Educational administrators' conceptions of whiteness, anti-racism and social justice

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to examine the intersections of whiteness, anti-racism and social justice in educational administration. It is an attempt to understand how white administrators who work in racially minoritized school communities reconcile the moral challenges of articulations of racial equity with the hierarchical institutions of schooling.

Design/methodology/approach – This qualitative study asks ten white administrators how they understand themselves as raced, the ways they see race operating at individual and institutional levels in schools and districts, and factors that facilitate and/or hinder social justice work as it pertains to race.

Findings – The data indicates that whiteness is a difficult subject for white administrators, even those who agreed to be interviewed about whiteness, racism, equity and social justice. As agents of the school districts where they are employed, the administrators generally view these issues from an organizational perspective that does not challenge hegemonic structures. They typically understand social justice from non-critical perspectives, see whiteness at the level of the individual, racism as unacceptable individual acts, and multiculturalism as preferable to anti-racism.

Research limitations/implications – The findings cannot be generalized; however, they show that academic education and certification programs need to be revised in order to prepare administrators to deal with issues of locatedness and difference.

Originality/value – The study is set in a Canadian context where, in spite of overwhelming evidence that visible minority students are marginalized in and by school policies and practices, racism is often overtly and emphatically conceptualized as a phenomenon that happens in other times and places.

Keywords Race, Racial discrimination, White people, Leadership, Social justice, Canada

Paper type Research paper

Education is often assumed to be a moral activity (Stefkovich and Shapiro, 1999; Starratt, 1994). However, its moral nature is neither accidental nor neutral. As Schwandt (2000) suggests, schooling is involved in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, which is permeated with ideological and political values. As mirrors of the economic, political and ideological stratifications of societies in which they exist, schools normalize and idealize white, middle class, male, heterosexual experiences and world-views, and exacerbate the injustices of the larger society. Ryan (2006) contends that the cultural capital valued by and in schools is based within a specific class, race, gender, and sexual orientation. As a result, students whose life experiences are outside of those thought to be desirable (p. 7) "are routinely excluded from learning activities because they do not bring to school the same kinds of language and interaction skills that are required". By privileging the knowledges and experiences of the already advantaged, educational institutions routinely configure society as a static entity into which students must fit.

Overwhelming evidence that an emphasis on improving high stakes test scores and streaming students who do not "measure up" into workplace programs unfairly disadvantages already marginalized students (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Haberman, 2004). Nonetheless, discourse surrounding effective schools continues to promote these approaches and run contrary to board and system mission statements that articulate respect and value for all students. At individual, institutional, and systemic levels, educators make choices that create educational environments that are immoral for many students (McMahon, 2007). The damage this causes is compounded for black students in Canadian schools, where the historically and socially constructed realities of racial group and individual identities are denied.

This qualitative study examines the intersections of whiteness, anti-racism and social justice in educational administration. It is set in a Canadian context where, in spite of overwhelming evidence that black students are marginalized in and by school policies and practices (Dei *et al.*, 1997; Lee, 2002; McMahon and Armstrong, 2003; Solomon and Palmer, 2006), racism is often emphatically conceptualized as a phenomenon that happens in other times and places. This is an attempt to understand how white administrators who work in racially minoritized school communities reconcile the moral challenges of articulations of racial equity with the hierarchical institutions of schooling. It asks ten white administrators how they understand themselves as raced from a subjective perspective, the ways they see race operating in school districts, the role that race plays in power relations between predominantly white teachers and administrators and visible minority student populations, and factors that facilitate and/or hinder social justice work as it pertains to race.

