families. The lack of cultural sensitivity and racial attitudes that were exhibited by members of the PA were also present in the way students of color were treated and perceived by white parents:

The neighborhoods are really—this neighborhood right here, they don't allow the kids to walk through their neighborhood. When I mean the kids, they don't allow the kids of color to walk through their neighborhood.... There just is a very hostile environment. At the parent action team, parents [of color] have said, "My kids have to walk down and around this neighborhood." People in that neighborhood were like, "These kids act this way." I was like, "Whoa. What do you mean by—" it's like, there is a lot of racial tension.

Ms. Moore stated that the white parents in the PA did not like having students of color in their neighborhoods. She also shared that when she walked through this neighborhood, some of the residents thought she was a student of color and they came out of their homes to say something to her: “They come out and—they try and intimidate me in the same way they intimidate kids.” Ms. Moore discussed these issues with parents during the parent action team meetings, and she also partnered with the social workers at her school to support students who were impacted by these racialized experiences.

## Discussion

The findings of this study applied Furman's (2012) framework of social justice leadership to the leadership of two school leaders in an urban charter school as a way of understanding how they demonstrated a commitment to social justice in their leadership and practice. The examination of their leadership revealed five themes including reflexive leadership, building trust and support, building inclusive communities, creating systemic change; and supporting families in larger sociopolitical contexts. In this discussion, a closer examination of the findings will elucidate the *praxis* of these two social justice leaders in light of the literature and the interdependent nature of the dimensions within Furman's framework.

School leaders for social justice interrogate established best practices for parent involvement and enact ways to meaningfully engage them. For example, when Ms. Lin talked about cultural programming events, she had invited community organizations to work with multilingual parents to “showcase their strengths, and part of their heritage” and this encouraged some of the Burmese mothers to share their expertise in weaving. However, Ms. Lin was also deeply troubled because she did not want to contribute to a “one-size fits all” approach of inviting multilingual parent participation through a narrow set of opportunities e.g., cooking ethnic foods, sharing cultural practices, wearing cultural clothing, etc. Ms. Lin, the principal, was concerned that ascribing to “cultural programming as best practices” for these families would reinforce the idea that this is all that they are able to contribute. She wanted to “get beyond this” and identify other ways that her school could build upon cultural capital and other types of capital, such as encouraging the families to participate in decision-making roles. Ms. Lin also recognized the need to improve this area to create better and greater ways of engaging parents beyond just cultural practices. Araujo (2009) and Baird (2015) similarly challenged the limitation of cultural programming and offered alternative ideas on best practices when working with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Instead of prescriptive strategies to engage multilingual families. Araujo (2009) and Baird (2015) suggested leadership dispositions and approaches that require leaders to first know the students and families in their schools.

Social justice leaders also challenge established best practices around building family-school relationships and employ authentic approaches in getting to know culturally and linguistically diverse families (Auerbach, 2009). For example, Ms. Moore, the ESL teacher, embraced a community cultural wealth perspective and exemplified praxis in the way she placed herself out in the community, met with community members, and attended different community events in order to better know and understand the communities where her students and families lived. She found this approach to be the best way for her to get to know the families since so many multilingual families feel like outsiders coming into an English-speaking school environment (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). She disrupted the normative practice of asking multilingual parents to come into the school by choosing to go out into the community instead, thus bridging the community and school divide. Auerbach (2009, 2011) promoted authentic approaches to forging relationships with families in the form of community walks and home visits. DeMatthews et al. (2016) further underscored the significance of being a part of the community in order to understand the community’s cultural wealth, struggles and aspirations.

In much of the school-family best practices literature, the issue of resources for language translation does not arise—that is, English is the assumed language for all communication, including calls home, event flyers, report cards, and other forms of communication. In this setting, the inequity of this practice is identified and challenged. For instance, Ms. Moore advocated strongly for more resources to hire additional ESL teachers for a growing population of ELLs at North Charter School, and leveraged state law to convince the Charter leaders to provide funding to hire translators, a crucial resource for parents who did not have strong English language

skills. Ms. Moore challenged and changed the communication systems at place in the school (which was also adopted at the high school). Through her leadership, she was able to give parents access to translated student information and other school news that were readily available to English speaking parents.

Moreover, Furman's (2012) framework suggested that the five dimensions of social justice leadership capture "uniqueness at each level" (p. 204) and have the ability to become interdependent with one another as well. For example, both Ms. Lin and Ms. Moore demonstrated strong interpersonal reflection and growth and a commitment to social justice that carried into their interpersonal relationships with multilingual families. Ms. Moore used community walks to forge strong ties at the communal level with community stakeholders. Both leaders showed evidence of implementing systemic changes to school wide practices that were also influenced by ecological factors e.g., current immigration policies that inspired them to create supports for the families.

The example that exemplifies the interdependence across these five dimensions of Furman's framework was Ms. Lin and Ms. Moore's creation of several town hall meetings to address the growing concern among undocumented families about dealing with ICE and including resources from the City such as immigration attorneys to deal with the stress created by the recent changes to immigration policies in the U.S. Ms. Lin referred to parents "trusting us with this information" (undocumented status) which points to the strong interpersonal relationships that both school leaders had developed with the multilingual parents. In addition, Ms. Lin designated North Charter School as a "sanctuary school" sending a strong message to the community and to the parents about their support of all families regardless of immigration status. This action also connected to the communal dimension in building an inclusive community within the school. Finally, the example demonstrates Ms. Lin and Ms. Moore's strong commitment to social justice within the ecological dimension in directly addressing a sociopolitical issue that impacted many families, in particular those with immigration concerns.

## Conclusion

This study offers new directions for both theory and practice. Social justice leadership frameworks could benefit from the insights of critical race theory and culturally responsive pedagogy. Both of these frameworks could enhance the conceptualizations and analyses of race, culture, and language in the examination of school leaders' engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse families (Capper, 2015; Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Santamaria, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015).

Social justice leaders are not alone in their charge to transform schools into spaces where all students are included and treated equitably. ESL teachers are crucial to this endeavor, and they also serve as mighty advocates on behalf of English Language Learners and their families (Haneda & Alexander, 2015). This study has shown the power of teacher and principal collaboration on behalf of their culturally and linguistically diverse families in creating change through policies that build on notions of funds of

knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 1995) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). The two leaders in this case study, Ms. Lin and Ms. Moore, also demonstrated the power of social justice leadership to leverage the capital of multilingual parents to change school practices and create a more equitable climate to benefit the entire school community.

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