Review of literature

The ideology of transformational leadership which is currently in vogue in Ontario school districts highlights the leader/follower dichotomy, which Ryan (2002, p. 991) notes claims that "leaders are gifted in ways that followers are not, and as a consequence, it is their responsibility to inspire those less skilled individuals to reach greater heights". It assumes that ministry and district initiatives that are aimed at differentiated success and engendered compliance are moral. Although cloaked in the language of student success, the role of the transformational administrator is to overcome resistance to reforms and inculcate school personnel with high "levels of personal commitment to organizational goals and greater capacity of accomplishing those goals" (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999, p. 9). This ideology which pervades preparation programmes and school district selection processes, produces educational administrators who as Rapp (2002, p. 226) contends, "are trained, hired technicians of the status quo who generally believe in, benefit from, and often coerce teacher and students into supporting unjust state and corporate agendas". Transformational leadership fails to question the morality of the organizational goals of education and the means by which they are achieved.

The goals of educational systems, as Connell (1993, p. 27) identifies them, focus on "the *production of social hierarchies*" and "the modern *legitimation* of inequality". These are evident in a recent communiqué celebrating the success of the latest educational reforms in Ontario which reports that 60.5 percent of secondary school students have currently completed 16 credits at the end of their second year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). It is not disaggregated to determine which credits, at

what level and where they lead. It also does not acknowledge who comprises the almost 40 percent of students the schools are failing. Instead, sorting and slotting mechanisms surreptitiously called "Choices for Success" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) are implemented in school districts throughout the province.

Contrary to educational leadership models which serve to create and maintain inequities are leadership paradigms that are emancipatory (Corson, 2000; Ryan, 2003), transformative (Anderson, 2004; Dantley and Tillman, 2006; Foster, 1986), or polyfocal (McMahon and Armstrong, 2006). These are consistent with notions of social justice and antiracist education. As such, they are imbued with beliefs that educational leadership focuses on "democratic practice and equitable treatment of all members of the learning community" (Dantley and Tillman, 2006, p. 22). Informed by conceptions of critical pedagogy and democracy, Grogan (2002, p. 115) claims that social justice leaders must "interrupt the continued maintenance of the status quo". Schools have the potential to become sites for democratic transformation where leaders facilitate the creation of space and means for dialogue and action through which democratic processes are enacted.

Social justice

In contrast to conceptions of justice, which is seen as neutral or blind to locatedness, and instrumental in the maintenance of the existing social order, meanings of social justice are complex and evolving. Furman and Gruenewald (2004, p. 50) identify two connotations that could be categorized as background and/or process oriented and outcome focused. From a critical humanist perspective, the first meaning:

- views social structures as human social constructions that are inherently value-laden;
- critiques existing social constructions for inequities that result from unequal power relationships, and
- calls for (often radical) social change to overcome these inequities.

In order for social justice to impact on the lives of students who are marginalized by schools, it needs to move to action in the form of what Furman (2003, p. 5) calls "a *deliberative intervention* that challenges fundamental inequities". The nature of these interventions is potentially problematic and the forms that they assume in theory and practice are often more aligned with notions of justice. According to theorists (Connell, 1993; Furman and Gruenewald, 2004), if they fail to challenge the underlying assumptions on which education as cultural reproduction are based, social justice initiatives which focus on outcomes may actually serve to reinforce the *status quo*. This is the case in Ontario school districts, with their focus on remediation and intervention for "student success" By failing to question and restructure the curriculum, policies, and practices of schools, programs aimed at underachieving students create "narrow definitions of achievement and accountability are reinforced that restrict the possibilities for teaching, learning, and educational leadership" (Furman and Gruenewald, 2004, p. 53). It shifts social justice discourse away from any emphasis on democratic transformation in education to one which envisions schooling as sites for employment preparation. Although ultimately all secondary school pathways are school to work, some include college or university. In Ontario students who fail to succeed within prescribed white, middle-class institutions are streamed into school-to-work pathways.

Whiteness
Race is significant to the way we see ourselves and the way others experience us. It is, "perhaps, second only to gender in terms of salient identities used in interpersonal relating" (Hill and Thomas, 2000, p. 194). The meanings attached to a particular race (e.g. white) are relational, defined in opposition to and conjunction with other races and these relations "converge, diverge, and change over time as people's relations to productive and reproductive activities change within a given society" (Ng, 1993, p. 51). At its most basic, according to Lawrence (1997), whiteness is a physical descriptor that includes Western European physical features and limited pigmentation of the skin, and a second layer defines whiteness as privilege. The third and final layer is "the ideology of whiteness, [which] refers to beliefs, policies and practices (often unarticulated) that enable whites to maintain power and control in society" (p. 108). Whiteness, blackness, etc., are socially constructed and the inequities inherent in their construction are reproduced and reinforced within educational institutions (Fine, 1997, p. 58). Furthermore, Evans (2007, p. 164) maintains that these constructions of race do more than co-exist, they "impose differential identities and images based on social status, power, and the cultural, physical, and intellectual attributes assigned to racial or ethnic groups". Educators need to take into account the roles of power and privilege in the creation of inequitable social systems based on race.

As theorists (Giroux, 1997; Kendall, 2001) suggest, white people often do not see themselves as raced or privileged as a result of their racial identity. While this is true of many white people, there are some whites who do see themselves as raced and who understand the systemic privilege accorded to their locatedness. Helm's (1994) White Racial Identity Theory seeks to explain coming to terms with whiteness. In the initial phases, white individuals often claim to be "color-blind" as a means of demonstrating what they believe to be an equitable outlook. In an attempt to distance themselves from racism and deny their privilege, whites may acknowledge the existence of racism while claiming that racism resides in those "other" whites and has nothing to do with them. There is a tendency to blame members of visible minority groups for their own oppression. These individualistic and limited understandings of whiteness function in schools to support the existing hegemonic structures and can be configured as consistent with outcomes based conceptions of social justice. Conversely, worldviews in the final stages of white racial identity awareness entail an understanding of organizational and systemic factors including their unearned privilege. Working from a critical humanist perspective that seeks radical change, they actively work to dismantle societal inequities.

As individuals, white people intentionally or not benefit from the systemic privileges attached to race. However, "the creation of a system in which race plays a central part – one that codifies the superiority of the white race over all others – has been in no way accidental or haphazard" (Kendall, 2001, p. 2). Since all whites benefit from and are implicated in inequitable educational institutions, the onus is on all whites to work to dismantle them. Although there has been a great deal of literature about the impact of whiteness and anti-racism in the USA, there is a lack of educational research on how these are experienced in Canadian educational institutions. Relying on American research to define reality for Canadian educators fails to take into account the different historical and social realities that exist between Canada and the USA.

Anti-racism

Canada promotes itself as a multicultural country that celebrates diversity and proclaims that everyone has an equal opportunity. Multiculturalism assumes very superficial connotations related to surface-level manifestations of culture and ignores the historical and social constructions of race with their attendant presence or absence of power and privilege. Anti-racism is often criticized as being a term that is too harsh in Canada because there is a "reluctance to acknowledge structural and individual forms of racism, which contradict our image as fair people" (McMahon and Armstrong, 2003, p. 256). An uncritical version of multiculturalism silences discourse about race and continues to disadvantage members of particular racial groups. There is an abundance of research to substantiate claims that schools in multicultural Canada continue to fail both Canadian born and immigrant black students (Dei *et al.*, 1997; Lee, 2002; McMahon and Armstrong, 2003; Solomon, 1996). This is at least in part because as Fine (1997, p. 62) claims, "when we study school-based 'success' and 'failure' as though they were inherently *individualistic* and therefore only *coincidentally* white (or not) [...] we *deinstitutionalize* pathways toward success and failure, and we deny racial [...] scaffolding of academic hierarchies". This is consistent with a belief that whiteness is strictly a physical trait and a conception of social justice which does not seek to transform existing hierarchical structures.

In an interview with Miner (1995), Lee provides a framework for understanding anti-racist practice in schools. The first two stages of this model have a multicultural perspective. While purporting to be equitable, they enable current structures to be maintained. The first level, surface, equates equity initiatives to expressions of culture. It focuses on the visible aspects of culture, through assemblies, concerts and festivals. Differences are seen in individual foods prepared, dances performed and costumes donned while commonalities of the rituals are emphasized. The transitional stage includes units of study that focus on "other" groups or individuals while the core curriculum, policies and practices remain intact. These do not challenge inequitable individual, institutional, or systemic practices. At the structural stage, multiple voice and perspectives are integrated into curriculum and school policies and procedures. The final stage, social change, adopts a critical humanist perspective that envisions schools as sites where all participants assume responsibility for changing inequitable social structures.

Methodology

Purposive sampling and snowballing techniques (Merriam, 1998) were used in the selection of participants for this study. They were referred by graduate studies faculty members and other interviewees.

Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the identities of the participants. The ten respondents (see Table I), from three school districts in the greater Toronto area, were chosen primarily because of their initial receptivity to talking about whiteness and issues of anti-racism, equity, and social justice and because they work in schools and districts with predominantly black and South Asian student populations. The students of South Asian heritage in these schools are primarily immigrants, while the majority of the black students are born in Canada. Research (McMahon and Armstrong, 2003; Ryan, 2002) demonstrates a discrepancy in the treatment of students from diverse racial minority groups by school personnel.

	Employment status	Highest level of academic education	Professional programs completed	Career goal
Ms Andrews	Leadership Development Principal	MEd	Supervisory Officer	Seeking promotion
Ms Burns	Secondary Principal	PhD	Supervisory Officer	Seeking promotion
Mr Charles	Teacher Education Principal	MEd	Principal Preparation	
Ms Downey	Secondary Vice-Principal	BA	Principal Preparation	Seeking promotion
Ms Edwards	Supervisory Officer	PhD	Supervisory Officer	Retirement
Ms Fitzgerald	Secondary Vice-Principal	MEd	Principal Preparation	Seeking promotion
Mr Grey	Secondary Principal	BA	Principal Preparation	
Ms Howell	Elementary Principal	MEd	Principal Preparation	Retirement
Mr Jenkins	Elementary Principal	MEd (enrolled)	Principal Preparation	Seeking promotion
Ms Little	Elementary Vice-Principal	MEd (enrolled)	Principal Preparation	Seeking promotion

Table I.
Profiles of respondents

Students of East Asian heritage are limited in their options by being ascribed the quiet, hard working, math specialist, "model minority" label (Asher, 2001). Conversely, research (Dei *et al.*, 1997; McMahon and Armstrong, 2003; Solomon and Palmer, 2006) finds that black students are configured as less capable and more violent. South Asian Canadian students' experiences of racism are similar to those of the black students, as identified by Bannerji (1997), who sees Canada's colonial heritage as complicit in the entrenched racism which contributes to the marginalization of Canadians of South Asian heritage.

Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions allowing me to gain an understanding of their lived experiences, analyze responses and obtain information that is "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). Although I assume that the participants in the study are honest in their revelations I am also mindful of the selective nature of disclosures. This may in part be self-protection and also a result of a self-enhancing variable, as identified by Taylor and Brown (1988), which suggests that individuals need to present themselves in a positive light. Analysis of the data identifies a broad range of understandings of whiteness, anti-racism, and social justice within these emerging themes:

- participants' understanding of their racial identities, and whiteness as it operates at individual, institutional, and organizational levels;
- their involvement in socially just initiatives; and
- individual institutional and organizational factors that enhance or inhibit this work.

Findings and discussion

The data indicates that whiteness is a difficult subject even for white administrators who agree to be interviewed about whiteness, racism, equity and social justice. The interviewees are Canadian born and intentionally were not asked about their cultural

backgrounds because for white people ethnicity is often used to supplant acknowledgement of race. They are all accredited by administration preparation programs that are consistent with what Marshall (2004, p. 4) found in the USA where, "[t]raditional training for educational leadership reflects a culture that has marginalized issues and concerns of social justice". Consequently their formal education is not instrumental in their understandings of whiteness, racism, equity and social justice. Marshall (2004, p. 4) contends that "educational administration faculty members may not have the knowledge, materials, strategies, rationales, or skills to infuse their curriculum content [...] with issues related to poverty, language minority, special needs, gender, race, and sexuality". It is often more the case that the faculty is also entrenched in the structures which work to preserve their power and privilege.

As agents of the school districts where they are employed, the administrators commonly view these issues from an organizational perspective that do not challenge hegemonic structures. Generally they understand social justice from non-critical perspectives; see whiteness at the level of the individual, racism as unacceptable individual acts, and multiculturalism as preferable to anti-racism. Ms Edwards, conversely, states that while she does play that role, her imminent retirement grants her a freedom which is not available to people who are seeking further promotion in the district. She speaks about the consequences she faced after introducing the ideologies of Freire during a transformational leadership retreat focused on improving test scores. She says:

> They co-opt this whole notion of what we can do for children and we call these same practices to improve EQAO scores transformation without any of the context of it. I got hauled in by the director . . . I said, I'm retiring in June. I said to him, Did I participate? Did I provide ideas? Yes you did, but your body language. I don't mind paying the price because there always is one.

Unlike the other respondents, she consistently identifies a pressing need for a form of social justice which radically changes existing curriculum, policies and procedures; an understanding of the individual, institutional, and systemic privilege of whiteness; and the importance of implementing anti-racism which generates social transformation.

Social justice

The form that social justice most often takes in schools is outcomes based and does not disrupt the social order. Ms Burns connects equates social justice with equity and inclusion so that, "equity to me means giving things differently to different people. Inclusion seems to me trying to come up with something that's an overall I don't know expectation, experience, whatever". These notions lead to the creation of remedial programs that some participants say are initiatives aimed at the achievement of equitable outcomes. Furman and Gruenewald (2004, p. 54) contend that these types of programs "have a record of putting further behind the very populations they were supposed to serve". Mr Jenkins and Ms Little both offer criticisms of the outcomes based version of social justice operating in schools. Mr Jenkins seems concerned that some students are receiving too much attention at that expense of the rest. "With data gathering, we are to focus on the 'bubble students' to move kids from Level Two to Level Three and virtually ignore the rest", which is analogous to grade changes from a C to a B. Ms Little questions the means used to arrive at these levels because, "Standardized tests see one appropriate way to think to arrive at an answer. They are used for sorting not to assess things like critical thinking skills or motivation".

Some of the administrators identify social justice initiatives with projects that schools undertake so that students can help people who are geographically, economically, and culturally distant from the school communities. Ms Downey says, "There's a school in the district with that special function or focus". Conversely, although she indicates the term "social justice" is rarely used in her school district, Ms Andrews identifies its problematic nature:

Because we are connected to some charitable organizations and we raise a lot of money ... Stephen Lewis Foundation in particular, we look at social justice elsewhere. I don't think we necessarily look at our own backyard and say are we employing practices that can improve the situation regarding social justice for kids.

Ms Edwards reflects on individual factors and organizational structures that work against a critical-humanist understanding of social justice in education. At an individual level she says, "you're dealing with people who come from a functionalist perspective who because they're part of the hegemony don't see themselves as having any part in it". Additionally, she notes that even teachers who want to do this work rarely see themselves as agents of social justice. "I think some of the student teachers we've had over the past few years. I think they get it but they get out in there as a brand new teacher and they get normed". This is especially the case for teachers seeking promotion because the rhetoric of equity is present in academic institutions and school mission statements. This becomes even more apparent with social justice as it relates to race and the entrenchment of whiteness.

Whiteness
The participants were asked to describe the ways in which whiteness functions, how and in what situations they see themselves as white. This line of questioning caused discomfort for the interviewees. Ms Burns, Ms Fitzgerald, and Mr Grey are clear that they do not use this terminology in describing themselves. In avoiding the question about his racial identity, Mr Grey states, "I am not trying to say I'm oblivious to the differences but I don't really think along those lines to be honest with you". In avoiding acknowledgement of their racialized selves, both Ms Fitzgerald and Ms Burns refer themselves as freckled, the brownish spots apparently rendering them non-white. Ms Burns says, "I'm not really white. But compared to most white people I'm pretty white". These responses are consistent with Kendall's (2001, p. 1) claims that the power and privilege attached to whiteness is so pervasive that it becomes invisible. "It's sort of like asking fish to notice water or birds to discuss air. For those who have privilege ... it just *is* – it's normal".

When the respondents do see themselves as white it is frequently juxtaposed to the blackness of the school communities in which they work. Mr Charles states, "I see myself as white just because I am a contrast to the populations I work in". Even more problematic is discourse that casts white administrators as victims. Ms Fitzgerald claims that whiteness is an identity that other people ascribe to exclude her with comments like, "You have no idea because you are". Similarly, Ms Downey recounts an experience:

I was recently in a black parent association meeting and I definitely felt white at that meeting. I was asked to come and give my greetings and meant to leave. And I felt, well OK, cause I would have thought it's a parent association and I'm part of the school and it's part of the team and were working together. But it was say your hellos and exit stage left. And I didn't feel very welcome.

Ms Edwards, on the other hand, is conscious of her racial identity and its impact on her experiences in school districts:

> ... whiteness is a big advantage in terms of promotion in terms of understanding the culture and knowing the hierarchy and knowing how to navigate it. I see whiteness has been for me, has gotten me where I am today, hugely. I like to think I'm a talented individual but I think if I'd been a black talented individual I would not be here, at all.

In a similar vein, Ms Andrews observes that:

> ... although I don't think I grew up in an extremely wealthy environment, I still think that there were socio-cultural pieces in place that allowed someone like me to succeed. And I suspect that if I had come from a different background or I had looked different that I wouldn't be in the position that I am.

These participants are able to articulate an understanding of the multiple ways which whiteness operates. Even though other respondents make reference to whiteness as associated with historical colonialism and treatment of First Nations populations or media depictions, they do not assume ownership for how it advantages them nor do they identify it as embedded in the policies and practices of schooling beyond acknowledging that the majority of teachers and administrators in their school district are white and some of the curriculum is Eurocentric.

Anti-racism

Without explicitly stating that race is not important in the experiences of students, most of the participants attempt to deflect questions about antiracist initiatives by focusing on economics, gender, and sexual orientation. A couple of the interviewees locate the need for anti-racism to eradicate what they identify as the racism of individual black educators. Without distinguishing between individual acts and institutional practices, Ms Fitzgerald reports:

> We have a teacher who is of Caribbean, black background who is basically saying that everybody else in the building is not inclusive and she's inclusive. Then she'll have kids in her African history class who are not black and who feel excluded in her class.

When looking at institutional antiracist policies and practices, the majority of the respondents articulated behaviours consistent with Lee's (Miner, 1995) surface level. Ms Fitzgerald identifies her anti-racist work:

> Did I change the Christmas thing at [School X] to the Festive thing to be more inclusive, yes. Do I celebrate our UCC (United Culture Club's) luncheon here, yes. Do I embrace the diversity in the school, yes. Do I go to the Diwali show, yes. Do I assist the kids with the Eid show, yes. Do I find Hanukkah stories and songs to do at our Festive Concert here? Yes. Am I hammering it down people's throats? No.

Her depiction coheres with what Ms Burns calls "embryonic" anti-racism in her school district. Mr Grey and Ms Downey refer to the existence of equity departments that offer in-services to staff as indicative of a commitment to anti-racism.

Several of the participants indicate that they feel educators are trying to do a good job in spite of obstacles. Solomon's (2002) study finds that even well-intentioned educators are hampered by their ignorance of what constitutes anti-racism or of how to achieve it. The interviewees' examples of anti-racist initiatives support his findings. Mr

Grey describes a Safe School Committee where students are involved in "reviewing how our security cameras are set up in the school and making sure that they do their job and their job is to prevent nonsense from happening in the school". Ms Downey shows ignorance of the wealth of Canadian literature when she reports that efforts to include more diverse novels were hampered because, "we were supposed to have Canadian writers ... which made it more difficult because there wasn't as much out there for us to choose from".

The respondents agree that it is problematic that the majority of teachers, administrators and educational faculty are white. Ms Fitzgerald and Ms Downey suggest that students who want to become teachers are still primarily white. Without apparently questioning the existing hegemonic structures, Ms Andrews, Ms Burns, Mr Charles and Mr Edwards state that they are interested in hiring teachers who are members of racial minority groups, "all things being equal". Although not stated explicitly, this comment represents hegemonic discourse that assumes equality, and suggests that hiring a weak black teacher would be problematic and that this is not a concern when recruiting white teachers.

Many participants cite time as an impediment to the creation of antiracist school communities. Mr Grey claims, "There're only so many hours in the day. I'm not trying to diminish the importance of this issue there's only so much you can do". Ms Andrews and Ms Edwards, however, contend that naming time as a barrier to implementing anti-racism is used to excuse individual entitlement and institutional structures. Ms Andrews describes the district structures as "narrowly focused on garnering ministry funding, obtained through commitments to efficient and narrow conceptions of teaching and learning". She states: "On literacy, it's not focused on the creation of the learning environments for kids that actually help them benefit from instruction for learning and all of the strategies used to build literacy skills". Furthermore, Ms Edwards contends that educational policies consistently marginalize black students and their families and educators are punished for working to create anti-racist, socially just communities which challenge existing hegemonic structures. She asserts: "I call it 'leading by whack a mole' because if they raise up and do something we whack them. That's my theory of district leadership". In order to counter oppressive individual and institutional practices, Ms Edwards works with her school communities to develop alternative visions for the district including restorative justice alternatives to suspension and expulsion.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings point to a lack of understanding of the tenets of social justice and anti-racism. The participants struggled with even talking about the impacts of whiteness, racism and anti-racism on experiences of schooling. This supports Ryan's (2003) study, which suggests that narrow views of what constitutes racism combined with a desire to project a positive image of themselves and their school community renders administrators blind. Intentional or not, the damage this inflicts and the privilege it bestows are real. It would be beneficial to conduct further interviews with these participants to determine the extent to which these conversations have impacted on the ways in which they speak about whiteness, anti-racism, and social justice.

Although the administrators need to be accountable for their roles in maintaining inequitable hierarchies, school districts, faculties of graduate studies and administrator

preparation program providers are ultimately responsible. The issues discussed in this paper are sidebars in mainstream Canadian graduate studies programs in educational administration, relegated to the domains of social foundations or equity studies. Principal and Supervisory Officer preparation programs (Ontario Principals Council, 2007) focus on leading effective schools within paradigms of efficiency. Candidates for promotion are judged by the extent to which they are compliant with ministry and district initiatives. In all of these arenas, discourse about whiteness, social justice and anti-racism are noticeably absent. Administrators who are involved in these initiatives are often transformative (Dantley and Tillman, 2006) in working with their student, parent, and school communities. At the same time they are also solo "heroic" leaders within school districts which neither value nor reward their efforts.

There is a need for anti-racist administrators to build alliances across school districts, to gain support for their work and share strategies. The respondents expressed a need for venues through which these conversations could take place. Transformative leadership enacted in community with students, parents, and other board personnel would enable educational leaders to operate from a perspective consistent with social change (Miner, 1995). School reforms, graduate studies and administrator preparation programs need to be reconfigured to reflect a social justice perspective. At the same time, in order to fulfill school and district mission statements, recruitment, hiring, and promotion policies and practices need to reward rather than punish educators who understand the complex and multiple ways that whiteness permeates schooling, and who work with students, parents, staff, and communities in the creation of antiracist learning environments.

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